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Sport Policy in a Transformed Socio-Political Setting: The Case of Israel

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This article describes the impact of socio-political transformation processes on sport policy through the Israeli experience. A framework was developed for analyzing learning processes, utilizing the argument that under highly centralized systems, citizens' preferences regarding any area of life, including sport, are strongly affected by governmental policy. We show that in Israel the lack of a significant sport policy during the centralized formative years of the State influenced citizens' long-term preferences regarding sport, in the sense that it was regarded as a marginal issue that did not trigger demands for policy change. We explain that the marginality of sport in Israeli society also continued when the nature of relations between citizens and politicians was transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up orientation.   15 ... 20

Key Words: sport policy, learning, alternative politics, Israeli society, political culture

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The nature of relations between politicians and citizens greatly influences citizen attitudes, beliefs, and political behavior. Mantzavinos, North, and Shariq (2004) explain how an institutional setting, which is composed of both formal and informal rules, significantly influences learning processes as well as the formation of preferences in most   30
fields of life. For example, political culture that evolves under centralized political rules may differ from one that evolves under a decentralized system. Yet, in addition to formal rules, informal conduct shapes citizen-politician relations. At any given level of formal

centralization, the relations between citizens and politicians may reflect either a top-down or bottom-up orientation. In the first case, policies and decisions are imposed from the top down, keeping citizens relatively passive. In the second case, citizens are the dominant players in raising policy problems and offering solutions, while politicians merely respond or adapt themselves to citizens' dictates.

This article develops a framework for analyzing the impact of such informal conduct on citizen attitudes, behavior, and culture and also illustrates the implications for policy formation. Public policy is defined as the authoritative allocation of resources or the collection of governmental decisions regarding the government activity, budgeting, and intervention in a given area of life (Weimar and Vinning 1998: 58–59). A governmental policy may thus focus on certain issues while marginalizing others by small budget allocations.

More specifically, we suggest that the formal rules and informal conduct that characterize political and bureaucratic systems usually influence citizens' beliefs, behavior, and cultural preferences. When formal rules are centralized and citizen-politician relations are informally characterized by a top-down orientation, citizens' beliefs and cultural preferences are significantly influenced by politicians' policies—especially in those areas of life where citizens do not have clear and well-established tastes and preferences. Under these conditions, when the government intervenes and forms policies in a specific area of life, it actually signals that this specific area of life is central for the given society and thus can also be of great interest to its citizens. When such areas are ignored by governmental policy, they are likely to be treated by citizens as insignificant. Furthermore, this learning process is likely to be stable in the long term, meaning that even when citizen-politician relations are transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up orientation, areas of life that were previously out of social focus will remain so, as long as the government does not begin to treat them as essential and central. In the long run, such processes may influence the issues, habits, tastes, and preferences that compose group and/or national identity.

This core argument will be applied in explaining the development of sport policy and sport culture in Israel between the years 1948 and 2006. Historically, the Jewish political, bureaucratic, and economic systems under the British Mandate rule prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 were highly centralized (Horowitz and Lissak 1978: 37–52, 69–104). This situation persisted in the 1950s and 1960s and reflected citizen-politician relations that were characterized by a top-down orientation. Given these conditions, Israeli society and culture were deeply influenced by governmental policies—especially in those

fields that were not subjected to a previous formulation of tastes and preferences by the majority of the public. We will explain that due to cultural and historical processes, sport was a relatively neglected area in Jewish culture and tradition, meaning that most Israelis did not have clear and well-established preferences and tastes in this area (Dar 2004; Kaufman 1996b). The sport establishment was also highly centralized and was dominated by political appointees who viewed their position as a default political option. The combination of a lack of professionalism and weak political power gave hegemony to relatively few teams in the various sporting fields. Under these conditions of centralized systems and relatively weak citizen preferences regarding sport, the fact that this area of life was relatively neglected by the government created a situation where sport was regarded as marginal by most citizens, many of whom did not form expectations or specific interests and preferences in this field.

Furthermore, we argue that this situation also persisted when citizen-politician relations were informally transformed into a bottom-up orientation through a process that will be discussed later in this article. This transformation did not bring about much pressure for change in the "neglected" fields, and as a result they continued to receive little or no governmental or social attention. We argue that this explains the relatively insignificant place of sport in Israeli society, a situation that continues until the present time. It also explains why an imposed governmental sport policy is not likely to emerge, given the bottom-up orientation; rather, deep cultural changes are required prior to any change in the place of sport in Israeli culture. A point of reference for these claims can be seen in the place of sport in culture and social life in the former Soviet bloc. In those countries, where the political and bureaucratic systems were highly centralized, a great amount of resources were invested in sport, reflecting that it was a central area of governmental policy (Riordan 1977: 101–102). This had a significant impact on popular culture, and when the formal rules changed, sport continued to be considered a central cultural area by these societies.

Similar processes did not occur in Israel, where minority groups and new immigrants have not traditionally used sport activities and competitions to channel their social group into the heart of Israeli identity (Sorek 2002). This indicates that they understand that sport is not regarded as a central part of that identity, as opposed to, for example, the military service (Levy 2006). The next section of the article constructs the theoretical framework, and then we will analyze the development of sport policy and culture in Israel through elaboration on socio-political processes.

Learning, cultural preferences, and sport policy

In this section we construct a theoretical framework for analyzing learning processes and the evolution of cultural preferences, given a certain type of political system as expressed by the informal relations 125 between citizens and politicians. We first present a theory of learning and then elaborate on a mechanism through which formal and informal rules are transformed. Finally, in this section we discuss sport policy in a comparative perspective.

The theory of learning presented below is rooted in the field of New 130 Institutionalism, which gained much from the work of Nobel Prize winner Douglass North (North 1990). In a recent article, Mantzavinos, North, and Shariq (2004) adopt an approach that views human learning as a continuous process in which the individual is constantly engaged in learning ways to solve problems—either existing or new 135 ones. Solutions to given problems are formed by using a mental model (i.e., a coherent, but transitory set of rules that enables the organism to make predictions about the environment based on available knowledge). A belief is formed when environmental feedback confirms the same mental model so many times it becomes stabilized, and a belief 140 system is defined as the interconnection of beliefs (Mantzavinos 2001: 16–42; Mantzavinos et al. 2004). It follows that norms, values, and ideas transformed to the individual through cultural and educational mechanisms play a significant role in the learning process and the creation of mental models. 145

We argue that because the transmission of knowledge is mediated by a wide variety of players, a centralized system will have great effect on citizens' preferences. Policy preferences in areas where most citizens do not have clear and well-established preferences are almost completely determined by state authorities, meaning that citizens' 150 preferences in these areas of life directly reflect those of the government. In other words, in centralized systems problem-solving mechanisms are controlled and manipulated by the government, and therefore citizens seek governmental guidance regarding how those fields that have not been subject to intensive preference formulation 155 should be regarded. It directly follows that in the absence of well-established citizen preferences in a given area of life, an area that is marginal in governmental policy preferences will also be regarded as such by the citizens.

We should emphasize that in democracies a high level of centrality 160 can also exist, whereas non-democratic systems may be economically decentralized. Therefore, formal and informal rules and conduct can influence citizens' policy preferences. Yet both informal and formal

rules are subject to change in centralized systems, whether by the government or by the citizens themselves. To understand this process and 165 also the policy areas that are likely to be subject to social learning and to citizens' actions, we elaborate on a mechanism explaining the evolution of alternative politics as informal rules in centralized systems.

Alternative politics and informal institutions

The question we address in this article refers to the strategies adopted 170 by citizens and interest groups when they are dissatisfied with the policy initiated by the government and, more specifically, how such strategies are implemented in different policy areas including marginal ones.

One of the main reasons for citizens' dissatisfaction with the gov- 175 ernment can be termed as "government failure" (i.e., the inefficient provision of governmental services) (Weimar and Vinning 1998: 159–195). Government failure can exist in various degrees, motivating citizens to adopt a wide variety of strategies or alternative problem-solving mechanisms. Basically, citizens' response to government 180 failure may range from physically leaving the society by emigration (exit), through active expression of dissatisfaction via protest and political participation (voice), to passive acceptance of the situation combined with social alienation (neglect). We rely here on Hirschman's (1970: 12–35) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Model and its extensions (Lyons and 185 Lowery 1986; Rosbult and Lowery 1985). Yet these strategies are the responses described by most analyses of political participation (e.g., see Dahl 1971: 15–18; Pateman 1970: 22–29; Putnam 1994: 7–12).

The availability of each strategy, as well as the cost-benefit calculations attached to them, are functions of the formal institutional set- 190 ting in a given society. For example, in democracies most of these strategies are widely available at relatively low cost, whereas in authoritarian regimes both the exit and voice options are relatively narrow and usually bear high costs. Thus, when there are certain institutional shortcomings that produce government failure, as long as 195 the existing institutional setting provides sufficient tools for improving outcomes—either through the actions of government or civil society—citizens are likely to respond to government failure using these tools. In other words, when citizens are dissatisfied with policy outcomes, they attempt to improve outcomes through the channels 200 made available by the institutional setting (i.e., prevailing formal and informal rules at both the governmental and civil society levels).

It follows that when the institutional setting not only produces government failure but also fails to provide sufficient tools for improving

outcomes, citizens are likely to look for alternative problem-solving 205
tools. This basically happens when citizens feel they are facing a situation in which all influence channels are blocked, meaning that the "voice" option is exhausted. It is more likely to take place when the political, administrative, and economic systems are more centralized.

Under these conditions, citizens may apply one of three alternative 210
problem-solving approaches: exit, neglect, or a unilateral initiative (a "do-it-yourself" approach). The first two approaches are passive, in the sense that people who adopt them have given up any active involvement in society (Lyons and Lowery 1986; Rosbult and Lowery 1985). The third approach suggests that when people are dissatisfied 215
with outcomes and believe that all existing mechanisms for influencing and solving social problems are blocked, they think of the situation as a preemptive institution-free situation. In this case, survival is understood in terms of unilateral initiatives, in the sense that these initiatives are independent of the existing institutional setting and 220
are not coordinated with either the government or with other sectors of society. It also means that these initiatives are often illegal or quasi-legal.

Thus, we argue that continuous government failure, combined with blocked influence channels at both the state and the social level, can 225
potentially trigger the evolution of an alternative problem-solving approach, characterized by unilateral initiatives. When, because of government failure, this problem-solving approach is applied by citizens and proves successful at providing outcomes, it gradually becomes a mental model. Through collective learning it also becomes a 230
shared mental model (i.e., a transformation of the belief system) (Mantzavinos et al. 2004). This process of continuously applying unilateral initiatives for solving social and political problems constitutes the evolution of alternative politics as informal institutions.

However, as explained earlier, we argue that citizens are likely to 235
apply such forms of action in fields of life they consider central and worth their investment. In areas of life where citizens do not have clear tastes and preferences, the nature of the political system significantly influences citizens' behavior. It follows that in centralized systems, such areas that traditionally have not been regarded as central 240
and significant by the government will continue to be regarded as such by citizens. While the resulting alternative politics may evolve and the nature of relations between citizens and politicians may be transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up orientation, there will be a continuation of governmental policy regarding citizens' well-being in 245
other areas of life. Changes in this respect are likely to occur only through a long process of belief change. We argue that this rationale

can basically explain the ways in which citizens view different aspects of culture such as sport and environmental issues. Yet the relationships of sport, policy, society, and politics to one another have been transformed in recent decades in such a way that citizens' attitudes regarding sport may also be influenced. A discussion of these processes follows.

Sport policy in a comparative perspective

Until the end of the nineteenth century, sport was traditionally an unorganized activity (Houlihan 1997: 1–2). It was neither part of governmental policy nor a matter of interest to politicians and bureaucrats. Parallel to the development of the nation state in the nineteenth century, sport became more organized within a national framework constructed mainly through the establishment of a range of sport-specific voluntary governing bodies (Houlihan 1997: 1–). National sports organizations grew because off the increasing number of regional and national competitions and the need for established rules and effective organization of events (McIntosh 1987). The growth in the significance of international competition, as well as of globalization processes in general and sport in particular, also triggered the involvement of national governments in sport (Ben-Porat and Ben-Porat 2004; Harvey and Houle 1994). By the 1980s and 1990s most industrial countries had reached a position where sport and government were linked across a wide and diverse range of policy issues.

There is a substantial amount of literature that falls within the sport and public policy field. Early work includes Chalip's (1996) critical policy analysis of the case of New Zealand and a recent study by Sam and Jackson (2004) investigates how a policy paradigm shaped the findings and recommendations of New Zealand's Ministerial Taskforce on Sport, Fitness, and Leisure. Other examples from around the world are Harvey's (2002) study on Canada, which draws on a socio-historical analysis to highlight how sports policy can contribute to good citizenship and social cohesiveness. It identifies the various aspects of citizenship and then shows how sports can contribute to them. The issue of access to sports as a social and cultural right also is examined in Harvey's work in the context of the growth of the Canadian welfare state. It explores how "active citizenship" and "social cohesiveness" can help to provide a prescriptive framework for shaping and evaluating sports policies. Studies on the United Kingdom are other examples (Green 2005; Henry 2001; Henry and Uchiumi 2001; Houlihan 2001, 2005). They describe the long way the United Kingdom has come in the last 30 years as far as sport policy is

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concerned: In 1975 the White Paper "Sport and Recreation" maintained that the government's role was not to control or direct the 290 diverse activities of people's leisure time. However, in the intervening years it has become clear that governments from different sides of the political spectrum in the United Kingdom have adopted increasingly interventionist positions in respect to sport and public policy-making.

The interrelations among sport, policy, and politics have been studied 295 in detail by Houlihan (1997), who compared five Western countries— Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States—in several aspects. Generally, he found a steady increase in the involvement of government in sport, whether as a provider, exploiter, or regulator. Houlihan also emphasized the intensity of the 300 association between sport and identity politics as well as the increasing strength and organization of sports interests. He attributed these to rising public expectations regarding access to sports opportunities—a consequence of increasing government administrative involvement and the creation of specialist administrative agencies and depart 305 ments to manage and oversee sport policy.

Regarding government involvement in sport, Houlihan (1997: 105–108) traces its origins to the late 1930s and early 1940s, when sport was used as part of the solution to the problem of lack of fitness among military recruits and conscripts. Later, sport was adopted as a 310 policy tool in relation to economic development, first at the local and municipal levels and more recently at the national level, when governments began to recognize the economic impact of hosting major international sporting events. Sport has also been used as a means of achieving greater social integration. Houlihan concludes that in the past thirty 315 years central governments have become more closely involved in this area, seeking to exploit sports in pursuit of a broad range of domestic and international policy objectives. Taken as a whole, the nature of government involvement in sports varies from one community and society to the next, and yet, it occurs for one or more of the following reasons: 320 safeguarding the public order (e.g., establishing rules regarding which sports are legal, how sport should be organized, who should have the opportunity to play/coach and where); maintaining health, fitness, and physical abilities; promoting the prestige and power of a nation; promoting a sense of identity, belonging, and unity; emphasizing values consis 325 tent with the dominant ideology; increasing support for political leaders and governments; promoting economic development (Houlihan 1994, 2000: 213–227; see also Coakley 2003: 403–439). However, it is much more difficult to establish a stable set of administrative arrangements for sport within the machinery of government. These problems clearly 330 have arisen in the Israeli experience, as will be discussed later.

The growth of government involvement in sport stands in contrast to the significant decline of the pioneering role of national governing bodies in the past in establishing rules, organizing competitions, and supporting clubs (Chalip, Johnson, and Stachura 1996). The increas- 335 ing tendency toward professionalization and commercialization in sport has contributed much to these developments; hence, the voice of governing bodies in policy debates on sport is getting progressively weaker. It is difficult to see how these bodies will be able to maintain their control over elite sport in the coming years. 340

We argue that this is also the situation in Israel, yet government involvement in sport is relatively low. Many sport activities are poorly organized and financed, and this calls for public action to create alternative sport organizations. A unilateral initiative to achieve this goal has not occurred because of the historical development of sport policy 345 in Israel's highly centralized political and bureaucratic systems. In the following section we apply the framework developed so far to explain the evolution of alternative politics as substitutive informal institutions in Israel and to explain why sport policy has not become a part of this process. 350

Alternative politics and sport policy in Israel

In this section we explain the impact of alternative politics, which evolved as a dominant informal institution in Israel in the 1980s and 1990s, on the process of policy formation in general and on sport policy in particular. 355

Israeli society and political culture were strongly influenced by the nation-building stage under the rule of the British Mandate in Palestine between the years 1917 and 1948. This period has been described and analyzed in numerous articles and books (e.g., Eisenstadt 1967; Horowitz and Lissak 1978, 1989; Kimmerling 1985; Lehman-Wilzig 360 1992; Migdal 2001; Shprinzak 1986). The main insights suggested by these studies can be summarized as follows. In the three decades prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Jewish community under the British Mandate of Palestine had a relatively large measure of autonomy in managing its own affairs in most fields of life. 365 British Mandatory authorities allowed the Jewish (and Arab) communities to create a political party system based on a form of democratic election, to establish economic and industrial organizations, and to run autonomous systems of public health, social welfare, and education. For the Jewish community, this autonomy did not include permission to 370 freely settle the country, to have an independent military organization, or to enforce the rule of law. The British policy of fighting independent

initiatives by the Jewish community in these areas of life became very
stringent in the 1930s and 1940s due to the intensifying conflict
between the Jewish and Arab populations.   375

These conditions led the Jewish leadership to form a twofold strat-
egy that became the keystone of the Zionist ethos. First, whenever it
was possible and authorized by the British Mandate, the Jewish lead-
ership created independent organizations, alternatives to those of
either the British Authorities or the Arab community, to accelerate   380
economic development, provide public services such as health, education,
and welfare, and to develop infrastructures such as electricity, roads,
water supplies, and building construction. Thus, the idea that the
Jewish community could not trust others and had to create its own
institutions and organizations gradually became a building block of   385
the Zionist ethos. The Jewish leadership also faced significant threats
from the Arab population and a British ban on wide Jewish immigra-
tion. Given the aspiration to expand the Jewish settlement in Palestine
as much as possible, the Jewish leadership gradually established ille-
gal paramilitary forces that had three main goals: to fight the Arab   390
paramilitary forces, to organize illegal Jewish immigration, and to
establish and defend Jewish settlements. These channels of activity
became the bedrock of the Zionist ethos, as well as of the values that
have been endowed, via the educational system, since the establish-
ment of the State of Israel in 1948 (Horowitz and Lissak 1978: 52–59,   395
154–156; Lehman-Wilzig 1992: 13–31). We should emphasize that
these channels of activity were not only "alternative" but also illegal
as far as the British Mandatory law was concerned.

In pre-statehood Israel, each political group formed its own insti-
tutions, and these also became tools in the ideological struggle   400
among the various camps. For example, health funds, educational
institutions, labor unions, youth movements, and underground army
organizations were formed separately by each camp, each with a
unique political identity. Similarly, sports unions were formed in
pre-statehood Israel as part of the very same process (Kaufman and   405
Bar-Eli 2005: 182–187).

Furthermore, as part of the Zionist effort, most areas of life were
subordinated to the goals of building military forces and settling the
country. The area of sport was no exception because most sport orga-
nizations were mobilized to serve the Zionist effort (Kaufman 1998;   410
Reshef and Paltiel 1993). For example, Hapoel—the workers' sports
union—was strongly affiliated with the Hagana, which was the
pre-state military organization controlled by the socialist political par-
ties (Kaufman 1996a). Similarly, Beitar—the sports union affiliated
with the revisionist party (i.e., the major predecessor of the present   415

Likud Bloc)—was actually founded (in 1925) as the youth movement of that party. According to the revisionist ideology, preoccupation with athletic activity was required for the purpose of achieving political goals through military means (Reznik 2002: 162–163). Thus, as in many other areas of life, the Jewish leadership under the British Mandate did not have an independent policy for sport, but rather sport was regarded as another means to strengthen the military effort.

The War of Independence (1948–1949) brought sport activities in Israel to a halt. The athletes, like the rest of the population (both men and women), were drafted into the recently established Israel Defense Forces. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Department of Physical Education, which was founded by the National Council in 1939, became a government body. Three years later, the first national sports organizations were established: The Olympic Committee of Israel, whose task was to represent Israeli athletes in international sporting events, and the Sports Federation of Israel, which was responsible for local sports activities. The organizations were responsible for all sports except tennis and football, which had their own federations (Galily 2007). Israeli society was characterized by relative stability during the 1950s and 1960s, but a significant change in the development of Israeli political culture came about in 1967 with the Six Day War (Horowitz and Lissak 1992: 116–129, 138–144; Naor 1999). Israel's victory gave rise to nationalistic and religious feelings (e.g., in regards to the Jewish holy places located in the West Bank). This change in atmosphere was also expressed in attempts by some religious segments of the population to unilaterally establish illegal settlements in the West Bank, which were later legalized by the government. These events marked the reappearance of the mental model that characterized the pre-state period (i.e., solving social problems through unilateral initiatives).

Consideration must be given to the fact that several processes were intertwined with Israel's process of state-formation: the processes of secularization, population growth,[1] urbanization, militarization, and the development of sports. These processes are not isolated but rather interdependent processes and therefore of importance when discussing the development of sport in Israel. During the 1970s and 1980s these socio-political processes, discussed in detail elsewhere (Mizrahi and Meydani 2003), led to the inability of the government to make efficient and stable policy decisions and caused a political stalemate. This intensified the feeling among the Israeli public that there was a continuing government failure in providing public services, combined with blocked channels of influence. The crisis was even deeper than a systemic failure of the government's

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ability to provide services, because there were no other agreed social mechanisms of compromising and solving conflicts between sectors and groups in the society.

Given these conditions, in the 1980s large sectors of Israeli society attempted to find alternative means of solving social problems through existing or newly-developed shared mental models. Similar to the process analyzed earlier regarding the settlers in the West Bank in the late 1960s, these sectors used unilateral initiatives as a problem-solving approach. The 1980s were characterized by a significant growth in the "black-market economy," particularly regarding illegal trade in foreign currency and "gray-market medicine" as expressed in a quasi-legal private supply of health services using public facilities; in "gray-market education," expressed in the employment of privately paid teachers and the evolution of independent private schools; and in pirate cable networks—all of which are alternative provisions of governmental services (i.e., substitutive informal institutions) (Lehman-Wilzig 1992: 33–55). Indeed, during the 1980s it became clear that, for many people, only unilateral initiatives could help improve their outcomes. Furthermore, most of these initiatives were institutionalized via the formal rules of the game and eventually became part of governmental policy.

The emergence of alternative politics embodied an even deeper change of informal institutions in Israel (i.e., the transformation of the relations between citizens and politicians). In the 1950s and 1960s these relations were informally based on a top-down approach, in the sense that policies were decided through the existing highly centralized system, with very limited participation of citizens. In the 1980s and 1990s the nature of these informal relations was transformed, and they were then based on a bottom-up approach. In this new, informal status quo, citizens identified policy problems and solved them unilaterally by forming substitutive informal institutions. In doing so, they actually signaled to politicians the required institutional changes; thus, institutional changes as well as specific policies and outcomes were initiated from the bottom up.

Furthermore, as such processes intensified, people gradually understood that alternative politics should be applied not only to the specific problems of supplying public services but also to the political decision-making process as a whole (i.e., they began to look for alternative centers of power). We argue that in Israel this alternative center of power has been the High Court of Justice which, by the late 1990s, had become a substitute for the political system through informal institutionalization (for further elaboration, see Mizrahi and Meydani 2003).

Sport policy in Israel and socio-political transformation

Sport policy in Israel has been strongly influenced by socio-political as well as cultural dynamics. Historically, sport policy in Israel was either subordinated to other dominant issues, such as security, or it was regarded as very marginal by the highly centralized political and bureaucratic systems. In other words, as long as sport could be instrumentally used for advancing politicians' interests in other areas of life (e.g., security), they were relatively active in this field. However, when sport stopped being instrumental (i.e., after the establishment of the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces), Israeli politicians significantly reduced their interest and involvement in sport, illustrated by the fact that there was virtually no official sport policy in Israel during the 1950s and 1960s (Bar-Eli and Simri 2002: 282–283).

Sport in Israel has been virtually free from governmental control since the very beginning, but it has always been linked to political parties (Nevo 2000; Simri, Tenenbaum, and Bar-Eli 1996). Sport in the pre-state era was first assimilated into the ideological framework of Zionism, when Zionist parties appropriated sport clubs as tools for partisan competition. For example, starting in the early 1920s, football clubs were incorporated into nation-wide sport associations that were affiliated with specific political organizations: Hapoel was an organ of the General Federation of Labour (Histadrut), Maccabi was affiliated with middle-class political parties, Beitar was associated with the right-wing "Revisionists," and Elizur was related to the religious-Zionist party (Ben-Porat 1998: 273).

The Maccabi sports organization was founded in 1912 and has been considered an apolitical organization for most of its existence. However, it has always had strong links to the General Zionist party—one of the predecessors of the present Likud Bloc. Three Maccabi members were even elected to the Israeli parliament (Knesset) in the beginning of the 1950s as part of the General Zionist ticket. The Hapoel sports organization, founded in 1926, has always been linked to the various Labour parties (Kaufman 1996a: 123), whereas Elitzur and Betar, dating back to the late 1930s, were connected with the Religious and the Revisionist parties, respectively (Kaufman 1998: 93; Reshef and Paltiel 1993: 52).

On the eve of World War II, the General Council of the Jews in Palestine established a Physical Training Department that would cater to all aspects of physical activity, with the exception of competitive sports. As mentioned earlier, most of the Department's activities were dedicated to the use of sport for strengthening the Zionist and military effort against the Arabs and the British Mandate authorities.

At that time, Maccabi and Hapoel, the two main sports organizations, had no areas of cooperation except in the game of soccer. This was because Maccabi was associated with the general international sports movements, whereas Hapoel was an active member of the international labor sports organization. The newly created Department did not possess enough power to overcome the political structure of the sport system, and therefore its accomplishments were minor (Bar-Eli and Simri 2002; Simri et. al. 1996).

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the close relationship between sport and politics was reflected, for example, by the fact that in the Israel Sport Federation—one of the most powerful sport bodies during the first three decades of statehood—the number of representatives from each of the four sport organizations (Hapoel, Maccabi, Beitar, and Elizur) was proportionate to the number of each of the respective party's seats in parliament. The Labour party, which was the dominant political party in power for the first 29 years of Israel's statehood, gave control over the most popular sports, such as soccer and basketball, to Hapoel—the largest sport organization.

According to Nevo (2000: 337), the party framework that characterized the structure of sport in Israel and the fact that the relationship between the different clubs was affected primarily by political identification, enabled only a few clubs to be given priority. This priority was expressed in a number of ways, such as a closed market of athletes with no movement between federations, and/or various types of assistance (sport-related or not) such as clubs helping sister organizations when necessary in league standings. This condition favored the larger federations and thus constituted a vested interest in maintaining a status quo. As a result, Israeli sport was characterized by the hegemony of relatively few teams in the different sporting fields, with the appearance of new teams at the upper levels being strongly limited.

Although the existence of sports organizations affiliated with political parties could have led to the formation of a consistent sport policy and the greater promotion of sport in Israeli society, this was not the case. The centralized nature of these organizations triggered the rise of bureaucratic and political interests, eliminating possible aspirations of effectively promoting sport in Israeli society. In other words, sport was an instrument for either promoting other policy areas such as security and/or for providing bureaucratic positions for political parties. These assignments were usually regarded as default options for those politicians who could not find better positions in the political establishment (Nevo 2000: 339).

These facts support our argument in two ways. First, the generally-accepted view that official positions in the sport organizations were

inferior to other positions in the political-bureaucratic establishment indicates that it was well known that these positions were relatively incapable of obtaining budget, resources, power, and personal benefits—the prime interests of both bureaucrats and political appointees (see 590 Miller and Moe 1983; Niskanen 1971: 15–35). Second, the fact that political appointees had no real interest or knowledge in managing and promoting sport further marginalized the place of sport in Israeli society and culture.

Shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Physical 595 Training Department became affiliated with the Ministry of Education. As explained earlier, the involvement of this new governmental unit was also relatively marginal, and during the 1950s and 1960s the government intervened in sport only in times of crisis. Such was the situation, for example, in the early 1950s when the Ministry of 600 Foreign Affairs intervened in a conflict between Hapoel and Maccabi over recognition by the International Olympic Committee. Because of this intervention an agreement was worked out according to which all sports bodies would be run on a parity basis, each side making up 50 percent of the members. This agreement held for about a dozen 605 years, and only in the early 1960s did the sports federations gradually adopt statutes of a truly democratic nature. Hapoel gained dominance due to its majority, in practically all the national sports federations.

In 1960, following complaints concerning the organization of Israel's participation in the Rome Olympics, a special government 610 inquiry committee (the Dafni Committee) was established. Its recommendation was to replace the existing department with a Sport and Physical Education Authority, which would supervise both competitive sports and physical education in Israel. The new Authority was to be headed by a member of the government Labour party. In practice, 615 the Authority has had a minimal effect on competitive sports and the autonomous sports organizations and federations. As for physical education, the Authority did not intervene in this area until 1986, when the Minister of Education finally decided to carry out the mandate that had been bestowed on the Authority twenty-five years earlier.   620

Thus, sport policy was considered to be a very marginal issue by all parties in the government. In 1977, following an upset in the elections, the Labour party became part of the opposition. While in power, the Labour party had been satisfied that sports were controlled by the sports organization aligned with it (Hapoel), but the new ruling party 625 (Likud) was faced with a national sports movement that was controlled by the opposition. However, leadership of the Ministry of Education and Culture was handed over to a coalition partner (the National Religious party), for whom sport was far from a top priority.

The new minister found himself in a peculiar situation—being respon-   630
sible, against his deep religious convictions, for sports activities that
took place primarily on the Sabbath.[2] Therefore, he chose not to inter-
fere in the sports structure; thus, Hapoel remained the most influen-
tial organization in Israeli sports. To a large extent this situation
persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with minor alternations   635
due to political and coalitional shifts (Bar-Eli and Simri 2002; Simri
et al. 1996). The government's decision to nominate Deputy Minister
of Education Pinhas Goldstein to be in charge of Israeli sport in 1990
should have been an important landmark, especially when it was
repeated by the similar appointments of Deputy Ministers Micha   640
Goldman and Moshe Peled. However, as in the decision to appoint
Matan Vilnai as Minister of Science, Culture, and Sport in 1999, these
appointees were ineffective in fostering the interest in sport, which
still failed to become a significant part of Israeli culture. One should
be aware of the fact that none of those officials managed to secure   645
passable budgets for sport, and those sports that are almost totally
dependent on state funding for their development and, in most cases,
existence, are critically under-budgeted. This affects training facilities
and leads to inadequate competition potential for Israeli sportspeople
and athletes (Galily 2007; Israel 2003).   650

Despite the lack of significant sport policy in Israel, two central pro-
cesses developed—mainly in the competitive sports of basketball and
soccer—beginning in the late 1970s and intensifying during the 1980s
and 1990s. First, these sports were gradually opened to imported play-
ers, beginning with basketball and later in soccer. This process started   655
informally when basketball teams imported Jewish players, or players
who converted to Judaism to obtain Israeli citizenship and play legally
(Galily and Sheard 2002: 61). The first influx of American players to
the Israeli basketball league occurred from the mid-1960s to the mid-
1970s. Over time, the growing number of Americans accelerated the   660
professionalization processes in Israeli basketball, which peaked in
the late 1970s with remarkable international achievements (Galily
and Bar-Eli 2005). Basically, these processes had similar characteris-
tics to those analyzed earlier regarding the evolution of alternative
politics as informal conduct in other fields of life.   665

Second, competitive basketball, and later also competitive soccer,
saw the increased involvement of business people in the ownership
and management of their teams. Accelerated privatization processes
and the declining influence of the major politically-oriented organiza-
tions turned sport into first-rate entertainment. From the 1980s   670
onward, sports have been to a large extent disengaged from party pol-
itics, although the various movements still maintain some of their old

links. For example, Hapoel remains affiliated with the Histadrut, but most of its leading sports teams have been sold off to private entrepreneurs; the same is basically true for Beitar and Elitzur (Galily 2007; Israel 2003). According to Ben-Porat and Ben-Porat (2004), this was a reflection of the globalization of these fields, combined with increased individualization in Israeli society. More specifically, Ben-Porat (1998; 2002) viewed commodification as the major process determining the social development of sport in modern capitalist societies and argued that this process in Israeli sport (e.g., soccer) was a logical consequence of the general social, political, and economic transformation of Israel.

Apart from soccer and basketball, other branches of sport have seen some promising individual achievements, especially in recent years. Judo, windsurfing, kayaking, sailing, and tennis, have produced some excellent individual performances. Nevertheless, for promotion of young Israeli-born local talents, it seems they lag behind the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who have made great contribution to Israeli sport: the performances in this category are of Anna Smashnova in tennis, Constantin Matosovich in the high jump (fifth place in the Sydney Olympics 2000), Alexander Averbuch in pole vaulting (European champion in 2002), and Michael Kalganov in kayaking (bronze medal in the Sydney Olympics). Other achievements in the Olympic arena came from homegrown Israeli sportsmen and women, Yael Arad (judo, silver medal, Barcelona, 1992), Oren Smadja (judo, bronze medal, Barcelona, 1992), and Gal Friedman (windsurfing, gold medal in Athens 2004 Olympics and bronze medal, Atlanta, 1996) (Israel 2000).

However, these processes only partially contributed to the development of Israeli sport in general, and basketball and soccer in particular. Most Israelis have expressed dissatisfaction with the level of sport and sport facilities in Israel (Kaufman and Harif 2002), yet there has been no significant demand for alternative informal channels of competitive sport activities. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was an ineffective sport policy in Israel, dissatisfaction among the public with the level and facilities of sport, and little demand for structural changes. As a result, between 1993 and 1999, four governmental committees (Maliniak, Ben-Dror, Levin, and Fogel) were set up by the ruling governments to assess the situation of sport in Israel. Most, if not all, of their recommendations were never implemented. For example, the Maliniak Committee report, which was submitted to Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein in 1993, explicitly recommended making the transition to full professionalism, separating sport and politics, putting an end to the National Betting Board's support of professional

sport, and cutting the central organizations' budgets by 80 percent; however—as with the other committees—these recommendations were never implemented (State Auditor Report 2006).

Another valid indication of the marginal role of sport in Israeli culture, and hence identity, is the fact that minorities and new immigrants in Israeli society have not used sport activities and competitions to a great extent to channel their social group into the heart of Israeli identity. It seems that they have made an accurate assessment that sport is not a central component of that identity (Sorek 2002; Galily 2007). As a comparison, new immigrants certainly view the military service as a way to become Israeli and to gain legitimacy in the eyes of strong social groups in Israeli society (Levy 2006).

Together, these characteristics reflected the marginal place of sport in Israel's popular culture. For example, the one-channel era, which had lasted nearly a quarter of a century (1968–1993), left Israeli sport fans rather unsatisfied. Because of the channel's tight budget and full program schedule, it could offer only limited broadcasts of sporting events. The first Israeli football league game was broadcast only in 1986. A local basketball game was not broadcast until 1991, with the establishment of the Second Channel (Galily 2007). We argue that this can basically be explained by the social and cultural preferences imposed by the centralized political system that existed before and after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Another example that illustrates the fact that the Israel government looks on sport as a marginal phenomenon is that the amount of government allocation to sports through the Ministry of Education and Culture is negligible. In 1998, for example, the Israeli government's allocations to sports through the Ministry of Education and Culture amounted to 25.7 million—only 0.38 percent of the Ministry total budget(!).[3] Of this figure, 5.7 million was used for policing sports events, mainly soccer matches. Of the remaining 20 million, some 50 percent was allocated to municipalities and local authorities who used the funds to maintain and operate existing facilities, support local sports teams, and arrange tournaments between schools and community centers. The remaining 50 percent was disbursed to other bodies and institutions, including the sports movements (Hapoel, Maccabi, etc.), the sports associations, the Israel Olympic Committee, the Wingate Institute (Israel's National Sports Center), and the Council for Excellence in Sports. These government funds are also used for major events such as the Maccabiah and the various sports championships. Therefore, sports are struggling, at the national and municipal levels, to find funding and tend to lose out to more pressing needs such as defense and security, education, health and welfare, housing, and infrastructure

improvement. There has been some success in encouraging the private sector to invest in sports sponsorship and advertisement. However, Israeli sports are caught in a vicious circle, with the relative lack of success discouraging the involvement of businesses (Griver 1999).

As explained earlier, the formation of beliefs can be understood in terms of problem-solving activity, which is significantly influenced by problem-solving mechanisms. In centralized systems problem solving, as well as the formation of beliefs in those areas where citizens do not have clear preferences, strongly reflects the government's priorities, meaning that if the government invests its efforts and resources in a certain policy issue, that is marginal for its citizens, this issue is likely to become central in the citizens' preferences. This can also be applied to sport policy. Given the lack of such a policy by the highly centralized systems in the formative decades of the State, Israeli citizens considered sport activities to be marginal in their cultural preferences. Therefore, when the nature of relations between citizens and politicians was transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up orientation, citizens did not look for mechanisms alternative to the existing ones to provide sport activities and improved sport facilities.

Conclusion

This article has examined the political and social environment in which sport policy is formed. While other studies of sport policy attempt to characterize the nature of sport policy in different countries (Chalip et al. 1996), this article focuses on socio-political influences on sport policy. In particular, it suggests a framework for analyzing the ways in which people learn and form preferences regarding sport, emphasizing the central role of institutions and structural factors in these processes. We believe that this contributes to the study of preference formation regarding sport activities as well as to the understanding of sport policy.

More specifically, we argue that the formal rules and informal conduct that characterize the political and bureaucratic systems influence citizens' beliefs, behavior, and cultural preferences. When formal rules are centralized and citizen-politician relations are informally characterized by a top-down orientation, policy areas for which citizens do not have clear and well-established beliefs, as well as cultural preferences, are dominated by politicians' policies. Under these conditions, when the government intervenes and forms policies in a specific area of life, it is actually signaling that this specific area of life should be central for the given society and thus can also be of great interest to the citizens. Areas that are left out of governmental policy are therefore

likely to be treated as insignificant by the citizens. Furthermore, this   800
impact is likely to be stable in the long run, meaning that even when
citizen-politician relations are transformed from a top-down to
bottom-up orientation, citizens tend to define policy problems and
solutions in the fields previously defined by the government as essen-
tial and central, leaving other areas of life out of the social game.   805

Given the highly centralized state system that existed in its forma-
tive years, Israeli society and culture were deeply influenced by
governmental policies that to a great extent set the social and cultural
agenda. For this reason, areas of life where citizens did not have well-
established tastes and preferences and that were relatively neglected   810
by the government, such as sport, have been regarded as marginal by
most citizens, who did not form their own expectations or specific
interests and preferences in such fields. Furthermore, we argue that
this situation also persisted when citizen-politician relations were
informally transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up orientation.   815
This transformation did not bring pressures for change in the
"neglected" fields; as a result they were once again left out of any gov-
ernmental plan and, this time also, social action. This mechanism
explains the low status of sport in Israeli society. It also explains why,
given the bottom-up orientation, Israeli government is not likely to   820
impose policies that will change the situation in the absence of signifi-
cant social demands. Therefore, it seems that deep socio-cultural
changes will be required before any substantial transformation in the
status of sport in Israeli society can take place.

Notes   825

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1. Over the years Israel continued to absorb immigrants. The most recent wave of mass
   immigration was comprised of members of the large Jewish community of the former
   Soviet Union, which struggled for years for the right to emigrate to Israel. While
   some 100,000 managed to get to Israel in the 1970s, since 1989 over 700,000 have set-
   tled in the country.   840

2. It should be borne in mind that historically, sport and Judaism were not always in conflict. According to Griver (1999), this aversion can be traced back to the third century BCE, when the Greeks ruled in the Land of Israel. Then the Jews viewed sport as an alien Greek concept, and Jewish contingents rarely took part in the classical Olympic Games because participants were required to offer gifts to the Greek god Hercules—a gesture that contradicted basic Jewish beliefs. During the Roman period, sports were associated with the cruelty and violence of gladiatorial combat. Nevertheless, the ruler of the land of Israel at the time, King Herod, built stadia throughout the country and encouraged contests in boxing, archery, racing, and gladiatorial disciplines. This did not change opinions, though, and for many centuries Jews saw sports as a "Hellenistic" evil to be rejected. Such opinions regarding sport still persist among some Orthodox Jews today.

3. One of the recommendations of the Levin Committee in 1998 was to raise the allocations to sports through the Ministry of Education and Culture to one percent of the Ministry's total budget.

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