



Transforming Kibbutz Research: Trust and Moral Leadership in the Rise and Decline of Democratic Cultures

Dr. Reuven Shapira

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TRANSFORMING KIBBUTZ RESEARCH TRUST AND MORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE RISE AND DECLINE OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURES Reuven Shapira The Kibbutz, Israel's most original social creation, has become the most successful of all communal societies as a radical social movement that has been highly socially involved by numerous federative organizations that influenced the wider society while being influenced by it. Unlike other successful communes that insulated themselves from their surroundings, the Kibbutz societal involvement engendered profound problems, but scholars did not treat them; nor did they treat the essentially non-democratic and unchanging higher echelons of Kibbutz leaders whose control of these organizations enhanced the movement's bureaucratization, oligarchization and conservatism. During the century since inception the kibbutz engendered a voluminous political, ideological and scholarly literature. Now comes Dr. Shapira and argues that most of these writings misunderstood essential aspects of the kibbutz. In particular, they did not treat the essentially non-democratic and unchanging higher echelons of kibbutz leaders and the numerous federative organizations and enterprises controlled by this elite. Nor did they fully grasp the fact that the kibbutz has never sought to set up a utopian society. It has always been integrated in the wider society and shared many of its norms and beliefs. As these federative organizations adopted low-trust, low-moral cultures contrary to Kibbutz high-trust cultures and high-moral leadership, exposure of their cultures could have spoiled the kibbutz image of a progressive society. Researchers followed leaders' efforts to prevent this, almost did not study these organizations, ignored their conformity to societal cultures and their negative impact on kibbutz cultures, missing major problems caused by this impact. The national kibbutz leaders who controlled and manipulated its ideology remained outside the accounts, largely because they spent most of their time away from their home kibbutz. They worked from offices located in Tel Aviv in the vicinity of the government centre. The impact of the external world on the kibbutz participation in the world was consistently ignored in the research literature that treated the kibbutz as a social isolate. The consternated reader may well ask: how can it be that three generations of kibbutz students missed the true nature of these phenomena, and only one scholar got it right? It is not unusual, even in scholarly work, for totally misconceived mental constructs to persist. Dr. Shapira was born and bred in kibbutz Gan Shmuel, has lived there most of his life, and while he taught in academic institutions he and his family resided in Gan Shmuel. Deeply committed to the kibbutz way of life he raised above the deeply engrained beliefs of kibbutz literature due to his burning desire to reform the kibbutz and make it again viable. This has been the energy driving a research project that has occupied his full attention for over thirty difficult years. His devotion to the kibbutz has not blinded him to its failings; obstinate spirit drove him to get to the root of matters, and the intellectual honesty to face up to unpalatable realities. In his search for the truth Dr. Shapira wrestles with the complex data till he was satisfied that he has got the right answers. Dr. Shapira has written an erudite and profoundly practical study. The thorough analysis and understanding of the structural tensions underlying the Kibbutz movement as a whole will make it possible both to overcome its current crisis and revitalize some of its few remaining high-trust parts, and to use its lessons for the invigorating of democratic work organizations elsewhere.

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