Whose Team Is It? Relations Between Soccer Team Owners and Fans in Israel: A Case Study of Maccabi Tel Aviv FC

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Abstract
The paper aims to better understand the significance and characteristics of the phenomenon of soccer team ownership in Israel, and its impact on relation patterns between soccer team owners and fans. The central claim is that the privatization of team ownership has redefined the nature of relations between the two sides, and has led to the development of a conflicting relationship between them. The emotional viewpoint held by fans, a central element of their identity, has suddenly juxtaposed with the business viewpoint held by the team owner. In Israel, the gap between these two viewpoints has led to a rift, with relations even deteriorating in to violence.

Keywords: Privatization, Soccer, Fans, Maccabi Tel Aviv FC

Introduction
The widespread influence of capitalization and globalization processes during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century has brought about significant changes in the character of soccer and the way the game is perceived. The privatization of soccer teams has been explained in detail by the commercialization thesis, which claims that within several years a large number of teams were transformed from community representation frameworks into worldwide economic empires (Coakley, 2009; Guilianotti & Robertson, 2004).

The current paper aims to better understand the significance and characteristics of the private soccer team ownership phenomenon in Israel, and its impact on relation patterns between soccer team owners and fans. The central claim, which will be expanded upon below, is that change in ownership patterns has redefined the nature of relations between the two sides and has led to the development of conflicting relations between them. The emotional viewpoint held by fans, a central element of their identity, has suddenly been juxtaposed with the business viewpoint held by team owners. In England, as in Israel, the gap between those viewpoints has led to a rift, with relations even deteriorating into violence.

This paper contends that understanding the phenomenon described here can teach us a great deal about how social struggle is carried out, how relations can deteriorate into violence, and what means and strategies can be employed to deter violence. Moreover, we maintain that conflicting relations between soccer fans and team owners reflect economic and social trends which require examination. In seeking to comprehend the processes and achieve the above aims, we found it useful to call upon the ‘figurational’ or ‘process sociology’ developed by Norbert Elias. Elias’s sociology (Elias, 1978), offers a useful approach to the study of the development of sports and other procedural aspects of culture. We will argue that the process through which sports gambling developed in Israel can be understood adequately only by presenting it in a historical context and by examining its interdependent processes. Using a process-sociological perspective, we paid particular attention to balance of power among individuals and groups. The struggles between sport organizations ies and private entrepreneurs in Israel are examples of balances of power that led to both intended and unintended consequences.

In the global era new trends can quickly spread to many other countries, Israel among them. Until the 1990s, Israeli soccer was influenced by the integration of sport and politics. Soccer teams belonged to various sport associations, such as Hapoel, Maccabi, Beitar, etc., which belonged to, or were sponsored, by political parties. Associations appointed party representatives as team managers. Thus, during those years soccer served as a tool for reinforcing identification between the fan and a political framework, and reflected the extent of the politicization of Israeli society (Ben Porat, 2001, Resnik, 2002; Baram, 2004).

Globalization, the interface between the global and the local (Giulianoatti & Robertson, 2004), has given off its signals in the local sport arena as well. In his book "From a Game to Merchandise", Ben Porat (2002) describes the story of Israeli soccer in light of the expansion and the empowerment of privatization and capitalization processes in the country, and their influence on team ownership patterns. The weakening of the links to political parties which began in the 1980s became a fait accompli once all the senior teams in the league turned to private hands (Ben Porat, 2002). Israeli soccer, like other soccer leagues around the world (especially in the U.K.), underwent a rapid process of commercialization, which reached a peak with the shift in team ownership patterns from political to private. In 1992 the soccer team Maccabi Haifa was purchased by businessman Ya'akov Shahar, and became the first team in Israel whose ownership was transferred from the
hands of a sport association to a private individual. The process of soccer teams transferring to private ownership spread quickly, and was accompanied by a number of trends including securing contracts with foreign backup players, astronomical salary rises for players and profit increases from selling broadcasting rights of soccer games (Ben Porat, 1999; Ben Porat & Ben Porat, 2004).

How has the change in the management of the game impacted soccer fans? As far back as the early days of the game in England in the 19th century, and until today, soccer has been a fans' game. Soccer fans are defined as spectators of soccer games who identify with a particular team and display loyalty and emotional identification with it (Guttman, 1986; Wann et al. 2001). The relations fans have with their teams have been compared to those of believers with their religion (Dunning, 1999:6). The importance of the team's symbol, the enthusiastic chanting, the perception of the stadium as a holy place, the admiration given to the players including the attribution of super-natural abilities to some, the sense of community created among the fans and the feeling of spiritual elevation at times of victory, support the claim that the team and the game represent a substitute for religion for many fans (Coles, 1975). The fans' deep commitment to their soccer team is forged and strengthened as respect, status, and community and personal integrity are assumed by the fans (Real & Mechikoff, 1992). Thus, the team's achievements represent confirmation of the fan's self-respect (Wann et al., 2001).

Ben Porat (2000) argues that a soccer team represents a reference group for the fan (Merton, 1949). Fans develop an entire compilation of values, behaviors, opinions and norms in light of their identification with the team. The development of deep identification with and commitment to the team by the fan usually begins at an early age. The process of the fan's connection to the team is often mediated first by a significant figure. Ties are developed based on emotion, history and a sense of mutual belonging – I belong to the team, and the team belongs to me (Hopcraft, 1971; Critcher, 1979; Guttman, 1986; Taylor, 1992; Hornby, 1992; Duquin, 2000; Wann et al., 2001; Giulianotti, 2002; Ben Porat, 2002; Cooper, 2002; Baram, 2004).

Nevertheless, the characteristics of a team's fans are not necessarily similar, and over the years the range of types who make up the character of fans has grown. Fans differ in the intensity and the motives for supporting their team. Giulianotti, who examined fan types in the U.K. at the beginning of the 21st century, claims that the change in the way soccer in U.K. was managed in the 1990s as well as the transfer of team ownership to private hands, have brought about change in the character of the typical British soccer team fan. He argues that the traditional fan has been replaced by a new one – the urban consumer (Giulianotti, 2002). The traditional soccer supporter, usually of lower socioeconomic status, recognized a common denominator for broad class and community identification with the team. However, in contrast the urban consumer reflects the climate of the economic-social era. This personality type belongs to a middle or high socioeconomic status and identifies with the change in social status and prestige of the game. These fans' connection to the team is entirely different from that of traditional fans. They hold a consumer's promotional brand-name viewpoint. Such fans are especially attracted to the big soccer clubs, who represent for them success, professionalism, wealth and social prestige. Giulianotti has emphasized the tension that has grown between the different fan types, as traditional supporters increasingly feel they are being pushed out of the stadium. Indeed, studies have shown that many traditional soccer fans are no longer present at games due to the increase in ticket prices (Campbell, 1999).

How are the relations between team owners and fans conducted? The motives, strategies and broader meanings of how relations between the sides are handled have been examined by literature on negotiation and conflict resolution. States of conflict develop in many cases as a result of competition for resources by the different sides. Competition creates a division between "us" and "them" – the ingroup and the outgroup (Sherif, 1966). An individual's sense of belongingness to the group occurs is reinforced when the group provides a framework and a source of identification for that person. Identification is then accompanied by the aggrandizement of the reference group, and in contrast, the attenuation of the outgroup. As a result, the team's success is perceived as the individual's personal success (Tajfel, 1982). The division's boundaries are not dichotomous and may change according to the circumstances (Konovich & Hodson, 2002). When cooperation between rival sides serves an interest, the perception of "us" and "them" is challenged and a new division occurs.

Krisberg (2001) defined "large-scale conflict" as a significant social conflict in a state in which a number of processes transpire: the two conflicting sides sense that their positions contradict one another, one or even both of the sides sense that their collective identity is in danger as a result of conduct by the other side, frustration is directed at the other side and there is a belief that change is possible and necessary. He claims that in order to understand social conflict, an examination of the process of its development over time and an understanding of the social and historical context leading to its development, are necessary. Schelling (1960) defined two extreme states with regard to states of conflict. Conflict between sides is commonly characterized by an attempt to bring about the surrender of the other side (a win-lose situation). In other, rarer cases, a dynamic of trust and cooperation will develop between the rival sides (a win-win situation). He contends that transformation of the conflict from struggle to cooperation may take place when mutual deterrence occurs. When each side understands the power of the counter-side and the magnitude of the potential harm, it may seek other routes of
action for coping with the conflict. Schelling emphasized that a conflict may be resolved only when the mutual threat is rational, credible and allows the other side leeway without feeling entrapped.

Fisher and Yuri (1983) considered why so many states of negotiation deteriorate into struggle and mutual defeat. They argue that the main obstacles to negotiation are the discourse level and the form of communication. They contend that when the language of negotiation amounts to an attempt to coerce positions or solutions, a win-lose dynamic develops. On the other hand, when communication between the sides expresses consideration of needs and motives, a dynamic of trust, cooperation and eventually a common gain, or a win-win situation, develops.

Scott (1990) suggests that during an analysis of states of conflict "manifest handwriting" and "hidden transcript" should be distinguished. "Manifest handwriting" refers to common public knowledge, while "hidden transcript" refers to all occurrences and events which are not public but are nevertheless significant. He claims that "manifest handwriting" reflects the viewpoint of those in power in society. In contrast, "hidden transcript" describes the point of view of both sides, thereby exposing the reaction of the powerless to changing social reality. "Hidden transcript" is not necessarily characterized by verbal content, but rather by gestures, fantasies and anonymous messages carrying content that usually includes criticism of the social agenda. It is unique in that it provides a glimpse of opposition by certain social groups to hegemonic trends - opposition which does not penetrate "manifest handwriting" easily in order to influence and shape social changes.

The current study attempts to reveal the crux of the conflicting relations between soccer team owners in Israel and team fans by examining the forms of action and strategies employed by each of the sides to reach their aims, in light of the wider social context where these relations take place.

Research questions

1. Soccer team owners in Israel in the private ownership era – What characterizes the pattern of private team ownership? What are the reasons that this phenomenon has become so extensive in Israel?
2. Soccer fans – How does the fan form ties with the team? How does the change in ownership pattern influence the nature of relations between fans and their team?
3. Conflicting relations between fans and team owners and how they are conducted – How does the change in ownership pattern influence relations between team owners and fans? When do states of conflict develop and how are they conducted?

Methods

In order to understand the impact of the change in team ownership patterns, an in-depth review of Israeli soccer from the start of the 1990s until today was conducted. Among all the teams in the super league, Maccabi Tel Aviv was chosen as a case study for its significance and influence on Israeli soccer, and because it is one of the most senior and popular teams in the country. Moreover, the publicity that events in the team have received, in our view, express the complexity of the relations between this team and its fans.

The research procedure was constructed using a variety of tools: Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the various sides and with other relevant agents: Former and current representatives of the Maccabi Tel Aviv management were interviewed. These included the team's former president, former team manager, former team spokesperson, former administrative director, the chairman of the team in the early 1990s (prior to the transfer into private hands), and the team president in the 1980s and 1990s. The team owner declined to be interviewed, and for this reason information from many interviews he has granted to the media was gathered. Maccabi Tel Aviv fans were also interviewed. Following a mapping of the various groups that make up the team's fans interviews were conducted with the heads of the three major fan organizations that were active at the period in discussion, which had a considerable impact on the nature of the relations with the team owner. In addition, fans who do not identify with any organization were interviewed as well. In total 15 fans were interviewed for the current study.

In addition, during the 2005-2006 soccer season a participant's observations of team games, practices and fan meetings were conducted. Data collection was conducted by locating and surveying soccer fans' virtual world on internet sites about the team and its fans.

Results

The Shift from Political to Private Ownership of Soccer Teams in Israel

The Israeli soccer narrative can be better understood in light of the political, social and economic context of the State of Israel (Ben Porat, 2002). which reveals three different types of team ownership patterns:

The political type:

Soccer teams were established and subsequently functioned within sport associations – Hapoel, Maccabi and Beitar, which were established and funded by political parties for the purpose of spreading their political ideology. Team management was left in the hands of party associates whose political ties were known.
and perceived as capable of leading the team to victory. Team chairmen had strong political ties, enjoyed social status, and even travels abroad through friendship games.

The transition type:

The desire for the team to succeed and for players' salary to increase obligated teams to raise additional funding resources beyond association support. For this reason, new types of men who won chairmen positions on the team began to emerge as far back as the 1960s. These types were often wealthy men with ties to the sport association, and who contributed private funds in order for the team to exist. Their business ties helped them to raise funds, which enabled the teams to grow. For them, team management was an opportunity to support the community, and express their love for the team, as well as to enjoy ties, status and the advancement of their other businesses.

The private-business type:

The adoption of capitalist policies by the government at the end of the 1980s, followed by extensive privatization, led to the weakening of sport unions and their reduced ability to fund the mounting costs of soccer teams. The difficulty in funding and maintaining teams opened the door for the new type, the private-business type. This type, individual who initially emerged in the early 1990s with the purchase of Maccabi Haifa by the businessman Ya'akov Shahar, quickly spread and businesspeople began increasingly acquiring soccer teams.

Maccabi Tel Aviv, which was the focus of this study, is illustrative of the commercialization of soccer and the conduct of the private business-type team owner. In 1995 the team's management rights were purchased from the Maccabi Union by a group of businesspeople. One of them was Loni Herzikowitz, owner of the electronics company Ishfar. His fortune in 2005 was estimated at $70 million (The Name of the Game, 1.9.05). The deal's success went faster than anticipated. In the first two years following the purchase, the team won the League Championship two consecutive times. In business terms, the deal was described as an immediate success. At the end of the second season, the team's management team disintegrated unexpectedly and Herzikowitz remained the sole owner of the team. An examination of the functioning of soccer team owners in Israel in the 1990s and 2000s, and particularly over the 12 years Herzikowitz owned Maccabi Tel Aviv from 1995-2007, sheds light on the motives behind team ownership.

The Period of Maccbi Tel Aviv Ownership by Loni Herzikowitz:

A scrutinized examination of Loni Maccabi Tel Aviv's motives for acquiring Maccabi Tel Aviv demonstrates the gap between the manifest and the hidden. Herzikowitz emphasized on many occasions that despite the difficulties that arose in the process, the principal reasons that drove him to purchase the team and maintain his position were his love for the team and making a social contribution. The establishment of the Maccabim Association which combines soccer practice with school assistance in many communities throughout the country, has been a source of pride for Herzikowitz (Ha'ir, 15.11.02). In addition he has expressed his desire to form a different kind of management culture which would lead Israel to achive European standards (Yedioth Ahronot, 4.5.06). His vision of soccer was mainly financial and he maintained that "soccer is a financial business like any other", though he has admitted that "we have not managed to turn the teams into financially balanced businesses. This is the failure of the entire industry and specifically ours" (Ha'ir, 15.11.02).

The period that he owned the team has been described as an ongoing failure (Y.T., a sports journalist, interview, 7.5.06). The lack of professional success, the failing management of the team expressed by enormous financial losses as a result of signing contracts with players at exorbitant amounts, and especially the complicated relations with the team's fans, all prevented the actualization of direct profits during his ownership period. Nevertheless, as argued above, Herzikowitz, like many other soccer team owners, was driven by his will to gain indirect profits. An extensive examination of the indirect profits Herzikowitz made provides a number of answers:

1. Marketing and advertising branding – Maccabi Tel Aviv's basketball team served as a model for the identification of the business company Elite with the team's success. As Danny Laufer, the Chairman of Maccabi Tel Aviv from 1988-1992, claimed:

   Look at the enormous profit Elite has made by its identification with Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball club. Everyone could say Maccabi Elite Tel Aviv. Their profit could not be measured monetarily. Similarly in soccer with Ya'akov Shahar, who would have known about his company for car imports before he became the boss and advertised his company through the team. Loni, who owned Sony, apparently hoped to attain the same kind of advertising, as identification of the commercial company with a successful sports brand is tremendously profitable. Unfortunately it did not work out so well for him, not in Sony nor in Maccabi (interview, 19.9.06).

   Business and political ties, public image and recognition – the purchase of the team turned Herzikowitz into one of the most discussed businesspeople in the Israeli press (Ma'ariv, 31.7.06). One of the topic Herzikowitz repeatedly attacked was the authorities' incompetence when it came to the illegal sports gambling
market. On different occasions he tried to promote the regulation of gambling by setting up a television sports gambling channel. A journalist's investigation revealed that the company, Connect T.V., which was suggested as the principal candidate for operating the channel was owned by Herzikowitz (Yedioth Ahronot, 24.12.03). According to estimates made by Member of Knesset Avshalom Vilan, the illegal sports gambling market turns over $3 billion a year (The Marker, 21.6.06). It may be that Herzikowitz took advantage of his position in soccer and business in order to attain the rights for operating the channel, which would have potentially yielded him tremendous profits.

In summary, Herzikowitz, like many other soccer team owners in Israel, repeatedly emphasized the ethical and social motives that drove him to purchase the team, but downplayed other motives that may well have promoted his business and increased his profits. As discussed above, the continuing trend of the commercialization of soccer within the global context is expressed, among other things, in the purchase of soccer teams in Israel by businesspeople who reside outside of the country. Understanding that soccer today allows many of the profits described above to be gained is what keeps the wheels of private ownership turning.

Soccer Fans – Identification Processes and Identity Construction

In contrast to the business motives which characterize team owners, the relations between fans and their team are based on deep emotional aspects. Support is established and strengthened over the years as a result of a combination of a number of central themes – love and loyalty, the formation of a community and personal identity construction which stems from identification with the team. Support usually starts at an early age, through the mediation of a significant person in the child's life:

I have been a Maccabi fan ever since I was a child. My father is also a die hard fan of the team. He used to take me with him to games. I grew up here in Bloomfield. We would come to every home game, and sometimes I would go with him to see visitor games. You could say I became a fan before I even understood what Maccabi was (Lior, interview, 29.4.06).

This fan child grew up in a home where the soccer team had considerable significance for the family. For such children, discussions about the team, going to the games, joy over victories and sorrow over defeats represent a language, values and structure in the home. The moment he joins the bleachers is the beginning of passage to maturity:

At home, the whole family is Maccabi - my Dad, my brothers, everyone. I grew into it and waited for the day I could go to the games. At age 11 it happened. Since then I have been in the bleachers (Maor, interview, 5.5.06).

With time, support develops into love, and the nature of ties between the fan and the team intensifies:

For me, Maccabi is me. It is the longest relationship I have ever had with anyone. For me, Maccabi is a stable place. Maccabi will never leave me. Family, friends, they all disappear, but Maccabi will always be there. (Haim, interview, 12.5.06).

During the initial years of establishing a relationship with the team, identification is rooted and established by the admiration of players and pride in the team's present or past achievements. A close connection characterizes the reference to the team. Expressions such as "my team" illustrate the quality of the bond between the young fan and the team. An inseparable part of team support is acquisition of knowledge about every aspect of the team, including names of the team's players, former mythological players and the team's years of victory. For the fans, the more they know the more they can feel and spread devotion and loyalty to the team.

Fans' deep commitment to their team intensifies when it provides a frame for self-identity construction. Fans define the team not just as a composition of players who play every Saturday, but rather through a wider connection of meanings – political, social, local and even ideological and ethical. In the past, the political aspect was at the focus of the identity construction that fans formed for their team. Teams such as Beitar Jerusalem and Hapoel Tel Aviv were identified with a clear political perception (Reznik, 2002). The weakening of the link between parties and teams and the change in ownership patterns from political to private, blurred the political aspect of the team's identity.

An exploration of the identity that comprises Maccabi Tel Aviv fans indicates that neither political, social, nor local aspects distinguish the team's fan. Maccabi Tel Aviv fans come from different cities as well as different political, economic, and social backgrounds. However, they share a common ethical perception of the essence and singularity of Maccabi Tel Aviv. The term, or the value, they identify with is "Maccabism". An interpretation of the term offered by the fans explains the identity that the team represents for them:

A Maccabist is loyal to the team, to the Maccabi symbol. A Maccabist is committed to doing anything for the team. A Maccabist is a player who will give his all on the field. A Maccabist means to never stop pursuing victory, to give another goal when we're leading 3-0. (Lior, interview, 29.4.06).

The team's fans regarded the team in the past and present through the extent of the "Maccabism" exhibited by the team's managers, players and even themselves as fans. In many ways, the fans' worldview is divided dichotomously between "Maccabists" and non-"Maccabists". This dichotomy can be viewed as a division according to the in-group and out-group. The "Maccabists" will always win the fans' admiration and unending
love and support, whereas the non-"Maccabists" will always appear in a negative light as a result of their non-
"Maccabist" conduct.

An analysis of how the team's fans refer to two significant figures in the Maccabi Tel Aviv soccer club in the 1990s and 2000s - Avi Nimni, a player, on the one hand, and Loni Herzikowitz, the team owner, on the other, illustrates the power of the dichotomous perception between the "Maccabist" and the non-"Maccabist". Avi Nimni is the figure that symbolizes for fans the essence of "Maccabism":

Nimni is the last survivor of old-fashioned "Maccabism". His commitment to the team and to the symbol is so great, that it's hard to think of anyone who will earn an inkling of the respect he gets (Haim, interview, 12.5.06).

The increased mobility of soccer players among teams in Israel and in Europe has hurt their ability to serve as symbols or sources of identification for the fans. Nimni, who proved his complete loyalty to the club's spirit, has won tremendous admiration in the bleachers. On the other hand, in regard to Loni Herzikowitz, fans mainly emphasize the selfish motives behind his actions. His conduct was perceived by fans as anti-
"Maccabism". According to them:

Loni grew up in a rich home where everything could be bought with money. He thought he could make Maccabi a business. That's how he sees the team and us, and that's where he's wrong (Haim, interview, 12.5.06).

Ten years that he's been on the team and it's a failure. He presents himself as a Maccabi fan, but seeing him smile after defeats says it all. Because of his mistakes, his arrogance, Maccabi is in the shape it is today (Uri, interview, 21.5.08).

The equation drawn up by the fans has placed the soul, loyalty to the symbol and relinquishment of ego in the face of money, selfishness and ego cultivation. This dichotomous perception has shaped fans' behavior pattern when confronting the team owner in times of crisis, as will be described below.

Another division between "Maccabists" and non-"Maccabists" centers around the team's audience. The extent of the fans' devotion classifies the bleachers into various support types. Those fans whose loyalty to the team is non-dependent on the team's achievements are called ha'surfim (Hebrew: the burnt, or the fantics). In contrast are the "success fans", whose ties to the team are dependent upon the achievements of the team. Die-hard fans regard the success fans as "fallen leaves" whose ties to the team are based on image and branding. As Giulianotti argued about fan types in England, the change in fan types in Israel also reflects the increase in the game's popularity and the weakening of the emotional aspect between some of the fans and the team.

The interpretation fans offer for the term "Maccabism", the lofty values they cast upon and identify with the team, enables them to recognize and define their expectations from the team: the ongoing pursuit of achievement, the execution of offensive soccer, loyalty and complete devotion to the team, and keeping club spirits up. Team management is perceived as responsible for the advancement and realization of those interests.

The private ownership pattern, which was rode upon the wave of global and capitalist trends, has made a significant contribution to the weakening of political, economic and local attributes of the team's former identification framework and identity construction. Fans found themselves standing before a team whose name remained unchanged but whose attributes were empty of content. Identification with the team was nevertheless maintained through the rise of certain figures symbolizing the spirit of the club, for example Avi Nimni. Still, a new framework had to be formulated. Fan communities and organizations, and their activities, have accounted for a substitute framework for strengthening the fans identification with the team.

Fan organization has always been present. The encounters of fans in the bleachers every Saturday have provided structure for shared activity. Among the various teams, meeting places have been established by fans in order to satisfy their need for experiencing the team, even between games. During times of crisis the fans mobilize for action – whether to save the club from bankruptcy or to protest at times of failure. However, fan organizations which were established following the change in ownership patterns set different aims. As they understand it, they now stood before a particular person and not an association or management representatives, and therein lie both the opportunities and dangers as one.

In 1996 a group of Maccabi fans founded the Ultras Fan Club. The origin of the name comes from Italian support group culture, and its founders defined the aims for establishing the association as the desire to serve as a home for the teams' fans and as an opposition to the new team management.

In the year 2000, an additional fan club was established called The 12th Player. The name expresses the significance of the fans to the team and its success. Its founders besieged Ultras' actions, whose struggle against the team management, according to them, negatively effected its achievements. The new organization's goal was to express their commitment for independent support to their team while maintaining Maccabi Tel Aviv fan rights.

The intensity of each organization's impact - first on its members, second on the rest of the fans, and third on the team's management, stemmed from a combination of the fans' need for belonging and the process of the weakening of fan identification with the team. Joining an organization stemmed among others from an understanding that their place in the bleachers was not assured. Similar to the change process the typical fan in
the U.K. underwent, from the traditional to the urban consumer (Giulianotti, 2002), in Israel the die-hard fans also feared that Herzikowitz was interested in attracting a new type, to the stadium. In their view:

*Herzikowitz wants a family audience, the kind that will come and buy tickets for the whole family, buy a Maccabi scarf, and go home at the end of the game. No violence. No disorder. He doesn't need us anymore.* (Hai, interview, 22.4.08).

**Conflicting Relations between the Team Owner and Fans**

An analysis of relation patterns between team owners and management and the team fans proves that three principal variables determine the nature of the ties between the two sides.

1. The extent of the team's success (measured both by achievements and the performance of attractive soccer) - Is the management, according to the fans, working to advance the team's success?
2. How team issues are managed – Is the management, according to the fans, working to advance not only the team's success but also to maintain the team's values?
3. The conduct of the owners and management towards team fans over time in general and in times of team crisis in particular.

For Maccabi Tel Aviv the era of private ownership began in 1995. As described above, within the first two years the team reached impressive achievements. Among the fans the change was perceived as a new era which would lead the team to success. Their understanding that the team's budget directly influences its success led to acceptance of the change with open arms. Appreciation of the team's success integration of foreign players and home players, and the attractive soccer they performed, enabled the ready acceptance of private ownership of Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Nevertheless, the seeds of conflict had already been sown. First, fans began to understand that in contrast to the past when they faced a management selected by the Maccabi Association, they were now facing a particular individual who had exclusive authority over the team. Second, they began to feel that the team owner defined the essence of "Maccabism" differently than they did. According to the fans, the ongoing pursuit of success is the essence of "Maccabism". However, Herzikowitz expressed himself otherwise when he said that the championship is not necessarily the team's objective. Before them stood a person who tried to redefine the elements of the team's identity. The following years witnessed a sharp decline in the team's achievements which was accompanied by a number of events that hurt the team's image. In 1996, the team's coach, Dror Kashtan, was fired despite the team's achievements during his leadership, in 1999 the ephedrine affair revealed that traces of the stimulant were found in one of the player's blood, and in 2000, the team's coach, Shlomo Sharf, was fired after two league games.

In 2001 an organized protest was initiated by a number of fans against the way the team was being managed:

*For six years nothing has happened in Maccabi Tel Aviv. Every summer they promise us an attractive team, but the promises have fallen short. The first series we win, the second series we win, and then we're back where we started...the problem starts at the top, with Mr. Loni. We appreciate his money and everything he's doing for the team, but he needs someone next to him who knows how to manage the team. We plan to have all the fans sign a petition and expect that Loni meet with us. We are human beings, adults who want the team to recover* (S.A., A.M. and S.A., team fans, interview, Tel Aviv, 22.2.2002).

The fans' protest grew in the following months. The team fans organized for a regular protest outside the Herzikowitz' family residence in north Tel Aviv. For a month and a half the fans stood outside his home carrying signs demanding that Herzikowitz leave the team. Shlomi recounts:

*We thought that if we hurt him, if we would sit outside his home we would get him to leave. Loni alienated us and we thought that if we agitate him and hurt him and his family we would get some attention. Loni simply ignored us. He didn't see us. We wanted him to go because in our view he was a cold, condescending person who didn't care about us. He tried to convince us that soccer is not so important. He's from another galaxy* (interview, 12.5.06).

The fans' protest was planned according to the former code "to burn the club down". In their view, by using threats and fear tactics against the team owner they would attain their aims. However, if in the past violence hurt the team management and its image which consequently hurt its core, now fans were organizing against an individual, according to whom surrender to violence meant encouragement of violent tactics. Relations between the sides reached the boiling point. The fans' desire to break the team owner worsened the dialogue between the sides:

*I don't see them as fans. These are low and despicable people who called me a terrorist and threatened me "Nazi, we'll finish you." I don't know what to call them – inferior. I don't see or hear them* (Loni Herzikowitz in an interview for Yedioth Ahronot, 7.12.02).

The fans' protest had two central implications:

1. The hardening of Herzikowitz' position towards the fans.
2. Increased frustration by the fans towards the team owner, and an understanding of their weakness in face of private ownership.

Relations between the sides continued to deteriorate. In 2002, the fans decided to put up signs against Herzikowitz on the stadium bleachers during team games. The owner's reaction was decisive:

Signs that are anti, even if sophisticated, will not be posted on bleachers. I don't think this is against freedom of speech. It's a free country where anyone can say whatever he wants. But in Bloomfield Stadium signs will not be posted, because at the end of the day they hurt the players. (Herzikowitz, in an interview for Tel Aviv, 15.11.02)

Herzikowitz assumed, it appears, that this group was marginal and that their struggle against him would die down shortly after. But the series of events impacted the formation of perceptions which developed on both sides in regard to the motives of the other. The fact that these events took place one after the other led to the inculation of mutual demonic perceptions (Alon and Omer, 2005) and the difficulty in escaping the deadlock in which both sides found themselves. Paradoxically, one year later, in 2003, the team succeeded in winning the championship. However, frustrations and distress continued to simmer below the surface. The 12th Player fans, who during the season led crowd support by cooperating with the team management, decided to raise several issues, in a public discourse in general and before the team owner in particular, which they claimed hurt not only Maccabi Tel Aviv fans but all soccer fans. Organization leaders began to conceive of soccer fans as consumers who have rights. This conception was developed based on their success in two earlier struggles. In the first case, they succeeded in preventing Herzikowitz from transferring team games from Bloomfield Stadium to Ramat Gan Stadium after turning to the Soccer Association and the media. Their objection to the transfer stemmed from their belief that monetary profits from Ramat Gan Stadium should not be grounds for leaving the team's home. In the second case they fought against the campaign led by the management to sell discount tickets for team games in supermarket chains, since according to them those tickets would be sold on account of tickets reserved for team fans' children. Their petition to the supervisor of business restrictions led to the cancellation of the deal with the supermarket chain. In a letter that was sent to the team management on 30.7.2003, a number of claims were raised:

1. The increased cost of game tickets would prevent disadvantaged fans from coming.
2. The support of the team management by the Israeli law, which was perceived by fans as legitimacy for branding them habitual delinquents and thus led to violent reactions towards them.
3. The team management's treatment of former players did not honor their legacy and contribution to the club.

Fan organization leaders asked to meet with the team management to discuss how to advance discussions on those issues. According to them, they were put off time after time. Two weeks later, the team management decided to release two of its senior players, Avi Nimni and Tal Banin. Nimni's release shocked the sports world in general and the team's fans in particular. On that same day dozens of fans came to the team's field to express their objection. Fans saw Nimni's dismissal as a blow to the player who symbolized the essence of Maccabi Tel Aviv - loyalty and commitment to the team symbol and thus an injury to them.

"The management decided to declare war on Maccabi Tel Aviv fans" (Boaz, 29.4.06). In response to these fans Herzikowitz said: "This is a limited group of bad hooligans who in England would be put behind bars. These are not fans and they should be restrained from the fields" (Yedioth Ahronot, 14.8.03).

The team management's disregard of the various claims raised by The 12th Player's organization representatives, along with the anger in the bleachers for the dismissal of their adored player from their team, enabled the formation of the biggest and most organized fan protest in the history of the Israeli soccer. The protest was made possible, among other things, by the increasing power of fan organizations, which agreed to cooperate in the struggle against the management, and because the organization's internet sites had become a source of information by sending out messages quickly among thousands of fans. In the first series of the soccer season fans distributed a letter to team fans detailing the reasons for their protest, its form of expression and their explicit request to keep it within legal limits. The protest was based on an attempt to hurt Herzikowitz where he was most vulnerable – that is his personal image and his earnings. For this reason the fans decided to come to team games in black shirts and to stop cheering for the team in home games. Their aim was "to turn the team games from a carnival of support to a somber atmosphere so that fewer fans would come and less money would reach Loni's pocket" (Meir, interview, 16.4.08). In order to sharpen the message, the fans decided to support and cheer for the team in visitor games whose profits were made by the hosting teams rather than Herzikowitz. In addition to hurting his earnings and image, the fans wanted to send a clear message that without fans there is no team. This statement was printed on the black shirts and hung on signs in the bleachers.

The fans' protest won wide media coverage in the written and televised press. An attempt by fans to hurt their team's management was perceived as a unique event. As quickly as two months later, the team management began to negotiate with fan organization leaders to end the protest, but discussions reached a dead end. The protest continued, but as opposed to its leaders' intentions, it declined into violence against Herzikowitz. The Israeli police force began arresting fans suspected of violence. At the same time joint meetings were held with
both sides to assist in bridging the differences. These meetings contributed to building a certain trust between the sides, but failed to result in real change. The protest reached its peak during the 2004 season, but it was in fact the team fans who demanded its end. The fans did not permit the paradox of support and protest to coexist.

Attempts at intervention by various agents to manage the conflict and bring the sides closer together failed. Discussions between Herzikowitz representatives and fans did not lead to a resolution of the crisis. Only in 2005, a year and a half after the start of the protest, when the team was about to celebrate 100 years of the club's existence, did Herzikowitz begin to speak directly with the fans and attend to the issues they raised. Fans felt that the management should meet their needs and publish an apology for hurting their reputation. These discussions brought an end to the fans' protest. The return of Avi Nimni to the team also contributed to a change in the climate between the sides. In the first practice of the 2005 historical season hundreds of fans burst onto the field. Herzikowitz, who in similar cases in the past summoned the police, told the fans "You are the boss, celebrate".

Conclusion

The question "whose team is it?" was crystallized through the fans' protest, its unfolding and its final conclusion. Does the team belong to its owner, who legally purchased the rights to manage it? Or, is the soccer team a community resource that belongs to its tens of thousands of fans? The growing gap between private business and community identity sharpens each side's definition of the conflict. The example of Maccabi Tel Aviv reveals an individual representing the economic trends of his time facing a community that witnessed before its very eyes a change in the focus of its identity – the team. As organization among the fans developed into protest against this blow in their focus of identity, they employed familiar methods that no longer fit the changing reality. When they understood that the language of soccer now reflected the world of business, their self-definition changed as well – from fans to consumers. This change formed new game rules by which team fans turned into a side that could produce deterrence on the other. Mutual deterrence, as Schelling (1960) argues, is necessary to convert a struggle between two sides into discussion.

Based on process sociology, we suggested that in order to understand the privatization process of sport in Israel, as its surrounding processes, one has to pay particular attention to a complex number of interests as well as to processes that are not isolated but rather interdependent and therefore of importance when discussing the relations between business and community. The nature of relations between soccer team owners and fans is influenced by the inherent conflict between business and community, between those with a fortune and the masses, and between commercialization and devotion. Relations thereby require comprehensive dialogue between the sides to provide for the various needs of each. Team owners, who regard the fan's role as cheering for the team, do not comprehend the significance the team has for many fans. On the other hand, fans who protest against the business takeover of the game are captives of a romantic perception that is disconnected from current economic-social reality. The common desire for the team to succeed, which also is derived from different reasons, requires a dialogue that recognizes mutual dependence, in order for success to be achieved.

A model of dialogue management and building of consent between team management and fans was implemented in 2008 with the Bnei-Yehuda Tel Aviv team. During discussions between the sides, various issues were raised related to the team's identity, the significance of the link to the community and the nature of fan support for their team. These discussions paved the way for establishing relations based on dialogue. Fan representatives decided during those discussions to advance the idea of establishing a fan organization that would unify all of the team's fans in one framework, so that the fans' rights could be protected. This model has won the support of the Ministry of Internal Security, which believes that dialogue between conflicting sides reduces and even prevents the development of violent incidents. The change in soccer team ownership patterns presents both challenges and opportunities. An exploration of the nature of relations between the sides and how they are conducted sheds light on the social dynamics that reflect reality at the start of the 21st century.

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