

# **Nitzanim Jewish Israeli Identity**

## **The Need**

During its 65 years of existence, the State of Israel has successfully established a vibrant democracy in the heart of the Middle East, a state whose many achievements include, among others, vast infrastructural development, a thriving business sector, and a rich cultural landscape which includes the revival of the Hebrew language. At the same time, the State of Israel is threatened, today more than ever, by a diminishing collective identity. As the population continues to splinter into a growing number of subgroups, increased feeling of alienation from one another arises while younger generation of Israelis see themselves as global citizens of the world without a particular cultural and religious connection to the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

In recent decades, the state has cast off all responsibility for fostering a deep sense of identity and affiliation (with the community, the land, and the people) among its citizens, leaving this work to non-governmental non-profit organizations and to the religious establishment, which represents only a small fraction of the Jewish population of Israel.

We believe that a deep sense of belonging to the Jewish people and the State of Israel is critical to the country's social resilience and that an increasing disconnect is liable to weaken the very fabric of Israeli society.

## **The Solution**

**Nitzanim** seeks to reassign responsibility for shaping and fostering Jewish-Israeli culture in cities, regional councils and rural settlements to the national institutions, as represented by the local authorities, who will shoulder a commitment to the creation of a shared public space in which meaningful encounters among different sectors are possible.

**Nitzanim** endeavors to empower communities and residents in their role as full partners in molding the identity of Israeli society as well as its social, cultural, and ethical character.

**Nitzanim** forges local partnerships between senior local officials and, professionals, volunteers, residents and local organizations who will work together develop the local community identity and to shape the public space in their localities.

**Nitzanim** fosters professional and volunteer leadership, social entrepreneurs, individuals and groups who together aim to create a rich Jewish life in their localities that offers relevant content and meaning for the contemporary Israeli Jew and that can produce a sense of belonging to the community and to the locality.

## **The innovation**

Among the many activities, enterprises, and projects, in the Jewish Israeli identity field, Nitzanim stands out with its unique program:

- All of the Nitzanim Initiatives are built on a basis of both an ideological and an economic partnership between the municipalities and Nitzanim.

- All decisions regarding the Initiatives' themes are made by the municipality working together with the residents' representatives, in accord with the local characteristics, and they are the ones responsible for setting them up and running them.
- Nitzanim is responsible for the national coverage of the network programs, and for knowledge sharing between Initiatives in the different municipalities.
- The organization's headquarters has proven professional capabilities in management, instruction, cultivation, and enrichment.

Thousands of volunteers are currently taking part in six municipalities around the country, reaching approximately 100,000 people. One of the organizations' goals is to reach over 500,000 people within the next two years.

All of the Nitzanim activities are based on the belief that we should profoundly understand the strong need to connect to our heritage strengthen the feeling of belonging to the place we live in, and encourage our joint cultural creation, in order to form the identity of the Jewish Israeli society in Israel and strengthen its social stability.

## **The Work**

Nitzanim is hard at work to develop viable activity centers throughout Israel. Hundreds of activities are being created, which cater to the many different target audiences in the education, culture, and community systems. Various learning activities are taking place; Community traditions surrounding holidays, and the circle of life and life rituals are being created; Dozens of seminars for educational teams are being held; Community leadership is being cultivated, all in the pursuit to shape a local Jewish-Israeli agenda. Building trust and mutual care, and strengthening communal and social solidarity are all the resolute of:

**Nitzanim** seeing the local authority as possessing the greatest practical influence on the residents and individuals lives over time.

**Nitzanim** being responsible for running and overseeing the program that is assigned to the local authority, professionals who hold key educational and community posts, local organizations, and active volunteer residents.

**Nitzanim** helping to renew the bond between Israelis with diverse approaches to Jewish tradition, Jewish culture and the classical Jewish and Israeli texts.

**Nitzanim** fostering, reinforcing, and enriching Jewish-Israel community life within the local Authorities, encouraging the creation of local communities that are motivated by a profound commitment to Jewish Israeli culture with a broad range of outlooks and values.

**Nitzanim** programs that take place in community centers, public sphere and recreational and cultural institutions.

**Nitzanim** collaborating with local authorities (the mayor/council head and relevant municipal department heads) which then assume leadership and ownership of the program, local educational and community agencies, and the residents.

**Nitzanim** emphasizing, cultivating and training local activists, volunteers, and local community leaders to guide and implement the program, to reflect the needs of each particular municipality.

**Nitzanim** networking, pooling, and distributing resources (knowledge, content, financial resources, relevant expertise, connections) that are created and accumulated to all of the local programs that are committed to its vision.

**Nitzanim** helping local authority and residents to establish and maintain optimal conditions for the success of a comprehensive program for the entire municipality.

## **The Partners**

Acting locally has Nitzanim thinking nationally. A countrywide impact brings together institutions, organizations, government support groups, and leading philanthropic agencies from all around the world, who take interest in influencing the cultural-social agenda in Israel. These stakeholders see eye-to-eye with Nitzanim's basic principles and core values of equal human rights, Jewish literacy, justice, personal and social responsibility, mutual care and respect, democracy and professionalism as long as Nitzanim's methods of delivering change.

## **The Success**

- Many towns and local councils in Israel are committed to the Israeli-Jewish agenda and provide inspiration and encouragement to other localities in the country.
- The infrastructure (human, organizational, programmatic, technological, financial) already exists to guarantee that the local programs will continue to operate and flourish for many years.
- The Nitzanim programs in the various localities have a firm economic basis and do not depend on a single or temporary source of funding