

Disability provision in European stadia within a corporate social responsibility framework: The case of Primera Division-Spanish Football League

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Aim of paper and research questions

The aim of this paper is to summarise the main findings of a pioneering research project '*Hacia la Accesibilidad Universal y el Diseño para Todos en Recintos Deportivos: El caso de los Estadios de Fútbol de 1ª División en España*' (Towards Universal Accessibility at Spanish Football Stadiums), funded by the Consejo Superior de Deportes (CSD) (Spanish Sports Council) and backed by the Liga de Fútbol Profesional (LFP) (Spanish Professional Football League). As part of this study, the project also aimed to present some recommendations to those clubs involved in the study as well as to the CSD and LFP in order to establish good standards of accessibility in new and existing Spanish Football stadia. At the heart of this paper lie several related research questions:

1. What were the needs and requirements of different types of disabled fans when attending football matches prior to, during and after the match?
2. How do clubs deal with accessibility in their stadia?
3. What were the accessibility standards and services in those stadia selected?

Literature review

Despite there having been clear advances in quality, comfort, safety, security, facilities and services in postmodern stadia, and there are good examples of what we could describe as *accessible stadia* like Old Trafford (Manchester United), the Allianz Arena (Bayern Munich), the Emirates Stadium (Arsenal) and the new Wembley, improving accessibility for disabled fans in football stadia still remains a challenge for most European clubs (Paramio, Buraimo & Campos, 2008). In this way, improving access in existing and new stadia in most European football clubs should be one of the main concerns for major international and national football organisations and individual football clubs themselves. Furthermore, this issue must not be overlooked in regard to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) applied to football clubs in general as well to the simple basic requirement to improve the standards of stadium facilities for disabled fans when they plan to attend a football match. As Phil Downs, former president of the National Association of Disabled Supporters and current secretary of Manchester United Disabled Supporters' Association, stresses '*We need to generate awareness within football not only in England but also in European clubs to improve their stadium facilities considering the social aspects that accessibility produce*'.

This is why CSR policies can play a substantial role in the relationship between clubs and particular groups as disabled fans in the near future (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008), considering the potential of CSR policies on enhancing the economic and social benefits of sport organisations (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

Research design and proposed data analysis

The fieldwork was carried out between February and December 2008 and focused on analysing the research questions outlined in regard to six Spanish Primera Division football clubs (Real Madrid FC, Barcelona FC, Villarreal SAD, Atletico de Madrid SAD, Getafe SAD and Murcia SAD). In order to answer the research questions, this paper draws on document analysis of materials produced by those clubs and their web pages, a series of in depth semi-structured interviews with directors of stadia and people responsible for Social Corporate issues of those clubs and disabled fans and their companions on match days.

Discussion of progress

In mid March 2009, the research group presented an Executive Summary report to LFP that summarised the existing facilities and services available to disabled fans in the clubs' stadia selected. This report highlighted the areas of best practice and identified the present barriers to people with disabilities when they plan to attend a match.

In short, in terms of communication between disabled fans and clubs, it was found that the majority of clubs did not fulfil the minimum requirements on accessibility as communicated on their web pages. In addition, the majority of web pages did not provide any useful information for their own disabled fans nor for away disabled fans (either national or international). In general, except stadia like La Nueva Condomina or Santiago Bernabeu, there was a poor supply of seats for disabled fans in stadia. Most of the facilities were for wheelchair users, but there were no provisions for visually impaired, ambulatory disabled or others. Despite these conditions, it was estimated that on average more than 30 disabled fans plus their companions (relatives and friends) regularly attend matches. Most of them attend on their own. At this stage it is unknown how many more follow the games. This has led to several meetings with LFP representatives to address these issues and to find effective solutions to improve the conditions for disabled fans on Spanish stadia. Finally, the paper will address some actions that, in our judgement, should be addressed in the *First Strategic Plan to Improve Accessibility at Spanish Football stadia (2009-2014)* as part of Football Clubs' CSR policies.

References

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