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Football supporters and the commercialisation of football: comparative responses across Europe

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European football market finances appear to be in very good health and impervious to the current Euro-wide financial crises. Yet beneath the apparent financial buoyancy a different story emerges, one of fan exploitation, spiraling debt and the threat of bankruptcy hanging over many clubs. In this introduction to the special issue we chart what is effectively a political economy of debt underpinning the European football market and threatening to bring professional football in Europe into disrepute. Against this backdrop the paper considers the impact financial exuberance and systemic debt has had on fans' identification with clubs. It is argued that whilst football fans have borne the social and economic costs of weak governance and lack of financial regulation, which have become the hallmark of European football, they have also shown themselves to be highly resistant to the commercialisation of football and innovative in their responses to this commercialisation.

Writing in his organisation's Annual Review of Football Finance in June 2010, Dan Jones, partner in the Sports Business Group at Deloitte, commented:

European football's continued revenue growth demonstrates an impressive resilience to the extremely challenging economic times – underlying the continued loyalty of its fans and the continued attractiveness of football to sponsors and broadcasters.¹

With economic performance in the European Union running at a negative-to-stagnant growth rate, the continued expansion of the European football market at 8% per annum meant that Jones' boast was not without substance. The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed market growth from €8 billion per annum in revenue to almost €16 billion per annum, powered by the so-called 'big five' leagues in England, Germany, Spain, Italy and France (Figure 1).² The English Premier League, Germany's Bundesliga, Spain's La Liga, Italy's Serie A and the French Ligue 1 are five of the six most highly supported leagues in world football (only Mexico's Primera Division is able to compete with Europe's elite leagues). In terms of the whole of world sport, only the US National Football League and Indian cricket's Premier League can boast higher average attendances than the best attended European football league, the Bundesliga.³ The big five together attracted almost €12 billion in television rights deals in their last round of negotiations with media groups. Their commercial revenue, boosted by corporate sponsorship, amounts to €2–3 billion annually,⁴ and Europe's flagship tournament, the UEFA Champions League, is now

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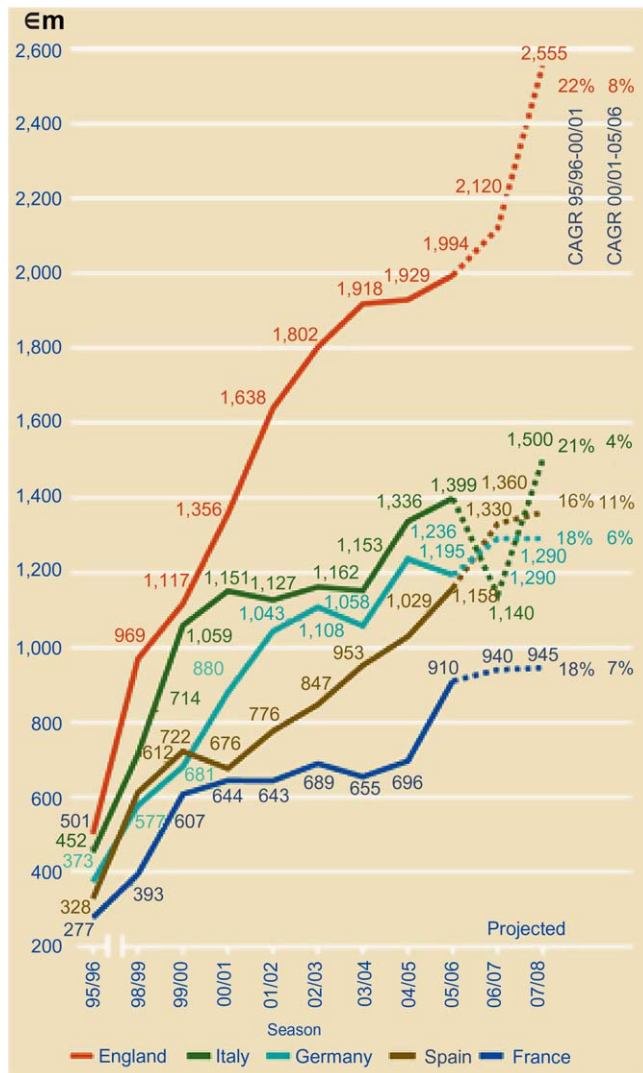


Figure 1. Revenue growth of the 'big five' European leagues – 1995/1996 to 2007/2008
Source: Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance 2007.

confirmed as the ultimate competition in global club competition. With a worldwide audience of more than four billion viewers per season, the viewing figures for the Champions League final now surpass that of the NFL's Superbowl. The European football governing body, UEFA, receives over €500 million in broadcasting and sponsorship deals for the Champions League.⁵

While such headline figures point toward a sector in rude health, some commentators take the view that focusing on them is 'akin to complementing a man in intensive care for having a full head of hair'.⁶ A more forensic examination of the state of European top-flight football reveals another, very different picture: one of debt, bankruptcy, a loss of competitive balance, and a barely concealed resentment of fan exploitation. The enormous riches pouring into European football may have

produced an unrivalled spectacle of top-class players from around the globe producing football of the highest standard, played out in state-of-the-art stadiums, but this has been accompanied by instability in the game. Top-division clubs in Europe have run up bank debt and commercial loans of €5.5 billion; 32% of clubs are in negative net equity (that is, their debts are larger than their reported assets); costs consistently outstrip income; and competitive balance has been diminished both between leagues (88% of the all-important revenue generated from European-wide broadcasting goes to the big-five leagues) and within leagues (the four largest teams in each top European division have on average four times the income of their domestic opponents).⁷ Though the financial spoils resulting from success are immense, the cost of failing to achieve success – realistically the only outcome for the vast majority of clubs – can be catastrophic. As one commentator puts it:

... the face of European football is contorted by the strain experienced by clubs attempting to remain on a financial tightrope which is constantly being yanked by their competitors. It's as simple as this. Clubs need to be successful if they are to prosper. But to be competitive they have to invest in player transfers and wages which, all too often, they are unable to afford. For all but the biggest clubs, every season represents a gamble. For those whose gambles do not pay off the result is relegation, reduced income and the prospect of severe financial difficulty. It's a kind of financial Russian roulette.⁸

Casting an eye around the various European leagues hammers the point home. In the first decade of the twenty-first century unsustainable debts drove a number of clubs to financial ruin or the brink of it. Italian clubs AC Fiorentina (2002), AC Parma (2003) and SSC Napoli (2004) were declared bankrupt, later to re-emerge under slightly different identities after spells in the lower Italian leagues. In Holland, bankrupt HFC Haarlem had their 121-year existence terminated in 2010, and BV Veendam were declared bankrupt in the same year. The case of Alkmaar Zaanstreek ('AZ') underlines the seriousness of the situation in Holland: Eredivisie Champions in season 2008/2009, the club was being run by administrators by 2009 as a result of its main sponsor, DSB Bank, being declared bankrupt.⁹ The seriousness of financial woes in the Eredivisie prompted the Dutch Football Association, the KNVB, to seek a pledge from each participating Eredivisie club before the 2010/2011 season declaring that they had enough cash to reach the end of the season. In Spain, clubs in La Liga are saddled with enormous levels of debt. Between them, Barcelona and Real Madrid have debts totalling almost €1 billion (a level of debt anchored by the two clubs' ability to generate enormous commercial deals), while Valencia CF's debt is more than €600 million and Atlético Madrid has debts in excess of €300m. Traditionally, Spanish clubs' debts have been underwritten by the local state or by regional banks. When Sporting Gijón went into administration their 'brand image' was bought by the municipal authority in order to rescue the club. As one Sporting Gijón insider put it: 'The council could not let us disappear; Gijón without Sporting is not Gijón.'¹⁰ However, this is a system coming under increasing pressure as the global recession continues to bite. More recently, RC Celta Vigo filed for voluntary insolvency, and Real Sociedad and Levante have also gone into administration. Unable to find a backer to take on its debts, RCD Mallorca went into voluntary administration in 2010, and the Spanish FA have threatened RC Deportivo La Coruña with demotion from La Liga because of their financial conduct. The English Premier League generates both the greatest amount of revenue

in European football and its greatest levels of debt. The total debts of its member clubs stood at just under €4 billion in 2010, anchored by huge television broadcasting deals and the fact that – unlike in most other European leagues – clubs own their own stadiums and are able to borrow against this asset. This has not, however, prevented high-profile cases of financial failure when clubs have taken on unsustainable levels of debt in their attempt to fulfil competitive ambitions: Leeds United FC – Champions League semi-finalists in 2001 – went into voluntary administration in 2007; West Ham United FC narrowly avoided bankruptcy in 2009 when their holding company, Hansa Holdings, went into administration; and most recently Portsmouth FC filed for administration after running up €160 million in debt. The problem of debt is not confined to the continent's premier leagues. Further down the pyramid, lower league clubs, attempting to make the breakthrough into more financially lucrative divisions, are equally susceptible to insolvency. In the summer of 2010, for example, 20 Italian clubs from Serie B, Prima Divisione and Seconda Divisione were declared bankrupt and prevented from competing in their respective divisions.¹¹

The loosely regulated path that football has taken has brought with it socio-economic consequences for football fandom. The massive expansion in football finances is driven, directly and indirectly, by the commercial exploitation of a 'brand loyalty' that generates money from fan allegiance to football clubs nurtured over generations. The emphasis is upon the *consumption* of football, through expertly targeted merchandising that exploits communal identity and the adoption of an exorbitant pricing policy for watching football, both in terms of matchday tickets and of pay-per-view broadcasting. And, of course, through such participation fans help to create the spectacle that attracts commercial sponsorship. Fan allegiance is seen as elastic. If existing stadia cannot churn out the required revenue, supporters can be shunted to new locations and new stadia which *can* improve the club's finances; if a club is not considered to be viable from a commercial perspective, it can be merged with local rivals. Even in the teeth of an economic recession fan identity is a rich seam that revenue-hungry clubs are eager to mine. For instance, the traditional moderately priced ticket to watch matches in the German Bundesliga – a reasonably well regulated league in comparison with others across Europe – has come under threat from successive price hikes and the introduction of premium-game surcharges. German supporter groups fear a situation will develop in which young and lower-income fans will be squeezed out of match attendance and a process of 'gentrification' of German football, similar to the process witnessed in the English Premier League in the past years, will be set in motion.¹²

As the commercial ethic penetrates further into the game, a sense that the social value of football is beginning to be ground down by financial imperatives has caused alarm. UEFA's president, Michel Platini, has spoken of an

explosion of sectoral and corporate interests at both league and club levels in all team sports that are played professionally. These initiatives, which often attract enormous media coverage, are designed to benefit one element, particularly if it is powerful and rich, rather than the masses. Attempts are made to reduce a discipline into a show, to demean a sport in order to convert it into a product. It is becoming more important to make a profit than to win trophies.¹³

An institutional response to this 'reductionism' – with the European Union and UEFA at the vanguard – has been forthcoming. In 2005, under the auspices of the

United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union, sports ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain set up a working group to provide the European Union with a sports model which enshrines in European law the principles contained in the Nice Declaration (2000), which underlines 'the social, educational and cultural functions inherent in sport'. For their part, the sports ministers concentrated attention on the issue of fair competition and, with respect to this, on professional football; this was reflected in the addition to the steering group of Sepp Blatter, the general secretary of world football's governing body, FIFA, and Lennart Johansson, then chief executive of European football's governing body, UEFA. The outcome of that meeting was the setting in motion of an Independent European Sport Review (IESR), which the ministers commissioned Portugal's former deputy prime minister, José Luis Arnaut, to carry out. In May 2006 Arnaut produced his report, *The Independent European Sports Review* (IESR). Arnaut concluded:

Sports in general and football in particular are not in good health. Only the direct involvement of political leaders, working together with the football authorities, can put it back on the road to recovery... there is a real risk that the ownership of football clubs will pass into the wrong hands, the true values of the sport will be eroded, and the public will become increasingly disaffected with the 'beautiful game'.¹⁴

He presented a series of recommendations aimed at curbing and controlling the commercial excesses that have been viewed as bringing professional football in Europe into disrepute. Arnaut recommended a fit and proper persons test for all potential owners of football clubs – principally as a means to deter the use of European clubs as money-laundering operations. He also suggested the need for a *salary cap* for players as an important step toward securing a competitive balance between clubs. The Report also called for the issue of player-trafficking to be addressed, with Arnaut in favour of stricter controls on the licensing of football agents. A more even distribution of wealth generated by the game was also a key element of the report. To this end it was argued that 'central marketing' of the game (that is, national leagues collectively bargaining with TV companies over the sale of image rights to televise matches) is the most suitable vehicle through which to begin to bridge the gap in income between top clubs and others. The ultimate objective of these recommendations was to 'provide a comprehensive and robust legal framework' for football's governance which allowed UEFA the authority to take a forceful lead on these issues, free from vested commercial interests' threats of legal challenges to their efforts in the European Court.

One of the most eye-catching statements made by Arnaut with respect to football's governance is that supporters should have a greater say in the running of the clubs they support. Arnaut stated that a 'properly structured supporter involvement will help to contribute to improved governance' of football clubs.¹⁵ The report highlighted the work carried out by Supporters Direct in Britain, an organization which aids the foundation and development of football supporters' trusts committed to the principle of mutual ownership of shares in football clubs. The report, noting the absence of a pan-European body representing the interests of supporters that UEFA could enter into structured dialogue with, advocated enquiries into the feasibility of 'rolling out' the British Supporters Direct model at a European level (while taking into consideration the different club ownership models that exist across Europe). In 2009 a joint UEFA/Supporters Direct report was published, entitled *What is the Feasibility for a Supporters Direct Europe?*¹⁶ Most recently of all – effective

from the 2013/2014 season – is UEFA's directive imposing financial fair play regulations across its member associations.¹⁷ Seeking to curb the big spending that has been the catalyst for many bankruptcies, UEFA are now insisting on a so-called 'break-even' requirement that will compel clubs not to spend more than the income that they receive. Clubs will also have to ensure they pay liabilities promptly rather than building up vast mountains of debt.

The various new reforms are, in essence, no more than measures for sustainable spending and rational business plans which have been advocated for a long time by 'industry' experts – UEFA's requirements are an intervention on these grounds, rather than relying on often unforthcoming clubs and individual associations to self-regulate and bring about financial discipline.¹⁸ However, this and other interventions into football governance by legislative bodies are promulgated along the lines of a plan to combat an existential threat to the game. Speaking to the European Parliament in 2008, Michel Platini commented:

Two key aspects make the European model of sport both unique and completely fair: the financial solidarity between the different levels of European sport and the openness of competitions... Any attempt to undermine these two elements would sound the death knell of the fundamental relationship that exists between sport and society in our continent.¹⁹

This view is shared in much of the critical literature, where the future of football is portrayed in terms of a struggle to determine its primary role as either an economic or a community asset. The debate is usually framed in terms of the ongoing commodification of football:

that process by which an object or social practice acquires an exchange value or market-centered meaning... involving the gradual entry of market logic to the various elements that constitute the object or social practice under consideration.²⁰

Overall, the ascendant view within this literature would appear to suggest that football has become, or is in the process of becoming, a business, and that the relationship between football clubs and their supporters is becoming narrowly defined in terms of producer and consumer.²¹ While there is little doubt that professional football, as with professional sports in general, is experiencing commodification, the reality is that football clubs are not simply businesses, nor can they ever aspire to be organizations driven solely by the desire to expand or protect economic value. Football's desire to be seen as a community asset based on local identities and traditions, on the one hand, and its pretensions to be a business on the other hand, contradict each other and rest on an uneasy compromise. Clubs hover between this ontological uncertainty: between being businesses and being community assets.

The collection

The aim of this collection of studies is to render the implications of this uncertainty for an understanding of football supporters' resistance to, and compromise with, commercialization. Moreover, football clubs and their supporters exist in their own unique national and local contexts, making some clubs/fans more or less prone to being drawn into the commercial pressures sweeping through professional football. In this respect, a European-wide study can offer us a comparison of the variety of

reactions to commercialization and a vantage point from which to understand what is happening within the European game at this moment.

To begin, David Kennedy's contribution uses the vehicle of English Premier League club Everton FC's attempts to relocate to a new stadium as a means to examine supporters' attitudes toward commercialization and the changing nature of football communities. In December 2006 the board of directors at Everton Football Club declared their intention to explore the possibility of moving from Goodison Park, Liverpool, their home since 1892, to a new stadium in Kirkby in the nearby borough of Knowsley. The proposed move was hugely controversial for Everton supporters. During the course of the Everton stadium dispute Kennedy carried out and published research which attempted to cast light on the variety of different viewpoints concerning the club's proposed move, in an effort to draw out the complexity of the fans' opinions regarding the relocation of the club. In particular, he sought to assess the balance of forces among supporters, between those who could be described as *traditionalists* (or 'cultural conservatives') and those defined by a *market-led* attitude. Football fans' behaviour toward the commercial strategies of club owners has usually been framed in terms of either accommodation with or resistance to the commodification of professional football. However, the author rejected, on the basis of his findings, any thesis assuming either the inexorable process of commodification *or* fierce resistance to this process, suggesting instead that the reality is somewhat more complex and nuanced. Overall, the evidence presented pointed toward supporters pragmatically adapting to commercial *rhetoric*, simply to press their case: fans from both sides of the stadium relocation debate deployed the language of commercialism in order to support or undermine the business case for the move. In later research – which forms the basis for his chapter in this study – it was found that the language of commerce had become even more influential among fans, evidenced by varying degrees of willingness to fuse the needs of business with notions of football club tradition. Intrigued by the softening of attitudes toward commercialism, Kennedy sets out here to provide a theoretical understanding of this development by utilizing Jürgen Habermas' concept of a struggle between the *systems world* and the *life world* (with the former tending to colonize and corrupt the latter). By enlisting this concept, the author provides an explanation of events in terms of the attempted superseding of one 'common sense' view of football community (in which supporters accept a pragmatic accommodation to commercial pressures – though, crucially, this is mixed with an outright rejection of their identification as consumers or customers) with another 'common sense' view of that community (a new configuration of motives and ideas that advance commercialization, in which a supporter's sense of moral ownership of the club has been weakened by the diktats of concern for its competitive resources and financial health).

We continue our study with a chapter concerning football governance in Germany. Drawing on a number of interviews with fans and industry commentators, supplemented by a wide range of secondary sources, Udo Merkel provides an account of the attempted bourgeoisification of football in the *Bundesliga*, contextualizing the movement toward greater commercialization of German football by highlighting traditional football communities' stubborn resistance to the process. Deploying Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Udo argues that the struggle over the direction football has taken in Germany cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider debate about social-class relationships in that country. He concludes that,

despite the shift toward a greater commodification of the game in Germany, the scope for democratic involvement of fans in the control of the game there remains strong relative to other major European leagues.

The onset and intensification of commerce within German Football were reflective of the changes occurring in the wider political economy, arising from corporate and media interests in the mid-1960s, and eventually ruptured the hegemonic hold of amateurism over football authorities clubs and their wider fan base, through which the upper and middle classes were able to retain their dominance over the direction of elite football in Germany. However, while money poured into football, rationalizing the number of clubs, making the remaining clubs into corporate-backed business entities and breaking player wage barriers, German clubs have never been the target of takeover bids from foreign capitalists with apparently unlimited supplies of money. Commercialization here was based on homegrown capital and was more susceptible to fan resistance. German football may have become increasingly commercialized, but it still remained a German affair, involving German players, fans, corporations and media. Those who had commercial interests in the club (such as corporate patrons, advertisers and media) were highly sensitive to fan loyalty. When many fans 'voted with their feet', staying away from football grounds in the early 1970s and again in the early 1980s in response to rising ticket prices and the growing social and cultural gap between fans and 'over-paid players', clubs reacted quickly by introducing corporatist measures (for example, by regulating the ticket market and encouraging a closer relationship between players and community). In the early 2000s the reliance of German football on German capital, this time in the form of the media group Kirchsport (a business entity that owned the broadcasting rights to the top two German league matches), proved again to be fragile. When the media corporation went bankrupt in 2001 clubs were forced to slow down and reverse the pace of commercialization, drawing them closer to their community of fans once more. The author describes how a second wave of fan resistance came in response to other aspects of commercialization, namely the commercially friendly environment of the new stadia that have emerged in recent decades and the resultant new middle-class fan base. Working-class fans' resistance took symbolic forms: using dress codes and national flags, and emphasizing solidarity with the traditional values of the football fan. The close relationship between clubs and communities meant that this resistance was transformed into clearly defined political stances – perhaps the most obvious example of this is to be found in the close-knit subculture of fans of FC St. Pauli of Hamburg, where wider social issues, such as opposition to racism, homophobia and fascism, have informed and fuelled resistance to the 'corporate takeover' of German football.

In his chapter, Amir Ben Porat provides an outline of the historical shift in the structure of Israeli football, from what are seen as political preoccupations among the game's governing bodies in that country to the embracing of entrepreneurial forms of governance and a greater emphasis on clubs' independence from national federation constraints. This movement, Amir argues, mirrors the development of Israeli state economic policy away from central control and toward the embrace of a free-market economy. 'The story of football's commodification in Israel', he explains, 'is understandable only in the context of the history of Israeli society'. With respect to this, he presents the evolution of football in Israel – the move away from its roots as a 'community project' toward a privatized form of sport – in the form of a series of phases of commodification.

The game's early impetus in Israel in the post-World War Two period came from the auspices of general sports federations organized around political groupings from across the political spectrum: from the Labour Camp on the left, to the right-wing Zionist parties. Football clubs in the early period of the game's history in Israel were closely associated with the political ideology of their founding members; strictly amateur affairs, they were reliant on municipal patronage for the financing of their efforts. From the 1950s, football in the country went through a series of stages in a move toward greater commercialization of its operations. The move toward the greater commodification of football in Israel begins with the disintegration of amateurism – first with the advent of semi-professionalism in the 1960s and 1970s, and later with full-blown professionalism. The breach was initially made with Israeli players turning professional with clubs outside of Israel. Gradually, the national associations became powerless to stave off the clamour for an internal market for players amongst competing domestic clubs. One of the main reasons for the incremental movement toward an accommodation with professionalism was the political nature of football in Israel. The social glue that the game provided for the new state, integrating a variety of groups – from established Israeli citizens, to new immigrants from different countries, to the local Arab population – meant that the modification of control over club/player relations was a price worth paying. Another reason was the pressures being exerted on old political allegiances by changes taking place within the economy.

Professionalism in football was encouraged and enabled by deregulation of the state economy, which reached a critical stage during the 1980s with the increased privatization of traditional areas of state activity. These changes are argued to have been responsible for the transformation of views of Israeli football, from its being seen as a community asset toward acceptance of the sport's being within the orbit of commodified social relations. This changing state of affairs was manifest in the increasing power and independence of Israeli League clubs *vis-à-vis* the sports federations that traditionally enjoyed control over them. In basic terms: the role of the public sector within the game shrank, and with it any vestige of non-commercial influence. Amir concludes his historical analysis of the growing commodification of Israeli football by assessing its impact on Israeli football fandom. More particularly, he assesses what he sees as key differences in outlook among fans created through this repositioning of the Israeli game.

Hans K. Hognestad's chapter analyses trends in football fandom in his native Norway. In Scandinavia, and more especially in Norway, football fans have for many decades developed allegiances to overseas clubs parallel to those with their local team. The huge levels of transnational support for English clubs in Norway which has gathered pace since the 1990s is of particular interest for the understanding of the globalization and commodification of football. Hans examines the extent to which fan identity has fallen victim to the type of cultural homogenization that is said to accompany the expansion of international capitalism, marked by the advent in football of *transnational networks* (that is, the rise to prominence of fan identification across borders with dominant foreign and commercially successful football leagues and their pre-eminent clubs) and, on the other hand, the ways in which fans have resisted this process through the maintenance of traditional local identities that evolved through football support. The author concludes that the contestation of identity is far more complex than is offered by these polarities, however. Although a multitude of media platforms are devoted to bringing a highly commodified global

football 'product' into our lives (not least through the market dominance of the English Premier League), and although football discourse is facilitated and structured by capitalist corporations, fan experiences and practice are always charged with a particular, local content, and an ongoing tension exists between global forces and the particular or local. Hans argues that it is increasingly difficult to find convincing arguments for making a general division between the domestic (or what the author describes as 'thick solidarity') and the transnational (or 'thin solidarity') in football fan identity.

Ramon Llopis-Goig provides us with a study that looks at the changing landscape of Spanish football in the context of the process of commodification of the country's social and economic life. Traditionally, the Spanish game has been analysed in scholarly studies in terms of either the effects of crowd violence or the nationalist and regionalist implications of Spanish clubs. Latterly analysis has also stretched to include gender issues (and the process of constructing masculinity, in particular) and there has been a spate of studies dealing with racism and xenophobia, both of which have blighted the Spanish game in recent years. Little attention, however, has been given to studying the effect on fans of the rapidly expanding influence of commercialization on Spanish football. Helping to remedy the paucity of coverage in this respect, Ramon carries out an empirical study of fans of Valencia FC and Levante UD. In particular, a discourse analysis is carried out on interviews conducted with fans of the two clubs, which seeks to unpack opinions concerning club ownership and perceptions of the effects of increased commodification on football fan culture. The conclusion drawn is that by and large, the process of commodification has not affected fans' feelings of identification with their clubs. The author argues that 'hyper-consumption' *has* been generated – to a great degree via intensification of football information in the media. This has in turn led to an intensification of the 'entertainment-festive dimension' of match attendance at stadiums. However, this is accompanied by a sense of symbolic ownership of their clubs among the fans interviewed – a situation in no small part driven by paternalism, the local roots of the majority of the clubs' presidents and the strong pull of the clubs as totems of regional identity. A growing contradiction exists, therefore, between Spanish football's role as part of an entertainment industry that produces great enthusiasm among the fans, and this enthusiasm's coexistence with an uneasy feeling about the dangers of the course that has been embarked upon.

The penultimate chapter in the collection comes from Peter Kennedy, who examines the role of Supporters Direct, a football initiative set up by the British government in 2000 as a way of intervening in the unequal relationship that exists between the relatively powerless supporters of football clubs and the private shareholders who have organizational control of clubs. Primarily, the focus of Supporters Direct has been facilitating the establishment of mutual forms of ownership at football clubs by offering a helping hand in setting up supporters' trusts. Although the empirical element of the study is chiefly concerned with a critique of the performance of Supporters Direct as it has influenced British football, there is a European dimension to it in that the model has been given the backing of the European football governing body, UEFA, which is encouraging its rolling out across other European leagues. Offering a Marxist political economy of football that gives priority to the unstable commodity structure of the football business, the aim of Peter's contribution is to question the assumed progressive nature of Supporters Direct and reveal an alternative view of that organization: that it is an integral part of a social policy aimed at

the preservation and extension of commodified social relations. Peter argues that there is a contradiction at the heart of the supporters' trust movement, its 'levelling' ideology being counterbalanced by a willingness to be utilized for commercial purposes by the football club hierarchies that the trusts seek to replace – a contradiction that, if one is concerned with attempts at formulating a more democratic governance for the game, ought to be considered with care before the Supporters Direct model is rolled out beyond the United Kingdom and into mainland European leagues.

The final contribution is from John Williams. The analysis of the ongoing Liverpool FC ownership struggle forms the backdrop to his contribution to the collection. In the midst of the high finance drama played out between competing billion-dollar consortiums seeking to gain control of the Merseyside club, a grass-roots movement has emerged through fan groups such as Share Liverpool and the Spirit of Shankly supporters' union. In his chapter the author seeks to highlight attempts by organized Liverpool fans to both come to terms with the commercial realities faced by a global force like Liverpool FC *and* to reinforce a moral economy by preserving what are seen as non-negotiable, traditional values underpinning and defining the organization.

Conclusion

The major purpose of this book is to describe and analyse supporters' reactions to the commercialization of football in Europe. What we discover is that the process of commercialization is uneven, as are the resulting tensions between football as both culture and business, and as both community asset and economic commodity. What the book demonstrates is how supporters contextualize and respond to these tensions within local histories, which ensures that any examination which adopts over-arching processes, such as neoliberalism, in an attempt to understand the commercialization of football must consider how they are pulled out of shape, altered and reconfigured by the embrace of local politics, social habitus and tradition. Hence we find plenty of examples where the relationship between football fans and clubs is characterized by a high degree of resilience, vitality and unpredictability – the fans' opposition has a rebellious and subversive quality and has helped to force a large number of compromises on the other side.

And yet, the volume also finds evidence that the fragile business status of the football club increasingly exposes supporters to the game's rampant commercialization. It is certainly the case that this exposure has diverse consequences for supporters. Nevertheless, as this book explores, it can drive supporters more firmly into the language of commerce, as they feel there is no way out except to support their club's fight to stay in the business and 'compete' with other clubs with much bigger 'asset bases'. There is little irony in the fact that it is often the strong sense of moral and symbolic ownership internalized by supporters that makes them just as susceptible to the promises of economic redemption and a future laced with success proffered by hostile or friendly takeovers as they may be to the guile of paternalism and the local roots of club owners.

The volume considers how on the one hand, commercialization can tend to incite supporters' interest and fascination with their club. As the club spins through an uncertain and heady cycle of change (owners, staff, players, sponsors all come and go in the search for success), the one abiding relationship remains that between fan and club. Hence the club becomes a reference point for supporter identity in a

fast-changing and unstable environment. It also considers how on the other hand, supporters often react to the same commercial forces in very different ways – for example, becoming football nomads; tourists, disillusioned with their local club, lured by the consumer choices offered by the mediatization of football.

Notes

1. Deloitte: 'European football market grows to €15.7 billion'.
2. Europe's 'big-five' total league revenue (combined matchday, commercial and TV revenue) 2010:
 English Premier League €2.3 billion
 Bundesliga €1.6 billion
 La Liga €1.5 billion
 Serie A €1.5 billion
 Ligue 1 €1.0 billion
 The big five leagues are followed in terms of revenue generation by the Dutch Eredivisie (€422m), the Russian Premier League (€352m), the Turkish Super Lig (€342m) and the Portuguese Liga (€256m). To underline the gulf, the English Football League Championship (English football's second tier) is bigger in revenue terms than any of these leagues (€440m). See https://www.deloitte.com/view/en_RU/ru/press/029abcdeb4959210VgnVCM100000ba42f00aRCRD.htm
3. Average attendance in 2009/2010: Bundesliga 42,000; Premier League 34,000; La Liga 30,000; Serie A 27,000 average; Ligue 1 20,000. See *European Football Statistics*. Attendances will rise in France and Italy over the coming years if the planned stadium improvements in those two nations go ahead: see fourfourtwo.com, 'New Stadiums Not a Cure for All Italians'; Ligue1, 'Stadium Development: France's Sporting Renaissance'. For the Bundesliga international comparison see EA.com., 'Bundesliga Has Third-Highest World Attendance'.
4. Leading the way is the English Premier League: the total value of the Premier League's current broadcasting rights deal, including the overseas packages – a market the English game has had particular success in compared with their largest European rivals – stands at €4.3 billion. EPL figs based on exchange rate of £1 = €1.2 as per time of writing. See 'Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance 2010'. The current Bundesliga contract – relatively modest in comparison with the other leagues in the big five, given the attraction of the German League for fans and sponsors – is €1.65 billion. Legal restrictions on pay-per-view contracts are currently under review, however, with leading figures in the German game such as Bayern Munich president, Karl Heinz Rummenigge, pushing for greater broadcasting options that could see the Bundesliga's revenues from this quarter soar: see Goal.com, 'The more profitable Bundesliga has a brighter future than the debt-riddled Premier League, say analysts'; see also 'Rummenigge rejects Bundesliga TV idea, calls for better rights deal'. With no collective bargaining in La Liga, Real Madrid and Barcelona dominate the revenue from television agreements. Both clubs signed a deal with Grupo Mediapro in 2006 that expires in 2013. Real Madrid's contract is worth €1.1 billion and Barcelona's €1 billion: see 'Real Madrid, Barcelona Face Pressure on Television Deals'. Serie A will receive a total of more than €1 billion from the new collective TV rights: see 'Serie A Likely to be Back in Black on TV Boost'. In Ligue 1, the Ligue de Football de Professionnel reached an agreement with Canal+ and Orange over four seasons for €2.75 billion: see "Everyone Gains" on Rights Issue'.
5. www.bbc.co.uk, 'Champions League Final Tops Superbowl for TV Market'.
6. The Telegraph, 'Deloitte's Picture of Football Shangri-La Not Enough to Fool Top Clubs'.
7. 'The European Football Club Landscape', UEFA Report, February 2010. The most comprehensive financial review ever undertaken by the body, the report surveyed 732 top-division clubs across all European leagues.
8. Cuttler, 'Big Debate: Football's Finances'.
9. AZ owner Dirk Scheringa is also DSB Bank's owner. In 2006, Scheringa, who had financed the club with the bank's money and allowed a €67 million club debt to amass,

- decided to change that debt into club shares. When DSB Bank went bankrupt the administrators naturally turned their attention to the club. See 'Dutch Clubs Still Facing Financial Peril'.
10. *The Guardian*, 'Domination by Barcelona and Real Madrid making Spain the new Scotland'.
 11. FIFPro, 'Crisis hits hard: 20 Italian clubs dissolved'.
 12. When Saturday Comes, 'German Fans Fighting Bundesliga Price Rises'; see also BBC Sport, 'German Club Fans Set for Boycott'.
 13. UEFA, 'Platini Plea for Values'.
 14. *Independent European Sports Review* 13–4.
 15. *Independent European Sports Review*, 72–3.
 16. However, sustaining the approach of Supporters Direct within the context of continental Europe is, by the organization's own admission, fraught with difficulty. Different countries have distinct sporting and legal systems, making share ownership – the cornerstone of supporter trusts – not the most logical way to deal with governance issues. It is the case also that some organized fan groups value non-involvement in club affairs, preferring to keep their independence and integrity, which could be compromised by being part of the ownership and command structure of a football club. See 'Supporters Direct Keeps the Faith in Fan Ownership Despite Setbacks'.
 17. 'UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations 2010'.
 18. From Deloitte's Annual Review of Football Finance 2010: '...we appear to be seeing a continuing shift from a sustainable "not for profit" model towards one with potentially calamitous consistent and significant loss making characteristics... On many occasions we have hoped that increased revenues would facilitate a move towards a more rational approach but, in a classic example of competitive game theory, clubs are continually driven to maximise wages rather than profitability.' See Deloitte, 2–3.
 19. 'Platini Plea for Values'.
 20. Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs'.
 21. Nash, 'Contestation in Modern English Professional Football'; Hudson, J. 'Critically Examining the Commercialisation of English Football'; Crolley and Hand, *Football, Europe and the Press*; Giulianotti, 'Sport Spectators and the Social Consequences of Commodification'; Robinson, 'The Business of Sport'.

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