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Democracy and Supporter Ownership

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In 2012, Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Sport, Media and Youth declared that:

Active citizenship and the culture of participation are essential to our daily lives in Europe and sport is a field where this can be both prominent and effective. Supporters sustain sport not only through economic investment but also through countless hours they devote to volunteering and participation at their clubs. This is a vital part of the role that sport can play in building stronger communities.

(Supporters Direct Europe, 2012)

Fan democracy and supporter ownership have now become a key part of national and European sport policies. This reflects the wider social significance of sport (and football in particular) to community cohesion and political engagement across Europe. It also shows how football fans have become a significant political group across the continent. Yet this has not always been the case. Fans have politicised in response to specific political economic changes in football.

European football has undergone a dramatic economic transformation over the last 25 years. The formation of the Champions League and Premier League in 1992 has heralded a lucrative approach to elite men’s football across Europe. Million-euro television deals, corporate branding and global stars have helped transform European football into a global media spectacle. In parallel to this economic transformation, clubs have become corporate entities that seek to expand their profile across global markets. This has attracted a range of global entrepreneurs who want to incorporate football clubs into their business portfolios. Yet global football is a paradox. With the exception of a small number of clubs like Juventus, Corinthians and Everton, football clubs are named after a locality. Bayern Munich, for example, is named after the city and the region of Bavaria. Most clubs are named after the city or town that houses the club, like FC Copenhagen, Marseilles or Roma. Others, like St Pauli, Boca Juniors or Beşiktaş, are more specific and acquire their moniker from their neighbourhood. As such clubs have come to represent a specific geographical community despite the national and international competitions they play in. For many fans, the football club has become a powerful symbol of community and
as their clubs have become increasingly globalised, various fan groups have fought to have their voices heard as stakeholders, rather than as customers.

The beauty of football is that it allows fans to articulate their differences through the ritualistic football season; it both unites and divides (Doidge, 2015b). Fans across Europe have long used football as a way of showing their local identity (Dal Lago, 1990; King, 1997, 1998, 2003; Giulianotti, 1999; Hughson, 2000; Lestrelin et al., 2006, 2013; Antonowicz et al., 2011, 2015; Millward, 2011; Ginhoux, 2012; Merkel, 2012; Nuhrat, 2013; Erhart, 2014; Hodges, 2014; Mintert and Pfister, 2014a, 2014b; Doidge, 2015a; Hognestad, 2015). As the game has changed in relation to global political economic forces, fans have begun to politicise around issues affecting their clubs. While many fans are happy to be consumers of football, there are many others who have become ‘active’ fans that are seeking to use football to challenge the direction of their clubs (Cleland, 2010). Yet we should not assume that fans automatically agree on potential approaches; fans have many different reasons for supporting football and this can lead to disagreement (Nash, 2000; Millward, 2011, 2012). Many groups of ‘active’ fans seek to challenge discrimination or raise money to financially support clubs in times of crisis. As many of these groups seek to expand beyond traditional forms of masculine fandom, they appeal to a greater range of fans. Despite this, participation remains intrinsically gendered (Erhart, 2011; Caudwell, 2012; Mintert and Pfister, 2014a, 2014b; Dunn, 2015). Despite the focus of these groups to engage in fan democracy and increase the voice of fans, traditional gender roles remain.

What is significant is that while football has also Europeanised, with increasing interaction between clubs and policymakers across the continent, fans are doing likewise (Doidge, 2013). They are sharing successful strategies, approaches and organising collective actions. Increasingly, pan-European organisations like Football Supporters Europe (FSE), Supporters Direct Europe, Centre for Access to Football Europe (CAFE) and Football Against Racism Europe (FARE), are coordinating this action. This chapter addresses different approaches across Europe, with particular focus on England, Germany, Poland and Italy. In each case specific local and national cultures affect civil society and the manner and intensity of fan engagement. But, at the same time, fans are incorporating ideas from across Europe in order to have more democracy in their own club.

**Supporters’ associations**

While football fans are heterogeneous and have many different motivations for their support (Bromberger, 1993), they have collectivised and organised their support socially for decades. Historically, this has been around social activities as fans congregated to discuss the game throughout the week. This trend started in the 1920s in England, while in Germany and Italy fans took advantage of greater civil freedom to form local associations after the Second World War. This approach historically has been a passive relationship between fans and owners (Taylor, 1992; Merkel, 2012; Doidge, 2015a). As the Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB) enforced amateurism until the 1960s in Germany, this ensured a less financially driven focus of clubs and fans (Merkel, 2012). This was markedly different in England, where fans would raise money through social activities like raffles and dances to contribute to the club’s facilities, including supporters’ club facilities at Luton Town, turnstiles at Plymouth Argyle and even the purchase of the stadium at Oxford United (Taylor, 1992). Directors were clearly supportive of these fundraising activities as the supporters as a group possibly invested more than some individual directors. There is little evidence of this occurring in Italy, as local entrepreneurs established themselves as patrimonial owners very early in the development of Italian football (Doidge,
2015a). Yet the supporters’ clubs became excellent decentralised spaces where fans could organise their support, including distribution of tickets and planning travel to away games. As Guschwan (2011: 1996) argues:

In eras past, neighborhood fan clubs were an essential link between professional teams and ticket buyers, that is, fans. While fan groups are no longer the primary distributor of tickets, organized fan clubs remain a vital part of local social life for many Italians.

 Fans effectively became the administrators and fundraisers for the football clubs. While this helped establish a relationship that was seen as mutually beneficial to both directors and fans, it also solidified a power imbalance between the two groups.

Despite the financial assistance these fan associations provided the football clubs, few supporters gained access to the football club board. More importantly, as Taylor (1992) argues, there were no calls from the fans for representation. Many football clubs maintained a paternalistic approach to their supporters. They were happy for the financial input, but without further interference. Some clubs, notably Aldershot, Plymouth Argyle and Southampton, gained access to the board for the chairs of their associations (Taylor, 1992). There is no indication that this is purely down to gratitude and cordiality, and not just the individuals themselves who were within the same social networks as the directors. As Taylor (1992: 38–9) argues, in relation to English fan associations:

the most typical pattern of supporter-club liaison throughout the period 1930–70 … was the ‘one-way’ system which involved a Board member acting as president and/or Chairman of the Supporters’ Club and its committee. There appears to be no examples of Supporters’ Club members being given the opportunity even to elect which of the Board members should sit on their committees.

This relationship allowed football club directors to build and maintain their hegemonic ownership of the football club. As the clubs remained resolutely local, with directors and fans coming from the same locality, conflict was minimised.

Throughout the 1970s, there was increased conflict with supporters as the clubs wanted the money from the supporters’ clubs, but without giving representation. The clubs effectively treated the supporters’ clubs as sources of revenue. Growing commercial pressures, fuelled by a growth in players’ wages, started to challenge the relationship between fans and directors. This was more pronounced in Germany where the relaxation of amateurism led to a dramatic commercialisation of the game (Merkel, 2012). It was less pronounced in Italy as patrician owners merely incorporated football clubs into their family of businesses and subsidised them accordingly (Doidge, 2015). This led to the development of a specific ‘love–hate’ relationship between Italian fans and the owners of their clubs (Portelli, 1993). Fans in Italy are reliant on their owner having the political and economic support to sustain their club, but they detest the fact that they are in this relationship. The specific political and social conditions in Italy have hindered the ability of fans to successfully challenge this situation (Doidge, 2015).

There were surprisingly few examples of politically inspired movements in football before the 1990s, aside from abstaining from the game, or joining a spontaneous protest after a game. There were sporadic campaigns to boycott matches but these rarely received substantial support as fans were caught between the dichotomy of supporting one’s team and censuring the board (Taylor, 1992). More importantly, these protests and campaigns were highly localised. There was little or no national coordination. Both Italy and England developed national federations of
fan associations, but these were not politically active. Initiated by the secretary of the Northampton Supporters’ Club, representatives from Plymouth Argyle, Brentford, Boscombe and Charlton Athletic attended a meeting at Lyons Restaurant in London to found the National Federation of Football Supporters’ Clubs (Natfed) in 1927 (Taylor, 1992). Yet this national federation did not coordinate national campaigns. Their motto of ‘To Help and Not to Hinder’ clearly represents this hands-off, non-confrontational approach. A similar situation occurred in Italy. Larger clubs have Centri di Coordinamento (‘Coordination Centres’) which manage the various supporters’ clubs and their activities. In turn, these coordination centres are affiliated with the FISSC or Federazione Italiana Sostenitori Squadre Calcio (Federation of Supporters of Italian Football Teams). Formed in 1970, this federation provides advice and support for coordination centres and supporters’ clubs. While it attempts to provide a voice for fans, it does not critically engage with key issues related to contemporary fandom, such as policing, regulation and commercial development, and, as such, the FISSC does not engage in political activities.

By the 1980s it was becoming apparent that the existing model of fan engagement with clubs and government was not fulfilling the desired role for all fans. In Italy, the ultras provided their own outlet for contesting changes (Dal Lago, 1990; Podaliri and Balestri, 1998; Testa and Armstrong, 2010; Doidge, 2015b). Germany experienced a similar development as football fandom became a significant political subculture for many young (mainly male) fans (Merkel, 2012). There was also a growth in hooliganism and extreme political affiliation that dramatically impacted attendances. As Merkel (2012: 364) argues, ‘One of the most convincing indicators of football’s popularity is matches’ attendance figures. Fans often react promptly and unequivocally to changes.’ Hooliganism also had a dramatic impact on attendances in England which helped to politicise certain fan groups. The lack of national and political integration in relation to the interests of supporters was illustrated by Natfed’s response to hooliganism and the Popplewell report. The Heysel tragedy acted as a catalyst for more politically active fans to form the Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) in 1985. The dynamism of the FSA captured the imagination of the media and led to significant contestation with the Natfed, even though they rarely courted the media.

Political mobilisations occurred in the 1980s around specific issues related to political extremism (in Germany and Italy) and government and police legislation (England). The economic transformation of football in the 1990s led to a significant development in fan activism. Particularly in England, but also across Europe, a range of independent and politically active fan groups emerged to contest the commercial development of the game. As King (2003: 171) argues:

Before the commercialisation of football in the 1990s, fans looked upon themselves not as customers but as members of their club which they supported through active participation. The season ticket was not regarded as an onerous expense but rather as a subscription fee which sustained an institution of which the fans were active members. The club was ultimately supported not financially but by fans’ regular and vociferous attendance at games. The ticket price was a maintenance fee for use of an institution of which a fan was a member. Fans contributed to the very public good from which they benefited. The rapid increase of ticket prices in the 1990s has transformed this membership model radically.

Stadium redevelopments and relocations combined with increasing ticket prices to challenge (predominantly masculine) fan groups’ notions of their fandom. This political activism combined with a range of other activities that sought to make the stadium more inclusive for all fans. The
rights of disabled fans were often overlooked in stadium redevelopments so fan groups lobbied to maintain access for disabled fans. Similarly, anti-racism initiatives took off to challenge the incessant racist chanting at matches.

These groups had a specific localised characteristic. These Independent Supporters’ Associations (ISAs) mobilised around particular issues affecting their clubs. Different ISAs have advocated vastly different strategies depending on local circumstances. For example, IMUSA advocated the purchase of shares so that they could gain a voice on the Manchester United board, while Southampton fans raised issues over the lack of inclusion in the team of Matt Le Tissier, or a proposed move away from their historic stadium of the Dell. These groups were successful in mobilising quickly at a local level. Yet they often operated independently of the FSA, whose membership dwindled after successfully challenging the implementation of identity cards. ‘The ISAs’, King (2003: 182) argues, ‘have become more and more significant because masculine fans at the same club are unified by years of close association and share the same interests in regard to their club. The FSA is unable to mobilise fans because in an increasingly deregulated environment there are few national issues.’

Despite the challenge of unified national issues, activist fans in Germany and England have continued to unite nationally to challenge for more democratic engagement in football. This reflects the respective civil societies in both of these countries where political engagement through parliamentary democracy and lobbying is more common. In Germany, the Bündnis Aktiver Fussball Fans (Association of Active Fans, BAFF) was formed in 1993 from a collection of fan initiatives, fan clubs and anti-racist activists (it was originally named Bündnis antifaschistischer Fanclubs und Faninitiativen and changed its name in 1998). BAFF campaigns on specific aspects of fan culture, including anti-discrimination activities, as well as lobbying against specific changes to regulation that directly impact fan culture, like anti-pyrotechnic legislation and policing. The Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF) acts as a similar umbrella group in England. Formed out of a merger of the FSA and Natfed in 2002, the FSF campaigns on particular issues that affect football fans. They are democratically elected by their members and actively lobby government, the football federations and leagues in order to have the voice of fans heard. As with BAFF, these issues are communicated through the internet and social media, and these fan federations hold annual congresses to share and raise issues that have a national significance, for example over high ticket prices (‘Price Watch’) or aggressive policing (‘Fair Cop’). National approaches have also been picked up elsewhere in Europe with the Danske Fodbold Fanklubber (Danish Football Fanclub, DFF), which was formed in 2003. Five years later, the Federación de Accionistas y Socios del Fútbol Español (FASFE) was established in Spain to act as a national umbrella group, while Prosupporters emerged in 2009 to act as a similar group for Austria and the Balkans. Another country with a strong national approach, Turkey, has a Taraftar Hakları Derneği (Taraf-Der) which actively campaigns against similar regulation of fans as elsewhere in Europe, like challenging the introduction of identity cards and regulation of pyrotechnics.

This national approach is not uniform across Europe. Italian fans have struggled to go beyond the visible protests of the ultras and the more passive approach of FISSC. Although this approach might be changing with the Supporters’ Trust model, which will be discussed later, this does not incorporate all fan groups in Serie A. Reflecting the weak national civil society that exists in Italy, national cooperation among fans is severely inhibited and this undermines their ability to challenge the growing legislation and regulation against fans. A similar situation occurs in Greece and Poland. Even countries with strong collectivist approaches, like Finland and Sweden have not organised nationally, but this reflects the way that fans have been integrated into wider debates. As similar approaches towards commercialism and policing spread across Europe, this
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is likely to challenge some of these national contexts and the Europeanisation of fan democracy might counteract this.

The success of these national federations rests on their being able to communicate to fans that specific local issues are of national (or European) importance. Only when fans put aside parochial differences can they create a sizeable opposition to undemocratic changes in football. As Merkel (2012) argues, the ‘50+1’ ownership model has not been retained because of the benevolence of the DFB and club owners and the DFB; it is there because fans have fought for it. The mobilisation of football fans has developed significantly in relation to specific local, national and global changes to football. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was a greater call for fan democracy as a severe financial crisis impacted many clubs across Europe.

Fan projects

An alternative approach to fan democracy has originated in Germany. Fan projects operate as a link between these different fan groups, the football club and the authorities (Doidge, 2014). After a fan died as a result of a hooligan incident, the first fan project was established in Bremen in 1981. All Bundesliga clubs now have fan projects and these help to act as education and social spaces for fans. Fan projects act as communication hubs between the various authorities and fans. Fans are the central foci of these organisations, but they liaise with police, lawyers, council and the football club in order to present a fully rounded picture of both the fans and authorities’ perspectives.

It is important to note that fan projects are not usually fan-driven initiatives. They are independent organisations that are financed by the clubs and local and regional authorities. They are run by sozialarbeiter (‘social workers’) who work with football fans to provide skills suitable for employment, emotional support and preventing antisocial behaviour (such as violence and racism). They are significant to fan democracy because they seek to gain a deeper understanding of fans and work with them to prevent some of the negative aspects of football fandom. This is achieved through building trust, running education and skills workshops, and providing safe social spaces.

Part of the success of fan projects can be explained by German political and social culture. The combination of strong civil society and respect for the state ensures that grass-roots projects have the time to build trust. There is one similar organisation in England called Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD). This is a youth work project that works with local authorities, community groups and fans to challenge racism in Sheffield. It works in partnership with both Sheffield football clubs (United and Wednesday) and uses the power of football to educate young people about racism. FURD is an exception in England as the libertarian underpinnings of the main political parties inhibit the role of social workers to interfere in the personal lives of the citizens.

Poland provides a different opportunity to demonstrate the success of this approach. Before the European Championships were held in Poland and Ukraine in 2012, there was a pilot project to implement fan projects (Doidge, 2014). They were intended to challenge hooliganism, but have expanded into other activities dependent on the goals of the fans. Called kibice razem (‘Supporters United’), the projects were originally trialled with four clubs (Lechia Gdańsk; Arka Gdynia; Polonia Warszawa; and Śląsk Wrocław) and have now been extended to another five. Each kibice razem was originally partnered with a German fan project who provided advice and support. These networks continue informally, as it is important that kibice razem follow the needs of the local fans, rather than a pre-prescribed agenda imposed from outside of Poland.
Supporters’ trusts

The dramatic economic transformation of European football since the 1990s has created an elite group of clubs that can compete in both their respective national league and the Champions League. The dramatic growth in income generated from media deals and prize money has contributed to a culture that encouraged clubs to challenge this hegemonic group. Fans, media and directors alike have urged clubs to constantly push for promotion and titles. While this is an intrinsic aspect of competitive sport, the intensity has magnified thanks to the anticipated financial reward.

Supporters’ trusts emerged in the UK as a result of some highly publicised financial problems in English football. These supporters’ trusts emerged out of the Independent Supporters Association (ISA) that evolved in the 1990s. However, ISAs have not had the same development elsewhere in Europe as diverse issues and ownership structures have impacted fans differently. In Sweden and Germany, regulations enforce a ’50+1 rule’, which gives supporters some ownership of ‘their’ club as they own 50 per cent plus one share of the club. Consequently, these fans have not had to create independent groups to challenge for more democracy in the boardroom.

This is likely to change in Germany as the ‘50+1’ rule is coming under pressure from owners who wish to profit from football. Historically, sports clubs in Germany were mutual associations. The DFL followed similar deregulatory practises in England and Italy. In 1998 they agreed that clubs could become limited companies and attract private investment. This had disastrous consequences for some clubs, including Borussia Dortmund who nearly went bankrupt in 2005 (Merkel, 2012). Yet the ‘50+1’ rule ensured that all liabilities were not the end of the club. Alongside financial support from fans, the league and even their rivals Bayern Munich, Dortmund remained and were able to challenge the Champions League final eight years later.

Despite the relative success of the ‘50+1’ rule, political economic pressures from owners are growing. When the rule was implemented in 1998, two exceptions were granted to Wolfsburg and Bayer Leverkusen who had long-standing links with Volkswagen and Bayer Pharmaceuticals respectively. In light of these two exceptions, owners have attempted to challenge the legality of the rule. In particular, Martin Kind, the Hanover 96 president, challenged the DFL in 2009. His proposals were rejected by 32 of the 36 clubs. Just as occurred in Italy and England (King, 1998; Doidge, 2015b), owners of German clubs are agitating for deregulation so they can maximise their profits. At Hoffenheim and RB Leipzig, wealthy benefactors are circumventing the regulations through intense financial investment independent of fan involvement. Fans at RB Leipzig are agitating against these changes. The Austrian energy drink manufacturer has invested €100m. in a provincial team called SSV Markranstädt that they renamed RB Leipzig. Although plans to rename it Red Bull Leipzig were refused by the DFL, the name Rasenballsport Leipzig (or ‘lawn ball sport’) was accepted. Despite ownership rules, membership prices have been set prohibitively high at €800 a year (compared to €60 at Bayern Munich). This has resulted in the club having only 11 members, mainly employees of Red Bull. Fans have protested in the stadium and explicitly targeted the company and the rules. One choreography using coloured card exclaimed that ‘50+1 must stay’, and then became ‘Red Bull vertreiben’ (‘Red Bull go away’).

As Red Bull are directly challenging the fabric and spirit of the DFL rules, fans of German clubs will need to be more coordinated in their approach to retain their position. As Merkel (2012) has argued, this rule does not exist through the benevolence of owners. Fans have to keep agitating to maintain it. Occasionally an owner may bequeath their shares to the fans, but this is due to the sustained activism of fan organisations. In 2012 at Panathinaikos in Greece, the
former rally driver, Giannis Vardinogiannis, transferred his 54.7 per cent majority shareholding to a fan collective called Panathinaiki Alliance. Through their website (www.paomprosta.gr) fans can become members for €20 and contribute to the running of their club. Yet this situation represents the exception, rather than the rule.

Supporters’ trusts have spread across Europe as the political economic challenges of football ownership challenge local clubs. The movement is nascent in Italy, but interest is growing. These supporters’ trusts are following a similar model to the ISAs and supporters’ trusts in England. Broader issues, such as racism and community engagement, were central to these groups. Consequently, they attract fans from a more diverse section of the fan base. It should also be noted that these groups are not hermetically sealed from other forms of fandom, as King (2003) argues, some members of ISAs had links to hooliganism as it was the predominant football culture between the 1960s and 1990s. Similarly, in Italy, ultras culture has assumed a dominant role in fandom (Doidge, 2015a). While supporters’ trusts are a progressive approach to engaging with fan democracy and diversity, it makes the cross-pollination of ideas more difficult.

The challenge for supporters’ trusts in Italy and elsewhere, is about being able to make their case to other fans, ultras, the media, the club and the authorities. Unlike England there is no long-standing tradition of fan engagement with governance. And unlike Germany, there are no regulations concerning fan involvement in clubs. As mentioned previously, the FISSC has been a passive voice for fans and have not actively challenged legislation affecting fans (like the identity card, the tessera del tifoso). Meanwhile, the ultras have assumed a more confrontational approach. Supporters’ trusts in Italy potentially operate in a middle ground between official supporters’ clubs and the ultras (Doidge, 2014). They can actively challenge perceived fan repression, while doing so in a more constructive manner than the ultras. Supporters’ trusts highlight the importance of political engagement as a prerequisite for civic engagement rather than a by-product of it. This is not to say that political activism cannot come from pre-existing social networks, but that these forms of engagement derive from specific localised issues.

The localised nature of supporters’ trusts, as with ISAs before them, ensures that their focus is often particular to a specific football club. Most trusts in Italy have emerged out of specific financial problems. Many of them are associated with smaller clubs like Modena, Ancona, Arezzo and Taranto. There are only two trusts at Serie A clubs: myRoma and Verona Col Cuore (Doidge, 2015b). The plight of AS Parma in 2015, which went bankrupt and relegated to Serie D, highlights the pressing need for fans to take an active role in the running of their club.

Supporters’ trusts are also embedded within their local communities. The trust associated with the Puglian team of Taranto has not only rescued the club from financial instability, but is active in the local community. The football club was declared bankrupt four times between 1993 and 2012. Finally, fans founded the supporters’ trust l’Aps Fondazione Taras 706 a.C. They now own over 25 per cent of the club and have fan representatives on the board. They have also campaigned about local issues, particularly around access to sporting facilities for locals and the local environment. The largest employer in Taras is also the biggest polluter in Italy, which is leading to cancer and leukaemia in the local population. The fans have campaigned to make the steelworks more environmentally friendly without affecting its economic viability and potentially leading to job cuts.

The internet and social media has facilitated the expansion of supporters’ trusts and mutual associations globally. Even though fans mobilise locally, the reach of the internet has allowed the groups to publicise their message across a wider network, and attract members and donations from across the globe (Millward, 2011, 2012). Once again, this parallels the wider political
economic transformation of football. As the owners and sponsors operate in wider global networks, fans are mobilising in similar ways. Liverpool fans mobilised online and specifically targeted the financial organisations supporting the then owners of their club (Millward, 2012). The mutual association Spirit of Shankly organised locally, which encouraged fans to protest at the ground. Yet the SaveLFC ancillary movement mobilised online. In this way they could link the localised Spirit of Shankly group to the global fan base of Liverpool. Effectively, these two fan groups merged shortly afterwards to provide a coherent approach. Ultimately, this becomes central to fan organisations as generating consensus among a heterogeneous group of fans can be difficult (Nash, 2000). Avoiding factionalism is the key.

As with ISAs, the parochial nature of football fandom can inhibit the success of supporters’ trusts. King (2003: 184) reiterates the point that:

While it is possible that fans can be mobilised on a national level for certain critical developments such as the introduction of all-seater stadiums, it is almost impossible to sustain national fan groups beyond a period of crisis.

The fragmented nature of football fandom can hinder collaboration which then affects all fans. National bodies can help sustain knowledge and facilitate links between different trusts. In England, the establishment of Supporters Direct in 1997, with the support of the New Labour government, has facilitated this. Supporters Direct acts as a political lobbyist and support network that assists fans establishing trusts. It has since become Supporters Direct Europe and operates across the continent with a similar cooperative approach. The various Italian trusts formed ‘Supporters in Campo’ in 2013 to act as an umbrella organisation for their activities and this national association is affiliated to Supporters Direct Europe. Fans have to put aside parochialism and egos in order to collaborate and share information that can then allow them to challenge the hegemonic position of owners and football federations.

**European democracy**

More significantly, there is a growing European approach to fan democracy. Localism and egoism is the long-standing challenge for the various fan groups challenging governance structures. Putting aside parochial attitudes is vital in order to share ideas for the greater good of football fandom. Groups like Supporters Direct and Supporters in Campo can provide the information, resources and moral encouragement to support individual trusts. Despite the varying local context, there are many common themes to the issues facing football fandom across Europe: violence, police repression, discrimination, financial mismanagement and commercial involvement. Many of these seek to minimise or marginalise the fans in order to build a customer-base via television.

During the twenty-first century, European organisations have formed to challenge and lobby authorities about the rights of football fans. As mentioned previously, Supporters Direct became a European-wide organisation in 2007. Meanwhile other pan-European organisations have also been established to share ideas and campaigns across the continent. Although the European Gay and Lesbian Supporters Federation was established in 1989, all the others have come into being since the turn of the century. Football Against Racism Europe was founded in 1999 by a collection of European anti-racism groups, ISAs and fan projects. Similarly, the Campaign for Access to Football Europe (CAFE) was formed in 2009 to challenge for the rights of disabled fans.
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This Europe-wide approach has also seen the formation of a pan-European football supporters’ federation. Football Supporters Europe (FSE) was established in 2008 to act as an umbrella group for the various campaigns and interests affecting fans. Interestingly, this is replicating similar pan-European cooperation that is affecting other areas of football. Football associations have been affiliated to UEFA since 1954, and football players’ unions since 1965 under FIFPro. Greater European integration has occurred since the formation of the Champions League (King, 2003). Football clubs have also organised themselves as a political lobby group. Originally this was a G14 collective of 14 (then 18) elite clubs between 2000 and 2008, but has now become the European Club Association of over 100 clubs. Similarly, police forces collaborate and share information about football fans across Europe (Tsoukala, 2009). Fan groups like FSE, CAFE and FARE are countering these hegemonic groups and helping to provide a democratic voice for fans.

These groups have to be careful to maintain a democratic voice. All of these fan federations and lobby groups are based in England and Germany. This reflects the advanced nature of the political economic transformations of football within these countries, and also demonstrates their specific civil societies. Culturally, Europe is a diverse continent and different fan groups respond in distinct ways. Ensuring that all their voices are heard is paramount for the sustained success of these organisations. As shown with the kibice razem in Poland, civil society has to be built in some countries. Civic engagement cannot be seen as an Anglo-German imposition, but must be built from the ground up. More importantly, football actually becomes an apposite vehicle to do this. It is for this reason that the European Commission, UEFA and various national governments have supported fan initiatives like Supporters Direct and FSE. In this way football fans are the vanguard for a broader European civil society.

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