**EASM 2019**

**Developing an Accessibility League Table in European Football: What is an Appropriate Methodology?**

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**Abstract**

**Aim and Research Questions**

There has been increasing political attention on the issue of accessibility within sports stadiums (e.g. Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017). Given this focus there is a need for a more overarching understanding of how football stadiums within Europe are implementing measures designed to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Our aim is to develop an accessibility league table for assessing football stadiums within European football. This research is in the formative stages and this presentation focuses on the development of a valid and reliable methodology with which to assess each club in five leagues in European football (England, Spain, Germany, Italy, France). The research question is therefore: what criteria need to be included to develop an accessibility league table in European Football?

**Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

Ranking systems and league tables assessing organisational performance across a variety of measures can become embedded and institutionalised, shaping organizational structures and processes (e.g. Locke, 2014). They can also impact on the way an institution is perceived. Thus, organisations seek to ensure that they perform well in ranking systems despite concern as to whether they provide a true reflection on organisational practice: this concern relates to whether the methodologies are valid.

Within professional sport there are a number of ranking systems related to the measurement of off-field organisational activities. Deloitte has long been the champion of the Money League, a very simple table that ranks football clubs based on their revenue. Responsiball seeks to rank Football Leagues based on their governance, community and environmental credentials, while Forbes provide a ranking for the most valuable sports brands on an annual basis. These rankings are helpful in providing more understanding of the off-field activities of professional sports leagues and teams.

At present, efforts to measure the extent to which football club stadiums are addressing accessibility are lacking, despite this issue gaining political attention (e.g. Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017). There is one notable exception: in 2015, Revitalise produced an accessibility league table for football clubs in the English Premier League and the Football League Championship. While this work was important and provides a sound starting point for addressing accessibility, accessibility is not an English phenomenon, and as such further work across European football leagues is required. It can be argued that promoting an accessible and inclusive stadia environment to people with disabilities and older people should not be considered in isolation from other managerial and economic decisions across European football (see Paramio-Salcines and Kitchin, 2013; Paramio-Salcines, Kitchin and Downs, 2018). Instead accessibility and inclusion need to be considered as a sound business decision and not only as a legal requirement or social values. Despite pockets of good practice in some clubs across Europe (Kitchin and Bloomer, 2017), the reality is that accessibility remains low on the agenda of most clubs.

**Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis**

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the development of the methodology that we intend to use to develop an accessibility league table. The methodology will be underpinned by the identification of various criteria that we need to draw on in order to analyse and assess the extent to which a stadium is addressing accessibility. Thus far, we have identified a range of criteria that could be included in the methodology for the accessibility league table. This includes such criteria as the total number of accessible spaces as a proportion of the stadium capacity; the total number of wheelchair spaces as a proportion of the stadium capacity; the adequacy of information for supporters with disabilities on the club’s website; the proportion of accessible toilets compared to total accessible seating; the proportion of accessible parking spaces compared to total accessible seating; the proportion of stewards with disability awareness training; the number of accessible parking spaces within stadium grounds; and the presence of contact details for accessibility team; the presence of an access statement. However, the aim of the presentation will be to discuss these criteria, think about how they could be weighted to inform our methodological approach, and to engage in discussion and feedback form audience members as to potential criteria that we have overlooked.

**Results/Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of presenting our methodology is to engage in discussion as to whether this methodology is appropriate, what we might have missed and need to include, data collection, and the potential limitations of adopting such an approach.

**Conclusion, Contribution and Implication**

Despite the growing focus on accessibility at stadia and venues there has yet to be a rankings system that is able to compare and contrast professional football clubs in Europe. Such a ranking would serve a two key purposes: firstly it would highlight those clubs at the upper ends of the ranking system and demonstrate good practice; second, if an accessibility league table was produced on an annual basis it has the potential to become accepted and embedded in the sector, will give more prominence to the issue of accessibility, and shape the decision making processes of football clubs.

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