

## Liverpool Football Club supporters: An alternative creative class

For many, sport is a central element to everyday life in the city and beyond (Bale, 1993), providing an outlet for creative expression, whether this is through active participation or spectating. Football, in particular, has held a certain social position within the urban experience, historically associated with 'the working man', as captured by Lowry in his industrial landscapes of the north-west (see Figure 1). This brief paper offers the example of supporters of Liverpool Football Club (Liverpool FC) as a particular cultural group that challenges understandings of what the creativity city is and the type of people that are considered to be creative.

Figure 1: L.S. Lowry (1953), *Going to the Match*



(Source: [http://www.leninimports.com/l\\_s\\_lowry\\_going\\_match\\_oil.html](http://www.leninimports.com/l_s_lowry_going_match_oil.html))

Despite the seemingly perpetual commercialisation of English football and rising admission prices since the inception of the Premier League in the early 1990's (Conn, 2011), many of the sport's professional clubs remain geographically rooted in parts of cities that are traditionally working class and still rely on a loyal core of supporters from this social background. Liverpool FC is one such example and the famous 'Kop' end of the club's Anfield ground maintains a prominent position amongst dense rows of Victorian terraced housing (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Anfield, the home of Liverpool FC is located in a traditionally working-class area of the city



(Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2011/jul/12/liverpool-anfield-stanley-park-redevelopment>)

On a match day, the vast bank of Liverpool supporters who gather on the Kop are regarded as some of the vociferous and passionate football supporter in the world, especially famous for their colourful displays of scarves, flags and banners for which they have “a long and proud tradition of creativity” in producing (Kop Banners.org, 2007). For these Liverpool supporters, this expression of support on their bi-weekly pilgrimage to the Kop is fundamentally creative act, which is essential in the reinforcement of a shared sense of belonging and identity. And yet, Richard Florida (2003: 8), who seemingly recognises the potential for all human beings to be creative, would deny these supporters their creativity as he makes the clear distinction that to be a member of his ‘creative class’, one must be “fortunate enough to be paid to use their creativity”.

Indeed, these devoted working class supporters fail to fit into to Florida’s narrowly defined creative class, which is reserved for only those suitably educate and economically productive.

“The Kop is a one-off. It’s a cradle of terrace culture, humour, songs- the original 12<sup>th</sup> man. *The Kop innovates...*As with songs, fashion and all aspects of terrace culture, we lead the way with flags and banners.”

(Reclaim the Kop, n.d., emphasis added by author)

Figure 3: Watching a match on the Kop is arguably as much a statement of a collective identity as it is attending a game of football



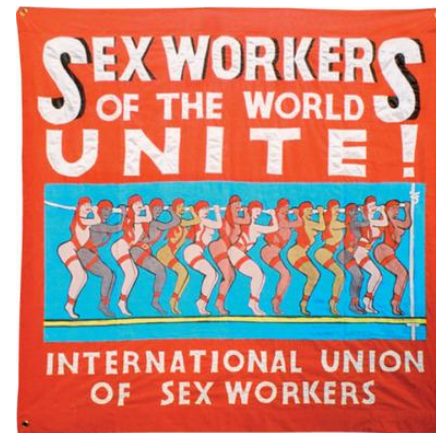
(Source: <http://liverpoolstudentmedia.com/2012/02/should-i-be-ashamed-of-my-football-club/european-football-uefa-champions-league-semi-final-2nd-leg-md12-liverpool-fc-v-chelsea-fc/>)



Opposing Florida's (2003: 13) limiting notion that creative communities are centres of economic growth, Edensor et al (2010: 9) are keen to acknowledge that creativity is also "located in everyday, popular, vernacular culture...is social and sociable, culturally specific and communally produced". Understood in these terms, the banners produced by Liverpool FC supporters are comparable to cultural artefacts in Jeremy Deller's *Folk Archive*, such as Ed Hall's trade union banner (see Figure 4), which are "quite clearly the result of a self-consciously creative activity" (Millar, 2005: 152) and helps a community to find its voice and project it into the world.

Moreover, a banner such as the one commissioned and funded by a collective of Liverpool FC supporters following the club's Champions League triumph in 2005 (see Figure 5) is indicative of 'networks of creativity' envisioned by Edensor et al (2010), which counters the tendency to establish boundaries around creativity through notions of creative clusters and spaces.

Figure 4: Sex Workers Banner by Ed Hall featured in Jeremy Deller's *Folk Archive*



(Source: <http://sophiologist.tumblr.com/post/435241306/vicemag-sew-solidarity-crew-ed-halls-protest>)

Figure 5: *Liverbanner*, commissioned by a collective of Liverpool FC supporters



(Source: <http://www.kopbanners.org/>)

A kin to arguments from author Don Mitchell (2006) concerning his perception of the “end of public space”, Florida is equally dismissive of urban spaces such as sports stadiums as being “irrelevant, insufficient, or actually unattractive to many creative-class people” (2003: 9). However, using de Certeau’s (1984) concept of space, Anfield, and the Kop in particular becomes a meaningful ‘practiced place’ through the creativity actions of Liverpool FC supporters.

The documentary *Passport to Liverpool* highlights how Liverpoolians have a tradition of taking to the streets when faced with injustice and adversity<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, Anfield offers Liverpool FC supporters a particular site where a protest can utilise creative mediums such as banners, singing and chanting to effectively project a range of political messages to a wide audience through a diverse range of media coverage.

Moreover, the Liverpool FC supporters travelling to away games, offer an example of how creative networks “increase the potential for new and emergent forms of activity across a range of sites” and “connect local practices to wider networks of cultural activity” (Edensor et al, 2010: 15).

The organisation of these fans’ protest movements is contrary to the ideas of Landry (2000) and shows that creativity does not have to be instigated through policy but instead be an integral to effective protests.

<sup>1</sup> Such as the general transport strike in 1911 or the dock workers strike (see Urban 75, n.d.)

Figure 6: The Kop protests against malicious lies published by *The Sun* in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989



(Source: Flickr, AndrewMoore, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/apmoore/351649454/>)

Figure 7: ‘Don’t Buy The Sun’ campaign sticker on a seat at White Hart Lane, Tottenham.



(Source: Photography by author)

To conclude, this brief outline of the vernacular creative practices of supporters of Liverpool FC has been used to challenge dominant ideas about creativity and “established doctrines that link creativity to economic priorities” (Edensor and Millington, 2010).

**Figure 8: Liverpool FC supporters re-appropriate ideological symbolism in their protest against the perceived capitalist motives of the club’s former American owners**



(Source: <http://liverpoolreds.livejournal.com/561716.html>)

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