DANIEL TORCHIA

BRIGING FOOTBALL BACK TO THE FANS: THE CHALLENGING CASE OF

CONFERENCE PAPER

STREAM 31: DOCTORAL STREAM: EXTENDING THE LIMITS OF PARASITICAL POLITICS

ABSTRACT

Fan ownership is a quite recent phenomenon in the UK which is expanding and creating more or less solid realities in the football leagues. Most of these clubs are established as community interest companies, rather than for- profit business and are part of the Third Sector. However, a fan-owned football club shares most of the characteristics of other alternative forms of organisations/third sector companies, but operates in a competitive system of leagues which adds several pressures and challenges. Martin Parker (2002) would define them as utopian organisations, leaving room to interpret the word "utopia": either as something to strive to achieve, to escape from an undesired world; or with a negative connotation, as something which will never be achieved and can only be dreamed of. The vision of a better future seems to be common denominator for the formation of third sector organisation (Hull, 2011), and football clubs are no exceptions. The studies on alternative forms of organisations have not touched yet fan owned football clubs, which have been mainly analysed within the sociology of sport. Critical Management Studies (CMS), as Hull (2011) states, offers an almost natural fit to many third sector organisations, due to the political principles they are often based on. Fan owned football clubs instead have to deal with a bigger set of challenges, given the competitive nature of the leagues. CMS can offer a solid ground to bridge the gap between a community interest company, aimed at benefiting its members, and the completion in leagues where the opponents are privately owned clubs.

 Is it possible to have both? In other words: is the utopia possible? How are those issues managed? How sustainable is a business model that starts from principle of cooperation and social inclusion but has to deal constantly in an environment where it is one of a kind? Are these clubs just parasites living off the big clubs, ready to become a smaller scale version of them if an opportunity arises? Fournier (2002) envisaged a solution for alternative forms of organisations to pursue their aims of social development and liberation of the individual from oppression: remaining as small and local as possible to maximise their effectiveness, and create strong links across the different companies. This would partly explain the creation of entities like Supporters Direct, but fails to capture the competitive status of football, where success on the pitch is to be pursued at all levels. At what cost though? This is a proof that in management studies and even more in CMS, we cannot adopt a "one size fits all" model of management, given its contingency to the socio-political conditions which led to the development of fan-ownership.

This tricky dualism between social development and restless competition deserves attention and theoretical development. This paper brings together literature on the sociology of sport, especially around fandom and fans resistance, and elements of CMS literature around alternative forms of organisation. The empirical work conducted takes place at FC United of Manchester, a fan owned football club born out of years of political struggle between fan groups and the way modern Premier League football is set up, and the way Manchester United is run. The club was formed in 2005 and run as a non-profit cooperative with a democratic membership system. The fieldwork consists on an ethnographic project that will carry on until the first months of 2014. It led to volunteer for the club, with the role of community manager's assistant. During the first months at the club there has been an involvement in the community projects FC United runs in schools and other sites, to write for the match day programme, to follow almost every game home and away, and to attend social events and members meeting. The work so far is getting complemented with interviews to board members and volunteers to grasp how the organisation is led and what are the daily challenges in sustaining and promoting an alternative business model. When football is placed within a wider socio-political context than just merely on what happens on the pitch, growth and expansion assume a different meaning. Ethnography can be the best way to bridge all this gaps and get a sound understanding of the organisation as a whole within a wider context than just the football one.

"This football club can only go as far as you (members) want it to go"

(Andy Walsh, at the FC United General Meeting, 28th April 2013)

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based around a period of research carried between January and June 2013 and it is the outcome of several months of ethnographic research. Within this context, participant observations have been gathered as a result of the direct involvement with FC United of Manchester as a volunteer, with the role of assistant in the community programme, and with notes also taken at football matches, events and members' meeting. Field notes have been complemented by eight semi-structured interviews of about 45-60 minutes each conducted with staff, board members and volunteers. This work-in-progress paper is a partial account of the fieldwork for a PhD project that will carry on until the first months of 2014: an even closer involvement with the clubs and a series of semi-structured interviews with fans and other volunteers will be conducted as the new football season starts again.

FC United of Manchester (henceforth simply FC United) is a semi-professional football club established in the summer of 2005, by Manchester United fans who saw the takeover of the club by the Glazer family as the 'last straw' (fc-united.co.uk) of many years of decline in their enjoyment and rising discontent towards a commodified game and rising ticket prices.

This paper will focus on the understudied growing phenomenon on fan-owned football clubs in the UK, a Country that is witnessing an increase of non for profit organisations in the Third Sector which aim at bringing back football to the wider community. Myers and Cato (2011) call for studies around the cooperative sector outside the retail sector and fair trade producers, arguing that the rest has been largely ignored and unexplored. The paper will try to understand and highlight the challenges arising from the competitive nature of the game itself, whether the efforts

to make the club a sustainable entity can risk to become vain due to the increasing pressures coming from the league, finances and even the members themselves.

RELEVANCE TO CMS AND TO THE STREAM

The paper argues that the outcomes of the studies can be extended beyond football and football organisations, making it relevant for the whole CMS community, even those not interested in sports. The battle that FC United and other fan-owned football clubs are fighting it is against the effects that the capitalistic turn that football has taken, where some of the basic values and principles of the game have been replaced by profit making machines, to reach a system on the edge of collapse. Soriano (2012) warns us that some big football clubs spend even 80% of their revenues on footballers' wages, and the clubs keep borrowing large amounts of money to feed this habit. In Spain, banks like Bankia, Caixa and Santander have generously sponsored Real Madrid and Barcelona's radical investments in buying players like Ronaldo, Kakà and David Villa. Clubs are unsurprisingly struggling to pay back these huge debts, leaving the banks to seek help from European public funds to cover 5 billion Euros of unsolved debts (and these are just the figures for Spain..). It appears not to be a battle just for football, but to try to restore some values in society that have been lost, and this is why these clubs are so strongly community-oriented and promote ideals of cooperation, kinship and friendship.

The stream theme is addressed by reflecting upon the issues arising from the competitive nature of the game, and the heterogeneity of values among members. The paper tries to reflect upon the possibility that clubs like FC United might become in time a smaller scale replica of what they are fighting for. Can the utopian organisation become a mirror and parasite of big clubs?

FROM A COMMODIFIED GAME TO FC UNITED

Has the expansion of the Premier League had any effect on match goers and generally on football itself? In the novel *Anthill* (2010)) biologist-novelist Edward Wilson makes an interesting comparison between two types of systems like a university and an anthill and argues that any organised system when it gets to a certain size and has got enough time to evolve, it also becomes qualitatively different , developing a more heterogeneous population. The reason for this is because the more parts of the system interact with each other, the more phenomena emerge, creating a more interesting and strange world. The answer therefore is yes, the Premier League has changed the face of British football in a significant way: Giulianotti (2002:29) argues that football in the last 20 years has undergone a process of hypercommodification, that has changed the system from that of a subculture to a mega-business with media and multinationals involved (Hogneastad, 2012:377), making it very heterogeneous. Focusing only on fandom, Giulianotti highlights the differences that the hyperfcommodification has created, and divides the type of audience that attends a football match into four categories, based on their type of approach to matchday: the supporters, the fans, the followers and the flaneurs. It does not seem surprising that in this complicated context, resistance is likely to arise. Hogneastad (2012) poses an interesting question of whether these new football movements are just acts of naïve local heroism or genuine responses to the commodification of the game.

FC United was born out of years of political struggle which culminated in the drastic decision to create a brand new club. During the 90s the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA) was established ,fought and then won an uncanny battle to stop Rupert Murdoch taking over Manchester United. This victory increased fans awareness on their role within a football club, to use Hogneastad's words (2012:380):

 "(fans regard themselves as the) most stable part of the club community and the most important emotional stakeholder: the supporters constitute a subcultural

community of commitment, loyalty and solidarity, with the stadium standing out as a symbolic representation of the club community, often drenched in topophilic sentiment".

Alan[1], talking about his growing involvement with Manchester United and then FC United highlights the increasing role supporters had in Manchester United and how, when they have seen their power decreasing, they decided to walk away from it:

"There was then the formation of Manchester United as a plc – as a public limited company – and the Independent Supporters Association was really set up in antagonism to that. The critical moment with that came when Rupert Murdoch tried to buy Manchester United in 1998/99 and we managed to stop that happening and that was probably one of the biggest supporter victories there's been, because nobody…well, very few people have ever stopped Murdoch doing what he wants and we managed to prevent that. And that process, particularly around Murdoch, focused attention on ownership, and it was about saying, well, actually, if we want to address all these things and we want to prevent this happening again - stop somebody else coming along and doing this - we need to get ownership in the football club. I see it as a progression over probably the best part of 20 years that lead to the formation of FC United, so…"

(Interview with Alan, Fc United founding member and current board member)

Crowther (2006) in his book about his account of FC United's formation and hi disengagement from modern football, passionately talks about his role as a football supporter who has decided to step up and react to the oppressing power modern corporate football is exerting . He is confident that fans are the ultimate *"football power brokers"* (2006:119), so if they react to the commodification of the game, they can ensure a long term sustainability to football itself.

It is worth looking at the club manifesto, seven immutable organising principles on which FC United has been founded, which are stated in the website (fc-utd.co.uk):

- ***The Board will be democratically elected by its members.***

- ***Decisions taken by the membership will be decided on a one member, one vote basis.***

- ***The club will develop strong links with the local community and strive to be accessible to all, discriminating against none.***

---

[1] Fictional names have been used for the interviewees

- *The club will endeavour to make admission prices as affordable as possible, to as wide a constituency as possible.*

- *The club will encourage young, local participation - playing and supporting - whenever possible.*

- *The Board will strive wherever possible to avoid outright commercialism.*

- *The club will remain a non-profit organisation.*

The club is registered as an Independent Provident Society (IPS) that gives the status to FC United to belong to the Third Sector. The phenomenon of fan-owned football clubs is a recent one in the UK but is rapidly growing, with AFC Wimbedon in 2002 setting the example for other football clubs to be founded following its structure and example. To date there are 30 fan-owned football clubs in England, and, given the recent establishment of most of them, very little has been researched into management issues, whereas the attention has been set on fandom, atmosphere and identity (see for example Poulton, 2009). This paper provides an overview and a critical reflection on the challenges this type of clubs face to run their daily operations and in looking ahead to the future, given the relative short history these clubs have.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALTERNATIVES

Fukuyama (1992:46) famously states that we cannot picture a world that is different from the present one but at the same time better. This statements seems to bind us into a world that cannot escape from the capitalistic turn that it has taken, with all the pros and cons. The Premier League seems to be integral part of this process: Soriano (2012) defines it as the best football market in the word with revenues of over £ 2000 million, with Manchester United being one of the most successful financially, having managed to increase tenfold its revenues in the first ten years of the format. It is striking to think about football primarily as markets to exploit, given the nature of football itself, that of a game, and looking at where football in England comes from. Manchester United, for example, was formed by a group of railway

workers 1878 as Newton Heath LYR Football Club by the Carriage and Wagon department of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway (LYR) depot at Newton Heath. The transformation of big clubs into multinationals has changed radically the face of football, and it was about time that emancipation from this system was to be sought from some of the stakeholders. Football as a grassroots movement: it seems therefore quite intuitive that are the supporters themselves to seek and establish alternative organisations which are more rooted in the community than corporate football clubs. Fournier (2002) emphasises the importance of grassroots utopian movements, not only in terms of providing an alleged better future, but especially in showing that there are viable alternatives, that not everything is decided and not that, as Korten (1995) argues, the forces of capitalism are inevitable and inescapable. Hull (2011) stresses on the fact that being able to imagine a better future is a very important first step towards achieving social change. Several authors highlight the importance of resistance and the danger of unquestioned conformity in society and in organisations: Collinson (2006) provides the most extreme example, namely the extermination of six million Jews as the ultimate remainder of the threat coming from unquestioned conformity. Grint (2005) agrees that unquestioned consent can be destructive for organisations and Casey (1999) explains how in her case study "Hafaestus" the employees had mixed responses towards adapting to the new corporate culture imposed by the company. Post structuralist studies, building from Foucault (1979) contend that many of the studies on mainstream leadership and followership promote conformist selves, through the process that Foucault calls "normalisation", while very few studies focus on resistance among followers (Collinson, 2006). The employees at Hefaestus who did not internalise the process of normalisation and unquestioned acceptance of the new company values got asked to leave the company, and this is why Collinson (2006) contends that followers often go through the process of normalisation for the fear of losing their jobs. A football club is a different case though, there is a voluntary association which is not wage-driven and therefore is even more peculiar to see why fans are seeking emancipation from the club: it is a matter of values.

It seems like the football clubs serve as a form of identity creators, where local pride gets reinforced when local communities get together to support "their" club. This

point it is well explained by Mark, an FC United employee and former IMUSA board member:

"A football club is always the centre of its community, so it's something that, for where you're from, from where your family's from, or who your family support, it's something as a source of local pride and identity. And it's just, it's…yeah, that's it, it's a source of pride and identity, and something to belong to. And, as you get older, and you start getting into the habit of going, it's…I mean, you feel like they're representing not just other people, not just your city, your families city, it's representing you. You know, you meet friends, and there's a whole sub-culture comes up around it, even in terms of clothes, music, beer. It just turns into almost like a way of life really. It's just that sense of community and belonging, and something that can and should be a focal point for people to get involved with. A source of pride to say, yes, this club represents me and where I'm from."

(Mark, personal interview)

When those conditions do not apply anymore it might happen, as in FC United's case, that people seek autonomy and emancipation. Knights and Willmott (2002, in Parker) argue that it has been since the Enlightenment that autonomy has been a central issue for the individuals, emphasizing how the sense of personhood, identity and purpose revolve around the discourse of autonomy. Knights and Willmott provide their own reading of Habermas and Foucault on the matter of autonomy which is worth mentioning. Habermas believes that autonomy depends from the meanings flowing from symbolic interactions and collective communicative relations (Knights and Willmott, 2002:72) and that it is what can emancipate us from dogma. Foucault instead takes a more cautious position, stressing on the seductive power that the quest for autonomy can have on us, warning how autonomy cannot be a discourse unconstrained by power, that autonomy is deeply embedded in power-knowledge relations and that social consensus is also an effect of power. Foucault does not believe in the utopian version of autonomy but he agrees with Habermas recognising that despite its potential danger, along with reason it is still our only resource to fight oppression (ibid:74).

The will to fight for autonomy and emancipation from capitalistic forces might give birth to grassroots movements like FC United. Because of its very nature of being 'just' a football club, as opposed to more famous political or anti-capitalist

movements, might make the discourse a bit blurry at first sight to the uncritical eye, but makes it more interesting researching into. At FC United there is perception that it is more than just football, but rather a form of resistance to powers that from football extend to several aspects of society and life.

The will to provide an alternative way in football seems to coincide with the will to re-establish a sense of "community" which modern football has contributed to erode within its own limits, by removing terraces in stadia and by imposing incredibly high ticket prices, constraining or even preventing access to most of the working class fan-base. The concept of "community" itself is not unproblematic as it will be seen later.

THE THIRD SECTOR

The definition "third sector" has only been created in 1972, but some of its characterising principles have existed for a long time. Hull (2011) boldly states that CMS scholars have largely ignored the third sector, despite being CMS a broad church but whose principles can be almost naturally tailored around third sector organisations. It must be said that it may be a matter of definition mainly, because authors like Parker, Grey, Willmott and Fournier (2002) have touched upon some of the issues around alternative forms of organisation even without explicitly citing the third sector. It is perhaps not useful to engage in a debate around definitions and use for the purpose of this paper interchangeably expressions like "voluntary organisations", "alternative organisations" , or "third sector organisations". Kim (2011) regards voluntary association among the most important parts of civil society, agreeing with Morris(2000, in Kim, 2011) who also sees cooperative and mutual as the foundation for civil society. Similarly Wallace and Cornelius (2010) assume that third sector organisations have a positive impact on the social good within communities, and Hull (2011) emphasises their role in giving voice to individuals and communities to express dissent and difference. Haugh and Paredo (2011:24), despite acknowledging that challenging capitalistic cultures is difficult and will always

be challenged, argue that social enterprises are slowly changing the face of capitalism towards more responsible ways of doing business. Pollit and Bouckaert (2004, in Wallace and Cornelius, 2011) go even further arguing that third sector organisations are likely to be more effective than the public sector and that government policies in the UK over the last 30 years have been leaving community issues to these organisations. From a conceptual point of view it seems that there is a shared agreement on the idea that alternatives must exist and continue to offer service, but the current state of things leave room for scepticism: several authors (Cornelius et al, 2008; Cornelius and Trueman, 2007; Hull, 2000; Diamond and Southern,2006; in Cornelius and Wallace, 2011:44) doubt the long term capacity and sustainability of third sector organisations to provide quality social provision. Milbourne and Cushman (2012) argue that the current UK situation is far from being ideal, and that the celebratory words towards the thirds sector of the Big Society strategies have been short lived. The scholars argue that third sector organisations might not survive the cuts in funding, and this would not harm only those organisations, but would demotivate cross-sector trust. From the inside,at FC United, a certain scepticism toward the relationship with the central government seems to be shared:

Jack:

"Taking community interest companies and social enterprise in its widest sense, I think central government, a Conservative led government, has used them as part of their agenda to break up, as they see it, monopoly providers within the health service, within local government, and in other social areas. I don't think they've got a real strong political commitment, to social enterprise and community interest companies as such….I don't think that commitment to social enterprise co-operatives and community interest companies is as strong as the rhetoric that comes out of central government, and has been for the last…or the Conservative party…for the last three or four years"

(Jack, paid staff member, personal interview)

Mark:

"..with the Tories, it's pretty much been the same, them and the Lib/Dems actually..with all the government cuts towards community services on various things, it's actually got worse. They might not have targeted football clubs directly, but

because you're a community interest group, because of all the funding cuts and everything, you can't do as much as a community interest group, because things have changed. In terms of like on the surface, not a lot has changed with the relationship, but in terms of when you get underneath it, it has changed quite a bit, because funding, especially like if you're up north, the funding is just getting cut more and more elsewhere, so yeah, it's definitely had an impact, because you can't do as much, or you're scrapping for less money to do the same amount of work."

Alan:

"In terms of the third sector, more broadly, I think the process of recognising the importance of the third sector and co-operatives was their…was already starting when Labour were in power and to some extent, that's been carried through with this government. And you see it in some…but it's far from perfect… I think on the whole, however, there's lots of good words said about co-operatives and social enterprises and less meat on the bones."

Along with many difficulties that a third sector organisation experiences with the current economic situation, there are several issues which make a fan-owned football club a very particular case. In the next sections the paper will deal with the principles that the club is following and the challenges in maintaining them. Being a football club whose purpose is to challenge the status quo in football is a great ambition and a massive challenge. This analysis cannot abstract from some methodological considerations on how the data have been obtained and what made possible to collect them.

METHODOLOGY

To get a better insight in the organisation several steps have been made, which, after almost eight months of proposals, emails, "ambushes" (as Andy Walsh called them) outside the office or even at the door, led to a collaboration with the club. The principle in its purest form, for choosing to conduct an ethnographic study can be resumed by Watson's words (2011:202) as it represents the best way to understand *"how things work"*. Although it might sound superficial and vague, Watson's statement is actually a very powerful slogan for ethnography. Four months of

volunteering, attending matches, social events and meetings have been providing quite rich qualitative data and helped building that trust that would have not been possible without a mutual exchange, especially in a type of organisation which relies massively on volunteers' willingness to sacrifice their time and resources to help the club. Ethnography has changed a lot from the early days of Malinowski: it has advanced in terms of techniques, and scholars have taken a great range of different epistemological and ontological positions, which may even be completely antipodal to Malinowski's realism. One thing has not changed in ethnography though, as the likes of Watson (2011) and Van Maanen (1988;2011) seem to implicitly agree on: it is a process that requires time, patience, building trust and empathy among the subjects studied and showing them always the necessary respect. In the early days it was called "going native", as it was referred to the native and indigenous populations studied, but the principle has survived. The interviews have only come prior to the write up phase of this paper, and the interviewees have accepted with a smile. Seven months before, an attempt to briefly talk to the general manager to propose a collaboration had to go through two office staff, to obtain two minutes of the general manager's time. This shows clearly the benefits of the ethnographic approach to research, where trust is a key issue. It is curious but perhaps not surprising that no one has been paid to be interviewed, instead a symbolic Krispy Kreme doughnut was offered as payment and most people asked the question "when it is best for you to do the interview?" and not the other way round. This paper constitutes just a preliminary, and perhaps rather disorganised analysis of the data gathered so far.

FC UNITED: CHALLENGES AND FEARS

As Andy Walsh has reiterated many times over the years (Crowther,2006; Members meeting on the 28th April 2013) the club can only go as far as members want it to go. This statement contains all the uncertainty and challenges in sustaining a third sector, fan-owned football club that exists for benefits of communities and that wants to set an example to change the way football is run.

How high should the expectations be set? Andy Walsh's measure of success is to be found in celebrating the existence of the club itself after 8 years, challenging the status quo of most Premier League clubs and not only. He argues that the Glazer model has worked for them and for very few other people, relying on supporters' finance. He then questions if getting rich by extracting the wealth from supporters, even if it then leads to a Premier League title or a Champions League, is a good measure of success for football and society.

FC United has put in place several initiatives over the years to ensure the sustainability of the club over the long run, and to benefit the members and the surrounding communities. One of the most interesting initiative is to promote affordable football, by offering the chance to fans to buy ticket prices at the price they can afford to pay. The financial stability of the club is the absolute priority for the board, and it is one of the reason they hired paid staff to keep the finances under control while before it was done only by volunteers. Despite being promoting affordable football for everyone, money raising is and it has been a central part of the club commitments, to complete a move to a new ground in Moston, that requires about £ 5 million to be built. The club currently rents grounds outside the city, in Bury and Stalybridge and the move to their own stadium in Moston is seen as the key strategic point to achieve the long term objectives of the club, and it seems that every discourse around the future of the club cannot abstract from it. A great amount of cash has been thrown in by fans and member for the stadium and through the community share scheme that the IPS structure has allowed to create, and almost £ 2 million have been raised through the scheme and halftime draws (funnily called "A pound for the ground"), buckets, donations etc.. How much more will members be willing to pay for the club? The emphasis of the general manager in the meetings has been on celebrating the here and now, being able to keep it going following some unchangeable values after 8 seasons. The people interviewed highlight the challenges of competing in a league where, even at that semi-professional level, there are clubs which benefit from businessmen with great finances at their disposal, and players who earn three or four times what FC United's player earn. Whereas the club has enjoyed three promotions in the first years and now is always fighting for promotion, wages have not increased that much both for

players and office staff, and it is not unlikely for good players to leave and find a club economically more suitable.

The club has missed the promotion to the Conference North division for three seasons in a row now, and this has started to affect memberships and match attendance. This leads to a question: how important is success on the pitch for FC United members and supporters? From the board and office members the message that filters through is in unison, that promotions do not have to become an obsession that endangers the funding principles of the organisation. Alan in the interview specifies that although in his opinion the ethos of the club lies on other issues, being promoted and climbing the leagues does help to achieve other goals, *"because of the nature of football".* From the interviews with volunteers who are also regular match attenders on terraces it does not seem that there is a total agreement on this matter though. Pat reports that there are people who would love to see FC United being a very successful football club on the pitch, rather than off the pitch:

"Well, I know some people who say it should be more emphasis on the football, and never mind all the community….. Again, I'm thinking of the group of people that I stand with at matches who some of them do go for the football, and it's the social side around the football, and they don't go to anything else, and, as I said, there's another one who disagrees entirely with the community stuff, but he's into the football"

(Penny, volunteer, personal interview)

Similarly Jane echoes :

"I've certainly heard disagreements with that. I certainly think for…I don't know how many, but certainly for some fans the winning's important. I don't think it's any coincidence that match going numbers have dropped since we've been stuck at this level of not getting promotions. I think there are people who are not…it's not that they're not interested in FC but they do want to win and they do want promotions."

(Jane, volunteer, personal interview)

Another major issue is the idea(l) of community that fan-owned football clubs in the UK are stressing on: does it exist "a" community and is it reflected on members and match attenders? FC United has several projects to improve the living conditions and benefit the surrounding communities, working especially with young people but also with ex –offenders and mental service users. Particularly intense is the collaboration with the Manchester College and the projects in schools like Abraham Moss High School, which is among the most multicultural and ethnically diverse schools in the city. FC United has the legitimate hope and desire to make some of these kids the members of the present and of the future but is this diversity reflected in the crowd at the matches? Alvesson and Willmott (1996:180) urge us that to be critical, we need to avoid to ignore the historical conditions (and socio-political) on which organisational features have been created, and this case should make no exception. Robert picks up on this point to describe the current crowd at FC United:

"Well, I think, talking about integrating people of different ethnic backgrounds into the crowd first of all. There is a kind of historical legacy that FC United is built on, which is men, white men, as you say, on the whole, and more men than women, although we think we have more women in our crowd than many football clubs, and also men of a certain age. By that I mean, I suppose, men in their late forties, and early fifties. So, how long have they been living in Manchester? Well, probably, at least, 30 years. What's their ethnic background? Well, their ethnic background reflects the ethnic background of Manchester of 30 years ago, but taking out first generation migrants, and that's why they're nearly all white. That's the core of the club, because the club is, actually, built on a historical tradition, and you can't ignore that, and in many ways that, actually, is a strength, because there is an understanding of what's happening when you come to an FC match, which is a culture. It's a culture, isn't it? "

(Robert, paid staff member, personal interview)

Football is loved by many but how much room there is to bring racial and religious diversity into the club? When a young Muslim man on his first FC United match looked around himself and pointed at the chippies inside the football ground his only question asked was: " *Halal?"*, just to find out that halal meat was nowhere to be

seen and come back with a rather funny dish made of chips in a bun, ordered at the end of the match in clear state of hunger. How is football a place for social inclusion then? The efforts to give a space and a voice to the communities need to be reflected to the main activity of a football club, which is football, and in this case lots seems to be done. The historical conditions must be taken into account but as much as the here and now. Again on this point Robert sees the development of a new stadium as the moment in which FC United will be unconstrained and can provide services for better social inclusion:

"I think, our culture as a founder in football club can challenge that, because if anybody wants to come up with a new food offer at our match then there's nothing really to stop them doing that, once we have our own stadium. At the moment, in our home matches we're very, very curtailed by the fact that we don't have control over the stadium entirely during the matches, but once we have our matches based in our ground the opportunities to bring in innovation, and variation, and to explore what people want to do at matches, not just with food, but with the whole event, and experiment, and it's going to be truly joyous, and it's something that we're also building towards through our community work that we want to have a number of different organisations, and groups of people that, probably, don't think of themselves as organisations, involved in the match day experience so that the full weight of Manchester's diversity should be apparent in everything. "

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has used an ethnographic approach to discuss and analyse some of the issues around the understudied world of fan-owned football clubs. It has started with a theoretical debate around the importance of establishing alternatives to try to challenge the status quo and it then moved to a brief discussion around the third sector in the UK. The interviews and the fieldwork notes have been used to analyse some of the issues around the club. It has been found a certain heterogeneity of values among the members who might not fully subscribe to the ethos of the club, at

least when promotions are starting to become difficult to achieve. Law and Mol (2002) talk about the difficulties in setting a standard for "the good" in the world of managerialism but more generally in the philosophical sense of the term. The idea of "the good" can be equally applied to Manchester United (and most big Premier League clubs) and FC United, although on different levels. Revenues seems to be "the good" for big Premier League clubs: full stadia and high ticket prices, regardless of who actually attends the matches, and FC United was born out of the acknowledgment of a different idea of "good" by some fans. FC United was founded on a clear idea of "the good", namely social improvements for the communities and the promotions of affordable football and values of cooperation. Three years of missed promotions could have changed the scenario or certainly partly exacerbated the situation, and part of the fans seem to find "the good" in a winning team, rather than one which fights mainly for social inclusion. Decreased membership and attendance could be interpreted as a signal of a reduced interest towards this type of clubs, that do not put promotions at the top of the list, if achieving them would have to come at the expenses of the financial and social sustainability of the club; this might signal a shift in "the good", that can constitute a potential threat for the club. Key strategic figures in the club made clear that although promotions can help to reach even bigger social goals, they do not constitute a reason to compromise and alter both the ethos and the day-to-day running of the club, but, as the club ultimately depends on its members, things are liable to change. Richard Hull(2011) warn us that that Third Sector organisation can head towards hybridity and might lose their roots and replicate professional best practice of managerialism. Instead of being the promoters of civil society, these organisations can unravel dark sides and self-interest. What Hull argues seems to imply that given certain conditions, fan-owned clubs might convert their practices and goals to the capitalistic machines they are fighting against.

Even the idea of establishing a sense of community seems of difficult achievement: football in the UK is based on a tradition of white working class people, mostly men, and this is reflected in the type of crowd that attend lower league football matches. Accessing the wider, multi-ethnic , communities of British cities can represent a tough challenge for this type of clubs, being built on different historical and sociological traditions. Diversity is not equally represented on the terraces, limited

also by other factors like food available on matchday. It is fundamental a to reach the communities with project of social inclusion and being at the same time accountable for them on matchday.

Those issues need further investigation and a closer involvement with the community of fans and members, as it is ultimately their club rather than staff member and board members

REFERENCES

Alvesson, M., Willmott, H. (1996) *Making Sense of Management: A Critical Introduction*, Sage: London

Casey, C. (1999) Come, Join Our Family: Discipline and Integration in Corporate Organizational Culture, *Human Relations*, 52(1), 155-178

Cornelius, N., Todres, M. T., Janjuha-Jivraj, S., Woods, A., &Wallace, J. (2008) Corporate social responsibility and the social enterprise, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 81, pp.355–370

Cornelius, N., & Trueman, M. (2007) The regeneration challenge in the developed world: Insights generated from a capabilities approach applied to the understanding of regeneration efforts in post-industrial cities. *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, 2, pp.155–161.

Crowther, P. (2006) *Our Club Our Rules*, Lulu

Diamond, J., & Southern, A. (2006). Research into regeneration: Gaps in our knowledge base. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 26(5–6),pp. 189–193

Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and punish*, London: Allen Unwin

Fournier,V. (2002) *Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities*, in: Parker, M. (2002) *Utopia and Organization*, Oxford: Blackwell

Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press

Giulianotti, R. (2002) Supporters, Followers, Fans and Flaneurs: a Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football'. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues,* 26(1), 25–46

Grint, K. (2005) *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*, Houndmills : Palgrave

Habermas, J. (1987) *Knowledge and Human Interest*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Haugh, H., Paredo, A.,M. (2011),*Critical Narratives of the Origins of the Community Interest Company,* in: Hull, R. (2011) The Third Sector, *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies*, 1

Hognestad, H.,K. (2012) Split loyalties: football is a community business, *Soccer & Society*, 13(3), 377-391

Hull, A. (2000) Neighbourhood renewal: A toolkit for regeneration, *GeoJournal*, 5, pp.301–309.

Hull, R. (2011) The Third Sector, *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies*, 1

Kim, S.,H. (2011) On the historical determinants of third sector strength: A qualitative comparative analysis, *The Social Science Journal*, 48, pp.641-650

Knights, D., Willmott, H., (2002) *Autonomy as Utopia or Dystopia*, in: Parker, M. (2002) *Utopia and Organization*, Oxford: Blackwell

Korten, D. (1995) *When Corporations Rule the World*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press

Milbourne, L., Cushman, M. (2013) From the Third Sector to the Big Society: how changing UK government policies have eroded third sector trust, *Voluntas*, 24, pp.485-508

Mol,J., Law, A. (2002) *Local Entanglements or Utopian Moves: an Inquiry into Train Accidents*, in: Parker, M. (2002) *Utopia and Organization*, Oxford: Blackwell

Morris,S.(2000) Defining the non profit sector: Some lessons from history,*Voluntas*, 11(1), pp.25–43

Myers,J., Scott Cato, M.(2011) From 'Personal' to 'Mutual': *Exploring the Opportunities for Cooperative and Mutual Forms of Ownership and Governance in the Design and Delivery of Social and Public Services* in: Hull, R. (2011) The Third Sector, *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies*, 1

Parker, M. (2002) *Utopia and Organization*, Oxford: Blackwell

Pollitt,C., & Bouckaert,G. (2004) *Public management reform: A comparative analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Poulton, G. (2009) *Cultural Participation, the Making of Distinction and the Case of Fans of FC United of Manchester*, CRESC Working Paper 73

Soriano, F. (2012) *Goal: The ball doesn't go in by chance. Management ideas from the world of football*, Houndsmill : Palgrave Macmillan

Van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the field on writing ethnography*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London

Wilson, E.,O. (2011) *Anthill: a Novel*, New York: Norton

Wallace, J., Cornerlius,N. (2011) Community Development and Social Regeneration: How the Third Sector Addresses the Needs of BME Communities in Post-Industrial Cities, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 97:1, pp.43-54

Watson, T. (2011) Ethnography, Reality, and Truth: The Vital Need for Studies of 'How Things Work' in Organisations and Management, *Journal of Management Studies*, 48:1, pp.202-217