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## **Football's ability to combat social exclusion**

### **Abstract**

Over the past few years there has been a clear shift in governmental focus on the role of sport within British society. The old maxim of 'sport for sport's sake' has been largely superseded by an approach emphasising the role of sport in helping to create a more inclusive social environment (Department for Culture, Media and Sport / Strategy Unit, 2002; Local Government Association, 2001). Sporting excellence is no longer enough on its own, rather sport is seen as a tool to be used in addressing the underlying factors which lead to the exclusion of certain individuals and communities. It is our contention that this political positioning and the related search for funding leads to over ambitious claims for what can be achieved. As the sport with the highest media and public following, football (soccer) is increasingly being challenged regarding its role in addressing this social agenda. In this paper we review some of the available evidence relating to the contribution of football and sport more generally. To do this we shall first examine how 'social inclusion' is interpreted; then, adopting a more questioning view of both football and sport, summarise what their contribution to social inclusion might realistically be. We contend that this has to mean considering a more differentiated interpretation of both sport and social inclusion.

### **Introduction**

At face value there has been a shift in the culture of football (soccer) itself. Largely driven by the global success of the Premiership in England, the game appears to be more popular than ever amid protestations that some of the old negative images, particularly of hooliganism, are on the decline. The football authorities are mindful of their responsibilities in governing the game from the grassroots upward and are involved in a variety of socially beneficial activities typified by national campaigns to combat racism and by other community-based initiatives, such as the Football in the Community programme. However, it is also argued (Wagg, 2002) that while this seeming success in transforming the public image of the game has increased its following, it actually masks a number of serious social exclusion problems and the failure of the football authorities to address them. Such difficulties are typified at national level in particular, by support for the England team which is reliant on an exclusive cultural framework centred around notions of 'Englishness', which serve to exclude others (Crabbe, 2004).

At a time when sport is being encouraged to be more critically reflective it finds itself caught in a project funding game that encourages blandishments and grand claims. These claims are typically made to curry political favour but are more often statements of faith rather than causal links established through research evidence. What is offered here is not intended as an exhaustive review but a way of grounding policy debates and avoiding a polarisation of positions by considering some of the underlying processes. We want to argue both that it is proper to treat assumptions about the good that football does with some scepticism, and that at the same time those in football should take seriously the challenge of social inclusion. While this paper draws predominantly on British material, including projects undertaken by the Centre for Leisure and Sport Research, we also incorporate studies from elsewhere

(and look beyond the high profile actions of the professional game). Moreover, concern with social inclusion through sport is now widespread (e.g. more generally in Europe, Ferrera, Matsaganis & Sacchi, 2002; in Australia, Patterson & Taylor, 2001; in the United States, Hurst, 2001; and Marger, 2001) and football firmly established as an international sport.

### **The Social Policy Background**

In the late 1990s the increasing focus on social issues in the UK was brought about by the election victory of New Labour and a recognition of the utility of cultural projects in relation to societal problems (Levitas, 1998). The debate about the role of sport (and the arts) in addressing social inclusion was stimulated by the Policy Action Team 10 report to the Social Exclusion Unit (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999). In the foreword, Chris Smith, then Secretary of State, outlined arguments subsequently reiterated by many other politicians:

... art and sport can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves.

The report suggests that sport and the arts should be seen as integral to regeneration work rather than additional since they contribute to social inclusion, the quality of life and neighbourhood renewal and "...are fundamental to community involvement and ownership of any regeneration initiative when they offer means of positive engagement in tune with local interests" (DCMS, 1999, p. 6). Sports and arts practitioners, it was argued, therefore need to acknowledge that social inclusion is a core part of their business, which may need a fundamental shift in thinking on the part of some.

With such 'social engineering' as the order of the day, conceptual clarity is important in the policy debate. Instead, what we find is a plethora of terms used almost interchangeably? In addition to social inclusion, we have neighbourhood renewal and regeneration, to which might be added social exclusion, community development, social capital, and several others (though not often 'poverty' these days) depending upon the policy debate of the time. However, our focus here is on exclusion and inclusion.

On its web site the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) explains social exclusion as:

...a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.

(<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/odpm/odpm-seu.asp>, accessed 16.9.04)

The advantage of this definition is that it extends the concept beyond the previously narrow preoccupation with employment. On the other hand, it is disappointing that the emphasis of the PAT 10 report was heavily upon consuming rather than producing and contributing. It has to be questioned how inclusion and regeneration can be expected if all that people are invited to be party to is consumption. The kind of local projects we examined (Long, Welch, Bramham, Hylton, Butterfield & Lloyd, 2002; Centre for Leisure and Sport Research, 2003) go some way to redressing that.

We are in accord with Castells' view (2000) that social exclusion needs to be understood as a set of processes rather than a condition. In other words, social exclusion means getting left out of significant political, economic and frequently socio-cultural processes. The kind of definition used by the SEU is often taken to imply that measures implemented to reduce the symptoms of exclusion (around health, education, employment, crime and housing) will serve to achieve social 'inclusion'. However, such measures are important but not sufficient in themselves. For example, getting people into work may be an important component of social inclusion, but not sufficient to achieve it. Measures that fail to address underlying processes of exclusion, will fail to promote social inclusion.

One of the key questions that usually goes unaddressed is why it should be presumed that people who are excluded want to be included, especially if it means being included in a set of values that disparages what they are. Indeed, Levitas (1996) objects to the integrationist agenda, and suggests that more fundamental questions require to be addressed about why everyone should be incorporated into the dominant vision. Hence, we contend that the crucial measure of inclusion is the ability of people to influence decision-making processes. Rather than presuming that people must be included in a dominant view of what constitutes society, citizens should have the chance to shape at least some elements of it. This tension is thrown into even sharper relief when 'social inclusion' is sometimes extended to 'cultural inclusion'.

### **What can Football Contribute to Social Inclusion?**

So if social inclusion is key, what can 'the beautiful game' contribute to achieving this goal? On the one hand football captures the attention on a scale that other endeavours struggle to replicate, and as such it is a vehicle with considerable potential to engage and communicate. On the other, some commentators contest the very nature of the modern game:

Football has grown ugly nowadays. Players dive to gain penalties; kick each other, curse and spit; feign injury and forever complain about decisions. Few games are played in generous spirit; many frequently involve fisticuffs. Off the pitch, overpaid players drunkenly roam the nightclubs and streets causing, in the case of some players, criminal injury. Coarse and abusive behaviour is not confined to the players either. Attending a football match is an invitation to sit in front of some moron screaming obscenities at the referee. Then there are the pitch invasions and the racist minority... No other sport embeds cheating so thoroughly nor routinely tolerates harassment of the officials as football does. (Davids, 2003, p. 4)

We offer this simply as a salutary reminder to football's advocates that it is not simply a repository of all that is good. Why would anyone then think to use football to promote social inclusion if, as Davids (2003) and others argue, in its current manifestation it is racist, sexist, given to violence and dependent on cheating others? These values are at odds with the spirit of social inclusion and appear to be conveniently overlooked in a policy debate that presumes fair play, teamwork and honest endeavour. In this context we ought to question whether football really is such a good thing and examine what evidence there is that sport generally, or football in particular, promotes social inclusion. The substantive evidence to support the assertion that it does is largely lacking and many of the claims made for it are based on simplistic arguments and anecdotes. The PAT 10 report itself came to the same conclusion as previous commentators (e.g. Allison & Coalter, 1996; Coalter, 1989; Glyptis, 1989; Long & Sanderson, 2001) that there is little 'hard' evidence of the social benefits that accrue across sport and the arts.

In light of the above comments, how is it possible to identify whether football contributes to social inclusion? Depending upon the concept of inclusion being used, the factors we describe in Table 1 might conventionally be seen as potential measures. The first two might more reasonably be taken to relate to what Coalter (2002) refers to as 'sporting inclusion', the remainder to ideas of social inclusion through sport.

<i>1. Involvement represents inclusion in its own right</i>	Participation benefits those concerned since the activity, of itself, is seen to be a 'good thing'. If people are involved in sport then they must be involved in society.
<i>2. Higher participation rates by groups presumed to be excluded</i>	If so-called excluded groups (e.g. minority ethnic groups, the unemployed, older people) reveal greater participation rates then inclusion has been increased.
<i>3. Improved policy indicators</i>	If involvement in sport is shown to improve those indicators currently set by the SEU as education, employment, crime, health.
<i>4. Realising human potential</i>	Benefits at the individual level (confidence, esteem, skills, etc.) or collectively as 'community capital' (extended social networks, increased community cohesion, civic pride, collective skills, etc.).
<i>5. Opening-up social structures &amp; organisations through participation</i>	Inclusion is not possible unless institutions allow, hence the significance of those projects that involve excluded people in decision-making.

**Table 1: Possible Criteria for Considering Social Inclusion Through Sport**

In this paper we look beyond the participation measures of the first two criteria. Government concerns in terms of sport and social inclusion revolve around the policy indicators [3] identified in Table 1, and tend to be formulated in terms of the first four outcome measures indicated below in Table 2. This follows naturally from the agenda that brought New Labour to power: a commitment to reduce unemployment, a promise to be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime'; a continuing commitment to protect and invest in the National Health Service; and a slogan of 'Education, Education and Education'. However, our previous research (Long et al.,

2002) suggests that we should extend this list to include three further considerations that embrace levels 4 and 5 in Table 1.

<i>Education</i>	Improved educational performance, increased employment possibilities, access to information, reduced alienation
<i>Employment</i>	Better skill levels, aptitudes, job-readiness, improved employment rates
<i>Crime</i>	Reduced delinquent behaviour and levels of crime
<i>Health</i>	Improved levels of health, increased referrals, better (and more equal) standards of health
<i>Personal development</i>	Raised self-esteem and self-confidence, interpersonal skills, control over own destiny, improved relationships with 'peer' groups
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Celebration of one's own culture, improved relationships (social connectedness), raised community cooperation, civic pride (identification with the local community)
<i>Active citizenship</i>	Raised sense of ownership or 'stakeholding', involvement in decision making, exercising rights and responsibilities, improved relationships with 'establishment' groups

**Table 2: Outcome Measures for Social Inclusion Through Sport**

We noted earlier the paucity of hard evidence related to these social inclusion objectives. It is therefore now worth examining, in the light of a number of previous studies, how football can measure its impact against these seven outcomes.

### *Employment*

Contrary to the claims of some ambitious feasibility studies, Rosentraub and Swindell (1998) conclude that large scale prestigious sports initiatives (e.g. the construction of football and other stadia) are not a significant source of economic development or job creation, and are an expensive way of delivering the jobs they do create. In smaller scale, local projects perhaps rather than creating direct employment, it is more realistic to expect a contribution towards 'job readiness' by instilling coaching, organisational and other transferable skills, even as fundamental as reliable attendance.

Certainly, enthused by their involvement in projects, participants themselves may hold very positive views about enhanced employment opportunities. The Charlton Athletic Race Equality (CARE) programme (Garland & Chakroborti, 2001) was found to offer a good example of how employment skills can be acquired through a football inspired programme. Over a two year period 400 CARE participants earned one or more governing body awards – e.g. Junior Team Managers, sports medicine, first aid, etc. These awards do not merely represent a paper qualification, but lead to raised aspirations and increased confidence to work in sport (or elsewhere).

It is because participants readily identify with football that it becomes possible for the skill development to take place, whether simply in terms of attendance, or IT, interpersonal skills or customer relations. Their activity during the course of these programmes also gives them a wider network of contacts that may provide introductions to, or information about, potential employment.

### *Education*

Sport, inside and outside schools, can have an impact on educational outcomes in terms of improved motivation of pupils, improvements in school ethos or in addressing particular problems (Shephard, 1997; Thomas, Landers, Salazar & Etnier, 1994; Zervas & Stambulova, 1999): for example, the transfer from primary to secondary school or indeed to university.

According to Levacic and Jenkins (2004) the introduction of Specialist Sports Colleges has had a beneficial impact on educational performance in terms of the grades achieved in public exams that extends well beyond improvement in PE grades (though they concede that their positive findings about performance relative to other specialist colleges do not concur with others).

Beyond the formal educational institutions there has been some success too. CLSR's work offers limited evidence: 62% of those involved in the Leeds Football Community Link programme thought their schoolwork was better as a result of their participation in the scheme (Long et al., 2002). At a national level, *Playing for Success* projects aim to raise educational standards by setting up study centres in professional clubs and other venues. They make use of youngsters' interest in all things football (rather than playing football) to engage those otherwise disinterested in education, and have achieved some success in improving levels of literacy and numeracy as well as ICT skills (Sharp et al., 2003). A recent review of assorted projects (Sallis et al., 1999) concluded that there was little evidence that sport improved educational performance. However, they also concluded that nor does it damage it, thereby helping to address some parents' fears that involvement in sport will jeopardise children's academic chances.

### *Crime*

In a strange linguistic trope much recent policy discourse aligns issues of crime with social cohesion, presumably partly in a questionable attempt at positive reframing and partly in a more laudable attempt to emphasise the significance of the social context. However this elision seems to us to be unwarranted and we retain the distinctiveness of our social cohesion domain (see below).

Over recent years much effort has been made to gather evidence on sport's ability to reduce crime. However, even then the evidence is ambiguous, and even when there appears to be a positive relationship the causal attributes appear uncertain (Nicholls, 2004). There is a general presumption that involvement is sufficient to have a positive outcome in reducing levels of crime. Our respondents typically believed it to be true that getting people involved in football will reduce crime simply by keeping them off the streets but there are doubts about the long-term impact achievable, as one of our earlier respondents noted:

*For two hours they play 5-a-side, get them off the streets, shower, and then back up the road and they're 'on the corner' again... When you shepherd them onto the minibus and take them on the astroturf they will be good, but when you're not with them their peers are a bigger influence.*

[Respondent 17 from Long & Sanderson, 2001, p. 194]

Even if people are encouraged to subscribe to the best attributes of football (co-operation through team work, fair play, respect, etc.), there is no necessary reason why that should extend beyond their sports participation into the rest of their lives. The involvement of other community support services is important in helping to maintain positive benefits (Morris, Sallybanks, Willis & Makkai, 2003). The Youth Justice Board (2001) claims considerable reductions in crime as a result of summer sports programmes such as *Splash* and *Youth Inclusion Programmes* (YIPs), but the methodology used in reaching this conclusion is questionable (e.g. measures used, nature of recording, area covered, timespan involved). Nonetheless, they claim to have recorded a reduction in crime of 14-32% (arrests & exclusions from school having fallen too), though conventional team sports are the least well attended. However, there is counter evidence indicating that sports participants are more likely to offend (Begg, Langley, Moffitt & Marshall, 1996).

To be effective, the nature of any sports programme needs to be different depending upon whether the aim is diversionary – i.e. to stop people getting involved in crime – or therapeutic – i.e. to prevent people re-offending (Utting, 1996; Taylor, Crow, Irvine & Nichols, 1999). Unfortunately, those most in need of help commonly get excluded from such projects, either because staff cannot cope with them or because of problems arising from being seen to reward bad behaviour.

Additionally, a factor of key interest to funding agencies is the cost effectiveness of sports programmes designed to decrease crime. It is useful therefore to recall the Coopers & Lybrand (1994) study for the Prince's Trust which demonstrated the large savings to the public purse of keeping even small numbers of potential offenders out of trouble for a year. They estimated that the projects they examined “would be cost effective if they prevented between 1-in-22 and 1-in-75 of their participants from pursuing any criminal activity over a 12 month period”<sup>1</sup> (p. 2). And to that can be added the reduction in distress caused to victims. Projects written-off as failures by the application of too exacting standards may therefore be extremely cost-effective.

### *Health*

Despite evidence garnered over the years (Townsend & Davidson, 1980), it is only relatively recently that there has been welcome recognition of the health divide in the UK (Acheson, 1998; Forbes, 2004) and this has been accompanied by an appreciation that solutions may not be just medical but have a social dimension too. It might initially be thought that in health terms at least the positive contribution of sport would be incontrovertible. However, randomised control trials (the gold standard in medical research) are few and far between.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that these figures related to people who were known offenders rather than simply those ‘at risk’.



The claims for the health contribution of sport are founded on the supposition that more physical activity promotes better health. Most available evidence, though, relates to the benefits of physical activity and it is presumed rather than proven that these benefits extend into sport. The most commonly cited benefits are physiological, particularly relating to improved cardiovascular function (Surgeon General, 1996). However, there is not agreement on what constitutes sufficient activity (in terms of intensity, duration and frequency) to secure a return in terms of improved health. Although the 'official' position in the UK encourages adults to participate in 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity five times a week (Chief Medical Officer, 2004)<sup>2</sup>, some insist that even low levels of activity bring benefits, while others insist that only very intensive activity will do (Gilson, 2003). Thus it is a contentious point whether involvement in sport will necessarily result in sufficiently frequent, vigorous or prolonged activity to produce the recognised physiological benefits. Against some of those formulations much sports participation would fail, being too gentle and relaxed. Nonetheless, sport has advantages over the promotion of physical activity in general, since it can have greater intrinsic appeal to participants, thereby encouraging continued involvement (adherence).

Concerns about the amount of activity notwithstanding, there is some evidence that self-reported measures of health and wellbeing are improved by participation, as for example in the Leeds Football Community Link programme (Long et al., 2002). This may well be related to the psychological benefits thought to derive from physical activity through reducing anxiety and depression (Biddle, Fox & Boucher, 2000; Fox, 1997; Mutrie & Biddle, 1995; Sonstroem & Morgan, 1989). Once again though, such claims do not go uncontested. Counter-intuitive though it may seem, Roberts & Brodie (1992) found no such benefits to be derived from recreational sport.

Despite the potential for positive physical and mental effects, Roberts & Brodie (1992) also note that getting significant benefits through sport is hard. Moreover, they maintain that sport does nothing to reduce health inequalities as those most in need tend not to take part. In addition, sport can cause participants individual 'costs' in terms of injuries, accidents and general wear and tear on the body, not to mention more general costs to employers and the nation arising from loss of work days and strain on the health services.

The fun, adherence and wellbeing of some are matched by the aversion and alienation of others. However, on balance, even though playing in goal may produce only a limited cardiovascular return and the weather is sometimes unpleasant, we are persuaded that football generally offers the prospect of an enjoyable way of achieving health benefits.

### *Personal Development*

It seems that the most common type of contribution in this area either advocates the use of sport and PE as a means of supporting personal development or a discussion of what PE in particular needs to do to promote this most effectively. However the associated logic models are suspect, based on presumptions that participation will make the individual a better person. It is therefore not surprising that researchers have

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<sup>2</sup> Also endorsed by public health authorities in other countries, like the Surgeon General in the United States.

called for greater conceptual clarity in support of empirical evidence about how team games can enhance people's personal, social and moral education (Theodoulides & Armour, 2001). Just how are participants being developed? Writing in the *Guardian* of his early disillusionment with sport, Witchalls (2004, p. 17) described his encounters with football:

I was one of the last to be picked for teams. To make up for it, I would manage to get the ball from the opposing team, only to find that someone from my own team had tackled the ball from me, convinced I would only screw things up. I soon lost interest in trying to get possession of the ball and learned the art of running meaningfully with the pack while contributing nothing at all.

Witchall's encounter with football is perhaps not quite the sporting metaphor we would normally choose for developing life skills. Moreover, just as writers like Connell (1987) and Messner (1990, 1992) point out that boys' experience of sport is by no means 'gender neutral', it also contributes to the dominant values associated with ethnicity, sexuality and physical capability. It is through their participation in competitive sport that boys in particular learn dominant cultural values associated with the subordination of women and others, and construct idealized images of what it means to be a (heterosexual) male. "Prowess of this kind becomes a means of judging one's masculinity" (Connell, 1987, p. 84-5). Gender distinction is inculcated at an early age within sport, as boys learn to perceive physical strength, robustness and aggression as masculine traits (Laitinen & Tiihonen, 1990; White, Young & McTeer, 1995) and to employ derogatory terms for lesser-status males considered not to meet this prevailing definition of masculinity (Messner, 1992).

Nevertheless, when administered in more enlightened settings, football offers the prospect of success to some who would not otherwise experience it, and it is usually assumed by project workers that personal development is a by-product of involvement. In almost every project we studied (Long et al., 2002), project workers were convinced that the norm for those on their respective programmes was a fulfilling experience that made them more rounded individuals, better able to appreciate and respond to what life has to offer (e.g. progression from a youngster 'at risk' to an Olympic Medallist). Within the Leeds Football Community Link (LFCL) football programme 78-85% of participants reported that they were variously more confident, more relaxed ('chilled') and less bored.

Despite the difficulty inherent in trying to show that football (or any sporting projects) improves the government's four social inclusion policy indicators (education, employment, health and crime) it might be assumed to be possible to show that the hoped-for personal development is intermediary to securing these goals. However, personal development is not an easy concept to measure, even when broken down into its constituent parts (e.g. self-confidence). In addition, assessment of a project's success is often based on anecdotal rather than systematic evidence (Long et al., 2002). Despite the demonstrative power of personal histories, these are too often based on the stories of successful survivors rather than a considered evaluation of all including those who dropped out. The consequences of these processes of exclusion (whether through racism, sexism or homophobia) are normally underestimated

because research focuses on those in the sport and accounts from those like Moran (2000) who have been driven out are rare.

It is also difficult to link personal attributes to particular behaviours. For example, Emler's (2001) review found that low self-esteem does not necessarily lead to criminal behaviour and those with high esteem are more likely to be racist and reject desired social influences. If that is indeed true, enhancing self-esteem and confidence through football will not reduce delinquency per se.

### *Social Cohesion*

In the wake of another round of urban unrest, this time in northern, former mill towns, Denham (2001, p. 28) concluded:

Sporting and cultural opportunities can play an important part in re-engaging disaffected sections of the community, building shared social capital and grass roots leadership through improved cross-cultural interaction.

Football, like sport in general, can increase the 'inter-connectedness' of individuals by bringing them together and providing them with a wider network of contacts. Almost without exception, respondents in the LFCL programme reported meeting more people and making new friends, or 'bonding' as it is referred to in the current discourse around social capital (Putnam, 2000). Although at LFCL almost as many said that they were now able to get on better with other people, football programmes may not be as successful at 'bridging' between diverse groups (Long, et al., 2000; and Collins & Kay (2003) argue the same for sport generally), typically contributing to processes of 'othering' that emphasise difference to the detriment of those left out.

Moreover, ascertaining direct 'cause and effect' is problematic within any particular sporting context. Coakley (2004) is critical of how the relationship between sports experiences and socialisation processes has been oversimplified within popular discourse (and much past research) about sport as a tool in character building. Instead, sports can be seen "as sites for socialization experiences, rather than as causes of specific socialization outcomes .... These experiences take on a meaning only through social relationships that occur in particular social and cultural contexts." (Coakley, 2004, p. 124).

Nonetheless, football can provide people with a means to work together in common purpose via shared goals and values (although this rather depends on the values in question, as the earlier quote from Davids illustrates). CARE emphasises shared respect with a module on learning about equalities and cultural diversity designed to challenge prejudice and stereotypes (Garland & Chakroborti, 2001). Similar agendas are incorporated within other sports-based programmes, including those operated by the Youth Charter for Sport in Manchester (YCS, 1998). People benefiting from these projects are then expected to give something back to the local community (e.g. as a coach or role model / mentor). Their continued participation alone ensures some level of social engagement. It is also generally felt that sport provides a potential contribution to collective wellbeing; for example, a successful football team can promote community pride and collective identity, though, it must be remembered that teams lose and get relegated too. Despite this potential, such contributions are rarely

given much attention by clubs, prompting the Independent Football Commission (IFC, 2004) to note a general lack of recognition by clubs of the positive part that their community work can play in addressing social issues, and their general mismanagement of neighbourhood relations.

### *Active Citizenship*

The active involvement of individuals in their local community is part of New Labour's notion of a 'stakeholding' society. Some of the projects we have worked with (Long et al., 2002) are able to demonstrate their commitment to active citizenship with participants 'putting something back', e.g. through volunteering. The way in which those who have benefited from CARE then contribute to Charlton Athletic's 'Red, White & Black' race awareness days and other community events gives an indication of stakeholding in both the project and the local community, as do the contributions to training local clubs.

We contend that when considering social inclusion it is important to question what it is people are being invited to be included in. Is it something desirable or something closer to Davids' interpretation or Witchalls' experience? As we argued above, for inclusion to be complete, people have to have a say in the decision-making. Many projects encourage socially excluded people to take part but do not provide them with any role in decision-making. Even when sports projects take active steps to involve participants in decision-making, this process is typically not set-up by participants themselves – they are invited to contribute to somebody else's project/vision. In this respect, the LFCL programme provides a more positive model through its insistence that teams have to be community initiatives, not set-up by LFCL staff.

Our earlier work on race and ethnicity (Long et al., 2000) demonstrated the absence of those from minority ethnic groups in the football institutions (County and District Associations, League Committees, etc.) that run the game. This is typical of the exclusion of certain (usually disadvantaged) groups from positions of power and influence and is indicative of how knowledge (e.g. of how systems work) is essential to exercising rights and responsibilities. In light of football's history it is important to acknowledge the exclusion that is racism. For example, examining the position of minority ethnic communities within sport in Scotland, Scott Porter Research & Marketing (2001, p. 34) concluded:

At the core of the issue, and creating by far the largest barrier, is an experience of fear of racial discrimination. Racial discrimination is not just about physical or verbal abuse but also includes institutional racism.

Not being a part of these institutions leads to a perpetuation of the mechanisms that exclude.

### **Why Should Those in Football be Interested in Social Inclusion?**

As the IFC (2004, p. 41) noted: "English football has the potential to become a powerful international exemplar of a business delivering and manifesting racial integration at all levels. It can do it. Will it?" Unfortunately, social inclusion

generally is not seen as part of football's core business, which can be summarised as the professional game concerned with commercial and playing success, the 'grassroots' game organised for people's opportunity to play, and the governing bodies of the game concerned with its regulation. Most people involved in football do not consider themselves to be community workers as such, so why should we expect the institution of football to be tackling this social inclusion agenda?

Even for the self-interested within football there are a number of potential, positive aspects to be highlighted:

- Increased size of market – engaging with more people increases interest, participation and spending on football.
- Unearthing talent – the involvement of more people in the game increases the available pool of talent. Although this is not necessarily the be all and end all, it is not insignificant, and it applies at all levels of the game.
- Responsibility for football's image – engagement in the social inclusion agenda provides positives to replace the negatives of hooliganism, which abound in the game.
- Social responsibility – as the 'national game' football cannot be separate from society. Much as it might like to it cannot absolve itself from its social responsibility. However, in terms of racial equality in particular, it 'has been slow to change and dilatory in building on its successes' (IFC, 2004). Arguments like, "*There's racism in football because there's racism in society and it's society's responsibility to solve it*", are inadequate and cannot be defended.
- Access to public funds – a not insignificant consideration. Engagement with the social agenda is likely to be significant for local authority, Lottery and other public funding initiatives.

The reason sport in general and football in particular potentially have such an important role to play is that they can act as a point of contact with people who would not otherwise want to engage. As one of the respondents in an earlier study observed:

*Sports participation involves a certain amount of self-discipline in any case. It teaches them a lot more self-control although they don't realise that's going on. If you told them 'today we're going to have a lesson in self-discipline and self-control'... whoah!* [Respondent 2 from Long & Sanderson, 2001, p. 194]

Football projects capture the imagination. This partly explains the achievements we discussed earlier, of the *Playing for Success* projects around the country.

## **Discussion**

At the same time as recognising the special potential of football projects to address the social inclusion agenda, caution is appropriate. It is fair to point out that the initiatives we describe only represent relatively small projects not 'football' as a whole. Beyond those, the Football in the Community programme has expanded considerably over the past decade, offering many positive examples of engagement within local neighbourhoods and involvement with socially excluded groups. But even then, there are considerable differences in the values adopted, the quality of the

schemes being delivered, and weaknesses in the national infrastructure of this programme (McGuire & Fenoglio, 2004).

Projects may (often rightly) claim success in attracting new participants and therefore be fairly satisfied with the running of their schemes. However, there will undoubtedly be other 'harder to reach' groups who are not currently getting involved for a variety of reasons. In this sense, if programmes remain unchanged they may actually serve to heighten the exclusion of others, rather than increasing opportunities by seeking out new ways of targeting a wider audience not accessed through traditional channels. The IFC (2004) notes the need for more effort by football in integrating both disabled supporters and minority ethnic groups. They reach a particularly depressing conclusion regarding the latter:

There is no room for complacency, especially as the slow pace of change is damaging perceptions of the game, and of the will of the governing bodies to act. Too little is being delivered, and too slowly (p. 9).

In this respect, things do not appear to have advanced significantly since Bradbury's (2001) survey of clubs in the Premier and Football Leagues, regarding racism in football (88 of the 92 clubs contributed). While nearly two thirds of clubs claimed that they already appealed to all members of the community and one third felt that they were already 'successful' in attracting black and Asian fans to matches, according to supporter surveys, the actual level of 'active' minority ethnic support for most football clubs in England was estimated at between 0-2% of the total crowd.

At the national level too, the chauvinistic support may exclude many (Crabbe, 2004). Even if people are apparently welcomed, we still have to consider what it is they are being invited to be part of. Earlier on, we used illustratively the experiences of Davids and Witchalls to contest the niceness of football, and it is important to be aware of the tensions, ambiguities and paradoxes involved. As Carrington & McDonald (2001, p. 12) point out, "sport, like many other cultural areas, is a site of contestation, resistance and struggle, whereby dominant ideologies are both maintained and challenged".

There is often a temptation for projects to claim a wide range of benefits to make themselves more attractive politically and increase their chances of funding. This may result in the construction of an agenda which becomes difficult to deliver and projects thus might be better advised to address more modest claims. There is certainly no reason to expect to show major benefits in each of the categories in Table 2 above. However, it is important to identify whether apparently successful projects are securing social inclusion. For example, football projects delivered in disadvantaged areas do not necessarily benefit the socially excluded. Moreover, even if the project is working with the socially excluded and delivering benefits to them it need not necessarily be doing anything to promote social inclusion.

Notwithstanding these words of caution, football projects can make a difference to the lives of some in disadvantaged groups. It is perhaps disconcerting that provision for young people in particular so often seems to be validated only by extrinsic benefits (especially crime reduction). Its strength also lies in its capacity to improve the quality of life.

## Conclusion

Sport's struggle for policy inclusion has coincided with a government searching anxiously for new solutions, thereby prompting this new found interest in contributions to social inclusion. We endorse Patriksson's (1995, p. 128) observation:

The point is that sport has the potential both to improve and inhibit an individual's personal growth. The futility of arguing whether sport is good or bad has been observed by several authors. Sport, like most activities, is not a priori good or bad, but has the potential of producing both positive and negative outcomes. Questions like 'what conditions are necessary for sport to have beneficial outcomes?' must be asked more often.

Because the desired outcomes from sports participation are "only a possibility" (Svoboda, 1994) there is a need to consider *sufficient conditions* (those under which the potential outcomes are achieved). In looking forwards, football needs to address this question of what conditions are necessary if it is to make a substantial impact in combating social exclusion. Carefully applying logic models to the various elements of Table 2 should help to clarify that. Whatever the current state of play, football's institutions need to be made open to all, even those who may currently be viewed as 'outsiders'. People need to feel they can play a part in running the game, since true inclusion is conditional upon the chance to share in the decision-making process.

Praiseworthy as individual actions may be there will be no real impact unless all sectors of the game are involved to make sure that the ethos of football is imbued with the principles of inclusion. This demands a proactive approach from elite clubs down to grass roots level, in translating policy into action and avoiding accusations of piecemeal delivery or tokenism. This has to incorporate the national association through county associations down to local clubs and involve administrators, officials, coaches, players and spectators. Football should not shirk its own responsibility. At the same time it should expect to be part of a wider initiative, collaborating with others rather than 'going it alone' – other partners more accustomed to working with excluded groups have to be 'included'.

Some of the faltering moves towards social inclusion may not make national headlines. However, football should celebrate simple goals and be wary of making excessive claims about what can be achieved. Any case is weakened if it cannot be demonstrated in reality. Just like tap-ins from two feet, modest goals effectively delivered can be immensely valuable.

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