

Sport And Social Capital And Ethnicity: Case Study of Tabriz's Tractor Football Club In Iran

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Abstract

Social capital appeared as a new concept in sociology. This study is based on the social capital approaches, which have been considered as a topic. For shaping the social capital, the social relationship is essential. This is why in this study, the relationship between sport and social capital has been considered. Associated with the topic, the Tractor Tabriz as a football club has been chosen as a case study. The Tractor Tabriz football club is representing the Azeri Turks in the Iranian Super League. As a result, this football club as a sport activate could make social networks among the Azeri Turks ethnic group in Iranian society. Also, the Tractor football club gathered individuals at the same point. Afterward, which provided social capital and social solidarity among the Azeri Turks ethnic group. Therefore, the Tractor Tabriz football club has played an impressive role to be a mass movement of the ethnic and identity demands of the Azeri Turks.

Keywords: Sport, Social capital, Ethnicity, Tractor Tabriz, Iranian Azeri Turks

Introduction

The concept of social capital recently has been appeared as a social phenomenon and one of the most interesting and discussing concepts in social science. In fact, the concept of social capital has been advanced as a scientific resolution for removing social issues which have come out in today's societies. In other words, less social capital in society is one of the reasons for social issues (Echtahadi, 2007: 415). Today's industrialized countries, while developing in economics and industry, have been faced with some social issues and crises. In these societies, the concept of social capital has been conceptualized for resolving social issues and crises. The concept of social capital is found out in the studies of Tocqueville, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Tönies (Kemal et al., 2011: 90).

Therefore Lyda Judson Hanifan is known as the first social scientist who used the concept of social capital. Hanifan in an investigation studied social capital and its contribution to USA society in 1916. According to Hanifan the concept of social capital has not to the dimension of economic benefits, but it has conturbation over economic. In addition to that Hanifan used the concept of social capital to demonstrate the affections of social capital in making of social solidarity, social comminution between individual and family, the daily life of people, and in a friendly position (Woolcock et al., 2000:159).

To form social capital, the significance of relationships and having a relationship with others are two essential things. Also keeping up that relationship is significant. In fact, individuals who could not achieve something alone could achieve them together. Individuals by making a social network, become unity with each other by having one or more common worths. In other words, this network is a source for individuals, which could be made capital for them. According to the social approach, individuals by how many people know, via which could have a common opinion and worth with each other, afterward, the social capital could come out as a result for them. According to Putnam, the concept of social capital is defined as among individuals relationship, social network and interactions are bringing up a social trustful situation. Social capital could have some significant social functions in society and human groups such as social trust, social solidarity, or another example the solidarity among an ethnic group. Therefore the social capital could provide common benefit for members f of a group, then organize them to obtain a common purpose in the society (Field, 2006: 6-49). According to the purpose of this study, the society of Iran contains multi-ethnic groups. One of the largest ethnic groups in Iran is the Azeri Turks. Also, they have a better status in Iranian society. The Azeri Turks people mostly are located in north-eastern Iran. According to Iranian officials, Turks ethnic groups totally cantain %40 percent of the population of the country (<http://shoaresal.ir/fa/news>). Recently a representing football club of the Azeri Turks has appeared in Iran. In the Persian language, its official name is Tractor Tabriz. From a point of sociology, this football club representing whole Turks ethnic groups, which has become a cultural and identity symbolic for them. In this context, in every match of this football club, about 50 thousand the Azeri Turks fans follow the club from the stadium. In this study, the becoming of the club as social capital for the Azeri Turks are considered as a topic. This study, based on the social capital approach and tries to respond to the questions such as; how could the football club be a social capital for the Azeri Turks people? How does the football club provide social solidarity and relationship among the Azeri Turks people?

The method of the investigation

In this study regard to the topic of this study and, the combination method of the library study and field study has been selected for presenting exact results. So in this study, the indirectly participant observation has been selected as one of the field studies. To collect the related data the researcher has taken part in the matches of the Tractor club in Tehran and Tabriz. Afterward, the matches and the fans of the Tractor football club several times have been observed by the researcher. So during the observation in the field study, the social behaviors of the fans of the Tractor club particularly their slogans have been observed in the stadium.

Findings

According to both methods theoretically and observation in the field the finding of this study as conceptually categorized such as below:

Social capital and sport and ethnicity

Today's obviously the sport particularly sport like football is a social event. A sport such as a football has millions of followers or admirations across the world. Also, and football club ownerships invest molar dollars annually over the club. This is why within a sociological perspective would be a statement that football is not only a sport. Which includes economic, political, cultural, and representing an identity across the world. The significant point about football as a social sport and a social event is behind it there are a lot of people as fans. The football club is representing them. Somehow the fans belong themselves to the particular club, with particular color and flag and symbol. The fans take part as the viewer in stadiums to watch its match every week. This is why today's football sport and its all matches are more significant for its fans and ownerships across the world. In this study, the relationship between social capital and sport and ethnicity has been considered from a sociological perspective. The concept of ethnicity is considered a social concept in sociology. The concept of ethnicity includes groups of humans which are determined with a shared culture and history and language also, it can have a determined geographic region (Giddens, 2006: 487).

The concept of ethnicity has been appeared after the nation-state and making national identity across the world. Somehow a group of humans with the facility as mentioned above remained out of national identity, the group defined as ethnic groups. Afterward, ethnic groups regard to social transformation across the world, ethnic demands have risen in some countries. Therefore, in some regions of the world, ethnic groups are determined to approve their identity. In this context, ethnic groups used different ways such as media, applications, and sport to approve their rights. Over the past years, the ethnic movement has expanded to sport fields such as football in some points of the region. For example, FC Barcelona and its fans in Spain is a famous example in this case. The fans of the Barcelona football club named their club an army. Also, the club is "more than a club" for the fans of the Barcelona football club (Garcia, 2012:1). Recently the Tractor Tabriz football club has played a role like Barcelona in Iran. According to all materials above, today's sport and particularly a football club can be played an effective role and has more contributions to approve ethnic demands such as the situation of Barcelona. The situation can be happened particularly in multi-ethnic societies, while a football club represents an ethnic group in the society. As the club can assemble its fans with the same ethnic features to fight and demand their whole right from the society, which the ethnic groups inhabited and are a citizen. The is why Kuper describes this situation as "the football against the enemy" (Kuper,1994: 27).

As the fans of a football club such as an ethnic group would use the football against its rival in the field. The fans of a football club by assembling around the football club, along time

common social behavior shapes among fans. Also, this case could happen among an ethnic group. As the club gathers members of the ethnic groups around the club. Afterward, the club could be the ethnic representation and an ethnic symbol for the fans of the club. In fact, during the time-shared social identity, shared social and cultural demand appearance among the fans, then they could come out the issues as demands such as ethnic and identity demands. Eventually, through the club, the social capital develops among the fans of the club. After that as mentioned social trust and social solidarity increase among the fans. Finally, the fans through the club insist on their social right such as ethnicity, identity, etc. The mission of this study is to demonstrate the development of the social capital among the fans of the football club in the case study of Tractor Tabriz football club in Iran. Therefore, it seems that Tractor Tabriz football club could gather many fans with a common language, a common culture, and ethnicity at the same point. This is why in this study the situation has been considered as a sociological phenomenon.

Sport and social capital

In this part of the investigation, the relationship between sport and social capital has been described. Sport is a social concept, this is why it has functions of social, cultural, and health. In this case, there are different studies over functions of sport in social science and psychology. Having health function in a sport is a significant contribution to having a good society. Also, the health effects of it have been determined for individuals.

In addition to it, out of the health function of sport, which has also social function, cultural function, political function, identity function, etc. About having a relationship between sport and social capital, which has already been determined. For example, according to Hall, the sport could be provided social capital for those who are interested in the sport. In other words, sports activities, sports clubs, which could provide social capital to members and sport participation (Hall, 1999: 61). In another investigation, according to Tonts, who has investigated sport in one of the rural of Australia. Found out that, the result of this investigation has demonstrated that sport is one of the significant parts of the lifestyle in this rural. Also according to this investigation, having the relationship between sport and social capital has been determined (Tonts, 2005: 137).

Keaney and Delaney in their research demonstrated the role of sport over social capital between sports activists and sport participation in Britain (Delaney et al., 2005: 1). Therefore, common emotion, common social worth developing among fans of a football club along time. In point of sociology, abundantly generally sports and especially football is considered as a social phenomenon. Fans of a football club assemble under common points. This is why afterward, social solidarity, social relationship, and social identity could be developed among the fans of the football clubs.

Tabriz Tractor football club

Tabriz Tractor was established by the workers of a Tractor factory in Tabriz city, East Azarbaijan province in 1970. The club has been grown over time. The Tractor football club played until 2000-2001 in the Iranian Super League, afterward which dropped down to second division league. But the club tried to come back to super League again. Eventually, the club has been successful to enter the Iranian super League in 2009 year. Tractor after entering to super Liga had successful results. As for the first time, which entered to Asian Champions League in the 2012 season. The significance of this club is having about its lots of fans. Therefore Tractor Tabriz became the first in Asia in having lots of fans. Also, it has been

listed in multi fans club in the world. The whole of Iranian the Azeri Turks follows the Tractor football club. Also out of Tractor club in the Azeri Turks region, another Iranian football club has rare fans. Fans of Tractor is known as passionate fans in Iran. In this case, Lewis Mia Benfica FC of former player and coach about fans of Tractor said that I have never seen fans of Tractor in my whole life. Tractor has been named as red wolfs by its fans. The fans throw out slogans whole matches such as “yel yatar tufan yatar yatmaz Tractor bayragi”. which means the wind sleeps, the storm sleeps but never sleeps the flag of Tractor and “yaşasın Azarbaijan”. Which means long live Azerbaijan (<http://www.yjc.ir/fa/news>).

Recently, especially since 2000, it seems that attention for ethnic identity has been increased in the Iranian Azeri region. Also, they are serious for demand their ethnic rights. This movement and demonstrations of Tractor fans in the stadium evaluated as separation group or Panturkism movement in the region (<http://www.jahannews.com>).

Being popular of Tractor club between the Azeri Turks and other Turks ethnic groups, this sport phenomenon created this question, for what reason the Tractor club is very popular in the Turk communities of Iran? in the mind of sports experts and politicians, and social science researchers. Absolutely having lots fans for the Tractor Club which was not only for sport or football. According to experts, fans of Tractor by assembling freely and without any cost in the stadium, express their Turk ethnic identity and ethnic rights. This is why the Tractor football club is not merely a sports event for the Azeri Turks community. Thus the Tractor has become a social movement for fans of the Tractor in the Iranian Azeri region. In other words, it seems that the club carries out the Turks ethnic nationalism movement in the region for the fans of the Tractor (<http://zamaaneh.com/humanrights>). According to Gol sport, the fans of Tractor insist on their ethnic identity. For example the fans of Tractor in all matches, they no pay attention to the results of the match, instead filling the stadium only insists on their ethnic identity. In another word, the fans of Tractor compare themselves with Spain's Catalonia region and their FC Barcelona club (<http://www.goal.com/iran/news>). In this case, Sadr, an Iranian football expert says that we are witness that the fans of Tabriz's Tractor have a common emotion about their homeland. Hence having the same language and ethnicity features among the fans, which developed solidarity and friendship among the fans of Tractor (<http://www.hamshahrimags.com>).

Some experts evaluate the matches of the Tractor football club is as the scene of a protest for the Azeri Turks people (<http://zamaaneh.com/humanrights>). Afterward, this event had political reflections and sensitivities, for Iranian officials (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article>).

Tractor football club and social capital

The Tractor Club out of Tabriz particularly in other ethnic Turks groups regions has many fans. Generally, it seems that out of the Tractor other football clubs have no fans in those ethnic Turks regions. These days, using of sports fields particularly football stadiums as a vehicle from some movements such as nationalism and ethnic nationalist discourse has been determined. As the fans can not express their rights and demand in normal conditions, this is why stadiums are a better place for the fans to emphasize their right such as ethnic rights. In this context, demands such as ethnic identity and ethnicity nationalism are usually demanded by the fans of Tractor in stadiums. In whole matches of Tractor, its fans emphasize their ethnic Turks identity and demonstrate it by writing on the banner in the stadium, whenever

Tractor carries out its match in stadium (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article>). As early mentioned, the demonstrations of the fans in the stadium by the Tractor fans had left some political sensitivity in Iranian society (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article>).

According to the purpose of this study and based on the relationship between sport and social capital, since the Pahlavi regime so far, the Azeri Turks' ethnic demands their ethnicity, identity, and cultural rights the Azeri Turks ethnic groups challenge those demands in Iranian society. But the fans of the Tractor club used it as a tool, eventually, the club became a symbol for them in their region. According to social capital approaches, it could be discussed that the Tractor provides one kind of social capital among the Azeri Turks ethnic group. From Putnam's point of view, social capital comes out as a result of relationships among individuals, which eventually contributed to achieving common benefits among groups or individuals in society. In this context, according to Woolcock, the social capital could be made a powerful continuity among members of a group such as a member of a family or member of an ethnic group existing the social capital into clubs, parties and companies are examples of being social capital at the level of society. Which already has determined (Pir Ahari, 2009: 111-112).

Therefore, based on the topic of this study the significant point is that the Tractor club could gather Turks ethnic group under common value and at the same point, and this was a significant success for the fans of the Tractor. The club by providing relationship among the Azeri Turks, somehow this sport event has become as a social capital among the fans of the Tractor Club. As debated above, social relationships could bring social capital for people who are in a social relationship with each other. In addition to that, the Tractor club contributed to express and exhibit the Azeri Turks' ethnic groups of some ethnic rights such as identity, social, and culture in the Iranian society. This event was calculated as a social opportunity for the Azeri Turks ethnic group in Iran to introduce themselves. This is why social trust has been increased among the fans of the Tractor Club over time. In fact, to increase social capital, social trust is an essential step. In other words, the sporting event has become a mass and social movement to approve the Azeri Turks' ethnic identity in Iran. And the Tractor has played a role to approve the Azeri Turks' social, cultural, and ethnic identity in Iranian society. Afterward, it seems that common emotion, common values, common demands social solidarity, and social trust recently have increased among the Azeri Turks people in Iran.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, The Tractor Tabriz as a football club has been considered as social capital for Iranian Turks ethnic groups as the fans of this club. Therefore based on the social capital approaches, the relationship between sports particularly football and, social capital has been studied. Turks ethnic groups particularly the Azeri Turks are the largest ethnic groups after Parsian in Iranian demography. Iranian Turks ethnic groups have a long history and are known as one of the native ethnic groups in this region. Since collapsing of the Qajar dynasty and then the rising of the Pahlavi regime, Turks' identity and cultural rights were ignored by the Pahlavi regime in Iran. This is why the Azeri Turks' ethnic groups reacted to the policy of the Pahlavi regime. This ethnic reaction to the Pahlavi policy converted to social movement over past years in Iran. Nowadays this movement is going on under ethnic nationalism in Iranian society. In addition to it, the movement and ethnic rights, due to social and cultural reasons since 2005 became massive like social movement in the Azeri Turks region. One of the significant demands of the Azeri Turks is being officially their mother tongue in Their region. To approve this demand, they attempt to civil movement during the time. In this

context, Tabriz Tractor as a football club entered to Iranian super league again as representation for Tabriz city in the 2009 year. The club is known as a multi- fans club in Iran and Asia. This case is one of the important advantages for the Tractor Club. This is why the Tractor Club owns a good position in Iranian sport. Therefore the club has been determined as Iranian Turks' identity representation and symbol. The Tractor Club has provided social relationships to whole the Azeri Turks in Iran. The Tractor club assembled the whole of the Azeri Turks at the same point and oriented them. Indeed it seems that the Tractor club has an effective contribution to make social solidarity among the Azeri Turks. For example, it has been determined that, in some sensitive matches of the Tractor, more than one hundred fifty thousand fans come to the stadium to watch the match of the Tractor in Tabriz as host. In addition to it, out of Tabriz as host, particularly in Azadi stadium in Tehran the fans of the Tractor full at least half of the stadium. Therefore according to the social capital perspectives, the Tractor eventually could raise the social capital among the Azeri Turks, people.

Briefly, the Tractor club has gathered whole the Azeri Turks at the common point. Afterward, the Tractor has provided social relationships, social trust, and social solidarity among whole Turk ethnic groups particularly the Azeri Turks. Somehow the Tractor has an effective role in obtaining and express the Azeri Turks some social rights such as ethnic rights identity in Iranian society. Eventually, it seems that those demands via the Tractor club have recently been like a massive movement among the Azeri Turks people.

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