



The Open Landscape Institute; Israel

2007 - 2008 Report



The Open Landscape Institute (OLI)



Goals and Activities

The Open Landscape Institute (OLI) was established by Yoav Sagi, former Executive Director and Chair of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), in the early 1990's to cope with the severe shortage of land in Israel and to promote sustainable development in order to preserve land and open space and protect Israel's natural and cultural legacy.

OLI collects and analyzes data about open spaces and consolidates policy principles and tools to safeguard open spaces. The institute's activities focus on the following: planning policy, land management policy, agriculture and the environment, the economy and the environment and social aspects of open spaces. OLI's work and recommendations are disseminated amongst planners, decision-makers, environmental organizations and the public at large. OLI's professional staff plays an active role in planning and managing open landscapes and lobbies for the adoption and implementation of its recommendations by government authorities.

OLI was the first to identify Israel's severe land crisis and was a pioneer in dealing with the preservation of open spaces. OLI's impact on Israel's land-use policy and open space preservation is respected by the planning community and by decision makers. In addition, OLI's work and recommendations have had a significant influence on the agenda of environmental organizations regarding the preservation of open spaces, and especially on SPNI which has since placed this issue at the top of its priorities.

OLI's Units & Missions:

- *OLI Think Tank* – an interdisciplinary think tank comprised of top experts in a variety of fields whose aim is to develop policies and tools necessary to combine development needs with the preservation of open spaces.
- *Research and Planning* – preparation of applied research and planning studies.
- *Survey and Evaluation Unit* – preparation of nature and landscape surveys as background for sustainable land use planning and management.
- *GIS Unit* – provides mapping and spatial analysis services for planning and conservation of open spaces.

The Open Landscape Institute is an autonomous professional institute which functions as a meeting place for professionals dealing with the protection of open spaces. Heading up the institute is the Board of Directors including professionals in a wide variety of areas such as: ecology, planning, economics, social studies, public policy and administration. OLI's activities and projects are funded by donations and grants. OLI operates within the framework of SPNI.

OLI Think-Tank (OLI's Forum)

During 2007 the forum dealt with the following topics:

- Transfer of development rights for the purpose of open space preservation
- Renewable energy sources and their impact on open space
- Incentives for environmentally friendly agriculture – learning from best practices in Europe.
- The fifth "anniversary" of the special committee for national infrastructures – a critical review of its functioning as a vehicle to bypass regular planning law.



- Review of the effectiveness of several ways to protect open space – a session at the annual meeting of Israel Planners' Association.
- Presentation of OLI's studies (urban parks, feasibility of implementing the Land Trust model in Israel, open space analysis report, the Korkar's Habitat survey) – a session at Israel Ecological Association.
- Implementation of open space preservation considerations in a plan to remove army and security infrastructures from potentially valued open areas
- The impacts of Municipal Governments management on open space preservation
- Methods and implications of economic evaluation of open space resources
- Participation of OLI's staff members at numerous academic, professional and official forums.

Open Space Preservation Report

OLI's annual Open Space Preservation Report analyzes policies and decisions of government authorities regarding open space preservation. The document examined the consideration of open spaces by government authorities and serves as a tool for comparative surveillance in promoting open space preservation. The second report prepared in 2007 analyzes the decision made during 2006. Starting this year the annual report has also begun examining aspects of the legality and enforcement of laws against illegal construction in open spaces. The main findings reveal that there still exists a severe disregard for open spaces by government authorities, mainly the Israel Lands Administration.

The 2006 report was widely distributed and received broad media coverage. In addition, the report was publicized on OLI's website and was the subject of great interest with more than 5,000 downloads.

The 2007 report is currently being prepared and will be completed by the summer of 2008. Similar comprehensive reports will be prepared annually.

Land Management Policy

Land management and allocation policies have significant influence on the future of open spaces in Israel. OLI deals with this issue by examining land management policy, conducting applied research and accordingly formulating recommendations for policy and tools for sustainable development and the protection of open spaces.

Completed and ongoing studies:

- *Feasibility of applying land trust models in Israel* - Examining the feasibility of implementing land trust models and tools in Israel for the purpose of preserving open spaces by acquisition of land and development rights. The study was completed in 2006 and was further reviewed by experts during 2007. Preparation of pilot test cases will be considered for 2008-9.
- *Measuring economic values of open spaces* - Developing the rationale and methods for determining measurable economic values of open spaces. Formulating recommendations in this regard for the process of land allocation and management. The study was completed by a team of experts and distributed in 2007.
- *Urban nature parks* – The study reviews the mutual relationship between parks in cities and the conservation of biodiversity. The study, completed and distributed in 2007, is already being used as a guide for promoting the biological contribution of urban parks. An



expanded guide for the planning and management of urban parks will be conducted during 2008.

- *Local governments and open space preservation* – The study examines the impacts of the structure and function of municipal governments on open space. The issues reviewed include the impact of municipal policies and actions on land and open space preservation, an analysis of development pressures on open spaces and the formulation of recommendations that direct development to existing urban areas. The study, conducted by leading experts in municipal administration, will be completed during 2008.
- *Metropolitan Parks* This project, being conducted jointly with the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS) and in cooperation with government authorities and the municipalities, aims to promote parks adjacent to urban areas. The work is being carried out by a large crew of experts from different fields, including planning, the environment, economics, law and municipal administration. The main component of this project was completed during 2006. Professional reviews were conducted during 2007. The study will be finalized and disseminated during 2008.

New studies to be conducted during 2008-2009:

- *Renewable energy sources and open space preservation* – the study aims to examine the impacts of renewable technologies on open space. The purpose is to provide recommendations for the best comprehensive and environmentally sustainable use of renewable energy sources.
- *Enforcement of land use and planning law in open areas* – the collaborative study undertaken in cooperation with JIIS will utilize case studies of best practices and failures in enforcing land use and planning law. Findings will be used to examine and overcome the current poorly enforced system that leads to severe deficits in the provision of open space in Israel. The study will conclude with a series of recommendations on how to overcome the current situation.
- *Population absorption into existing rural communities* – the study will examine the demand by sectors of the Israeli population for relocation to rural areas. Emphasis will be placed on the successful relocation of these people to existing rural communities rather than to new ones. (The preparation of this study is dependant on funding allocations and the cooperation of the Rural Local Government Union).
- *Impact of collection of entrance fees in protected areas and parks* – the study will examine public attitudes towards various means of financing maintenance cost of protected areas and parks, and the impact each method has on the public attitude's toward open spaces.

OLI's Open Space Survey and Evaluation Unit

OLI's Survey and Evaluation Unit surveys, documents and evaluates the environmental sensitivity of natural resources, landscapes and the cultural heritage of open spaces. This information is distributed to planners, environmental and development organizations, for use in formulating and managing sustainable land use planning. The purpose is to survey all unprotected open spaces in Israel. Priority is determined by the extent of threats to each site's natural resources. The areas that have already been surveyed are shown on the map herewith attached.



This unit works in cooperation with the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Tel Aviv University.

OLI's Surveys - 2007-2008

Completed surveys:

- *Tzalmon Drainage Basin*; Lower Galilee – The survey, initiated and financed by the region's drainage authority, in order to provide them with ecological guidance for planning a drainage system. The study was completed during 2007.
- *Survey of a phosphate mining area in the Negev* – Initiated and financed by SPNI, the Ministry for Environmental Protection, the INPA and OLI in order to ensure ecological needs as part of planning of the phosphate mining industry in an ecologically sensitive area. The survey was completed during 2007.
- *The city of Modi'in environs* – The survey, initiated and financed by SPNI, INPA, JNF and OLI was completed during 2007 in order to incorporate ecological issues in plans for the city's expansion.
- *The Carmel National Park* – The survey commenced in 2006 was completed in 2008. Initiated and financed by INPA in order to provide ecological data to for development pressures that threaten the park.

Ongoing surveys:

- *Palmachim Coast Survey*- The Palmachim sand dunes between Tel Aviv and Ashdod, along Israel's Mediterranean coast are subject to heavy developmental pressures. The survey began in 2006 and will be completed in early 2008.
- *West Jerusalem*- The hills west of Jerusalem are in a strategic location and form a green belt around the built up areas of Jerusalem. The area is threatened by pressures for development extending from the city in a westerly direction. The survey will be completed during 2008.
- *Atlas of the Sandstone Ridges (Korkar) of Israel's Mediterranean Coastal Plain*- This atlas will map the remaining ridges in the area and will serve as a database for planning, for supervision and preservation of the remains of this important, rare and threatened habitat. During 2006 OLI documented the area between Tel Aviv and Yavne which is one of five sections of this survey. During 2007 documentation was completed between Tel Aviv and Haifa. During 2008 field work will be completed along the whole coastal plain. The study is conducted in cooperation with the JNF, INPA and the Ministry of Environmental Protection.
- *The Naftali Mountain Range*- An area in the northeastern Upper Galilee marked by rich and diverse natural vegetation and wildlife and planted forests. This area was badly damaged by fires caused by the rocket bombardment during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. The survey will investigate the preservation and restoration of the area's resources. The survey began in 2007 and will be completed during 2008.
- *Tzafit region in the Judean Foothills* – A significant part of the largest open space in Central Israel. The survey will provide ecological background for a master plan initiated by the JNF. The survey began in 2008 and will be completed next year.
- *Poleg Eastern Watershed Basin* – Poleg Stream in central Israel is one of Israel's coastal streams. The survey aims to provide landscape data and evaluation to be used for conducting a regional master plan for the preservation and restoration of the stream. The survey, funded by INPA, and the Ministry for Environmental Protection will be completed in early 2009



New surveys planned for 2009 (pursuant to funding and time)

- *Tavor Drainage Basin Survey*- pending initiation by the Tavor Drainage Authority.
- *Bik'at Beit Netufa Survey* – A sensitive valley landscape in the Lower Galilee characterized by unique traditional farming cultures and threatened by a drainage plan.

OLI's Geographic Information System Unit

OLI's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Unit provides OLI activities with computerized mapping, spatial analysis and mapping services. GIS is a useful work tool that combines environmental and planning information. The system includes computer programs that enable the collection, examination and amendment of extensive amounts of information (from the perspective of geometric relationships and content), data analysis (statistical and spatial) and map production specifically geared towards planning and decision making needs.

OLI's GIS Unit has become a substantial conservation and land use planning and monitoring tool for many other conservation and planning organizations including SPNI, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the National Planning Administration, the Committee for Agricultural Land and Open Space Preservation, the Coastal Protection Committee and many other NGOs and governmental organizations engaged in land use, planning and conservation.

Policy and Tools for Open Space Preservation

Preparation of a national data base atlas of Israel's Open Spaces – The project attempts to examine the feasibility of the preparation of the collection and compilation of all existing data regarding open spaces into one comprehensive data base. The data base will serve two purposes: It will be used as a reference for land use planning, allocation and management decisions, and will serve as necessary background information in the case that a National Strategy for the Preservation of Israel's Open Spaces will be commissioned.

Initial steps began in 2007 and included reaching initial consent among environmental organizations to launch the project; the assignment of a GIS professional to conduct a GIS feasibility study. The GIS feasibility study that was completed during 2008 will provide further advice on how to continue with the project.

Statutory Plans for Open Spaces Designated for Preservation

This project is part of the efforts of the Coalition for the Preservation of Israel's Open Spaces. The intention is to ensure the protection of areas designated for preservation in National Planning Scheme (TaMA) No. 35 through the preparation of particular regional planning schemes for each area. OLI is one of the leading partners in the project.

The following plans have been promoted thus far:

- *Bik'at HaNadiv Plan* - completed and approved by the planning authorities during 2006
- *Shikma Watershed Plan* – completed and approved 2008
- *Ayalon Watershed Plan* - in final preparation stage
- *Poleg Watercourse Plan* - under preparation

Raising awareness and public participation

In order to promote greater awareness and to increase involvement of decision makers, planners, professionals and the general public in issues of land-use, and the preservation of open space, OLI operates in the following areas:

- ❖ Active participation of professionals and decision makers in OLI's Think Tank.



- ❖ Presentation of OLI's policy principles and tools to relevant planning, legislative and executive authorities.
- ❖ Dissemination of hard copy and electronic copies (via the OLI website and other channels) of OLI policy papers, surveys and information regarding open space preservation. (www.deshe.org.il)
- ❖ Organizing lectures, study days, presentations and participation in professional conferences and meetings regarding the preservation of Israel's open landscapes.
- ❖ Media publicity
- ❖ Production of a comprehensive presentation on the issue of open space preservation. The presentation was widely disseminated during 2008 via the OLI web site and through the distribution of CD-Rom copies.

Implementation of OLI's Recommendations

OLI works closely with SPNI's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and other environmental organizations in order to promote the adoption of OLI's recommendations by government authorities.

OLI's Director and planners serve as members on Israel's National Planning and Building Council and OLI's Director is a member of Israel's Lands Council. Participation in these national institutions contributes significantly in conveying of OLI's messages to the most influential forums on the future of the built and natural environments in Israel.

Two signs of tribute and recognition of OLI's on-going contribution to Israel's planning agenda were made during 2008:

In August 2008 OLI's Director, Yoav Sagi was granted by the State of Israel with the 60th anniversary life time award for outstanding contribution to Israel's environment by leading the campaigns for open space preservation, and; prior to this, Yoav was also awarded by the Israel Planners' Association with the Association's premier annual award for outstanding contribution to Israel's planning industry.

International Activities

OLI is an active member of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and of the task force dealing with protected areas in global Mediterranean regions by cooperation with other organizations, national and international organizations.

**The Open Landscape Institute's work is carried out thanks to the generous Support of:
*The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation, the Elizabeth B. and Arthur E. Roswell Foundation, the Foundation of Philanthropic Funds – FJC and The Beracha Foundation***



OLI-Open Landscape Institute

Nature and Landscape Surveys Conducted by OLI



