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**The Social Value of Football Research Project
for Supporters Direct:
Working Papers**

**How Can We Value The Social Impact Of
Football Clubs?: Qualitative Approaches**

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1. Football's Historic Relationship With 'Communities'

Since their formation in the late 19th and early 20th century, football clubs have historically held a position at the heart of urban communities. Mostly formed as work, church, social and community teams, they rapidly became representatives of towns, cities and suburbs, and focal points for the formation and expression of local identities¹.

Over the course of their history, relationships have developed between clubs and local businesses, citizens and residents, community groups, schools and local authorities and other stakeholders. These long standing and deep rooted bonds between clubs and local communities have never been easy or straightforward, nor necessarily welcomed by some. Each of these relationships will entail both positive and negative 'impacts' on those different groups of stakeholders - and the 'value' of those impacts can be interpreted in both 'quantitative' (e.g. numbers of local people employed) and 'qualitative' (e.g. how people feel about the club) ways.

As football has globalised and commodified, the range of these relationships has stretched beyond the merely local, particularly with top flight clubs that have become international 'brands'. However, most football clubs are not global leisure brands. They rely on the support of local communities and businesses to exist, rather than on corporate advertising and television revenue; and they retain a desire and a focus to engage local people and organisations in a number of ways. Even major clubs still rely heavily on matchday supporter communities for income.

We also have to recognise that clubs exist in very different local contexts, with different ownership structures and aims, at different stages of development and relationships to other clubs. This makes any simple comparative approach difficult.

The 'value' to local communities will vary from club to club, dependent on location, historical context, ownership and club practices. As SROI and social accounting approaches both stress (and notwithstanding comments below), getting an understanding of the different stakeholders in football clubs and the different (positive and negative) impacts of the club's activities in the broadest sense on those, is fundamental to understanding football's social and community value.

2. Central to Local Communities?

Partly as a result of football's historic community relationships, clubs are often referred to as being 'central' to local communities, or of great importance - and value - to them. The Football League say that their "clubs have always been at the heart of their communities"² and the Premier League likewise have argued that their clubs - and football more generally - delivers significant community benefits: "Football is a fantastic vehicle to engage people who otherwise might slip through the net in a wide range of areas, particularly health, education, social inclusion and inequality."³

¹ Brown, Crabbe and Mellor (2003) *Football And Its Communities, Interim Report 1: Baseline Analysis Of Case Study Football And Community Initiatives*: 8

² <http://www.football-league.co.uk/page/FAQ/FAQsDetail/0,,10794~1356598,00.html>

³ Premier League, *Creating Chances*, Community Report 2007/08

Indeed, these arguments fall within a broader European understanding of the social value of sport. The European Commission's *Helsinki Report on Sport* argued the need to safeguard current sports structures in order to maintain the social function of sport within the Community framework. The *Nice Declaration (2000)*, *European Model of Sport (2000)* and the *European Sports Charter (2001)* further entrenched the notion that sport was of social value within Europe and this has most recently been outlined in the European Commission *White Paper on Sport*:

[Sport] generates important values such as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and fair play, contributing to personal development and fulfilment. It promotes the active contribution of EU citizens to society and thereby helps to foster active citizenship. The Commission acknowledges the essential role of sport in European society, in particular when it needs to bring itself closer to citizens and to tackle issues that matter directly to them.⁴

3. Evidence Base

There is some evidence to support these claims and of clubs' impact, locally. However, the *White Paper* itself calls for a move to more evidence based policy, a recognition that policy has not been based on firm evidence to date.

Crucially, much of the evidence there is in England about clubs' local impact concerns the impact of community programme interventions - activities designed to provide services for particular groups or areas - rather than the overall impact (and social value) of the club as a whole. This might *include* the club's community scheme, but also all its other activities. As such, in thinking about the social value of football clubs, we need to differentiate between and understand the different roles of:

- The 'direct' community interventions by club's community schemes
- The overall operation of the club as a local institution and its positive and negative impacts

4. Direct Community Interventions

Since the 1970s, as a result of a perceived disjuncture between clubs and local communities, there have been more instrumental attempts to build beneficial relationships between clubs and communities. This was first undertaken through the Sports Council and then via the Football In The Community Schemes (FITC), funded by the Footballers' Further Education and Voluntary Training Society, based at the PFA.

FFE+VTS helped to develop a national network of club based community schemes - many now semi-independent, charitable organisations - that at the time was unique in sport. It invested in work with local communities through clubs' FITC schemes for over 20 years from the mid-1980s⁵. FFE+VTS was disbanded in 2007 having achieved significant progress in some areas and having supported some excellent community schemes that delivered benefits to local communities. The Premier League and the Football League Trust respectively now lead the development of these club-based community scheme and trusts.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/whitepaper8_en.htm#6

⁵ McGuire B.J., Fenoglio R.A. (2004) *Football in the Community: Resources and Opportunities, a National Research Project for the Footballer's Education Society*, Manchester: Footballer's Education Society

As such these 'direct' community interventions are usually undertaken via clubs' community schemes. Many of these are in fact semi-independent charities, which are distinct legal entities. Clubs, leagues and social programmes which schemes help deliver also, to varying degrees, attempt to evaluate and account for their activities.

The Premier League, for instance, reports that in 2007/08⁶:

- 1.42m people took part in community activities across the 20 clubs
- £13m has been made available to clubs to use for community projects via the new Premier League/Professional Footballers Association Community Fund.
- Clubs themselves have put in vast amounts of cash and other resources
- These have been backed by a total of £125m redistributed into a wide variety of programmes.

The Football League Trust, although a new organisation, is now distributing £4m a year to the community projects of its 72 clubs⁷. The baseline audit carried out by the FLT in 2007 suggested that those FL clubs that responded:

- Employed 2,512 people
- Had around 1,300,000 participants
- Staged sessions for a total of around 15,000 adults across all schemes⁸

Both Premier League and Football League community schemes and trusts also deliver a range of national programmes such as the Kickz programme, administered by the Football Foundation and Positive Futures, a activity based youth inclusion programme funded by the Home Office. Programmes such as these provide another layer of monitoring and evaluation of the local impact and evaluations of community programme activities.

These latter two cases utilise the Substance Project Reporting System, which allows both quantitative information - such as the numbers and demographics of participants as well as the investment by partners in the project - and qualitative information - such as audio visual files, testimony and case studies of impacts - to be collated and reported.⁹

5. Wider Club Community Roles and Value

Our research for the Football Foundation¹⁰ - *Football and its Communities*¹⁰ - suggested that clubs need to think about and organise their community roles in two ways:

All levels of football can develop new structures and methods of working which will enable them to develop better relations with their multiple communities. The proposed approach is based around two connected strategies:

⁶ <http://www.premierleague.com/page/CreatingChancesArticle>

⁷ Football League Trust (2008) *Make Every Goal Count: FLT Strategy Document*, Preston: Football League

⁸ *Ibid*: 47

⁹ Mellor, G (2008) *Kickz First Season Progress Report: Monitoring and Evaluation 2008*; Crabbe, T (2007) *Positive Futures: Putting the pieces together? The 2007 Positive Futures Monitoring and Evaluation Report*, London: Home Office

¹⁰ See Brown, Crabbe and Mellor (2006): *Football and its Communities: Final Report*, London: Football Foundation.

- The first is the creation of new and independent community organisations at clubs which will be 'outward facing' and will work on developing community interventions in areas such as health, education, community safety and regeneration.
- The second is the development of a more holistic approach towards community issues which cuts across the full range of football clubs' activities.

Both of these ways of thinking about community impacts inform an understanding of a club's community or social value.

As stated above, many clubs now have independent community organisations operating as charities and trusts and to varying degrees are evaluated. However, outside of the specific interventions of community programmes, there is a relative lack of evidence to support arguments that football clubs as a whole are of value to local communities in which they are situated and of the impact of clubs in a more holistic manner. Indeed, it is arguable that even within clubs there is less understanding of how they impact on communities in these other ways, which might include:

- degrees of local employment
- whether there is a local purchasing policy
- minimising disruption to residents, including travel and parking schemes
- facility redevelopment
- liaison with local community groups
- extent of local resident membership and attendance
- ticketing policy with local preference schemes
- involvement of supporter communities in the club
- involvement of leading staff in local initiatives, forums and networks
- relationships with the local authority

Approaches such as SROI and Social Accounting stress the importance of analysing both the negative and positive impacts of an organisation, the different perspectives of a full range of stakeholders and an understanding of the many different operations of a company that can have impacts on its value locally. Likewise, our more ethnographic research for *Football and its Communities*, attempted to review the different roles three case study clubs and the different perspectives of four groups of stakeholders: local residents, local businesses, supporters and disadvantaged communities¹¹.

6. Financial Valuations

One of the only comparative *valuations* of football clubs are the annual reviews of football finance undertaken by Deloitte¹². However, these are exclusively about their financial performance, without any analysis of local impacts. Although there is a growing, wider public discourse about the financial worth of football clubs (their earnings and their indebtedness), this again is largely confined to interpretations of the balance sheet which, whilst no doubt important, isn't primarily concerned with the local community or social impact and value of football.

Part of the problem of this approach, as well as of assessments that attempt to produce a single financial outcome of social 'value' in football, is that the values placed on clubs

¹¹ All three Interim Reports for Football and its Communities are available at:

http://www.substance.coop/publications_football_and_its_communities

¹² [http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/UK_SBG_ARFF2008_Highlights\(1\).pdf](http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/UK_SBG_ARFF2008_Highlights(1).pdf)

by local stakeholders - staff, fans, residents, businesses, local authorities - are often rarely financial in nature.

- Supporters and their organisations routinely refer to their 'love' for a club as a driving force behind their association with it. The (then) Football Supporters Association suggested in 1999 that fandom was based on a 'lifelong emotional commitment'¹³. Just as one would not place a financial value on other 'loves' or emotional ties (family, partners, musical taste), it sometimes seems incongruous to attempt to evaluate supporters' valuations of their club in financial terms.
- Likewise, the 'civic pride' associated with a team's FA Cup win goes beyond the financial benefits that a city might get as a result. Portsmouth's decision to award the victorious 2008 FA Cup team and manager the Freedom of the City - which followed a similar award to the club as a whole in 2003 - was, according to Leader of the city Labour group, Jim Patey, because 'They're all very worthy of the freedom of the city. They've really enhanced Portsmouth.'¹⁴ It may also be due to a desire for the locality (and authority) to be associated with successful clubs - an image value which is difficult to quantify.
- Supporters Direct's work itself is responding to a desire from fans to be more involved in the running of their club and in ensuring its sustainability long term. However, this is not undertaken for any financial benefit or result for the supporters, their commitment is almost universally voluntary and the valuations they have of their club cannot be seen in purely financial terms.

Understanding clubs' social and community *value* therefore needs to:

- Be more extensive and broader based than the evaluations of community schemes (though still incorporating them)
- Go beyond financial and market valuations that are undertaken
- Have more qualitative valuations than approaches that attempt to arrive at only a singular financial social valuation
- Recognise the different aims, approaches and impacts of different ownership structures

If football is able to meet this evidence gap, there are significant benefits:

- Lobbying government (local, national, European) and regulators
- Developing beneficial relationships with local authorities
- Gaining planning and other agreements for new facilities
- Generating social investment
- Promoting different forms of ownership

7. Qualitative Approaches

7.1 The qualitative in the quantitative

When considering these different approaches to determining social and community value of football, and indeed research more generally, we need first to recognise that quantitative approaches are on the whole neither purely objective nor purely quantitative

¹³ Football Task Force (1999): *Final Report*

¹⁴ <http://www.portsmouth.co.uk/arisesirharry/We39ll-give-them-the-freedom.4103892.jp>

and in some senses attempting any 'pure' distinction between quantitative and qualitative is difficult to sustain.

- Market valuations of clubs can vary according to perspective (buyers and sellers) and are contingent on circumstance
- Accounts of financial performance vary according to practices and often contain qualitative judgements
- Approaches such as SROI inherently involve qualitative assessments, by stakeholders as well as in setting financial proxies
- Approaches such as the Contingent Valuation Model, or determining the value of public goods, are based largely on the (sometimes uninformed) judgements of questionnaire respondents
- Survey data - such as satisfaction surveys of local residents, supporters - are inherently based on personal qualitative judgements.

7.2 The quantitative in the qualitative

Likewise, it would be wrong to assume that approaches that promote qualitative methods and outputs - e.g. textual analysis, interview data, reviews of comments on internet forums - are purely that, or need to be expressed as such.

Assessments people make, for instance in interviews, can often be informed by an understanding of quantitative data. Supporters' calls for greater involvement in ownership of clubs are often in part an expression of concern with the finances of their clubs. Also, below we suggest some ways in which qualitative data can be expressed in more quantitative and accessible ways.

7.3 Qualitative research

One way of approaching qualitative research is through accepted and well practised methods such as qualitative interviews, focus groups, observations, media and documentary analysis. In considering questions such as the different business advantages of different forms of ownership, or of community interactions with football clubs on match days, and the different interpretations and opinions of clubs' community impacts by different stakeholder groups, these remain highly relevant and should be included within case study approaches.

More involved case study work might involve a more ethnographic approach in which researchers explore the lived experience of different groups in relation to football clubs, often longitudinal in nature. These can be to greater or lesser degrees participatory in involving different stakeholders or club personnel.

One of the problems with such approaches of course is the resources they require both for researchers and others involved, which can often be a barrier to such valuations being carried out. They also tend to depend on the employment of a researcher 'on the ground'. Less resource intensive and more participatory approaches that nonetheless seek to capture similar qualitative data and utilise new technologies might include:

- Online qualitative questionnaires
- Blogs from different stakeholders, or on particular issues
- Online or other diaries

- Comment facilities, to gauge different perspectives on club developments, documents or issues
- Collation and tagging of photographs and other AV material
- Interactive and community mapping tools
- Mapping of social data against supporter, resident or other information

7.4 Ownership

Given the particular focus within this project on assessing the community and social value of different forms of ownership and to understand the various benefits of different ownership models to different stakeholder groups, it will require both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

For instance a method that seeks a simple financial valuation might be able to place an added value on a club that, because of its community ownership, was given preferential terms for stadium development: such as the value of local authority input. However, to understand how and why that was the case, for whom the form of ownership mattered most, what processes this went through and assessing alternatives, will require a more qualitative approach such as interviews with owners, club staff, residents, local authorities, developers, funders.

It may be possible to ask people to place a perceived financial value on clubs under different ownership structures, through a questionnaire approach. However, to explore that in any depth and to ensure different perspectives are aired and understood will require a much more engaged process with stakeholders.

7.5 Traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation

In terms of the evaluations of community interventions, the problem with most traditional approaches are that they:

- Tend to rely on recording fixed, pre-determined outcomes
- Have been overwhelmingly (and often totally) statistical
- Don't represent the breadth of work or success 'stories' of community interventions
- Are used to back up unsustainable causal claims (e.g. crime reduction as a result of social programmes)
- Are often bureaucratic and burdensome (often on one member of staff)
- Sometimes have no clear purpose to user and returns only appear in aggregated statistics
- Have no 'real time' use to funders, partners and schemes
- Often occur at the end of a project and as such learning is not implemented into practice and delivery

Commissioners and funders understand that monitoring and evaluation is seen as a burden, so have tried to simplify the process. However, this has led to an over-reliance on statistical data which produces lots of monitoring (auditing) but not much evaluation. Where complex information is being sent to commissioners/funders, they often don't know how to process it.

In the context of this research, it is particularly important to recognise that claims of the value of community interventions which are based on causal relationships, are difficult to sustain. Some approaches suggest that because of a particular scheme, change in practice or delivery in a new area, things like crime are reduced and that this can then be translated into a 'value' to the local community or state. However, as has been argued elsewhere:

'...initiatives have too often focused on trying to establish a direct causal relationship between involvement in sport and the social policy concerns of the day. Attempts at proving such direct 'outputs' are inevitably problematic and the shortcomings of this approach are being recognised increasingly across academic, practitioner and policy-making circles. At best, this method can produce a numeric record of, for example, how many participants have not been arrested over a given period of time. However, the incomplete nature of this 'data' renders its usefulness limited. Such statistics are notoriously unreliable as, in the case of arrest figures, they ignore unreported crimes whilst the 'fact' that somebody has not been *arrested* gives no indication as to whether they have actually been involved in crime or not. Furthermore, any evidence of non involvement in crime could never be directly attributed to the impact of a specific programme...'¹⁵

7.6 More appropriate approaches to monitoring and evaluation

There has been a move in recent years to more participatory and qualitative approaches to monitoring and evaluation which incorporates:

- Front line managers and workers becoming part of the research process, gathering evidence on their work, understanding it and feeding it back into practice.
- Splitting the process into essentially four elements: collecting, storing and processing information on people/participants that clubs work with; the actual work done with people; evidence of that; and reports on the evidence of work done with people.
- Including 'qualitative', visual evidence of interventions and impacts as part of the evaluation process. However, there remains a problem of how people transmit their understandings of qualitative evidence and how valid it is as an indicator of impact.
- Making the process more 'live', not dependent on an 'end point' and more useful' to practitioners, allowing an ongoing handle on evidence and performance in different periods.

The work Substance have undertaken in developing new, online monitoring and evaluation tools, has attempted to embrace these elements¹⁶.

7.7 Using different kinds of data

To take one element of this, it is important that monitoring and evaluation allows the collection, collation and reporting of different, and new, kinds of data. Clubs and club community schemes currently routinely gather lots of evidence in lots of different ways and there need to be means by which this can be mobilised in support of their work.

This might include photos, videos, documents such as codes of conduct, audio evidence, work with 'beneficiaries' and local communities, transcripts of focus groups and meetings held with participants or local residents etc. In particular, young people -

¹⁵ Crabbe, T et al (2006) *Knowing the Score: Positive Futures Case Study Research: Final Report*, Home Office: November 2006

¹⁶ See www.substance.coop/sprs and www.substance.coop/views

whom many clubs claim to benefit - are storing their thoughts on issues and experiences wherever they want to (such as online environments) but instead of trying to capture these thoughts 'live', most approaches are still using surveys, questionnaires etc. requiring a less engaged, post-event input.

As such, we feel that monitoring and evaluation of clubs' direct community interventions - indeed of an holistic approach to understanding their community value more generally - needs to be:

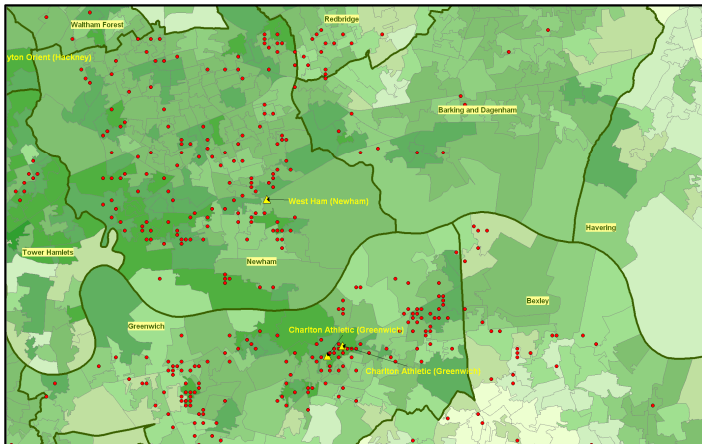
- Both quantitative and qualitative
- Participatory and user friendly (e.g. online)
- Producing 'live' statistics and outcomes to range of partners
- Showing the 'progression' and 'distance travelled' of individuals and communities over time
- Providing a means of collating and reporting different forms of qualitative evidence
- Meeting a range of partner and funder's needs, and showing how key local and national agendas are being met
- Reciprocal to funders and delivery
- Moving from 'Monitoring and Evaluation' to 'Learning and Development'

8. Presentation of Data

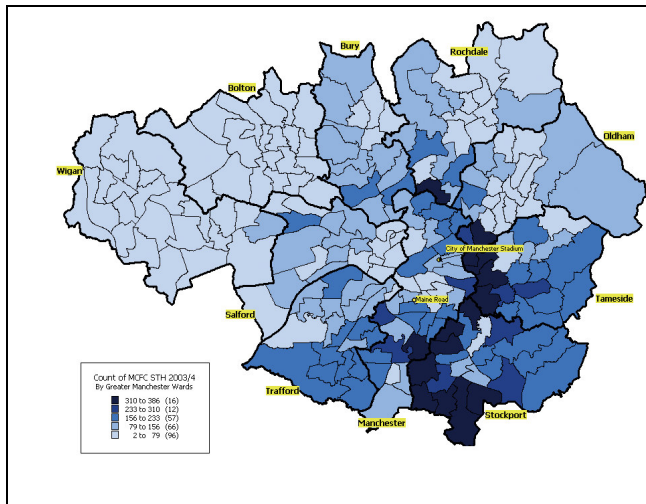
Finally, we feel that too often research into sport and community impacts can result in either reports that are inaccessible to most of the stakeholders whom they concern, or little understood financial statements, or media reports that reduce 'findings' to basic statistics. As such, there is a need to explore, when appropriate, different means of presenting data. These might include some of the following.

8.1 Digital maps of communities and clubs

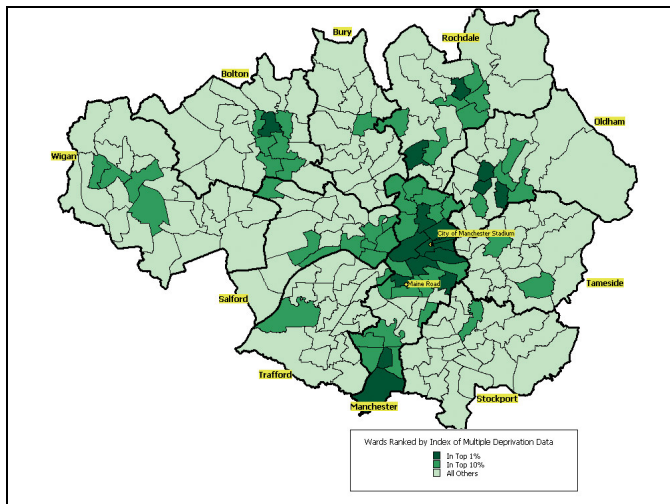
Digital mapping techniques have opened up attractive ways of presenting a range of data. The example below shows the location of venues and participants on Kickz schemes run by clubs in London. These are mapped against Multiple Deprivation data in which the darker colours illustrate the more deprived neighbourhoods. This allows clubs, for instance, to show how they are engaging and involving those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.



The next example shows the relative distribution of a club's season ticket holders, in this case Manchester City¹⁷.



This example shows the concentrations deprivation by ward in Greater Manchester and allows comparison of the location of supporters against IMD (2004) data¹⁸.



Such visualisations allow clubs, fans, residents, local authorities and other stakeholders to understand more immediately about the club and its place against different local demographics. The exercise can be repeated using a wide range of social data such as IMD and Census.

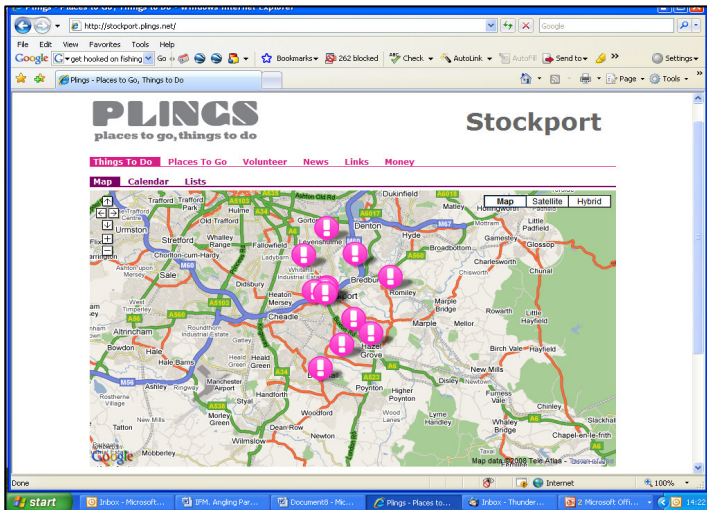
8.2 Plings - 'Fish where the fish are'

One of the tools that Substance have developed, Plings, helps to collate and present information on places to go and things to do for young people. At its most basic this can

¹⁷ *Football and its Communities*, op cit: 52

¹⁸ *Ibid*:

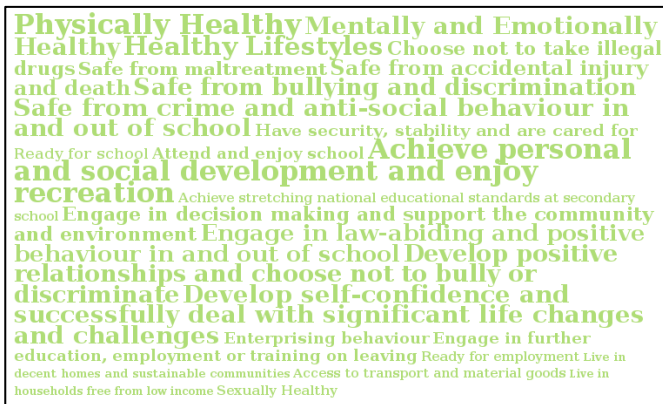
produce maps of different venues where activities take place - by clicking on each icon you get information about that venue and activities there¹⁹.



However, the principle that underpins Plings - ‘fish where the fish are’ - recognises that not all social groups access data in the same way and that there is a need to ‘publish’ data - which could be activity data such as this or even research findings - in a variety of ways that people themselves routinely use. This might be a system interface, a web page, a social networking site, to mobile phones or in more traditional formats such as leaflets, reports and pdf documents.

8.3 Tag clouds

Tag Clouds are a means by which qualitative data can be presented in a more immediate fashion. The size of each word relates to the number of times that word has occurred. Tag clouds could be generated - as the one below is - through asking people to allocate key words to pictures or in monitoring and evaluation systems. This example relates to the numbers of media files uploaded in the Substance Project Reporting System and tagged against the different elements of the Every Child Matters Outcome Framework. It helps provide a snapshot of a project’s impact against a key national agenda.



¹⁹ <http://stockport.plings.net/>

However, you can generate tag clouds from more routine qualitative data - such as interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, text from supporter forums, local media coverage of clubs etc.. The example below simply illustrates the frequency of different words collected in an online comment tool about a pipe band event in Glasgow in 2008.

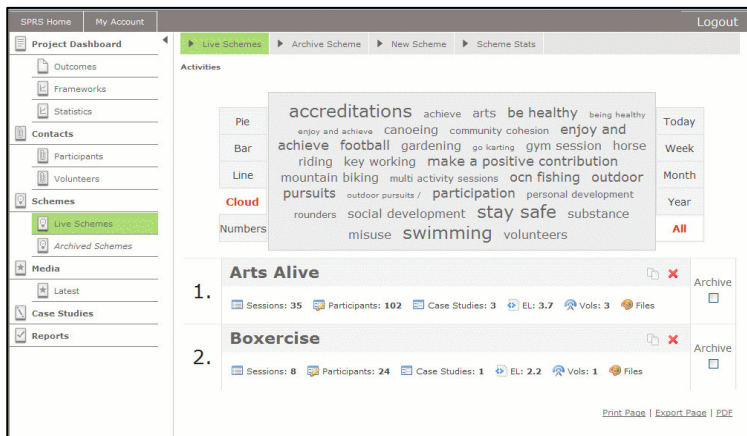


Developing this further, Tag Lines such as those below can be produced that show change in emphasis over time. This might for example be used to gauge the different ways people talk about clubs moving from one ownership form to another; or the perspectives of local residents before and after key changes in club practice.



8.4 Web based reporting

Given the increasing use of the internet, web based reporting is another way that research into clubs' social and community impacts might be made more accessible. At its most basic, this might involve the distribution of research reports on websites as pdf documents. A step forward might involve the generation of online comments from readers about those reports - as we are doing with these Working Papers - which can themselves then produce further meaningful data. This makes the process of reporting 'live' and interactive. At its best web based reports should allow easy access to both qualitative and quantitative data to a whole variety of stakeholders and incorporate some of the approaches outlined above. The example below is from our evaluation of the Home Office funded Positive Futures program.



What all these approaches attempt to do is to allow access to and participation in the reporting of research and evaluation exercises. Within the scope of this project, the adoption of such approaches will help broaden participation in the project and allow reflection on data generated through case study research.

9. Conclusion

It is important therefore, that in moving research on clubs' community value forward we: acknowledge the different, but linked spheres of activity of direct community interventions and other club operations; embrace qualitative interpretations; assess clubs' impacts in an holistic way, across a range of stakeholders; and seek to present data and findings in accessible ways that seeks to generate ongoing feedback and discourse with stakeholders.