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# Fan activism and a close community: a case study of German fan behaviour



Figure 1: Ostkurve in the Weserstadion. Retrieved from Caillera

Tijmen (T.Q.C.) van Reijssen, s1061446  
Supervisor: Jacky van de Walle  
Bachelor's thesis Geography, Planning and  
Environment studies (GPE), Nijmegen School  
of Management, Radboud University  
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Dear reader,

I would like to thank you for reading this thesis, which has been a wonderful journey for me, as a researcher, student and football fan to undertake. It was a fun, yet difficult story to write, with highs and lows, but still I am still proud of the work I delivered; I hope you too. I thereby wish you great fun and pleasure reading this thesis.

Thijmen van Reijssen

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*“It is togetherness and unity that helps in many ways” (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023)*

# Abstract

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Football supporters are more and more seen as hostile, annoying, drunk and violent people. People who throw beer on the pitch, racially abuse players, light fireworks, etc. The media loves to highlight the role that fans have in this case, often calling them the scapegoat for everything that goes wrong with football fans. This means that the negative sides of football fandom are often more highlighted compared to the positive sides. For someone unaware, it will even be hard to name positive things about football fans, because people do not know any positive sides. This research tries to shine a light on the positive things football fandom can bring, because yes, these do exist. It thereby looks at how German fans behave both in- and outside the stadium.

The goal of the research is to discover how German football fans engage and express themselves during football matches, keeping in mind social and political characteristics. The following research question has been made to try and fulfil this objective: *How do German football fans express themselves, keeping in mind sociological and political characteristics?* This main research question is complemented with four sub questions, that try to answer the main question. These are directed to the sense of belonging, political preference and the awareness of issues in society, the identity of fans and finally interests fans could have.

To answer the sub questions, together with the main research question, semi-structured interviews have been held with members of the fan department at German first-tier and second-tier football clubs (Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga respectively). Together with interviews, some observations have been made to see if results could be connected to practice. These observations have been done during two football matches in the Bundesliga in April, and one took place during a members' meeting of the club, also in April.

From both the interviews and the observations fans can be seen as heterogenous groups, which are highly engaged in social projects. Fans are not alone in that case, they are often supported by the clubs they love in organisational and financial ways. Examples of social projects that are executed by fans are donations of money and clothing, collections of money and many more. Clubs also tend to donate money to local organisations, organisations that try to improve the position of marginalised people or just organisations that are doing a good job in their opinion. Clubs also educate young people about their role in the Second World War and the horrors that happened in that period, so this period will always be remembered.

Concludingly, German football fans behave in a pro-active and reactive way. They are highly engaged in both politics, both in- and outside the stadium and are highly aware of issues in society. They try to keep the stadium experience as accessible for everyone, coming up for their rights as a fan. Future research could try to involve a higher number of participants, to improve the validity of the research, or the research could be executed in another country, to see if any differences occur.

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# 1). Introduction & motivation of the research

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## 1.1 Introduction

Ever since I became a football fan, at a very young age, I knew about the big international clubs such as FC Barcelona, Bayern Munich and of course the traditional top three in the Netherlands: Feyenoord, PSV and Ajax. Only later I realized that I only supported two clubs, namely, Feyenoord and the German side of Borussia Mönchengladbach. This did not change until a couple of months ago when I visited Werder Bremen against Union Berlin. I visited this game with a friend of mine, who has a seasonal ticket, together with her dad. She explained that on the left side of us, the more die-hard football supporters are seated, on the Ostkurve. She mentioned that these supporters were generally more left-wing and progressive, and that could be seen in the way these supporters expressed themselves as part of their identity. They expressed themselves with all kinds of flags, including an Antifa flag, an extreme-left anti-fascist organisation (L'Ami, 2018). Another banner the fans on the Ostkurve had was a banner against the stigma on mental illnesses in football (Vice, 2023). It is often difficult for football players to talk about this, since it is hard for them to expect what the reaction of the public will be, of which they are often afraid. The banner said something like: *"bleib stark Niklas, wir stehen immer hinter dich"*, (stay strong Niklas, we are always there for you) for player Niklas Schmidt. A picture of this can also be seen in paragraph 8.4.3. It seems like something small, this particular action, but may not be underestimated. In 2009, the goalkeeper of Hannover 96 Robert Enke committed suicide after struggling with mental health issues since 2003 (Kaper, 2022). Coming back to the action of support for Niklas Schmidt, I did not know that football supporters had this level of solidarity. Before I visited this game, I knew about the famous example of FC Sankt Pauli, but not about the club I just visited. FC Sankt Pauli is another German football club known for its extreme left-wing fanbase, from the neighbouring city of Hamburg (Totten, 2015). On the complete other side of the spectrum, you have the Italian side S.S. Lazio, one of the two big clubs in Rome with an extreme right-wing fanbase (NOS, 2017). This club is often in the news, in a negative way. Fans are known to be racist, fascist and antisemitic. Even Mussolini's great-

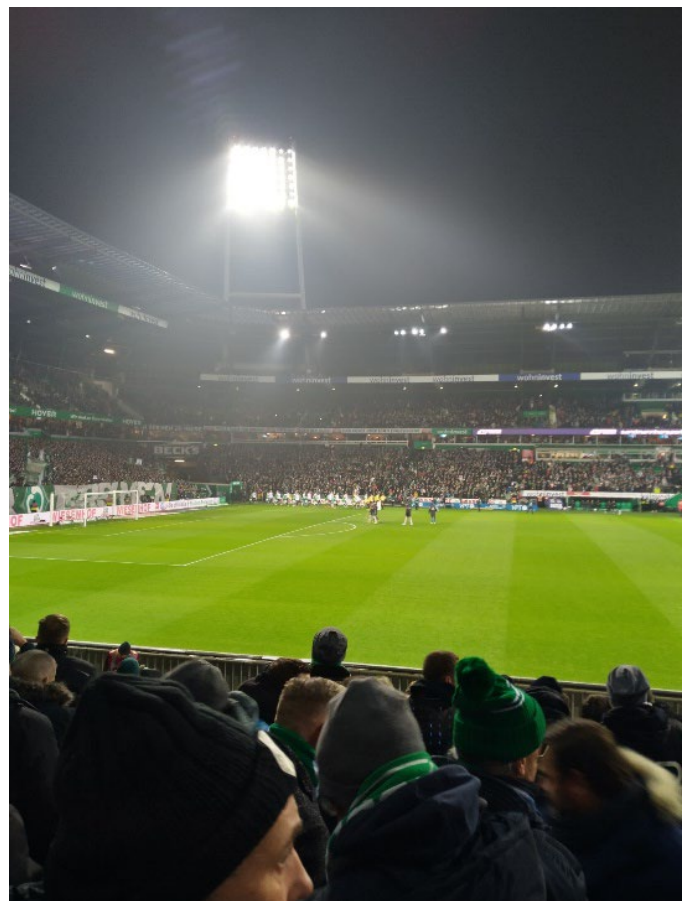


Figure 2: Werder Bremen versus Union Berlin, 25th of January 2023. Own work

grandson currently plays for Lazio (NOS, 2023a). Are these supporters identifying with these values, or are they just a fan of the club? The fans could be identifying with the history of the club, with football, or throughout football. Identity in football brings questions, like does identity even belong in football? Apparently yes, according to some (FHM Editorial, 2020a & 2020b).

Football fans are known to have some interest in social issues, as can be seen with the fans of Werder Bremen and FC Sankt Pauli, but it does not end there. Sometimes, rivalries do not exist anymore for a few minutes, as both teams unite for a goal that surpasses rivalry. This is in my opinion one of the most beautiful parts of being a football fan, seeing rivalries disappear for a few minutes to stand for something more important than just a simple game with twenty-two men chasing a ball for 90 minutes, as Johan Crujff would say. Fast forward to the 6<sup>th</sup> of February of 2023, when Feyenoord played at home versus PSV. This game, important for the first place in the Dutch football competition, was not only a rivalry that day. There was a sense of community, especially in the 12<sup>th</sup> minute of the game, when both Feyenoord and PSV supporters applauded for Thijs Slegers. Former journalist and press manager of PSV, Thijs Slegers got told that his doctors could not stop the leukaemia anymore and this would mean bad news (Bakker, 2023). Slegers did not ask for attention for himself but asked to donate stem cells to match ill patients with healthy ones to save lives. As of the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, more than 8000 people donated stem cells, now, of which I am one as well (Omroep Brabant, 2023). This uniting behaviour of football fans is not new. Thijs sadly passed away not much later, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March (PSV, 2023).

Another famous example are the fans of the aforementioned club Union Berlin. In both 2004 and 2008 fans helped the club get out of trouble (Kochhar, 2022). In 2004, the club was almost bankrupt and in 2008 the stadium was not up to Bundesliga standards; more than 1.400 volunteers helped to get the stadium eligible for Germany's top-flight (Kochhar, 2022). These fans clearly feel connected to the club; as if the club is part of their lives. The fans belong to the club and each other. Not only at these big, professional football clubs but also at smaller, local, 10<sup>th</sup>-division clubs (Youth Sport Trust, n.d.; Yates, 2022). It is also part of a bigger plan, to connect people with their local club (Coleman, 2020). The club was able to put up a good fight with bigger teams Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich, but ultimately "Der Rekordmeister" clinched the title on the last matchday in a thriller. But why would these fans do so much for their beloved team?

## 1.2 Motivation

One of the reasons which motivate me to research football and geography can already be sort of read in the introduction. As mentioned in the introduction, I like to pick examples that I witnessed myself, or so to say use my own experiences. That's why I picked the examples of Werder Bremen and Feyenoord, and not from other clubs. My own experiences are however not the only reason why I am motivated to put so much effort and time into this research. Another reason is the fact that football supporters are often seen

as violent, racist, alcoholics, and drug users (Punzi, 2022). While I am not denying any of these aspects, it is mostly a select, small group that (sometimes) ruins it for the bigger group. My motivation is to shine a brighter light on football supporters than the news tries to do. From my own experiences can I say that it is only rare to see 'real hooligans'. Even though supportive actions by football supporters are mostly documented, it still seems as if this is not the case. Supportive actions done by fans are often undocumented, and if they are documented they are not widely known to a bigger public.

The second reason why I am motivated to research football fan behaviour, is that in my opinion football stadiums can be seen as some sort of a social breeding ground; you can see all sorts of people, from all sorts of classes, etc. It is thereby not only a place where football is played but way more than that. This is called an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). It has been researched that football is a classless sport nowadays, this used to be way different in the olden days (before the first world war), when it was an elitist sport (Fürthjes, 2016; Bosatlas van het Nederlandse Voetbal, 2017; p. 12-13). It began to grow during the first world war, when there was a high need for soldiers with great discipline and endurance, despite the Netherlands staying neutral in the first world war (Bosatlas van het Nederlandse Voetbal, 2017; p. 12-13). It does not matter if you're rich or poor, the stadium is a place for everyone. I think that this is wonderful to see, especially how people sort of cooperate in a stadium, by singing, chanting, supporting and all other actions they perform.

The choice for choosing Germany and not the Netherlands (or another country) is relatively straightforward. First of all, the amount of (scientific) literature that can be found on fan culture and fan behaviour regarding this topic is not that big and focuses for a big part on Germany. It becomes even more specific since a large part of the literature is focused on FC Sankt Pauli and leaves other football clubs neglected. It is thereby way more researched than in other countries. Secondly, I feel like supporters in the Netherlands are way less politically engaged when compared to Germany. I have been to many games of Feyenoord, and have not seen any political messages, only incidental messages directed against the UEFA. Football fans are way more apolitical in the Netherlands, maybe due to the Dutch 'Verzuiling' (Pillarisation) of society, although this has not been proven scientifically. It has not been researched why Dutch fans are (more) apolitical, but it has been researched in the German context; this made choosing easy.

## 1.3 Research goal and question

The goal of the research is to discover how German football fans engage and express themselves during football matches, especially in a societal and political way. The research tries to unravel what motivates German football fans to act in a particular way, together with getting a better view of football fans.

Following the research goal, a research question has been made to answer this objective, together with the ambition to fill the gap of knowledge. The following main research question has been developed for that purpose: *How do German football fans express themselves, keeping in mind sociological and political characteristics?* To answer the main research question, several sub-questions have been made:

- *How is the sense of belonging expressed by German football fans, both in- and outside the stadium?*
- *How are political preferences and awareness of societal problems expressed both during football games and outside games?*
- *How does identity influence the behaviour of German football fans during football games?*
- *What kind of interest do German football fans have in their beloved football club?*

The concepts and notions of the prior sub questions can seem quite vague, but these are all explained in chapter 2.2.2.

## 1.4 Societal & scientific relevance

### 1.4.1 Societal relevance

The research should be directed towards the media, but also to the bigger public who watches football but are less engaged than more hardcore supporters. With this, supporters are meant that follow the team regularly via television and other media but do not visit games often. The media offers the bigger public a view of the behaviour of football supporters, which people could take for granted. By directing and offering it to the media, this image can maybe be changed. Generally speaking, the image in the media of football supporters is often quite negative and related to violence and hooliganism (Van Bekkum, 2021). And sadly, football violence still happens too often, sometimes not even close to the stadiums (Van Schaik, 2023). Just when Morocco won from Belgium at the World Cup in 2022, many violent protests occurred in cities such as Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam (Schrijver, 2022; Correspondent, 2022; Ghysens, 2022). When Feyenoord had to play against AS Roma in 2015, it went horribly wrong again. Fans of this club ruined several fountains in the old city centre, and that especially hurts if you are a fan of this club like I am (NU, 2015; NOS, 2015). It is not great for the overall image of the club to see violent and destructive fans going all around towns. All these articles highlight violence and destruction, but this should not be the only thing where people think about when they hear the word 'football supporter'. It has a big necessity to come up with better aspects of supporters, especially now. The first few months of 2022 have been spammed with news messages of supporters who cannot behave

in a normal way, leading to several abandonments of games, in particular in the Netherlands (Van Genechten, 2023; Mostert, 2023). A clear solution is yet to be found, so until then, it remains difficult for clubs to handle. Especially now it is necessary to turn the image of football supporters around.

Luckily, there are still a lot of cases when football supporters express a sense of community and unity, not violence and destruction. Sadly, this is highlighted less often than the negative sides and/or is less often in the news. Examples of this include the applauding for Thijs Slegers as mentioned in the introduction and the famous cuddly toy action from ADO Den Haag supporters (Omroep West, 2019). This action is directed at children with cancer, to which fans of the away team throw them to. This is of course a wonderful action which unites football, and the community around it. It would be desirable to see more of these actions to polish up the bad image that the bigger public gives to football fans. With these actions, people could change their perceptions.

## 1.4.2 Scientific relevance

### *Football and behaviour*

Loads of scientific literature has already been written about football fans, football fan behaviour and attitudes. This of course includes so to say 'normal' behaviour, but a lot has also been written about hooliganism. Let's start with football fan behaviour. Walser, Fletcher and Magrath (2018) talk about the attitudes of football fans considering homophobia, in which they concluded that a lot of German football fans support and want 'social and legal rights' for same-sex marriage (Walser et al., 2021). Magrath has also researched homosexually themed chanting with English football fans (Magrath, 2018). Although most of the fans respect homosexuality, they think chanting these words advantages their team, without knowing or caring about the consequences.

Disrespectful-themed chanting during football games goes hand in hand with other, negative forms of fan behaviour, namely hooliganism. A lot has been written about this topic, from research in the Dutch context (Schaap et al., 2015; Spaaij, 2007), to countries such as the United Kingdom and the Balkan countries, where hooliganism is more prevalent (Hodges, 2016; Hester & Pamment, 2020). Schaap et al. (2015) argue that political divisions, religion, social classes and nationalism hardly play a role in the Dutch context. Also, the concept of the so-called 'hoolifan' has been researched, whereby a 'hoolifan' is defined as someone who supports the violent actions of hooligans but does not participate in these activities (Rookwood & Pearson, 2012). The concept of 'hoolifan' is also way more recent than hooliganism, which is as old as football itself.

One part that could also be placed under the umbrella of behaviour is the sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is the "human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by members of a group" (Cherry, 2023). This could be the connection with a city, a country, with the neighbours in your street, and even in a fan community. Football in local communities is often cared for by volunteers, parents of players

or others. This means that these people often play a large role and thereby have a sense of belonging (Aggerholm & Breivik, 2021).

### *Governance and activism*

Another aspect of football fan behaviour where a lot has been written about is football fan activism. There is no clear definition of football fan activism, which can make the subject quite broad. This means that it can vary from issues such as sustainability and commercialisation to decision-making in clubs. Football fan activism could be described as anything that matters to a football fan and where one is willing to put energy and funds in. This definition is made up, and quite broad, which makes it easier to define what can be described as football fan activism. Despite the existence of football fan activism, the start of an issue does not always come from fans. In the case of Forest Green Rovers, it came from the new owner. Forest Green Rovers, an English professional football team is quoted to be 'the greenest football club in the world' and 'the first carbon-neutral football club in the world' (Samuel et al., 2022; Papp-Vary & Farkas, 2022). Not only can these sustainable measures be achieved with financial overtakes such as the case with Forest Green Rovers, but football clubs can also do it on their own. Despite the ability to change into sustainability, it is hard for the clubs to do so since they are often not even aware of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Lozano & Barreiro-Gen, 2022). Both normal 'sustainability', but as well as 'social sustainability' is deemed important, whereby the focus lies on transparency to the outside world and democracy, as mentioned by Brandt and Kurscheidt (2022).

A lot of other research has also been done considering social change (Fitzpatrick & Hoey, 2022; Numerato, 2016; Winands & Grau, 2016; Hodges & Brentin, 2016). Fitzpatrick and Hoey (2022) argue that a politicised football fan base has not been always the case; this used to be different. There has been a shift from a more apolitical and more passive football supporter to a politically and socially engaged supporter, at least in the United Kingdom. Since the arrival of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the activism of supporters has not only been offline but also online, for example on social media or other outlets (Numerato, 2016). Since the 1980s, numerous socio-educational fan projects have been established in German cities, to combat hooliganism and improve the behaviour of football fans. This has led to fan projects now being seen as deeply grounded institutions, with great results but with room for improvement (Winands & Grau, 2016).

Finally, articles have also been written about governance and football (Garcia & Llopis-Goig, 2021; Uhrich, 2021). Uhrich (2021) also argues that the involvement of football fans in decision-making in clubs is a good thing and should be developed further to enhance the connection between fans and the club and her decisions. According to Garcia and Llopis-Goig (2021), it is said that fans should be considered a stakeholder because of a feeling of dissatisfaction "*with the governing structures of the game*". Football thereby needs (more) regulation. Football fans as stakeholders in clubs will be further elaborated in the

theoretical framework of this research. Also in 2021, when the members of Bayern Munich protested against Qatar Airways as their major sponsor due to human rights violations in Qatar (Herold et al., 2022).

### *Migration and identity*

Football has also been researched in relation to migration and identity. The easiest example of this is the case of Mesut Özil, who resigned from the German national team after he was seen as the obvious scapegoat after Germany got knocked out (Van Campenhout & Van Houtum 2021). Literature has also been written about racism and multiculturalism in German football (Koch, 2022; Merkel, 2014). Koch (2022) argues that multiculturalism failed in Germany, with big traces of racism still visible; it is sometimes even denied being an existing problem. The case of Mesut Özil can easily be linked with the findings of Merkel (2014), in which is mentioned that before 2012, many Turkish Germans opted for the Turkish national team instead of the German national team. After 2012, this was not the case anymore. Mesut Özil could be an example for young Turkish Germans to choose Germany instead of Turkey.

### *Football and politics*

Despite the fact that a lot has been researched about football, football fans and football fan behaviour, there is still a gap in the literature where not much research has been done about. A fair amount of research has been done about the relationship between football and politics, but not on the influence of politics on football. A few examples of the relationship between football and politics include articles about left-wing supporters, or just football fan culture in general (Djordjevic & Pekic, 2018; Zaimakis, 2018; Spaaij & Viñas, 2013). These articles reflect respectively Serbia, Greece and Spain with specific case studies of these countries. On a club level, the amount of literature is even more scarce, with FC Sankt Pauli being one of the few examples (Totten, 2015; 2016; Daniel & Kassimeris, 2013; Siny, 2020). Despite it being a German case, it is the only thing that scholars write about, probably because of the famousness of the club. FC Sankt Pauli clearly is a club which distinguishes itself from the rest by promoting itself as a 'social' club, with a politically active fan scene (Gómez-Bantel, 2016).

It seems that the subjects are considered separate, instead of subjects that should be seen together in a network. Even though the amount of literature on football and politics in general is quite extensive, the influence that football has on politics is not researched extensively at all. Goerres et al. (2019) talk about the influence of football on German Bundestag elections, while Škvrňák concludes that party and football club membership influences coalition forming in municipalities (Škvrňák, 2021). The other way round, the influence of football on politics has been researched in combination with nationalism, especially in Spain (Catalonia and the Basque Country) and Scotland with the rivalry between Celtic and Rangers FC, also known as the 'Old Firm' (Quiroga, 2020; Ortega, 2016; Whigham et al., 2021). FC Barcelona played some seasons in the colours of Catalonia, being yellow and red to express Catalan nationalism and the club supported the Catalan independence referendum in 2017. Despite the support for independence and the Catalan language, the club always looked for a peaceful solution (Mendez, 2021).

### *What will be researched?*

Ending this scientific relevance, elements of all the analysed literature will be considered when collecting data. Concludingly, the behaviour of German football fans will be analysed, to see how political preference and interest in social issues are expressed during football games and outside the stadium through social organisations. The named variables are not exhaustive, others are mentioned in paragraph 2.2.2. This will be done in combination with the policy regarding the behaviour of fans, as can be read in paragraph 4.1.1.

## 1.5 Reading guide

In chapter two, the structure of the research will be laid with the theoretical framework, explaining the key concepts, operationalising them and forming the conceptual model. Following chapter two, the methodology, research methods and plan will be given. After the research plan, the results can be read in chapter four, with the conclusion and discussion in chapter five, and the beginning of the end with an epilogue in chapter six. The thesis ends with a list of used literature and an appendix, consisting of the interview guides and observation schemes.

## 2). Theoretical framework

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### 2.1 Key theories

There are several theories used in social studies where football fan behaviour and football fan identity are measured. These theories are for example about fans as stakeholder, the behaviour of a large group and the identity of a fan. The theories are respectively the theory of collective behaviour by Herbert Blumer, the stakeholder theory from Freeman (1984) and finally the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979).

#### 2.1.1 Theory of collective behaviour

In a stadium you are never alone. A stadium can have a small capacity of around 5.000 people, with the biggest coming up to 100.000 and everything in between. In these stadiums are always groups, trying to make a great atmosphere by singing, showing banners and lighting fireworks. All of these things are behaviour, in this case of fans. A single fan cannot create this atmosphere you see at some stadiums, by that, cooperation is needed.

The theory of collective behaviour appeared in the late 1970s, after the first studies about crowds appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These first studies appeared after social scientists started researching crowds, and by then still mostly demonstrations. The most famous and influential of all of these was 'The Crowd: A study of the popular mind' by Gustave Le Bon, a French sociologist and psychologist (Le Bon, 1895). According to Le Bon, one would only behave collectively if several conditions were met, which are listed in the following sentences. The anonymity of being in a crowd resulted in a belief of '*individual unaccountability*', and a '*cumulative sense of invincibility on the part of the crowd*' (McPhail, 1989). The sense of individual accountability means that people do not think that they will get caught in the actions they perform as an individual in a group. The second cumulative sense of invincibility makes the crowd think that they cannot be caught because of their strength in numbers. These prerequisites would ultimately lead to "*the disappearance of the conscious personality*". What Le Bon meant with this was that everyone would lose their ability to think rationally and their "*phenotypic characteristics*" (McPhail, 1989). In short, it means that the individual has:

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"been transformed into a crowd which puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think and act were he in a state of isolation" (Le Bon, 1895).

Blumer later acknowledged that all group activity can be seen as a form of collective behaviour, but later made a distinction between the so-called routine collective behaviour and “elementary collective behaviour”, in which he thought social phenomena could develop (McPhail, 1989). According to him, five steps form the process of collective behaviour, which are also described in the context of football hooliganism in Poland by Jasny & Lenartowicz (2021). Those five steps can be seen in the following illustration and are further elaborated beneath it.

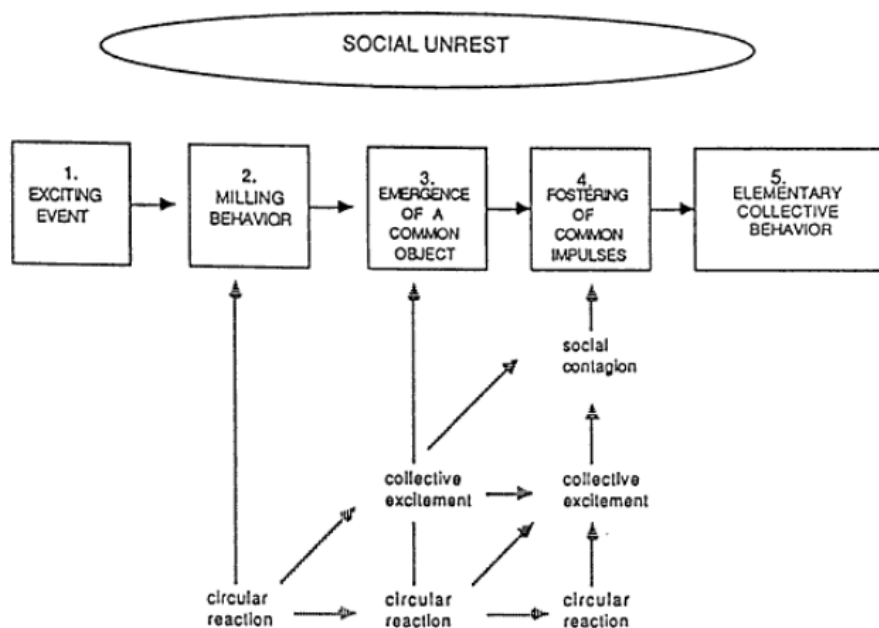


Figure 3: Steps and underlying mechanisms in Blumer's theory of collective behaviour (McPhail, 1989)

First, a problem must emerge. Secondly, the problem must gain enough attention to cause debate in society, or in other words, it must be legitimised. The third step is a mobilisation of action, or to make sure that the emerging problem becomes the subject of a discussion. The fourth stage is coming up with a plan of action, while in the fifth step the plan of action will be executed (McPhail, 1989; Jasny & Lenartowicz, 2021). As can be read in the article of Jasny & Lenartowicz (2021), a ‘social problem’ can be a quite vague and a broad topic. It is defined as “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (Jasny & Lenartowicz, 2021).

## 2.1.2 Stakeholder theory

The second theory that is of importance, is the stakeholder theory, originally conceptualised by Freeman (1984). This theory has been used extensively in several different fields of study. The stakeholder theory in connection with football has been quite underused, albeit that football supporters are more and more seen as stakeholders in clubs. Stakeholders are defined as "people or groups that can either affect or be affected by an organisation's actions" (Freeman, 1984; Biscaia et al., 2018). According to Jaeger (2021), football fans can be described as stakeholders since they comply with all the requirements to be considered a stakeholder. This is further elaborated in the following paragraph. Especially in Germany, football fans should be seen as stakeholders due to the '50+1 rule', in which private investors can never have more than 50% of the voting rights in the shareholders' assembly (Bauers et al., 2020). This means that fans always have a majority when taking important decisions for the well-being of the club.

The stakeholder theory has originally been developed to give a broader view of not only shareholders but also stakeholders. To be considered a stakeholder, one must comply with three criteria: legitimacy, power and urgency. According to Mitchell (1997), up to seven different sorts of stakeholders can be identified, but this is focused on the complete theory, not on football fans (Mitchell et al., 1997). Out of these seven, only the so-called 'definitive stakeholder' is the most important in this research. A definitive stakeholder combines legitimacy, power and urgency and is thus the most important (Winskowski, 2022). In football, only active fans are regarded as definitive stakeholder. This is also confirmed by other scholars (Senaux, 2008; Anagostopoulos, 2011; Cicut et al., 2017). As the author says, "*These fans draw attention with their unconditional support of the club through chants, choreographed sequences, or banners*" (Winskowski, 2022). Other fans do not have the power, legitimacy and urgency that active fans have, and therefore not considered a stakeholder. Active fans have the same goal as the rest of the fans, maximising their benefit. It is however that these fans have a bigger influence because of the stricter and more professional organisation (fan groups/clubs) they are in compared to normal fans. The influence they have can both be positive and negative.

Active fans fulfil all these categories, as explained by Senaux (2008). He explains that fans have legitimacy, because they attend games, or buy merchandise. Fans have power because they influence the teams' performance, attendance and sponsorship deals. Finally, fans have urgency because they (could) start complaining after a series of losses (Senaux, 2008; Jaeger, 2021). Jaeger (2021) concludes in his research that football fans have a considerable impact on football clubs. Clubs are dependent on the income they get from fans (ticket- and merchandise sales), and fans are dependent on the club. Fans do not only have an impact on the club, but they also have an interest. This can be related to the games itself, but also to economic, social and political aspects. This means that fans and groups of fans should be considered tight groups, with a high level of solidarity. Finally, socio-political attitudes are also mentioned, since football

can be seen as a representation of society. This means that the expression of social problems can be observed by observing fans during games.

### 2.1.3 Social identity theory

The final theory of importance is the social identity theory from Tajfel & Turner (1979). The theory is about the self-image that an individual has when he or she is part of a group. Being part of a group can be during many occasions, for example being part of a football club, their neighbourhood, etc (Vinney, 2019; Hatch & Schulz, 2004; p. 56-65).

The social identity theory consists of three main processes individuals go through when trying to form their 'social identity', whereby social identity is defined as *"it consists (...) of those aspects of an individual's self-image that*

*derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging"* (Hatch & Schulz, 2004; p.

59). Before speaking about the processes, it is important not to forget that three assumptions are coming with this theory.

These assumptions are (Hatch & Schulz, 2004; p. 59-60):

- *"Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem";*
- *"Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative connotations";*
- *"The evaluation of one's own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics"*

The first process is the process of social categorisation. The process of social categorisation is the process in which individuals place themselves in social groups. This process enables them to place themselves in the social world and to understand this world (Vinney, 2019).

The second process is social identification. Social identification is the process of behaving like members of a certain group and creating the same habits, attitudes, expressions, etc. It is thereby important that the

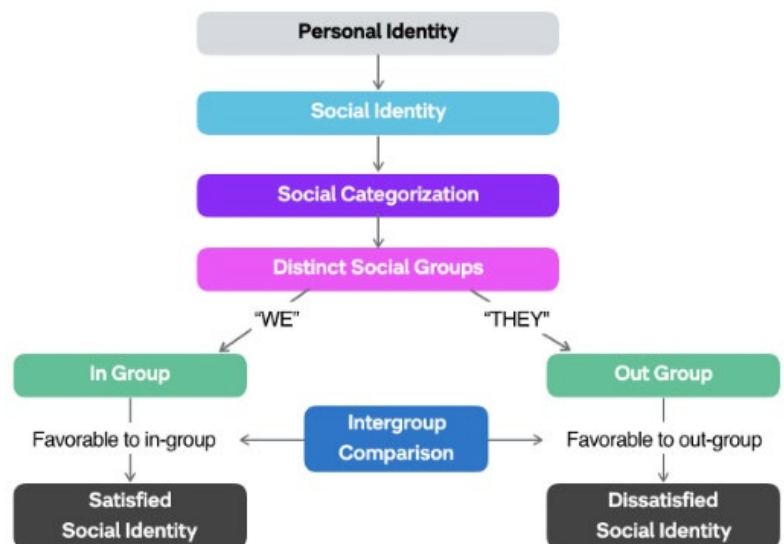


Figure 4: Framework of the social identity theory. Retrieved from Jenbonhomme

person in the in-group can positively identify him/herself with other group members (Hatch & Schulz, 2004; p. 60).

The third and final process is the process of social comparison. Members of a group will compare themselves to other members of the in-group, but also to members of the out-group. The in-group is defined as the group the member is part of; the out-group are all other groups. If they feel that other groups are better for their own identity, they have the ability to change. They can for example leave the group they are currently part of or try to improve the situation in the current group (Vinney, 2019). However, it is important to notice that the group they try to compare to must be relevant, not just any random group.

## 2.2 Conceptual model

To be able to research how German football fans express themselves during football games, a conceptual model has been made. The following variables have been taken into account in this conceptual model: social identity, interests, political preference, social involvement and sense of belonging. The variables interests, political preference and sense of belonging are further influenced by three other variables, fans, club and place. The conceptual model will be further elaborated below the picture.

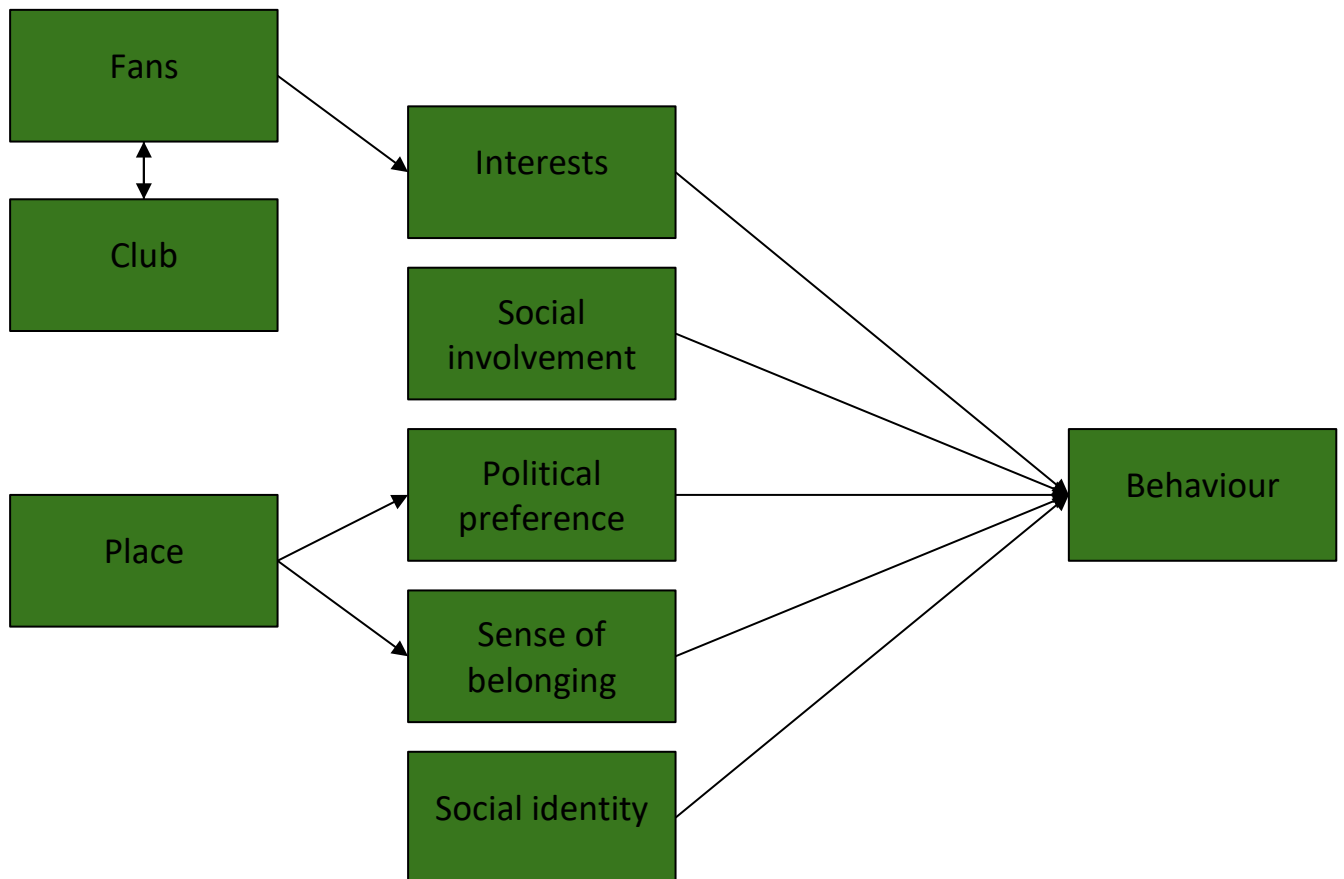


Figure 5: Conceptual model. Own work.

### 2.2.1 Elaboration of the conceptual model

Let's start at the top and work our way down. At first, fans have an influence on the club. This influence can be political, by voting as mentioned by Urich (2021) and Garcia & Llopis-Goig (2021), but fans can also influence the club in several other ways. One could think of several things, such as important decisions, the stance on issues in society, and the list goes on. It can also be said that clubs have an influence on fans, for example on issues like racism and discrimination. A club has the ability to keep out violent, racist and any other fans it does not want or tolerate by banning them from the stadium. Furthermore, fans have social, economic, political and sports-related interests as explained by Jaeger (2021) and further elaborated in the paragraph below. These interests influence in their way the behaviour of fans.

Political preference and the sense of belonging are both influenced by place. Anyone can have a feeling of affinity with a place and feel like they belong there or feel at home there. This is not only true for society, as has been showed by Dazkir (2018) and Redhead and Bika (2022), but also in the world of football. This is especially true in a country such as Northern Ireland, where being part of a religious group means voting for one party. In Belfast is a strong sense of belonging with space, where there is a strong segregation between catholics and protestants, even in football (Bleakney & Darby, 2018).

The remaining variables, social involvement and social identity are thought to not be influenced by any other variables. In the next paragraph these variables will be further explained.

### 2.2.2 Operationalisation

To have a clear definition of the concepts in the conceptual model, it is important to define these concepts correctly, which is called operationalisation. This is done in this paragraph. Interests are defined as *“a connection with something that affects your attitude to it, especially because you may benefit from it in some way”* (Oxford University Press, n.d.). According to Jaeger (2021), the interests of fans are mostly sports-related, but economic, social and political interests do exist as well. Sports-related interests concern the form of the team and the successes that a team can get, while economic interests include consolidation and return to fan investors. Social interests include all sorts of things, for example, fan engagement, respect of fan issues and fan culture. Finally, political interests are described as *“clear position against racism, discrimination or homophobia”* (Jaeger, 2021).

Social involvement (also called social engagement) is the level of participation in society or a community. Social involvement strengthens social norms and capital and requires at least an interaction with more than two people, an activity and social exchange (Hatherley-Greene, 2021). The result of social involvement can be a bigger social capital, which is defined as *“the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society that enable the society to exist and be successful”* (Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d.). This can be volunteering, but also working for social organisations that try to improve the position of marginalised people or groups in society. Fans could have valid reasons to support or be part of such organisations, especially when it is in line with their ideology and political preference.

Political preference is defined as: *“any temporary sign supporting a political candidate, stating a position regarding a political issue or similar purpose.”* (Law insider, n.d.). Stating a position can be divided into several scales, with the simplest one being the division of politics between left and right. The left side of the political spectrum is more focused on alleviating marginalised people, while the right is more focused on personal freedom. This division can further be expanded with centrism, and other gradations of left and right.

Sense of belonging *“refers to a human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by members of a group”* (Cherry, 2023). In the influential work of McMillan and Chavis (1986), the sense of community (a

synonym for sense of belonging) has been researched. They made a definition which contained four important elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Membership is defined as *“a feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong”* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is the feeling of being part of something. Influence consists of both the influence an individual member can have on a group, and the fact that cohesiveness is needed to influence members of the group. The third factor, integration and the fulfilment of needs, also called reinforcement is the fact that being part of a group should be rewarding for its members. Finally, a shared emotional connection is necessary for members to strengthen the community. A shared emotional connection consists of seven important features, of which one is the Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft divide from Ferdinand Tönnies (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This feature is further explained below.

It has been proven that attending sports games improves the sense of belonging (Inoue et al., 2019; Soria et al., 2022). Being part of a group and being accepted by a group is thereby of high importance for people. The feeling of being part of something is considered something more important than ourselves (Cherry, 2023). However, it is important to distinguish different sorts of relationships. Social scientist Ferdinand Tönnies made an important breakthrough with his Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in 1887. In this book, relations between people could be seen in either an intrinsic (coming from the person self) way or an extrinsic (coming from outside the person) way. In a Gemeinschaft, a person wants to form relationships with people to form a group, while in a Gesellschaft, a person wants to be part of a group to reach certain goals (Tönnies, 1887).

Finally, social identity can be seen as all sorts of social and demographic characteristics including age, gender, nationality, etc. (Jaeger, 2021). Behaviour should be seen as every action during a football game, from making (political) statements to just basic cheering. Behaviour should in this context be considered the same as expressions. The focus of behaviour is on the expressions during games, but also outside the stadium, by participating in volunteering or investing time in improving the situation of marginalised people, or in other words, expanding one's social capital.

## 3). Methodology, research methods and plan

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### 3.1 Research methods

**T**he research was conducted in a qualitative manner since concepts like identity and behaviour are hard to measure in a quantitative way. It must be said that it is not impossible to measure identity and behaviour quantitatively, however qualitative research methods are way better suited for this purpose, since people can talk and give their opinion about behaviour of others (Behavioural Insights Network Nederland, n.d.). Ways of doing qualitative research include methods like interviews, observations and literature studies. In this research, semi-structured interviews and observations were used.

It should be stated that all the interviews were semi-structured; this offers a level of freedom for the interviewer, while also maintaining a level of freedom for the interviewee. Doing semi-structured interviews also offers a high level of flexibility, and leaves space for extra follow-up questions after answers from the interviewee (Merkus, 2021). The interviews will be held with an interview guide, which can be found in the appendix (paragraph 8.2). The interview guide will be made according to quality standards, to get the best results (requirements see: Boezeman & Donkers, 2017; p 3-4). The interviewer will thereby follow the interview guide as closely as possible to guarantee that the question is answered correctly (Vennix, 2019; p. 148-149).

Since the research is not focused on the Netherlands but on Germany, the interviews were held in English. However, an exception can be made when the interviewee does not speak English at a sufficient level. The interviews were held partly or completely in German and in English, with five interviews conducted in English, two conducted in German, with the last interview being a mix of both. One was face-to-face, while the others were conducted via Zoom. Therefore, the interview guide is both in English and German to make the process easier. The interviewer will always ask the interviewee if he/she wants to be recorded, which would make the interpretation simpler, and make transcription of the interview possible. If the interviewee does not want to be recorded, the interview can still continue, however, only notes will be made during the interview. When the unrecorded interview is finished, it will be summarised instead of transcribed. When the interview is recorded, the interview will be transcribed afterwards and coded thereafter. According to Williams & Moser (2019), the optimal coding process consists of three steps. Open coding is thereby step one, in which distinct themes and concepts are identified. In the second step, axial coding narrows the amount of broad(er) codes back to a lower number with more specified codes. The final and third step is selective coding. During this process, the axial codes are grouped into bigger themes. The transcribing and coding of the interviews will be done with the program Atlas.ti 9, a

specialised program for analysing and processing qualitative data. The data will be analysed afterwards if this can be fitted with the theories mentioned earlier.

If the interviewee wishes to stay anonymous, everything is made sure that the results of the interviews are not traceable back to the person who said certain things. If there is any sensitive information, this information can be anonymised if necessary. In this research, none of the respondents needed to stay anonymous.

The observations were non-participant observations. This means that the researcher does not actively participate in the activities of the football fans and does not introduce himself to the participants (Williams, 2008; Arthur et al.; p. 166). Since the observations were held during football games, it is impossible to inform everyone about the reason why the researcher is there. A possible introduction of the researcher could obstruct the 'real' behaviour and could lead to socially desirable behaviour, which is undesired for the researcher and leads to a lower reliability of the research. Possible modes of observation will be writing field notes, taking pictures and filming actions done by fans. Observations were not done with an observation scheme, but odd things were noted, and things that were interesting were photographed or filmed. Normal things were not necessarily important to photograph were not noted, only if something interesting or something relevant for this research happened.

The observations were done during football games of the club Borussia Mönchengladbach, a club currently playing in the Bundesliga, the highest tier of German professional football. Information about German professional football can be found in paragraph 3.2.1. Mönchengladbach is a city located about 30 kilometres from the Dutch border town of Venlo and has approximately 275.000 inhabitants (DeinMG, n.d.). The football games will be Borussia Mönchengladbach against VfL Wolfsburg on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, and Borussia Mönchengladbach against Union Berlin, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April. In addition to this, the Mitgliederversammlung was attended (English: Members meeting; in Dutch: Algemene Ledenvergadering) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April. The first two observations are available for everyone who bought a ticket for this game, while the last observation is only possible since I am a member of the club; outsiders are not invited to this event.

Sub questions	Literature review	Observations	Interviews
Sub-question 1: <i>How is the sense of belonging expressed by German football fans, both in- and outside the stadium?</i>	X		X
Sub-question 2: <i>How are political preference and awareness of societal problems expressed, both during football games and outside games?</i>	X	X	X
Sub-question 3: <i>How does identity influence the behaviour of German football fans during football games?</i>	X		X
Sub-question 4: <i>What kind of interest do German football fans have in their beloved football club?</i>	X	X	X

Table 1: Data collection methods per sub question. Own work

### 3.1.1 Elaboration of the table

For answering the sub-questions, it is necessary to acquire knowledge via both literature research and interviews. For the second sub-question observations will be done as well, to get a better view of behaviour during football games in Germany. During the Mitgliederversammlung, observations will be done as well to see how fans can influence their interests in the club. Combining these three methods, also known as triangulation, improves the reliability and validity of the research (Benders, 2023). An

observation scheme in which the results of the observations are displayed can be found in the appendix, in paragraph 8.1.

### 3.2 Research plan

To answer the sub-questions and ultimately the main research question, semi-structured interviews with expert scholars and members of staff from German football clubs were conducted. Those members of staff are of the fan (support) department. It is however important to note that experts will only be contacted if they really can be of value. Some of those experts are already referred to in the scientific relevance. A club-based approach will be taken, and when necessary, a broad, expert view could be given.

While it was difficult to contact people at those clubs nonetheless, both German first-tier football clubs (Bundesliga), as well as second-tier football clubs (2. Bundesliga) were contacted. This only expanded the pool of possibilities, while also broadening the view and not only restricting it to the Bundesliga.

The example of Sankt Pauli given in the introduction would already be a great example of a specific case, but this club currently plays in the 2. Bundesliga. Only restricting it to the Bundesliga would mean this great case cannot be used, limiting the reliability of the research (Korzilius, 2008; p. 22-23). The second reason why it was tried to contact German football clubs from the 2. Bundesliga is the spatial segmentation in German football. Almost of the 36 Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga clubs are located in the former Federal Republic of Germany (FDR), better known as West Germany. This is due to all sorts of reasons, which are mostly connected to money (Ford, 2021). Only three out of 36 are former Eastern German teams; those being Hansa Rostock, 1.FC Magdeburg and Union Berlin. RB Leipzig was only established in 2009 and that's the reason it is not mentioned as a former GDR club. The clubs were chosen with a few criteria in mind. First of all, the researcher chose his favourite club(s), after which he chose some other clubs that are not disliked by him. Thirdly, he contacted some remaining clubs, and finally, he contacted clubs that have an interesting history regarding the behaviour of fans.



Figure 6: Location of German first- and second-tier teams. Retrieved from Reddit.

There are however interesting cases to be found in the third- and fourth tier of German football. Despite the lower number of fans, attendance, tv money and all other reasons, there are a lot of interesting cases of clubs in the third- and fourth tier of German football who are alluring enough to talk about. These clubs are for example FC Energie Cottbus and Dynamo Dresden. Fans of Energie Cottbus depicted themselves not too long ago as members of the Ku Klux Klan, a racist organisation from the United States (Deutsche Welle, 2018). Dynamo Dresden is interesting because the Ultras are right winged as well. During the game against Erzgebirge Aue on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, anti-LGBTQ banners could be seen during the game (Sächsische Zeitung, 2023). Because of these events, and other events in the past, these clubs were contacted as well.

Later, a full table and map with all the interviewed clubs will be given with some geographical- and other details. This table, together with the map can be found in paragraph 8.1.2.

### 3.2.1 Research population

In the case of this research, the research population was both be small and big at the same time. In the article of Jaeger (2021), the research population only consists of clubs from the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga. Only clubs playing in these two leagues were considered to be 'professional'. This meant that the research population was constrained to only 36 teams, eighteen in the Bundesliga and eighteen in the 2. Bundesliga. In this research, the research population was expanded to fit the demand of the researcher. Only choosing teams from the first two leagues does not mean that there are no interesting stories to be told, on the contrary. The goal of the researcher was to get an overview of the whole of Germany, this means that, according to the researcher, clubs from all over the country were to be used, to get the best results. As said, the research population was expanded to meet this demand. This means that the research population is now expanded from 36 to 132, of which eighteen are playing in the Bundesliga, eighteen in the 2. Bundesliga, twenty in the 3. Liga and 76 in the Regionalliga's. The Regionalliga is the fourth level of German football and is further divided into the Regionalliga Nord (19), Nordost (18), West (18), Südwest (18) and Bayern (20). The number inside the brackets is the number of clubs playing in that league. It is often cited that the Regionalliga's are the final league that can be considered professional, despite the fact that some clubs are more semi-professional (Ramesh, 2023). In figure seven, the football pyramid has been visualised.

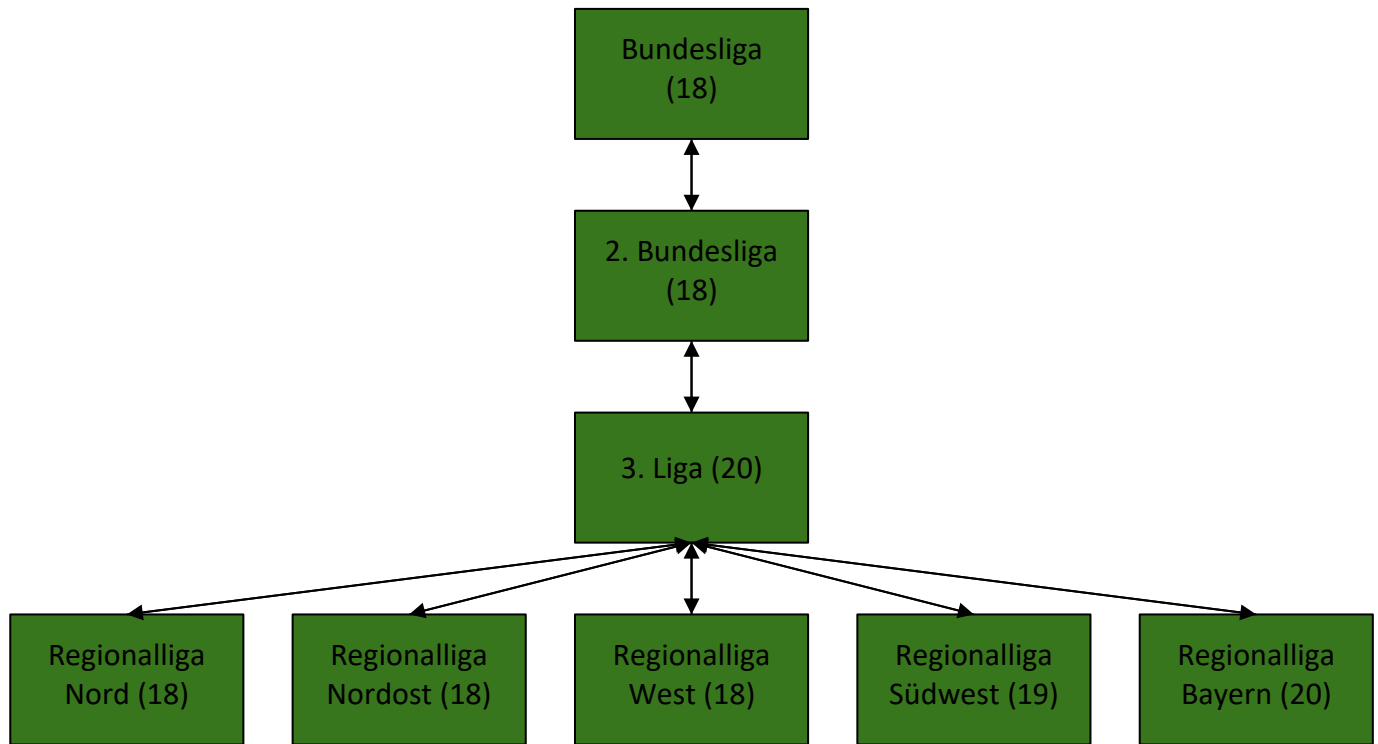


Figure 7: German football leagues 1 till 4. Own work, based on Reddit.

## 4). Empirical findings

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### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the interviews will be summarised and combined into one, coherent story which should give a good view of German football fan behaviour and the acting of clubs. First, some background information will be given regarding the clubs, together with other statistics. After this, the sub questions will be answered one by one.

#### 4.1.1 The social side of the spectrum

**B**efore the actual results are presented, it is important to know who the interviewees were. Six of the eight interviewees were supporter liaison officers (SLO), the other being a professor in political science and the director of the fan and social department. For people who are not common with the principle of an SLO, or supporter's liaison officer, it is a person that can be best described as someone who builds bridges between supporters and the club. Not only supporters, but all other stakeholders, such as the police, fire brigade, security, train companies etc. Supporter liaison officers do not only exist in Germany but also in Sweden, where clubs also remain largely 'owned' by fans (Stott et al., 2020). SLOs are there to mediate conflicts, and some of the interviewed ones have a history in social work, or a history in the fan scene. Having a history in the fan scene helps them understand what issues fans can have; *"I've been a member of Ultra Szene Mainz for a long time, so I know the guys from the stand"* (Vincent Baum, 28-04-2023). This is of course an advantage, and makes the contact between fans, ultras and the club easier. SLOs support fans with travels to away games and always try to keep an open dialogue between fans and the club, which can sometimes be difficult; *"Also wir stehen sozusagen immer auf einer Brücke, die manchmal auch etwas wackelig sein kann"* (Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023). This can be translated as: "We are so to say always standing on a bridge, which is sometimes wobbly". SLOs are thereby the first ones to get spoken to by fans when issues arise, or when they want to voice their opinion.

Supporter liaison officers were first introduced in 1988, with Borussia Mönchengladbach being the first one to introduce this concept (Borussia Mönchengladbach, 2023a; p.22-23). It was a reaction to hooliganism and violence in German stadiums, and later became a part of the "National Concept Sport and Security". This project was introduced in 1993, and together with many other projects and measures became later part of the licensing agreement (Nationaler Ausschuss Sport und Sicherheit, 2012). Nowadays, every Bundesliga club has at least three SLOs on a full-time basis to support the club and its fans.

### 4.1.2 Map & table with interviewees

On the following page, a table with a list of interviewees and some other statistics can be seen. The number of inhabitants of all the cities in which the club is housed is retrieved from Statistisches Bundesamt, the German federal statistics organisation (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021).



Figure 8: Map of Germany with the cities of the football clubs. Own work

Interviewed person(s)	Meinolf Sprink	Jan Ruoff & Jennifer Albers	Marc Francis	Vincent Baum	Julian Einfeldt	Jermaine Greene	Carsten Krystek	Christos Kassimeris
<b>Organisation</b>	Bayer Leverkusen	Borussia Mönchengladbach	Eintracht Frankfurt	1. FSV Mainz 05	FC Sankt Pauli	Werder Bremen	VfL Wolfsburg	European University Cyprus
<b>Stadium</b>	BayArena	Borussia Park	Deutsche Bank Park	MEWA Arena	Millerntor Stadion	Weserstadion	Volkswagen Arena	/
<b>Function</b>	Direktor Fans/Soziales	Supporters Liaison Officers (SLO)	Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO)	Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO)	Member of staff, Fanladen department	Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO) and Anti-Discrimination	Head of Supporters Liaison Officers (SLO)	Professor in Political Science
<b>City</b>	Leverkusen, Germany	Mönchengladbach, Germany	Frankfurt, Germany	Mainz, Germany	Hamburg, Germany	Bremen, Germany	Wolfsburg, Germany	Nicosia, Cyprus
<b>Date of the interview</b>	17-04-2023	17-04-2023	03-04-2023	28-04-2023	04-04-2023	19-04-2023	04-04-2023	05-04-2023
<b>Number of inhabitants in the city</b>	163.851	261.001	759.224	217.556	1.853.935	563.290	123.949	/
<b>Bundesland</b>	Nord-Rhine Westphalia	Nord-Rhine Westphalia	Hessen	Rhineland Palatine	Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg	Free Hanseatic City of Bremen	Lower Saxony	/
<b>Location in Germany</b>	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	Former West-Germany	/
<b>Position in the football pyramid</b>	Bundesliga (1)	Bundesliga (1)	Bundesliga (1)	Bundesliga (1)	2. Bundesliga (2)	Bundesliga (1)	Bundesliga (1)	/

Table 2: Table of interviewees. Own work

## 4.2 Members (and non-existing ones)

The first sub question that will be answered is the following one: *“How is the sense of belonging expressed by German football fans, both in- and outside the stadium?”*. This question will be answered with concepts that were asked during the interviews, and altogether form a part of the answer to this particular sub question.

### 4.2.1 Membership & influence

In the organisation of normal German football clubs, fans can become a member of the club. For a yearly fee, fans thereby get some rights and possibilities other fans, who are not a member, normally would not get access to. Important advantages of being a member are the fact that you have the possibility to vote in the Mitgliederversammlung (members meeting, see paragraph 3.1), some discounts in the fan shop, and some others. At clubs such as Eintracht Frankfurt and Werder Bremen, you have the opportunity to become a so-called *“Fördermitglied”*. This means that you are still a member of the club, but you do not have the right to vote. It is also cheaper to be such a member. This is not possible at every club, for example not at Borussia Mönchengladbach. Membership is an important part of the 50+1 rule that is enforced in the top two tiers of German football, the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga.

Of course, not every club has the same number of members or even has any members if you may call them members. A graph with all the statistics can be seen below in figure 8. A club like Eintracht Frankfurt has around 115.000 members, and *“we are growing so rapidly”* (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023). This growth can also be seen in the data. According to Statista, Eintracht had some 5000 members fewer in November of last year (Statista, 2022). In Mönchengladbach, a slightly lower number comes up with 96.441. A similar rise can be seen at this club as well. The number of members has risen from 78.000 in 2017 to 95.800 in 2022, and now 96.441. This is almost a 24% increase in members in a period of around five years (Borussia Mönchengladbach, 2023). It has to be mentioned however, that the city of Mönchengladbach only has a third of the inhabitants Frankfurt has. The funny thing about this is, that only a small part of the fans in Mönchengladbach are members. According to Jan Ruoff, the supporter liaison officer of BMG, only five to ten thousand people in the city are a member of the club. The people in Mönchengladbach say, *“Ich bin der Gladbacher, ich brauche kein Mitglied sein”*, or translated, I live in Mönchengladbach, so I am part of the club as well. The other clubs have fewer members. The reasons for this could be historical successes, popularity and locality. A club like Mainz, with hardly any trophies only has around 15.000 members. The club has no rich history and lies in the shadow of Eintracht Frankfurt, who won the Europa League in 2022 and has qualified this season (2022-2023) for the Champions League. Or as Vincent Baum would say: *“we don't have a big investor, we don't have the biggest history and we don't have the biggest stadium, the not the biggest fan base, (...). We are very near to Frankfurt which is also difficult”*. This factor, locality, is also true for other clubs. In the Ruhr Area, many illustrious football clubs are present, such as 1. FC Köln,

Borussia Dortmund, FC Schalke 04 and Bayer Leverkusen. When one club has a successful period, more ‘casual’ fans could change their allegiance in favour of that club. These people are also known as ‘success supporters’. This is perfectly exemplified by the case of 1. FC Magdeburg, as can be read here: *‘Wenn Magdeburg aufsteigen würde in die erste Bundesliga, dann hätten die mit einem Schlag dreimal so viele Fans. Da bin ich mir sehr sicher, dass die heute nicht kommen, wenn sie in der dritten Liga spielen’* (Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023). This can be translated as: “If Magdeburg were to promote to the Bundesliga, then they would have triple the number of fans. That’s something I am sure about, that they don’t come today because they play in the 3. Liga”

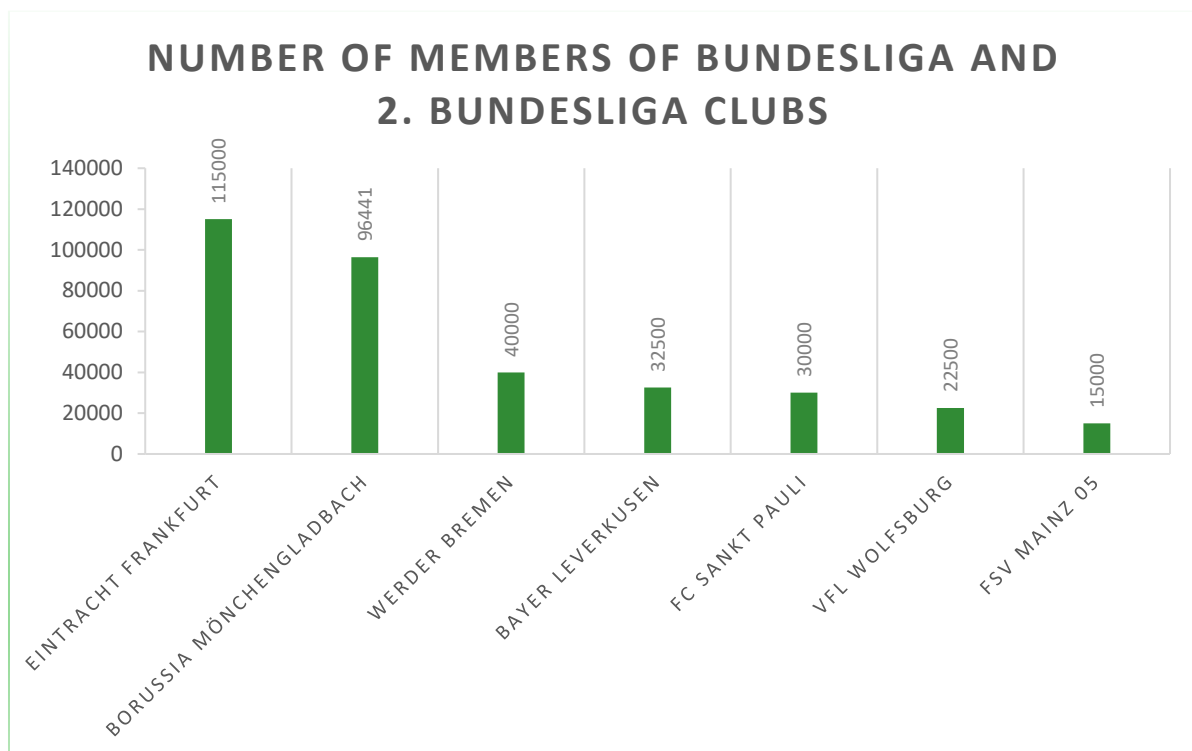


Figure 9: Graphic with the number of members per club. Own work, based upon interviews.

There are however exceptions to the rule of having ‘real’ members. Clubs such as Bayer Leverkusen and VfL Wolfsburg are all clubs with an exception. As a member of the club, you do not have the right to vote, because there is no Mitgliederversammlung. This has to do with the ownership of the club, which is different compared to all other German first- and second tier football clubs. This, together with discussions about ownership and the 50+1 rule will be further elaborated in paragraph 4.5.2.

Being a member of the club is not the only way in which fans can influence the club, or force decisions in favour of the larger fan base. Another 'formal' way of letting the board hear their opinion is via the 'Fanbeirat'. The Fanbeirat is a meeting with representatives of all involved stakeholders, such as ultras, an organisation which represents unorganised fans, members and the head of all the fan clubs. They meet every few months to discuss things that are an issue for fans, or the club informs these organisations about plans they have for the future. Furthermore, every fan could of course try to get elected as someone who is in the board, called the 'Aufsichtsrat', or supervisory board in English. These are the more formal ways of keeping a dialogue between fans, organisations and the club, in



Figure 10: Mitgliederversammlung in Borussia-Park. Own work, 17-04-2023

order to maintain a good relationship with each other. A lot of clubs stated that they have these boards, the 'Aufsichtsrat', the 'Fanbeirat' and some an honorary board in which former players or influential members are part. In the figure (10) above, the Mitgliederversammlung can be seen, with on the left side near the screen people that are asking the board about sportive performances and other questions in their interest. More informal ways that fans could use to influence the board are the use of banners and other types of media. Banners are also often used to carry out political messages, something that will be explained in more detail in paragraph 4.3.1.

As has already been explained in paragraph 2.1.2, fans can be considered a stakeholder according to the stakeholder theory, because they fulfil all three criteria to be considered a stakeholder (Freeman, 1984; Jaeger, 2021; Bauers, 2020). Again, to be considered a stakeholder, one must have legitimacy, power and

urgency. Fans have legitimacy, because they attend games, buy merchandise and are committed to the club already since a very low age (Senaux, 2008). Fans have power because they are an important source of money for clubs (season ticket holders), and in Germany, fans have power because they are a part of the democratic fan culture, with their membership and so on. Finally, fans have the urgency to protest against the bad results of the team and voice their opinion against the board. This makes fans an important stakeholder, just like any other stake- or shareholder.

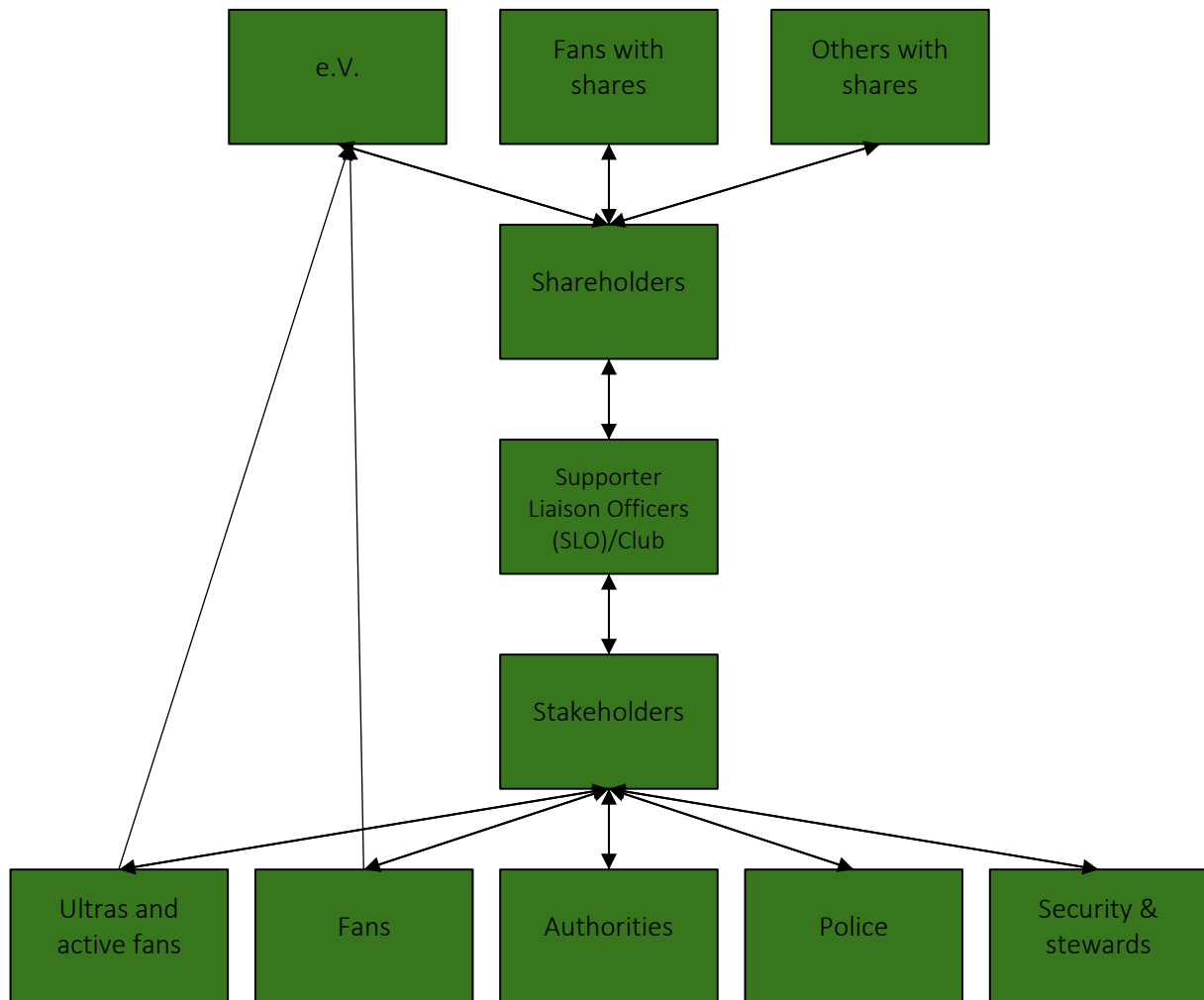


Figure 11: Stakeholder theory conceptualised in the context of this research. Own work, based on Freeman (1979) and interviews.

In figure 11, a model has been made to show the stakeholder theory from Freeman (1979), fitted to this specific research context. Up top, possible shareholders of the clubs can be seen, such as the e.V. (further information see paragraph 4.5.1), fans with shares and finally other owners with shares. These three 'players' are considered a shareholder in this context, with the e.V. ruled by fans. This explains the arrows leading from the bottom left two to the top left. In the middle are the supporter liaison officers, which form a middle point between the stakeholders and the shareholders. The stakeholders are fans, local authorities such as a municipality, federation, the police and finally security and stewards inside the stadium.

## 4.2.2 Connection to the club & sense of community

Football fans are often bound to their beloved football club for a long time, sometimes their whole life. Occasionally, fans change loyalty to another club, which has been more successful in the last couple of years, while their club has not been performing well. This phenomenon is the so-called phenomenon of a 'success supporter'. This is a supporter who likes to celebrate the wins, but when a club is performing poorly, that supporter is nowhere to be seen (Pieters, 2019). A fake fan so to say, or a prize/win only win. Luckily, most fans aren't like this, at least from what can be made up from the respondents. Some fans have been supporting their club for as long as they remember, while others became fan in a later stage. Most of the SLOs have been fans of the club since a very young age, some through family, others through friends who took them to games. It didn't matter if the club was playing in the Bundesliga, or 2. Bundesliga, no, the mentality of the players is the most important. *"Also, viele Fans sagen, 'wir gehen zum Borussia, egal welche Liga'. Das bindet natürlich schon."* (Jan Ruoff, 17-04-2023), "we go to Borussia, we don't care which league, that connects of course".

The feeling inside the stadium is the feeling of being surrounded by family. The stadium feels like a small city, with all kinds of different people in that city; *"So yeah, it is a small city [Deutsche Bank Park], a small town, we have all kinds of people in there, in that city."* (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023). This feeling, of being in a small community is something that has been widely researched in the academic world, with the best example being the concept of *Gemeinschaft*, created by Ferdinand Tönnies, (Tönnies, 1887). A *Gemeinschaft* "refers to a group of individuals mainly characterized by a strong sense of common identity, attachment to traditional and sentimental concerns, and close personal relationships." (Hasa, 2021). A *Gemeinschaft* is often translated in English as a 'community'. People in a *Gemeinschaft* are also bound to sentimental concerns, shared beliefs and a shared physical space. People in a stadium fit these criteria; they are all fans (common identity), have sentimental concerns (wanting your club to win) and have close personal relationships. The last depends on what kind of fan you ask since certain fans are more connected than others (see paragraph 4.4.3). It should be noted that the concepts common identity, social identity and social identity theory are not the same. Having a common identity in this case means being a fan, social identity is a variable, and the social identity theory is one of the key theories used in this research.

According to the supporter liaison officers, the fan base of clubs can be named two things. First of all, fans are sceptical. Fans first need to see something, mostly at least multiple times to be convinced about something. *"die Wolfsburger sind nicht schnell zu begeistern. (...). man braucht mehr als ein Erfolg."* (Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023), "people in Wolfsburg aren't easily enthusiastic, people need more than one success". The other word that comes to mind is 'Leidenschaft'. *Leidenschaft* can be translated as passion. Or as Jan Ruoff states, *"Wir sagen mal eine Leidenschaft die leiden schafft"*, or a passion that creates suffering. They are able to celebrate the wins, and able to suffer when the team loses.

Being a fan of a football club fits social theories as well, in this the social identity theory. The theory, as explained in paragraph 2.1.3, is about the self-image an individual had when he or she is part of a group (Vinney, 2019; Hatch & Schulz, 2004). The theory has three processes, which an individual goes through, with the first being the step of social categorisation. In this process, fans become part of the greater fan community. This could be a more casual fan, a member or an even a member of the Ultras. The second step is the process of social identification. This is changing their behaviour to match the behaviour of the other group members (other fans). In this process, the individual creates the same habits, attitudes, expressions and others. The same habits can be for example wearing a shirt from your favourite club, while the same expression could be waving your scarf when everyone else is doing the same. The final step is social comparison. During this process, the individual will compare themselves to members of the in-group (in this case other fans in the stadium) and members of the out-group (in this case fans of other clubs). When fans feel that they are better off at another club, they could change their loyalty, and the process will start all over again. The steps and the examples have been filled in by the researcher based on statements that were mentioned during the interviews.

## 4.3 Politics (and the lack of it)

The second sub question that will be answered is the following one: *“How are political preferences and awareness of societal problems expressed both during football games and outside games?”*. This sub question will be answered from both a clubs’ perspective and a fan’s perspective, and lastly, sustainability is addressed as well.

### 4.3.1 Political involvement

#### Fans

Fans are automatically involved in politics in Germany, whether they like it or not. As is explained in the next paragraph, members have the right to vote, but fans are also politically involved in other ways. Fans can protest for certain values they pursue. It is not rare to see politically themed flags or other objects that somewhat spoil political preference. Starting with more fan-political issues. Fan-political issues are issues which more have to do with the team on the pitch and the competition as a whole. You could think of issues like the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), *“Also ihr macht unser Spiel kaputt, wenn es um (...) Entscheidungen geht, wo der Videoschiedsrichter sich einschaltet, zum Beispiel.”* (Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023); *“You are*

*ruining our game, when it is about decisions from the VAR, for example”*. Another point of protest, which has come up for a few years now, is the protest against the starting times of matches. The fans protest against the Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL) and DAZN, a commercial broadcaster in Germany; *“DFL, DAZN and others: your starting times annoy us”*. This can be seen in figure 12. The DFL is the



Figure 12: Protest of fans against DAZN and the DFL. Own work, 09-04-2023

organisation that handles the

Bundesliga and the 2. Bundesliga, while the Deutsche Fußball Bund (DFB) handles competitions like the 3. Liga and lower. The DFB is the national football association, comparable to the Dutch KNVB and English FA. The German sentence makes more sense, especially because that day also was the second day of Easter. Also, fans are generally speaking against the commercialisation of football. This is because football has been so accessible for people in Germany to attend; *There are always fan political aspects like no to*

*any ownership, no to any stadium name, stuff like that, anti-commercial activities” (Jermaine Greene, 19-04-2023).* It is interesting to spot differences between clubs because there are some interesting ones. In the table in paragraph 4.1.2, the stadium names can be read. Out of the seven stadiums, at least two have a sponsored name, and two more have the name of a company in them. The Deutsche Bank Park, the stadium of Eintracht Frankfurt, is sponsored by a bank and the MEWA Arena from FSV Mainz 05 is named after a textile-making company, Mewa. This is not new, before this current sponsorship, the stadiums were called the Commerzbank Arena and Opel Arena. While both these clubs and her fans are against further commercialisation of the Bundesliga, the stadium name is sponsored, as opposed to the Borussia-Park and the Weserstadion, named after a name and a river flowing through Bremen.

While these issues are more or less sports-related, fans also politically express themselves. During the game of Werder Bremen on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, Antifa flags could be seen, and those are not only limited to the Weserstadion. In Frankfurt and Mainz, these are also visible *“one thing that is always displayed is Che Guevara, which is symbolising things, we sometimes have rainbow flags, antifa signs in the stadium” (Mark Francis, 03-04-2023).* Antifa (an extreme left organisation) and Che Guevarra (an Argentinian who had a great role during the Cuban Revolution) are well-known examples of things that are connected to the (extreme) left side of the political spectrum. Not a lot of fans are politically active in the sense that they are part of a political party or municipality or something similar. That is more an exception to the rule, many fans are thereby passively politically active with banners and chants. These banners are mostly directed against the DFB, DFL and others in the case of fan-political issues; in the case of real political issues, they are mostly themed against right-winged people, as a reaction to a subject that is important for fans or something else.

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*“Mostly as a reaction or if you know that the team, or the fans of the other team are for example right-wing, then you will probably hear some left-wing chants, some “Nazi raus” or something like that.” (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023)*

Elections, be they local or federal, are not seen as of influence. The protest against right-winged themes is something that keeps coming back, both inside- and outside the stadium. Inside the stadium with banners, outside the stadium with contra demonstrations against neo-Nazis: *“against Nazi demonstrations so that they come and block the route of the of the Nazi demonstration and show that they are not welcome” (Vincent Baum, 28-04-2023).* Demonstrations, outside the stadium, seem to be a common theme for supporters. “Demonstrationsaufrufe”, or a call for a demonstration is something that comes back multiple times, sometimes for the aforementioned example of the neo-Nazis, other times for Fridays for Future, to protest for a better climate. Other issues, such as LGBTQ and migration are also themes for protests, but these will be further elaborated in paragraph 4.3.3. Another way of passive political behaviour is by singing politically themed chants. This is not always there, but again, most of the

time as a reaction to something else, as can be read in the following quote: *“Mostly as a reaction or if you know that the team, or the fans of the other team are for example right-wing, then you will probably hear some left-wing chants, some “Nazi raus” or something like that. (...) It is often times a reaction on something, but for the general purpose.”* (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023). Furthermore, German football fans are *“generally more vocal in terms of social, political and economic issues rather than other leagues”* according to Christos Kassimeris, professor of political science. Especially last year, in the upcoming months to the World Cup in Qatar, fans boycotted the country due to poor human rights and the corruption inside FIFA.

Finally, the theory of collective behaviour can also be linked to fan behaviour. This applies both inside and outside the stadium, of which the first one will be exemplified further in this text. If the theory of collective behaviour can be fitted, a situation must comply with five steps (Le Bon, 1885, McPhail, 1989). First, a problem must emerge. In this case, the problem is racism in society. This problem has been chosen to fit the theory of collective behaviour and is thereby selected by the researcher. A problem like commercialisation could have been chosen as well. If this would have been done, the respective steps would have been filled in with different examples which would fit the theme of commercialisation. The second step is that the problem gains enough attention to cause debate. This has happened already, think about the countless demonstrations in society against racism. The third step, mobilisation of action, happened as well, with protests inside the stadium with banners and choreographies. The fourth stage, creating a plan of action, has also happened. This step is already implemented, because the fifth step, executing the plan of action has happened as well. Concrete measures include naming a codeword to the security, or any other member of staff, which brings supporters to a room with pedagogic workers to talk about their issues. This is called *“Wo geht es nach Panama?”* (Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023). This is not only used at VfL Wolfsburg, but also at other clubs, that use the same sentence, or a similar one. It is also used at festivals all around Germany (Focus, 2017). Further amplification of awareness and safety in the stadium will be given in paragraph 4.3.4.

### *Clubs*

A big difference can be seen in the involvement of clubs regarding politics and other issues. While some clubs have a high involvement, others tend to stay out of politics and try to be as unpolitical as possible. It is however impossible to stay completely unpolitical in Germany, even if they wanted to remain unpolitical. The quote listed below perfectly summarises this:

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*“The moment, of course, you exercise your right to vote, like you said, for yourself, for the particular club we all understand, of course, that voting is a political process. So automatically you’re politicising anything that happens within football. (...) So in that sense, whether they like it or not, German fans become political automatically”* (Christos Kassimeris, 05-04-2023)

First of all, members have the opportunity to vote, for new members of the board, members of the honorary council and for changes in the statutes. I had the opportunity to vote for boards in the Mitgliederversammlung, of which more details can be found in paragraph 4.5.1. While the attendance of 1.216 people was relatively low, with only 1,3% of all the members present, the questions and statements fans made were often critical, with great backing from other fans (Borussia Mönchengladbach, 2023b). While most of them were fan-related, such as about the behaviour of the manager and his changing policy, others about subjects such as sustainability and access for disabled people were more serious. More information about this can be read in paragraph 4.3.

Not every club is as politically involved as the other. A club like Borussia Mönchengladbach or VfL Wolfsburg tries to stay out of as much politics as they possibly can; they are rather more unpolitical than politically active at all. As long as you behave in a normal way, and are a fan of BMG, then you are more than welcome; *‘Und alle kommen hierhin und dürfen hier reinkommen, weil wir keine Sittenpolizei am Eingang spielen. Aber wer hierhinkommt, darf alles das, was ihr privat gehen mach, davon nicht äußern, sondern hier ist es nur Borussia (Jan Ruoff, 17-04-2023)’*. This does however not mean that they condone actions that are deemed unfriendly. It seems that the club is maybe a bit harsh and does not do anything to promote human rights or anything like that, but that is not true. Subjects like racism, discrimination, human rights and hostility against migrants are not considered politics; these values are wanted by the club, but not as a political subject, but as a prerequisite. In comparison to a club like Werder Bremen, Eintracht Frankfurt or FC Sankt Pauli, they almost market themselves as political. For example, when Black Lives Matter was a big issue, they played one game without their sponsor, and replaced the free space with ‘black lives matter’. Not just to show their opinion, but really to let people become aware, and not just to go with the flow of other clubs and feeling some sort of group pressure to really do something this time. At Werder Bremen, it is also expected that the club does something, even though not all fans like this politically active behaviour. Werder also has something that is called “Klare Kante gegen Rassismus”, as mentioned by Jermaine, or a clear stop against racism.



Figure 13: Activism of Werder Bremen against national socialism. Drutjons, 05-02-2022.

The political involvement of clubs does not end with political actions (or the lack of it) and the rights of fans to vote, no it goes way further. This is not bound to any special club but to everyone. Everyone knows what happened in the Second World War, the holocaust and the murder of millions of people in this troubled time in history. Even now, some 75 years after the end of the war, there is still a feeling of shame among Germans (Anderson, 2016). In Frankfurt this feeling is even bigger since that club used to be one of the bigger clubs with a large Jewish following, *“our president is known to speak for the Jewish community, (...) since we used to be one of Jewish clubs (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023).”* Clubs also educate youth about the horrors of the war, with excursions to concentration camps, and research of locals in the period between 1930-1945. Involvement of clubs regarding this can also be seen in figure 13, in which a screen with *“Nie wieder Nationalsozialismus!”* or never ever national socialism again!

### 4.3.2 Voting behaviour

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, Germans are still quite ashamed of what happened in the Second World War, and thereby very cautious to vote for any political party that is sort of right-wing. There is a big consensus among clubs that people who vote for Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are not welcome inside the stadiums. The AfD is a populist, right-wing political party that is especially popular in the former East Germany. This division can clearly be seen on the map below, in figure 14. Showing your political preference inside the stadium is something that is not desired, although symbols from both the left and right can be seen, such as antifa flags, or symbols from Che Guevara. You would not be welcome if you were to walk in the Weserstadion, or the MEWA Arena with some AfD merchandise. You would be thrown out by security immediately, that is how deeply the AfD is loathed by most people.

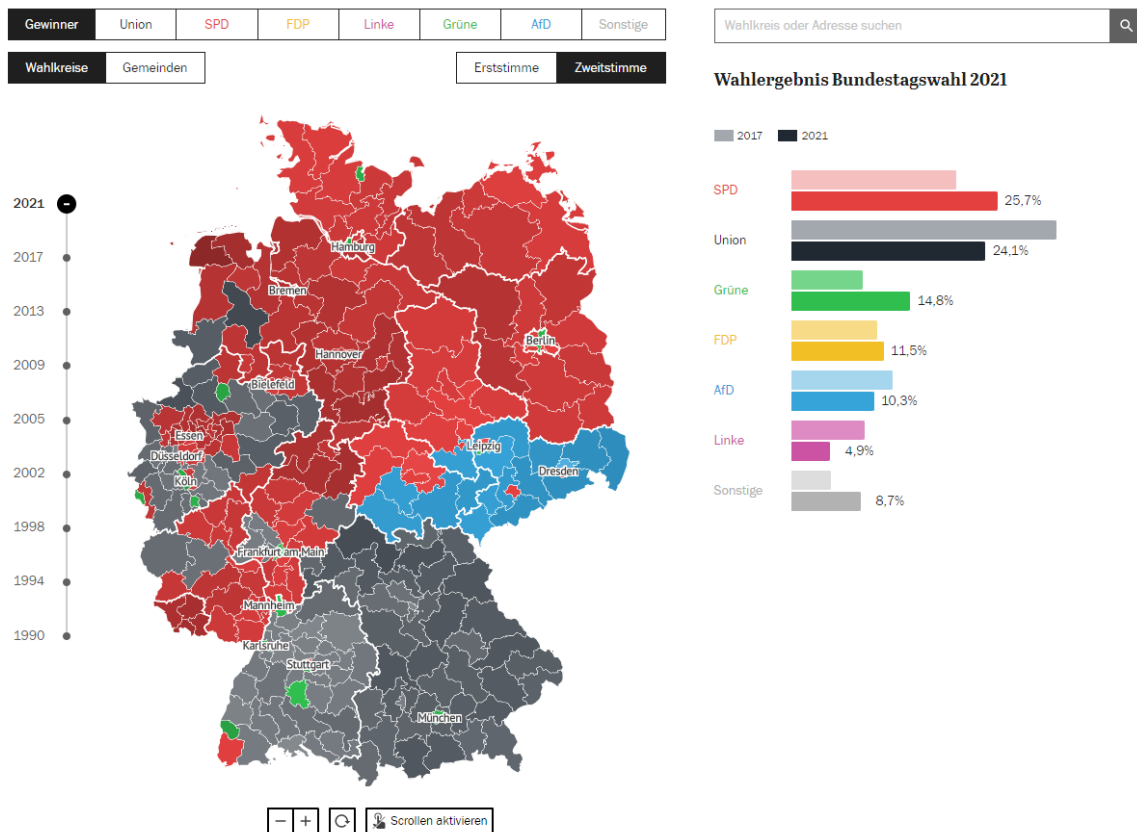


Figure 14: Election results of the federal elections in Germany, 2021. Retrieved from tagesspiegel.de

The political parties that were mentioned the most during the interviews were the ‘big’ parties in Germany, the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union), Die Grüne, FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei) and die Linke. The SPD is a social democratic party and the oldest political party in Germany (Duitsland Instituut, n.d.). The CDU is, together with the CSU (only in Bavaria) the second largest party and is a more conservative, centre-right party. The other parties are less relevant and thereby not described in detail. It was mentioned during the interviews that Bundesliga fans tend to be more inclined to vote for a left-wing party than a right-wing party, but this was deemed more dynamic than just a division between left and right. Wolfsburg is more directed to the SPD, since large industrial companies like Volkswagen and IG Metall have been present in this city for a long time now *“Hier, das ist, glaube ich, traditionell auch in Wolfsburg ein Standort, der ja sehr sozialdemokratisch geprägt ist, hier durch die große Gewerkschaft, durch die IG Metall”*(Carsten Krystek, 04-04-2023). *“Here, I believe, is traditionally also in Wolfsburg a place, which is very social democratic, here through the large trade union, through the IG Metall”*. Also in Frankfurt, this division between right and left is not as static as it may seem:

*“It’s funny, we also have the CDU, the Christian Democratic Union, which is always strong in Frankfurt, but I think they are the most moderate version of the CDU that you will find in Germany. They are the most left-tendency right*

wing party that you will find, but yes, our mayor is from the SPD for example.”

(Marc Francis, 03-04-2023)

### 4.3.3 Fan- & club behaviour regarding issues in society

As can be read in paragraph 4.3.1, fans are politically involved in all sorts of issues that they value important. As such, they also value other things that are not purely political, but still of importance in their view. Inequality in society and migration are commonly given by most respondents as an answer to why fans use banners inside the stadium or protest in demonstrations throughout Germany. The topics of these issues are very broad, it is not only big themes such as migration, but also support for people with disabilities, blind or deaf fans. Both fans and clubs use their power to show others a message. Something like a department for diversity is something that was unthinkable ten years ago. Nowadays, this is way more common to see. Greater awareness of LGBTQ has led to more infrastructural measures taken by clubs, such as gender-neutral toilets. In Wolfsburg, this has given some positive side effects as mentioned by the respondent. Now, dads with their daughter, or a mother with her disabled son are able to use the same toilets. Football and the culture around it are often associated as a hostile environment for LGBTQ people, but this is slowly starting to change. *“they [LGBTQ people] said that they had made hard experience with football fans and that's the reason because the culture is not inviting so” (Jermaine Greene)*. With *“Wo geht es nach Panama”* the clubs try to make the stadium a safer place for everyone. Not only for LGBTQ people, but everyone who feels scared, attacked, or anything else. People can use this sentence and retreat to a safe space. Other infrastructural measures that have been taken by clubs are live audio reports of the game for blind people, who are not able to see what is going on. This has been given as an answer by respondents to become more inclusive. Also, reports for deaf people are done, to be as accessible as possible for everyone. In the future, stadiums will be more and more filled with people in wheelchairs, which is caused by demographic trends. People get older and older and more and more people have trouble walking and getting up the stairs.

Not only inside the stadium tries the club to be a place for everyone, but also outside the stadium. It became apparent that the club is often a middle point in society. People of all social classes are in the stadium, from young to old, from rich to poor. These different kinds of people are in the stadium the same: equal. During one of the observation moments, a banner with *“Soziale Arbeit schätzen, statt behindern!” (Value social work, instead of hindering it!)* could be seen. The fact that social work and social projects are so important, is demonstrated by the sheer number of projects that can be read about in the next paragraph, in which both fans and the club are involved in.

### 4.3.4 Social projects

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, both fans and club do a lot to help marginalised people, or at least try to improve the position of people in lower social-economic classes. The social projects that are

organised can be roughly divided into three categories: sports-related, social-related and health-related. These social projects are specific cases mentioned during the interviews.

### *Sports-related*

Sports-related projects include projects that are obviously connected to sports. Some of these projects are organised by the club, while others are done by fans. You could think of walking football, football for elderly people who are impacted in their mobility or refereeing for teams around the city. In this situation, the club tries to create a dialogue between them and the fans. In Wolfsburg, a lot of people are also members of the scouts and volunteer over there. Of course, these efforts are valued greatly, but clubs seem to notice that young people are often more and more bound by time. School until 18:00, homework and other activities leave little time for refereeing or training pupils. Sports-related projects that are organised include things like football training for blind people and football and handball for disabled people.

### *Social-related*

Social-related projects are projects, that try to improve the position of people or improve the cooperation between people in a certain area. The latter is to improve social cohesion and to keep people off the streets. At FC Sankt Pauli, they have a project called U18 Ragazzi, with the Fanladen as a place for minors to have a safe space and talk about the problems they encounter. It is a space to talk about vulnerabilities and how it is to grow up in the fan scene, since older fans (mostly Ultras) have a certain image and expectations of these so-called 'prospects'. Another social project that is still being done by some fans is Covid-19 related and includes 'Die Tafel'. Die Tafel (or The Plate in English) is organised by Ultras and is a project that aims to improve the position of homeless people. Being homeless is already hard, in the pandemic it was even harder, with social distancing, masks etc. Die Tafel is like a foodbank; it hands out food to homeless people and money with a low income. Also, in Covid times, fans started cooking meals for homeless people as well. A member of a fan club in the United States saw this and started handing out meals as well; this is still done today *"What he did was, once a week, he made 200 salads for people working in hospitals, to give them free food, he gave them free food, once a week."* (Marc Francis, 03-04-2023). Another project that was a relic of the pandemic is getting groceries for elderly people. These people were afraid to go outside, with the risk of getting infected. Ultras and other fans, who had more than enough time now, cooperated with the club to buy groceries for these people, so they did not have to get outside. Another project related to food is the so-called "Fassenbrechen" (breaking of the fasting) during Ramadan. This is the traditional Iftar, the meal directly after sunset when Muslims are allowed to eat again during Ramadan. This is done in Bremen, done by the club to connect with fans in an informal way. Fans also offer services to people who are in need of them, such as legal counselling. People have the opportunity to visit fans on a weekly basis to help them with legal documents, court cases, or anything else, and fans will help people on a voluntary basis.

Since 2015, when a refugee crisis broke out in Europe, German fans were there as well to care for these people in need. They organised all sorts of activities, for example, cooking for refugees, and donations of money, clothes and tickets for matchdays. The fans, together with the club tried to make a 'welcome culture' in and around the stadium. The help of fans is really approachable; *"And I think if you need a helping hand in the district of Saint Pauli, you could probably ask a fan group and they would do it."* (Julian Einfeldt, 04-04-2023). Since February 2022, when the war in Ukraine started, both fans and clubs have shown solidarity towards the war-torn country. A club like Borussia Mönchengladbach donated €87.949,11 in help to Ukraine. This is done through the Borussia-Stiftung, the foundation of the club (Borussia Mönchengladbach, 2023a, p. 69-73). They even organised a friendly game between them and the Ukrainian national team. Collections by other teams have also occurred, together with donations of money, clothing and used military equipment.

### *Health-related*

Lastly, there are some health-related projects clubs and fans participate in. For some clubs, homeless people can be an issue, since they can cause problems, and give people an unsafe experience around the stadium. In Hamburg, there is an initiative that helps homeless people with their hygiene, with a shower bus, as Julian mentioned. A general practitioner is also present for any needed medical care. In Frankfurt, Eintracht supports an organisation that helps drug addicts with a safe space. This organisation offers spaces to take drugs safely, provide medical care, and have showers. Speaking of medical care, the Ultras of Eintracht Frankfurt are connected to the Ultra scene of Atalanta Bergamo, in Italy. When Covid-19 was in the early stages, in months like April and May 2020, Ultras helped build hospitals in Lombardy, which was the region in Italy that was hit disproportionately hard with infections. It is not uncommon to see cross-border actions like this. Finally, in July 2021, massive rainfall led to floodings in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Rhineland-Palatinate, and especially the Ahr Valley had been struck hard, with many villages and infrastructure left damaged or completely destroyed. Clubs that are close to that area, such as Borussia Mönchengladbach and Bayer Leverkusen donated money, and football clothing for people in that area.

### 4.3.5 Sustainability

Football clubs are maybe not the first ones you would think about when thinking about sustainability. As mentioned by Lozano & Barreiro-Gen (2022), football clubs are civil society organisations that try to incorporate sustainability measures into their business, although this happens (too) slowly (Lozano & Barreiro-Gen, 2022). Clubs seem to be standing alone in this struggle to become more sustainable, but this is not true. Fans are seen as a stakeholder as well. The process of becoming more sustainable is all about to change with measures from the DFL, coming into force next season. In 2021, clubs voted for the fact to include sustainability in the licensing agreement of the DFL, so for clubs playing in the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga (clubs in the 3. Liga and below are governed by the DFB, Deutsche Fußball Bund). This

part of the licensing agreement has been based upon the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations and is combined by clubs with other, already existing processes of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environment, Society and Governance (ESG). This season was (2022-2023) a period of transition, while the 'real deal' will start next season (Deutsche Fußball Liga, 2022). This transition period has already been great for a few clubs, which have already been certified for next season, including Borussia Mönchengladbach (Borussia Mönchengladbach, 2023a). Clubs also admit that this is a good development *"Das heißt, wir haben also, ob das CO2 Abdruck ist, ob das, wie heißt es, Energieverbrauch ist, ob das Recycling ist. Das sind Dinge, die sind im Flüsse (Meinolf Sprink, 17-04-2023)"*. Meinolf mentions that carbon dioxide, the use of energy and recycling are things that are dynamic, meaning that more and more clubs are aware of these things and committing themselves to become more sustainable.

### *Measures from clubs*

Many clubs state that they already started doing measures to ensure a better environment before these new rules were introduced, some since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, others earlier. Sustainability measures from clubs can be on every thinkable level, from a small to big impact, and from a very personal to a very impersonal approach. The measures listed are in an order of impact, from a small impact to a larger impact. First of all, recycling of paper, making use of (sustainable) FSC paper and other recycling measures are one of them. It is better for the environment and saves forests. Another way of saving plastics is via the cups that you get when you buy a drink in the stadium. They have a deposit on them, which you can retrieve when you hand back the cups (Pfandbecher in German). Or other measures, for example ones to stop wasting food, as can be read here: *"die letzten Essensreste nach einem Buffet auch noch einsetzen können für Obdachlose (Meinolf Sprink 17-04-2023)"*.

Larger measures, such as solar panel installations on the stadium roofs are also present. On the MEWA Arena, the stadium of Mainz, solar panels are already present, and research done by FC Sankt Pauli also states that solar panels on the stadium roof are possible, however this measure has not been implemented yet. Another solution is reforestation. To cover a part of the carbon dioxide the club emits, VfL Wolfsburg plants trees, already since 2015, *"Eine der ersten Initiativen, die jetzt schon uralt ist, ist das der VfL Wald. Also wir sammeln Geld und forsten Waldflächen wieder auf, Ja, und unterstützen sozusagen die Aufforstung von Waldflächen"* and FC Sankt Pauli tries a more basic approach, with so-called 'Ausgleichsflächen':

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*"Then there was a talk about uhm yeah, about spaces for recovery of nature. In German is called "Ausgleichsflächen", because the club has a lot of spaces in Hamburg and around Hamburg, which are used for football purposes and to create spaces for yeah, recreation in nature, as some kind of an equation. (Julian Einfeldt, 04-04-2023)*

This is done to recover nature because the club uses so much space club for football purposes. This perfectly fits with the last big measure taken by clubs: carbon compensation. This is done to compensate for the use of domestic flights within Germany, which are still used by clubs when they must travel long distances within the country.

The carbon compensation brings us to the final point which is often mentioned during the interviews. Every club mentions the travels of fans, especially to away games, but also to home games. Away games are mostly several hundred kilometres single journey, with the longest being upward to 735 kilometres (Bremen to Freiburg im Breisgau). This journey can be travelled by car or train, but travelling by car most definitely means big carbon dioxide emissions. Clubs try to mitigate this by organising car-free matchdays, or fan organisations organise charter trains back to the city where they are situated (as can be read in paragraph 8.1.3). Not only clubs are aware of the emissions they create, fans are as well. Fans want to travel sustainable as well, as was witnessed during the Mitgliederversammlung on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April in Mönchengladbach. After the board members have spoken, it is up to the fans to ask questions to the board, one of their democratic rights as members of the club. One fan asked why the club has so few electric charging stations for cars to charge, to which the CEO of the club answered that they have over 11.000 parking spots, and that it would be hard to fit all the parking spots with electric charging stations, but that there are plans to build more chargers. He mentioned that the club cannot do this alone; they are dependent on multiple actors, such as companies, the municipality and the electric grid operator. It basically means that there is a will from the club to become more sustainable, but no opportunity to reach that sustainability.

A lot of these measures are more ‘background’ measures, measures not immediately visible to the normal fan. These fans will judge the club because they think the club is not doing enough to become more sustainable, while this is not true, *“aber sind natürlich viele Sachen, die nicht so sichtbar sind. Keine sieht es genau, ja, was wir eigentlich alles machen, weil die Leute sehen, die Mannschaft fliegt zum Auswärtsspiel nach Berlin oder fliegt nach München und so (Vincent Baum, 28-04-2023)”*. The flight from Mainz to Berlin or Munich is of course way more visible than let’s say, FSC recycled paper, or a deposit you get from your drinking cups to reuse them. As he admits as well, sportive goals are always the top priority, but it is a bit double. It is hard to achieve both at the same time, as he argues:

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Vincent: “the success in sport of course is highest priority. But yes, I think it's difficult to get to talk about this with the other fans or to understand that. When you say, oh, we are here we are climate neutral, “Klimaneutral” and the team flies to every game” Thijmen: “Yeah, it's hard to explain, of course.” Vincent: “In Germany, yes.”

Because of the fact that a lot of measures are unable to be seen by most fans, it is thereby important for clubs to communicate to fans about their plans.

## 4.4 Identity (and apparently Northern Germans are different)

The third sub question that will be answered is the following one: *“How does identity influence the behaviour of German football fans?”*. This sub question will be answered with the main concepts of connection to the region, fan characteristics and the organisation of fans.

### 4.4.1 Connection to the region

**T**he connection to the region the football club is located is often big. People are proud to be a citizen of Wolfsburg, Mönchengladbach or Mainz just to name some places. A club like Mainz, with hardly any trophies, has a fanbase that is in the area around Mainz, Rheinessen. In comparison to Borussia Mönchengladbach, who has many fans all over Germany, but especially in Bavaria; *“We have many fans in Bavaria, because, in the 70s that were just two teams Bayern Munich and Borussia, and many teams in Bavaria, especially Nürnberg, this area, they hated Bayern, so they got Borussia fan.”* (Jan Ruoff, 17-04-2023). In the case of Mainz, fans are really bound to the local area, while fans from BMG, Sankt Pauli or Werder Bremen could be from all over the world. As Julian from FC Sankt Pauli mentions, fandom has no real boundaries *“And but we have a lot of fan clubs all over the world. (...). This this year I met people from Uruguay and Australia.”* Of course, the ideology that is connected to FC Sankt Pauli is not only popular in Germany, but over the whole world. The connection to the region is also evident in Wolfsburg. Near Wolfsburg, cities such as Hannover, Braunschweig and Magdeburg all have clubs with a rich history, some more successful than VfL Wolfsburg itself. Fans who are connected to the club because of the reason they live in a certain area, are called local fans (Hunt et al., 1999).

### 4.4.2 Fan characteristics

To see if the variable identity has really had an influence on the behaviour of German football fans, the concept of identity was defined as the personal characteristics of fans, just as in Jaeger (2021). Age, nationality, and gender were asked during interviews. These concepts can give us an idea of what an average fan could look like.

#### *Average age*

The average age of fans is something that is hard to specify in the first- and second tier of German football. The average age of fans also depends on the stand, or the group of fans you are looking at. The average age, in a normal stadium is around 40, 42, or a bit older. This is what the respondents said and argued that this is mostly because of demographic reasons in Germany, with a population that is getting older and older. This also means that the average age of fans will keep rising in the future, since supporter liaison officers argue that it is nowadays harder to get younger people into the stadium. Demographics are however not the only reason. Eintracht Frankfurt is expanding its stadium to have a place for everyone in the stadium. With this expansion, they are trying to get more standing places for younger

people, who can afford these cheaper tickets. Younger people are harder to convince to get into the stadium, because of school, the internet (and the opportunities and distractions it causes) and other time-consuming activities. Also, with ticket prices rising, it is becoming more and more expensive for youths to buy a ticket for the game.

### *Male/female divide*

Football and stadiums are often seen as a place without many women. Football is a man's sport is what people would often use as an argument. It is unlikely that these people have ever been in a football stadium, and if they would, they would know otherwise. Some clubs have a larger female fan base than other clubs, but overall, the number of female fans has been rising over the last few years. With the rising popularity of female football, female fans also know their way to the stadium. Not only the rise in popularity of female football is the reason for more women in the stadium, but other reasons are also apparent, such as a safer environment that is being offered in stadiums, with examples like *"Wo geht es nach Panama"*. The bottom line of percentage is around 20%, while some clubs have a percentage that is nearing the 40%, with the remaining 60% being male. For example, at FC Sankt Pauli, Julian argues: *"I think it's 80% male, maybe 20% female"*, while at Werder Bremen, the percentage of female supporters is almost double, as Jermaine said: *"I would say it's about 60% male, 40% female for Werder Bremen."*

### *Nationality*

It would of course be weird to think that the fan base of clubs would not be German. This research focusses on German fans, German clubs and Germany. The vast majority of fans thereby have the German nationality, but in every stadium people of other nationalities can be found. Fans from neighbouring countries like Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Switzerland. It depends on where the club is based, a club like Borussia Mönchengladbach attracts more Dutch fans due to the close proximity to the border (around 25 kilometres). In every city, migrants and former migrants can also be found in the stadium, for example in Wolfsburg. A lot of Italians live in Wolfsburg, new generations of former 'Gastarbeiter', but also people who fled from countries like Afghanistan, Syria or the Balkans. After the arrival of the European Union and the opening of the borders, a lot of people from Poland arrived in Germany and became fans of their local club, which was mentioned during the interviews. One nationality is also often present during football games, and those are Brits. In the United Kingdom, football culture is different. You cannot drink beer during games, there are no standing stands and no 50+1 rule to protect the fans (NOS, 2023b). At last, there is one group that cannot go unnoticed. These are fans from South Korea and Japan. These people become fans of a certain club because a South Korean or Japanese player is playing at that club. All of a sudden, South Korean or Japanese flags could be seen during games, because fans found their way to this specific club.

"So we had Shinji Okazaki a few years ago, the Japanese player and they are also every time there was a bus with a Japanese fans every at every game, it

was crazy and now it's the same with Jae-Song Lee [South Korean player, red.]" (Vincent Baum, 28-04-2023)

### *Identity*

Not much can be said about the 'real' identity of fans, except one thing. In one of the interviews, it became apparent that there is a sort of cultural divide. This division is a relic of the past because of all sorts of cultural and historical reasons, with the most important one being a different sort of German (Lower-German in the north versus High German in the south). A typical of fan of Werder Bremen is described as Nordish, according to Jermaine:

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"and the typical Werder fan is somehow typical Nordish. So the northern Germans aren't that hysterical, I would say. And they're not that crazy about the club, but they know when they have to stick up and create a big moment and that's the biggest specialty of Werder fans." (Jermaine Greene, 19-04-2023)

### 4.4.3 Organisation of fans

As mentioned by Jasny & Lenartowicz (2021), football fans are often considered to be a homogenous group, while this is not true. You may expect fans to be unorganised, but this is not the case. Fan bases of Bundesliga (clubs in the Bundesliga) are often tight, and well-organised (into groups). However, the number of fans, organisation and cooperation differs depending on what group of fans you are talking about. In this paragraph, the groups of fans will be analysed and compared. First of all, the fan base is built up like a pyramid "*die Fangemeinschaft ist wie eine Pyramide. Du hast die Ultras, du hast die aktive Fanszene, du hast die Fanclubs, was die Clubmitglieder und das Menschen, das sind Eventtouristen.*" (Meinolf Sprink, 17-04-2023). Sprink's pyramid is not mentioned in scientific literature, but it still gives us an idea how the relation between different groups of fans is arranged. This pyramid is based upon the number of fans in that group, to a certain extent. At the top of the pyramid is the group with the lowest number of members, while the bottom of the pyramid represents the largest group. This must be taken with a grain of salt. The exact number of fans is only an estimate, the number of members in fan clubs is an exact number. This means that the position in the pyramid could differ between these two, meaning that members of the club and fan clubs are turned around. The pyramid can be seen in figure 19.

### *Ultras*

In this paragraph, the pyramid will be analysed, from top to bottom. The first group, that is in fact the top of the pyramid, are the Ultra groups of a club. The Ultras are often a small group, but it is hard to give an exact number of this group. For example, at Werder Bremen, the Ultras consist of around 300 to 500 people. However, for this group, the number of members is relatively irrelevant. The Ultras are the groups who make the most noise, produce the biggest banners, and they are the fans that cause opinions and debate. People conceive Ultra groups as hooligans, while this is not necessarily the case. Ultra groups

often consist of young fans, mostly young fans of an age between 16 and 25, sometimes a bit older. There are no clear boundaries on the age range of fans in Ultra groups, this is more a rough estimation. These fans are the most vocal in the whole stadium *“They're much closer to the club, they're much critical of the club, but. They are, I would say the group and the peer is for them more important as for fan clubs”* (Jermaine Greene, 19-04-2023). The sense of belonging is way more important than in other groups of fans. These fans often create the atmosphere, in which other fans cooperate, but more important do not start. The ‘fuel’ for singing are still the Ultra groups. The next page offers some pictures of choreographies at Werder Bremen, with banners, flags and one enormous banner. Note, that on the top-right picture, a banner for Niklas Schmidt is shown. Ultra groups are often connected to other Ultra groups, from clubs that are friendly to them. For example, Eintracht Frankfurt Ultras are connected to the Ultra scene of Atalanta Bergamo, an Italian football club, of which more can be read in paragraph 4.3.4.



Figure 15: Choreographie of Werder Bremen. Drujtjns, 19-03-2022



Figure 16: Choreographie of Werder Bremen. Drujtjns, 25-01-2023



Figure 17: Choreographie of Werder Bremen. Drujtjns, 20-11-2021



Figure 18: Choreographie of Werder Bremen. Drujtjns, 16-04-2023

Table 3: Illustrations of choreographies performed by the Ostkurve. Own work

### *Active fan scene*

The active fan scene is considered to be one step lower in the pyramid, on the second stair seen from above. The active fan scene consists of fans who are not part of the Ultra scene, but still active. The fans in this group are probably larger than the Ultra scene but considered more active than fans. There is not much known about this group, only that they are in this place in the pyramid. Most of these active fans are also relatively young, round the same age as members of Ultra groups.

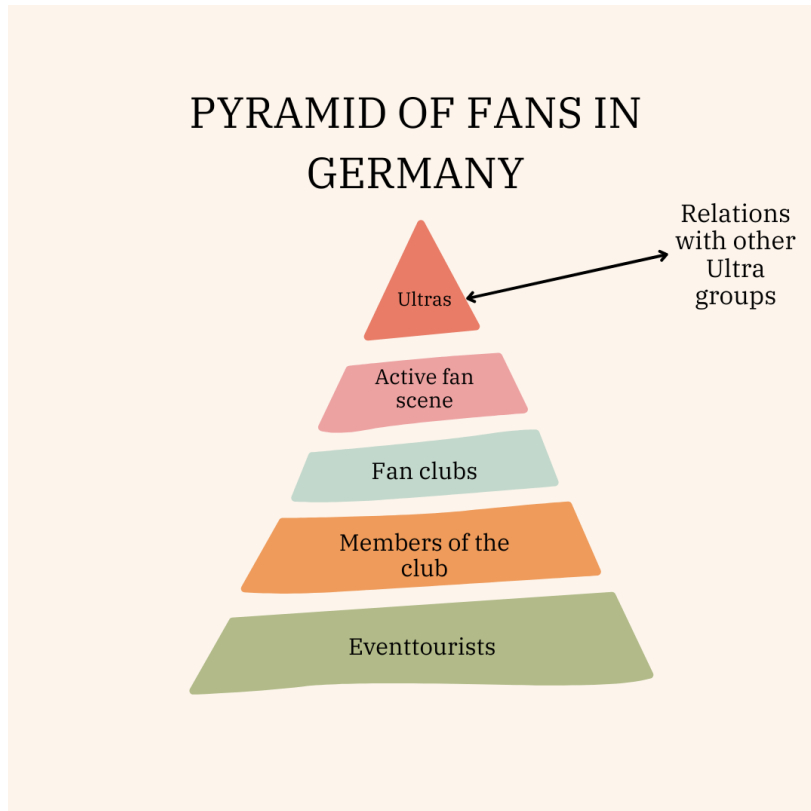


Figure 19: Pyramid of fans in Germany. Own work, based on Sprink, 17-04-2023 & Francis 03-04-2023.

### *Fan clubs*

The fan clubs and their members are considered the third tier in the pyramid of fans and are in the middle. Fan clubs are groups of fans, mostly consisting of fans from the same district, town, region, country, etc., for example Sankt Pauli Holland. These fan clubs can vary enormously in size, from small groups of only five to seven members, to large groups of more than 1000 or even 2000 people. Fan clubs can be from all over the world, but the density of fan clubs is of course higher near the club the fans support, than further away. The supporter liaison officers of the respective clubs help fan clubs, with

home and away travels. The organisation of these fan clubs can differ from club to club. While smaller fan

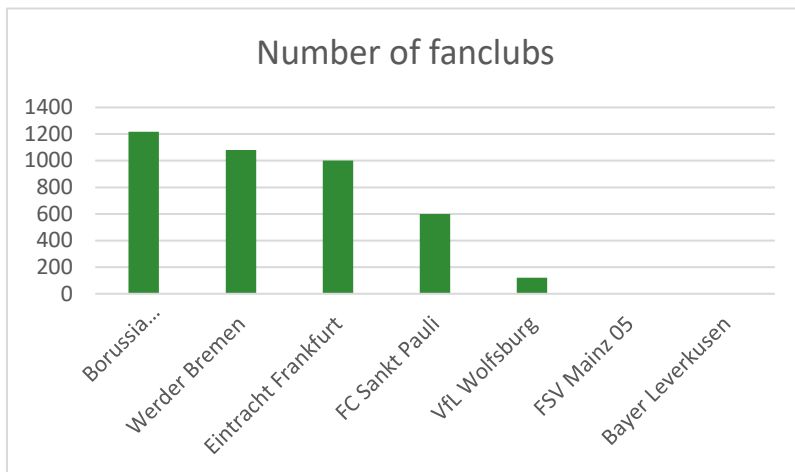


Figure 20: Number of official fan clubs. Own work, based upon interviews.

clubs have a more informal board, while larger ones probably have a professional organisation.

### Members

The fourth tier of fans are the members of the club. In figure 18, the number of fan clubs of the clubs can be seen. Some clubs have more than others, while others did not mention a specific number during the interviews. Members of

the club often have advantages compared to non-members and are more important than normal fans and non-members. Membership and all other information can be found in paragraph 4.2.1.

### Event tourists

The last category are the event tourists. These people are not what you could call a real fan of the club. These people are somewhat comparable to success supporters (paragraph 4.2.2), but not the same. Event tourists are people that are more interested in the club, than that they enjoy football as a sport. The people that are considered event tourists do not feel the pain when the club loses and are not as interested in the sportive performances compared to members, active fans and especially the Ultras. An example given by Meinolf Sprink perfectly highlights what is meant: *‘Also bei München [Bayern München] kommen Leute ins Stadion, die wollen Bayern München sehen und sagen Schönes, großes Spiel. (...) Da geht es eigentlich darum Ticket ja oder nein.’* They only come to see Bayern Munich, and their goal is to get a ticket, and watch the game. The same can also be said about FC Sankt Pauli. More people are aware of the values FC Sankt Pauli tries to portray, or at least what the fanbase values as important. They feel more connected to the left-wing ideology than the football, and do not care much about the performances on the pitch.

## 4.5 Money & the abundance of owners (and the exceptions)

The fourth and final sub question that will be answered is the following one: *“What kind of interests do German football fans have in their beloved football club?”*. Fans have multiple interests in the club, and different expectations, while the club also expects something from her fans, which can all read in this chapter.

### 4.5.1 Ownership

In Germany, the ownership of professional football clubs is regulated differently compared to many other countries. In many countries, football clubs can be bought either via shares on the stock market or bought by rich people who have enough money. After this buyout, the new owner can make all the decisions practically alone. In Germany, it is different. In German clubs, investors, be it a Saudi sheik, Russian oligarchs or anyone cannot have more than 50% of the ownership. This means, that fans, or the club always have the majority in elections on important topics, not an outside investor (Bundesliga, n.d.). The 50+1 rule is a sort of protection mechanism for the fans, to make sure ticket prices don't rise to absurd amounts, or to defend all the other interests of fans.

There are however a few exceptions. The two main exceptions are VfL Wolfsburg and Bayer Leverkusen. These clubs are both owned by the mother companies Volkswagen and Bayer respectively, as can be seen in the table below, table 4. These teams are currently the only ones in the Bundesliga with an exemption to the rules. As a club, you can only apply for an exemption to the rules if an investor has had an interest in the club for a period longer than twenty years (Bundesliga, n.d.). TSG 1899 Hoffenheim used to have this status as well, but Dietmar Hopp said in March 2023 that we would give back the majority to the club. Some background information about Hopp, he is an entrepreneur which gave him millions of dollars (owner of SAP, software company) and grew up in Sinsheim, where TSG 1899 Hoffenheim is located. With these millions, he supported Hoffenheim and later took a majority stake in the club, to much dislike of other supporters (Bundesliga, n.d.). The ownership of Hopp was not liked by many fans and many of them protested and try to blackmail him. The 50+1 rule has always been a point of criticism, both for fans in favour of keeping the rule or from fans who wish to abolish the rule. *“Es gab aber andere Szenen wie in Dortmund, da wurden auf einmal solche, wir heißt es sind Zielscheiben genannt. Hasta la Vista Baby das Gesicht von Hopp war zu sehen (Meinolf Sprink, 17-04-2023)”*. This statement from the fans of Borussia Dortmund was a personal treat against Hopp and was later sanctioned by the DFL and the DFB.

Currently, there are talks to tighten the rules regarding the 50+1 rule and the exceptions and to make no new exceptions. *“Wir sind gerade in Diskussionen auch mit den Kartellamt, wie man das für die für die Zukunft rechtssicher machen kann, damit es nie mehr Diskussionen gibt, dann sind wir ein gelernte Ausnahme (Meinolf Sprink, 17-04-2023)”*, basically, everyone knows that Wolfsburg and Leverkusen are

the exceptions, so people should not protest against these clubs anymore. To ensure that German clubs remain competitive in European football, strict rules are necessary to keep that position.

Club (full name)	Eintracht Frankfurt Fußball AG	FC Sankt Pauli	VfL Wolfsburg Fußball GmbH	Bayer Leverkusen Fußball GmbH	Borussia VfL 1900 Mönchengladbach GmbH	SV Werder Bremen GmbH & Co. KGaA	1. FSV Mainz 05
Owner	Eintracht Frankfurt e. V. (67,89 %) Others (32,11%)	Fußball-Club St. Pauli von 1910 e. V. (100%)	Volkswagen (100%)	Bayer AG (100%)	Borussia Verein für Leibesübungen 1900 e. V. (100%)	S.V. Werder e.V. (100%)	No real owner, the professional team is in the e.V.

Table 4: Table with clubs and owners. Retrieved from websites from the club and interviews.

Most of the clubs are organised in an e.V., with the professional structures of the club organised in an AG, or GmbH, as can be seen in table 4. These three are all German business entities. An AG is roughly the same as a public limited company, or in Dutch: *'naamloze vennootschap (nv)'*. In a public limited company, shares can be bought and sold on the stock market. In the case of Eintracht Frankfurt, 67,89% of these shares are in hands of the e.V., or "eingetragener Verein". This means that more than 50% is in hands of the fans, thereby complying with the 50+1 rule. A GmbH is roughly comparable to a Dutch *'besloten vennootschap (bv)'*. In this entity, a company has shares as well, but these are not traded on the stock market. The shares of the GmbH are owned by the respective e.V., so still in hands of the fans. The entity in which Werder Bremen is, is a combination between an AG and an GmbH.



Figure 21: Protest of fans against the DFL. Own work, 23-04-2023

An e.V. is an association, and in associations, you have the right to vote, again, complying with the 50+1 rule.

Protests against the abolition of the 50+1 rule are funnily enough both from fans and from clubs. Fans want to keep this special fan culture, and this accessibility fans have with the club. In 2007, the president of Hannover 96, tried to get rid of the 50+1 rule, but 32 of the remaining 35 clubs voted against this proposal (Bundesliga, n.d.). In the figure 21, a text can be seen with: "Stoppt den Vermarktungswahn gegen Investoren in der DFL", also on the Nordkurve" (Stop the marketing mania against investors in the DFL). The fans who made this banner are on the Nordkurve, the fanatical side of the fan base of BMG.

## 4.5.2 Expectations

Nowadays, there are a lot of expectations regarding sportive successes, both from fans and clubs. These expectations are going both ways; fans expect something from the club, while the clubs expect certain things from their fans. Before we start with the expectations fans have from their club, let's begin with the expectations the club has.

### *Expectations from clubs*

A club does not expect much from their fans, however there are a few things they do. One of them includes a well-behaving fan base. A club does not benefit from bad behaviour of her fans, it only works against them. Knowing that you have an infamous fan base, will not be great for the image of the club. Another thing the club can expect is the support of the fans towards the club and the team. When it is necessary, they expect the fans to stand as one and support the team in every way possible. It is expected by clubs that fans do not discriminate, or act in a racist way. Clubs have a zero-tolerance view against racism and discrimination, and fans who act like this will face fines, and results in a stadium ban.

### *Expectations from fans*

Fans have many expectations from the club they support and love. They want the club to finish as high as possible in the league, win the DFB-Pokal, be there for everyone, etc. They also know, that achieving all of these goals is not always possible. For a team like Mainz, it will be incredibly hard to ever win the Bundesliga, but nevertheless, fans would still dream about it. First of all, (some) fans have sportive expectations, but not all of them. For example, at Mainz, everyone is already happy when they achieve a certain number of points in a season, not to get relegated "*In Mainz we're always happy when we get the 40 points to stay in the league. Everything which is more of course we are happy, yes.*". For some other clubs, this is a whole different story. At FC Sankt Pauli, fans have the expectation to promote to the Bundesliga within a couple of years. There is also an expectation at the other side of the spectrum, namely, "*if we fight against relegation to the third division, yeah, then you really there's a lot of bad blood because the economic potential of FC Sankt Pauli is better than third division.*". So, fans do really have expectations, but this should be put into perspective.

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*, 'Also weißt du auch, dass du als Borussia oder als Bremen oder als Wolfsburg nie alle Spiele gewinnst, du wirst immer deshalb erwartest du nicht bei jedem Spiel einen Sieg. Der Fan erwartet aber, dass die Mannschaft in jedem Spiel alles gibt. Und wenn das passiert und verliert trotzdem ist alles gut' (Jan Ruoff, 17-04-2023)*

Fans do want the club to win, first and foremost, but the one thing that is more important than getting points in a game is the mentality of the players. When the mentality is missing, and you lose because you are so nonchalant, fans get upset. When you give everything and still lose, well it is unfortunate, but you did your best at least and that is what the fans care about.

The quickest way for a club to qualify for European football is by winning the DFB-Pokal. The DFB-Pokal is the German cup and as a club in the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga you are automatically qualified. The DFB-Pokal is a one-time chance to secure a spot, but if you lose, then you are out. Getting successes in the cup is also seen as of lower importance compared to the competition:

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*"It's the easiest way to get there [European Football], so the hopes are huge in the beginning of the season, but to be honest, for every fan it's more important to stay in the Bundesliga and to be successful over there than to win the DFB Pokal because when you lose and you're out, then you're out and it's done so, so there's no, no hesitation. (Jermaine Greene, 19-04-2023)"*

It would of course be nice to win the DFB-Pokal, but no one has a real expectation of winning the cup. It depends mostly on who your opponent is, and sometimes that opponent has a great amount of luck that evening; it is of course the cup, where miracles can happen.

Another subject on which fans like to expect certain things are the financial situation of the club. Fans would like their club to be economically healthy, debt-free and able to make some purchases when this is deemed necessary. However, the last few years have been tough for clubs. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the whole world, fans were not allowed in the stadium anymore. This caused a massive drop in income for clubs, who get a substantial amount of money from ticket sales. In 2020, the season was halted for a few weeks, before it resumed without fans because several clubs would suffer the consequences of not getting any television payments (Ford, 2020). Only since this season, 2022-2023, clubs are fully back to the normal situation from before 2020, but some still suffer to this day. Some of the net results of this season were still negative, partly due to Covid-19, *"wir haben in der Corona Zeit viel Geld verloren. Wir haben Spieler nicht verkauft, wir haben keine Zuschauer gehabt, wir haben weniger Einnahmen und Sponsoring gehabt natürlich."* (Jan Ruoff, 17-04-2023). Others were already positive again, or at least break-even. Luckily, no club went bankrupt and all of them survived, but the long-term effect is still visible to this day. Of course, the pandemic was for some clubs a bigger issue than for others. Clubs like VfL

Wolfsburg and Bayer Leverkusen are owned and get financially supported by respectively Volkswagen and Bayer. Bayer Leverkusen has an agreement with Bayer AG, that a possible profit is redirected to the company, while any losses are paid for by Bayer AG. At VfL Wolfsburg it is a similar story, but with some slight changes. If VfL Wolfsburg were to lose money a couple years in a row, Volkswagen would stop supporting the club financially. If this would become the reality, VfL Wolfsburg would be just like any other Bundesliga team, which can lose or go bankrupt.

The final subject on which fans have expectations is the support of the club on social issues. Fans are participating in social projects such as collections of money, clothing or used military equipment to support Ukrainians, or support others in any way they can.

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*“The other hand is that the fans, our fans expect, expect us to do stuff as well. (...) and they're telling us that they're they want us to do stuff, so we always have to think about being political active as well” (Jermaine Greene, 19-04-2023)*

They expect the club to support them with donations as well, or at least help organising collections or donations. They also expect at least makes a statement in the media, or in the stadium. *“Die helfen uns, wir helfen denen. (...) es findet alles irgendwie immer koordiniert statt und wir unterstützen die” (Meinolf Sprink, 17-04-2023)*. It is always a circle, both fans and club help each other.

## 5). Conclusion, recommendations & discussion

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### 5.1 Conclusion

**B**efore the main research question will be answered, first, the sub questions will be answered. The sub questions will also be answered, keeping in mind the theories mentioned in the theoretical framework (chapter two). Starting off with the first sub question: *How is the sense of belonging expressed by German football fans, both in- and outside the stadium?* Well, German fans feel an enormous sense of belonging when they are in the stadium. A lot of fans are member of the club, which gives them several advantages and most important of all, the right to vote. The right to vote is executed during the Mitgliederversammlung and offers fans a way to show their opinions and their democratic right. Not only formal ways such as the Mitgliederversammlung are ways to show their opinion, but also via banners or protests. The right to vote, in combination with the protests and banners, make fans an important stakeholder. Fans are a stakeholder the club should value a great amount and always stay in contact with. The connection to the club is also big, for some even holy. Fans support their club as the 12<sup>th</sup> men on the pitch, and together form a big family, or a Gemeinschaft. Being a supporter of a certain club is for some a bigger part of their lives, however being a fan is part of the identity.

The second sub question; *How are political preferences and awareness of societal problems expressed both during football games and outside games?* Generally speaking, fans are very aware of the environment they're in. Political messages can be often seen in stadiums, although it depends at which club you look at; one club is more politically active than another club. Fans in the Bundesliga tend to be more left-winged than right-winged in their political preference and fans can be found during demonstrations against right-wing themes. Issues in society such as LGBTQ and migration are well understood; activism for both is apparent, both inside and outside the stadium. Political messages made by fans are often a reaction to something else, again to right wing themes or recent events. Social projects are done by every club and are available in many shapes and forms, from training for migrants, or football for disabled people. Clubs value local projects in their close proximity. Finally, clubs are in the process of becoming more sustainable. It is still hard for clubs to become more sustainable since the largest amount of greenhouse gasses come from fans. A change in the behaviour of fans is thereby necessary to be more sustainable.

The third sub question: *How does identity influence the behaviour of German football fans during football games?* It is not sure how identity influences the behaviour of German fans during games, some other characteristics from fans can however be said. The fan base of clubs largely follows patterns of demographics, fans get older and older, and clubs have to keep attracting young people to the stadium. clubs are attracting more and more women to the stadium, which is a great development. Furthermore, the fan base is not only German anymore; non-German fans know their way to the stadium better than

ever and are an important part of the atmosphere in the stadium as well. The entire fan base of a club can be seen as a heterogeneous group. Ultras, active fans, members of the club and event tourists, with Ultras having the biggest connection to the club. Fans are more and more part of an 'imagined community', and thereby is the club becoming part of the identity of the fan. Fans are self-categorising themselves with other members of the fanbase, which fits the social identity theory.

The last sub question is: *What kind of interest do German football fans have in their beloved football club?* Well, the interests of fans are quite extensive. With the 50+1 rule, fans are able to influence the club more than competitions without, and this rule is liked by both fans and clubs. Fans also have many interests. Fans expect the club to perform well, give everything from the beginning until the end, and hopefully qualify for a European competition. Fans also expect the club to be economically healthy. Covid-19 had a huge influence on the financial situation, and clubs are slowly recovering from the pandemic. Finally, fans expect the club to help them by supporting them with social projects. Due to the role fans have in the decision-making process and the influence they exert; fans should be seen as a stakeholder to be reckoned with. In Germany, fans are seen as a stakeholder, both by the club, and local authorities. The opinion and interest of fans should not be overlooked, because fans have the power, urgency and legitimacy required to be a stakeholder.

With the sub questions answered it is now time to answer the main research question. The research question shall shortly be repeated, before giving the answer. The main research question is the following: *How do German football fans express themselves, keeping in mind sociological and political characteristics?*

German football fans behave in a proactive and reactive way. They express themselves in a politically active way, with banners, protests and other ways to let them hear their important opinion. Sociological and political issues in society, such as polarisation in politics, LGBTQ and migration are part of being a fan. Fan political issues such as ownership are also subjects fans value highly and try to defend at all costs. Fans also act reactive, when they feel it is necessary to react. The war in Ukraine, black lives matter, the catastrophic floodings in Germany in 2021 and the World Cup in Qatar (2022) caused massive debate, both in a positive and a negative way. The way fans behave can be linked to the theory of collective behaviour. As a group, the message of the fans gets more attention, just the thing they want to get. The first three events saw massive support from fans and many actions and donations happened in an act of solidarity. The months leading up to the World Cup saw many protests from fans, that boycotted the event and protested heavily with banners because of the poor human rights in Qatar. German fan activism is not bound to any boundaries, international issues do matter.

### 5.1.1 Revision of the conceptual model

The results have shown us that the currently adopted conceptual model, figure 5, does not fit anymore. Results have shown us otherwise. This means, that some relations between variables have been changed or moved, which can be seen in figure 22. In comparison to the old model, the variables 'club' and 'interests' are linked now as well; this used to be only 'fans' and 'club'. The other change is the relocation of the variable 'place'. In the original model, this variable used to be linked with 'political preference' and 'sense of belonging'; the results do not support this link. In the revised model, these links have thereby been removed. The variable 'place' has been an influence on 'social identity', which can be taken from the results.

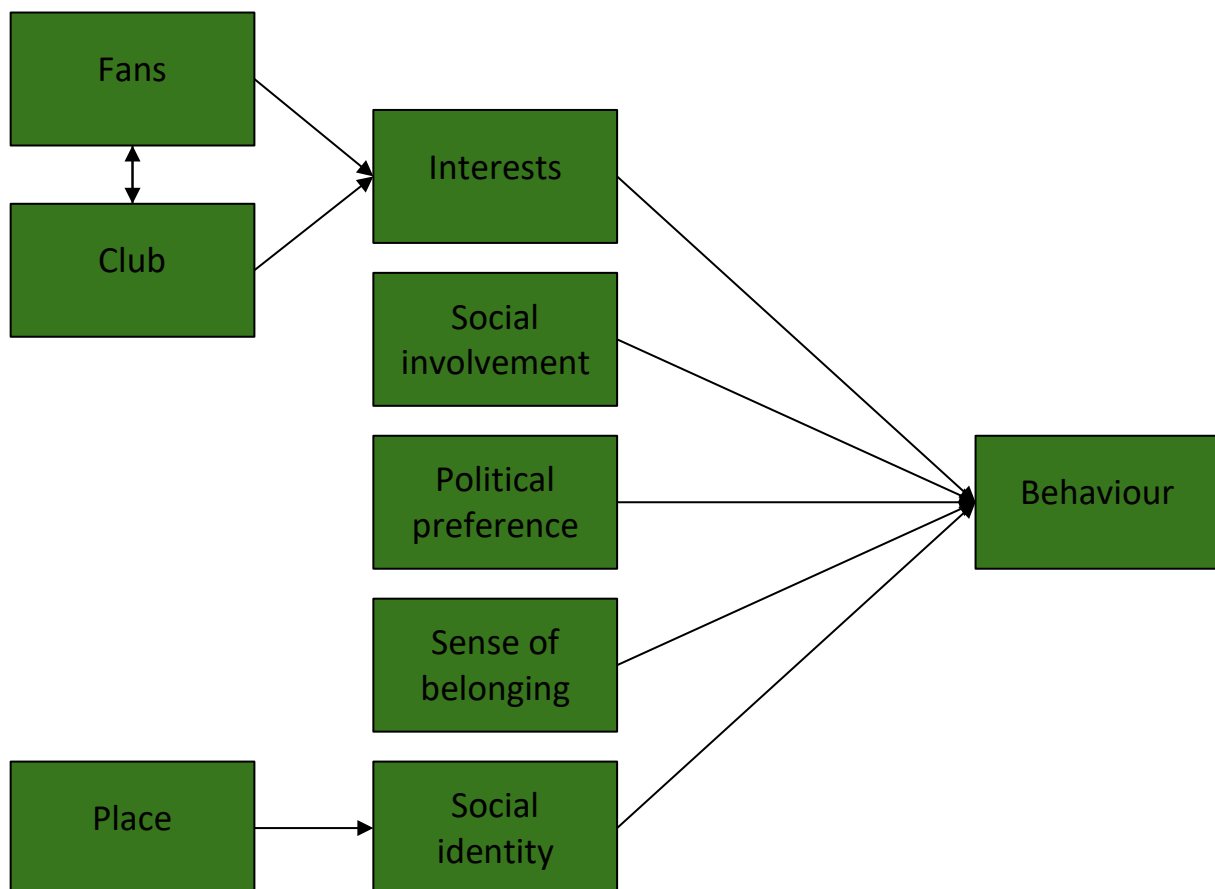


Figure 22: Revised conceptual model. Own work

## 5.2 Discussion & recommendations

No research is ever perfect, nor is this one. There are a few things that could be taken into account when doing similar research. First of all, the number of participants. In this research, the number of participants in Bundesliga, 2. Bundesliga, 3. Liga and Regionalliga are only seven, while there are 116 clubs in these four tiers of German football. In this research, only six Bundesliga sides are interviewed, and only one 2. Bundesliga side. This limited number of participants does affect the external validity of the research; the results are not really generalisable. In new research, the researcher could try to conduct more research on

2. Bundesliga sides, to at least even the balance between the first two leagues. This would at least mean that some things could be said about German fans in the first two tiers.

In this research, sides from the 3. Liga and Regionalligas are not even present. It would have been interesting to see if there would be any differences between smaller and bigger clubs; in this research that is impossible to see. The only thing that would give that away is the number of prizes a club has won. A goal of this research was also to spot any spatial differences in the answers given, especially between clubs from former East Germany and West Germany. This was not achieved, since all the interviewed clubs are from the former West Germany, see the map in paragraph 8.1.2.

One thing that became apparent during the interviews, is the number of measures of clubs that are taken to become more sustainable. In new research, a bigger focus could be laid on this subject, since there was only one question about this subject. Fans could as well be interviewed to confirm the answers of the supporter liaison officers if this were to give new views; it would definitely be recommendable.

Another recommendation that could be done is to conduct the research in another country. This could offer some sort of comparison to Germany, and other countries and associations could maybe learn from the German approach or the other way around.

### 5.3 Limitations of research

Doing research is never without any limitations; neither is this one. It is thereby important to acknowledge that the results may not be generalisable for everyone, or that it is easily reproducible. Below will be explained why this is the case and what the consequences are. As mentioned in the paragraph above, the external validity of the research is not high, due to several reasons. For one, only a small number of interviews were conducted. Of the whole research population of 132, only seven were interviewed (5,3%). If we only were to take the first two tiers of German football, the percentage would be around 19,4%, which still is not that high. 37 clubs have been contacted, of which seven wanted to participate. Thirty of these clubs did not want or could not participate, which is called non-response (Vennix, 2019; p. 97). The non-response causes a lack of generalisability, even though this was already difficult to achieve as mentioned earlier.

Since this research will be qualitative and focussed on German football fans, the results are not to be generalised to another country. Secondly, the amount of semi-structured interviews will not be big enough to generalise about the 'average' German football fan; only a select number of members of staff of German football clubs can be interviewed. The results of these interviews should give an image of 'a' German football fan, not 'the' German football fan. An important sidenote should be told here as well. Because the research population is expanded massively, the results are hard to generalise to even a certain competition, for example, Regionalliga fans maybe do act the same as Bundesliga fans (or do not).

The research of course must show this. All these facts mean that the external validity will not be high, but this was not the main goal of the research.

### 5.3.1 Lost in translation

Since the interviews for this research have both been conducted in German and English, the quotes stated in the following chapters can both be in English and German. This has been done to prevent the loss of meanings and statements when one translates something, also known as lost in translation. Sometimes, when necessary, a translation will be given, howbeit this is not always the case.

## 6). Epilogue

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First of all, I would like to thank my good friend Sarah for taking me to the football game of Werder Bremen versus Union Berlin on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and for correcting my documents in German. This is where the whole journey of making this thesis and conducting the research all started; without her, this research would never exist. She also sent me some pictures of choreographies in the Weserstadion, which can be seen in this work as well. Secondly, I would like to thank my friend Silke for sitting and working on the thesis for countless hours, together with my other great friends Bas, Stijn, Job and Femke. They provided the necessary distraction, with the best games of Geoguessr and walks around the university I have had for a long time. They also gave me really nice feedback which helped me get the best result possible (hopefully 😊). Thirdly, I would like to thank my supervisor Jacky van de Walle and all the other people for giving feedback and guiding me through this journey. Finally, I would like to thank all the respondents for their time and effort in helping me write this thesis.

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## 8). Appendix

### 8.1 Observation schemes

The observation scheme is to be used during the earlier mentioned football games and the members meeting.

#### 8.1.1 Observation scheme #1

When and where?	Borussia Mönchengladbach vs VfL Wolfsburg, Matchday 27, 09-04-2023, Borussia Park, Mönchengladbach, Germany	
What?	Observation (Indicator)	Findings
<b>Political preference</b>	I did not see any politically inspired messages or banners before or during the game, inside or outside the stadium. A Swiss flag could be seen in the stadium, but this has to do with the many Swiss players the club has and had in the past.	Not seeing any politically inspired messages does not mean that they don't exist, I just did not see them at this time.
<b>Awareness of issues in society</b>	The lines in the middle circle of the pitch were not the usual anymore, the now resembled the logo of the British nuclear disarmament movement or more commonly known as the 'peace' logo. Several banners of the club with the texts "Gegen Rassismus", "für Respekt" & "für Toleranz". Everytime when someone gets a card or gets substituted, an ad of partner Sonepar could be seen. Sonepar is a French company which specialises in electrical components and is since 2019 the so-called "Innovationspartner" of BMG	The club is already doing things to create awareness for racism, respect and tolerance. Not much could be seen regarding sustainability, but this could be more in the background, or unknown to many.
<b>Interests</b>	Before the start of the game and sometimes during the game, a banner with a DFB logo with a red cross through it could be seen on the Nordkurve. In the 11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> minute, after a disallowed goal, fans on the Nordkurve started throwing easter eggs on the pitch. It seemed that this action was not so secret anymore, since stewards cleaned it up quickly. It was a protest against the DFB, DAZN and other broadcasters, with fans not being happy about	It is clear that supporters do not like some of the times when the games start. It is not exactly clear which times they mean, but that is not completely relevant for this case. It is also clear that the DFB is not a much-liked organisation.

	the times the football games start.	
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## 8.1.2 Observation scheme #2

When and where?	Mitgliederversammlung Borussia Mönchengladbach, 17-04-2023, Borussia Park, Mönchengladbach, Germany	
What?	Observation (Indicator)	Findings
<b>Political preference</b>	Nothing could be seen regarding political preference.	The club is unpolitical in a sense, that political messages are not displayed.
<b>Awareness of issues in society</b>	Fans had the opportunity to question members of the board and while most were about letting academy players play, or other sportive-related things. One fan asked for more electrical outlets for cars, to become more sustainable and critique the board for not enough outlets. The board later mentioned that extra electrical outlets are in the planning phase.	Fans are aware of issues in society, and act like that. The board is aware of issues of fans and acts accordingly. They want to become friendly to the environment, but some things make this impossible or way too complicated.
<b>Interests</b>	Fans had the opportunity to vote (multiple times) for honorary members and for the dismissal of several boards. The last vote was for the change of the statutes of the 'Verein'. All of these votes were passed, with a few votes against the proposals and a few abstentions.	Fans know that they can influence the board with voting, and the board is aware of this.

### 8.1.3 Observation scheme #3

When and where?	Borussia Mönchengladbach vs Union Berlin, Matchday 29, 22-04-2023, Borussia Park, Mönchengladbach, Germany	
What?	Observation (Indicator)	Findings
<b>Political preference</b>	Nothing could be seen regarding political preference, instead of the things mentioned already in the earlier observations	Not seeing any politically inspired messages does not mean that they don't exist, I just did not see them at this time.
<b>Awareness of issues in society</b>	A banner with the text "Soziale Arbeit schätzen, statt behindern" could be seen on the Nordkurve (Value social work, instead of hindering it). Another banner with "Stoppt den Vermarktungswahn gegen Investoren in der DFL", also on the Nordkurve (Stop the marketing mania against investors in the DFL)	Fans, especially ones on the Nordkurve are engaged heavily in social issues. Multiple times per game banners can be seen with protests on them.
<b>Interests</b>	Another banner with "Stoppt den Vermarktungswahn gegen Investoren in der DFL", also on the Nordkurve (Stop the marketing mania against investors in the DFL).	This banner, together with other actions is hinted against the DFB and DFL to stop further commercialisation in Germany.
<b>Sustainability</b>	Multiple times a slide on the big screens could be seen with an announcement regarding a charter train back to Berlin, which departed from nearby station Rheydt Hbf.	The emissions of fan travels are still a huge issue, but this is a valid solution to try and (partly) solve the problem.

## 8.2 Interview guides

### 8.2.1 Interview guide football clubs (English)

Good morning/Good afternoon, my name is Thijmen van Reijssen and I am currently studying Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment studies at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. As part of my curriculum, I must write a bachelor thesis, which in my case is about football. Luckily that is not a big problem, since I am a massive football fan myself! For my bachelor thesis I am researching German football fan behaviour. The goal of the research is to discover how German football fans express themselves, both in the stadium and outside the stadium.

I will be asking several questions about different subjects, such as fans as stakeholders, social involvement and others. The interview will approximately take between 30 and 60 minutes. The data from this research will only be seen by my supervisor and myself, not by others. The final report will be published online on <https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/home>, where the thesis can be read by others. If you do not feel comfortable sharing your thoughts to a bigger public, it is possible to stay anonymous.

Would you like to stay anonymous, meaning that your name will not be published in the interview transcript and that individual statements aren't traceable back to a particular person.

- Yes? Then we will continue.
- No? Then anonymity will be guaranteed.

To make data analysis easier, I would like to record the interview to listen back what has been said exactly, to make sure there are no differences in the interpretation of your statements. The recordings will not be published anywhere, it is purely for myself. After everything has been handed in, the recordings will be deleted. Is it okay if I hit record?

- Yes? Then I will hit record
- No? That is fine as well, but interpretation could take a bit longer.

Before we really start the interview, please interrupt if there is anything unclear, or if there are any questions. If there is a word you don't know the German equivalent of, please ask me. Also, if you can explain yourself in German better in a particular subject, please do so, I will be able to understand this as well. If there is something you cannot answer, or don't want to answer, it is no problem.

I will start this interview with some introductory questions, after which I will be diving deeper into more specific subjects I mentioned in the beginning. After the interview is finished, there is room for extra questions, or for things I have not asked. Are there any questions before I start the interview?

**Start the interview/start the interview and hit record**

Just to warm up,

- What is your name?
  - o Can I call you (first name)
- What does your work contain?
  - o What is your exact job title?
  - o How long have you been working for this club?
  - o How long have you been working for the fan department of this club?
- How long have you been a fan of (specific football club)?
  - o What was the reason of becoming a fan of this (specific) club?

### **Social identity**

I would like to start with questions about the fanbase of (insert club). These questions include questions about personal characteristics such as age and other social characteristics.

- What is the average age of fans of this club?
  - o Are there reasons for this?
  - o Is this because of demographics in this city/region/municipality/etc.?
- Is the fanbase largely male or female?
  - o How big is the number of female fans?
  - o Is the number of female supporters rising?
- Is the fanbase of (insert club) mostly German?
  - o Why is that?
  - o Are there people of other nationalities often present during football matches?
    - Where do these people come from?
  - o Why are these people here?
- How are fans organised?
  - o Could you give an example of this?

### **Sense of belonging and organisation**

I would like to continue with the fanbase as a tight community, and the sense of community of fans.

- How many members does the club have?
- Are a lot of fans members of the club?
- Do fans have ownership in the club?
  - o If yes: is this because of the 50+1 rule?
    - How is this being done?
  - o If not: who is/are the owner(s) of the club?
- Are fans able to fulfil managerial positions within the club?
- Are there other ways fans can have an influence on the club?

- How would you describe the emotional connection fans have with this club?
  - o What could the reasons be that this is the case?
  - o Could this be due to historical sportive successes, such as winning the DFB Pokal, promotion or European football wins (Europa- & Champions league)?
  - o Could the emotional connection have become stronger after relegations?
- Does a 'normal' football fan feel a sense of community?
- What word could be used the best to describe the community of fans?
  - o So if I am correct, the fanbase could be described as tight/loose, etc.?

### **Political preference**

Now I would like to ask a bit about the political preference of fans.

- Are fans politically involved, for example a member of a municipality or a political party?
- Are the fans of (insert club) more left-winged or right-winged?
  - o What political parties should I think of?
- Are these mentioned political parties big in the region/city/municipality as well?
- Are political messages displayed during football matches?
  - o If yes: How is this being done?
  - o If no: Why is that the case?
- What do messages of fans contain (during games)?
  - o Can these messages be conceived as positive or negative?
- Are politically inspired messages more common during election times, both national and local?
- Can politically themed chants be heard during games?

### **Social involvement**

We will be finalising now with the interests and impacts fans have on this club. Especially here in Germany, fans have a big impact on decisions made by the club. This, and the interests fans have in the club will be the subject of the following questions. These interests could be social, sports-related, economic, political or anything else. Starting off:

- Do fans expect sportive successes?
  - o Do fans expect to stay in the league at least?
  - o Do fans expect a championship?
  - o Do fans expect successes in the DFB Pokal?
- What do fans expect of the club's economic well-being?
  - o What was the net result of last year?
  - o What are the reasons of this deficit/profit in the club's financial information?
- How do fans act when they are being faced with injustice, such as the war in Ukraine?

- Is the club supportive in these hard times?
- What do fans do to promote the rights of marginalised people, such as migrants?
  - What does the club do?
- Does the club do anything to promote LGBTQ acceptance?
- What is the stance of the club against racism and discrimination?
  - How is this enforced?
- I have read that Bundesliga clubs need to meet certain sustainability requirements, ordered by the DFL. What is already been done to become more sustainable?
  - What will be done in the short-term?
  - What will be done in the long-term?
- Are there fans who do volunteering for social projects?
  - What kind of projects should I think about?
  - Are these projects supported by the club?
- Are there any other projects which enhance the position of marginalised people?

Well, thank you for answering these questions. It was a pleasant experience to hear your view about German football fan culture. Are there any questions or comments from your side that have not been mentioned during this interview?

This was everything I had for today and I would like to thank you for your cooperation. I have one final question. I would like to know if I could contact you if I have any questions, be it about interpretation or other uncertainties?

Finally, do you want to receive the final product when this thesis is finished?

- Yes, to which email address can I send it to?
- No, that's fine as well.

Very much thank you for your time and have a nice day!

## 8.2.2 Interview guide expert scholar (English)

Introduction: same as the one stated above

Yesterday I spoke to a person who is working at the Fanladen department at FC Sankt Pauli, and he gave me some great information about the fan scene and the behaviour of football fans. This interview for a bit more background on FC Sankt Pauli. I will be asking some specific questions about the club and a few more general questions on German football fans. These questions are in no particular order. Starting off:

- What is your name?
  - o Can I call you (first name)?
- What does your work contain?
- Many people and scholars have already researched FC Sankt Pauli, its fans and the subculture that is a part of the club. Could you shortly explain what the most important aspects of this subculture are?
- How are the fans of FC Sankt Pauli organised (in groups, something else)?
- Would you say that the term Gesellschaft created by Ferdinand Tönnies and further elaborated by Maximilian Weber is more important at FC Sankt Pauli than at other German football clubs?
  - o Why is that the case?
  - o Why is that not the case?
- Are the fans able to have an influence in the club?
  - o Is this because of the 50+1 rule that is in place in Germany?
- Are there other ways fans could have an influence?
- How would you describe the emotional connection fans have with FC Sankt Pauli?
- Is the fanbase of FC Sankt Pauli comparable to that of any other club in Germany?
  - o And in Europe/the rest of the world?
- Is the activism from FC Sankt Pauli fans more or less compared to the eventful 1980s?
- With the rise of commercialisation of football, has this meant a rise in activism as well?
  - o If yes: of what does this activism consist?

Well, thank you for answering these questions. It was a pleasant experience to hear your view about German football fan culture. Are there any questions or comments from your side that have not been mentioned during this interview?

This was everything I had for today and I would like to thank you for your cooperation. I have one final question. I would like to know if I could contact you if I have any questions, be it about interpretation or other uncertainties?

Finally, do you want to receive the final product when this thesis is finished?

Very much thank you for your time and have a nice day!

### 8.2.3 Interview guide (German)

Guten Morgen/Guten Mittag, mein Name ist Thijmen van Reijssen und studiere momentan im 6. Semester den Bachelorstudiengang Geographie, Raumplanung und Umwelt an der Radboud Universität Nijmegen, Niederlande. Um mein Studium abzuschließen, ist es verpflichtend, eine Bachelorarbeit zu schreiben. Mein Oberthema lautet Fußball. Das kommt mir sehr gelegen, weil ich selbst ein großer Fußballfan bin. In meiner Bachelorarbeit untersuche ich die Fankultur und das Verhalten von Fußballfans in Deutschland. Das Ziel meiner Studie ist, zu erforschen, auf welche Weise Deutsche Fans sich äußern, sowohl im Stadion als auch außerhalb.

Ich werde Ihnen zu verschiedenen Themen Fragen stellen, wie zum Beispiel Fußballfans als Stakeholder, Soziales Engagement und vieles mehr. Das Interview dauert ungefähr 30 bis 60 Minuten. Die erhobenen Daten meiner Interviews und Studien wurden nur durch mich und meinen Supervisor eingesehen, nicht durch Andere. Die Bachelorarbeit wurde auf <https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/home> veröffentlicht, wo die Bachelorarbeit durch jede und jeder gelesen werden kann. Falls es nicht gewünscht ist die Meinung öffentlich zu äußern, ist es möglich anonym zu bleiben.

Wenn Sie anonym bleiben, bedeutet das, daß Ihr Name im Interview Transkript nicht veröffentlicht wird und das individuelle Aussagen nicht auf Sie zurückzuführen sind.

- Ja? Dann machen wir weiter.
- Nein? Dann ist Anonymität garantiert

Um die Analyse der Daten zu vereinfachen, wünsche ich das Interview gerne aufnehmen. Es ist nur für mich, um sicherzustellen, damit es keine Unterschiede in der Auslegung Ihrer Aussagen gibt. Die Aufnahmen werden nach dem Abgeben der Bachelorarbeit wieder gelöscht. Ist es okay, das ich, daß Interview aufnehmen?

- Ja? Denn nehme ich auf.
- Nein? Das ist okay, meine Interpretation könnte dann aber möglicherweise länger dauern.

Haben Sie noch Fragen bevor wir das Interview starten? Wenn etwa nicht deutlich ist, oder ein anderes Problem besteht, sagen Sie gerne sofort Bescheid und warte nicht bis zum Ende. Wenn es etwas gibt, das Sie nicht beantworten können oder wollen, ist das kein Problem. Ich werde mit Fragen über Sie als Person und Ihre Funktion starten. Danach folgen Fragen über Subjekten wie Soziale Identität, Sense of Belonging, Politischen Präferenzen und Soziales Engagement von Klubs und Fans. oder für Themen, welche noch nicht abgedeckt wurden. Haben Sie Fragen vor dem Start des Interviews?

**Start the interview/start the interview and hit record**

Zu Beginn,

- Was ist Ihr Name?
  - o Möchte ich ihn (Vorname) nennen?
- Aus welchen Aufgaben besteht ihr Job?
  - o Was ist der exakte Bezeichnung Ihres Jobs?
  - o Wie lange arbeiten sie schon für diesen Klub?
  - o Wie lange arbeiten sie schon in der Fanbetreuung?
  - o Waren Sie schon vorher Fan dieses Klubs?
    - Wenn ja: Wie lange schon?
  - o Aus welchem Grund sind Sie Fan dieses Vereins geworden?

### **Soziale Identität**

Jetzt würde ich gerne fortfahren mit Fragen über die Fans des Vereins. Diese Fragen enthalten Fragen über persönliche Merkmale, wie Alter und vieles mehr.

- Was ist das durchschnittliche Alter der Fans dieses Vereins?
  - o Gibt es einen Grund für das?
  - o Ist das auf die Demographie in dieser Stadt/Region/Gemeinde/Bundesland zurückzuführen?
- Sind die Fans größtenteils männlich, weiblich, oder anderes?
  - o Wie groß ist die Anzahl weiblicher Fans?
  - o Nimmt die Anzahl weibliche Fans zu?
- Sind die Fans dieser Klub größtenteils Deutsch?
  - o Warum ist das so?
  - o Sind Menschen von anderen Nationalitäten oft anwesend während Fußballspiele?
    - Aus welchen Ländern kommen diese Menschen?
  - o Warum sind diese Menschen da?
- Wie sind Fans organisiert?
  - o Können sie das weiter erklären, vielleicht mit einem Beispiel?

### **Sense of belonging und Organisation**

Das waren die Fragen über Identität der Fans, jetzt wurde ihn gerne befragen über Sense of Belonging, oder frei übersetzt „Das Zugehörigkeitsgefühl“. Auch stelle ich Fragen über den Klub als Organisation.

- Wie viele Mitglieder hat der Klub?
- Sind viele Fans auch Mitglieder des Vereins?
- Besitzen Fans Teile des Vereins?
  - o Wenn Ja: Ist das wegen die 50+1 Regel?
    - Wie wird das gemacht?

- Wenn Nein: Wer sind die Eigentümer des Vereins?
- Haben Fans die Möglichkeit, Führungspositionen im Verein zu übernehmen?
- Gibt es andere Möglichkeiten, wie Fans Einfluß auf den Verein nehmen können?
- Wie würden Sie die emotionale Bindung der Fans an diesen Verein beschreiben?
  - Was können die möglichen Gründe davor sein?
  - Könnte dies an historischen sportlichen Erfolgen liegen, zum Beispiel dem Gewinn des DFB-Pokals, einem Aufstieg oder dem Gewinn der europäischen Fußballmeisterschaft wie den Europa- oder Champions League?
  - Könnte die Emotionelle Bindung der Fans starker geworden sein nach einem Abstieg?
- Fühlt ein "normaler" Fußballfan ein Gemeinschaftsgefühl?
- Welches Wort kann am besten genutzt werden, um der Gemeinschaft von Fans zu beschreiben?
  - Wenn ich das gut gehört habe, bedeutet das, könnte man die Fangemeinde bezeichnen als fest/locker usw.?

### **Politische Präferenz**

Jetzt wurde ich Ihnen befragen über der politischen Präferenz von Fans.

- Sind Fans politisch engagiert, zum Beispiel Teil einer Gemeinde oder einer politischen Partei?
- Sind die Fans eher links- oder rechtsorientiert?
  - An welche politischen Parteien könnte ich denken?
- Besteht die Nähe zu einer bestimmten Partei?
- Werden bei Fußballspielen politische Botschaften gezeigt?
  - Ja: Auf welche Weise?
  - Nein: Warum nicht?
- Welche Themen behandeln Botschaften von Fans während Spielen?
  - Könnte diese Botschaften positiv oder negativ aufgefaßt werden?
- Sind politisch-inspirierte Botschaften öfter zu sehen während Wahlzeiten, sowohl bei nationalen Wahlen und lokale/regionale Wahlen?
- Dürfen während der Spiele politische Gesänge zu hören sein?

### **Soziales Engagement**

Wir beenden dieses Interview mit den Einflüssen, die Fans auf den Verein haben. Insbesondere hier in Deutschland, wo Fans ein großer Einfluß haben im Vergleich mit anderen europäischen Ländern. Diese Interessen können einen sozialen Grund haben, aber auch ökonomisch, politisch und vieles mehr.

- Erwarten Fans sportive Erfolge?
  - Erwarten die Fans, das den Klub nicht abstiegt?
  - Erwarten die Fans eine Meisterschaft?

- Erwarten die Fans einen Aufstieg?
- Erwarten die Fans Erfolge in dem DFB-Pokal?
- Was erwarten die Fans vom wirtschaftlichen Wohlergehen des Vereins?
  - Was war das Nettoergebnis von letztem Jahr?
  - Was sind die Gründe dieses Defizits/Gewinns in den Finanzinformationen des Vereins?
- Wie verhalten Fans sich, wenn sie mit Ungerechtigkeiten konfrontiert werden, wie zum Beispiel dem Krieg in der Ukraine?
  - Ist der Klub unterstützend in diesen schwierigen Zeiten?
- Was machen die Fans, um die Rechte von marginalisierten Gruppen, wie zum Beispiel Migranten zu fördern?
  - Was macht der Klub?
- Was macht der Klub, um die Position und Akzeptanz von LGBTQ zu fördern?
- Welche Haltung vertritt der Verein gegen Rassismus und Diskrimination?
  - Wie wird das durchgesetzt?
- Ich habe gelesen daß Bundesliga Vereine ab nächstes Saison Nachhaltigkeitsanforderungen brauchen, die sogenannten Zertifizierung für nachhaltigeres Wirtschaften (ZNU), angeordnet vom DFL. Was wurde bereits getan, um mehr nachhaltiger zu werden?
  - Was wird kurzfristig gemacht werden?
  - Was wird Langfristig gemacht werden?
- Gibt es Fans, die sich Ehrenamtlich für soziale Projekte engagieren?
  - Welche Art von Projekten sind das dann?
  - Wurden diese Projekte auch unterstützt durch den Verein?
- Gibt es noch andere Projekte, welche die Position von marginalisierten Menschen verbessern?

Vielen Dank für das Antworten meiner Fragen. Es war eine angenehme Erfahrung mit Ihnen über deutsche Fankultur zu sprechen. Haben Sie noch Fragen oder Anmerkungen Ihrerseits, die in diesem Interview nicht erwähnt wurden?

Das wars für heute, vielen Dank für das Interview und die Informationen. Ich habe jetzt noch eine letzte Frage. Ich wünsche gerne wissen, ob ich Sie kontaktieren darf, wenn doch noch eine Frage aufkommt.

Und wollen Sie die Bachelorarbeit bekommen, wenn sie fertig ist?

- Ja, zu welcher Emailadresse soll ich das senden?
- Nein, okay.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeit und noch einen schönen Tag!