

## **‘More than a Club’. Football as Social Capital? FC Barcelona<sup>1</sup>**

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...the difference between us and similar clubs of our size, lies precisely in the fact that the existence of FC Barcelona – its social consequence, cannot be explained solely as a result of its sporting success. Such success cannot adequately account for the importance and transcendence of the club. Within our club, there is a great diversity of people who have joined for a whole variety of different reasons: sporting, family, friendships, emotional commitment and also because Barça has been seen as representing and guaranteeing a certain progressive ideal, as well as democratic values.

(FC Barcelona president, Joan Laporta, ‘The Spirit of FC Barcelona’, Speech to the London School of Economics, Monday, 7, March, 2005)

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quality of a society’s social interactions...Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together.

(The World Bank, 1999)

It seems strange that little academic endeavour has been devoted to football as social capital given the sport’s significant place in community and society. There are a range of studies on general football history and the histories of individual clubs. These studies have in turn generated a large number of texts looking at the growth of football as a global sport, football hooliganism, the economics of football, the architecture of football stadia, and the study of certain

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football clubs in regard to social history. All these aspects of football register, but the study of football as social capital is neglected.<sup>2</sup>

This absence is even more surprising given the increasing academic attention to the concept of social capital. When many other elements of society are changing such as local government, wars, employment, churches, religiosity, communities, the links between a community and its sports clubs remain. Indeed, the links between a sports club and an individual can be even stronger and as journalist Aidan Smith noted (2006: 2), many individuals will change their homes, employment, political and religious affiliations and even their partners but never change their affiliation to their sports club. Many football fans often go to their first football match with a relative when they are infants and become fans for life. Moreover, some fans often get engaged to be married at one of their team's games, then get married on the pitch at their favourite club, and finally get their ashes thrown over the pitch when they die. Football straddles life from the cradle to the grave or the womb to the tomb.

In our previous research on community media, intergenerational relationships, trade unions and miners welfares in Scotland, we have sought to look at the forgotten and less visible signifiers of social capital. We have argued that this phenomenon has an history, an 'archaeology' and a regional as well as a local dimension. Ultimately, we contend that the building of social capital is not accidental; rather it is an embodiment of complex historical, social and political agency which is part of the development, construction and re-development of collective community identities.

In this brief exposition we posit FC Barcelona as a putative case study in social capital. Accordingly, we begin with a brief look at Barça's significant and turbulent history and evolution. We then describe the key sociological facets of social capital. Lastly we seek to situate the club in a dynamic model with regard to the creation and maintenance of this value as community development.

As is well documented elsewhere, social capital is an influential social science concept that has witnessed a proliferation of

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of such studies are available in our Bibliography. See especially, Lanfranchi (2001 & 2004). Also of interest in this respect is, Watt (2009).

articles in academic journals in recent years. Simply put, this value is the ‘capital’ inherent in developing community activity, civic life, volunteering, and associational involvement.

Interestingly, and empirically, the roots of this concept can be traced back over time. For example, the main proponent of this perspective, Robert Putnam, in his book, *Making Democracy Work* (1993), found that in Italy successful local governments were those that historically exhibited high levels of associational life and trust. The theorist found that the historical roots of the civic community were related to “astonishingly deep enduring traditions of civic involvement and social solidarity” that could be traced back to the 11th century (Putnam, 2000: 345–346). In his summary of Putnam’s findings on Italian government Halpen wrote:

Putnam’s argument was essentially that the differential success of the regional governments resulted from stable differences in social capital between the regions. The most successful regional governments were generally in the north (of Italy). These areas had high levels of social capital as measured by participation in ‘horizontal’ associational organisations, such as choral societies and high levels of reported social trust between strangers. (2005: 8)

Although the people who actively participated in associational life are long dead, their activities leave behind traces, *momento mori*, of their contribution. These traces are familiar to archaeologists and landscape historians both on and below the land. However, for those seeking evidence of social capital, these traces can also be found in art, in public buildings and associational bodies. As an example, where we can see these traditions portrayed pictorially is the Lorenzetti murals on Good and Bad Government in the Hall of the Nine in the *Pallazo Pubblico* in Siena.



Photo: courtesy of P. Denning

This work is allegorical and details what is required of the governed to make and maintain a good community. It also shows the effects of bad government. Behind the symbols, the allegory and the focus on the elite, we can glimpse both the Siennese army and the working people, though the mural sees them as the recipients of the enlightened government of the Nine and not as the creators of social capital through associational activities. The public of Sienna were developing their own associational activities, however, with the emergence of sporting events and carnival in the public square *Piazza del Campo*. The now world famous Palio race with its *Contradas* (neighbourhood based groupings) emerged in the late medieval period.

Both the murals and the *Palio* show that the concept of community is being both contested and played with, and associational activity takes on many guises. Some of these are formal and largely male led activities, such as those held in the Hall of the Nine in the *Palazzo Pubblico*. Others, such as the *Contradas*, were informal and community led and defined. These activities had involvement by women, children, the elderly as well as men. Their voices are never heard, but they are portrayed at work and at play in the mural. Yet,

while the Hall of the Nine is now devoid of its former activities, the *Palio* and its *Contradas* remain.

The development and growth of association football in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had close links both to the new military forms, factories and trade unions. In place of murals and public palaces there were clubs and stadia. While Putnam has looked at armed forces, employment and unions to study social capital, the informal and worker-led developments have often escaped serious study. As a result, there is little, if any scholarship that has linked the theory of social capital and the phenomenon of football. There is limited research on football's role in community development over time in Italy or elsewhere. This oversight is something we seek to begin to address in this article with regard to FC Barcelona.

As such, we offer this paper as a position statement, a work in progress. We argue that by looking at FC Barcelona through the lens of social capital we can begin to outline how a football club can develop a community agenda in the community, beyond the turnstiles, simultaneously suggesting that Barça's agenda for community development is also one which reflects social capital.

### **Social capital theory as community development**

The emergence of social capital as a popular concept is directly attributable to the publication of Robert Putnam's classic book, *Bowling Alone*, in 2000. In Putnam's schema, this value relates to social networks, mutual support, co-operation, trust and norms of reciprocity associated with these networks. Ultimately, social capital is about levels of community activity and civic organisation. Where there are high levels of social capital then local communities are healthier, wealthier, cleverer and less tainted by social ills such as crime.

Putnam's theory revolves around the development/demise of community, civic engagement, social and voluntary participation in organisations, institutions, groups, and agencies in society. He intimates that social associations and levels of participation in community type groupings reflect the level of social capital in society.

Here, the phenomenon can be an individual or a collective asset and is measured in terms of participation rates in related organisations such as unions, churches, political parties, bowling leagues, sports clubs, voluntary groups and associations.

The theorist argues that social networks have value; so just as a hammer (physical capital) or a university education (human capital) can increase productivity, so too can social contacts for groups and individuals. Here, social networks come in different shapes and sizes such as the school class, family unit, civic organisation, church, political party, trades union, professional associations and again to this list we might reasonably add football clubs. Putnam established empirically in the USA that stocks of social capital had declined dramatically after the post Second World War baby boom as people were less engaged than previously in informal socialising, civic, associational and community activities, preferring now to 'bowl alone.'

It is important to differentiate between the various component dimensions of social capital, namely 'bonding,' 'bridging,' and 'linking' (Putnam, 2000: 22). In its bonding, social capital is a kind of 'community glue' characterised by exclusive and strong links amongst group members. Within this process there is a strong sense of solidarity, shared identity and security among members of a homogeneous group with a common purpose that connects them such as a club, the family or community organisation.

The bridging element of this value is characterised by a network of weak ties which bring together people in similar situations with different interests and views, such as trade unions or associations which link people from different age, ethnic and backgrounds. This type of social capital is outward looking and reaches across social divides between people. The final component, linking, is described as the connection between people who have different levels of political power, or come from different social classes. This element links unlike people in dissimilar situations wherein, say, a road sweeper may become associated with a professor to advance a community cause.

Overall, social capital relates to the resources that accrue to an individual by virtue of being in a network of institutionalised

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition where people embed themselves in that network for potential future returns. This phenomenon, then, revolves around the concept that relationships matter and that social networks are assets that allow people to build communities, knit communal fabric and commit to one another. Social capital is about building communities, developing civic association, engagement and participation in the collective, incubating and cultivating a sense of belonging. The phenomenon yields benefit, either psychological or physical, through reciprocity, trust, norms and sanctions. For Lin, the value:

is rooted in social networks and social returns, and must be measured to its root. Therefore, social capital can be defined as resources embedded in a social structure (...) Thus conceived, social capital contains three elements intersecting structure and action: the structural (embeddedness, opportunity, accessibility) and action-oriented (use) aspects. (2005: 12)

### **‘Més que un club’**

This section offers a brief historical overview of FC Barcelona’s history through the lens of social capital. Firstly we consider the institution as an embodiment of Catalan identity in its structures such as membership and supporters associations. We then proceed to evaluate Barça as a key repository of Catalan identity during the Franco years and, later, in democratic Spain. Finally, we examine FC Barcelona in the global arena as a patron of UNICEF and one of the largest clubs in the world.

### **FC Barcelona: an embodiment of bonding social capital**

FC Barcelona was founded during the months of October/November, 1899 by a group of Spaniards and non-Spaniards led by Swiss national, Joan Gamper. A decade later the club would have 8,000 members. Interestingly and importantly, by way of contrast, other football clubs founded in the same historical era did not develop a fan based model of ownership like that devised by this club. Gamper

suggested the original idea of setting up a 'sports' club, and it was he in 1908, the year when the club was 're-founded,' who suggested that the club should also be a pro-Catalan institution and a social actor with a strong focus on bonding links. This can be seen in the club's statutes where Article 4 refers to the second function of the club which calls for:

the promotion and participation in social, cultural, artistic, scientific or recreational activities that are adequate and necessary for maintaining the public representation and projection that the club enjoys, the fruit of a permanent tradition of loyalty and service to club members, citizens and Catalonia. (from club website)

The structure of the club reflects this in terms of ownership: essentially, the proprietors of the club are the fans, not a rich business magnate or conglomerate of capitalist directors. Barça's membership (*socis*) in September, 2009, numbered over 170,000 and they participate in the running of the club. As Burns has noted,

The club remains, according to its statutes, faithful to the democratic principles of its founding fathers - a 'private association without profit motive, owned and controlled by its membership.' (2000: 25, 39 & 347)

Thus Barcelona, as an institution, displays strong 'bonding' opportunities for members. Ball further notes the broad base of the support of this multi-sport (*polideportiva*) establishment which, 'succeeds in symbolically incorporating the whole community by extending football base into other sports, namely basketball, handball and hockey' (2006: 83). FC Barcelona has teams for a number of disciplines and was founded as the community's sports club. The club carried this aspect further with the development of the first *penyes* in 1944. As we shall see below, *penyes* are more than just a fan base as they play a part of the decision making process of the institution as without the backing of the *penyes* the club's directors cannot really act. Their influence is also economic. Without a rich owner or patron, the club sought other ways to develop and it was, for example, the



first association of *penyes* who helped raise the finances to build the Camp Nou stadium, opened in 1957.

### **FC Barcelona: an example of bridging social capital during the Franco years**

The club's philosophy has deep historical roots with the commitment to the defence of democratic rights and freedoms. This is underscored the repression suffered by the Catalans' during General Primo de Rivera's subjugation in the 1920s followed by Franco's repressive authoritarian reign (1939-1975). It was in the 1920s and 1930s then that the seeds of the symbiotic relationship between the club's identity, Catalonia, politics, community development and football were sown. This was a theme expounded in the newspaper *La Rambla* in the 1920s, one that struggled initially to take root but was to flourish many years later and became part of the very ethos and socio-political fabric of the institution, very much a given today as epitomised by the mantra, 'more than a club'.

The Spanish Civil War has been described as the, 'apotheosis of mistrust, the breakdown of a community, and as a consequence, the destruction of social solidarity' (Perez-Diaz, 2004: 252) and, as we shall see, trust is an integral aspect of social capital. Franco's xenophobia prohibited non-Castilian lexis and, in this environment of paranoia, the Catalan language was proscribed, along with other tongues associated with democracy, like English and French. Castilian nomenclature was imposed and the name changed to Barcelona Club de Fútbol (the original version was re-instated with official indulgence in 1974 to celebrate the 75th anniversary). The dictatorship set about repressing regional cultures, a policy whose violence was anticipated by the execution of club president, Josep Sunyol, by Francoist troops in August, 1936.

Sunyol had wanted to create a bridge, an articulation of links between football and politics, coining the term, 'sport and citizenship', a device indicative in itself of social capital. Sunyol had written that 'To speak of sport is to speak of race, enthusiasm, and the optimistic struggle of youth. To speak of citizenship is to speak to the Catalan

civilisation, liberalism, democracy, and spiritual endeavour' (Burns, 2000: 98-99).

In this respect Ball underlines the significance of the event claiming that Sunyol's death was, 'the truly defining moment of the club, the desecration of an ideology in bud, of cultural separatism, independence, the right to autonomy. It proved even then, Barça was more than a club, and this sense of historical continuity affords some comfort to the bearers of the flag...' (Ball, 2006: 99).

The official slogan, today visibly spelt out in the colours of the seats opposite the main stand, was coined in January, 1968, by club president Narcís de Carreras to emphasis the social relevance of the institution for Catalonia: a significance rooted in the origins of the club which was to acquire appreciable importance during the Franco years.

### **FC Barcelona post 1975: Developing linking forms of social capital**

The first president of the post Franco era, Agustí Montal, was replaced by Josep Lluís Núñez who was elected club president in 1978. Núñez was the club's guiding force until 2000. Success on the field saw Barcelona win the league championship with Johan Cruyff in 1974, the European Cup Winners Cup in 1979 and yet again in 1982 and 1989. According to the club's official web site the club expanded continuously in this period from 66,000 members in 1974 to 77,000 in 1978, rising to 108,000 by 1988. Likewise, there was a parallel increase in the number of supporters clubs from 86 in 1979 to almost 700 in 1993. Clearly, success on the field and mobilisation in the exercise of democratic freedoms brought a surge in the membership.

In 1999, the club celebrated its centenary embracing the slogan, 'El centenari de tots' ('Everyone's Centenary'). The post Franco development of the club culminated in the success of manager Johan Cruyff's 'Dream Team' which won four consecutive league titles between 1991 and 1994 and the club's first European Cup at Wembley Stadium in 1992. However, the same decade also brought a degree of political in-fighting amongst various factions who vied for presidential power.

On 15, June 2003, Joan Laporta, a lawyer and politician was elected club president ushering in another successful era for the club both on and off the pitch. Under his stewardship the team won their second and third European Cup/Champions league finals, adding to their curriculum the world club cup in 2009. In the same year, membership reached a total of 172,938.

Laporta was elected for a second term in the summer of 2006 and he continued to promote the values associated with the club: Catalan nationalism, civilian duty, and a universal perspective. The institution's dimension of social commitment has sought to move beyond the forms of social capital classified as bonding and bridging to those of linking, as illustrated by the relationship UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, with whom a unique shirt sponsorship agreement was established in 2006. According to this deal Barcelona will donate \$1.9 million per year over five years to support UNICEF programmes. UNICEF, the world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, is on the ground working for children in over 150 countries, supporting child health and nutrition, sanitation and education.

Meanwhile, the *Fundació FC Barcelona*, the social identity of the club established in 1994, consciously works to promote solidarity in the area of the club's social, educational and cultural activities. Linking with UNICEF has allowed Barça to make a contribution to the world's poorest children becoming 'more than a club' beyond Catalonia in the process. To date, for example, UNICEF has used the money to support programmes benefiting children with HIV in Swaziland. Laporta hopes his successor will carry forward the club's policies of public spiritedness, pride in Catalan heritage, promotion of democracy, humanitarianism, solidarity, individual and collective freedoms.

In this respect, The Foundation, which was originally committed to promoting these activities in Catalonia, is now worldwide. Recognition of this international philanthropic dimension was achieved in 2007 when FC Barcelona and UNICEF won a Spirit of Sport Award in recognition of their pioneering community work. The Laureus World Sports Awards celebrate the, 'universal power of

using sports as a tool for social change' and acknowledge those who take action 'to create a better world'.

### **FC Barcelona and its history: social capital taken further**

In terms of social capital and its components of linking, bridging, bonding, reciprocity, trust and support networks, one can point to the existence of over 1,054 *penyas*, a *penya*, as indicated above, being a combination of supporters' club and action group. These groupings, independent associations, constituted under article 22 of the Spanish Constitution and governed by their own statutes since 1997, are officially recognised by the club and have a right to vote on the Club Advisory Council. The regulations which apply to their existence are published on the official FC Barcelona web site and includes a 'statement of motives' that stress their importance as networks that offer a means of promoting the central qualities of 'civic pride, social integration, a sporting attitude, solidarity, democracy, Catalanism, and other values which reflect the club's commitment to society as a whole.'

Indeed, any group not in line with these values will not be legally registered. These connections entail reciprocal obligations to others within the network and if the shared norms, expectations and objectives are not embraced then membership will be withheld or rescinded. However, once officially enrolled as a certified, bona fide *penya* the group can enjoy, 'all the benefits and privileges provided for in the statutes of FC Barcelona in function of its integration into the social life of the Club.' Once a year FC Barcelona organises a Worldwide Official Supporters Club Meeting to promote the institution's spirit – the network has global representation.

Surprisingly, little work has been undertaken in Spain on our present topic but one author has argued that Spain lacks strong social capital indicators with evidence of weak associative networks and participation in informal networks and a greater inclination to join societal associations, 'examples of which include sports, recreational, cultural, and educational associations of various sorts'. Spanish social capital, according to Perez-Diaz has a strong base in family networks and other networks of informal cooperation, emphasising *pandillas*

such as sports associations, and *fiestas*. (Perez-Diaz, 2004: 272)  
Interestingly Burns quotes a typically enthusiastic Barça fan who said,

I don't know if you can call us tribal. I don't like the word. I prefer to see myself as part of a collective fiesta in which I can celebrate the great opportunity of being surrounded by others who feel the way I do. The club belongs to us; we are linked to it as if were a vital element of our existence. (Burns, 2000: 45)

Evidently, this is a clear indicator of the process of bonding and linking within the framework of social capital. Another example cited by Burns is that of a young fan, José María González, who wrote a book on his experience as a fan noting on winning of the Spanish league in March, 1985, their first championship success in 14 years:

What I learned that day was that the people of FC Barcelona can show themselves more than willing to assert their sense of community, which is almost tribal, but which is more like one giant fiesta, a ritual of engagement that is set instinctively in the collective subconscious. (Burns, 2000: 276)

Here again we can see how through the 'informal ties' of football, fans embed themselves in a social network in return for a collective sense of identity, what Putnam terms, 'generalised reciprocity', bringing meaning and success to life through supporting a club with passion. Clearly, participation in cultural and sporting activities can provide fans with a sense of belonging, support, 'organic solidarity', and social interaction. By extension, the fans become, 'the unarmed army of Catalonia' (Kuper: 28/04/2009).

As noted above, activist *culés* (Barça fans) also operate on a more formal structured basis, developing network alliances and allegiances between groups when it comes to presidential elections. An example of this involvement in political and electoral power games occurred in March, 1998, when a vote of no confidence against President Núñez was presented by the Blue Elephant coalition and supported by the *Barça* legend, Johan Cruyff. Núñez survived the

motion, however, as the network of fans ‘trusted’ their sitting president to take the team forward to a successful future.

Putnam (2005) acknowledges that sports, art and culture can have an impact on connecting people thereby creating social capital. In our scenario the processes of bridging, linking and bonding social capital are evident *de facto* in the structure of the *penyes*. Of course, the bonds and connections created between fans are weaker than the bonds actively created between people who play sport in a team and participate in such an activity together on a regular basis. Nevertheless, supporting a team like Barcelona does clearly bring a sense of belonging, identity, ‘organic solidarity’ and civic pride thereby creating social capital.

As we have seen, when Franco was in power, going to support FC Barcelona was the only public arena, outside the officially tolerated Church, where Catalans could associate *en masse*, develop a shared commonality, speak the Catalan language and connect with one other on the basis of civic pride, trust and ‘organic solidarity.’ The stadium became a forum for conversation about politics and civic deliberation as well as watching football as is evinced by the legendary boycott of public transport for the fixture against Racing de Santander on March 4, 1951 when the immense crowd walked to and from the match, refusing to board the trams. In this way the club became a community activity as fans became what Boal might term, ‘spect - actors,’ not just spectators, that is to say they were consuming and creating culture at the same time.

Social capital is relational; it is built up, developed and exchanged between people and groups and can be enhanced by historical, cultural and social factors which give rise to norms, values and trust through networks of association. We believe FC Barcelona offers a case in point. As noted earlier, Nan Lin has formulated a model of social capital based on community networks as the underpinning foundation of this phenomenon. Social capital is captured from resources embedded in these networks. Lin has suggested that returns to social capital can be psychological and be either ‘instrumental’ or ‘expressive.’ The former refers to the gaining of added resources not possessed by the ego whilst the latter refers to

the return being that of possessed resources. These psychological returns are harnessed in 'network locations'.

Extrapolating from the model suggested by Lin, one might reasonably conceptualise FC Barcelona as a 'network location' where fans can develop 'weak' or 'strong' social ties in their relations and the type of return yielded by supporters is that of 'life satisfaction.' Lin writes that, 'Life satisfaction indicates optimism and satisfaction with various life domains such as family, marriage, work, and community and neighbourhood environments' (2005: 18-19). To this list we might well add football clubs.

Being a football 'fanatic' and 'spect - actor' on the terraces can obviously bring a sense of togetherness, a sense of community, attachment, pride and confidence. Clearly, psychological factors and behavioural influences can operate at an individual, group, organisational, or community level. In sum then, as Putnam has proposed, social capital is about bonding, bridging, and linking to develop community. Cultural and sporting activity can also lead to the creation of social capital as well as forming an important part of a communal identity (Putnam, 2005, 1 -4). Extrapolating from this one could reasonably suggest that sport can play a part in developing regional or even national identity.

However, we should note that this is a contested process and that the creation of social capital is not cosy and rosy. Some commentators such as Ball and Kuper fairly question the uncritical orthodox rendition of Barça's story as being hagiographic and 'Disneyfied'. Ball comments that, 'much of what has been written about FC Barcelona is so uncritical that it has created a climate of literary lap-dogism, which in the end does the phenomenon no favours', and considers that there is ultimately an 'ambiguous truth about FC Barcelona' (Ball, 2006: 82).

The club is not a conflict free zone. It is possible to point to the lack of consideration of the complex and contested identity concepts of Catalan/Catalonia/Spain, and the tension between FC Barcelona as entrepreneur and philanthropist as is evinced by the multi-million dollar shirt sponsorship deal for 2011 wherein the Qatar Foundation will take prevalence over the UNICEF logo. Needless to say, the furore surrounding the allegations of corruption in FIFA's acceptance

of the successful Qatari bid to host the 2022 World Cup will inevitably reflect badly on the club, as will the support given to the initiative by manager, Pep Guardiola.

In addition, there are instances of damaging infighting during club presidential elections and scandals that suggest Barcelona is a divided house. For example, citing novelist Jordi Puntí *FT* Journalist, Simon Kuper writes that,

for all Laporta's rhetoric, FC Barcelona no longer means quite as much as it did when other Catalan symbols were forbidden....Catalanism has become less central to the club's identity. After all, when Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Spain's prime minister, is himself a FC Barça fan, it becomes harder to present the club as a resistance movement against Spanish centralism. (Kuper: 28/04/2009)

There are also issues relating to how Barça handles difference and issues of gender and sexuality that are also expressed in a community setting and within a football stadium. FC Barcelona have a policy of zero tolerance and expelled the *Boixos Nois* supporters club because it has been infiltrated by the extreme Right. The continued existence of this grouping and its disruptive presence at away matches is, however, disconcerting. The recent decision by the club in June 2011 to close non-football related sports activities on cost grounds has also highlighted that the decision to be 'more than a club' is contested on many grounds. On a more positive perspective, the development of the *Penya Gai i Lesbiana* and its official acceptance by the club in February, 2009, is an interesting development, particularly given the presence and importance of the gay community in Barcelona and Sitges. These are traces and trails which need further research in assessing the impact of social capital in this environment.

### **Conclusion: Football as social capital beyond FC Barcelona?**

In June, 2007, according to a fan's web site the club had 156,000 club members (*socis*) and was the third richest club in the world. Today the club continues to grow at an exponential rate with at least 172,938 members and 1,954 supporters clubs. Apparently, 26% of the Spanish



population are supporters with thousands of registered foreign fans as well.<sup>3</sup>

In the current era, social solidarity, community and trust are integral facets of brand FC Barcelona. Simultaneously, a global fan base has seen the club consciously respond to the world wide passion for by encouraging club membership from outside Catalonia with an expansion of what we believe to be a social capital network. Thousands of foreign fans have signed up as club members with the reality that *Barça* has become a global and ‘tribal’ networked institution: ‘more than a club’.

This international desire to extend the social capital network has, ‘developed into a need and obligation’, and ‘the best way for the club to do this has been to take a step further and become, ‘more than a club around the world.’ This is an institution ‘that is so concerned for its people that it needs to be globalised’ ([www.fcbarcelona.cat](http://www.fcbarcelona.cat)). In the modern epoch of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century we see this commitment to charity and community as a defining characteristic of social capital as football.

On 7, May, 2007, Joan Laporta delivered a lecture, entitled ‘More Than a Club in The World’, to an audience at Stanford University in the USA, where he affirmed the club’s commitment to being ‘a global enterprise with global commitments, while continuing to identify Europe’s largest and most developed non-state culture’ (Laporta: 07/05/2007).

During the two and a half hour lecture and question and answer session the club president explained the meaning of the ‘more than a club’ mantra from three different perspectives – sporting, economic, and social –, whilst he also spoke about *Barça*’s historical development - all overarching, interlinking themes we have covered in our critique of social capital. Laporta has succeeded in continuing to weave together a remarkable trajectory of history, politics, football, an archaeology of social capital and community development in delivering FC Barcelona as a post-modern club in today’s game. Laporta ended his seven year presidential reign at *Barça* on 30, June, 2010, to be replaced by a former senior adviser and presidential

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<sup>3</sup> [www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/supporters\\_of\\_FC\\_Barcelona](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/supporters_of_FC_Barcelona)

running mate, Sandro Rosell. Rosell secured 61% of the 57,088 votes cast by socios. Time will tell if Rosell continues to develop the social capital model and legacy successfully driven forward by Laporta. Certainly, Rosell has stated, ‘Tots som el Barça’ (‘We are all Barça’), which superficially suggests he is very much in the Laporta tradition. He is certainly committed to driving forward the Club, ‘to further success both domestically and around the world’.<sup>4</sup>

However, Barça is looking to prune certain sections of its sport club portfolio to reduce costs in areas such as wheelchair basketball and baseball. Although the savings are modest it suggests that even such a respected institution is not immune from fiscal crises.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, on the football playing side, Barcelona continues to move forward successfully, beating Manchester United 3 – 1 at Wembley on 28, May, 2011, to secure yet another Champions League success leading the influential periodical Newsweek to run an article asking, ‘is Barcelona the greatest football team ever?’<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, more academic, empirical, critical and primary research on the conceptualisation of football as social capital has to be undertaken not just with reference to FC Barcelona but also with regard to the many other clubs in world football that would lay claim to reflecting this condition in their origins and or goals. Further study is also required regarding local football clubs that did not grow like *Barça*, but which still play an important role in their community, especially given the number of football clubs who have recently been in financial difficulties, namely, Glasgow Rangers, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Notts County, Sheffield Wednesday, Stockport, Rochdale, Accrington and Dundee.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.fcbarcelona.com/web/english/club/historia/presidents/sandrorosell.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.3cat24.cat/noticia/1234847/futbol/Les-vuit-seccions-del-Barça-afectades-per-les-retallades-demanen-a-Sandro-Rosell-que-faci-marxa-enrere>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.newsweek.com/2011/06/03/is-barcelona-the-greatest-soccer-team-ever.html>

Supporters in the UK, however, can only look to the Barcelona model with envy whilst their own club may be threatened with winding-up orders or takeovers by Russian oligarchs, sheiks, or other billionaires in the arena of global capitalism. In the face of such a threat it is our contention that, in its exhibition of social capital, Barcelona offers a distinct and successful alternative. We believe that fundamental to the club's football identity is a clear commitment to freedom, democracy and community - the very essence of the phenomenon.

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