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# **Change or continuity? The impact of New Labour's modernisation programme on grassroots football within Hampshire**

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# **Change or continuity? The impact of New Labour's modernisation programme on grassroots football within Hampshire**

During their time in government, New Labour sought to modernise and professionalise public services and this included the voluntary sector in sport. This paper explores to what extent grassroots football within Hampshire has changed in response to the modernisation process. Grassroots football has traditionally been dependent on the time and efforts of volunteers, contributing to an amateur-voluntary culture. Six semi-structured interviews, with members of the grassroots voluntary workforce, suggest that more needs to be done in diversifying the local workforce. Moreover, modernisation through technology and the FA Charter Standard Programme have benefitted local football and have generally been well received. However, there is a tension between the amateur-voluntary traditions of grassroots football; and the modernised, professionalised, inclusive society which New Labour developed through their modernisation agenda. Thus, this research demonstrates that modernisation is not a time limited process, rather an ongoing process which continues beyond New Labour's time in office.

Keywords: Charter Standard Programme; grassroots football; modernisation; New Labour; voluntarism

## **Introduction**

Local grassroots football has been delivered and governed by volunteers since its mobilisation in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. This culture of voluntarism remained throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, New Labour, elected to power in the United Kingdom in 1997 under the leadership of Tony Blair, had the ambition to modernise and professionalise delivery and governance. New Labour's modernisation agenda sought to: "alter the ways in which the state interacted with a range of individuals and agencies within the context of the 'modern' world" (Dickinson 2014, 31). Whilst there is much literature available regarding how modernisation has affected sports organisations, including National Governing Bodies (NGBs) (Adams 2014, Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009, Houlihan and

Green 2009, Jefferys 2012, Phillpots, Grix, and Quarmby 2011b), there is limited literature regarding how modernisation has shaped and affected grassroots sports- including local football.

The aim of this paper is to explore to what extent local grassroots football administration within Hampshire has changed as a result of New Labour's modernisation agenda. The paper begins by introducing how grassroots football has traditionally been delivered. Focus then turns to how the modernisation agenda pursued by New Labour has affected the administration of grassroots sport. The data collected through the semi-structured interviews provide the basis for three themes for discussion: diversifying the workforce; modernising through technology; and modernising governance through the FA Charter Standard Programme.

### **Grassroots football administration**

Traditionally, grassroots sport has been dominated by the efforts of volunteers to the extent that it has been said that sport is centred around the voluntary sector (Adams 2014). Indeed, the vast amount of sports organisations have remained dependent on volunteers into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cuskelly, Hoye, and Auld 2006). This was and is no different for football; football clubs, County Football Associations (CFAs), and the Football Association (FA) were established as voluntary organisations. As Lusted and O'Gorman (2010, 141) note:

For much of its history, the organisation, control and development of the game have been overwhelmingly left to a dedicated and committed body of local grassroots football volunteers.

Indeed, it was not until the 1990s that the FA became more directly involved with grassroots football (Lusted and O'Gorman 2010).

Local football administrators reflected the amateur-voluntary tradition, which developed in the late Victorian Period (Holt 2008). This meant that football administrators were typically white, middle-class men (McCarthy 2013, Lusted 2009). Lusted (2008, 2009) refers to Handy's (1988) 'spider's web' structure when describing the power structures of local football. This structure suggests that the closer an individual is to the middle of an organisation, the more power and influence that individual will have. Moreover, those recruiting new members tend to recruit people sharing similar characteristics to themselves, resulting in homologous reproduction (Kanter 1977). However, since New Labour came to power in 1997, there has been an effort to develop a diverse workforce within grassroots football and its power structures (Lusted 2013). Moreover, the FA's Charter Standard Programme, introduced in 2001, was able to provide quality assurance and in turn professionalise local grassroots provision (O'Gorman 2011). Indeed, these efforts to diversify and professionalise the volunteer workforce can be viewed as part of the modernisation agenda of the New Labour government (1997-2010).

### **Earned autonomy: New Labour's modernisation**

Tony Blair's New Labour came into power after winning a landslide general election in 1997. New Labour was born out of constitutional and structural reforms of the Labour party which began in the 1980s, and most notably in 1995 led to the rewording of Clause IV in the party's constitution (Atkins 2010). The rewording of Clause IV effectively opened the door for the 'third way' (Hauss 2014). This approach, when New Labour campaigned for power, promised to reverse the centralising trends that the Conservative Party had established (Midwinter 2001). New Labour would attempt to "forge a new political settlement framed around constitutional renewal [and] substantial investment in public services" (Diamond and Kenny 2011, 8). This would be achieved by attempting to decentralise through partnership and modernisation (Dickinson 2014).

Key to the New Labour project was the modernisation of government and public services which included QUANGOs such as Sport England (Dickinson 2014). Indeed, if there was a word which captured the essence of New Labour's social and political project then it would be 'modernisation' (Finlayson 2003). Modernisation was defined as:

ensuring that policy-making is more joined up and strategic; making sure that public service users, not providers, are the focus, by matching services more closely to people's lives; delivering public services that are high quality and efficient (Cabinet Office 1999, 6-7).

The modernisation agenda focused on issues of governance in regards to how the state could change how it interacted with a range of individuals and agencies in the 'modern' world (Dickinson 2014). Modernisation revolved around a number of central themes including: the desire for high quality public services achieved through performance standards; an emphasis on the user as opposed to the provider; a strong belief in the value of public-private sector partnerships; the promotion of a stakeholder society; and the introduction of the 'third way' (Falconer 2005).

The 'third way' was New Labour's attempt to temper free market capitalism with social justice, whilst avoiding excessive domination of the state over social and economic life (Atkins 2010). In effect it was a mixture of a continuation of Conservative policies (e.g., New Public Management (NPM)) and New Labour constitutional reforms (Adams 2014, Hyndman and Lapsley 2016, Leach 2009). Alongside working with the private sector, New Labour embraced working with the third sector, also known as the voluntary or community sector (Dickinson 2014), of which sport and football have historically been reliant on (Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009, Lusted 2008). An underlying theme of the 'third way' was to establish a policy of Best Value; New Labour's alternative to the Conservative's Compulsory Competitive Tendering (Thompson 2010). Best Value focused not on which sector provided a service, rather focused on ensuring that the sector

used provided that service with the most efficiency and quality (Bevir 2005). Best Value was one of a number of mechanisms that also included performance indicators and public service agreements. This ensured a continuation and development of NPM through the modernisation agenda. Whilst there would be a continuing drive for efficiency and effectiveness, New Labour sought to be more responsive to society (Hyndman and Lapsley 2016).

Utilising and providing public money to the third sector led to an increase in the resources available to organisations which sat in the third sector, such as football clubs, thus expanding the size and scope of the sector. However, the mechanism of Best Value was also designed to change the culture of third sector organisations. Organisations were therefore expected to acquire key professional skills and experience in areas such as procurement, contract negotiation, and cost allocation (Dickinson 2014). Organisations which received government funding would be subject to a number of key performance indicators (KPIs). These would be agreed between the delivery partner and the government, either directly or through a QUANGO such as Sport England (Massey and Pype 2005). The KPIs would provide evidence for the value (or lack of) of the service that an organisation was providing (Leach 2009, Rouse and Smith 1999). Failure to prove that Best Value was being achieved would result in top-down controls being applied, such as the removal of funding (Rouse and Smith 1999). This was typical of New Labour's payment by results accountability system (Armstrong 1999), referred to by Dickinson (2014, 45) as "earned autonomy," whereby organisations would gain greater freedom and financial resources if they could prove that they performed well against delivery targets. Thus the decentralising process which New Labour claimed would take place also had a strong centralising element to it in terms of organisations being held accountable by a series of negotiated targets and performance indicators (Dickinson 2014). In order to

assist with this accountability system and to improve performance, New Labour introduced benchmarks of efficiency and measurements of success such as the Charter Marks (Bevir 2005, Thompson 2010). Within grassroots sport, The FA Charter Standard Programme is an example of Charter Marks being used to improve the performance of non-government organisations.

### **Modernising grassroots sport**

New Labour's modernisation programme sought to use sport as part of their 'third way' joined up approach to governance and delivering on wider welfare goals (Jefferys 2012). Whilst John Major's government focussed on increasing the resources available to sport through funds from the National Lottery, New Labour focused on the organisational reform of the sport sector (Houlihan and Green 2009). Therefore, while there is evidence that John Major's tenure as Prime Minister marked the beginning of significant reforms in the state's involvement in sport, it is clear that New Labour accelerated these reforms (Phillpots, Grix, and Quarmby 2011a). Sport England's role shifted towards managing grassroots sport through County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) and adopting a more strategic role in ensuring public funds were properly spent (Houlihan and Green 2009, Phillpots, Grix, and Quarmby 2011a). As part of the drive towards professionalism and modernisation, Sport England saw an introduction of senior staff from business backgrounds, demonstrating how New Labour's agenda influenced sport in terms of making the state apparatus becoming more business-like (Houlihan and Green 2009). Part of Sport England's remit became to distribute Treasury and National Lottery funds to NGBs who were working towards and in line with government policy and strategy (Brookes and Wiggan 2009).

Evidence of the earned autonomy theme coming from the modernisation agenda can be found within the sports strategy *Game Plan* (DCMS 2002). Sport England, in

response to the government's *Game Plan* introduced a "spine of accountability" framework which outlined what was expected from organisations such as NGBs and voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) who would be receiving public money (Houlihan and Green 2009, 689). *Game Plan* focused on the accountability and KPIs of funded organisations, along with making funding more accessible in the removal of "red tape" (DCMS 2002, 5). However, the extent to which the "red tape" was removed is debatable. NGBs and VSCs would only receive funding if they modernised and professionalised their services and provision of sport (Green 2008). This included meeting comprehensive criteria including: achieving Clubmarks, encompassing NPM principles, and outlining how funding could be used in a sustainable manner (Jones 2008, Adams 2014). As a result it can be observed that the line of accountability ran from VSCs and NGBs up to government via Sport England (Houlihan and Green 2009). Therefore, it can be contended that New Labour, through this performance management funding system, reinvigorated grassroots sports through prescriptive centrally imposed targets (Jefferys 2012).

However, this led to the creation of a democratic deficit, whereby NGBs and VSCs began shifting away from being mutual aid organisations towards becoming service delivery organisations (Green 2008). The sporting authorities and government, along with society, began to expect a professional quality of service which met wider government objectives, as opposed to loose, informal and voluntary delivery for sport's sake (Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009). The introduction and subsequent growth of professional sports development through the investment in full time Sport Development Officers (SDOs) led to additional pressures for volunteers (Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009). Volunteers became expected to specialise and meet the demands laid out ultimately by the government seeking Best Value. These expectations that began to be developed were at

odds with some volunteer motives and expectations (Cuskelly, Hoye, and Auld 2006). There were (and still are) a large number of volunteers within NGB and VSC structures who held strong amateur and Corinthian ideals about sport (Green 2008). These volunteers would experience the burden of an increase in bureaucracy in areas such as child protection and Clubmark, which were key criteria to meet in order to receive funding (Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009). Consequently, tension emerged between the modern professional/rational-bureaucratic model of management driven by New Labour, and the more amateur-voluntary model of decision making and governance (Adams 2011). For the former, success would be measured in achieving modernisation, change and wider outcomes, whereas for the latter success would be focused on stability and longevity of the status quo (Green 2008).

### **Methodology**

To identify and analyse the impact of New Labour's modernisation on grassroots football in Hampshire, data was collected from six local grassroots football administrators, each participating in one individual semi-structured interview. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences and background as grassroots volunteers, and to what extent this changed/remained the same, and their experiences of the FA Charter Standard Programme. The aim of the interviews was to create an oral history of the experiences of the grassroots football volunteer workforce in Hampshire. By taking this reconstructivist approach (Booth 2005) a 'people's history' has been developed. This is where historical accounts are: for, from, and about a population which does not hold institutional power (Jordanova 2019).

A purposive sample of existing or former club secretaries from local grassroots clubs in Hampshire was used for the interviews. This method of sampling was used as it was the most efficient way to recruit eligible participants given the existing knowledge

of grassroots volunteers within Hampshire (Battaglia 2008). The clubs from which the participants were drawn from included clubs made up of youth or adult male only teams, and clubs made up of a combination of youth, adult male and female teams. The key eligibility criterion for the sample was that participants had to have been involved in grassroots football within Hampshire prior and post New Labour's time in government (1997-2010). This contributed to a relatively high average participant age of 72.16, with the youngest at 67 and oldest at 85. All but one of the participants was male, and all participants were White-British, both reflecting the historical tradition of the voluntary grassroots football workforce (Lusted 2009, McCarthy 2013). To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms are used when referring to interviewees below.

Interviews took place during the summer of 2018 and were recorded by a mobile recording device and were fully transcribed post interview. This research plan was provided with institutional ethics approval. After data collection was concluded, a thematic analysis took place, which allowed for themes within the data set to be identified, analysed, organised, described, and reported on (Braun and Clarke 2006). To be accepted as trustworthy (Nowell et al. 2017), the thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching, review and defining themes, and finally writing up the findings. Coding was data-driven in that the themes selected for analysis were driven by the data collected (Braun and Clarke 2006, Punch 2005). Practically this involved the author manually reading the transcripts, highlighting key codes, and then cross referencing across transcripts, resulting in a number of initial themes being identified (Hardy and Bryman 2004). These initial themes were then reviewed and refined into the key themes (Braun and Clarke 2006), resulting in a coherent set of themes to write up the discussion (Nowell et al. 2017). These

themes are: (not) diversifying the workforce, modernising through technology, and modernising governance through the Charter Standard Programme.

## **Results**

### ***(Not) diversifying the workforce: the spider's web remains***

The interviews revealed that there is a lack of diversity regarding age, gender, and ethnicity within the local grassroots level of the game in Hampshire. This was the case at club level, league level, and at the Hampshire Football Association (HFA) Council. Gordon, despite acknowledging that there were a couple of females on his league committee said that, "It is a feature of football that it is pretty much a white male sort of domination." When asked why he thought this was the case he said that, "I think it is just a lot of people running football are old school and times are changing aren't there." Nigel added to this point by describing his league committee as being all white, only having one female, and most being retired. One of the reasons for this, according to Nigel, is that whilst clubs have ethnic minority players, he does not see them moving "into management or saying on committees", going further to claim that they are not encouraged or "push[ed]" to do so. Elsie, the only female interviewee in this research, provided stark insight into her experiences as a member of the HFA Council, describing that she felt "totally invisible" and "ignored." She would be questioned at certain meetings with people asking, "What are you doing here, what do you want?" However, she also alluded to positive changes she experienced when HFA incorporated in 2000, suggesting that, "Instead of just being a men's club, it was just a proper company business." When asked whether this change was well received, she said that it was not, due to "a lot of the older gentlemen wanting things to remain the same."

These comments from Elsie, alongside the observations provided by the male interviewees, exacerbates and evidences the patriarchal culture that seemingly remains within the structures of local football within Hampshire. Despite Malcolm noting that, “There are also women involved now,” it is clear from the interviews that older men remain the dominant force when it comes to the administration of football. Thus, despite efforts from the FA and CFAs to increase diversity within local football administration, the data provided by the interviews of this study suggests that this has not been noticed at the grassroots level of the game. However, the interviews did provide data regarding the change and development of technology used by grassroots volunteers.

### ***Modernising through technology***

One of the biggest changes identified by the interviewees was that of the development of technology. Indeed, Dennis said that, “It [technology] is probably the biggest change of the whole lot.” Administration and communication systems have shifted from paper-based systems to electronic systems. Harry said that the increase in technology led to football administration feeling less personal. He goes on to suggest that it has not really led to a reduction in time spent on club administration, “Email to me is an abused system... I sometimes feel I get unnecessary emails where a quick phone call would do... I think it is overused.” Harry also shared his frustration that hardcopy paperwork remains. He is of the view that everything should be online to make the process more efficient. An alternative point of view is provided by Dennis who said that he “puts up” with the new technology; however, he finds operating his paperwork system “much easier and much better [because] I can get hold of it whenever I want. I haven't got a flat battery or anything like that.” He does, however, acknowledge the advantages of technological advancements

used within the administration of football, noting that it allows access to far greater information in a much shorter period of time.

While most of the participants acknowledged the benefits of the advances in technology, even if it has taken time to adjust and keep up, this was not the case with Malcolm. He explained that he continues to carry out all his administration by paper and handwritten document, claiming that the biggest challenge he is faced with is the new systems that are introduced in regard to club administration. Whilst acknowledging that this method is time consuming, he said that he enjoyed doing it and that it provided him with easy access to information in a way he thinks the new systems will not:

I had the finger on the tab; I knew who had registered and who hadn't and who I needed to approach and not approach. But now I find that with this new system that they are bringing in, I'll be honest with you I haven't got a clue with it.

Nigel also provided a more critical account of his experiences with technology, sharing his frustration with the lack of flexibility from the developments in technology. He suggested that this lack of flexibility was because of a lack of consultation from the FA. However, whilst frustrated with the current lack of flexibility, he does predict that in the long term the technology will improve his experience as a local grassroots volunteer. Overall, despite some resistance, the developments in technology have been deemed to have in the main positively affected the experiences of the local volunteers.

### ***Modernising governance: The Charter Standard Programme***

Alongside developments in technology, grassroots football clubs have modernised through the FA Charter Standard Programme. The programme, which can be viewed as the FA's response to New Labour's Chartermark, aims to modernise and professionalise the governance and running of grassroots football clubs. The consensus from the

interviewees was that the Charter Standard Programme has benefitted grassroots football within Hampshire. According to the interviewees, benefits of being a Charter Standard club include better coaching, better players, along with increased status and profile. Nigel said that, from a financial point of view, the Charter Standard Programme has provided some funding to clubs; however, the funding has been “fairly limited.” Moreover, the financial benefits were not the main motive for clubs to work towards achieving the Charter Standard status. Funding would be largely based around bursaries and some support with the provision of football and other equipment. Elsie mentioned that clubs occasionally received tickets to professional matches. However, according to Malcolm, these benefits have dried up since the programme was first introduced.

Drawbacks of achieving and maintaining Charter Standard status largely revolve around the increase in time and effort to ensure that the club meet the criteria outlined by the FA. Gordon, for example, stated, “It is more work. There’s no question.” This involves a large emphasis on child protection and ensuring the relevant individuals such as coaches hold up-to-date qualifications. Nigel spoke about how his club recruited individuals from a local university to assist with the club achieving the Charter Standard status. Since achieving the status, the club now have a Charter Standard Co-ordinator who is responsible for ensuring the club keeps up to date with everything, particularly that individuals within the club update their qualifications as and when required.

Aside from the increase in time spent on the administration, all the interviewees who have been actively involved in the Charter Standard Programme were complimentary and had no major concerns, despite it being very much a top-down approach to regulating local football. For example. Elsie said that:

It brought in a regulation type tick box if you like so we could see that these clubs weren't just a one-man band. They are accountable; they have

to have accounts; they have to have minutes. The children are looked after, so there is a whole set of things.

Moreover, Gordon believed that the top-down approach that the FA has taken with the Charter Standard programme is beneficial for football, stating that the FA should be in control of local football. However, the willingness to conform to this top-down approach has not been consistent in all cases. For example, it was outlined by Malcolm that for many clubs, when they find out what they need to do to achieve the Charter Standard they are put off from doing so. This perspective was shared by Elsie, who pointed to the opposition to the programme when it was first introduced, citing a lack of understanding from clubs as why it was needed and beneficial to the clubs and players. Accordingly, what the interviews do not provide is an account from an individual involved with a club that is opposed to the Charter Standard Programme. Thus, whilst the data from this research suggests that the Charter Standard Programme has had a positive effect, an indication is given to the resistance and opposition towards the top-down approach from the FA.

## **Discussion**

This paper has explored the extent to which local grassroots football administration within Hampshire has changed as a result of New Labour's modernisation agenda. Findings indicate that whilst there has been some diversification in the volunteer workforce, across clubs, leagues and the HFA Council, more action is required to eliminate the white, middle-class male voluntary 'spider's web' culture (Lusted 2009, 2008, Handy 1988). If this continues to remain the case, Handy (1998) argues that the same sort of individuals will continue to be recruited to positions of power and influence, resulting in a lack of innovation. Given that the FA and CFAs are trying to come up with new ways to engage and inspire individuals of all backgrounds to participate in football (whether that be

playing, coaching, refereeing, or administrating), the continued lack of diversity from the top to the local grassroots game is concerning. How are the needs of underrepresented groups be understood and met if individuals from these groups are not part of the decision-making process?

Lusted (2013) notes the continued persistence of Victorian sporting traditions and how these act as significant mechanisms in opposing the implementation of equality policies. Indeed, there is a widespread sense within the FA that when over time the white male volunteers are replaced with more diverse and enlightened volunteers, then equality policies and other areas of reform will be much easier and successful (Lusted 2018). However, Spaaij et al. (2014) suggest that there is a discrepancy between the policy objectives of government and sport organizations and the way in which diversity is understood and responded to in practice; ultimately diversity is not being adopted widely at a local level. This can be seen within HFA; for the 2017-18 season there were nine female members of the Council out of 115, and one female Directors (Hampshire FA 2017), however this increased to two female Directors for the 2018-19 season. Thus, despite CFAs such as HFA achieving The Equality Standard for Sport, and introducing Inclusion Advisory Groups (The Football Association 2018), there is still a long way to go to make football administration more welcoming and appealing to those of minority groups.

There has been greater success in modernising local grassroots football through the development of technology. Developments in technology have largely assisted local club volunteers in providing a more professional service, as opposed to loose and informal delivery (Harris, Mori, and Collins 2009). Most of the interviewees from this study welcomed these improvements thanks to technology, even if at first it was a challenge to adapt to new systems. However, not all those interviewed for this study have fully

embraced the professionalism that developments of technology bring, preferring the informal, personal systems that have been their own for many years, demonstrating that volunteer and Corinthian ideals about sport remain (Green 2008). The limited diversification of the workforce, combined with some negative attitudes towards technological developments, demonstrate that there is a tension between those of the traditional white, middle-class male voluntary culture that local football administration was built on; and the modernised, professionalised, inclusive society which was introduced as a part of New Labour's modernisation agenda.

The FA Charter Standard Programme as a form of top-down modernisation has improved local grassroots football, but has also increased the demands to local football clubs and the volunteer workforce. The programme has been generally well received; however, consistent with Howie and Allison's research (2016), this study argues that there has been opposition. The interviews provided no data to support O'Gorman (2011) in his findings that there is often contravention regarding maintaining up-to-date qualifications or perceived unsuitability of clubs achieving the award. However, the interviews did point towards an element of competition between clubs (O'Gorman 2011) as a motive for working towards the award. This is an example of how New Labour created a 'third way' environment, whereby grassroots football clubs would be expected to prove that they were providing best value (Bevir 2005) and *even better* value compared to other local clubs as they compete for new players and subscriptions. Also, whilst developments in technology have made it easier and quicker for local volunteers to carry out their roles, the data provided by the interviews in this research suggests that the work that comes with achieving and maintaining a club's Charter Standard status has increased the time spent on football administration. This was cited by some of the interviewees as a reason why it is a challenge to grow and diversify the grassroots football volunteer

workforce within Hampshire. Therefore, this research suggests that whilst the implementation of the Charter Standard Programme has improved local grassroots football club provision, it needs to be recognised that this example of modernisation has led to increasing demands on the local volunteer workforce. Given that volunteers are typically involved in grassroots football ‘for the love of the game’ (Cuskelly, Hoye, and Auld 2006), governments, the FA, and CFAs should exercise caution as to the demands they place on volunteers. Whilst the changes may lead to improves in local grassroots football, this will be no good if there is not an engaged and happy volunteer workforce.

Given the focus of the study of grassroots football within Hampshire, by default the study cannot comment with certainty on the impact of New Labour’s modernisation on other localities. Thus, similar research involving different localities across the country would help build a national narrative of the experiences of local grassroots volunteers and enable comparisons between different areas. Indeed, previous research (Taylor 2008, James and Day 2014, Walvin 2000) has argued that it is imperative to investigate local areas discretely to better understand the developments and histories of local football. Moreover, there was a lack of diversity in the gender, age, and ethnicity in those interviewed for this study. Whilst this was to a large extent unavoidable given the traditional aging white, middle-class male make up of local volunteers, further research into the experiences of underrepresented groups as local grassroots football volunteers, particularly females and those from non-White-British backgrounds is required. Researching the experiences and opinions of these traditionally marginalised groups will provide a better understanding of the actual barriers facing underrepresented demographics.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this paper demonstrate how the modernisation brought about by New

Labour should not be understood as resulting in immediate change within local grassroots football. Rather, modernisation is an ongoing process on institutional, cultural, and individual levels, and continues despite New Labour leaving office over a decade ago. Indeed, there remains a tension between the aging white, middle-class male voluntary culture that local grassroots football had traditionally been built on; and the modernised, professionalised, inclusive society which was introduced as part of New Labour's modernisation agenda.

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