

# Is Citizen-Centred Governance a Myth or a Reality? The Case of Football Fans in Europe

By Dino Numerato  
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences  
Loughborough University (UK)

Policy Analysis and Public Management (PAM) Seminar Series  
Università Bocconi, 17 February 2015

## Abstract

The notion of citizen-centeredness emphasises a dialogical, collaborative and emancipatory nature of contemporary governance. According to this perspective, citizens are at the centre of attention, citizens' needs and experiences are carefully considered, and citizens are engaged in public service delivery and decision-making processes. In this vein, football fans have recently been viewed as citizens and their voice has been formally recognised by football and political authorities. However, notwithstanding this formal recognition and an introduction of various mechanisms to engage football fans, the impact of the fans' voice has been limited. How can we explain this puzzle? To address this question, this study analyses the dynamics between fans and football and political authorities with a particular focus on the implementation of supporter liaison officers (SLOs) in European football clubs. SLOs were introduced by the UEFA licencing regulations in the 2012/2013 season to mediate the relationship between football clubs and fans and to ensure that fans have a greater say in football governance. Since then, every football club playing a European competition has to appoint an SLO. The objective of this study is to critically examine the SLO implementation process and the impact of the SLOs on the empowerment of football fans. The data that underpin the qualitative analysis are drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources available online and offline: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations and a documentary analysis. Framed by the concept of reflexivity, the study identifies six patterns that characterize different dynamics between fans and football authorities: transmission, auto-referentiality, appropriation, alteration, loosening and anti-reflexivity. The paper discusses the explanatory utility of these patterns for further analyses of citizens' empowerment outside the sphere of sport.

**Key words:** citizen-centred governance, football fans, supporter liaison officers, social change, reflexivity

## Introduction

Contemporary citizens have been brought into the centre of attention of public policies and academic narratives. Public management studies suggested the ideas of new governance (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005), citizen governance (Simmons et al. 2007), a move towards a public service dominant approach (Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2012) or citizen-centred governance (Andrews and Shah 2003). Numerous calls for a stronger consideration of citizens praised the participatory decentralization for its dialogical and collaborative nature and argued that citizen-centred governance has enabling and emancipatory potential (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006). Although the previous scholarship provided a thorough discussion of instrumental tools and legislative aspects of citizen-centred governance, the attempts to critically examine the socio-cultural patterns of these processes and to analyse their impact have been rather rare.

To address this gap, this paper is focused on a specific type of citizen: a football fan. The understanding of football fans as citizens can sound a bit uneven if confronted with common sense and mainstream public discourse. Research into football fandom has primarily objectified supporters and understood them as "hooligans" or "consumers". Only recent academic have enriched these understandings. These debates have mirrored an increasing critical engagement of football fans who claimed their voice in relation to fan culture and in relation to the way how the game is governed (Cleland 2010; Giulianotti 2011; Nash 2000; Welford, García, and Smith 2015; Williams 2007, 2013).

The discursive shift in understanding of football fans is far to be only academic. The recognition of previously objectified social category of fans has been mirrored in numerous statements made by football and political authorities. The importance of fans was recognised by the president of the UEFA Michel Platini who argued that "*[s]upporters are the very lifeblood at the heart of professional football*" (UEFA 2011:3). The interest of the European football governing body was followed by European political authorities. Androulla Vassilou, the former European Commissioner for Education claimed that: "*[s]upporters not only invest countless hours to support and volunteer for their clubs, but also help to build a spirit within their community. As active citizens and as key stakeholders, supporters should be formally involved within the sport movement*" (Supporters Direct 2012:2). Similarly, the "Fisas" European Parliament report on the European Dimension of Sport suggested that "*[t]ransparency and democratic accountability at sports clubs can be improved by the involvement of supporters in the ownership and governance structure of their clubs*" (European Parliament 2011).

The institutional recognition of fans was accompanied by an introduction of specific policies to favour citizen's engagement of fans. UEFA regularly meets and consults representatives of football fans from several established bodies at national and transnational levels. One of the tools that the UEFA introduced following strong lobbying and engagement of fans was the introduction of supporter liaison officers (SLOs) by the UEFA licencing regulations in the 2012/2013 season. Since then, every football club playing a European competition has to appoint an SLO whose role is to mediate the relationship between football clubs and fans. The idea of SLOs was inspired by a German model where this tool has been employed for more than two decades. One of the main principles was to give more voice to supporters and reinforce the citizen-centeredness in football governance. The idea of SLO represents a tool with high emancipatory potential that match the theoretical notions of active citizenship, inclusivity and deliberation. The SLOs are not intended to be fan representatives. The expected role of SLOs is to mediate relationships between football supporters and their clubs, to foster dialogue

between them and to prevent violence and conflict at stadiums via communication with competing clubs' SLOs. SLOs should provide greater transparency on both sides and lead to fewer misunderstandings and obtain a deeper insight into fan views. Last but not the least, it is expected that the SLO concept will also have financial benefits thanks to stronger ties of loyalty between fans and their clubs (UEFA 2011).

Against this backdrop, this study is focused on the following objectives: to explore the dynamics between football fans and football authorities and to critically examine the empowerment potential of the SLO tool. The analysis is framed by the concept of reflexivity and a theoretical aim of the study, in addition to strictly empirically objectives, is to develop the concept of reflexivity. Although the reflexive processes have been widely discussed in numerous sociological studies, empirically informed research to develop the theoretical roots of the concept is still needed (Ailon 2011; Archer 2013; Cataneo 2014).

The next section briefly outlines the concept of reflexivity, explains its relevance for the analysed topic and discusses its analytical utility for understanding the processes of social change. The section that follows introduces the term meta-form and suggests how the concept of reflexivity can be extended with reference to Simmel's distinction between social forms and contents. The analytical section then provides an interpretation of different processes surrounding the implementation of SLOs. The final discussion summarises the main observations and discusses the relevance of the identified processes for the analysis of similar developments in other social spheres.

## **Reflexivity and social change**

Sociological narratives have frequently presented reflexivity as a distinctive sign of contemporary, late-modern societies. The concept of reflexivity was used to diagnose contemporary social developments and to describe the capacity of social actors to view and assess their own position in relation to other social actors and to the external world, to express doubts, to problematize existing social order, and to identify new opportunities for social action. Reflexivity is in some accounts connected with emancipation, chances and opportunities (Archer 2007) and with capabilities for the redirection and reorientation (Donati 2010) of individual life trajectories and societal developments.

Theories of reflexive modernization define reflexivity as a permanent revision of social agency (individual and collective) in the light of (new) knowledge and new circumstances (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). Reflexivity of social actors emerges either reactively, or proactively vis-à-vis crises of late-modern societies, perceived risks and uncertainties (Beck 1992; Zinn 2006), processes of detraditionalization and increasing role of expert knowledge (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). Reflexivity thus means a problematization of conditions that have been normalized and taken-for-granted (Giddens 1991) and an expression of contextual incongruities between aspirations and contextual factors (Archer 2007).<sup>1</sup>

How are these broader social processes related to football fans and their engagement? Critical engagement of football fans with football culture represents an expression of reflexivity, an effort to critically review and transform the existing social order in the sphere of football.

---

<sup>1</sup> Placing the current research in the context of other studies it is worth noting that a narrow definition of reflexivity will be employed throughout the study, similar to the one that Archer (2007) refers to as to meta-reflexivity.

This regards in particular three broader aspects contested by the active minority of critically engaged fans: firstly, the processes of globalization and commodification of the game and their impact on local communities, traditions, rituals and symbols (Kennedy 2012; Millward and Poulton 2014); secondly, criminalization of fans and repressive measures undermining civil liberties (Numerato 2014), and, thirdly, organizational mismanagement and a lack of financial sustainability in football governance (Hamil et al. 2000; Welford et al. 2014).

The implementation of SLOs provides a space to articulate fans' discontent and to mediate the critical engagement without necessarily deepening existing cleavages between fans, clubs, and football and political authorities. The emancipatory potential of the SLO tool, which is consistent with the notion of citizen-centred governance, is, however, seldom materialized. Although we can observe numerous practical and organization benefits of the SLO implementation, the impact on the existing football culture tends to be rather marginal.

These assumptions expose to critical scrutiny the link between reflexivity and social change and stimulate several questions in relation to the nature and consequences of reflexive processes. Do the reflexive processes in contemporary societies represent *the* social change or do they just represent a potential for *a* social change? To what extent do reflexive processes contribute to the processes of social reproduction and to what extent do they disrupt the existing social order? What are the potential impacts and unintended consequences of reflexive agency in contemporary societies? The necessity to raise these questions is also related to the position of reflexive discourses in contemporary societies in which reflexivity becomes an inherent principle of late modernity (Giddens 1990), an axial principle (Lash 2003), an imperative (Archer 2013).

In order to answer these theoretical questions, an analytical distinction between the reflexive subject and the object of reflexivity is made. It is assumed that in case of reflexive processes the object of reflexivity potentially objectivizes itself through the incorporation of reflexive discourses<sup>2</sup> articulated by the reflexive subject. Therefore, in case of social change, the reflexivity has a capacity to transform the originally reflected objects into active reflexive subjects. However, it remains questionable to what extent and under what circumstances does this transformation really take place. The notion of meta-form will be introduced to further explain these processes.

### **Social form, content and meta-form**

The notion of meta-form is inspired by the sociology of George Simmel and his distinction between social forms and contents. The triad of social forms, contents and meta-forms is suggested as an extension of Simmel's ideas that he programmatically formulated in the "*Problem of Sociology*" (Simmel 1909) and unsystematically exemplified throughout his essays on the role of money, fashion, metropolitan experience or secrecy in modern societies. In particular, Simmel distinguished between social content and social form and emphasised the importance of "formal sociology"<sup>3</sup> whereby of the role should be to "*isolate form from the*

---

<sup>2</sup> The discursive nature of reflexivity has rarely been emphasised in previous studies. Exceptions are represented by works of Ailon (2011), Alexander (1996) or Argyrou (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Some of Simmel interpreters, such as Dave Firsby (1992), warned about the reduction of "*Simmel's work to that of sociology of formalism*" and suggests that a critical reading of Simmel's studies should better distinguish between "*programmatic statements*" and "*substantive studies*" presented in Sorokin's, Abel's or Aron's work. Frisby emphasises that Simmel call for "*formal sociology*" cannot be misinterpreted and understood as a call for endless typifications and taxonomies that would be in contrast with Simmel's interpretative approach and essayistic style.

*heterogeneity of content of human sociation.*" In this regard, sociology "should proceed like grammar, which isolates the pure forms of language from their contents through which these forms, nevertheless, come to life". As Simmel further argued that "[i]n every given social situation, content and societary form constitute a unified reality. A social form can no more attain existence detached from all content, than a spatial form can exist without a material of which it is the form" (Simmel, 1909: 297). A social form therefore represents a common element of seemingly different contents. To give an example, As Simmel suggested, family, business, gangs represent different contents that sometimes end up with the social form of conflict.

The relation between forms and contents is further explained in work of Tenbruck who argued that "[i]n abstracting forms, one does not simply disregard the non-common elements in the contents in order to arrive at the most general, but rather empty and 'formal' characteristics. Forms are not general concepts arrived at by generalization and abstraction, and formal sociology is not the analysis of such general concepts. 'Abstracting' must be understood in the radical sense of extracting or extricating from reality something which is not a directly observable and common element in it. In abstracting the forms of sociation, the wealth of phenomena is no more disregarded or repressed than in any other science" (Tenbruck 1994: 356–7). In other words, "Simmel's program does not rule out content" (Tenbruck 1994).

Simmel's assertion that forms must be abstracted from reality, therefore, does not mean that sociological reasoning is disconnected from the observed social world. This can be exemplified through Simmel's statement in "Superordination and subordination" where he argued that "In every single social-historical configuration, there operates a number of reciprocities among the elements, which can probably never wholly be enumerated" (Simmel 1950:200). This remark is also relevant for the suggested notion of meta-form that is understood as an expression of reflexivity. The meta-form is related to the unity of specific social forms and contents. The exploration of reflexive process is focused on transformations of a specific configuration between the meta-form, social forms and contents over time, during the dynamics between the reflexive subject and the reflected object. The capacity of reflexivity to provoke citizens' empowerment and social change can be understood through the extent to what this configuration is preserved or disrupted.

To explore social change and reflexivity therefore means to analyse different ways in which the configuration between contents/forms and meta-form is maintained or transformed in time and how these processes affect the originally transcendental nature of reflexivity, i.e. the capacity of reflexivity to enhance social change. Furthermore, a meta-form is more than a critique of a particular content, although a reference to particular contents can make part of the articulation of a meta-form. Meta-forms encompass both the contents and the social forms beyond them.

Meta-form is an awareness of existing social forms placed in practice, their critique and an eventual formulation of alternatives. Whereas there is a necessary unity between a social form and contents, the connection between a meta-form and the unity between social forms and contents, is floating, versatile. It is exactly this unstable nature that renders the connection between meta-forms and social forms/contents fragile and difficult to maintain over time, especially considering the fact that such connection potentially provokes a rupture in the everyday lived experience and disembeddedness from existing social relations. The analytical focus on reflexivity as a discourse cannot isolate the articulation of reflexivity discourses from the social interactions in which these discourses are embedded. Considering that reflexivity

means a rupture with everyday experience, meta-forms are not socially embedded per se; on the contrary, from the phenomenological point of view, they are destructing to existing social forms. The assumptions about the disembedding nature of reflexivity is important to explore a capacity of reflexivity to empower contemporary citizens and to work as a vehicle of social change, contributing to the radical transformation of social institutions.

With relation to the increasing reflexivity of football fans and the implementation of tools that amplify their voice, we can raise the following questions: To what extent do football and political authorities listen to the voice of football supporters, accept their perspective, review their initiatives and revisit the existing modes of governance? To what extent does the citizen-centred governance that is promoted both by authorities and by engaged supporters, contributes to the transformation of contemporary football culture? To what extent are these processes enhanced by the implementation of SLOs? And what social mechanisms do undermine these processes? Answers to these questions will provide an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that facilitate and hinder the transformation of contemporary football culture.

## **Methods**

The data that underpin the analysis are drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources available online and offline. The design of the research was qualitative in order to understand the meaning that the social actors attribute to reflexive discourse and to analyse the impact they have on their behaviour. In total 78 semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours have been carried out primarily in the Czech Republic, England and Italy, but also in Germany and with several relevant actors at the European level, with supporters from Greece, France, Slovakia, Spain or Sweden. The sample of respondents was composed of supporters, policy-makers, journalists, politicians, football federations' officials and football clubs' representatives. The interviews were complemented with numerous short informal interviews and with observations at relevant events (workshops, seminars, supporters' events, tournaments etc.). During the first year, non-participant and participant observations amounted to 210 hours. Last but not least, the data corpus has further been enriched by digital collection of data; as foreseen by the proposal, the online material was used as a secondary archive, including 450 documents gathered through continuous (e.g. newspaper articles, policy statements, blogs contributions, website posts, open letters, supporters' declarations, petitions, message board posts) monitoring of online discourses. The data were analysed both manually and with the NVivo 10 software package.

The following sections present six different processes that either foster or undermine the transcendental potential of reflexivity, understood as the meta-form with a capacity to stimulate a social change. In particular, empirically informed explanation of the following six processes will be provided: transmission, auto-referentiality, appropriation, alteration, loosening and anti-reflexivity.

## **Transmission**

A transmission remains the only process that facilitates the social change congruently with meta-forms articulated by reflexive subjects. In case of transmission, reflected objects are transformed into active reflexive subjects who both cognitively and behaviourally embrace

reflexive discourses. This means that the configuration between form, content and meta-form remains unchanged. A configuration between forms, contents and meta-form suggested by reflexive subjects is accepted and taken into consideration by reflected objects. In these circumstances the social change as defined by reflexive subjects takes place. The social change takes place at two dialectically interconnected levels, both at the level of single actors and the level of social institutions.

More specifically, the process of transmission embraces the situations during which football authorities accept comments raised by football fans and incorporate them into their cognitive and behavioural action. A Swedish project Stand Up for Football that provides a dialogical partnership between fan representatives, the Swedish government, the corporate sector and the Swedish Football League during the implementation of the SLO project can serve as a good example of this transmission. The primary objective is to promote dialogue between heterogeneous groups of football fans and football authorities and to foster positive fan culture.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the SLO also expands the relation between club and supporters and embraces some educational activities, community development initiatives and promotion of positive fan culture. Eric Sjölin, who is the Elfsborg SLO, in an interview provided to Supporters Direct, suggested: *"I also do a lot of work with schools. This involves me going to schools to talk about the values that Elfsborg believe are important. I talk to the kids about positive supporter culture, respect for others, responsibility, attitude and tolerance, for example. Last year I visited 40 school classes. Sometimes I take players with me, which always goes down well. We also organised a football tournament for 6-12 year-olds that was contested by 1,700 school kids."* (Supporters Direct, NA)

This transmission is not enhanced only by the cooperative nature of Swedish culture but also by the culture of fans, which is not so strongly embedded in social struggles, conflicts, rivalries and collective memories as in other countries where the counter-cultural and necessary opposite approach of fans represents a very part, a constitutive element of football fans identities (Ferreri 2009; De Rose 2009; Roversi and Balestri 2000). Although the Swedish fans portray on the stadiums tifo displays and tend to imitate the South European football culture, these displays are regulated and are less embedded in the relations of struggle and conflicts, as the meaning in South European football. The process of transmission is facilitated by brokers and translators and by moderate repertoire of contention that tends to emphasise dialogue and marginalize conflicting (op)positions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Auto-referentiality**

In case of referentiality, the reflexive discourse remains blocked in the social milieu in which it originated. The meta-form in these instances is kept by reflexive subjects and is disregarded by reflected objects. Reflected objects, therefore, do not objectify themselves and do not become active reflexive subjects. In other words, the transcendent nature of reflexivity is kept, yet only by reflexive subjects, and not transmitted. In these circumstances, mechanisms of social

---

<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding four corporations, including Deloitte, Swedbank, Svenska Spel, TV4 Gruppen, financially backed up the project, *"their involvement of is rarely visible although they significantly support to the project."* (Field notes, 22 May 2014, Milan, Italy).

<sup>5</sup> Last but not least, this is facilitated by the Football culture in Sweden which is not strongly related to the commercialized logic of global spectacle.

reproduction are fostered and mechanisms of social change are undermined. Social change takes place in the direction which is opposite to the one foreseen by the meta-form. The contents and forms initially related to the meta-form are marginalized and the perception of the symbolically representing and represented meta-form is coupled with alternative, yet substantially different contents and forms.

The roots of auto-referentiality can be traced in the nature of both the reflexive subject and the reflected object. Auto-referentiality processes are enhanced by a social closure of reflexive subjects or/and due to a suspicion raised by reflected objects. The mechanisms of closure or suspicion can be nourished by reciprocal stereotypisations and inappropriate generalizations. During these processes both reflexive subjects and reflected objects create false and biased pictures about their counterparts. These misrepresentations deepen existing cleavages and conflicts. The emergence of auto-referential processes can also be reinforced by an existing context of distrust that does not provide a room for ideas that suggest a rupture with an established social order. Such processes of auto-referentiality reinforce existing social identities and social boundaries and instead of the culture of dialogue maintain or even deepen existing cleavages.

Some of the aspects related to the implementation of SLOs in Italy document well the nature of auto-referential processes. An example can be provided by a cancelled workshop that aimed at bringing together football and political authorities with fans, at the occasion of the Football Supporters Europe 2014. However, except the organisers, no fan and no football or political authorities attended the workshop, although the workshop was communicated well in advance. The context of the workshop that was organised as part of the anti-racist tournament *Mondiali-Antirazzisti* was seen as too “radical” and “politicised” by authorities on the one hand and the idea of SLO as too imposed by fans who require to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis political institutions (Field notes, 5 July 2014, Bosco Albergati, Italy). Moreover, the problem of the weak SLO implementation in Italy is also related to the weak appetite of club management (Field work, 22 May 2014, Milan, Italy; 17 October 2015, Rome; 2 December 2015, Coverciano). In particular some big, although not necessarily economically sustainable, Italian clubs were among those who most strongly opposed the SLO concept, with no willingness to establish any sort of dialogue of fans (Field work, 15 June 2014, Ancona, Italy). The similar view was maintained also by some fans in the Czech Republic who perceived this role to be “*another bureaucratic nonsense from Europe that does not have anything to do with the passion of supporters*”

### **Strategic appropriation**

In case of strategic appropriation, reflexivity discourses are colonized by reflected objects. Contrary to auto-referentiality, the meta-form is communicated, yet the reception of the meta-form is deliberately partial, incomplete and consequently disconnected from its original purposes. Similarly to auto-referentiality, strategic appropriation undermines the transcendental potential of reflexivity. However, strategic appropriation does not necessarily deepen existing cleavages between reflexive subjects and reflected objects and its effects are not necessary adverse to the ideas social change. The colonization or circumvention of reflexive discourses is caused by different, often instrumental nature of rationality that is at odds with the substantive rationality underpinning reflexive discourses.



As suggested, the meta-form is not completely disregarded in case of strategic appropriation; the reflected objects bring into action specific policies and tools that should stimulate the diffusion of meta-forms and consequently bring into being the related forms and contents. However, the instrumental use of these practices marginalizes the objectives for which these tools were developed. Consequently, the reflected object relates its actions to the contents and forms than are different from those represented by the meta-forms articulated by reflexive subjects.

The colonization of meta-forms on the one hand provides a certain “acknowledgment” of the importance that the reflexive discourses have in contemporary societies. However, the fact that they are used for different purposes downsizes their immediate potential to enhance social change. Whereas the auto-referential processes do not comprehend any transmission of the transcendental nature of meta-forms from the reflexive subject to reflected object, the strategic appropriation still maintains some, although limited, transformation of reflexive discourses.

The implementation of SLOs in some countries and clubs would suggest the scenario of strategic appropriation. Following this scenario, the concept of SLO is strategically appropriated by the reflected objects - clubs and associations - for the purposes of customer service or for security purposes. An example of strategic appropriation can be provided by the implementation of SLOs in Premier League that is symptomatically overseen by the Department of Customer Service. Similar understanding of SLOs can be observed in the Czech Republic, where the president of Czech Football League Association suggested: *“Our fan is our costumer and this is a sort of our Customer service.”* These understandings are at odds with the meta-form suggested by reflexive subjects, an active minority of critically engaged football fans in the UK, who often remembers via banners and T-Shirts that *“Football was not invented in 1992,”* referring to the data when the business model of Premier League was created and brought about a radical transformation of football and supporters culture in the UK that has since then been globalized and (hyper)-commodified (Giulianotti 2005; Millward 2011).

During these processes of strategic appropriation the position of football fans is understood through the lens that are incongruent with their perspective and that they tend to contest. In other words, the contested vision of the “passive” football fan as a costumer or a problem-maker is reproduced and the requested vision of fan as an empowered, “active” actor is marginalized. The strategic appropriation of the SLO marginalizes other topics that make part of the SLO idea, e.g. a stronger supporter’s voice in football governance, improved relations between clubs and fans, better dialogue and more transparency. In other words, instead of building bridges and fostering dialogue, the processes of strategic appropriation risk provoking a further distancing between fans and their club.

## **Alteration**

In case of alteration, critical knowledge which is constitutive of reflexivity operates independently on the meaning possessed by the meta-form and is dispersed through its symbolic representations. The meta-form prevails in the practices of reflexive subjects, however is weakened at the expense of means that were originally developed to express the reflexive discourses. In this case, a means used to promote reflexive discourses becomes an end in itself and is partially or totally disconnected from the meaning that was originally attributed to reflexive discourses. In comparison to strategic appropriation, this disconnection is not deliberate and represents a rather secondary and unexpected effect. The meaning of alteration

is closed to what Simmel called *eigendynamic* processes, in other words “*autonomous processes [that] tend to become independent of the motives that provoked them in the first place and to assume life of their own*” processes (Nedelmann 1990: 251). Hence, during the processes of alteration the signifier representing the signified meta-form is preserved, yet the signified content and forms are marginalized and substituted by different forms and contents.

While the analytical focus in case of strategic appropriation and auto-referentiality is given on the reflected object and on the “dynamics” between the reflected objects and the reflexive subjects respectively, the analytical focus in case of alteration is driven by the separate focus on reflected objects and reflexive subjects. In case of alteration, the transcendental nature of the meta-form is again marginalized and although the newly stimulated social processes do not lead to the intended social change, they do not either contribute to the maintenance of the *status quo*. Alteration stimulates an emergence of alternative social processes during which the transcendental nature of meta-forms is not fully suppressed, yet somehow encapsulated. An excessive concern about the tool developed to enhance the social change can be one of the vehicles of these autonomous processes. The critical meaning is therefore encapsulated in texts, icons, symbols or formal procedures or it is weakened by the processes of routinisation, aestheticisation, ritualisation or bureaucratisation.

The implementation of SLOs in Italy represents an example of bureaucratized and formalised process with no real social change understood in terms of transformation of the relationship between political and football authorities and football fans. Most likely no other European country witnessed so many events, workshops and conferences about the role and philosophy (sic!) of SLOs, with very extremely slow conversion of these debates into a meaningful tool of fans empowerment, foreseen by the proponents of the concept. Face-to-face interviews and non-participant offline observations suggested that the in particular the early phase of the implementation of SLOs in Italy can be described in terms of mimetic institutional isomorphism (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983), as ‘*tick-box exercise*’ that existed ‘*on paper only*’ (Field notes, 23 May 2014, Milan; 15 June 2014, Ancona, Italy).

An official of the Italian Football Federation in an interview suggested that there was ‘*probably no club in the Serie A that would have taken the role seriously*’. Both subsequent interviews with supporters and non-participant observations at two SLO events confirmed that the implementation of the SLOs was in a very embryonic stage of development and that frequently, SLOs existed only mimetically.<sup>6</sup>

## Loosening

In case of loosening, the signified of the reflexive discourse is completely disconnected from its original signifier. The meta-form is kept in life through its signifiers however the meaning attributed to them is completely different from the meaning originally attributed to the meta-form. The relationship between the meta-form, social forms and contents is therefore disrupted and social forms and contents related originally to the meta-form are fully substituted. The transcendental potential of meta-forms is heavily undermined and the symbolic representation of the meta-form is far too fragile and weak to foster the intended social change. The meta-form becomes an excuse, a pretext for a behaviour which is not originally related to the meaning of meta-form.

---

<sup>6</sup> Only recently (late 2014) has there been a certain shift in these developments and more activity at the level of clubs, federations and leagues.

These processes happen due to the heterogeneity of reflexive subjects or due to the fact that the real meaning of the meta-form is misunderstood, misconceived and misinterpreted by a cluster of reflexive subjects or reflected objects. Whereas the process of alteration assumes a parallel co-existence and a certain preservation of meta-form, loosening is typical of the total disconnection between the meta-form, social forms and contents. The “survival” of meta-forms in social reality is secured only by signifiers that represent them but without really having the same meaning that these signifiers originally had.

The mechanism of loosening that undermines the transcendental potential of meta-forms for social change can be illustrated on the comment made by an English fan who has been actively engaged in the developments of the SLO in the UK: *“There is still a lot of misunderstanding surrounding the role. Some clubs and SLOs just think that it is a perfect tool to collect information of costumer needs and perhaps find some inspiration for new merchandizing products. The problem is that this understanding prevails and some people tend to take SLO for something that it is not. This does not mean that they deliberately circumvent the main idea. They just think that they do well their jobs.”* A Czech fan made a similar note, again suggesting that the misunderstanding does not need to be necessarily deliberate: *“The role of the SLO is sometimes misconceived by clubs who tend to perceive our role as a ticket officer or as an advisor on merchandising.”*

Although the role of SLO emerged in football after strong lobbying of football fans, they do not welcome this role unanimously. In this regard, any attempt to transform the game can be confronted with the simple fact that the majority of supporters just want to *“enjoy the game without necessarily being engaged in football politics”*. Some of them understand the SLOs to represent an additional *“intrusive bureaucratic burden”* introduced by the UEFA, some of them just do not see the room for dialogue that the SLOs should foster and understand their role to be rather an extended hand of clubs security service; in this vein, they perceive an SLO to be a spy that reports to club or to police. This happens in particular in contexts where trust between fans and SLOs is not developed.

### **Anti-reflexivity**

The anti-reflexivity processes systematically and deliberately undermine the reflexive discourse. On the one hand, the meaning represented by the meta-form is fully transmitted and the configuration between the meta-form, social forms and contents is perceived by reflected objects. However, the reflected objects programmatically oppose the reflexive discourses, contest their theoretical and ideological framing, and disputing the evidence based beyond the meta-form. The concept of anti-reflexivity was coined by two authors (McCright and Dunlap 2010) who studied the campaign of the coalition made by political elites and corporate interests that contested the “myth” of climate change raised by environmental activist. In case of anti-reflexivity processes, the transcendental nature of meta-forms is on the one hand communicated and perceived, however it is also contested.

While the previous processes - such as appropriation, loosening or alteration - commonly lead to the disconnection of the existing unity between meta-forms, social forms and contents, in case of anti-reflexivity, the reflected objects capture the configuration between a meta-form, social forms and contents in its totality. However, they tend to critically asses its significance and validity by providing counter-arguments and diffusing opposite claims. The reflexive subject and the reflected objects are similarly distant as in case of auto-referentiality.

Whereas in case of auto-referentiality the meta-form is not even contested, as the main attention of reflexive objects is shifted to contents, in case of anti-reflexivity it is the very meta-form that is contested. In other words, while the auto-referentiality does not even consider the potential logic beyond the meta-form, the processes of anti-reflexivity represent systematic and abstract criticism of the meta-form.

An example of anti-reflexivity can be illustrated on the example of the National Observatory on Sports Events in Italy, which is an adjunct department of the Italian Ministry of Interior. Although the Observatory on the one hand promotes the concept of SLOs, it does so, understandably, in a very selective manner, through the lens of security. This framing, consequently, contributes to the marginalization of other aspects of the SLO concept, such as dialogue, transparency, inclusiveness and the understanding of a fan as an active actor rather than as a passive object of policies.

As one of the representatives of fans associations suggested during an interview: *“Sometimes we feel to be ignored by the Observatory. On the one hand, officials from the Observatory continue to speak about stakeholders and about how important it is to involve them. This language, however, hides, who these stakeholders actually are. You can easily understand if you quickly look at the last Task Force. Who are the fans that were queried to provide a feedback to the document? In addition to one expert, but quite small expert group of lawyers, there was an elite group of fans who are far to be critical about football and whose aim is, instead of providing good feedback, is to shake hands with clubs owner, celebrities and have a pizza with players at the end of the season. These fans do often a great job with their supporter clubs but the authorities should consider that there are also other fans who claim their voice.”* The critical voice in relation to the Observatory has also been suggested by a football official who feels that more space should be provided to fans’ feedback: *“The Observatory would like to take all credits for the development of the SLO project in Italy but if you give them too much significance, you risk that the SLO will not dialogue, but it is about their own power and the continuity with repressive policies that affects especially normal fans.”* He remembers that the continuous advocacy of the Supporters ID Card is based on the misleading and selective portrayal of statistical evidence that justifies the existing *status quo*. *“If you claim that you are doing better and that the numbers show the violence in the Italian stadium is decreasing, you are only partly correct. Ok, the conflicts expressed in absolute numbers decreased, this is correct, but you should also notice that thanks to your repressive policies the stadiums are empty compared to ten, twenty years ago. Is this really what people in football want?”*

## Conclusions

To start with the conclusions, the answer raised in the title can be repeated: Is citizen-centred governance a myth or a reality? The question was formulated with a rhetorical intention to provoke rather than to define a main focus of the paper in strictly literary terms. The objective to either fully embrace, or dismiss the concept of citizen-centred governance would be far too ambitious. This paper, rather, more modestly identifies some challenges that the citizen-centred governance models face and provide an explanatory framework to identify and anticipate them.

The empirical examples and identified social processes suggested that the original philosophy beyond the SLO concept - to provide football fans with voice - is frequently marginalized at the expense of secondary and conflicting objectives and interests. The interpretation of the particular case of European football fans and SLOs implementation

suggests the limited potential of emancipatory policies. The list of the processes - that represent different dynamics between reflexive subjects and reflected objects and different reconfigurations of the relation between the meta-form, social forms and contents - is not intended to provide a rigorous classificatory schema with mutually exclusive categories. The processes that hinder the transcendental potential of reflexive discourses understood as meta-forms often co-occur in social reality and may be expressed with different intensity.

The limited emancipatory capacity of citizen-centred policies implies the necessity to revisit the normative understanding of late-modern reflexivity viewed as deliberate, emancipatory, one-directional and linear. On the other hand, more analytical attention has to be paid to ambiguous and non-linear understanding of reflexivity (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003; Beck 1992; Lash 2003).

The empirical conclusions and observations yield also further theoretical implications. In the circumstances of higher availability of reflexive discourses increases the likelihood that reflexive social meta-forms will be reduced to mere social forms; their capacity to transcend and change socio-cultural worlds can be undermined and the transcendental potential of reflexivity to enhance social change can be weakened. The emergence of reflexive action is not considered to be the social change; it is considered to be a prerequisite of a social change that could, but does not have to, be materialized. If there is a challenge for social sciences to understand the nature and impact of contemporary reflexivity, it is not in the effort to diagnose reflexivity in contemporary societies or to capture its increasing occurrence over time, but in the attempts to understand how reflexivity operates and what impacts on societies it can have. While the observers of reflexivity hitherto drew narratives about the de-routinization of society due to increasing reflexivity trends, we could seemingly observe an emergence of the routinization of reflexivity.

Last but not the least, this study was focused on a highly emotional and in a sense also a less "serious" context of football supporters and the social sphere of football. Similar processes can apparently be observed in other social spheres and the provided explanatory framework can be used to analyse environmental activism, critical consumption, citizens' involvement in urban planning, or movements of health care patients.

## **Acknowledgements**

This paper presents research undertaken as part of the project "Football fandom, reflexivity and social change" (FANSREF). The project was funded by the EC Marie Curie Fellowship, FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IEF. Thank you to the interviewees for their time and availability.

## **References**

- Ailon, G. 2011. "Mapping the Cultural Grammar of Reflexivity: The Case of the Enron Scandal." *Economy and Society* 40(1):141–66.
- Alexander, J. 1996. "Critical Reflections on 'Reflexive Modernization.'" *Theory, Culture & Society* 13(4):133–38.

- Andrews, M. , and A. Shah. 2003. "Citizen-Centered Governance: A New Approach to Public Sector Reform." in *Bringing Civility in Governance, Vol. 3 of Handbook on Public Sector Performance Reviews*.
- Archer, M. S. 2007. *Making Our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, Margaret S. 2013. *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Argyrou, V. 2003. "'Reflexive Modernization' and Other Mythical Realities." *Anthropological Theory* 3(1):27-41.
- Beck, U., W. Bonss, and C. Lau. 2003. "The Theory of Reflexive Modernization." *Theory, Culture & Society* 20(2):1-33.
- Beck, U. 1992. *Risk Society*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U., A. Giddens, and S. Lash. 1994. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bingham, L. B., T. Nabatchi, and R. O'Leary. 2005. "The New Governance: Practices and Processes for Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in the Work of Government." in *Public Administration Review*, 65(5): 547-58.
- Cataneo, A. 2014. "Defining Personal Reflexivity: A Critical Reading of Archer's Approach." *European Journal of Social Theory*. Published online ahead of print, Available at: <http://est.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1368431014549684>.
- Cleland, J. A. 2010. "From Passive to Active: The Changing Relationship between Supporters and Football Clubs." *Soccer & Society* 11(5):537-52.
- Cooper, T. L., T. A. Bryer, and J. W. Meek. 2006. "Citizen-Centered Collaborative Public Management." *Public Administration Review* 66 (S1):76-88.
- DiMaggio, P. J., and W. W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48(2):147-160.
- Donati, P. 2010. "Quale 'modernizzazione riflessiva'? il ruolo della riflessività nel cambiamento sociale." *Sociologia e politiche sociali* 13(1):9-44.
- Ferreri, A. 2009. *Ultras. I Ribelli Del Calcio. Quarant'anni Di Antagonismo E Passione*. Lecce: Bepress.
- Frisby, D. 1992. *Sociological Impressionism: A Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory*. London: Routledge.

- Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giulianotti, R. 2005. "Sport Spectators and the Social Consequences of Commodification: Critical Perspectives from Scottish Football." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 29(4):386–410.
- Giulianotti, R. 2011. "Sport Mega Events, Urban Football Carnivals and Securitised Commodification: The Case of the English Premier League." *Urban Studies* 48(15):3293–3310.
- Hamil, S., J. Michie, C. Oughton, and S. Warby. 2000. "Recent Developments in Football Ownership." *Soccer & Society* 1(3):1–10.
- Kennedy, D. 2012. "Football Stadium Relocation and the Commodification of Football: The Case of Everton Supporters and Their Adoption of the Language of Commerce." *Soccer & Society* 13:341–58.
- Lash, S. 2003. "Reflexivity as Non-Linearity." *Theory Culture Society* 20(2):49–57.
- McCright, A. M., and R. E. Dunlap. 2010. "Anti-Reflexivity: The American Conservative Movement's Success in Undermining Climate Science and Policy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27(2-3):100–133.
- Millward, P. 2011. *The Global Football League: Transnational Networks, Social Movements and Sport in the New Media Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Millward, P, and G. Poulton. 2014. "Football Fandom , Mobilization and Herbert Blumer : A Social Movement Analysis of F . C . United of Manchester." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 31(1): 1–22.
- Nash, R. 2000. "Contestation in Modern English Professional Football: The Independent Supporters Association Movement." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35(4):465–86.
- Nedelmann, B. 1990. "Georg Simmel as an Analyst of Autonomous Dynamics: The Merry-Go-Round of Fashion." Pp. pp. 243–58 in *Georg Simmel and Contemporary Sociology, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, edited by M. Kaern, B. S. Phillips, and R. S. Cohen. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Numerato, D. 2014. "Who Says 'No to Modern Football?' Italian Supporters, Reflexivity, and Neo-Liberalism." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. Published online ahead of print, Available at: <http://jss.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/14/0193723514530566.abstract>
- Osborne, S. P., Z. Radnor, and G. Nasi. 2012. "A New Theory for Public Service Management? Toward a (Public) Service-Dominant Approach." *The American Review of Public Administration* 43:135–58.

- European Parliament. 2011. *Report on the European Dimension of Sport (Fisas Report)*. Brussels.
- De Rose, M. 2009. *Controcultura Ultras*. Cosenza: Coessenza.
- Roversi, A., and C. Balestri. 2000. "Italian Ultras Today: Change or Decline?" *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 8(2):183–99.
- Simmel, G. 1909. "The Problem of Sociology." *The American Journal of Sociology* 15(3):289–320.
- Simmel, G. 1950. "Superordination and Subordination." Pp. 181–223 in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
- Simmons, R., J. Birchall, S. Donehy, and M. Powell. 2007. "'Citizen Governance': Opportunities for Inclusivity in Policy and Policy Making?" *Policy and Politics* 35:457–78.
- Supporters Direct. 2012. *The Heart of the Game: Why Supporters Are Vital to Improving Governance in Football*. SD: London.
- Supporters Direct. NA. *Interview with Eric Sjölin, Elfsborg Slo*. Published online, Available at: <http://www.supporters-direct.org/news-article/interview-with-eric-sjolin-elfsborg-slo>
- Tenbruck, F. H. 1994. "Formal Sociology." Pp. 347–72 in *Georg Simmel. Critical Assessments*, edited by D Frisby. London /New York: Routledge.
- UEFA. 2011. *UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook*. Nyon: UEFA.
- Welford, J., B. García, & B. Smith. 2015. "A 'healthy' Future? Supporters' Perceptions of the Current State of English Football." *Soccer & Society*, 16 (2-3): 322-343.
- Williams, J. 2007. "Rethinking Sports Fandom: The Case of European Soccer." *Leisure Studies* 26(2):127–46.
- Williams, J. 2013. "Consumers, Hooligans and Activists." Pp. 198–212 in *The Cambridge Companion to Football*, edited by H. Steen, R.; Novick, J.; Richards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zinn, J. 2006. "Recent Developments in Sociological Risk Theory." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 7(1):published online. Retrieved from: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/68/140>.