

Sporting Success in Peripheral Cities: Women Non-fans' Perceptions of Premier League Promotion and Urban Identity

Research Article

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Abstract: This study examines how women non-sports fans in a peripheral city perceive and interpret their local football team's promotion to the Premier League. While existing research focuses primarily on economic impacts and fan relationships with clubs, there remains limited exploration of how professional sports success affects broader populations, particularly non-fans. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 women residents who self-identify as non-fans, this research reveals complex dynamics of urban identity formation and social cohesion in peripheral urban settings. The findings demonstrate a notable duality in residents' responses, characterized by renewed civic pride coupled with persistent skepticism about sustainable urban development. Analysis reveals three major themes: "Local Pride and Skepticism," "Social Cohesion and Community Engagement," and "Dynamic Urban Identity." Particularly significant was the emergence of new patterns of community engagement among non-traditional stakeholders, suggesting that sporting achievement can foster social connections even among those who maintain personal distance from sports culture. The study contributes to our understanding of how sporting achievement influences peripheral urban communities beyond traditional fan bases, while highlighting the complex relationship between sports success and sustainable urban development through the unique lens of women non-fans' perspectives.

Keywords: *Peripheral cities • Local pride • Israel • Football • Gender perspectives*

1. Introduction

Professional sports teams often serve as powerful symbols of local identity and pride, extending their influence far beyond the confines of the stadium (Heere & James, 2007). While existing literature predominantly focuses on urban development impacts (Coates & Humphreys, 2003) and fan relationships with clubs (Spracklen, 2022), there remains limited exploration of the broader population's emotional and perceptual connections to local sports teams beyond economic considerations, especially non-fan residence. This study examines the unique case of Irony Tiberias, a professional football club in Israel, and its impact on the residents of Tiberias, a peripheral city in the country's north. Hapoel Tiberias, which was the leading club in

the city, became a prominent force in Israeli football during the 1960s and 1980s. Since then, it has experienced a turbulent history marked by limited sporting success. However, Irony Tiberias which began its operation in 2006 soon rose to power and achieved popularity among fans parallel to its sportive success. The 2023/2024 season saw the club's promotion to the Israeli Premier League, reigniting interest in its role within the community. While extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between successful sports teams and their dedicated fan bases, there is a notable gap in understanding how these teams affect the broader population, particularly those who may not actively follow sports. This gap is even more pronounced in the context of peripheral communities. The present study aims to explore the social and emotional implications of Irony Tiberias' presence and recent promotion on the local population, including those

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who are not avid sports fans. By examining how the club fosters local pride, a sense of achievement, or other emotional responses, this research sheds light on the often-overlooked societal impact of sports teams. By focusing on Irony Tiberias, we aim to contribute to a broader understanding of how sports teams can influence community identity, cohesion, and well-being, among women residents not directly engaged with the sport itself. This study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of sports' social impact in three key ways. First, while existing research predominantly examines economic or urban development impacts of sporting success, this study uniquely explores the emotional and social dimensions that extend beyond traditional economic frameworks. Second, by focusing specifically on women who self-identify as non-fans, this research provides a crucial gender perspective that has been largely absent in professional sports impact studies, which have typically centred on predominantly male fan populations. This approach allows us to understand how sporting achievement influences broader community dynamics beyond the traditional supporter base. Third, by situating this analysis within a peripheral urban context, the study illuminates how sporting success functions differently in non-metropolitan settings, where social capital formation and community identity may have distinct patterns and significance. Together, these contributions provide valuable insights for understanding the wider social value of elite sporting activity in peripheral cities and its ripple effects throughout various community segments not traditionally associated with sports culture.

Tiberias exists within Israel's complex landscape of regional identities, where geographic location significantly influences socioeconomic opportunities and cultural perception. As a relatively small peripheral city in northern Israel, Tiberias has experienced a gradual socioeconomic decline since the 1980s (Dahan, 2025), and according to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, the chance of social mobility in Tiberias is one of the lowest in Israel (CBS, 2020). This peripherality creates a distinct regional identity characterized by both local distinctiveness and structural disadvantages compared to central metropolitan areas. However, as MacDonald et al. (2009) note, the social closeness found in small towns can contribute to integration through sport, involving the participation of families and communities. In peripheral contexts like Tiberias, local sports clubs often bear outsized significance as symbols of recognition and achievement, potentially creating improved self-image and sustainable motivation for future community involvement (Tian, 2005). This regional context is crucial for understanding how sporting achievements are interpreted

by residents, including those not directly engaged with sports culture.

1.1 Sports as a symbol of place and culture

Local sports teams are often seen as representing where they come from. This includes the cultural, historical, and social characteristics of the community. The team becomes a symbol that represents the values of the place, feelings of belonging, and local uniqueness (Harasta, 2021). In some places, the team has historical importance and accompanies the community for generations, which gives it significant cultural and social weight (Evens et al., 2013). Also, competitive sports clubs create a platform for fans' collective identification. The fans, who come from different social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds, find in the group a unifying factor that allows them to connect around a common goal (Biel et al., 2024). The games themselves become an arena where local identity is built and maintained. The colours, symbols, and songs of the group are an essential part of the local culture and are sometimes even passed down from generation to generation, which strengthens the feeling of belonging to the team and the place (Mastromartino et al., 2017). In small communities or cities where there is only one dominant and successful club, the club may be one of the most prominent factors in the public and cultural sphere. Residents identify themselves with the club, and it symbolizes local history and pride (Evans & Norcliffe, 2018). In many industrial towns, for example in England or Italy, the local football teams became the focus of local identity especially after a decline in local industry. Football remains a source of pride and a reminder of the glory days of the community (ibid.). Sports can serve as a bridge between different parts of the population, especially in places where there is social or ethnic heterogeneity. The support for the local team bridges these gaps and provides a sense of uniformity (Kaal, 2021).

Football in particular is a rich and complex subject, where sport, culture, and society intertwine to create a sense of belonging and pride in local communities (Brown, 2008). Local Football clubs, as sports in general, are usually seen as a cultural resource that represents the community. They provide a platform for social belonging and a sense of collective identity (Heere & James, 2007). Residents often feel pride in their local team and see it as a mirror that reflects the character of their community. It can represent local values, history, and heritage. This is especially true in communities where the local club has been part of the city or region history (Cleland, 2010). The

successes of the local club or franchise can increase the residents' sense of pride and positively affect the community's self-image. Even residents who are not die-hard fans can feel a connection to the team in situations of success, when the team becomes a source of local fame (Wilson & White, 2002). Success in the competitive sphere often translates into a sense of accomplishment for the entire community of supporters. The club's achievements provide the local residents with a reason to celebrate and take pride in their city (Gómez-Bantel, 2018), and in many cases, they also affect the place's public image (O'Brien et al., 2024).

1.2 Fans, the community, and social involvement

Sports, and especially local sports teams, play an important role in strengthening community ties. Local teams create a community of fans, whose actions contribute to the formation of local identity (Garcia-Lopez, 2024). Fans are active in fan clubs, in social organizations related to the team, and sometimes even in charity activities (Giulianotti, 2005). Involvement in the community through football intensifies the sense of belonging and connection to the place by providing a social framework for the fans (Jarvie, 2006). Local sports teams can serve as centres for social connections and increased community involvement. The games and events provide residents with opportunities to meet and communicate with each other, which strengthens the sense of belonging and community resilience (Lev et al., 2020; Rääkkönen & Hedman, 2024). Supporting the local team creates a sense of partnership and friendship between the fans. The shared feelings of excitement, disappointment, and joy create strong emotional bonds between community members (Gordon et al., 2021). Fans feel that they are part of a larger group, which shares the same interest and excitement, which strengthens the sense of identification and community (Harasta, 2021). Being a community member of fans of a specific team allows shared collective identity, especially in areas with ethnic, cultural, or social diversity (Garcia-Lopez, 2024). Football provides a framework that allows community members to feel a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves (Mori et al., 2024). In peripheral areas, where there are often economic and social challenges, a successful local soccer team can serve as a source of pride and give residents a sense of hope (Darnell, 2012). Even if there are tensions within the community, support for the local club can serve as a unifying factor that overcomes internal differences (Sandvoss, 2003). Research from the

field of social psychology indicates that a sense of belonging and pride arising from belonging to a group helps the members of the community develop a sense of self-worth and satisfaction with their lives, and strengthens mental health (Mori et al., 2024).

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine how non-fan women residents perceive and experience their local football team's historic promotion to the Israeli Premier League. The qualitative methodology was chosen to capture the nuanced emotional and perceptual dimensions of this phenomenon, allowing for deep exploration of participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. The aim of the study is to examine how women from the city of Tiberias perceive the significance of the local football team's promotion to the Premier League.

The study will be based on semi-structured interviews of 12 women (Table 1). All the participants are residents of Tiberias who have lived in the city for over 10 years. The women, as self-proclaimed, were not football fans or supporters of any particular football team. All participants but one are mothers. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 12 women. Initial participants were recruited through the researchers' personal and professional networks in Tiberias, followed by snowball sampling (Noy, 2008), where existing participants referred other potential interviewees who met the study criteria.

The interview consisted of ten questions including: What does the promotion to the Premier League mean to

Age	Years living in Tiberias	Having kids
59	59	Yes
42	42	Yes
39	34	Yes
32	32	Yes
55	55	Yes
31	28	Yes
26	24	No
26	26	No
22	22	No
29	29	Yes
28	10	Yes
24	24	No

Table 1. Details of participants
Source: Authors' contribution.

you?; How do you think the promotion will affect the city?; What is the significance of sport in the city in your opinion? The interviews, lasting approximately 1 h each, were conducted between September and December 2024. Following established qualitative research protocols, interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing platform (Zoom), depending on participants' preferences and logistical considerations. In-person interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants, typically in their homes, ensuring comfortable and private settings conducive to open dialogue. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit participant consent, following a thorough explanation of the research objectives. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate comprehensive data analysis. In several cases, brief follow-up telephone interviews were conducted to clarify specific points and explore emerging themes in greater depth.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the rigorous methodological framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was selected for its systematic yet flexible nature, allowing for deep exploration of how non-fan residents perceive and interpret their local team's success. The analytical process began with thorough familiarization with the interview transcripts, followed by systematic coding of meaningful segments of text. These initial codes were then gradually refined and consolidated through an iterative process of comparison and contrast. Through this detailed analysis, several distinct but interconnected patterns emerged from the data. The initial coding process revealed recurring elements centred around community pride, future aspirations, social connections, and economic possibilities. These elements were further refined through multiple rounds of analysis, leading to the identification of more nuanced interpretative themes.

Three major overarching themes emerged from the data, each encompassing several interconnected elements. The first theme, "Local Pride and Skepticism," captures the complex relationship between residents' pride in their city's achievement and their broader feelings about their community, including both historical connections and present-day ambivalences. The second theme, "Social Cohesion and Community Engagement," encompasses the various ways in which the team's success has influenced social cohesion and community engagement, particularly highlighting how this sporting achievement has fostered new forms of social connection and collective purpose. The third theme, "Dynamic Urban Identity," reflects how the team's success has influenced residents' views of their city's potential, encompassing both immediate impacts on youth development and broader aspirations for economic and social development.

3. Findings

3.1 Local pride and skepticism: The duality of urban identity

The findings reveal a complex relationship between residents' pride in their city's recent sporting achievement and their broader perceptions of urban development. This duality manifests in two distinct yet interconnected aspects: renewed civic pride following the team's promotion, and persistent skepticism about sustainable urban progress.

The team's promotion to the Premier League has sparked a renewed sense of local pride among residents, even those who do not typically engage with football. This pride extends beyond sporting achievement to encompass broader civic identity. As D., a 42-year-old resident, explains: "It gives us a feeling that we are on the map and it advances us, maybe it will make people believe more in Tiberias in all sorts of issues. They will see us and then maybe they will want to invest more." This sentiment of enhanced visibility and potential is echoed by M, a 39-year-old, who notes: "When I say that I am in Tiberias, they tell me, 'Your team is in the Premier League,' it is really a matter of pride. It goes beyond football. It is a feeling of 'Wow, we did it.'"

However, this surge of civic pride exists alongside deep-seated skepticism about the city's ability to sustain positive change. Residents express concern about the persistence of development challenges, drawing from past experiences. R., a 55-year-old, articulates this tension: "My sons love soccer and they really said that the team was promoted. I'm happy about it, but at the same time, like everything in Tiberias that doesn't take off, even though there is potential, I don't think anything will happen with it." This skepticism is further illustrated by S., a 59-year-old, who shares: "They tell me it's a ghost town. It's such a shame. It could be a very touristy city, and it's unrealized potential." The emotional connection to the city remains strong despite these concerns. Residents consistently express deep attachment to the community's interpersonal warmth and unique character. This sentiment can be found in T., a 26-year-old, answer who emphasizes: "I am very connected to Tiberias. I love the city, the people, the warm temperament, the fact that people here are very family-oriented, a lot of human capital." M even tried to live in Jerusalem for 2 years, but returned to Tiberias "I used to live in Jerusalem but I did not feel at home. Here I have a lot of help from my family." And yet, she is still in conflict about living in Tiberias. "I feel like we are stuck here. Nothing is changing and I'm not sure I want my daughters to grow up like this."

The findings reveal a significant pattern in how these women perceive and validate sporting achievement as a form of legitimate civic prestige. Despite their personal disconnection from football, the participants recognize the team's national-level success as a meaningful marker of urban achievement. This recognition suggests that sporting excellence, particularly at the Premier League level, transcends its categorization as merely popular entertainment to become a validated source of civic pride. The women's responses indicate that athletic achievement is perceived as equivalent to success in other prestigious domains of urban development. However, this appreciation of sporting excellence is tempered by a persistent uncertainty about its sustainability. The participants express concern that this newly acquired prestige might be temporary, viewing it as contingent upon continued athletic success rather than representing a permanent shift in the city's status. This duality between recognition of achievement and skepticism about its permanence reflects broader tensions in how peripheral city residents interpret and evaluate markers of urban progress and prestige.

Examination of the findings reveals certain tendencies between different age groups within the sample, though these patterns require careful methodological consideration. Younger women in the study demonstrated a tendency toward greater optimism regarding the transformative potential of the team's success. As *A., a 28-year-old participant, noted: "I feel like this is the beginning of change for us."* Conversely, older participants expressed more tempered perspectives grounded in lived experience. *R., a 55-year-old long-term resident, reflected: "We've seen promising changes before, even dramatic initiatives, but it's cyclical – there are ups and downs too."* However, there exists a strong correlation between participants' age and their length of residence in the city, making it methodologically difficult to determine definitively whether age itself or deeper familiarity with Tiberias' urban development patterns serves as the primary influencing factor on these perceptions. It is important to note that the observed differences were neither sharp nor entirely consistent across participants, and the relatively small sample size limits the ability to draw generalized conclusions about age-related effects on perceptions of sporting achievement in peripheral cities.

3.2 Social cohesion and community engagement through sports achievement

The promotion to the Premier League has catalysed significant changes in community dynamics and social engagement

patterns, even among residents who do not directly participate in football culture. The analysis reveals how sporting achievement can serve as a mechanism for strengthening community bonds and fostering collective identity in peripheral urban settings. The data demonstrate how athletic success has created new patterns of community involvement and social connection. As A., a 31-year-old, reflects: "Promotion to the league has great social aspects. It mobilizes everyone for the purpose of victory and unity, and after the game everyone cheers on all the networks. Everyone loves Tiberias and forgets about the troubles." This sentiment of collective engagement creates inclusive spaces for broader community participation. Particularly noteworthy is how non-fans have begun engaging with the team's progress, B., a 28-year-old, articulates this transformation: "I have the desire for them to succeed. I am not a football fan, but I really want them to succeed. I found myself looking for the results of the games and what was happening." This engagement reflects how sporting achievement can transcend its immediate context to become a shared point of community reference and collective aspiration. N., a 59-year-old, said: "I heard about the win from my sons. They grew up after the army and suddenly they started going to games and even playing by themselves in the neighbourhood in the afternoons. Suddenly the house is talking about soccer. It's really contagious."

The findings suggest that this enhanced social cohesion operates on multiple levels. C., a 22-year-old, emphasizes the broader civic implications: "I don't know about football. I know that Tiberias being promoted is something rare. They talk about it a lot, joy in the city gives it meaning. I want Tiberias to advance in all its aspects, whether it's football or restaurants." This perspective illustrates how sporting success has become intertwined with broader aspirations for community development and progress. The findings indicate that the team's success has created a unique platform for community convergence, where sporting achievement serves as a catalyst for broader social integration and collective identity formation. This process appears particularly significant in a peripheral urban context, where opportunities for unified civic engagement may be limited. The data suggest that even residents who maintain distance from sports culture find themselves drawn into new patterns of community participation and social connection through the shared experience of the team's success.

3.3 Dynamic urban identity: Between community "warmth" and developmental stagnation

The interviews reveal a complex urban identity characterized by the interplay between strong communal bonds and

persistent concerns about developmental limitations. This duality manifests in residents' narratives through their simultaneous expression of deep local attachment and frustration with perceived stagnation. Participants consistently emphasize the distinctive interpersonal qualities that define their community identity. R. articulates this communal warmth: "I really like the warm people in Tiberias. People are very warm and nice to each other in Tiberias and I also really love the Sea of Galilee." The depth of this communal connection is further illustrated by M., who provides a comparative perspective:

What I love about it is that it has human warmth. Beyond the warmth, there are people who are hospitable. You can see in the groups of Tiberias that someone is looking for something and a million girls jump to help without wanting anything in return. I was once in Tel Aviv on a bus and someone fell and the driver kept driving and I said to myself that this would never happen in Tiberias. The driver would stop and help her.

However, this strong sense of community attachment exists in tension with a pervasive narrative of unrealized potential. D., a 26-year-old, articulates this complexity:

Tiberias is kind of complex to me. On the one hand, I feel that I don't like being slandered and not supported. It has a bad stigma for this city. On the one hand, it hurts me that people laugh at it, and on the other hand, I feel it myself. It's a city that they can't crack... They don't understand this city, they're constantly trying to make it something it's not... Nothing is rising. Maybe it's an old city that they're trying to make young.

This tension between attachment and frustration becomes particularly evident in residents' responses to the football team's promotion. While recognizing its potential as a catalyst for change, participants express skepticism born from past experiences. As T. reflects: "My sons love soccer and they really said that the team was promoted. I'm happy about it, but at the same time, like everything in Tiberias that doesn't take off, even though there is potential, I don't think anything will happen with it." This sentiment is echoed by L., who confronts external perceptions: "They tell me it's a ghost town. It's such a shame. It could be a very touristy city, and it's unrealized potential." The findings suggest that residents' urban identity is characterized by a dynamic tension between strong communal bonds and developmental frustration. This duality reflects broader patterns in peripheral urban development, where strong social capital coexists with structural limitations. The football team's promotion serves as a microcosm of this tension, embodying both the potential for change and the persistent concerns about sustainable development.

4. Discussion

4.1 The paradox of peripheral success: Urban identity formation and social cohesion through sporting achievement in non-traditional engagement spheres

The findings illuminate a complex phenomenon of dual urban identity that both extends and challenges existing theoretical frameworks. While previous research emphasizes sports teams' role as symbols of local identity and pride (Gómez-Bantel, 2018; Harasta, 2021), our findings reveal a more nuanced reality in peripheral urban contexts. The women's narratives demonstrate how sporting achievement functions within what Evans and Norcliffe (2018) describe as the social production of space, though with notable complexities not previously emphasized in their work. This duality particularly resonates with Spracklen's (2022) analysis of fan culture in commodified environments, though our study extends this understanding by examining non-fan perspectives. The participants' sophisticated interpretation of sporting achievement as legitimate civic prestige, even among non-fans, aligns with Wilson and White's (2002) observations about community pride, while simultaneously revealing new dimensions of how peripheral communities process sporting success. This builds upon Coates and Humphreys' (2003) work on urban development impacts, though our findings suggest that in peripheral contexts, the relationship between sports success and urban identity is more complex than previously theorized. The data particularly enrich our understanding of how sports teams influence community identity beyond traditional fan bases. The findings reveal significant insights about the broader social impact of sporting achievement beyond traditional fan communities, particularly illuminating how women who self-identify as non-fans engage with and interpret their local team's success. Our data demonstrate that athletic achievement functions as a catalyst for community engagement in ways that transcend conventional sport-society relationships. The participants' narratives reveal how sporting success creates what might be termed peripheral engagement zones – social spaces where even those traditionally disconnected from sports culture find themselves drawn into new patterns of community participation and dialogue. This phenomenon extends beyond Rääkkönen and Hedman's (2024) conceptualization of sports-based community competence, revealing how athletic achievement can foster social cohesion even among demographically distinct groups. The emergence of what our

participants described as informal information-seeking behaviours – checking match results, following team progress, and engaging in community discussions about the team – suggests a form of social participation that does not require traditional fan identity yet contributes to collective civic engagement. This finding particularly enriches our understanding of how sports influence community dynamics in peripheral urban settings, building upon but significantly expanding Mori et al.'s (2024) framework of community sport development. The data suggest that the team's promotion has catalysed what might be termed "incidental community building" – where sporting achievement creates opportunities for social connection and collective identity formation even among non-fans. The behaviours observed among our participants challenge traditional fan categorizations while maintaining their identity as non-fans. Unlike Giulianotti's (2002) classifications of supporters, followers, fans, and flâneurs – all of whom engage with sports through varying degrees of emotional investment and consumption – our participants engage with team outcomes primarily for their civic significance rather than sporting interest. Their information-seeking is motivated by community solidarity, not team loyalty or sports passion. This suggests a distinct "civic observer" position outside conventional fandom frameworks, where peripheral city residents engage with sporting success as a community achievement rather than a sports achievement. This finding reveals how peripheral contexts may generate engagement patterns that transcend traditional fan/non-fan dichotomies while still contributing to collective identity formation. This observation particularly challenges traditional assumptions about the relationship between sports engagement and community cohesion, suggesting that in peripheral urban contexts, sporting success can function as what Garcia-Lopez (2024) might term a "social bridge," facilitating community connections through shared civic achievement rather than shared sporting interest. The findings thus contribute to our theoretical understanding of how sporting achievement influences community dynamics beyond the traditional fan–team relationship paradigm, suggesting a more nuanced model of sport-based community engagement that accommodates varying levels of direct sports interest while maintaining focus on collective civic identity.

The participants' perspectives reveal a distinctive approach to football's significance that merits specific attention. Notably, the women do not attribute importance to football as a sport per se, but rather recognize its cultural and social utility as a mechanism for community impact. This perspective reflects their position as non-fans who view football through a functional lens rather than through sporting passion or team loyalty. As M.

articulated: "I don't understand football itself, but I understand what it means for our city to be recognized." The participants' detachment from sports culture paradoxically enables them to perceive football as a social phenomenon and functional tool for change rather than as an end in itself. C. emphasized this instrumental perspective: "I don't care about the game, but I care about what the success brings to Tiberias." This functional interpretation allows them to evaluate sporting achievement primarily through its potential civic and social contributions rather than its athletic merit. For these women, football's importance lies not in the sport's inherent value but in its capacity to generate recognition, social cohesion, and potential urban development opportunities. The sporting success holds no intrinsic value for them; its significance emerges entirely from its perceived social and cultural impact on their peripheral community.

4.2 Sporting achievement as urban catalyst

The findings regarding urban transformation potential reveal complex dynamics between sporting achievement and sustainable urban development that warrant careful theoretical examination. Our data demonstrate how sporting success interfaces with existing urban development narratives in peripheral contexts. This phenomenon manifests through participants' simultaneous recognition of football achievement as a legitimate catalyst for change while maintaining deeply embedded skepticism about sustainable transformation. The women's narratives significantly extend O'Brien et al.'s (2024) conceptualization of sports teams' influence on city identity by revealing how peripheral communities process potential urban change through a lens of historical disappointment. Particularly noteworthy is how participants constructed what we might term "conditional optimism" – a measured hope for urban development that acknowledges sporting success while remaining grounded in historical urban challenges. This finding builds upon but substantially complicates Coates and Humphreys' (2003) framework of sports-based urban development by experiences of unrealized potential actively shaping how residents interpret new opportunities for change. The data suggest that sporting achievement in peripheral contexts relates to the significance of Premier League promotion and evaluated against a backdrop of previous development initiatives and their outcomes. This theoretical insight extends beyond existing literature on sports-based urban development by highlighting how resident skepticism functions not as simple negativity but as a

sophisticated evaluative mechanism shaped by lived experience. Participants articulated a careful calibration of expectations that acknowledges potential positive change while maintaining protective skepticism based on historical understanding of urban development patterns in peripheral contexts.

4.3 Gender, space, and sport: Examining women's peripheral perspectives on athletic achievement

The persistent skepticism expressed by participants reveals important insights about peripheral urban development. Their simultaneous hope for positive change and expectation of disappointment constitutes a form of “protective skepticism” developed through repeated experiences of unfulfilled development promises. This dualistic perspective illuminates the limitations of sporting achievement as a sustainable urban catalyst. The “we will ruin it” sentiment reflects not merely pessimism but a sophisticated historical awareness of how previous opportunities have been undermined by systemic limitations. This cautions against simplistic assumptions about sports-led urban revitalization in peripheral contexts, where structural disadvantages may persistently challenge sustainable development regardless of sporting achievement. This finding suggests that effective urban initiatives must address underlying structural challenges alongside celebrating symbolic achievements like sports promotion.

The findings offer significant insights into how women in peripheral urban settings interpret and engage with sporting achievement from positions traditionally considered external to football culture. Our analysis reveals that female residents who self-identify as non-fans construct meaningful interpretations of athletic success that differ substantially from traditional sport–society paradigms. This gendered perspective introduces a form of civic participation that acknowledges sporting achievement's community significance while maintaining personal distance from football culture itself. The women's narratives extend Heere and James's (2007) conceptualization of community–team relationships by revealing how gender intersects with peripheral urban identity. The data demonstrate that participants' engagement with the team's success operates through distinctly gendered civic frameworks, where sporting achievement is evaluated primarily through its potential community impact rather than its athletic significance. The differences between the women's perspective of the effect of the football team's success probably point to the importance of life experience and fear of disappointment. Their understanding that life in the periphery does

not magically change is a long and drawn-out process that needs to be proven over time. The success of the soccer team should restore the trust of the women with life experience in the hope that things can be better in the periphery. Perseverance over time in the success of the soccer team may strengthen these women's sense of trust and hope. This finding may add another perspective to the research that success gives a sense of belonging and pride, arising from belonging to a group helps the members of the community develop a sense of self-worth and satisfaction with their lives, and strengthens mental health (Mori et al., 2024). This finding particularly contributes to the understanding of how sports influence community identity in peripheral settings, suggesting that women's perspectives offer crucial insights into the broader social implications of athletic achievement beyond traditional fan-based analyses. Notably, the participants' sophisticated articulation of both hope and skepticism regarding urban development through sports suggests that gender influences how residents evaluate and interpret markers of urban progress.

4.4 Theoretical contributions and implications for peripheral urban studies

This study makes several distinct theoretical contributions to the broader academic discourse on sport–society relationships and peripheral urban development. First, it extends existing theoretical frameworks by introducing the concept of civic observers – residents who engage with sporting achievement through community solidarity rather than sports interest, challenging traditional fan/non-fan dichotomies (Giulianotti, 2002). This finding reveals how peripheral contexts may generate engagement patterns that transcend conventional fandom frameworks while contributing to collective identity formation. Second, the research contributes significantly to our understanding of peripheral cities by demonstrating how sporting success functions as both a catalyst for hope and a trigger for protective skepticism rooted in historical disappointment. Unlike metropolitan contexts where sporting achievement represents one of many sources of civic pride, in peripheral cities, it becomes a concentrated test of urban transformation capacity. The concept of conditional optimism identified in this study – where residents simultaneously embrace potential while guarding against anticipated disappointment – offers a new theoretical lens for understanding how peripheral communities process markers of success. Third, regarding non-fans' relationship with football, the findings reveal that disengagement from sports culture paradoxically

enables a more instrumental evaluation of sporting achievement's social value. Non-fans in peripheral contexts view football success not as sporting accomplishment but as cultural currency that can potentially translate into recognition, resources, and development opportunities. This instrumental perspective provides insights into how sporting achievement can influence broader community dynamics beyond traditional supporter bases, particularly in contexts where alternative sources of external recognition are limited. These contributions collectively suggest that sporting achievement in peripheral urban contexts operates through distinct mechanisms compared to metropolitan settings, requiring adapted theoretical approaches that account for the heightened symbolic significance of external recognition in communities experiencing structural disadvantage.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how non-sports fan women residents in Tiberias perceive and interpret their local football team's promotion to the Israeli Premier League impact their city. It contributes to our understanding of how sporting achievement influences peripheral urban communities beyond traditional fan bases. Through in-depth interviews with 12 long-term female residents, the research revealed complex dynamics of urban identity formation and social cohesion. The findings demonstrated a notable duality in residents' responses, characterized by renewed civic pride coupled with persistent skepticism about sustainable urban development. Particularly significant was the emergence of new patterns of community engagement among non-traditional stakeholders, suggesting that sporting achievement can foster social connections even among those who maintain personal distance from sports culture. This finding reinforces the importance of the role of competitive sports in peripheral cities, which creates connection and belonging for residents, even those who are not sports enthusiasts. The community created around a shared area of pride is strengthened despite the duality that may be a passing episode. However, at the same time, the findings indicate that the hope and optimism associated with the success of the municipal soccer team in the periphery are not absolute, and older women with life experience understand that the success of the soccer team will not change the city unless the success is maintained over time.

Several limitations warrant consideration when interpreting these findings. First, while our qualitative approach provided rich insights, the relatively small sample size of 12 participants limits the breadth of perspectives represented. Future research could benefit from larger, more

demographically diverse samples that include women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, age groups, and educational levels to capture a broader spectrum of non-fan experiences. Second, the study's specific cultural context within an Israeli peripheral city may limit the direct transferability of findings to other urban settings. Comparative studies across multiple peripheral cities, both within Israel and internationally, would enhance our understanding of whether the identified patterns represent localized phenomena or reflect broader global dynamics in peripheral urban communities experiencing sporting success. Third, the study's temporal proximity to the team's promotion captured immediate emotional and social reactions rather than long-term impacts. Longitudinal research would be valuable in examining how these attitudes evolve over time, particularly investigating whether the observed social cohesion and civic pride endure beyond the initial excitement of promotion. Fourth, while gender formed a central analytical lens, future research should adopt a more intersectional approach that explores how ethnicity, class, religion, and other social factors interact with gender to shape perceptions of sporting achievement in peripheral contexts. Finally, applied research exploring how these findings might inform urban development policies could help translate these insights into practical strategies for leveraging sporting success toward sustainable community development. Such studies could engage city planners, sports organizations, and local government officials to develop integrative approaches that capitalize on the social capital generated through sporting achievement while addressing the underlying structural challenges identified in residents' skepticism.

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Author contributions

Hadas Brodie Schroeder and Orr Levental: conception and design of the study, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, manuscript preparation, and obtaining funding.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this research. There are no commercial

associations or financial interests that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Ethics approval and informed consent

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Tel Hai College (approval number: 021124). Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants before conducting the interviews. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

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