



FREE

Football Research in
an Enlarged Europe

**Brussels
Committee of
the Regions
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The Public Sphere of European Football

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The “Public Sphere”

“The public is not a domain made up of viewers or listeners, but instead a space for the contributions of speakers and addressees, who confront one another with questions and answers. Rather than everyone else’s gaze being focused on the actor, there is an exchange of reasons and opinions.”

Jürgen Habermas

Habermas and beyond

Public Sphere & Public Space

- Football spaces offer sphere to interact
- Football spaces are multiple:
stadia; fan zones; public viewings; cafés; bars; mega sports events, virtual spaces...

National and transnational

Q: Why talk about “European” Public Sphere when it only exists at national level?

A: A different, *sui generis* European public sphere is in the making.

Theoretical debate (2)

- ① New forms of spaces and spheres are emerging
 - “Europe’s Silent Revolution”: more individuals with education, language skills & larger set of competences
 - Cognitive mobilisation: abstract ideas are processed more easily

- ② Time and space broken: *Not Here, Not Now*
 - Digital natives and digital migrants are multitaskers, breaking time and space boundaries by use of ICT
 - Forums; blogs; online magazines; youtube; twitter; multiple social media
 - From media consumers to content producers (media)

Critical questions (1)

- ① Football as “bottom of the barrel” topic (Bromberger)
 - Q: Can football be a legitimate topic of scientific inquiry?
 - A1: “You can’t be serious!”
 - A2: “Yes, we can!”
- ② Political sphere vs non-political spheres
 - Q: The “Public Sphere” concept involves political debate; can a non-political issue – such as football – count?
 - A1: “*Everything is politics.*” (Thomas Mann)
 - A2: The fragmentation of communicative spaces leads to a multiplicity of public spheres.

Critical Questions (2)

Football as passive spectator sport

Q: How relevant is a spectator event, where 22 people play, and all others are passive watchers?

A: Evidence shows: *people talk and communicate about football and related events.*

The gender gap

Q: How relevant is a male dominated sport, watched by men, and spoken about by men only?

A: Evidence shows: *football begins to be feminised.*

Football in Europe

- ① Europeanisation: high vs low politics
 - topics & issues discussed can have a larger diversity
- ② Science of ideal vs Science of reality
 - rather than remain concept-focused, scientists should also look at everyday reality
- ③ Football is *highly* europeanised; downloading / uploading / crossloading
 - policy, regulations and rules
 - values, evaluations and concepts

Football in Europe

- ④ unites Europeans
 - 63% agree (47% for the EU)
- ④ creates shared memories, legends and jargon
 - *Panenka; Ballon d'or; Wembley; Zidane...*
 - The “Invention of Tradition”
- ④ transcends time and space : *Schengen / EasyJet*
 - Transnational support
 - Transnational loyalties
 - Transnational communication

Evidence from FREE (2)

Interest and exchange beyond borders

- ⑥ 64% discussed football with another European
- ⑥ 54% follow football news from another country
- ⑥ 70% watch football from another country
- ⑥ 60% of fans support a club from another country

Evidence from FREE (3)

More detailed information in:

- ① FREE Policy Brief no.1 on the Public Sphere issue
 - ① Summary of research: *Sport and Citizenship* issue
 - ① FREE Surveys “Key Findings Reports I and II”
(forthcoming online)
 - ① FREE Project working papers (online)
 - ① FREE book series (starting 2015)
- and, of course,
- ① the roundtable debate in a few minutes

Are we finally FREE ?

- ① No walk in the park – issues to be addressed:
 - Commercialization of football
 - Competitive gap
 - More regulation?
 - And the usual suspects:
racism, violence, nationalism
- ② Wider geography; diverse set of issues



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FREE Consortium Roundtable

Paul Dietschy (Université de Franche-Comté)

Nils Havemann (Universität Stuttgart)

Gosia Kowalska (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Özgehan Şenyuva (Middle East Technical University)

Alexandra Schwell (Universität Wien)

Nina Szogs (Universität Wien)

moderated by

Albrecht Sonntag (ESSCA School of Management)



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Wrap-up and conclusion

Jonathan-Michael Hill

(European Commission, Head of Cabinet Tibor Navracsics)

Simon Kuper

(Financial Times)

Albrecht Sonntag

(ESSCA School of Management)