

Supporters and Football Governance, From Customers to Stakeholders: A Literature Review and Agenda for Research¹

Dr. Borja García and Dr. Jo Welford

School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences,

Loughborough University, United Kingdom

Corresponding author: Dr Borja García, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3TU, United Kingdom.

E mail: b.garcia-garcia@lboro.ac.uk

¹ This article presents research part of the FREE Project (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, www.free-project.eu), funded by the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7) of the European Commission, under Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (Grant number: 290805).

Abstract

The commercial and political development of association football (soccer) in Europe has transformed the relationship between the sport and its fans. A growing political discourse has argued that football has lost the connection with its (core and traditional) supporters; a connection that should be regained by allowing them a greater say in the governance of the game as legitimate stakeholders. This article reviews the emerging academic literature on the role of supporters. It suggests that the evidence to support a case in favour of increased supporter involvement in football governance is limited. This group of literature is theoretically and conceptually incongruent and fraught with contradictions. Academic attention thus far is broadly divided into two areas with little overlap between the two: analysis of supporter engagement at the macro (government/policy) level with a top-down focus, and sociological ‘bottom-up’ case studies of supporter engagement and activism at the micro level (individual clubs/supporter groups). The study of supporters has predominantly focused on them as customers/fans and it needs to articulate a new narrative around this ‘governance turn’ to consider supporters as stakeholders, hence responding to on going policy developments. By doing so, it will be possible to reconcile the existing disparate bodies of work to gain a greater understanding of the new demands from the supporters and, moreover, the literature will be better placed to have an impact and to contribute to better informed policy-making if public authorities decide to continue their existing political agenda in favour of greater supporter involvement in football governance.

Keywords: Football; soccer; supporters; activism; governance; research; policy; literature review

On 29th May 2015, a capacity crowd of 4,000 FC United of Manchester (FCUM) fans watched their local non-league football² team take on Portuguese giants Benfica in a friendly match to open their new Broadhurst Park stadium. What was notable about the game, however, was not the international opposition (twice winners of the European Cup in 1961 and 1962) but the home club. FCUM was founded only in 2005 by fans of another European giant, Manchester United (MU), that were disillusioned with the takeover of MU by the American Glazer family. According to those disenchanted MU fans, their club's new owners did not respect the traditions of the club, prioritising profits over any sense of community (Brown 2007). Moreover, those MU supporters felt their opinions were not taken into account by their club. Thus, they decided to leave Manchester United to form a community-oriented club at the very bottom of amateur football in England. That was the birth of FCUM in 2005. The fact that in ten years FCUM has been able to develop, build its own stadium and attract a crowd of over 4,000 people is testimony to the possibilities of what has been called fan-power. That is, a group of football supporters working together for the benefit of their club and their local community.

In the decade since their formation, FCUM have seen four promotions whilst remaining true to their ethos as a transparent, open and democratic co-operative. FCUM supporters can buy so-called 'community shares', hence becoming members of the co-operative and co-owners of the club. Supporters (as owners) vote on everything from committee elections to facilities at the new stadium and the club board is democratically elected and fully accountable.³ Manchester United, on the other hand, is operated like a commercial franchise by its owners, the Glazer family. Therefore, supporters do not have the

² This article refers to association football, also known as soccer. The term football would be used for the sake of simplicity throughout the article.

³ For more background on the formation of FC United, their new stadium and their community work see Brown, 2007, 2008; see also the following websites <http://www.supporters-direct.org/homepage/what-we-do/case-studies/fcunited#sthash.V7dfU0kP.dpuf>; <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/fc-united-new-stadium-benfica-9357971>; <http://www.fc-utd.co.uk/>

possibility to become shareholders unless the owners decide to sell some of their shares. Consequently, supporters cannot participate in the democratic life of MU. Their main relationship to the club is a commercial one, whereby they buy tickets and/or merchandise and attend matches. MU supporters are basically customers of their club, whereas FCUM supporters can, if they so wish, become co-owners and play a vital role in theirs. The case of these two Manchester clubs exemplifies perfectly the role of people groups in football governance. In this article we review recent academic and political interest on the role of supporters in the game. But before going any further it is necessary to clarify the differences between those people groups involved in football, if only to help those unfamiliar with the jargon and structures of European football. Throughout this paper we will refer to fans, supporters, customers, shareholders and stakeholders. The terms fan and supporter are used here interchangeably (for stylistic reasons) to refer, generically, to individuals that have an interest or an allegiance towards a particular football club. Thus, fans or supporters are groups that have an interest in football and their club, but the level of engagement will differ amongst different sub-groups.

This level of action is defined by the other three terms we will be using throughout the article. Customers (see Giulianotti 2002) refer to those fans or supporters that simply follow their team by attending matches, buying merchandise or through the media. Whereas they feel an allegiance to their colours, these fans do not have an interest in becoming involved in the governance or management of the club. Thus, these fans simply vote with their feet or their wallets, showing more or less interest on the club by the amount of matches they watch, merchandise they buy or media they consume to be informed about their team. Stakeholders, on the other hand, refer to the supporters that have an interest in becoming involved in the management of their club, and by extension in the management of the game at the macro and meso-level. The form and shape of that involvement differs from country to country

according to the legal structures of football club ownership. These fans form associations in order to have formal dialogue with their club and even the governing bodies. In England fans can form supporters trusts (see further below), whose objective is to gain partial or full ownership of the club. Therefore, a fan that joins a supporter trust will no-longer be just a customer, but they will become stakeholders. This paper explores precisely that transition, whereby supporters have been encouraged to organise themselves in order to become stakeholders in the governance of football. Whereas football governing bodies in Europe have struggled to recognise supporters as legitimate stakeholders, academic authors elsewhere have long considered fans as stakeholders in sport (see for example Cunningham, 2009; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000).

Finally, shareholders is a more technical term that we use much less in this article. It basically refers to those fans that have managed to obtain (total or partial) ownership of their football club. Unless they are multimillionaires, this can only be done through cooperatives, trusts or similar legal figures where fans pull together their resources to buy shares of the club. Hence, supporters can be at the same time shareholders and stakeholders if they have managed to obtain some degree of ownership of their club.

In recent years, debates about the governance of European football have increasingly focussed on the role of the fans. This is due to a growing concern that the increasing commercialisation of the game might be having harmful effects on its socio-cultural dimensions (see for example Conn, 1997; Giulianotti, 2005). Indeed, some of the governance pitfalls of football are being associated with a lack of engagement with supporters (Hamil, 1999; Hudson, 2001). In very broad terms, it is argued that opening the game up to the supporters will not only connect the game to the community, but also to increase transparency and accountability.

Thus, the All Party Parliamentary Football Group's (2009, p. 14) enquiry into football governance stressed that "the one group that are most under-represented in the sport are the people who should have the most say; the fans." Moreover, the British government has highlighted its desire for football supporters to be recognised as key stakeholders in the game, (see DCMS 2011, 2013). An 'Expert Working Group on Football Supporter Ownership and Engagement' was launched by the government in October 2014 to explore ways to increase fan engagement (DCMS, 2014).

Thus, one can see a clear policy discourse in favour of encouraging supporters' involvement in football governance. However, the evidence upon which this is based has not been articulated by the policy-makers or in the academic literature. Not many have stopped to question the extent to which fans are eager to actually become activists in football governance. Given the growing political importance of this issue in terms of football governance and wider sport policy, it is imperative that this gap is addressed. Our objective here is to synthesise existing knowledge on supporters and football governance. Specifically, we (a) give a timely review of the existing knowledge base; (b) identify where previous research in this area has been focussed; (c) highlight any gaps in the existing knowledge base; and (d) suggest directions for future research.

In order to meet the aims above, the paper proceeds as follows. First, we give an overview of the context around supporter involvement in football governance, bringing the issue up to the current situation. Second, we construct a narrative review of the existing academic knowledge base, focussing on top-down policy initiatives and bottom-up case studies, the two major areas where research has been concentrated. We conclude with suggested directions for future research.

The Growth of Supporter Involvement in Football Governance

In this section, we review the literature that relates to the historical development of supporter involvement in football governance. The majority of the academic attention given to this phenomenon has adopted an empirical/chronological approach, describing events and discussing motives behind supporters' eagerness to get together in diverse groups and associations.

The Beginnings of Supporter Activism

Historically, football clubs made little effort to involve supporters beyond their role as fans or ticket holders (i.e., customers) (Cleland, 2010). The formation of the Football Supporters Association (FSA) in 1985 was the first attempt at a single, unifying body of football fans to create an independent, coherent voice of football supporters in the organisation of football. The FSA was founded by a small group of supporters in Liverpool in the aftermath of the Heysel disaster.⁴ Peter Garret, the first General Secretary of the FSA, felt strongly that supporters had to re-claim the game in order to help fighting violence and hooliganism. It was their responsibility to organise themselves independently to contribute to the management of football (Taylor 1992; 2014). The FSA was, therefore, a true bottom-up organisation founded by a small group of supporters worried by the way in which football authorities were managing issues of violence and safety in football.

The next step in the mobilisation and activism of fans were the Independent Supporters Associations (ISAs). These became "the dominant form of organised fandom in English football in the 1990s" (Nash, 2000, p. 466). ISAs were founded as independent organisations to represent the interests of supporters and establish lines of communication

⁴ The 1985 final of the European Cup final between Liverpool FC and Juventus Torino at Brussels Heysel stadium had to be delayed because of crowd incidents between the fans of both clubs. A total of 39 persons died before the game, most of them crushed against a safety wall.

with their clubs. ISAs had a fundamental difference with the FSA, as they were only focused on one club (Taylor, 1992). On the other hand, ISAs shared with the FSA two important features. First, they were established by the supporters themselves without any external help, thereby offering another example of fan bottom-up activism. Second, ISAs had a critical stance towards their club, protesting against safety, standing and pricing policies (Taylor 1992). Thus, the FSA and the ISAs are stages of the same movement, where groups of active supporters decided to organise themselves to open channels of dialogue with clubs (mainly ISAs) and governing bodies (mainly FSA).

The Premier League, the football task force and Supporters Direct. Two important events need to be taken into account to understand the development of supporter engagement in football governance. First, the creation of the Premier League in 1992. Second, the arrival into government of the Labour Party in 1997.

The Premier League was created in 1992. English football's top 20 clubs decided to form the Premier League in order to benefit from the sale of broadcasting rights to digital television operators. Without setting-up the Premier League, those clubs in the top tier of English football would have had to share the income with the other 72 professional clubs in the English football pyramid. The creation of the Premier League is seen as the starting point of the massive commercialisation of English football (Martin, 2007). The Premier League had a clear impact on certain groups of supporters that resented the economic drive of the competition. Some fans disagreed with the commercial ethos of the Premier League whereas others, simply, felt priced out of the game (see Conn, 1997). The question, therefore, was whether the ISAs would be a suitable vehicle for those fans that wanted to protest against these developments.

The arrival of the Labour government to power in 1997 was instrumental to change the dynamics in which supporters engaged with football structures. The Conservative Party in power until 1997 (and specially Margaret Thatcher) only considered football fans as a group to be controlled, rather than trusted or empowered. The Labour government, however, had a different approach. They set up the Football Task Force in order to analyse in depth the structural, social and economic problems of English football. The Football Task Force had the remit to deliver three reports on how to improve the modern game. One of the recommendations of the Football Task Force (1999a, 1999b) was to promote supporter ownership of football clubs, recommending that the government should help fans wishing to become stakeholders (rather than mere customers) in their club (Brown & Walsh, 2000).

Governmental focus on the need for football supporters to be represented resulted in the formation of Supporters Direct (SD). SD was established in 2000 to “help supporters achieve a say in the future of their clubs” (Smith, 2000, p. 14). It was an attempt to “promote sustainable spectator sports clubs based on supporters’ involvement and community ownership” (Supporters Direct, 2011, p. 2). SD’s objective is to help fans at individual clubs navigate the legal and economic procedures of setting up a cooperative (formally called Supporters Trust) that shall have the objective to gain total or partial ownership of the club. As of 2014, there were 203 supporters’ trusts, 75 of which have a member represented in the club’s board of directors (Supporters Direct, 2014). SD is a direct response to the creation of the Premier League. SD became a reality thanks to the support of the Labour government and the Football Task Force. Whereas the Premier League may have seen supporters mostly as consumers, SD was an effort to redress that balance by encouraging them to become stakeholders.

The Need for Supporter Involvement

At the time of the formation of SD, there was considerable optimism about the benefits that such organisation could bring to the management and governance of English football. Authors cited benefits such as increasing the community focus of clubs (Brooking, 2000; Burnham, 2000) in order to transform them into community assets (Watkins, 2000). It was also thought that SD would encourage a democratic approach to ownership by involving the local supporters in club ownership (Lomax, 2000). This, in turn, could make clubs more accountable (Hamil, Michie, Oughton & Warby, 2000), ensuring a fair dialogue beyond clubs and supporters that goes beyond a mere commercial and marketing relationship (Crowther, 2000). These authors were most of them involved in the supporters' movement (e.g., Lomax was the founder of Northampton Town Supporters Trust). Thus the analysis in those papers is based largely on the authors' own discursive interpretations. These papers are not theoretically driven, but simply discuss supporter ownership as a concept, anticipating possible benefits and drawbacks.

The development of fan activism was supported by growing academic criticism of the modern game, and the impact this was having on fans. Martin (2007, p. 638) states that the "new commercialism" of football led to it selling its historic soul as the "people's game." Member of Parliament Chris Smith suggested that, without intervention, football may suffer from an increasing gap between the rich and the poor clubs, resulting in higher ticket prices, lower attendances, and less money filtering down to the grassroots of the game (Smith, 2000). It has been argued that transformations to modern football have 'gentrified' football spectatorship into a more affluent, middle-class and family-orientated body (Martin, 2007; Webber, 2014). Against this backdrop, Nash (2000) suggested that ISAs first and SD later became sites for contesting changing crowd demographics. Advocates for the supporter trust

movement believed that it could help football to remain the people's game (Burnham, 2000; Hamil et al., 2000; Watkins, 2000).

The debate about supporter involvement has remained in very similar terms to date. Fast forward to 2014, when the British parliament has expressed strong dissatisfaction with the response to their 2011 enquiry into football governance (see DCMS 2013; 2011), criticising the Premier League and the FA for their lack of progress in devising a long-term strategy for SD in order to remove barriers to supporter ownership and fan consultation at club level. The value of the supporters trust model has been praised by national and international expert groups (Arnaut, 2006; DCMS, 2013), European football's governing body, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) (P. Kennedy, 2012; Supporters Direct, 2009) and, unsurprisingly, existing trusts themselves (see for example Swansea City Supporters Society Limited, 2011). Others (Madden & Robinson, 2012) give a positive economical perspective.

This section has briefly summarised the reasons behind political and academic attention to supporter movements in English football over the last decade and a half. The remainder of the article turns to analyse the academic literature available in this area and to consider future directions for research. The growing body of work concerned with the way supporters engage with football structures covers two main areas: (1) policy-based work, written from a top-down perspective and commenting on the formation (and advocacy of) supporter trusts and other formal fan groups; and (2) single or small-number case studies, written from a bottom-up perspective and focusing on fan-club relationships and supporter activism at specific clubs.

The Political and Organisational Framework of Supporter Activism

Supporter trusts and the Supporters Direct model was not the first formal avenue for fan-club structural relationships, as explained above. Supporter trusts are just one of many options where fans may join forces to establish dialogue with their clubs. ISAs and other groups exist across the leagues, all playing a role in fostering communication between clubs and their supporters. The crucial difference is that trusts have the objective to obtain ownership of the club. However, the current governmental interest in, and policy support for, Supporters Direct makes it a site of particular interest. Further, this model of supporters' engagement has received the greatest amount of attention in the literature. It will therefore form the basis of this discussion, as there has been very little recent examination of alternative forms of supporter activism.

The top-down studies into supporter engagement with football governance focus largely on structures and policies encouraging supporter engagement. These works tend to be quite normative, rather than analytical, and fall into two categories. A first group is unequivocally positive about the involvement of fans in football governance, whereas a second group of works is much more critical. This section is structured following this twofold distinction for the sake of simplicity. This is an eclectic body of literature that draws upon diverse conceptual approaches, such as Marxist political economy (P. Kennedy, 2012; D. Kennedy, 2012) and third way politics (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2007; Martin, 2007). Papers that consider supporter engagement beyond the club level draw upon organisational approaches such as institutional theory (Hughson & Poulton, 2007) and stakeholder management (Walters, 2011). A large number of these papers were published in a special edition of *Soccer and Society* in 2000 – the year Supporters Direct was launched – and are written by various individuals involved in the birth of the movement in some way. As such,

there is only minimal theory underpinning some of this work, which should be considered when situating it within the wider body under review here.

Advocating Supporters' Trusts: A Model of Good Governance?

To review the literature in favour of the supporter trust model, we draw upon principles of 'good governance' in sport (see Alm, 2013; Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; and Geeraert, Alm & Groll, 2013 for current and comprehensive overviews). Indeed, the move to increase supporter representation in decision-making positions in football forms part of an attempt to address well-publicised claims that football is poorly governed (see for example Michie & Oughton, 2005; Winter, 2011) and in need of urgent reform (DCMS, 2011). Hamil, Holt, Michie, Oughton & Hailer (2004: 48) comment that "supporters trusts can play a positive role in the governance of football clubs by ensuring higher levels of transparency and accountability, by promoting links with the local community, by encouraging new support (especially from younger fans), by bringing business, legal and professional skills to the boardroom and by providing finance." There has been an increased interest in the good governance of sport over the last ten years – particularly the need for enhanced democracy and accountability. It is these two good governance principles that feature most dominantly in the literature around the supporter trust movement.

Hamil et al. (2000) argue that democratic processes in football clubs will be enhanced with the inclusion of representatives of the supporters trust in the club's board of directors. This is based on the notion that "access to representation in decision-making should be available to those who make up the organisation's 'internal constituencies' (such as players, supporters, and managers as well as owners)" (Henry & Lee, 2004, p. 31). In principle, democratising the board in this way has potential for increasing fan satisfaction as well as improving accountability. In the case of Northampton Town, Lomax (2000) believes that key

developments at the club, including equal opportunity policies, anti-racism education, improving disabled access and fan forums have “stemmed entirely from the [Supporters] Trusts’ representation on the board” (p. 83). Lomax (2000) proposed that any supporter elected to the board should have full executive and, therefore, voting powers; furthermore, the trust should be based on a system of one person-one vote, rather than one Pound-one vote (Lomax 2000). There is one element missing in the discourse of these authors, including Lomax. They do not really enter to examine who and how should be elected to the club’s board representing the supporters. Moreover, they do not discuss how both trust and non-trust members could be represented by those supporters elected into the board.

Accountability is a key principle of good governance at any level of sport (Houlihan, 2013; Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013). Hamil et al. (2000, p. 4), writing at the time of the formation of Supporters Direct, believed that involving supporters in their clubs is in the benefit of “widespread public interests and concerns,” with Crick (2000) further noting that supporters have a widespread interest to play as part of necessary checks and balances. Whilst there is clearly the potential for this to occur, and indeed a supporters’ representative elected to a football club board will have access to information that may not otherwise be in the public domain (Margalit, 2008), it should not be presumed that fans nominated to the board of directors will be more accountable than any other directors purely on the basis that they are a supporter of the club. As Geeraert et al. (2013) stress, accountability is a complex process that includes a dialogue between the board or committee as a focal point of the organisation and a wider forum of constituents. Having a representation on the board does not necessarily ensure a clear dialogue with the constituents in order to be accountable. To illustrate this, Watkins (2000) states increased accountability and responsibility as a major benefit of supporter ownership at AFC Bournemouth; however several years later, Whitehead

(2006) claims that the new supporter-run board at Bournemouth was no more open or accountable to the fans, particularly in financial decision-making.

Despite some optimistic perspectives at the time, Malcolm (2000) cautioned against presuming that the ideal of “democracy, representation and community” that provided the basis of arguments for increased supporter involvement could in fact be achieved. Without a more balanced insight into the potential for increased democracy and accountability at clubs, conclusions thus far remain based on unhelpful dichotomous understandings of the football context as modern (problematic) or traditional (good), and fans as mirroring this model (a claim that is still relevant fifteen years later). This body of literature only considered supporter involvement from a policy perspective; fans themselves are excluded, and there is little in the way of in-depth investigation as to how supporter representation works in practice.

Critical Insights into the Supporters Trust Model

Overall, there is a lack of a critical perspective to balance and add caution to the political encouragement and support of trusts. It is possible to find only a small group of useful critiques to this model of club governance coming from the academic literature (in particular D. Kennedy, 2012; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2007; Martin, 2007). It is noticeable that there has been minimal empirical work thus far into investigating the relationship between fans, trusts and club governance structures. The remainder of this section gives an overview of the critique and caution that this literature offers to the supporter ownership model.

First, trusts are only given the option to become stakeholders in their club during times of significant financial crisis; as *a last resort option* for the club (P. Kennedy, 2012). Therefore, they are only likely to be integrated into club structures when there is no alternative source of funding available – as a final resort bail-out. If trusts are considered in this context, and not as a potentially fruitful and long-term club-supporter relationship, there

is also the significant danger of exploitation. The trust can be seen as another funding stream through providing membership fees, fundraising and access to funding otherwise inaccessible to the club (D. Kennedy, 2012).

From this, arguably the most pressing issue is whether trusts can actually gain any official impact on club governance outside of this 'last-resort' option. Some believe this is unlikely to happen at the top level of the sport (although if proposed legislation does come into fruition, clubs at all levels may find their hands forced). Holt, Michie, Oughton, and Shailer (2004) stress that the amount of finance involved in top level clubs makes very difficult for supporters to gain any decision-making influence. Supporter representation at the board level is still heavily concentrated at the lower end of the professional leagues (Martin, 2007); Conn (2004) believes that a fully mutual structure is only possible at the smallest (and cheapest) of clubs. Yet as the lower levels of football have been less affected by the trends of commercialisation (Martin, 2007), it could be argued that changes in club ownership at this level have little impact on the wider football context. The money required to 'buy' a say at the top level of football is prohibitive for trusts. The only option for supporters in this situation is to ally with existing shareholders to build a big enough share, leaving the trust open to misuse and potentially losing any potential decision-making power (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2007).

Continuing the critique on these grounds, a third issue is how trusts can be *representative of all fans* at any club. Requiring supporters to contribute financially may exclude some fans anyway (Martin, 2007). Trusts that are intended to reflect the whole supporting community yet require financial input are likely to be exclusionary to at least a degree. This is just one example of the difficult issue of representativeness facing supporters trusts. Kennedy and Kennedy (2007) suggest that the need to 'buy in' to a trust can separate trust members from 'ordinary' fans. In the high profile case of Manchester United fans

attempting to purchase shares in their club, different fan groups could not come together in agreement to form a large enough majority (Brown, 2007). Large clubs in particular have a number of fan groups, of which a trust may be one, representing different perspectives. This asks pertinent questions concerning which fans the trusts represent, and more importantly, who do they not represent? This has yet to be explored.

A fourth issue highlighted in the literature is that if trusts were to acquire ownership, they *must run their football club*. Clearly this is a fundamental aim of trusts so it may sound remiss to consider this a critique, but authors have suggested that this raises two very real concerns for fans involved. First, there is the question of whether fans can make rational decisions about a club to which they are emotionally attached (Giulianotti, 2005; Watkins, 2000). Even the very notion of defining the nature of the fan-club relationship as ownership may be problematic for some, because it masks the root of this relationship based largely on loyalty, identity or tradition (P. Kennedy, 2012). Second, one must consider whether it is in fact possible for a trust to avoid the central element that they have been formed to challenge, reflecting a potential tension in juxtaposing the benign underlying values of the supporter movement with the economic reality of running a football club; “Its levelling ideology is counterbalanced by a willingness to be utilised for commercial purposes by the club hierarchies trusts seek to replace” (P. Kennedy, 2012, p. 419).

Questions raised by this body of work are important in providing a timely critique to this particular model of supporter ownership. Despite clear policy support for the supporter trust model, caution must remain due to the critical perspective afforded by academic studies and, just as importantly, uneven patterns of success experienced by trusts (see for example Conn, 2009). Little is truly known about the complex workings of trusts within clubs, the variance in opinions amongst supporters, or potential alternatives to this model: this must be

addressed. The discussion moves now to the attention given in the literature to the experiences of supporters who attempt to engage with governance at their clubs.

Context Specific Case Studies of Supporters' Activism

The policy-based literature above provides an (albeit limited) debate concerning the role and potential of supporters trusts, but it is mostly focused on the organisational structure itself, analysing its pros and cons in general terms. We now turn to a body of work that offers an alternative perspective: a bottom-up approach from the individual (supporter/group) level. This body of literature is less about whether supporters trusts (as a generic idea) may be positive or negative, but is more about the personal experiences of people engaging (or attempting to engage) in aspects of club governance. An examination of this relatively small amount of academic research into supporters and football governance 'in action' is of use not just in providing depth to the discussion, but also demonstrating how interest in this area has developed and the direction in which it has travelled. There are a growing number of case studies into particular clubs that examine how supporters have involved themselves in governance at their club, either through collective action and protests or attempts to make a formalised space for themselves in decision-making structures. It is important to highlight that as this body of work focuses on supporter-motivated engagement with governance, this is dominantly constructed as a form of activism. That is, supporter engagement emerges through their dissatisfaction: it is *reactive*, in response to something (or someone) at their club that they are not satisfied with. This is important as it underlines an absence of *proactive* supporter engagement: if and how supporters involve themselves in governance outside of a crisis or negative situation.

This body of literature is conceptually heterogeneous as it is formed by a collection of individual case studies that do not follow a common theoretical approach. Most of the papers

adopt a qualitative inductive strategy and make relatively limited theoretical contributions. Their aim is to describe and reflect, rather than to elaborate a theoretical understanding of the socio-political dynamics present in the working of supporters' trusts. There is also a diversity of research methods that contributes to the heterogeneity. Hence, the added value of this review is not just summarizing what has been done, but synthesising it to overcome the limitations of the *n=1* approach. Additionally, we analyse the literature in this area in the context of existing sociological theories into fan typologies that many of these studies reflect upon, considering how these underlying conceptual approaches can be integrated and extended.

The review of this bottom-up body of literature is divided into two sub-sections. First, we examine the literature in relation to whether supporter engagement is considered as successful. We use the concept of success not just because this is a common theme running through the material, but relating this back to the policy drive for supporter engagement in football club governance. Understanding how this can be successful is vital and yet is amiss from the top-down body of work. Examples of effective or successful (or conversely, ineffective or unsuccessful) supporter engagement are key to trying to understand or develop best practice. Second, this body of literature is discussed in relation to the sociological understandings of fan identity, particularly the categorisations of different types of fans and fan typologies, which they often draw upon.

It is important to note that 'supporter engagement' is a broad, varied and fluid concept that has not been comprehensively defined in literature or policy. Thus, case studies cover various forms of engagement such as protests (in person or virtual), supporter trust activities, club-fan consultation, club takeovers and even the formation of new clubs. What counts as supporter engagement will vary according to the interpretation of the term. We have kept it as wide as possible to highlight the variance.

Effective Supporter Activism

The overwhelmingly dominant feature of all case studies concerns the notion of *success* (and so by default, failure). All examinations of supporter action and influence address this, either explicitly or implicitly, and give insight into the fluid and complex nature of this concept.

What counts as successful supporter action? These case studies highlight a major difficulty in defining ‘successful’ supporter engagement, and what it might look like. Particularly for our understandings of activism, this is a considerable challenge. There have emerged some strong claims of successful supporter action/influence/interaction at the club level (Brown, 2008; Drury, 2006, Lomax, 2000; Millward, 2012; Nash, 2000; Watkins, 2000). Yet what counts as success varies considerably, from influencing a club decision in the short-term to integrating supporters into decision-making structures at the club long-term, and even taking ownership of their club. At Northampton Town, the first league club to set up a supporters trust, their success was gaining a long-term secure position on the club board (Lomax, 2000). Other supporter groups feel they have achieved success through being consulted and listened to, despite not holding an influential position or having representation at the board level (Nash, 2000). It soon becomes apparent when looking closely at these cases that success and failure are not opposing terms, but can (and frequently do) overlap. Success can expose failures; failure can bring unintended successes. Protests and collective movements can fail in their ultimate objective, but unite fans over a common cause (Brown, 2007).

Two well-publicised examples which have attracted academic debate illustrate this excellently: the ‘unsuccessful’ fan protests at Wimbledon and Manchester United (in that they did not achieve their preferred policy outcome), which then resulted in the ‘successful’

formation of new clubs. When highly organised and continuous collective supporter action failed to stop Wimbledon FC from being moved by its owners to Milton Keynes, the Wimbledon Independent Supporters Association (WISA) formed a new club fully owned by the supporters, AFC Wimbledon (see Joyce, 2006). This has been heralded as a success for the local community and the supporter movement in general (Cleland, 2010). Yet this success stemmed from their failure to influence the decision-making processes both within and beyond their club. Similarly, Manchester United supporter groups protested vehemently against the takeover (and compulsory purchase of supporter shares) of their club by the American Glazer. When this failed, a section of supporters formed their own community club, FC United of Manchester (Brown, 2007, 2008). The outcome of this story has already been explained in this article. In both of these cases, an unsuccessful challenge to existing structures led to the successful formation of an alternative fan space. AFC Wimbledon and FCUM are representations of the contradictions of success and failure in fan activism.

Difficulties in defining success mean that it remains almost an abstract concept, leading naturally to an inherent difficulty in measuring it. Collective fan action against current and potential new owners at both Liverpool (Millward, 2012) and Manchester United (Brown & Walsh, 1999; Crick, 2000) respectively resulted in favourable decisions from the perspective of the supporters, but it is not possible to gauge the specific impact that the supporter action had on the decision in each case. In any situation of this kind, clubs can state that they changed their decision for any number of reasons, which may be a useful tactic in suppressing and attempting to demobilise fan action.

How can success be maintained? Even if an agreement to recognise successful supporter-led action is reached, the literature suggests that a second hurdle is then to ensure continuity beyond single-issue campaigns. Two different perspectives on the supporter takeover at AFC Bournemouth illustrate the difficulty of long-term success. Watkins (2000)

described how a group of supporters made a successful bid to gain control of the club in a time of significant financial crisis. However, Whitehead (2006), writing several years later, offered a reflective critique of this time, describing how the initial optimism faded due to a lack of financial transparency. What was at the time considered a successful intervention by the group of supporters was not a success in the long-term for the majority of fans.

Similar issues are seen when the issue relates to the difficulty supporter groups may have in repeatedly challenging governance or management decisions in their clubs. Manchester United fans made an effective challenge to the potential takeover of their club by Rupert Murdoch's BskyB (Crick, 2000) yet could not unite fans and small shareholders to withstand the takeover of the club by the Glazer family a few years later (Brown, 2007). In response to this line of reasoning, however, Drury (2006) reminds us that one significant 'victory' for a fan group may have an unplanned long-lasting legacy by reminding those who hold the power that fans are capable of effective collective action if they feel necessary.

Huge variations in context, alongside difficulties in understanding and conceptualising 'success' makes drawing any conclusions about how clubs and supporters should go about working together extremely problematic. Every club has its own unique context, history and financial situation, and within this, fans represent a vast array of individuals and groups with their own identities, experiences, perceptions, and aspirations for the future of their club. A success at one club may be considered a failure at others; a success to one fan might be considered a failure to another. Context-specific understandings and analyses are therefore imperative and will have a major impact in determining effectiveness. Extreme caution needs to be taken in any attempt to bring all of this together into recommendations for increasing supporter involvement. Given our present review, a 'one size fits all' approach to supporter involvement is extremely unwise and unlikely to have widespread impact. This is of course a problem for the development of the literature, as the

importance of the context increases the difficulty to draw conclusions beyond individual case studies. However, this literature review has already demonstrated that when bringing together the number of $n=1$ studies, it is possible to start drawing common conclusions. Drawing a strong and systematic comparative structure of different cases around concepts such as success and effectiveness and exploring some of the variables identified in this section has the potential to increase our understanding of this new reality in football. This will also advance our theoretical understanding of supporter action, venturing into conceptual frameworks that reach beyond sociological typologies (see the discussion further below).

The debate of what constitutes effective and successful supporter collective action is at the heart of the research done to date. We have seen that this represents both a conceptual and empirical challenge, and debates remain slightly generic and abstract in nature. The tokenistic nature of this literature calls for further in depth systematic and comparative research to understand the dynamics of this complex reality. It is also necessary that, in doing this research, voice is given to the fans themselves so they can reflect on the struggles of supporter collective action and reality can be seen through their eyes.

Supporter Engagement and Fan Typologies

Studies into supporter engagement and activism from a bottom-up perspective are dominantly sociological in nature, and despite being conceptually and theoretically diverse, make an interesting contribution to current thinking around fandom. This work points inevitably to dichotomies that simplify the debate and preclude a deeper understanding of what engagement with football governance means for supporters, and how this interacts with other aspects of their fan identities. The two approaches that are most often reflected upon are Redhead's (1993) concept of participatory (active) and passive fandom, and the traditional consumer vs fan dichotomy proposed by Giulianotti (2002). Although both of these authors

stress that these categories are not static or prescriptive, this typological approach to studying fandom suggests that there are certain characteristics that define active, traditional or 'authentic' fans such as attending matches (Gibbons & Nuttall, 2014), having close ties to the local community (Brown, 2007) and immersion in local cultural practices (Williams, 2012). This is in contrast to the more consumer-orientated 'new' fan that has a weaker identification with the club, its history and locality (Nash, 2000).

Cleland (2010) and Cleland and Dixon (2015) use Redhead's (1993) active/passive categorisations to consider the changing relationship between football clubs and supporters. This has shown how the increasingly 'active' nature of fans has resulted in greater inclusion at football clubs, although predominantly at smaller clubs (Cleland, 2010) as the greater number of 'passive' fans at larger clubs can limit the overall power of the supporter body (Cleland & Dixon, 2015). However, what studies of supporter activism have shown is the fluid and contested nature of the 'active/participatory' fan category. Cleland and Dixon (2015) found that active Newcastle United Supporter Trust members emphasised the importance of local culture, community and place, yet disagreed on the long-term aims of the trust. Conversely Millward (2012) demonstrated that participatory fandom is no longer bound up with the immediate physical community and global collective action for a common cause can be effective. Here we return to the concept of success, where the limited categorisation of fan engagement as 'active' or 'passive' raises further questions. How does the active nature of fan engagement relate to authentic or traditional forms of fan behaviours?

However, it is the need to reconceptualise understandings of 'authentic' fandom that is most heavily represented in the supporter activism literature. The fans of two of the largest Premier League clubs, Liverpool and Manchester United, feature in several case studies that critique problematic understandings of traditional authentic fandom and its proposed incompatibility with modern 'consumer' fan practices and the increasingly global market

(Brown, 2007, 2008; Rookwood & Chan, 2011; Williams, 2012). The example of Manchester United fans who protested against the American takeover of their club by forming FCUM complicates assumptions about authenticity and the local community. Brown (2007, p. 631) suggests “a need for refinement of such categories” as the fans of FCUM are considered as authentic and traditional, yet as owners/shareholders are “part of the collective they themselves have come to produce and consume.” Millward (2012) and Williams (2012) in combination demonstrate that the politicised Liverpool supporter group Spirit of Shankly highlights the fluidity of the ‘local’ aspect of authentic fan identity. Although local cultures and traditions are at the core of the group – to make it ‘authentic’ – the need for large-scale collective action needed for effective action has resulted in “local sites across the world” connected via the internet (Millward, 2012, p. 645). Indeed, it could be claimed that as well as the fragmentation of community that scholars such as King (1998) claim is associated with an increase in global markets, new lines of fandom practice (e.g., online) might help to maintain community and tradition rather than dissolve it (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010).

The critique of dichotomous understandings of fan behaviour and the influence of commodification is not new, and has been done excellently elsewhere by others (see for example Williams, 2007). Yet this small body of literature on supporter activism and engagement with football governance suggests that there is an absence of viable alternative frameworks, particularly when trying to understand how this type of fandom relates to other more extensively studied and theorised fan behaviours. Thus, the traditional study of supporters from this mostly sociological perspective fails to catch completely the new reality that sees supporters going beyond the mere consumption (or not) of football. The study of fandom and supporter engagement would benefit from taking an even stronger ‘governance turn’, where the traditional theoretical approaches based on sociological typologies of fans

can also adopt concepts from governance analysis, stakeholder theory or political science that relate to civil society and organisational activism.

Conclusions and Agenda for Future Research

Whilst there is clearly a growing attention to the role of football supporters as stakeholders, we have unearthed significant gaps in terms of academic knowledge and debate around football supporters and their involvement in governance structures. In this final section, we analyse those gaps and suggest two future directions for research in relation to supporter involvement in football governance.

First, the vast majority of empirical research that looks at supporter involvement in governance from the perspective of the supporter is focussed on the club level. This is perhaps unsurprising as it is through their clubs that the vast majority of supporters identify and engage with football, yet this reveals a telling silence surrounding the potential for supporters to engage with governance structures beyond this. For example, is there a space for fans to join in collective action across clubs, and even countries? What would be the potential impact of this type of action? Should supporters be involved at the governing body level? Whilst there are examples of cross-club activism, such as campaigns by the Football Supporters Federation⁵ and other movements, this has not been studied systematically. The most recent governmental enquiries into football in the UK (DCMS, 2011, 2013) recommend that a fan representative should be included on the FA board to make the structure more accountable and democratic. There are a number of issues to consider and questions to answer in relation to this, further pressing the clear need for empirical research that examines,

⁵ The Football Supporters Federation holds regular meetings at various locations across the country where fans of any club are welcome to attend. It currently has two main campaigns: Twenty's plenty, which calls on all clubs to recognise the commitment of away fans and therefore cap away ticket prices, and the safe standing campaign To persuade the Government, football authorities and football clubs to accept the case for trialling limited sections of standing areas at selected grounds. See <http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/>. Both of these campaigns have made ground towards their aims.

in depth and breadth, the experiences and perceptions of the supporter in relation to football governance - not just at the club level but in the wider football context.

Second, the tendency to focus on single case studies in isolation does not facilitate comparison and generalisation. Again, it is not to overlook the value of these studies in providing rich, in-depth and context-specific discussions of how club-supporter engagement is played out in reality. Yet, by their very nature, these case studies are constrained to that particular context. Research that compares the experiences of supporters across different clubs and at the different levels of the game will contribute to the bigger picture of supporter-club relationships. What different relationships exist? Which ones are perceived the most positively? What are the key issues to supporters across clubs and leagues, and how do they engage with their clubs in order to get their voices heard? Again, in terms of the potential for collective action, work that goes beyond single case studies should illuminate these issues.

There is a need to go beyond the single case study, using methodologies that include in their sample supporters at different clubs, different divisions and even different countries if possible, so their experiences can be compared. That is to say, designing research methodologies that revolve around theory, concepts, and variables, rather than cases. Moreover, this is an area where innovative methodologies can be used. Welford, García and Smith (2015) have explored supporters' activism using qualitative visual auto-ethnography with a group of supporters across different English clubs. We would encourage scholars in this area to be innovative and imaginative, as football fandom is a very rich area of research for sport management.

This does not mean we are suggesting abandoning the case-study approach. Quite to the contrary, we think it is necessary to make this approach stronger, so it can facilitate meaningful research to move forward this area of inquiry. To that extent, it may be

interesting for researchers to make use of the collective case study (Stake, 2005; Creswell, Hanson, Plano-Clark & Morales, 2007). Stake (2005) identifies three kinds of case study: the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective case study. As Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 55) point out, the intrinsic case study is undertaken because the researcher wants a better understanding of this particular case. In contrast, an instrumental case study is where a particular case is explored to provide insight into a particular issue and generalize (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 56). The multiple or collective case study extends the instrumental case study to several cases because this will lead to better understanding and theorising of the subject of research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 56). Thus, in a collective case study the researcher will select one issue or concern but also multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 246). We invite scholars in this area to consider the collective or multiple case study as an avenue for expansion.

This has the potential to increase the generalizability of the research, contributing to better theorising that includes new concepts from governance or management theories. Alison Doherty (2013, p. 5), points out that “the ability to explain phenomena is based in theory, and so the body of knowledge in sport management must derive from theory-based and theory-building research”. Doherty (2013, p. 6-7) describes theory as the foundation of research, practice and teaching. Indeed, she calls sport management scholars to devote serious attention to the development of (see also Cunningham, 2013). Here, we have reviewed recent academic attention to a relatively young phenomenon. It is perhaps the natural development of this new area, but it is important that colleagues (and we would include ourselves here) think about the conceptualisation of supporter activism, starting to use methodologies that can generate data conducive to better theorising. Building on this, it is also necessary that the research outside England is strengthened. Most of the literature available refers to the UK, where supporter activism is at the top of the agenda. However, there are significant movements of supporters

across Europe in countries such as Germany, Spain or Turkey. Research on these, perhaps as part of collective case studies, needs to be developed.

Third, although the term ‘supporter engagement’ features heavily in current policy discourses, this has not been defined. What is supporter engagement, and what are its boundaries? It seems imperative that a term so heavily relied upon is defined in some way. Must a supporter be a member of a formal supporter organisation to be engaged with governance? What we know from this body of literature about the supporters and their involvement in football governance structures is determined by their membership of (formal or informal) supporter organisations. In relation to this, it is necessary to point out that the majority of writing on specific clubs and cases of supporter action are written from an ‘insider perspective’. That is to say, by somebody within the club/trust/group. These tend to provide a single perspective rather than a balanced critique. Further, the focus is predominantly on organised supporter action and involvement, so the only supporters recognised are those that have formalised their commitment in this way. Empirical work should try to approach the football supporter from a more holistic angle so as not to exclude those who do not formalise their engagement with governance structures.

The final issue to be addressed, and perhaps the timeliest given the current policy context, is the need for continued, in-depth and balanced insights into the Supporters Direct model. Whilst there have been several papers helpfully offering a critical perspective on the role of Supporters Direct and its political agenda, there has been very little exploration or consideration of potential alternative or complementary models. Little is known as to why and how individual supporters want to get involved in governance, if at all. There is not much academic evidence of the extent to which supporters value the trust model or other alternatives. In order to fill this gap there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of trusts in clubs, and the role of supporters in trusts. Thorough, critical examinations of

the role of formal supporter organisations in their clubs, based on in-depth, empirical research across different contexts, are vital to ensure that the promotion of this model is properly founded. This is a crucial time for supporter involvement – the past year alone has seen many cases of protest, supporters taking over clubs, and political debates over whether fans should be more involved in football governance – it is imperative that attempts are made to capture this, to develop a body of useful literature through which to build the policy case for increased supporter involvement. Timely empirical research is crucial.

The ongoing discussion suggests existing gaps that we believe research in this area should try to address. We would also propose some conceptual advancements to build upon and strengthen existing knowledge. As this review has demonstrated, academic interest in supporter involvement in football governance has predominantly grown out of two distinct areas. Top-down policy discussions of the macro/meso level are predominantly descriptive in nature, with some use of organisational theories or socio-political frameworks. Bottom-up examinations of supporter activism or engagement on the other hand, generally from a sociological perspective, examine fan resistance and/or engagement by drawing upon existing frameworks of fan identity and typologies, be they passive/active, authentic/consumer, traditional/new, or fan communities as local/global.

We feel that insights into supporter engagement with football governance could be strengthened considerably by examining where these two bodies of work might overlap, which will help to better integrate and advance the theories underlying our study of supporter activism and fandom. The micro level bottom-up literature has some key themes around supporter activism that could clearly speak to governance theories. Yet taken as a whole, this has not yet fully engaged with the wider material on football governance. The two bodies of work included in this review remain disparate, despite their obvious overlap. Bottom-up, micro level studies that engage with concepts of governance yet remain grounded in the

experiences of the supporter would encourage a merger of the two approaches. Alternatively, incorporating this perspective of the supporter into macro and meso level work examining networks of power in football governance would give recognition to the increasingly significant position held by fans and examine whether this is disturbing existing power relations in clubs (i.e., whether it is effective or not, continuing this existing and useful theme).

One example could be a stakeholder theory approach, evident elsewhere in football governance literature (see for example Senaux, 2008). This would acknowledge that supporters, as a group who “affect and are affected by” organisational objectives (Freeman, 1984, p. 46), are situated within governing power networks and therefore have the potential for effective engagement. Walters (2011) uses this approach to demonstrate how Arsenal consulted with supporters over stadium development but this did not extend to their participation in the decision-making processes. Using such theories that engage with macro level governance issues to investigate supporter engagement from the perspective of the fan could be further illuminating and would add theoretical weight to research in this area.

Furthermore, many sociological studies of fan behaviour point to the limited application of existing typologies in helping to understand how football supporters engage with governance. Dichotomous understandings have limited use, as they fail to capture the complexity of fan engagement with governance because they tend to focus on the extent to which fans consume football matches. A second direction for future research would be to consider how typologies could be broadened to take into account these new activities of fans that extend beyond the stands or the television to venture into issues more linked to the boardroom. For example, work has shown that increasing use and scope of digital technologies and social media by supporters who engage with governance can distort the boundaries between the local and the global (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010; Millward, 2012). As a

result, previous definitions of ‘authentic’ or ‘active’ fandom that rely on physical proximity to football clubs are questioned. We would echo calls (Dixon, 2011, 2014; Gibbons & Nuttall, 2014; Williams, 2007) for a move away from existing typology-based frameworks towards a more nuanced understanding of fan behaviour. This should also recognise and acknowledge the different dimensions of supporter engagement with governance, and how they interact with other facets such as authenticity, loyalty, and consumption. It would be fruitful to further our understanding of how, why and what supporters do in relation to governance in an attempt to build a stronger evidence base, whilst also integrating this into what is already known about fan behaviour.

The increased attention football supporters are now receiving in the academic literature, away from the well-established body of work around football hooliganism, is a welcome avenue into learning more about this hugely popular social activity. Yet we are still a long way from understanding fandom. The way supporters engage with their clubs is changing; the internet and global markets are accentuating this, and whilst the cost of tickets continues to rise and the gap between the top and the bottom continues to grow, changes will continue. It is imperative that research works to capture these changes, to understand how fandom is evolving.

References

All Party Parliamentary Football Group. (2009). *English football and its governance*. London, England: Thales.

Alm, J. (2013). *Action for good governance in international sports organisations*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Play the Game/Danish Institute for Sport Studies.

Arnaut, J. (2006). Independent European sport review (final version), a report by José Luis Arnaut. Retrieved from http://www.ethicsandsport.com/public/uploads/files/documentatie/Independent%20European%20Sport%20Review%202006%20Full_Report_EN.pdf

Brooking, T. (2000). United for change. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 24-29.

Brown, A. (2007). Not for sale? The destruction and reformation of football communities in the Glazer takeover of Manchester United. *Soccer & Society*, 8(4), 614-635.

Brown, A. (2008). Our club, our rules: Fan communities at FC United of Manchester. *Soccer & Society*, 9(3), 346-358.

Brown, A., & Walsh, A. (1999). *Not for sale*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Mainstream.

Brown, A., & Walsh, A. (2000). Football supporters' relations with their clubs: A European perspective. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 88-101.

Burnham, A. (2000). Time for change: Supporters Direct. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 45-48.

Chappelet, J. L. and Mrkonjic, M.(2013) *Basic indicators for better governance in international sport (BIBGIS): An assessment tool for international sport governing bodies*. IDHEAP Working paper 1/2013. Retrieved from:

http://www.transparency.ch/de/PDF_files/Newsletter/201306_Newsletter_Publikation_Chapplet_und_Mrkonjic_2013_Basic_Indicators_for_Better_Governance_in_International_Sport.pdf

Cleland, J.A. (2010). From passive to active: the changing relationship between supporters and football clubs. *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), 537-552.

Cleland, J.A & Dixon, K. (2015). 'Black and whiter': The relative powerlessness of 'active' supporter organization mobility at English Premier League football clubs. *Soccer & Society*, 16(4), 540-554. doi: 10.1080/14660970.2014.891988

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Plano Clark, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35, 236-264.

Conn, D. (1997). *The football business: Fair game in the 1990s?* Edinburgh, Scotland: Mainstream.

Conn, D. (2004). Clubbing together. In M. Jackson & P. Maltby (Eds.), *Trust in Football* (pp. 25-28). London, England: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Conn, D. (2009, October 14). Supporters Direct keeps the faith in fan ownership despite setbacks. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/blog/2009/oct/14/supporters-trust-uefa-david-conn>

Crick, M. (2000). Shareholders united against Murdoch. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 64-69.

Crowther, P. (2000). Broadcasters v regulators: The threat to football from media company ownership of football clubs. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 30-35.

Cunningham, G. (2009). Understanding the diversity-related change process: A field study. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23, 407-428.

Cunningham, G. (2013). Theory and theory development in sport management. *Sport Management Review*, 16(1), 1-4.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). (2011). *Football governance: Seventh report of session 2010-12*. London, England: The Stationary Office. Retrieved from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmcumeds/792/792i.pdf>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). (2013). *Football governance follow-up: Fourth report of session 2012-13*. London, England: The Stationary Office. Retrieved from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcumeds/509/509.pdf>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). (2014, October 21). Government sets up experts group to forge stronger links between supporters and professional football clubs. *Gov.uk online*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-up-experts-group-to-forge-stronger-links-between-supporters-and-professional-football-clubs>

Dixon, K. (2011). A 'third way' for football fandom research: Anthony Giddens and structuration theory. *Soccer & Society*, 12(2), 279-298.

Dixon, K. (2014). The role of lateral surveillance in the construction of authentic football fandom practice. *Surveillance & Society*, 11(4), 424-438.

Doherty, A. (2013). Investing in sport management: The value of good theory. *Sport Management Review*, 16(1), 5-11.

Drury, J. (2006). West Ham United FC – Breaking the bond. In D. Brimson (Ed.), *Rebellion: The inside story of football's protest movement* (pp. 173-206). London, England: John Blake.

Football Task Force. (1999a). *Investing in the Community*. London, England: The Stationery Office.

Football Task Force. (1999b). *Football: Commercial Issues*. London, England: The Stationery Office.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman Press.

Geeraert, A., Alm, J., & Groll, M. (2013). Good governance in international sport organizations: an analysis of the 35 Olympic sport governing bodies. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 6(3), 281-306..

Gibbons, T., & Dixon, K. (2010). Surf's up! A call to take English soccer fan interactions on the internet more seriously. *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), 599-613.

Gibbons, T., & Nutall, D. (2014). 'True fan = watch match'? In search of the 'authentic' soccer fan. *Soccer & Society*. doi: 10.1080/14660970.2014.980735

Giulianotti, R. (2002). Supporters, followers, fans and flaneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities in football. *Sport and Social Issues*, 26(2), 25-46.

Giulianotti, R. (2005). Sport spectators and the social consequences of commodification: Critical perspectives from Scottish football. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29, 386-410.

Hamil, S. (1999). A whole new ball game? Why football needs a regulator. In S. Hamil, J. Michie, & C. Oughton (Eds.), *A game of two halves? The business of football* (pp.23-39). London, England: Routledge.

Hamil, S., Holt, M., Michie, J., Oughton, C., & Shailer, L. (2004). The corporate governance of professional football clubs. *Corporate Governance*, 4(2), 44-51.

Hamil, S., Michie, J., Oughton, C., & Warby, S. (2000). Recent developments in football ownership. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 1-10.

Henry, I., & Lee, P.C. (2004). Good governance and ethics in sport. In J. Beech & S. Chadwick (Eds.), *The Business of Sport Management* (pp. 25-42). Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Holt, M., Michie, J., Oughton, C., & Shailer, L. (2004). The state of the game: The corporate governance of football clubs 2004. Research paper no. 3, Football Governance Research Centre. London: Birkbeck.

Houlihan, B. (2013). Accountability and good governance. In J. Alm (Ed.), *Action for Good Governance in International Sports Organisations (AGGIS) final report* (pp. 22-25). Copenhagen, Denmark: Play the game/Danish Institute for Sport Studies. Retrieved from: https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/397727/1/AGGIS_Final_report.pdf#page=22

Hughson, J., & Poulton, E. (2007). Only genuine fans need apply: an organisational analysis of the English Football Association's response to football supporter stereotypes. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 2(1/2), 69-82.

Hudson, J. (2001). Critically examining the commercialisation of English football: A case for government intervention? *Sociology of Sport Online*, 4(1). Retrieved from: <http://physed.otago.ac.nz/sosol/v4i1/v4i1hud.htm>

Joyce, M. (2006). Wimbledon FC – No to Merton! In D. Brimson (Ed.), *Rebellion: The inside story of football's protest movement* (pp. 125-160). London, England: John Blake.

Kennedy, D. (2012). Football stadium relocation and the commodification of football: The case of Everton supporters and their adoption of the language of commerce. *Soccer & Society*, 13(3), 341-358. doi:10.1080/14660970.2012.655504

Kennedy, P. (2012). Supporters Direct and supporters' governance of football: A model for Europe? *Soccer & Society*, 13(3), 409-425. doi: 10.1080/14660970.2012.655509

Kennedy, D., & Kennedy, P. (2007). Supporter trusts and third way politics. *Sport in Society*, 10(2), 285-303. doi: 10.1080/17430430601147120

King, A. (1998). *The end of the terraces: The transformation of English football in the 1990s*. London, England: Leicester University Press.

Lomax, B. (2000). Democracy and fandom: Developing a supporters' trust at Northampton Town FC. *Soccer & Society*, 1(1), 79-87.

Madden, P., & Robinson, T. (2012). Supporter influence on club governance in a sports league, a 'utility maximization' model. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 59(4), 339-360.

Malcolm, D. (2000). Football business and football communities in the twenty-first century. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 102-113.

Margalit, A. (2008). You'll never walk alone: On property, community, and football fans. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 10(1), 217-240.

Martin, P. (2007). Football, community and cooperation: A critical analysis of supporter trusts in England. *Soccer & Society*, 8(4), 636-653.

Michie, J., & Oughton, C. (2005). *FA: Fit for Purpose? A Report for the sports nexus*. Retrieved from: http://www.englandtillidie.org/uploads/5/2/1/6/5216475/fa_fit_for_purpose.pdf

Millward, P. (2012). Reclaiming the Kop? Analysing Liverpool supporters' 21st century mobilizations. *Sociology*, 46, 633-648.

Nash, R. (2000). Contestation in modern English professional football: The independent supporters association movement. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(4), 465-486. doi: 10.1177/101269000035004002

Redhead, S. (1993). *The passion and the fashion: Football fandom in new Europe*. Aldershot, England: Avebury.

Rookwood, J., & Chan, N. (2011). The 39th game: Fan responses to the Premier League's proposal to globalize the English game. *Soccer & Society*, 12(6), 897-913.

Senaux, B. (2008). A stakeholder approach to football club governance. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 4(1), 4-17.

Smith, C. (2000). Strengthening the voice of supporters. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 13-16.

Sparkes, A. & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 366-381). London, England: Sage.

Supporters Direct. (2009). *What is the Feasibility of a Supporters Direct Europe?* Report prepared for UEFA. London, England: Supporters Direct.

Supporters Direct. (2011). *Developing football regulation to encourage supporter community ownership in football*. Supporters Direct Briefing Paper No. 2. London, England: Supporters Direct.

Supporters Direct. (2014). Facts & Figures. Retrieved from: <http://www.supporters-direct.org/homepage/aboutsupportersdirect/facts-figures>

Swansea City Supporters Society Limited. (2011). Minutes of the 11th annual general meeting. Retrieved from: <http://www.swanstrust.co.uk/AGM-Info.aspx>

Taylor, R. (1992). *Football and its fans: Supporters and their relations with the game, 1885-1985*. Leicester, England: Leicester University Press.

Taylor, R. (2014, December 19) The birth of the FSA (part 1 - Heysel and the early FSA) [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.fsf.org.uk/blog/view/the-birth-of-the-fsa-part-1>

Trail, G. & Chelladurai, P. (2000). Perceptions of goals and processes of intercollegiate athletics: A case study. *Journal of Sport Management*, 14(2), 154-178.

Walters, G. (2011). The implementation of a stakeholder management strategy during stadium development: A case study of Arsenal Football Club and the Emirates stadium. *Managing Leisure*, 16, 49-64.

Watkins, T. (2000). Cherries in the black: AFC Bournemouth's journey from bankruptcy to rude health under supporter leadership. *Soccer & Society*, 1(3), 57-63.

Webber, D. (2014). No longer the people's game: Karl Polanyi and the double movement 'against modern football'. Paper presented at the conference 'Whose Game is it? Supporters & Football Governance', Loughborough University, 24-25 October 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.free-project.eu/documents->

free/Working%20Papers/Webber%20No%20Longer%20the%20Peoples%20Game%20Karl
%20Polanyi%20and%20the%20Double%20Movement%20Against%20Modern%20Football.
pdf

Whitehead, D. (2006). AFC Bournemouth – community club... or con? In D. Brimson (Ed.), *Rebellion: The inside story of football's protest movement* (53-72). London, England: John Blake.

Williams, J. (2007). Rethinking sports fandom: The case of European soccer. *Leisure Studies*, 26(2), 127-146.

Williams, J. (2012). Walking alone together the Liverpool way: Fan culture and 'clueless' yanks. *Soccer & Society*, 13(3), 426-442.

Winter, H. (2011, January 20). Hugh Robertson: football is the worst governed sport in Britain, *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8272697/Hugh-Robertson-football-is-the-worst-governed-sport-in-Britain.html>.