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## Political implications of new social thinking: byproduct of the privatization of the kibbutzim

**Abstract:** In the 1980s the kibbutzim suffered a severe economic and demographic crisis, which endangered the continuation of their existence as cooperative communities. The solution was to adopt steps, taken from the ideas of the free market. Beyond the increase of economic efficiency, the rearrangement of the community under new rules was accompanied by political influence, as can be seen in the change of the voting pattern of the kibbutzim members to the Knesset.

The main argument is that the arrangement of kibbutz society under the new rules brought into the kibbutz a new social discourse that completely changed the way in which the individual defines himself in social and political terms. The political byproduct was that the Left parties that in the past served as a prototype for the socialist identity were perceived as not relevant to the new social identity, in favor of steadily increasing support for the center parties.

To track the change in the political identity, we chose to examine from up close three kibbutzim found at different stages of the change processes: Kibbutz Deganya A, Kibbutz Mizra, and Kibbutz Ein Dor. The objective was not only to identify which group in the kibbutz changed its political identity but primarily, to examine how the penetration of the new social knowledge contributed to this.

The findings revealed a large gap in the perception of reality primarily between two age groups in the kibbutz. Unlike the older generation, the younger employed neo-liberal social representations to define itself, the community, and the political system. The left parties, like the old kibbutz, were perceived as old, inefficient, and thus not relevant for it in the voting for the Knesset.

**Key words:** kibbutz, social representations, collective identity, political identity

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### Introduction

The kibbutzim<sup>1</sup> are Jewish socialist communes that developed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a part of the process of the national revival of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. As cooperative communities, they were established from the ideological drive to realize in practice the socialist idea and through it to lead and reshape Jewish society (Lanir, 1990, p. 85; Near, 1992, p. 25; Shepher, 1977, p. 23; Yatziv, 1999, p. 69). The pioneers of the Second Immigration, who came from the roiling climate of Europe, carried with them revolutionary ideas that challenged the old social order. Their aspiration to merge Zionism as the Jewish national idea and socialist ideology, derived from the fundamental assumption that the problem of the Jewish people is not only a national political problem, but also includes social-economic aspects and thus the unique conditions in the Land of Israel, necessitated the creation of Zionist socialism (Bein, 1976, p. 28).

The workers were educated and had a strong ideological awareness, which was channeled into energetic political activism, even before the formation of a political system.

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<sup>1</sup> Kibbutzim is the plural form of kibbutz.

Political activity was perceived by them as a decisive factor in the building of society and the realization of the national vision. The socialist doctrine that was brought by the pioneers of the Second Immigration was a pillar in the formation of the characters of the first worker communities. The pioneers' perception of themselves, the coping with the difficulties of reality, or the vision of the future – all these derived from the socialist set of knowledge that provided for them a language, and a cognitive instrument for the interpretation of what was happening around them (Darin-Drabkin, 1961, p. 55; Gavron, 2000, p. 19; Shepher, 1977, p. 23; Shoshani, 1973, p. 10). Thus, already in 1905, lacking a different organizational framework, the first two workers' parties were established, the Poalei Zion Party (Workers of Zion) and the HaPoel HaTsair Party (Young Worker) (Bein, 1976, p. 202; Horwitz, Lissak, 1977, p. 89). Beyond the supply of social services for the pioneers, the socialist parties gave the workers an identity and a context of belonging that were essential in the creation of the new social identity.

It is therefore not surprising that the kibbutz communities that were established from the same ideological drive maintained a close connection and commitment to the workers' parties, which were perceived as faithfully representing the socialist identity. Even though the difference in the kibbutz movements was expressed also in the brand of the different workers' parties,<sup>2</sup> it was still possible to say that the socialist idea was reflected in all of them. A look at the voting pattern to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) on the part of the members of the kibbutzim over the years shows that for decades the workers' parties<sup>3</sup> received unprecedented support of nearly 100%, despite and nearly without any connection to the dramatic events that accompanied society and the state. Beyond the political socialization that was conveyed through the educational institutions of the kibbutzim, and the social pressure that derived from the very fact of belonging to an intimate political community, this pattern of behavior proves the extent to which the socialist political identity was an inseparable part of the kibbutz identity, and that the political preference of the kibbutz member was derived from his belonging to the collective.

In the 1980s, the Israeli economy suffered a financial crisis that seriously harmed the kibbutzim and raised doubts about their ability to continue to exist as independent cooperative communities (Ben Rafael, Topel, 2009, p. 6). The loans that the kibbutzim took out from the banks, at high interest rates and under conditions of inflation, swelled to debts of billions of shekels, which were far beyond their ability to repay with the resources at their disposal (Hakim, 2009, p. 149). An especially deep shock was felt in 1986, with the disintegration of Kibbutz Beit Oren. A reality in which a kibbutz goes bankrupt and its members are left without guarantees, without savings, assets, or pen-

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the kibbutz movements and the different workers' parties is expressed in the representation of kibbutz members in the parties and in the voting patterns of the kibbutz members to the Knesset. The kibbutzim belonging to the Ichud HaKvutzot VeHaKibbutzim movement were characterized by voting for the MAPAI party and then for the Labour Party, the kibbutzim belonging to the HaKibbutz HaMeuchad movement were characterized by voting for the Achdut HaAvoda party and then for the Labour Party, and the kibbutzim of the HaKibbutz HaArtzi shel HaShomer HaTsair movement were characterized by voting for the MAPAM party and then for MERETZ.

<sup>3</sup> The use of the concept of workers' parties pertains to the different socialist parties over the years, those that merged with the Labour Party or left it over the years, such as the Poalei Eretz Yisrael Party, the Poalim Meuchedet Party, the Achdut HaAvoda Party, the Poalei Yisrael list, HaMaArach, Labour Party, Yisrael Achat, Meretz, and HaMachaneh HaZioni.

sions, eroded the self-confidence of the kibbutzim and raised concerns about the ability of the kibbutz to ensure the existence of its members (Pavin, 1992, p. 10). The characteristics of the crisis in kibbutz society were not only economic but also exposed deeper fundamental problems about the way in which the community was managed. It appeared that the kibbutz had not succeeded in adjusting and adapting itself to the political and social reality of the State of Israel in the 1980s. The adherence of the kibbutz community to its unique lifestyles regardless of the changes that had occurred around it was the main reason for the gap that steadily grew between the reality and erroneous perception of it. The crisis in kibbutz society therefore was a deep crisis that can be called a 'conceptual crisis'. The kibbutz language that had served the community for decades, through which social knowledge was built and the kibbutz identity was shaped, became irrelevant to the understanding of the crisis, or in its ability to propose ways of action (Lanir, 1990, p. 24; Leviatan, 2003, p. 10; Pavin, 1992, p. 11; Rozolio, 1999, p. 24).

One of the first steps towards escaping the crisis was to resolve the outside debts of the kibbutzim. In 1989, the Ministry of Finance under Shimon Peres promoted a recovery program (Ben-Rafael, Ya'ar, Socker, 2000, p. 88). Within this 'Kibbutzim Arrangement', the banks agreed to erase some of the debt, and the Ministry of Finance promised to transfer support grants of hundreds of millions of shekels to the kibbutzim (Hakim, 2009, p. 149). The condition that was set for this transfer of financial assistance was the repair of the internal failures of the kibbutz system, and the re-organization of the community in the spirit of the free market (Ben-Rafael, Topel, 2009, p. 7). On the part of the kibbutzim, the desire to increase efficiency was so strong that it overcame the values and principles perceived as formative elements in the kibbutz community. The privatization of services, differential salaries, or the distribution of the kibbutz assets to its members, increased economic efficiency, but totally changed the mutual relationship previously existing between the individual and the community. The new kibbutz model which was called the 'Renewed Kibbutz' (Ben-Rafael, Topel, 2011, p. 252; Ben-Rafael, Topel, 2009, p. 25; Russel, Hanneman, Getz, 2011, p. 109) introduced into the kibbutz a new social discourse and a set of values which for many years had been considered unacceptable.

Were the changes in the organization of the kibbutz community under the new rules accompanied by political implications? Figure 1 presents the voting for the Knesset of the kibbutzim members of the United Kibbutzim Movement (TAKAM)<sup>4</sup> in 1949–2015. It can be seen that the sweeping support of the workers' parties that characterized the kibbutzim and which were perceived as a part of the collective identity weakened greatly, while voting for the center parties<sup>5</sup> increased. Are these two phenomena related? Did the political identity that was so identified with the kibbutz changed under the influence of the new social discourse? What is the cause of the decline in the support for left-wing

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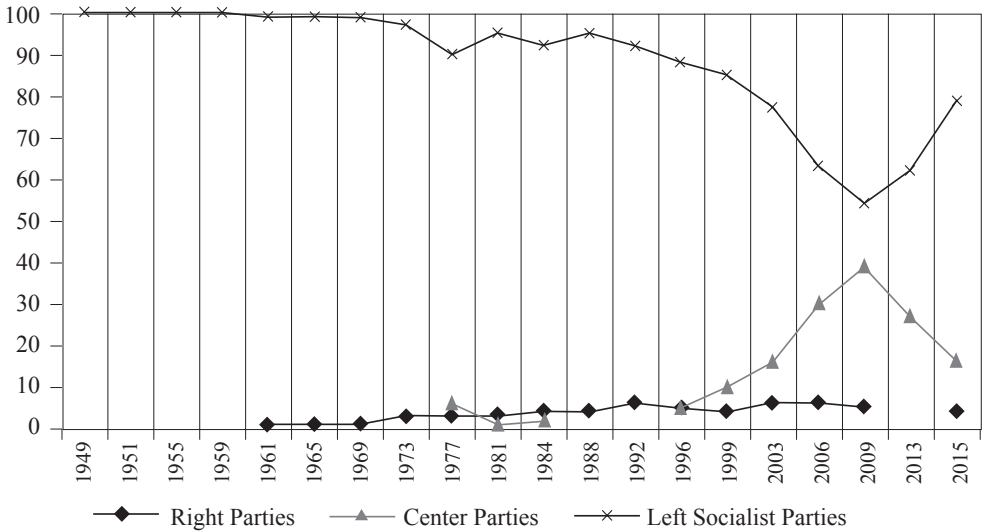
<sup>4</sup> Until 2000, the data for the United Kibbutz Movement are presented separately. From 2000, the voting data of all the secular kibbutz movements, which joined into one kibbutz movement, are presented together.

<sup>5</sup> The term center parties addresses the parties that position themselves at the center of the party system, between the Likud Party on the one hand and the Labour Party on the other, while they shun the traditional positions of these parties and strive to present national consensus. See: Yanai (2001) and Arian and Shamir (2001).

parties on the part of the kibbutzim members? This is the question that this paper addresses. Until now, most of the research studies on the renewed kibbutz have focused on the economic and social aspects of the community, while the political aspect was barely addressed. The contribution of this research study is that it broadens the scope of the understanding of the changes in the kibbutzim to the political dimension.

At the beginning of the article, the *social representations theory* (Moscovici, 1984), which served as the methodological pillar of the research study, will be presented. The search for a theoretical basis that connects language and social discourse on the one hand, and the understanding of reality on the other, led us to the use of this theory. Afterwards, the research structure, and the form of querying that shaped the database will be presented. The last part of this paper describes the quantitative and qualitative research findings, along with the discussion and conclusions. The main argument of this research study is that the economic reforms the kibbutzim experienced in recent years changed the social understanding, and has driven changes in the political identity.

**Figure 1. Voting Patterns for the Knesset in the United Kibbutzim Movement, 1949–2015**



Source for 1949–1999: Central Bureau Statistic – Elections Results.

Source for 2001–2015: Central Elections Committee Website – Elections Results.

### Social Representations Theory

The social representations theory is a social psychological theory that enables the examination of the influence of social structures on the individual’s cognitive functioning. According to this theory, the array of knowledge found in the person’s brain is called social representations, through which societies and individuals succeed in understanding the physical and social reality. Since reality is complex and the understanding of it lies beyond a person’s limited ability, a person creates certain representations that simulate

reality. These representations are created in negotiations through social discourse in society, and they include images, perceptions, and feelings, along with action scenarios in a given social context (Carvalho, Andrade, 2013, p. 30; Doise, 1993, p. 158; Elcheroth, Doise, Reicher, 2001, p. 732; Farr, 1984, p. 130; Good, 1993, p. 171; Jasper, Fraser, 1984, p. 102; Moscovici, 1984, p. 6; Wagner, 2007, p. 207; Wagner et al., 1999, p. 95). Social representations can be verbal and visual, and they appear in different forms of social behavior, such as the individual's manner of thinking, practices, and formal and informal communication in society (Bauer, Gaskell, 1999, p. 174).

The conclusion that arises from the theory is that a person is not truly free to choose how to understand the world, but his understanding of reality is derived from the same social representations created by the group to which he belongs. Social representations are incorporated in every social interaction, they supervise the transfer of information and are responsible for the attribution of meaning to the different phenomena to the point that the meaning they give to the individual is perceived as the sole meaning for him. The same array of knowledge created through social discourse is found simultaneously in the mind of the individual and in the minds of the other members in the group, and this trait is what gives the members of the group the ability to perceive reality and to attribute meaning to it in the same manner. Social identity, therefore, is the sense of belonging on the part of the individual to all those who are similar to him, in that they share the same constellation of social values, and this is what differentiates them from other groups that have different social values (Breakwell, Canter, 1993, p. 3; McKinlay, Potter, Wetherel, 1993, p. 136; Wagner et al., 1999, p. 96).

In times of social crisis, when a group is forced to cope with a threatening and unfamiliar reality, there is a process of 'anchoring'. The group members attempt to anchor the new phenomenon to the existing social knowledge that they share, and thus attempt to control reality through the transformation of the unfamiliar to familiar (Moscovici, 1984, p. 40). However, in cases that deviate from the hitherto social understanding, an opening is created for the appearance of new social knowledge which until now was situated on the margins of social discourse, and hence the possibility of a new understanding of reality on the part of the group develops.

### Research Structure

To follow the changes in the political identity of the kibbutzim members, we chose to examine three kibbutzim found in the Jezreel Valley up close: Kibbutz Degania Alef, Kibbutz Mizra, and Kibbutz Ein Dor. The three kibbutzim are considered senior ones, and they are situated in the geographic and ideological heart of the kibbutz movement. The three differ in their period of establishment and in the country of origin of their founders, so they provide a broad perspective for observation. Last, the three kibbutzim suffered from the economic and demographic crisis in the 1980s and today are found in different stages of the transition to the model of the 'renewed kibbutz'. The process of the re-organization of the kibbutz communities provided an opportunity to follow the new discourse that accompanied the change, and enabled the identification of the new social knowledge that developed.

The research study conducted during the summer of 2015 integrated two research methods, the qualitative and the quantitative. Every resident of the kibbutz received an anonymous questionnaire that included 66 questions. The first part included questions that pertained to the resident's demographic characteristics, and to the way in which he chooses to define himself. The goal was to identify how the respondent sees himself in the community. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the respondent's attitudes relative to the 'cooperative kibbutz' and relative to the transition to the model of the 'renewed kibbutz'. These questions were intended to reveal the way in which the respondent perceives the kibbutz lifestyle and the attitude he forms in relation to the changes in the community. The last part included a series of questions related to the Israeli party system. Here the goal was to examine whether there is a correlation between the way in which the member chooses to define himself and his attitude towards the kibbutz, versus his political identity.

Half of the questions were closed questions in which the respondent was required to note the degree of agreement with a series of statements on a scale of 1–5 (1=do not at all agree, 5=greatly agree). The other half was a series of open-ended questions in which the resident was free to give an image, association, or explanation in response to the question, and thus to reveal the social knowledge he uses. In addition, fourteen in-depth interviews were held with the residents of the kibbutzim and the main role-holders in the three communities. The emphasis in the interviews was placed on questions that seek explanations of reality. For example: What is the kibbutz? What is the reason that the crisis occurred? What is the most important value in the community? The purpose was to reveal the social understanding and the social representations used by kibbutz residents today. Since political reality is an outcome of the represented reality based on the social knowledge that the group creates, the changes in political preferences reflect changes in the patterns of thinking of the group, and these will be expressed in a new social discourse.

### Research Findings

The total number of respondents from the three kibbutzim was 338 (168 from Kibbutz Ein Dor, 98 from Kibbutz Degania Aleph, and 72 from Kibbutz Mizra). The ratio between men and women was nearly equal, 49% men and 51% women. In contrast, the distribution of the respondents according to the age groups was not equal but reflected the contemporary composition in the kibbutzim: 10% young people aged 20–30, 32% aged 31–40, 17% aged 41–60, and the largest group was of older people, 41% aged 61 and above. The distribution of the respondents according to their status in the kibbutz also was commensurate with the current social structure of the renewed kibbutzim. 70% were kibbutz members, 12% were members of the kibbutz who were born there, and 18% were non-member residents who lived in the kibbutz.

The local identity, which in the past was a source of great pride, became marginal in the eyes of the kibbutz residents. Originally the kibbutz founders enjoyed high social prestige in Israeli society, which saw the members of the kibbutz as those who had taken upon themselves the task of building the nation. Today, kibbutz members do not see

this identity to be a social asset, and of the respondents only 8% defined themselves as a 'kibbutz member'. Most of the respondents, like Israeli society, affiliated themselves with broader identity circles. 56% defined themselves according to their civil identity as Israelis, and 28% defined themselves according to their national identity as Jews.

**Perception of the Kibbutz in the Eyes of Its Residents**

A broad cross-examination of all the variables relating to the perceptions of the kibbutz indicated that there is a large and consistent gap primarily between the two age groups in the communities. In contrast to what was expected, significant differences were not found in the perception of the kibbutz between the kibbutz members and the non-member residents, and differences were not found between the three kibbutzim. The difference that recurred in all of the three communities was the intergenerational difference: the group of young people<sup>6</sup> aged 20–30, versus the group of older people aged 61 and above.

The differences were expressed in their perceptions of the kibbutz, in its values, and in the way in which it needs to act. Table 1 presents some of the means of the indices of the answers regarding the kibbutz.

Table 1

**Differences in the Perception of the Kibbutz between the Young People and the Older People**

Question	Older Respondents 61+	Young Respondents 20–30
I support the idea of "each according to his needs"	2.93	2.50
I support the transition to "renewed kibbutz"	3.57	4.33
I agree the idea of the kibbutz "died"	2.60	3.17
I think the kibbutz condition was improved by privatization	3.48	4.17
I participate in the collective decisions of the kibbutz	3.32	1.83

Source: Author's study.

As the data show, the group of young people presented an attitude of reservations about the model of the cooperative kibbutz and its values, while the older people had reservations about the transition to the model of the renewed kibbutz. The young people concur that the idea of the kibbutz has failed, and they do not support the perception of essential equality that characterized the kibbutz. They support privatization and agree that the processes of change that the kibbutzim are experiencing have improved their economic situation. In contrast, the answers of the older people reflected the support for the traditional attitudes of the kibbutz. They largely support the idea of "every person according to his needs," they display greater involvement in the community and in the making of decisions of the kibbutz, and they do not display sympathy for the process of privatization and the new kibbutz model. Despite the crisis that the community experi-

<sup>6</sup> The group of young people included for the most part, children of kibbutz members and kibbutz members.

enced and the processes of change, the older people do not agree that the kibbutz idea has failed. The comparison of the means of the two age groups using t-test confirmed that the differences between the two groups are statistically significant.

### **Social Thinking Regarding the Kibbutz**

The perception of reality on the part of the individual and his evaluation of his social environment are derived from the social knowledge he carries. This social knowledge is the collection of social representations that were created by the group the individual belongs to and lies at the root of his behavior. Through the open-ended questions presented in the questionnaires and interviews, it was possible to reveal the social language and the array of knowledge available, and thus to present a cognitive map of the kibbutz community. The array of social representations is presented in Figure 2 in the form of a pie-chart. The two internal circles are the respondent's circles of identity, and the outer rings describe the social representations arising from the answers to the open-ended questions. Each ring presents the respondents' understanding regarding another question, for example: the first ring presents the associations and images that arose from the answers to the question: What is the kibbutz for you? The questions are attached at the bottom of the graph. In this way, it is possible to understand not only the positions of the age groups, but also to identify the social language behind the perception of the reality. The frequency of the concepts on the graph represents their frequency as arising from the open answers.

The meaning of the kibbutz for its residents, as well as its advantages and qualities, are perceived differently by the age groups, as reflected in the schema of the social representations. The older people and the young people use a different language and therefore perceive the reality on the kibbutz differently.

The group of people aged 61 and above retained the socialist and idealist language of the old kibbutz, and most of them still defined themselves as belonging to the 'working class'. Two prominent characteristics arose in their language: the first is the extensive use of values, and the second is a strong longing for the past. According to the older people's perception, the kibbutz is not just a place of residence, but a place of solidarity, justice, independent work, and collaboration. The good of the kibbutz is all that is derived from the life of a cooperative community, such as mutual assistance, guarantee, cultural life, and quality education. The bad of the kibbutz is perceived as the exploitation of the cooperative method and laziness on the part of some of the members. The cause of the crisis of the kibbutzim is perceived as a crisis of values, or in other words, a decline in the commitment to the original values of the community on the part of two groups. The first group is of urban spouses who married kibbutz members. In the interviews, the older people claimed that the spouses who were not born on the kibbutz but who moved to live there after they married a kibbutz member, brought with them outside values and were not fully committed to the idea of the cooperative community. The second group is the young members of the kibbutz, who were influenced by the outside set of values and did not follow the path of the generation of the founders.

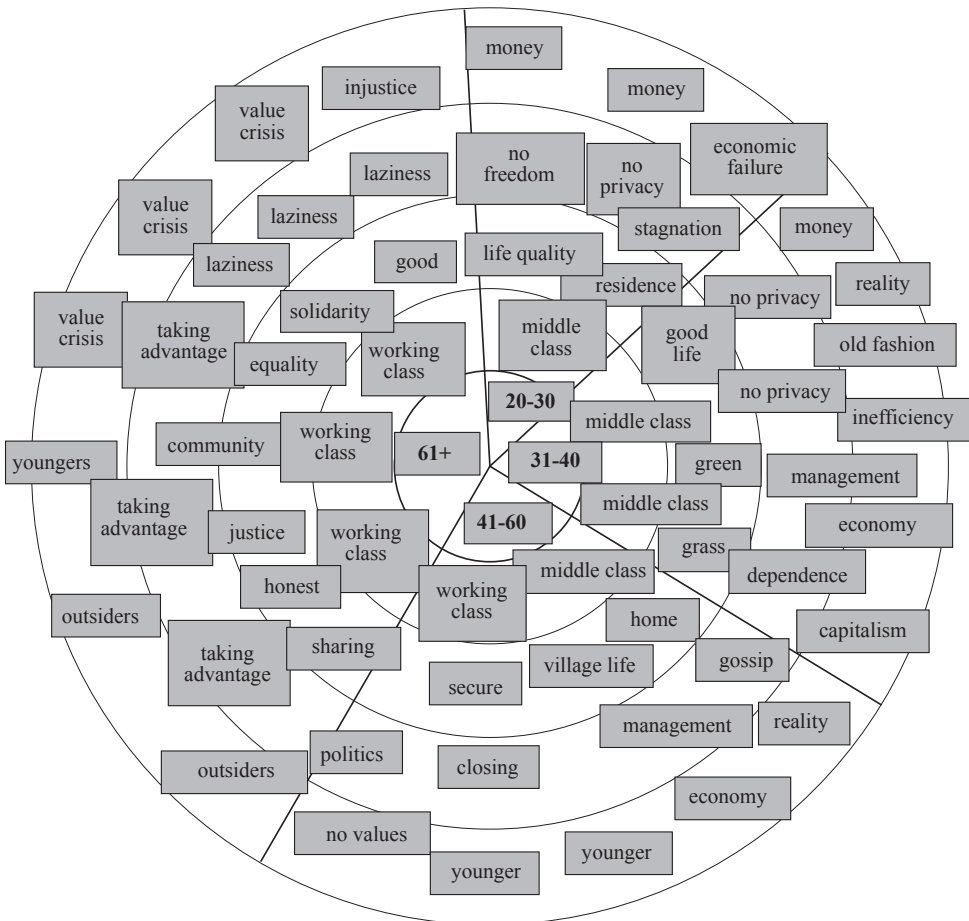
If in the discourse of the older people the focus for the understanding of reality is found in the community, then in the language of the young people the focus is the indi-



vidual. As the respondents' age decreased, the liberal discourse steadily strengthened. The kibbutz according to the young people is home in the functional sense of a residential place, without a unique self-perception. The advantages of the kibbutz are the material values it offers, such as grass, greenery, village, and quality of life.

The disadvantages of the kibbutz are all the traits of the community that harm the individual's freedom or his economic efficiency, such as lack of privacy and harm to freedom. Sharp criticism was presented of unprofessional management, waste and the unemployment that characterized the cooperative kibbutz. The crisis in the kibbutzim is explained by the young people as an economic crisis that was caused because of the irresponsible and unprofessional management on the part of the kibbutz in the past. It is therefore not surprising that the young generation chose to define itself as belonging to the 'middle class'.

**Figure 2. Schema of the Social Representations of the Kibbutz Members Relative to the Kibbutz**



1. When you think of kibbutz you think of...
2. What is bad in the kibbutz?
3. What caused the crisis in the kibbutz?

### Perception of the Party System in the Eyes of Kibbutz Residents

The next stage in the research study was to examine the political identity of the residents of the kibbutzim and their attitude towards the party system in general. Here, too, significant differences were found in the political behavior between the two age groups on the kibbutz, the young people and the older people, and this is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

The Differences in the Political Identity between the Young People and the Older People

Question	Older Respondents 61+	Young Respondents 20–30
I belong to the 'left camp'	70.9%	42.9%
I belong to the 'center camp'	25.5%	42.9%
The vote in the last elections was the same as at my first elections	71.0%	43.0%
I decide my vote many months before the elections	61.8%	28.6%
I decide my vote less than a week before the elections	10.9%	42.9%

Source: Author's study.

The findings indicate that most of the adults aged 61 and above continue to identify themselves as belonging to the 'left camp', while displaying party loyalty and adherence to their first political identity. The older people maintain stability in their voting and tend less to change their political preference from one election to the next. Their declaration of the formation of their vote many months before the elections proves that they have a stable and distinct political identity which is not influenced by events before the elections. Conversely, the behavior of the young people aged 20–30 reflects a new and unclear political identity. The belonging of the young people to the 'left camp' is not as dominant and obvious as it was among the older people, and nearly 43% of them declared that they belong to the 'center camp'. A considerable number of the young people reported that they form their political preference less than a week from the elections. The volatility in the voting of the young people, the formation of their decision at the last moment, and their support of the new center parties, indicate a distance from the old political identity of the kibbutz and the search for a political camp that is perceived by them as more commensurate with the social reality in which they live. The comparison of the means of the responses of the two age groups through t-test confirms that the differences are statistically significant.

### Social Thinking Regarding the Party System

Figure 3 presents the map of the social representations of the kibbutz residents regarding the party system and the political camps. This time the intention was to reveal the language the respondents used to describe the political camp to which they belong, and the images through which they perceive the rival political camps. The division of the groups in the graph this time is according to the declared political belonging of every respondent to the 'right camp', 'left camp', or 'center camp' respectively. The three



kibbutz perceives itself in a value-based manner through socialist language. The image that appeared the greatest number of times in the description of the left camp is equality. Left means equality, justice, help for the weak, and concern for human dignity. The representations raised regarding the 'right camp' illustrate how much the kibbutz residents dislike the rival political identity. The right is everything the left is not: capitalist, religious, racist, and lacking in social sensitivity. A representative sample can be seen in the responses of some of the kibbutz member who chose to describe the right with the image "not me". The political center is also presented by the attributes that differentiate it from the cooperative kibbutz: bourgeois, lacking in values, populist, and as such as representing Tel Aviv and the middle class.

Those who declared themselves as belonging to the 'center camp' constituted the second largest group in the kibbutzim, 26.7%, most from the younger age groups. The representations presented through this group were of a liberal perception. The perception of the 'left camp' was similar to that presented in the description of the old cooperative kibbutzim. The left means socialism, out of date, old and belonging to the past, is inefficient and naive. The 'right camp' is perceived in a negative and sharp manner, and here too there is a prominent reservation about its values and its voters. The right means religion, the Land of Israel, racism, and a mob. The political center is described through images that were very similar to the description of the renewed kibbutzim. The center means innovation, freshness, an efficient economy, and responsibility. Contrary to the perception of the leadership crisis of the left party, according to those belonging to this camp, the leadership of the center parties was presented as contemporary, young, and attentive to the public. The political center is the party expression of the renewed kibbutzim, a secular, liberal, and new alternative, in which the individual has greater opportunities.

## Conclusions

At the core of this work is the assumption that the individual's behavior can be explained through the group to which he belongs. The group gives the individual a language through which he thinks, values with which he judges, and images that help him evaluate reality. The group gives the individual support and a sense of belonging and constitutes a source of social identity. Hence, the changes that occur in the group certainly influence the individual and the way in which he perceives reality and chooses to act.

The homogeneous structure that characterized the cooperative kibbutz in the past was reflected not only in a similar population composition, but also primarily in the sharing of the same social representations. Over the years, the kibbutz community preserved a socialist discourse, while attempting to reduce the influence of composing new social representations. For example, the kibbutz had an independent educational system through which socialist values were indoctrinated, the kibbutz members had a party newspaper that preserved the political language, most of the kibbutz members worked in the kibbutz, and an effort was undertaken to reduce the entry of hired workers from outside the community. In this manner, the kibbutz preserved the social discourse and ensured the collective identity. The party expression of the kibbutz identity was expressed in the unqualified support for socialist workers' parties. As long as the social language of the

kibbutz was preserved, a similar understanding of reality on the part of its members was assured, and hence stable voting in the elections for the Knesset to the left camp.

The economic crisis of the 1980s shocked the kibbutzim and threatened the old social order. At first, the kibbutzim coped with the crisis through anchoring reality. They attempted to understand its causes and to resolve it through the familiar social knowledge of the community. An example of the phenomenon of anchoring can be found in the responses of the older members, who still display adherence to the socialist language. The kibbutz is perceived as unique because of its original values and its ability to assure equality and concern for another. Good in the kibbutz is derived from the realization of the kibbutz ideal, and the crisis derived from the lack of its full implementation. Even the evaluation of the present economic situation is given from the old constellation of representations. In some of the interviews held with the older kibbutz members, they presented the argument that the economic situation has become worse because of the process of privatization. Although, on the level of the individual, the person's level of income has increased, the experience of the older people was that the level of their life has declined, as presented by one of the older people from Kibbutz Degania Aleph: "The members have more money, but the kibbutz has less."

The scope of the crisis and the inability of the kibbutzim to understand the new reality forced them to adopt steps for the increase of efficiency that strengthened the individual at the expense of the community. The social fences that separated the kibbutz from its surroundings were lowered, and the homogeneity that characterized the community began to crack. The kibbutz members began to go and work outside the kibbutz, hired workers entered the kibbutz, the kibbutz began to sell services to the urban population and even allowed non-member residents to live in the kibbutz. The process of the loosening of social intimacy began even beforehand in the transition of the kibbutz from commune to 'community' (Talmon-Garber, 1970, p. 12), but this time the situation was different; not only the social relationships were weakened but also the social language. The weakening of the community enabled the penetration of new ideas, values and social representations which challenged the old discourse and changed the way in which the community understands reality. The new social representations were adopted primarily by the young people, who began to grow distant from the perceptions of the cooperative kibbutz, as indicated by the findings. Solidarity and mutual assistance gave way to efficiency and privacy. The value of equality, which held a sacred status in the past, gave way to the perception of freedom.

In one of the interviews conducted with a young woman from Kibbutz Ein Dor, the question of "What is equality in your opinion?" was presented. Her response was that "Equality is freedom". This answer can illustrate the change that occurred in the kibbutz, and in its social language. The kibbutz identity that relied on the old set of values slowly became unattractive and irrelevant on the part of those who adopted the new discourse. Many of the young people supported the argument that the image of the kibbutz in Israeli society is negative. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 8% of the respondents defined themselves as *kibbutznik* (a kibbutz member).

Additional examples of the distance from the kibbutz identity on the part of young people can be found in their lack of willingness to be involved in the collective decisions of the kibbutz, or in the fact that they do not think that the kibbutz is a unique form of

residential community compared with other communities. Like other research studies on the weakening of the value-oriented commitment of the young people on the kibbutz (Shlasky, 1997, p. 51), it is possible to see in this research study too, the liberal utilitarian perception that examines the kibbutz only according to its material advantages. Accordingly, the new social identity that began to be built in parallel to the old identity is a liberal social identity that places the individual at the center. This new identity that connected to the 'middle class' also influenced the political preferences of the kibbutz members. The old workers' parties began to be perceived as irrelevant by the young voters in the symbols they offer, in the declared values, or in the desired goals. The search for a political home that will express the new social identity is found at the basis of the volatility among the young people. The new center parties that have developed in recent years are those that began to be perceived as representing the new social identity of the young people of the kibbutz, as expressed in the research findings. The center parties offer a refreshing, new, and secular alternative that cares about the middle class that is identified with the young people of the kibbutz.

To summarize, regarding the question of "what caused the change in the voting patterns of the members of the kibbutzim in recent years?", it can be argued that the new social language means a different understanding of reality, and this lies at the basis of the change in the political preferences of kibbutzim members.

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## Polityczne implikacje nowego myślenia społecznego: produkt uboczny prywatyzacji kibuców

### Streszczenie

W latach osiemdziesiątych dwudziestego wieku kibuce dotknął poważny kryzys gospodarczy i demograficzny, który zagroził ich dalszemu istnieniu w formie społeczności spółdzielczych. Rozwiązaniem było podjęcie kroków inspirowanych ideami wolnego rynku. Wzrostowi efektywności gospodarczej i przeorganizowaniu wspólnoty zgodnie z nowymi regułami towarzyszyły skutki w sferze politycznej, co widać w zmianie sposobu głosowania członków kibuców w wyborach do Knesetu.

Główna teza artykułu głosi, że zorganizowanie społeczności kibuców według nowych zasad wprowadziło do nich nowy dyskurs społeczny, który całkowicie zmienił sposób, w jaki jednostka określa się w kategoriach społecznych i politycznych. Politycznym produktem ubocznym było to, że partie lewicowe, które w przeszłości stanowiły prototyp tożsamości socjalistycznej, zaczęły być postrzegane jako nieadekwatne wobec nowej tożsamości społecznej, w której nastąpił stały wzrost poparcia dla partii centrowych.

W celu prześledzenia zmiany tożsamości politycznej, postanowiliśmy zbadać z bliska trzy kibuce znajdujące się na różnych etapach procesów zmian: kibuc Deganya A, kibuc Mizra i kibuc Ein Dor. Celem badań było nie tylko ustalenie, która grupa w kibucu zmieniła swoją tożsamość polityczną, ale przede wszystkim zbadanie, w jaki sposób przyczyniło się do tego zdobycie nowej wiedzy społecznej.

Wyniki ujawniły duży rozróżnienie w postrzeganiu rzeczywistości, głównie między dwiema grupami wiekowymi w kibucu. W przeciwieństwie do starszych, młodsze pokolenie zastosowało neoliberalne reprezentacje społeczne do zdefiniowania siebie, społeczności i systemu politycznego. Partie lewicowe, podobnie jak dawne kibuce, zaczęto postrzegać jako przestarzałe, nieskuteczne, a zatem niemające znaczenia w głosowaniu w wyborach do Knesetu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kibuc, reprezentacje społeczne, tożsamość zbiorowa, tożsamość polityczna