

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## **FREE POLICY BRIEF No. 2: FOOTBALL STAKEHOLDERS & GOVERNANCE**

This is the second of three policy briefs based on findings from the FREE project. It summarises results from the project's 'football stakeholders and governance' research stream.

March 2015

### **INTRODUCTION**

As football touches a large part of the European population, it is not surprising that in recent years EU policy-makers have become interested in the governance structures of this game. There is a general consensus that the transformation of European football's governance is underpinned by a constant tension between the most commercialised and professionalised part of football (whose target is to maximise economic profits) and a more socio-cultural view stressing the social values of football.

For football fans, the evolution of the game creates a complicated scenario. On the one hand there are increasing calls by the European Union institutions to engage supporters in the governance of the game. On the other, the commercialisation of football might be endangering some of the values of football most cherished by supporters. What impact has this shift in European football had on the very diverse body of supporters in Europe?

The supporters' movement is an important part of Europe's civil society, and it has the potential to develop active citizenship and the social dimension of sport through fan involvement. Supporters are extremely diverse in Europe, mirroring the heterogeneity of fan cultures across the continent. Organisations such as Football Supporters Europe (FSE) or Supporters Direct Europe (SDE) have been praised for their work in favour of the supporters. They have earned with their work the status of partners in the development of EU sport policy. Moreover, a large number of supporter groups already work to improve the governance of the game at continental, national and local level in Europe.

Against this background, this policy brief summarises the results from the football stakeholders and governance research stream of FREE. Two other policy briefs deal in more detail with two other aspects of the project's research: the feminisation of football, and the historical, sociological and anthropological research streams.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The FREE Project sought to investigate the demand for increased regulation of football in Europe and whether supporters should be more involved in football governance. Football in Europe is by nature very diverse, just like the population and the culture of the continent. That diversity of the game and the heterogeneity of fan cultures across Europe need to be taken into account when analysing football fans' opinions and designing policies.

This policy brief draws evidence from a comprehensive, valid and reliable data set, including qualitative and quantitative research. References to football fans need to be understood within the scope of the data set. This is the largest, broadest and most comprehensive research effort (both academic and non-academic) in this area to date (please see “research parameters” on page 11 for details).

As a whole, our data provides significant evidence that:

- 🌐 there is a very clear demand for further regulation to improve football governance;
- 🌐 trust in supporters organisations to improve football governance is extremely high;
- 🌐 trust in institutions and bodies of football governance is low, particularly in some countries;
- 🌐 there is concern over certain models of ownership in club football across Europe;
- 🌐 supporters across Europe are actively getting involved in football governance through fan organisations at local, national and European level, and feel they should be better represented in the governance of football clubs;
- 🌐 disabled supporters can face significant difficulties attending some football stadiums, particularly as away fans, which they feel that governing institutions should address as a priority.

### 1. The regulation of football

The findings from the quantitative *FREE Project Survey on Football in the European Public Opinion (2014)* reveal a demand for more regulation of football. However there was interesting variance between the populations of the different countries polled, which demonstrates the diversity of the football context across Europe.

Figure 1: Responses to the question “Football is in need of more regulation by the authorities.”

	Country									
	AT	DK	DE	FR	IT	PL	ES	TR	UK	Total
Strongly agree	11.9	2.1	15.9	23.7	47.2	9.0	28.2	22.1	17.6	21.9
Agree	47.8	16.7	25.9	49.2	33.7	27.3	48.7	61.8	42.7	40.1
<i>Aggregate agree</i>	<i>59.7</i>	<i>18.8</i>	<i>41.8</i>	<i>72.9</i>	<i>80.9</i>	<i>36.3</i>	<i>76.9</i>	<i>83.9</i>	<i>60.3</i>	<i>62.0</i>
Neither agree or disagree	10.4	8.3	12.8	3.3	2.9	25.3	4.2	1.9	5.5	7.7
Disagree	13.4	52.1	18.5	21.8	8.0	23.7	13.6	10.2	28.7	18.6
Strongly disagree	7.5	14.6	18.4	2.1	6.6	9.4	2.9	2.3	4.0	8.0
Don't know/no answer	9.0	6.3	8.5	0	1.6	5.3	2.4	1.5	1.5	3.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Unit: percentage. Base: total number of respondents (n = 7 252) / Source: FREE CATI Survey (2014)

An overall majority of the Europeans polled (62%) agree that football is in need of reform. This is particularly high in Italy (80.9%), Spain (76.4%) and Turkey (83.9%), whereas in Denmark, demand for further regulation was particularly low. Poland and Germany also saw fewer than 50% of people agreeing that further regulation was needed.

The qualitative data gives insights into some of the reasons for this variance and demonstrates the diversity and heterogeneity of football fan cultures and perceptions in Europe.

In Poland, fans spoke about their concerns such as the excessive money flowing into the game and their fears of corruption, but felt that the fan experience was actually *over-regulated*. They were critical of heavy police control inside and outside stadia and tight controls over freedom of speech, which can explain their answers to the survey. The Polish fans that participated in the qualitative research thought of ‘further regulation’ as meaning more policing and control of the supporter match-day experience. They protested against what they consider to be unfair criminalisation of football supporters.

The Turkish participants highlighted recent scandals in relation to corruption and match-fixing, which can explain the high scores of the survey in favour of further football reform.

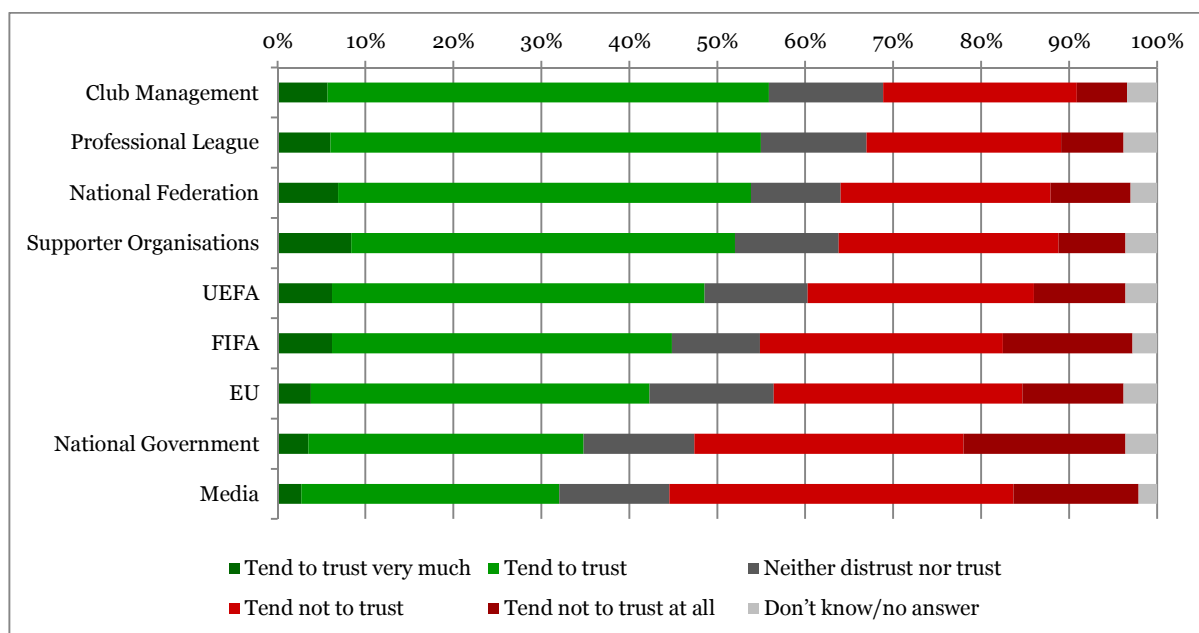
For fans in the UK, criticism was directed at the increasing power of external stakeholders such as media companies and the perceived lack of fair distribution of incoming finances. Thus, the qualitative research helps to explain the reasons behind the responses to the surveys whilst, at the same time, also suggests different priorities in relation to football governance and regulation that are clearly linked to the local context.

There was, however, one common concern to fans across our sample: The amount of money at the top level of the sport. This was an aspect that they felt needed further regulation to control.

## 2. Trust in institutions and bodies of governance

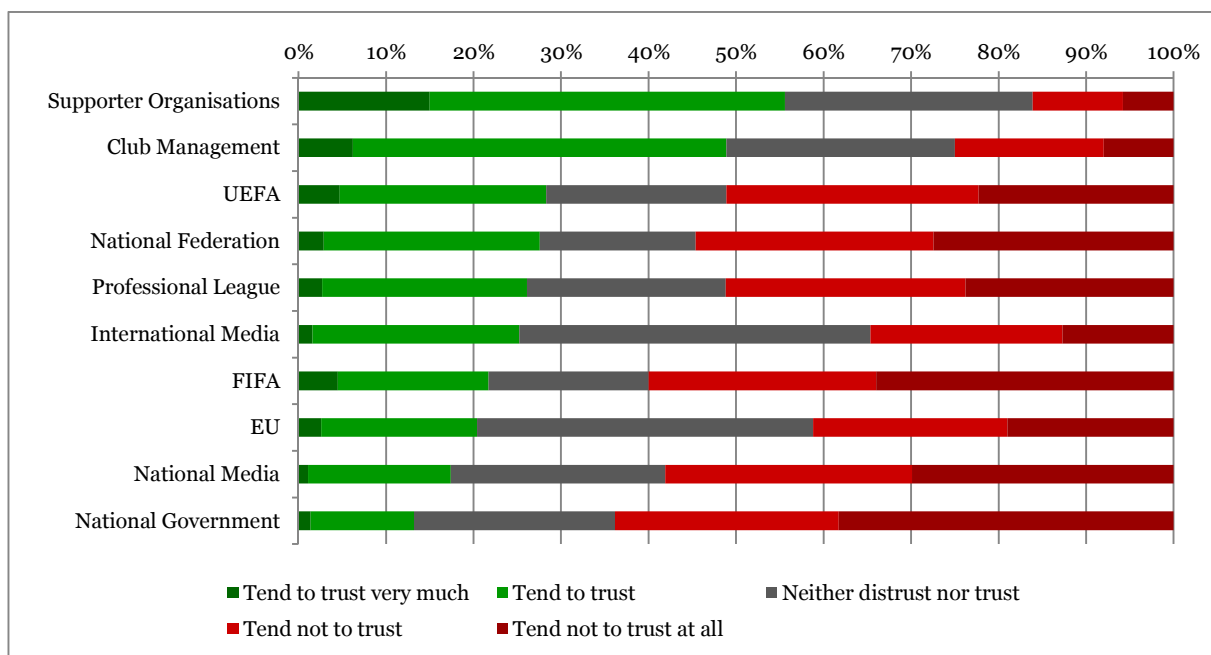
Both the *FREE Project Survey on Football in the European Public Opinion (2014)* and the *FREE European Football Fans Survey (online) (2014)* investigated trust in football institutions and organisational bodies who have some responsibility for football governance.

Figure 2.1: “How much do you tend to trust the following institutions or bodies with regard to the organisation of football?” [representative public]



Unit: percentage. Base: total number of respondents (n = 7 252) / Source: FREE CATI Survey (2014)

Figure 2.2: “How much do you tend to trust the following institutions or bodies with regard to the organisation of football?” [football fans]



Unit: percentage. Base: total number of respondents / Source: FREE ONLINE Survey (2014)

The comparison of results between the two surveys, one aimed at the general public and the other at those who follow football closely, points to some discrepancies between the two groups polled. Firstly, overall trust of most of the institutions was higher amongst the general population than football fans. This suggests that the closer individuals are to the daily business of the game, the more critical of them they become. In other words, the more involved people declare to be in football, the more suspicious they are of the governing bodies. Secondly, the ranking of the organisations changes slightly for the two groups. The general public expressed greater trust in professional leagues and national football federations, whereas football fans trust supporters organisations and UEFA (the European football governing body), much more. What is coherent is the higher level of trust placed in football bodies than non-football bodies (EU, media and national governments) for the organisation of the sport. Both surveys also demonstrate a high level of trust in supporters’ organisations to improve the governance of football. Of particular interest is the result of the FREE Online survey targeted at the attentive public with a clear interest in the game. Here, supporters’ organisations are the most trusted stakeholder, with over 50% of the respondents trusting or trusting very much the likes of Supporters Direct Europe or Football Supporters Europe. In other words, those fans that actively follow football from a close range have a high level of trust on the work of supporters’ organisations to improve the governance of the game.

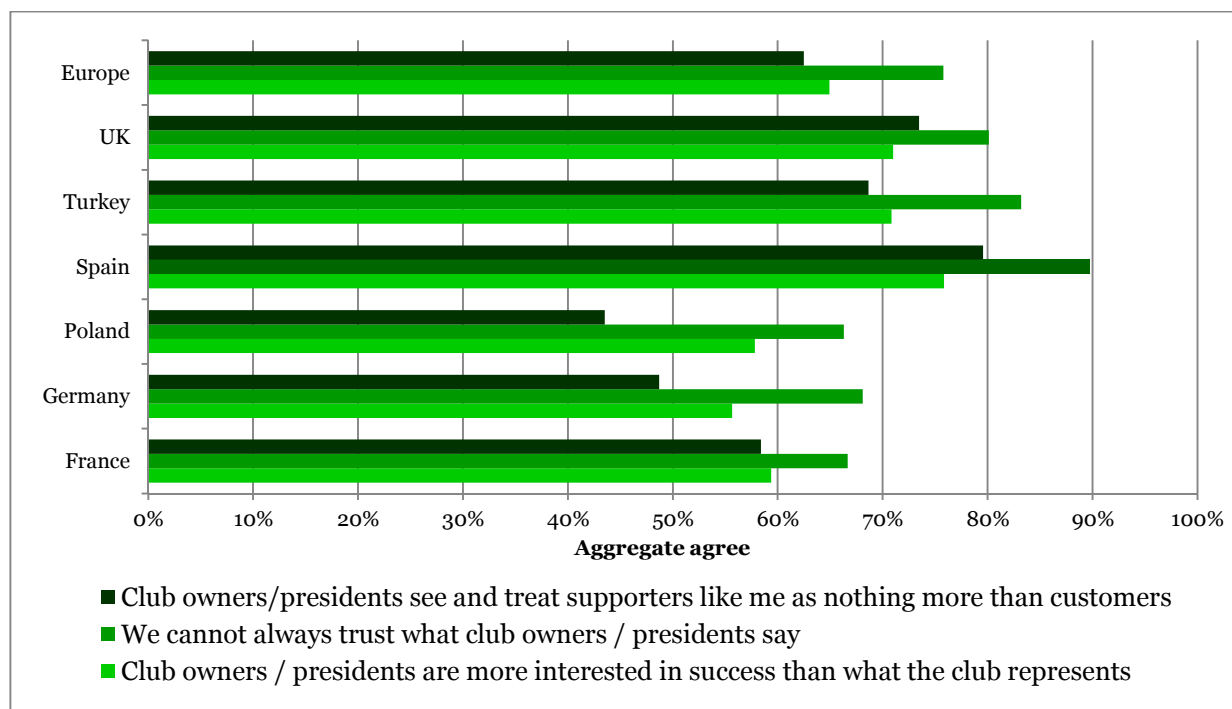
Qualitative data confirms the supporters’ mistrust of their national football association. Fans in Turkey and Poland were particularly critical of FIFA, UEFA and their national FA due to concerns over corruption and mismanagement. It is particularly interesting to note the low level of trust placed in the government to effectively regulate football. It is not that supporters did not want national governments to legislate on football, but rather that they thought the public authorities will not be strong enough to challenge the power of football bodies. In the UK, participants were aware that the government is considering further legislation of football, and had mixed thoughts as to whether this will ever see the light. Some felt it was the only way to regain any control over the game, whereas others were of the opinion that political institutions should not get involved in sport. They all agreed that supporters are already making a difference and that further fan engagement is welcome and necessary for the benefit of British football.

Regarding national federations, it must be noted that on the whole, the participants in our research believed in the current model of a national federation governing football in their respective countries. There was little interest in alternative forms of governance. It is the lack of power of those national federations what the participants in the research mostly complained about. Supporters want representative national governing bodies, but they want them to reform, enhance their transparency, fight corruption and regain some of their lost power, particularly in comparison to external stakeholders.

### 3. Club ownership

The different club ownership models evident across Europe are heavily scrutinised and debated by the media. The FREE surveys reveal that trust in current owners/presidents of clubs is very low, which will indeed vindicate the already existing campaigns of supporters across Europe to empower fans to regain a say in their football clubs, as exemplified by the recent projects coordinated by SDE and FSE with funding from EU preparatory actions in the area of sport.

Figure 3: 'Aggregate agree' ('Strongly agree' and 'Agree to an extent') for the following statements: [football fans]



Unit: percentage. Base: total number of respondents / Source: FREE ONLINE Survey (2014)

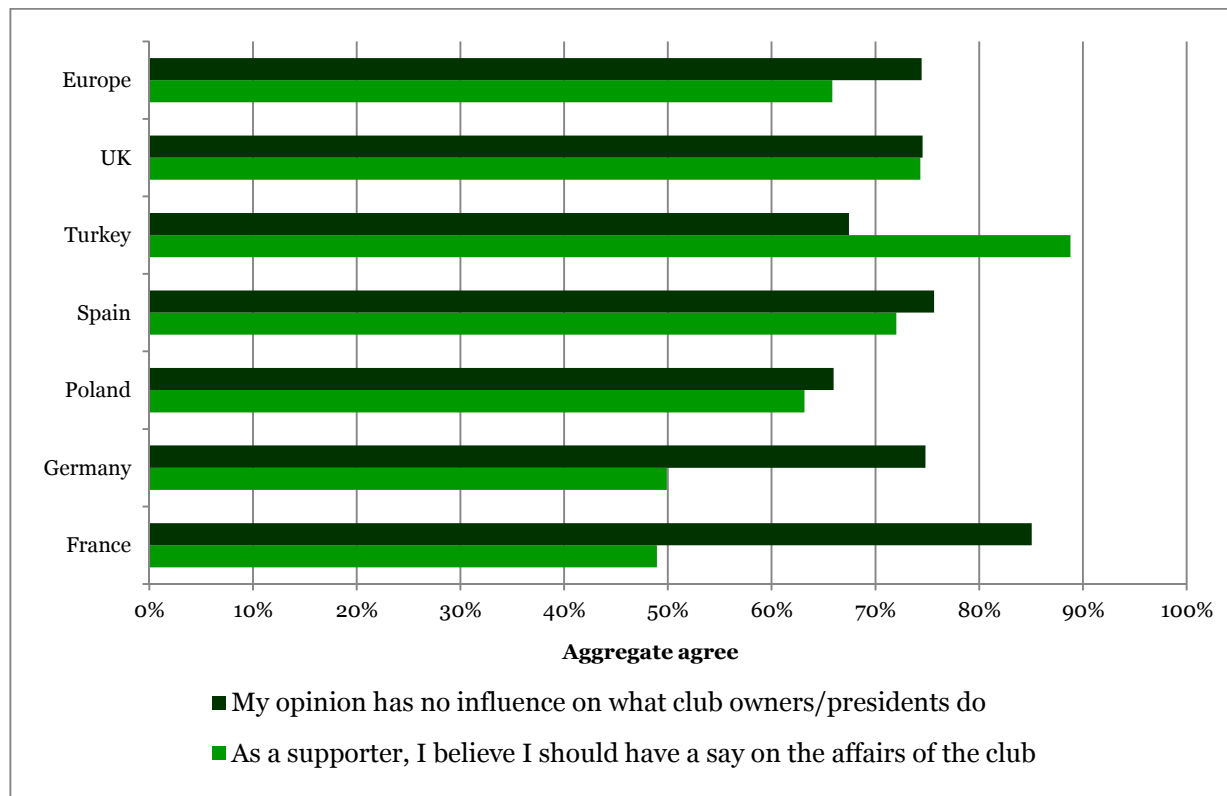
Again, there is a clear diversity in the results reflecting the different contexts and the diversity of fan cultures and interests, but overall the lack of trust in club owners goes well beyond 50% if we take the six countries in the on-line survey together. Critique is highest in Spain, with 90% of the respondents agreeing that “we cannot always trust what club owners/presidents say”. This is significant, as Spanish supporter organisations have been actively working on challenging the current ownership model of football clubs in the country. Our data finds wide support for those campaigns. The Turkish (83%) and UK (80%) based fans reported similarly high levels of agreement.

Qualitative data helps to illustrate the complexity of issues regarding ownership. The single-owner model is the most common ownership format in the English Premier League (a very similar model is used by most clubs in Spain as well, with the exception of Athletic Bilbao, CA Osasuna, FC Barcelona and Real Madrid). British participants in the research spoke at length about this, as it is an issue high in the public agenda due to the increasing number of supporter owned clubs and the work of Supporters Direct and Supporters Direct Scotland. Our participants expressed mixed feelings about the ownership structures of football clubs. Some criticised new foreign owners for not understanding the importance of clubs to local communities, and failing to value their fans. Yet overall, fans were more concerned with *how* the club was run. Single and foreign ownership is not necessarily opposed as a matter of principle. Participants in the project accept that to achieve on-field success in modern football requires significant financial investment, so they are not unanimously critical of majority owners. They acknowledge that football today is a business, and clubs must compete in this arena. What they want are owners that offer transparency, value their fans, engage with their communities and respect the history of their clubs, and acknowledged that this should be possible regardless of who the owner is. UK and Spanish fans heralded the German ‘50+1’ rule preventing majority private ownership as an ideal. The positive view of the German model clearly means that our participants are in favour of **some** supporter ownership, and see it as one way to secure democracy and links with the community in their football clubs.

#### 4. Supporter involvement in football governance

One major question for the FREE project – and football organisations and policy makers – is: if fans agree that football is in need of further regulation, would the involvement of supporters be a step to addressing this? Survey data demonstrated that supporters feel that they should have a say (66% of the total 6 countries polled in the on-line survey).

Figure 4: 'Aggregate agree' ('Strongly agree' and 'Agree to an extent') for the following statements: [football fans]



Unit: percentage. Base: total number of respondents / Source: FREE ONLINE Survey (2014)

The qualitative data gave further insight into the relationship fans have with club governance structures. Supporters expressed frustration at their lack of power across all of the countries, feeling that they are not allowed to make a difference. High profile clubs such as Cardiff City in the UK or FC Red Bull Salzburg in Austria were cited as examples of the lack of influence fans have, despite their active and effective organisation. On the other hand, supporters cited the case of English Premier League Swansea City (20% owned by the supporters) in the UK as an example that, if allowed by the governing structures, democratic supporter organisations and supporter ownership can make a positive impact on the game. Thus, supporters are critically aware of their value to clubs. They recognise the work that has been done by fellow supporters and would like to see more of that. In this respect, fans are not simply consumers with blind faith to their club, but are critical stakeholders with an understanding of the equity they hold. However, they feel they are facing too many barriers to transform this collective equity into meaningful action to make a difference at the club level. This tends to be blamed on the lack of willingness by the federations, clubs and leagues to give a real voice to the fans, despite the work of local and European supporters groups.

There is a lot of frustration amongst fans, which see the current structures of the game shutting them out. On the other hand, participants in our research feel that the existing structures can only increase supporter activism and cited campaigns in relation to safe standing, fight against racism and homophobia or even for affordable ticket prices as the type of existing work that demonstrates the value of the supporters for football governance.

## **5. Supporter ownership of football clubs**

The consideration of whether supporter representation and supporter ownership in football could be increased – therefore enhancing the governance of the game – is of particular relevance to the current European context. In the UK, legislation has been proposed to this effect. The German ‘50+1’ rule in combination with low ticket prices, full stadia and more relaxed fan regulation is often referred to as an example of how this might be successful. In Spain, supporters have demanded that supporter ownership structures are included in the amendment of the national sports act. Our qualitative research found fans of various countries looking elsewhere in the continent for viable alternatives to the governance models in their own countries. This confirms our conclusions about the potential for football to increase transnational inclusiveness across Europe (as discussed in the first FREE Policy Brief). This also confirms the positive effect of the work of supporter groups in Europe over the last decade with regard to mobilising fans across the continent.

Moreover, the way that fans engage with and understand the various national contexts of football introduces some interestingly conflicting perceptions that relate the elite leagues to their dominant model of club ownership. Here again, the diversity of football structures and cultures are an important element of the analysis. UK based fans drew upon the member-association ownership model at Real Madrid or FC Barcelona, whereas Spanish fans were critical of the dominance of their ‘top two’ and saw the English Premier League as offering more balanced competition. Austrian fans were critical of the Bundesliga and German clubs, whereas English fans praised the so-called German model. Opinions respond to different contexts, constructed realities and perceptions. But there is one commonality: Supporters need and want to be given the opportunity to invest in their clubs, be that financially or emotionally.

Supporters are already organising themselves across Europe to find ways to be involved with their clubs, and our data suggest that they would like to see more of that. The participants in our research believe that given the unwillingness of football stakeholders, the only way forward may be government legislation. However, they are worried that government regulation may lead to a mere effort of ‘ticking the box’ from the clubs, rather than a real genuine engagement with the supporter community.

## **6. Disabled football supporters**

The work of FREE with disabled supporters was circumscribed only to the United Kingdom. However, with assistance and advice from the Centre for the Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) we consider our evidence of relevance to European football. The reports from the disabled supporters that participated in our research suggest that significant improvements need to be made for these fans to enjoy an equal match-day experience to non-disabled fans. Our findings in this area are worrisome and in line with recent high profile media reports investigating the lack of provision for disabled fans at English Premier League clubs, and the resultant call for significant improvements.

Problems faced by disabled supporters are numerous and diverse. Many are related to the physical design of football stadia: difficulties with access, a lack of accessible facilities such as toilets and catering, and a lack of adequate seating. Only two of the twenty English Premier League clubs meet the required number of wheelchair-accessible seats as recommended in guidelines produced in conjunction with football organisations. As such, football is failing to meet its own standards of accessibility. Yet supporters themselves were less concerned with the number of seats provided, but the quality of these seats. Disabled fans listed numerous examples of being unable to see large amounts of the pitch from their specially allocated seats due to the poor location or design of accessible seating areas. In other words, disabled fans cannot watch the game from the areas that are supposed to be designed especially for them. These are subject to photographers, stewards and other fans blocking the view. Despite UEFA guidelines available to demonstrate how disabled seating areas should allow for unobstructed views, many grounds do not comply with these. Particularly concerning is the common practice (specially at Premier League clubs with old stadia) of seating disabled away supporters with the home fans, denying them an equal experience and putting them at greater risk of abuse due to their proximity to opposition fans. Moreover, this practice may be seen as not observing the legal requirement to segregate fans.

Another problem is the predominant interpretation of a disabled person as a wheelchair user. Actually, these represent a minority of disabled people, yet football clubs often have little understanding of the needs of disabled fans that are not wheelchair users. In particular, fans with a learning disability were often very poorly understood and catered for.

On the positive side, excellent examples of good practice were given where clubs had specific disability stewards that were aware of the varying needs of the disabled fan. Unfortunately these are uncommon, but they present a pool of good practice to build upon. European campaigning group CAFE and their UK-based partner Level Playing Field (LPF) work tirelessly with limited resources to monitor accessibility and the quality of experience at football clubs, and give guidelines for clubs in better understanding disability.

Another positive finding in this area is the role of Disabled Supporter Associations (DSAs). These are club-specific supporter groups for disabled fans with their own membership, committee and often a direct communication link to the football club. Participants in the research found DSAs an excellent way of attracting and integrating disabled supporters into the club, providing a platform to understand their needs. Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) were regarded as essential links between disabled supporters and football clubs. Developing a network of dedicated DLOs at clubs, who work with DSAs, would facilitate open communication between fans and clubs and would allow clubs to see where they need to improve to provide an equal experience for all. Our data shows that disabled supporters do not want special treatment: they just want equal treatment, to be able to attend and experience football in the same way as anybody else. That this is difficult to achieve is shameful and should be addressed as a priority.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these research results, the FREE research team draws the following policy implications and submits a series of related recommendations:

### 1. The regulation of football

- ☉ Supporters are highly concerned by the monopolistic tendencies of the European football market. There is a real risk of alienating fans if the number of clubs with a chance to compete keeps reducing. **Football governing bodies and public authorities should seriously consider strong cost control mechanisms to ensure the gap between the rich and the poor in European football does not get any bigger.** This applies to individual leagues in countries such as England, Spain and Germany as well as Europe-wide patterns including the East-West divide and the growing gap between the 'Big 5' and the rest of the continent, as discussed in the first FREE Policy Brief.
- ☉ There are clear concerns about the extent to which football governing bodies and clubs effectively implement principles of good governance and sound financial management. Public authorities need to continue supervising and encouraging the implementation of good governance principles within the football industry. In line with the suggestions of the Basic Indicators for Better Governance in International Sport (BIBGIS), **we recommend that formal consultation, participation and representation of supporters in football clubs is included as one of the indicators to assess good governance in football clubs. This may be implemented as part of European or national club licensing systems or national sports acts.**
- ☉ We recommend **tighter ownership control tests** (see point 3 below), including assessment of medium and long term business and social plans of the investors, to help the fight against the financial mismanagement of football clubs.

### 2. Trust in institutions and bodies of governance

- ☉ The lack of public trust in non-football bodies to manage football should be taken into careful consideration by European and national policy-makers. **National governments are correct to push for reform in the governance of football demanding inclusion of the supporters in decision making**, but direct regulation may be a last recourse.
- ☉ The trust in football organisations would improve if they engaged more with supporters. **We recommend UEFA to consider opening the membership of the professional football strategy council or the Executive Committee to representatives of the supporters**



**democratically and transparently elected**, when dealing with issues that are likely to impact on the fans.

- ☉ We recommend **national FAs to include democratically and transparently elected representatives of the supporters in their council, board and/or the creation of a supporters' commission** similar to the IOC athlete's commission. UEFA should ensure these reforms take place across Europe. Further, UEFA should continue to push for FIFA reform, in order to address the massive lack of public faith in the world governing body of football.

### 3. Club ownership

- ☉ Fans are interested in good governance, transparency, positive fan-club relationships and integration with the local community. These can be achieved through a variety of ownership models, but the common trend is that **supporters need to be genuinely involved in their clubs**.
- ☉ Supporters do not feel valued by football structures, yet they have a critical awareness of their role in generating the match-day experience and how this is a large part of the product that is sold to global TV audiences. The notion that supporters will not desert their club regardless of how they are treated does not ring true, as the recent decline in Italian stadium attendances demonstrates. Club owners need to understand that they should engage with their fans, or risk losing them. **We recommend that clubs recognise the 'fan equity', that is the intrinsic value that supporters and local communities bring to the club**.
- ☉ There needs to be a widespread cultural change around how clubs understand, relate to and involve their supporters, regardless of ownership model. This needs to be approached holistically and with the support of all bodies involved in the governance of football in Europe. Football clubs, federations and other bodies should not fear supporter engagement, but understand this as a way to improve governance and ensure that supporters are valued. Culture can only be changed through visible actions and rituals. Words are not enough. **We recommend clubs to set up formal structures to ensure supporter engagement. Annual supporter forums should be organised by clubs**.
- ☉ Communication activities are paramount for supporter groups in order to ensure their work is known by the wider fan community. Further research into the impact of supporters to build examples of best practice is needed. **Funding should be made available to supporter organisations to facilitate sharing of best practice and out-reach activities**.

### 4. Supporter involvement in football governance

- ☉ Stakeholders and public bodies need to recognise the positive effects and social capital generated by attending football. EU and national sports policies should expand their current focus on active participation in sport to consider spectating as a form of social inclusion. Projects that work on increasing diversity in the stands deserve as much consideration as those that work towards diversity on the pitch. **We specially recommend the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union to include spectating (besides playing) as another avenue for inclusion in and through sport, one of the priorities of EU sport policy**. Disabled supporters who took part in the FREE project exemplified this in a very convincing manner, and demonstrated that clubs can contribute to social inclusion agendas by striving to increase the diversity of their crowds.
- ☉ **UEFA must closely monitor and update the work being done by Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs) across Europe** since their mandatory introduction in the club licensing requirements. This was a positive step by UEFA but requires careful and ongoing monitoring to ensure that this role has been implemented effectively.
- ☉ Participants in our research defined a number of personal and conceptual barriers to get involved in the governance of football. Supporters would like more flexible and diverse avenues to engage with their clubs and with other fans. Fans organisations need to recognise and consider those barriers. **We would recommend supporter organisations to study carefully how to reach to even wider groups in order to increase their already noticeable membership. We would also recommend these organisations to flexibilise their structures to appeal to wider constituencies**.

- ④ **EU institutions and UEFA should also continue to support the work of the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE), Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE), Football Supporters Europe (FSE) and Supporters Direct Europe (SDE)** and consider how to make best use of the significant work of these organisations. It is essential that independent organisations can give supporters across Europe a collective voice.

## 5. Supporter ownership of football clubs

- ④ Supporters are aware of the variety of club ownership models in Europe. There is a general mistrust towards the owners/presidents of clubs and fans tend to look for positive examples in other countries. Supporters are highly critical of how their clubs are governed and would like to see increased transparency and accountability.
- ④ Member States and national federations should look outside of their own context to share best practice and learn lessons about how supporters can best be involved in the governance of football clubs, whilst respecting cultural and political differences. **Any move to legislate about football ownership should be considered very carefully and be based on robust evidence and support. We recommend the European Commission to fund a pan-European study on football/sport club ownership as part of its priority to strengthen the evidence base for policy making through the Erasmus+ sport programme.** We also recommend the European Commission to consider the development of supporter networks as one of its priorities for future calls for transnational collaborative projects within Erasmus+.
- ④ Building on the above, **we recommend the Council of the European Union to clearly endorse supporter engagement and/or ownership if it were to adopt conclusions or recommendations on good governance in sport. We recommend such conclusions to include the need for governing bodies and clubs to formally engage with representative of the supporters in their decision making,** as suggested by the Basic Indicators for Better Governance in International Sport (BIBGIS). Similarly, we recommend the Council's expert group on good governance in sport to work on recommendations to ensure a fair access of supporters to football, as part of the objective to promote "existing good governance principles, possibly followed by a pledge board", enshrined in the EU work plan for sport 2014-2017.

## 6. Disabled football supporters

- ④ **Resources must be committed to improving the experience for the disabled football supporter.** Many clubs are not complying with minimum legal standards and are therefore discriminating against disabled fans. Supporting a football club and attending matches can have positive effects on health and well-being for disabled citizens. Given the barriers supporters must overcome to watch their own club, many are put off and therefore unable to gain these potential benefits. **This must be addressed as a priority.**
- ④ There are many guidelines that have been developed in the UK and Europe, in collaboration with the FA, the Football Leagues and UEFA, to encourage clubs to make their stadia accessible to all. Yet clubs are often falling short of meeting these standards. **Football leagues and governing organisations, including UEFA, must regulate so that clubs must comply with these guidelines as well as country- and EU- specific legal standards. We recommend the use of licensing systems and the update of legislation,** which often only relates to access but do not contemplate further dimensions of the stay of disabled supporters in the stadium.
- ④ The increase in income at the very top of the sport means that having old stadia is now indefensible as an excuse for inadequate facilities for disabled supporters. A small percentage of this income, if ring-fenced for stadium improvements, could make a difference to the quality of the match-day experience for disabled supporters. **Governing bodies must consider how clubs should be encouraged to invest in improving their facilities, and act accordingly to enforce this commitment.** For smaller clubs without such a large financial income, **money should be made available to create a central stadium improvement fund.** Further, any stadium developments should consult with disabled supporters (through a DSA if possible) to ensure that their needs are taken into account.

- ④ We welcome the reform of the UEFA Club Licensing system to introduce the figure of a Disability Access Officer, as it was advocated in early recommendations of the FREE project. This is a much needed requirement across the continent. **We recommend careful monitoring to ensure that the DAO role is a unique club position and does not simply form part of a wider role at the club.**
- ④ Both Level Playing Field (England and Wales) and CAFE (Europe) have achieved a great deal with regard to improving the experience for disabled footballers under very limited resources. Governing bodies and national and international level should **recognise the importance of and work with these organisations that have a wealth of knowledge, experience and ideas concerning how standards could be improved.** This should extend to providing financial support to their work. This would allow resources to be committed to **finding, collating and disseminating examples of best practice** across the continent to provide inspiration for clubs to better engage with their (current and potential) disabled supporters.
- ④ We recommend the European Commission and the European Parliament to **encourage Member States to study how existing legislation may be used and/or strengthened to ensure and improve the rights of disabled supporters** to enjoy a fair and inclusive match-day experience. One example could be the use of the UK's **Football Spectators and Safety at Sports Grounds Acts to ensure clubs and stadiums provide the necessary facilities for disabled supporters.** Given the priority on evidence-based sports policy, **we recommend the European Commission to fund a pan European study on the legal regulation of disabled spectators' access to sport venues and their facilities.**

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The FREE Project has brought together scholars from very different academic backgrounds – sociology, anthropology, history, gender studies, political sciences – with the explicit objective to produce genuinely interdisciplinary research that interconnected a range of research methods in the most appropriate way.

Data collection included both various qualitative methods of investigation and several quantitative surveys. The evidence provided and analysed in this policy brief was produced by a range of complementary research activities, especially:

- ④ A CATI telephone survey whose sampling technique makes it statistically representative of the whole population of Austria, Denmark, France Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom (total sample = 7245, margin of statistical error:  $\pm 3.4$ , 95% confidence interval).
- ④ An on-line, self-selected, survey targeted at the 'attentive public to football'. The survey obtained a sufficient number of responses (N=11384) to carry out a comparative analysis of six countries: France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK.
- ④ In-depth qualitative research with a group of 65 supporters (a number of which were disabled fans) from 5 different countries: Austria, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK. Fans were asked to keep a diary and take photographs to document their football experiences over a period of eight weeks. Each participant was interviewed individually following the eight weeks.

### Disclaimer:

This Policy Brief was authored by Borja García, Jo Welford, Albrecht Sonntag and Dàvid Ranc from the FREE project consortium. The content of this Policy Brief does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union and its institutions and bodies. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author(s).

## PROJECT IDENTITY

Project name	Football Research in an Enlarged Europe (FREE)
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Further reading	Already published online working papers on <a href="http://www.free-project.eu">www.free-project.eu</a> . Forthcoming FREE book series published by Palgrave Macmillan (2015)