

## Panel I: Contemporary Politics and Economics

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**Paper Title:** *Abstracting Utopia: Early Kibbutz Architecture and the Politics of Space in Israeli-Palestinian Landscapes*

**Abstract:** Six decades of Zionist Jewish immigration preceded the declaration of the state of Israel: it was during this turbulent era that diverse actors—local and international, individual and collective—produced the ideological and infrastructural foundation for contemporary Israel and its contested Palestinian territories: the kibbutz. While the majority of Jewish immigrants flowed into Palestine's urban centers, a small movement of Socialist-Zionists sought the redemption of Jewish identity and capitalist society in co-operative, communist agrarian settlements. In a remarkable synthesis of World Zionist Organization bureaucracy and Socialist ideology, the planning and building of kibbutz settlements gradually developed into a unique, modernist design typology.

The memory of this period remains central to the contemporary Israeli national identity; this narrative is, however, typically limited to a romantic vision of pioneer bravery and utopian idealism. Similarly, international social science discourses generally regard the kibbutz and its unique socio-spatial organization as an exceptional moment of utopian experimentation in human solidarity and co-habitation. It is simultaneously this chapter of Jewish settlement that was instrumental in the territorial expansion of Jewish colonization and its defense during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

The kibbutz, therefore, maintains a dual existence in national and international discourse as architect of the present volatile ethnic and natural landscape of Israel, as well as an unprecedented moment of architectural innovation and intentional social engineering. If the kibbutz could qualify as an exceptional space—political or aesthetic—then is it necessarily the type of anomaly imagined in public memory? Drawing from the theories of Michel Foucault and postmodern semiotics, I will argue that the multi-dimensional space of the kibbutz is not an isolated site of exception, but a convergence and transformation of the same spatial and discursive practices essential to the establishment of Israel.