The transformation of European football: a case of Europeanisation?

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UACES Event
Qualitative Approaches to Investigating the European Parliament
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This UACES-funded one-day workshop on investigating the European Parliament provided researchers with an opportunity to share experiences and debate issues. The event, organised by DPhil students (Amy Busby & Ariadna Ripoll Servent, SEI), was attended by 22 participants including undergraduates, DPhil researchers, lecturers and practitioners who provided a vast range of rich experiences and perspectives. It was an excellent occasion for young researchers to meet scholars with extensive experience in the field and to gain first-hand ‘tradecraft tips’ from EP practitioners.

The workshop was divided into three sessions discussing various issues related to the use of qualitative methods in the study of the European Parliament. In the morning session, Paul Taggart and Tim Bale (SEI) presented their recent interview-based research on new MEPs’ backgrounds and discussed problems faced by qualitative researchers. They also showed a practical example of how studies dealing with the EP can overcome the ‘going native’ question and focus on other attitude dimensions such as role orientations. Anne Rasmussen (Leiden) and Richard Whitaker (Leicester) ran a session on the history and development of the field and methodological opportunities and issues. Whitaker teased out the divide between qualitative and quantitative studies and showed some examples where a combination of methods can prove fruitful. Rasmussen demonstrated the continuing use of qualitative methods in European studies, however she also showed a new paradox given by the increase in researchers in the field: while researchers have more datasets available to use in quantitative studies, it is also becoming more pertinent to pursue qualitative research due to a certain fatigue among informants. The morning session raised also the fundamental question of standards in scientific research, questioning whether positivistic approaches to research design are appropriate and necessary when using qualitative methods.

The afternoon session was a practitioner Roundtable where Richard Ashworth MEP, (Con, UK), Francis Jacobs (EP Office in Ireland) and Brigid Fowler (Foreign Affairs Committee specialist, former MEP assistant) gave their perspectives on working at the EP and how academic research depicts life in the institution. Jacobs listed several gaps in the research and challenged researchers to overcome the classical cleavages given by political parties when studying committees and other formations in the EP. Fowler raised some interesting questions about MEPs and their relationship with national politics, especially national parliaments and parties. Ashworth underlined the tendency of the EP to strive for more powers at the start of each legislature and shed light on why citizens feel disconnected from the institution. They also gave advice on research design issues such as access, contacting MEPs and surveys. The day included many lively debates and discussions and showed how qualitative methods can contribute and enrich European Parliament scholarship and raise wider questions for political science.

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UACES Event
The Transformation of European Football: A Case of Europeanisation?
Amsterdam, 12-13 June 2009

The workshop brought together the contributors of an edited book project (with MUP) that seeks to advance research on the transformation of European football (and particularly the question of ‘Europeanisation’ of football, i.e. the impact of European integration on domestic governance).

In his opening address Arne Niemann (University of Amsterdam), the workshop organizer, noted that there is a growing number of scholars working on the EU and sport, and that political scientists focusing on European integration are beginning to do some ‘serious’ work in this area, which has recently witnessed important developments, including the Commission White Paper on Sport and the passages on sport in the Treaty of Lisbon. Jonathan Hill (UEFA) in his presentation on the role of UEFA argued that the EU’s political and regulatory impact on the structures and governance of European football, and the subsequent response of UEFA and other stakeholder, which were once highly technical and often mainly legal in nature, have increasingly become mainstream political debates, discussed by national politicians, media, supporters groups and other actors. Wyn Grant (University of Warwick) held that the Europeanisation process has been particularly complex in the UK case and that this arises from deeper tensions that are encapsulated in the Varieties of Capitalism literature: the UK tends to prefer a neo-liberal model to the coordinated capitalism model favoured in many European countries. One consequence is that sport is often conceived of as a profit-maximising business rather than a source of social solidarity. This leads to tensions between the UK

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perspective and the developing European model of sport. Arne Niemann (University of Amsterdam) held in his presentation that top-down Europeanisation pressures emanating from the Bosman ruling brought about a ‘system transformation’ in German football concerning the nationality regime, which is indicated not least in the very large share of UEFA residents playing in the Bundesliga. Borja Garcia (University of Loughborough) in his talk on Spain contended that despite the sporting success of Spanish teams in European club competitions and the modernisation and global appeal of brands like FC Barcelona or Real Madrid, the structural transformations of Spanish football over the last decades seem to be mixed with a large degree of parochialism and intrusion by the national government. David Ranc (University of Cambridge) argued in his talk on ‘France – a case of UEFA-isation’ that what has been perceived as the current decline of French club football was partly a consequence of the Bosman ruling and of subsequent top-down EU-isation. The decline is, however, rather seen through the prism of UEFA competitions and prompts an assessment that is purely transnational, making the transnational strand of Europeanisation the most important. Osvaldo Croci (Memorial University) noted in his presentation that several factors can be attributed to the most important transformations of football in Italy. Apart from Europeanisation pressures, he suggests that local/national dynamics as well as ‘Anglocisation’ trends have played an important role.

During the second day, Otto Holman, Rens Vliegenthart (both University of Amsterdam) and Rik de Ruiter (University of Twente) discussed the problematic future of Dutch football, which is largely seen as the result of (top-down) Europeanisation processes. The nationality issue of the Bosman ruling triggered a development whereby increasingly younger Dutch players are transferred to non-Dutch clubs, leading to a decreasing quality of Dutch league football. Arne Niemann argued that the Europeanisation of Austrian football has most visibly had two dimensions: The nationality issue of the Bosman ruling and a certain historical heritage. As for the latter aspect, Austria due to its heritage as a fairly multinational state (Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy) has been more internationally-oriented right from the beginnings of the game. Melchior Szczepaniak (Loughborough University) suggested that for the Polish football league and clubs the post-1989 era was a period of intense Europeanisation as they were approaching the standards of professional and commercialised football of Western Europe.

However Europeanised, Polish football still suffers from two major illnesses that have their roots in the communist era and today thwart its development: hooliganism and corruption. Dirk Lehmkühl (University of St. Gallen) noted that the Swiss professional league is both young and international. He related these important trends to developments of both top-down Europeanisation, more transnational Europeanisation dynamics as well as other endogenous and exogenous factors. In the conclusion David Allen (University of Loughborough) wrapped up the workshop. He suggested that generalisation across chapters could relate to the question of whether there are similar patterns of change across Europe in terms of the governance of football, and that generalisation could further be achieved by comparing (and deducing from) the explanations for these transformations (with Europeanisation dynamics assumed to play an important role). The workshop was sponsored by UACES, the Centre for the Study of International Governance (University of Loughborough), the Institute of Sports and Leisure Policy (Loughborough), and the Amsterdam School of Social Science Research (at the University of Amsterdam). The book with Manchester University Press is scheduled to appear in mid-2010.

4th Sport&EU Annual Conference
Stirling, UK, 22-23 June 2009

The 4th annual conference of the Association for the Study of Sport and the European Union (Sport&EU, www.sportandeu.com) took place on 22-23 June at the University of Stirling. It was hosted by the Law School in the baronial surroundings of Airthrey Castle. The theme of the workshop was ‘looking back, thinking ahead’, which takes a prize for the most inclusive title possible and so there was an impressively wide range of presentations. There were 32 delegates from at least 12 countries across the EU. It was encouraging to see the wide range of institutions represented and the growing interest in the area. Sport&EU is, by nature, an interdisciplinary academic network. In previous years our workshop counted on UACES support and we contributed a special issue (2007) of the JCER.

There were papers on the europeanization of football and the issues faced by football in the light of EU regulation. Daniel Grey discussed third party ownership of players, homegrown players rules were analyzed by several delegates, and François Mandin covered obligatory release provisions for international football matches. An interesting session on juridification had Audrius Biguzas talking about alternative forms of dispute resolution, Simon Boyes looking at different judicial approaches to sport and Yann Hafner analyzing recent Swiss approaches to national quotas. A varied session covered media, broadcasting and gambling regulation; and the final session remembered the contribution of Edward Grayson to sports law in Britain with a particularly interesting paper by Mark James on violence in rugby highlighting the interplay between criminal prosecutions and internal regulation by the sporting bodies. There was also a fascinating keynote address by Louise Martin on the successful bid by Glasgow for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

A notable and welcome feature of the workshop was that presentations were informal and were being used by speakers to test tentative ideas, and to fly kites rather than give a fully formed, detailed paper. Long may this continue and that genuine academic discourse can occur instead of mere CV boosting. Many thanks are due to the organisers of the conference, especially our host Dave McArdle who delighted in showing us the sunlit surroundings of Stirling. Next year’s conference will be in Ghent (Belgium) and we look forward in anticipation.

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