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Other Forms of Fandom

The argument was getting heated. Passions were rising along with the volume of the voices. In a small unit on the edge of Livorno, members of a supporters' club were debating the virtues of A.S. Livorno's president, Aldo Spinelli. On one side were those who supported Spinelli and all that he had achieved for the club. They argued that the football club had come from nothing, and that he had helped them win two promotions, and a return to Serie A for the first time in forty years. Furthermore, Livorno had played in a European competition for the first time in the club's history. Although they had been relegated two years later, they were in a strong position to return to Serie A. Meanwhile those in disagreement were getting more vociferous. The football club was underperforming on the field. Many fans felt that the team should have been challenging for the title, but they were struggling to win games. The team had been on a run of five straight draws and was losing ground on Parma and Bari above them. They blamed the president as he did not have the resources to fund new players, and even worse, he was not as well connected politically as the owners of Bari and Parma were. He had taken Livorno as far as he could and someone else needed to purchase the club to take it further. The debate raged for the duration of the club's opening hours. Other members who visited for various enquiries were drawn into the debate and asked for their opinion, which only added fuel to both sides. When the club closed at eight o'clock, neither side had come to a resolution and ultimately nothing had changed; the president was still in charge.

Football invokes strong emotion in its followers. It has long been seen as an avenue for a predominantly localized masculine form of identity. Yet this identity takes many different forms as fans have different motivations for their support (Bromberger 1995). Fans come from a range of backgrounds and bring a variety of views and ideas from their wider social milieu. Consequently, sport in general and football in particular, provide apposite vehicles to observe the minutiae of social life. In the mundane surroundings of the social spaces where fans congregate, it is possible to observe the wider dynamics taking place in

society. In Italy, football provides the 'deep play' of society that permits a deeper understanding of society. Debates like the one above articulate specific interactions and help create and recreate these dynamics over time. Much of the academic focus of football fans in Italy has centred on the *ultras*. Yet there are many other fans who 'live and breathe' football and see it as an important part of their identity but do not participate in the same ritual space. Across the country there are many official supporters' clubs that are run by thousands of dedicated volunteers and these clubs provide another space for the performance of identity. There are also new supporters' trusts forming, which give a different type of engagement with the football club. The following chapter will detail the features of these official supporters' clubs and supporters' trusts. In doing so, it moves the debate away from the *ultras*, who occupy a privileged position in academic literature and political discourse, thanks to their roots in the visual, direct action of the 1970s. Yet there are other forms of political engagement in Italian football. Yet despite Robert Putnam's assertion that local associations automatically generate political involvement, the wider power networks that operate in Italian football still limit political engagement.

Official supporters' clubs

Official supporters' clubs provide an alternative form of supporter association, alongside the *ultras*. They have been around since the 1950s, with the *ultras* emerging from these organizations. Official supporters' clubs are, as their name suggests, affiliated to the football club and they operate within the patrimonial networks of the football clubs. Fundamentally, the difference between the groups is demographic. Most *ultras* are young males, whereas the official supporters' clubs encompass all ages and genders. Anyone can become a '*socio*', a member, upon paying their membership fees. Membership is through a different set of rituals to the *ultras*. Consequently, the official supporters' clubs do not replicate the focus on choreographies, politics and violence of the *ultras*, although members may still participate in the activities of the *ultras*. Likewise there is no spatial demarcation between groups. Although the *ultras* would restrict themselves to the *curve* at the ends of the pitch, official supporters' club members can be found in the *curve*, the tribunes along the length of the pitch or in the grandstand. Therefore, discussion of the official supporters' clubs presents an alternative view of Italian football supporters. This section will detail the organization and activities of these associations and locate them

within the broader argument illustrating the decline in social capital and political participation in Italy.

Official supporters' clubs are central to a number of fans. Like many other aspects of Italian football, the commercial activities have been decentralized away from the football club. As highlighted earlier, some *ultras* organizations like Lazio's *Irriducibili* were granted the rights to sell tickets or merchandising. Despite many Italian clubs establishing dedicated ticket outlets, official supporters' clubs still operate as ticket outlets and local distributors for merchandise and information related to the football club. Official supporters' clubs also organize away travel for fans and arrange social events. When important matches approach, these clubs become focal points for local fans trying to obtain tickets. As Guschwan (2011, p. 1996) argues:

In eras past, neighborhood fan clubs were an essential link between professional teams and ticket buyers, that is, fans. While fan groups are no longer the primary distributor of tickets, organized fan clubs remain a vital part of local social life for many Italians.

Many of these are situated in bars, while others are in dedicated club headquarters. Either way, they are located in the heart of the community that they serve.

Official supporters' clubs are set up by fans independently of the football club. In this manner they are not dissimilar to the *ultras*. However, supporters' clubs can choose to become affiliated to the football club, which the *ultras* would never do:

Everyone can found a Club Amaranto [supporters' club]; later on one can ask to have relations with the football club and can be a member of associated clubs ... Innumerable clubs can exist. There is no limit and the football club of AS Livorno does not have a voice in this and cannot influence the clubs. (Max, official Livorno supporters' club director, personal interview, June 2009)

Official status grants these clubs concessions to sell merchandise, and to use the football club's logo on the supporters' clubs details. Although the football club does not dictate the activities of the official supporters clubs, they provide concessions over merchandise and access to players. In this way, they are incorporated into the football club's patrimonial network.

In order to access these activities, fans become a *socio*, a fee-paying member. In return they often receive membership gifts, opportunities to meet players and invites to end-of-season dinners. They can also access discounted rates for travel to away games. Official supporters' clubs also provide financial benefits for

their members. Berlusconi provided a range of incentives to join the AC Milan supporters' clubs after he took over AC Milan. The extent of this patrimonial network facilitated his move into politics as he utilized the same practices when he set up *Forza Italia*, his political party. Other official supporters clubs negotiate benefits for their members, as they have access to a wide network of fans. These can include cheaper cinema tickets or special deals on hotels.

The clubs are the embodiment of the history, personality and social capital of the football club, supporters' club and member. Here the image of the city, supporters' club and football club are entwined. As Guschwan (2011, p. 1998) argues:

The clubhouse functions as a museum devoted to the exposition and celebration of culturally significant artefacts ... Roma Club Testaccio's 'shared vision of history, identity and heritage' is literally taped, painted, and tacked onto the walls of the clubhouse as selection of highlights from Roman History.

Although Guschwan was focusing on one club in the heart of Rome, this is typical of other club headquarters. Throughout Livorno, clubhouses will be decorated with significant moments in Livorno's history, both as a city and as a football club. They will have scarves, pennants and posters. Frequently they will have club jerseys signed by star players like Igor Protti or Cristiano Lucarelli. Significantly, they will frequently have many photos that show the directors and members of the supporters' club with star players. The social capital of the club is clearly visible for all members to see.

The independent nature of the supporters' clubs is reflected in the naming conventions of the clubs. Unlike the *Ultras* who name their groups after political groups or violence, names of official supporters' groups are more sedate. Some are named after the area of the city in which they are located, such as Sampdoria Club Rapallo, or Roma Club Testaccio. Others are named after prominent players, such as Club Igor Protti in Livorno, or Juventus Club Langa Bianconera Alessandro Del Piero in Cortemilia near Turin. Local history can also influence the nomenclature of the clubs as in the case of the Roma Club Impero Romano, named after the Roman Empire. A female supporters' club at Livorno is called B52s, and is named after the Second World War American bombers that were stationed at Camp Darby, an American airbase located between Livorno and Pisa. Some clubs are also named after family members in order to preserve their memory.

The clubs come to embody their operators and become a space to perform their identity. The B52s is located in a bar in Livorno and this provides for a more

socially orientated approach to their club. Like other headquarters mentioned above, it is decorated with memorabilia of A.S. Livorno, such as team shirts, posters and photographs. This club is also more frivolous as it embodies the personality of the director. This was evident from my first meeting with her as she responded to my interest in the club and the city with, 'Why Livorno? We are all pirates and prostitutes.' This Livornese performance reaffirmed the history of the city and the 'earthy' character of its inhabitants. The B52s club provides other opportunities to perform this Livornese character through the consumption of a range of products that were produced by the club. T-shirts were sold in the deep-red colours of the city and the football team and were emblazoned with the passage, 'Better to be unemployed in Ardenza [the suburb of Livorno near the beach where the stadium is located] than a worker in Milan.' Similarly, they also produced a range of stickers with similar amusing and vulgar quotations, with many directly reflecting *campanilismo* and directed at Pisa.

The physical proximity of these clubs to the local residential area allows for ease of access for the members and opportunities to meet other fans. Simmel (1950) highlighted the mundanity of social interactions. With his theory of sociability, he argued that people come together for the sheer pleasure of having shared interests. For many fans, there is no greater desire than to be with other people who have a common outlook. For Simmel, sociability was an end in itself – it was mundane. The symbol of the group is themselves. The mutual and everyday pleasure of the meeting friends and acquaintances is a symbol of themselves. While some groups and individuals seek wider meaning or action from themselves or their group, like politically active fan groups, it is not automatic that a group generates this. We cannot assume that broader social action emerges from social situations; this can only be defined within the group itself.

Official supporters' clubs create these sociable spaces by providing facilities in the local neighbourhood and by organizing social events. In this way they not only generate social capital among members but also help to provide a stronger attachment to the football club. Supporters' clubs organize football tournaments, Christmas parties and end-of-season dinners. Often the football clubs' players will attend to provide a 'star attraction' to entice participants. A major criticism of many football writers, from fans, journalists and academics, is that increased commodification of sport has led to an increased distance from fans. Taylor (1968, 1971) even proposed that this was a reason for hooliganism. Giulianotti and Robertson (2006), however, have demonstrated that members of Celtic and Rangers supporters' clubs in North America felt closer to the players

of their respective football clubs than they would have done in Glasgow. This was because players and ex-players attended the clubs' social engagements and dinners, which would not have happened as regularly in Scotland. Likewise, the supporters' clubs in Italy provide this opportunity to interact with players and management of the football club, as well as allowing them to interact with fellow *soci*. This provides an environment for people to socialize and interact away from the family and work colleagues and allows them to build bridging social capital, trust and associations in a wider community.

Supporters' clubs and political engagement

Although official supporters' clubs are sociable spaces, this does not automatically translate into wider political action. It is important to remember that football clubs rarely provide concessions to fans out of pure charity. As Merkel (2012) argues in relation to the Bundesliga, German fans have not achieved the '50 + 1' ownership model through the benevolence of owners and the DFB (German Football Federation). It was achieved by fans fighting for these rights. How this political activism grows among groups of fans is important. Putnam's (1993, 2000) central argument suggests that participation in voluntary associations contributes to increased political involvement and this underpins democracy. Likewise, Habermas (1989) suggested that debate undertaken in public created a 'public sphere' and this assisted in the formation of liberal political democracy. Although these clubs can create networks of social capital and they constitute a 'public sphere' where local and national politics are discussed, this does not automatically translate into further political engagement.

As previously noted, official supporters' clubs are recognized by the football club. This provides access to a wider network of supporters' clubs. In some of the smaller football clubs, this network is informal. The directors and members of supporters' clubs meet at matches, attend meetings with the football club, or organize end-of-season dinners together. Larger football clubs have official umbrella organizations. These *Centri di Coordinamento* (Coordination Centres) manage the various supporters' clubs and their activities. These coordination centres reflect the link between the fans and the club. Fiorentina's Associazione Centro Coordinamento Viola Club ties the violet colours of the football team to the official supporters' clubs, many of whom will have 'Viola' in their nomenclature.¹ Meanwhile, Juventus Club DOC uses the abbreviation 'DOC' that is used on

Italian food and wine to verify that it is from a particular region and of the highest quality.²

These coordination centres are associated with the FISSC or *Federazione Italiana Sostenitori Squadre Calcio* (Federation of Supporters of Italian Football Teams).³ This federation was formed over forty years ago to unite the coordination centres nationally. It provides advice to coordination centres and tries to provide an alternative voice for supporters. It is important to note that this is not the equivalent of the independent Football Supporters Federation in Britain, or *Bundniss Aktiver Fussball Fans* (Association of Active Fans, BAFF) in Germany.⁴ These organizations are politically involved with various aspects of football, and the changes that have taken place since the 1990s in relation to policing, stadiums and commercialization. The FISSC does not engage in political activities in the same way, as will be discussed later.

It is helpful to trace the development of supporters' associations in England to illustrate the commonalities and differences in Italy. The National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs (NFFSC) was the earliest organization of football fans in England and originated in 1927. Like the current Italian FISSC, this represented the official supporters associations affiliated to football clubs. Taylor (1992) argues that these supporters' clubs, and the NFFSC, were seen as deferential to the football clubs, and were unofficial fund-raisers for the owners. Fans at Luton Town and Plymouth Argyle raised money for new stands; the entrance turnstiles that were built in the 1920s at Argyle's Home Park are still in existence today. After the war, fans at Oxford United raised money to buy the ground.

There were few attempts to mobilize this financial support into executive power in the boardroom. Although the chairs of some supporters' clubs, notably Aldershot, Plymouth Argyle and Southampton, gained access to the board, there is no indication that this was due to the benevolence of the directors, but probably due to the fans being from the same social network. As Taylor (1992, pp. 38–9) argues:

The most typical pattern of supporter-club liaison throughout the period 1930–70 ... was the 'one-way' system which involved a Board member acting as president and/or Chairman of the Supporters' Club and its committee. There appears to be no examples of Supporters' Club members being given the opportunity even to elect which of the Board members should sit on their committees.

Despite the paternalistic approach of football club directors, there was at least some dialogue between fans and the board, even if it was one way. The situation

in Italy has been very different and members of the football club may be *soci* of supporters' clubs, but purely on an individual basis.

By the 1980s, the NFFSC was seen as too official, undemocratic and lacking campaigning credentials (Brown 1998). The Heysel tragedy provoked many fans to challenge the status quo in football. Led by Rogan Taylor, the Football Supporters Association (FSA) was formed in 1985. With a younger and more politically astute membership, the FSA developed a more prominent media profile. It was initially successful in campaigning against racism and the treatment of England fans abroad. Its most notable success was in challenging the introduction of identity cards for all fans. It is instructive that the resistance to the *tessera del tifoso* in Italy has not necessitated a national fan organization, and consequently, fan resistance has not completely eradicated the *tessera*. While national support is necessary to provide unity and strength in numbers, a lack of national focus can impede organizations like the FSA. As a result, the FSA was unable to sustain its power. The outcome was that 'the FSA is unable to mobilize fans because in an increasingly deregulated environment there are few national issues' (King 2003, p. 182). As Italy is the deregulated nation *par excellence* and local identification remains strong, this remains a major issue for fans of Italian football clubs. When fans do not unify nationally (or across Europe) it significantly weakens their ability to challenge the hegemonic authorities.

The demise of the FSA was due to an increase in Independent Supporters' Associations (ISAs). These ISAs were arising due to the increased commercialization of football during the 1990s. For Touraine (1981) and Melucci (1989), new social movements are often temporary, emerging and coalescing around a singular contemporary issue. Fans no longer mobilized around traditional class structures but formed new groups to challenge the changes to their clubs. Often these ISAs were established to challenge specific local issues, such as stadium redevelopments, relocations, or issues with boards of directors. The ISAs grew out of the fanzine movement that stimulated debate among fans (Jary et al. 1991). Italy, however, did not have a strong fanzine culture (Dal Lago and De Biasi 1994). The result is that the democratization of debate within football culture did not have the same stimulus as in the United Kingdom. The result is the polarized positions of the *ultras* and official supporters' clubs. While the *ultras* represent one form of new social movement, as Testa (2009) argues, alternative forms of political engagement have not taken hold in Italy.

The FISSC has become involved with specific transformations within football, specifically the Italian government's laws relating to identity cards. The FISSC promotes the *tessera del tifoso* along with the advantages associated with

being seen as a positive fan of the football club.⁵ However, by simply complying with government proposals, they risk being seen as part of the government's patrimonial network. The FISSC also promote specific initiatives, in particular 'Fair Play' projects. There are not, however, any anti-racism or anti-homophobia projects. While they publish a monthly newsletter, written by fans, entitled *La Voce del Tifoso* (The Voice of the Fan), this promotes the various initiatives of the Federation, as well as highlighting the transformations taking place in football from a fan's perspective. While the organization engages in a lot of very good work and tries to present itself as an alternative to the *ultras*, its relatively apolitical stance sees it remain relatively passive. In contrast to the strength and visibility of the *ultras*, this sees the FISSC struggle to provide an alternative voice for fans and further illustrates the decline of political engagement in Italy. Ultimately, it is suffering from the same problem as the NFFSC in England.

Despite the lack of national (or European) action, members of supporters' clubs do protest. The stadium permits fans to vent visceral expressions of anger or despair as part of the ritual of football. The boards of football clubs acknowledge some political protests, as Taylor (1971) highlighted. Unlike pitch invasions, members of the grandstand picketing the players' exit can elicit a response from the board. This was witnessed in Livorno in 2009 when the club hit a run of bad form. Members of various supporters' clubs, and independent fans, would wait outside the exit after every match. Often this was to wait for friends and family who were working as stewards or administrators. Significantly, these protestors are not *ultras*, as they engage in a very different form of protest. With the emotion of the game still strong, these fans wanted to vent their feelings at the players and management of the football club.

Much of the disagreement centred on the president Aldo Spinelli, as illustrated in the introduction to this chapter. Portelli (1993) has argued that there is a 'love-hate' relationship between Italian fans and presidents. From one perspective the fans are happy that their club has done well, thanks to the resources of the president. Yet they also resent the fact that they are reliant on the president and that that he will never love the club as much as the fans. Spinelli divided opinion whenever his name was mentioned in supporters' clubs, at the stadium or elsewhere in Livorno. The only time physical violence was witnessed in Livorno occurred after the match with Modena. An argument occurred between two fans. An elderly fan was vociferously supporting Spinelli and clearly disagreeing with a forty-year-old fan. Speaking in a manner that was audible to all those around him, the elderly fan pointed to the history of Livorno football club and reiterated that the club had had a difficult post-war history. He drew on his own

experience of watching the club and argued that they had not played in Serie A for over fifty years. They went out of business in the 1990s and had to fight their way through the leagues. The elderly gentleman attributed the subsequent relative success of Livorno to Aldo Spinelli who bought the club in 1999. Since then the club had been promoted back into Serie A and played in the UEFA Cup for the first time in the club's history. In contrast, the forty-year-old fan spoke of the immediacy of the situation. He argued Spinelli had taken the club as far as he could. He did not have the financial or political resources to move the club forward. Furthermore, he was not from Livorno but from Genoa; he had no love of the club. Both sides reiterated their position and emotions increased until the elderly gentleman grew exasperated with his younger counterpart and pushed him away. At this point others joined in to prevent any further escalation. The overall mood was only abated when the players started to exit the ground and board the team coach. This gave the congregated fans an opportunity to express their feelings. They jeered and booed the players, with some fans shouting 'shame' or 'players of shit' or 'idiots' (using the more vulgar vernacular expression of *coglione*). Once the gates ahead opened, and the team coach had sped away, the focus for the ire of the crowd had gone, and they dispersed.

Like the *ultras* members of supporters' clubs also have strong legitimacy with the football club and players. As can be seen from the number of supporters' clubs' social events that are attended by the players, fans are part of a wider network. Players also act as intermediaries during the protests and arguments outside of the gates. Taylor (1971) highlighted how the authorities treated a pitch invasion differently than a protest by fans at the stadium gates. This was reflected in Livorno. After a 1-0 home defeat to AlbinoLeffe in April 2009, star players Alessandro Diamanti and Massimo Loviso talked to fans outside the gates to explain the situation. More significantly, the president Spinelli exited the stadium. He approached the fans, alongside the director of football, Francesco Ceravolo, and explained that he took the concerns of the fans seriously and that he saw promotion to Serie A as paramount. He told the fans that he would take decisive action. Spinelli was true to his word. With two games of the season to go he sacked the manager Leonardo Acori and installed a former player, Gennaro Ruotolo, as manager. He then 'supported' his inexperienced new manager by sitting next to him on the bench during the subsequent matches and providing motivational speeches in training.

Fans and *ultras* are seen as important aspects of the football club. Dialogue and communication takes place between protesting *ultras* and protesting fans from supporters' clubs. This grants both parties a degree of legitimacy within

the overall power network. In this way both groups are incorporated into the hegemonic power of the football clubs. It helps the owners gain consent and limits the power of the fans. Yet this form of protest is informal and rests on the charisma and authority of the owners. It is instructive that Italian football clubs have had Referee Liaison Officers for decades, but only the clubs competing in European competition have Supporters' Liaison Officers due to this being imposed by UEFA. There are encouraging signs, however that this is being expanded, as Serie B clubs will begin to introduce this position in 2015. Italian fans need to challenge for more formal channels of communication with the football club. Yet political protest has been limited to such an extent that few fan groups are trying to get a voice on the board. There are signs, however, that this may be starting to change.

Supporters' trusts

Potentially there is a middle ground between the official supporters' clubs and the *ultras*. As Brown (1998, p. 64) argues, 'It is extremely difficult for any fans' organization to legitimately claim that they represent the views of a majority of a clubs' support.' Football fans are incredibly heterogeneous. Supporters' Trusts, however, can provide a space to engage politically with the power structures of Italian football, without the confrontational approach of many *ultras*' groups. Likewise, they will not just acquiesce to the authorities' demands like the FISSC. Supporters' Trusts highlight the importance of political engagement and direction as a prerequisite for civic engagement rather than a by-product of it. This is not to say that political activism cannot come from pre-existing social networks, but that these forms of engagement derive from specific localized issues.

Supporters' Trusts emerged out of the ISA movement in England as a direct response to a series of financial crises hitting various clubs. The first trust was established in 1992 at Northampton Town after the football club started experiencing severe financial problems. The Northampton Town FC Trust was established to raise money to save the football club from bankruptcy. This has since become a model for other supporters' trusts in the United Kingdom as various clubs have encountered financial problems, like Portsmouth and Plymouth Argyle. Some trusts have managed to take a controlling interest in their club, with Brentford and Exeter City both being run by their trusts. It is also important to differentiate trusts from ISAs and official supporters' clubs. As Dunn (2014, p. 3) states,

A supporters' trust is not a supporters' club, but is a properly-registered company, mostly set up as an industrial and provident society, where one share is owned by each member, and governed by an elected board. Money made by IPSs is invested back into the organisation to further its aims and objectives; in practise, with supporters' trusts, this means buying shares in the club, or funding community projects related to the club.

Unlike ISAs, trusts have a specific role to raise funds to buy shares in the football club and engage in community work. ISAs had a political role to campaign against specific elements within football, such as inclusion policies, stadium redevelopment and commercialism. This does not mean that supporters' trusts do not engage in political campaigns. After Northampton Town's trust was elected onto the board, they were the first club to introduce an equal opportunities policy. Elsewhere, supporters' trusts have joined campaigns for safe standing to be reintroduced at English stadiums and to prevent the establishment of a League 3 comprising Premier League B teams.

The supporters' trust movement developed with the introduction of Supporters Direct. This was established with the support of the New Labour government in 1999. This reinforces the importance of securing governmental support in order to provide the financial and political security of the organization. Supporters Direct acts as a political body that is a repository for information assisting fans setting up trusts. It has since expanded outside of Britain with Supporters Direct Europe. It is important for fans to put aside personal egos and parochial rivalries. In this way they can start sharing information. With a cooperative movement and a coherent message, fans can begin to challenge the hegemonic position of the authorities.

Supporters in Campo became the first umbrella organization of Italian supporters' trusts in June 2013. It united the growing interest in fan involvement in Italy and was supported by an EU project looking at community and supporter involvement in football. The importance of European connections was reinforced as it affiliated to Supporter Direct Europe. It launched with a handbook declaring *Il Calcio senza Tifosi perde la propria anima* (Football without fans loses its soul). It attempts to make the case for supporters' trusts and also lays down practical and legal guidelines for establishing trusts. Significantly, this handbook also lays out the general guiding principle of trusts by declaring that 'The supporters trust is to design and implement the development and growth of community values and for a stronger social and economic presence of its relative territory' (Supporters in Campo 2013). These supporters' trusts were

not simply to achieve democratization in the boardroom, but to be a social and economic benefit to the wider community.

In the short time they have been active, supporters' trusts in Italy have achieved a modicum of success. Five of these trusts have obtained a shareholding in their football club (Taranto, Modena, Arezzo, Ancona and Rimini). Meanwhile, four have achieved representation on the board of the football club (Taranto, Modena, Arezzo and Piacenza). It is significant that the early members have come from smaller clubs, as they did in England. One trust associated with a Serie A club, Hellas Verona, was also involved: Verona Col Cuore. Elsewhere, fans of A.S. Roma have also established a supporters' trust called MyRoma. Unfortunately, they have not joined Supporters in Campo. As Nash (2000) highlighted in relation to English ISAs, there is internal contestation both within and between organizations as they determine the direction of the organization. Ultimately, both organizations would be strengthened through sharing ideas and providing a powerful incentive to other trusts across Italy.

Perhaps the most interesting supporters' trust in Italy has been established in Taras in Puglia. The local football team, Taranto, has played in various leagues since its establishment in 1927, mainly between Serie B and Serie D. The club was declared bankrupt in 1993 after they suffered financial difficulties while in Serie B. They were re-established and allowed to compete in Serie D. The club continued to suffer financial difficulties and was insolvent another three times – the final time occurred in 2012. On this occasion the fans intervened and drew on the experience of supporters' trusts in Europe and founded l'Aps Fondazione Taras 706 a.C.⁶. They own over a quarter of the football club and have representatives on the board. This trust is the most active in Italy as it campaigns on a variety of football and local political matters. In May 2014, campaigners, including the trust, successfully fought to allow the sports field at the Naval Centre, Maricentro, to be used for football. Outside of football, members of the trust have also campaigned on local political matters. The largest local employer is the ILVA steelworks. This plant accounts for 83 per cent of Italy's pollution (Parliamentary Questions European Parliament 2007). The result is that many of the local inhabitants are dying from various diseases, including leukaemia and cancer. The conflict is that if the plant is closed, there would be no jobs, but if it stays open then the local population has a shortened life expectancy. Fondazione Taras is campaigning to clean up the steelworks and ensure its economic viability for the town.

Despite the emerging signs of wider political involvement by Italian supporters' trusts, the movement is still in its infancy. Part of this is related to the parochialism of football fans. Even though *campanilismo* is a strong cultural factor in Italy, this is a problem of all football fans. As King (2003, p. 184) argues:

While it is possible that fans can be mobilised on a national level for certain critical developments such as the introduction of all-seater stadiums, it is almost impossible to sustain national fan groups beyond a period of crisis.

The focus on the local can hinder wider development. Although the *ultras* have developed a wider *mentalità ultras* in the face of opposition to draconian legislation and police repression, the supporters' trusts need to do the same. Groups like *Supporters in Campo* can provide the central resources and moral encouragement to support individual trusts and share information. It is also important for these organizations to connect to the wider European network of football fans that are engaged in comparable activities. Although the local contexts vary, football fans across Europe are experiencing similar impacts on their clubs. Football Supporters Europe (FSE)⁷ potentially provides the wider umbrella organization that can facilitate the collaborative exchange of information and reinforce fan democracy. Only by sharing information can these new social movements develop. More importantly, only then can they begin to have an impact.

Summary

Throughout this book it has been argued that a hegemonic elite utilize personal and political networks to maintain their position. Football is central to this, and fans operate within this network. Complex power networks operate between politicians, entrepreneurs and club presidents. In many cases, these exist within the same individuals. Football club presidents seek to maintain their power using football and seek to both legitimate and pacify *ultras* and fans in various ways. This creates a complex approach to political engagement by fans in Italy. Although football clubs cannot tell official supporters' clubs what to do, they have been incorporated into the patrimonial networks of clubs. The football club provides concessions to these supporters' clubs, allowing them to sell merchandise and tickets, as well as providing players with end-of-season dinners. While this helps

build a strong local rapport between fans and football clubs, it also allows the authorities to minimize protest. When protest does occur, it is the manager that is removed, not the owner.

Some fans are starting to follow European forms of protest and are trying to gain a democratic voice within their football clubs. Currently, communication between football clubs, fans and *ultras* is informal and based on who is protesting the most vociferously. Supporters' trusts are attempting to formalize this communication and gain a voice for fans in the boardroom. Potentially they can also be powerful tools to make Italian football more inclusive. In doing so, they can provide an alternative to the *ultras* style of support. At the moment these trusts are operating in the lower league football clubs, but if a trust like MyRoma can join the wider Italian and European networks then it can lend the whole movement gravitas and help move Italian football forward.