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BACHELOR'S THESIS

The complexity of disability as a physical and social phenomenon

Kompleksiteten ved funksjonshemning som både et fysisk og sosialt fenomen

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I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 12-1.

Preface

This thesis is written as part of the bachelor study program in tourism management at Western Norway University for Applied Sciences. It focuses on disabled individuals as fans in sporting events. We believe this topic is not spoken very much about, and we also have our own experience with individuals with different disabilities.

We want to thank everyone who helped us make this bachelor's thesis happen. This includes MUDSA, Manchester United, Manchester United Supporters Club Scandinavia, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, and SIKT. Of course, we also have to thank our supervisor, Gregory Kwiatkowski, for his participation and help throughout this bachelor's process. He has been strict but fair and he has given us the extra kick we needed to complete the assignment.

Table overview

Table 1: Disability represented - Level Playing Field

Table 2: Ages represented - Level Playing Field

Table 3: Frequency of attendance - Level Playing Field

Abstract

Background: This bachelor's thesis investigates the challenges faced by disabled individuals in accessing and participating in sporting events. Using a combination of a survey and interviews, the study delves into the experiences and perspectives of both organizers and disabled football fans.

Purpose: This thesis aims to investigate which barriers disabled people face when attending sports events. What do sports event organizers do to leverage access to sports facilities, and how do they differentiate strategies depending on types of disabilities? Finally, what can be done on the organizational, legal, and practical levels to foster a transition toward truly accessible event venues?

Method: This thesis uses quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate this research question. We interviewed two individuals from Manchester United and the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association, or MUDSA, and surveyed Level Playing Field with around 1800 respondents.

Results: Most of the time, the laws and regulations around accessibility are only guidelines that are recommended but not required. The guidelines are often only the minimum of the law's requirements, meaning accessibility could be sacrificed. Simultaneously, this topic has become an important topic, and therefore, people and organizations should be more focused on facilitating events and arenas for everyone.

Conclusion: Accessibility will be a more focused and vital topic in the future. Therefore, should a law/guidelines be made that requires more organizations to follow, as existing ones do not include all types of disability? The organizers should also be obliged to make their events as accessible as possible, resulting in equal opportunities for everyone who wants to attend.

Sammendrag

Bakgrunn: Denne bacheloroppgave undersøker de ulike utfordringer individer med ulike funksjonsnedsettelse møter i forhold til både tilgjengelighet og deltakelse på live sportsarrangementer. Gjennom en kombinasjon av en spørreundersøkelse og intervjuer, rammes oppgaven inn i av erfaringer og perspektiver fra både organisatorene og funksjonshemmede sportsfans.

Mål: Denne oppgaven har som mål å undersøke hvilke barrierer funksjonshemmede individer møter på live sportsarrangementer. Hva gjør egentlig sportsorganisasjoner for å skape tilgjengelighet og tilrettelegging på sportsfasiliteter og hvilke strategier har de på de ulike typene av funksjonshemming. Vil undersøke også hva som kan bli gjort på et organisatorisk, lovlig, og praktisk nivå for å jobbe seg mot tilgjengelige sports stadioner.

Metode: I denne oppgaven har vi brukt både kvalitativ og kvantitativ metode for å undersøke og svare på problemstillingene. Vi har gjort intervju med to individer fra Manchester United and MUDSA, samtidig som vi har brukt Level Playing Field sin årlige spørreundersøkelse på rundt 1800 respondenter.

Resultat: Ofte er lovene og reguleringene for tilrettelegging for dårlig, og de retningslinjene som finnes er ofte bare anbefalinger og ikke lovpålagte regler. Anbefalingene er ofte bare et minimum av hva de funksjonshemmede fansene faktisk trenger. Samtidig er fokuset på dette temaet stadig i vekst og blir viktigere og viktigere, og organisasjoner og arrangører bør fokusere og tilrettelegge bedre på arrangementer og arenaer, slik at alle skal kunne ha lik tilgang til de samme opplevelsene.

Konklusjon: Tilrettelegging og tilgjengelighet kommer til å bli et viktig tema i fremtiden og organisasjoner bør derfor fokusere på og prøve å gjøre arrangementer så tilgjengelig som mulig for alle som har lyst å delta. Vi konkluderer også med at de lovene eller forskriftene som allerede finnes inkluderer ikke alle typer funksjonshemninger. Dette bør forbedres, som resulterer i at alle individer får mulighetene til å delta.

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1.0 Introduction

Football is the biggest sport in the world in terms of fans, revenue, product development and brand development (Nielsen sports, 2018). As it is the biggest sport in the world, it also means many people are interested in and follow Football on a regular basis. This also means that it attracts people from all walks of life. This thesis will focus on how football and mainly sporting arenas and organizations accommodate and facilitate people with disabilities.

An important part of developing is creating a more inclusive and accessible world; accommodating individuals with different kinds of disabilities has become important.

This thesis delves into some proactive measures taken by sports organizations, football associations, etc., to ensure that people with these disabilities can actively participate in events. We will explore the strategies already implemented by asking questions like: How do you adapt the event for people with disabilities? Are there any regulations or laws regarding accessibility? Have you made any improvements regarding accessibility?

We believe that many organizations and businesses are making their services or products accessible to people, regardless of ability, but the information to people with different needs is so poor. According to FIFA, there are about 5 billion football fans worldwide (FIFA, n.d.).

“Why do businesses make it accessible for everyone, but the people who need extra help don’t get informed about availability?”

From innovative facilities to policy adaptations, this examination will showcase the strides made to make the environment accessible to everyone, regardless of ability, and allow them to attend and enjoy the different events.

The main topic the thesis aims to research is how sporting organizations facilitate for people with disabilities so that they can attend these kinds of events. Manchester United Football Club is one of the biggest clubs in England and is very focused on accessibility to people with special needs. In this thesis, we collect information about how one of the biggest football clubs in the world facilitates the lives of people with different kinds of disabilities. We will look at different offers for participants at Old Trafford, as well as what they can offer at away games.

We would also compare Manchester United with other clubs and other sports organizations.

We were able to travel to Manchester, together with MUSCS (Manchester United Supporters Club Scandinavia) to see, with our own eyes, how the club is making it possible for people with different needs to attend Old Trafford. We talked to the CEO of MUSCS for making this trip happen.

On the matchday, we are interviewing Michael and Chas, who one works for Manchester United and the other one for MUDSA (Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association). In preparation for this meeting, we prepared some questions for them to have more arguments to our conclusion in the end.

This text will also be critical in terms of comparing inclusivity and tokenism. This means evaluating whether the efforts made by big sporting organizations are genuine attempts at inclusivity or merely token gestures to appear inclusive. For example, organizations could use individuals with disabilities for publicity without providing opportunities.

1.1 Background

This topic is relevant from several standpoints. Firstly, we are fascinated by big sporting events, and we are both football fans. The second motivation is Even's little brother, Jonas, who has a developmental disability, but he is very fascinated by sound and people moving around on a football pitch. Even's father and older brother are also massive football fans, but unfortunately, they sometimes find it difficult to attend events and visit attractions as a family due to Jonas' challenges.

These experiences are one of the main reasons why we found interest in this topic. Given that we would like to explore how a person with such disabilities is treated at a big sporting event. Even has personal experience with having a little brother with a disability, so we feel that this topic is important and will hopefully contribute to finding better solutions and improvements in dealing with inclusivity. However, the motivation and meaning of our work could hopefully make a difference not only for Jonas but for hundreds of other people with similar challenges. This makes our work more general and reaches in scope.

This text will have a critical perspective of how different sporting organizations and events facilitate for people with disabilities. We will experience how they facilitate these people at Old Trafford, Manchester United's Home stadium. We will also compare the big stadiums in England with the smaller stadiums in Norway. In this, we will also look at the laws and regulations of the different countries and how they compare.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis considers the following research problem: **The complexity of disabilities as a physical and social phenomenon requires in-depth research and accessible tourism, where attendance at sports events is an important element.**

- What are the main barriers to attending sports events for disabled people?
- What do sports event organizers do to leverage access to sports facilities, and how do they differentiate strategies depending on types of disabilities?
- What can be done on the organizational, legal, and practical levels to foster a transition towards truly accessible event venues?

1.3 Perception before the trip to Manchester

Most people do not need to worry about having the proper facilities at a sports event. One of the reasons we would like to research this topic more is the lack of information. Most people cannot even understand the difficulties of attending any event with some form of disability.

Our perception of Old Trafford is that this stadium is one of the most accessible stadiums in the UK. That is why we have chosen Manchester United as one of the primary sources to understand more about how people with different needs perceive a football match.

Old Trafford, or "Theatre of Dreams" has witnessed many historic moments in football, from

legendary matches to unforgettable goals. The stadium has become a picture of the passion and fervor of the game. Old Trafford is also making significant strides to ensure everyone can participate in a football game regardless of their abilities.

We already know a lot about Old Trafford because we have been fans for a long time and we have seen the well-thought-out infrastructure. The stadium has multiple wheelchair-accessible entrances, ramps, and elevators, providing more effortless movement for those with mobility challenges. But because we don't have any form of disabilities, we have just been to regular seating at Old Trafford. Still, this time, we are most likely to be shown how the journey on matchday for people with disabilities is facilitated.

To gain as much personal experience as possible, we aim to get a tour of Manchester United and be shown their ability to accommodate individuals with different kinds of disabilities. We are very optimistic about Manchester United's accessibility and think that this is the case, but it is our goal to research whether the perception is living up to what it is in real life.

2.0 Theory

This chapter, we will discuss the theoretical framework for our bachelor thesis, explaining the central concepts: disability, social attitudes, and the different legislation and regulations around accessibility. Level Playing Field is also a big part of this chapter, as are two case studies.

2.1 Disability and Accessibility

Disability is a part of being human. Almost everyone will either temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. Disability is *“any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them”* (Disability and Health Overview | CDC, n.d.)

According to the World Health Organization, disability can be divided into three dimensions: Impairment, activity limitation and participation restrictions.

- 1) Impairment in the body structure or function or mental functioning.
- 2) Activity limitation is for example hearing, walking, seeing.
- 3) Participation restrictions, like working, social engagement etc.

Accessibility goes hand in hand with disability, and it is described as ensuring the ability for everyone to have access, use and benefit from their environment, regardless of disability. It also means having the necessary conditions to reduce or eliminate the barriers that hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others (*What Is Accessibility? A Few Definitions*, 2019).

2.2 Social model of disability and social attitudes

Psychologist Dr. Nancy Doyle said in a Forbes article titled “**We have been disabled: How the pandemic has proven the social model of disability**” that:

“If everyone was taught sign language at an early age, a deaf person would no longer be disadvantaged. If towns were built and planned with physical disabilities in mind and there was no social stigma attached to looking or sounding different, then having a physical impairment would no longer be disabling”.
(Dole & Doyle, 2020)

This confirms the main point of the social model of disability that a disability is only disabling when it prevents someone from doing what they want or need to do.

Another critical part of the social model of disability is the distinction between “impairments” and “disabilities.” Impairments can be considered functional limitations an individual might face, like being unable to walk. Disabilities, on the other hand, are the disadvantages imposed on individuals by society.

Physical and mental impairments are natural and common parts of people's lives, and they have the right to accommodation and civil rights protection just like everybody else. It can

happen to anyone at any time, and it's even more critical that accommodations are provided. Attitudes towards individuals with disabilities have gradually become better and better. An important thing to remember regarding disability is that not all types of disability are visible.

Today, we are more open to talking about personal struggles than earlier. As early as after the First World War, we could see a dramatic shift in the attitudes toward disability as millions of soldiers returned home with many different types of injuries. This resulted in advancement in, for example, prosthetics, new housing facilitation, and sport, which was also used as a treatment.

Accessibility and social attitudes towards people with disabilities have improved significantly, but there is still a lot to do. By becoming physically and mentally more empathetic, individuals can pass on their positive attitudes to others (*The Importance of Positive Attitudes Towards Disability*, 2022).

2.3 Legislation and regulations

Compliance with the rules and regulations is very different from being more than compliant. Being compliant means that the organization is doing what is required of them, whether it's about how many tickets are available or how many bathrooms they have at the venue. If the organization is compliant, it could mean that they, for example, have the correct number of required bathrooms, disabled parking close to the venue, and designated seats for them and their helpers. If an organization is more than compliant, it will have more than what is required at its venue.

One of the things we would like to research is if sporting organizations or events are striving to be more than compliant and to ensure that all fans and supporters are taken care of the same as any other participant. An organization can be compliant with the rules and regulations, but that does not mean that its facilities are adapted for all possible disabilities. Do they have a private area for people on the autism spectrum, for example, a quiet space where they can disconnect from all the noise and from all the people who attend these events?

The Equality Act 2010 is the main domestic legislation governing disabled people's rights in the UK; it replaced several pieces of separate legislation covering discrimination, including the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (Crowley, 2023).

The purpose of this was to “harmonise discrimination law and to strengthen the law to support progress on equality,” stated the Labor government (Evennett, 2022). This act states the definition of when a person is discriminated against a disabled person, and in section 20 of the act, there are written provisions regarding the requirement to make it as accessible as possible for disabled people concerning other things like services and public functions.

In June 2015, the House of Lords considered and reported on the impact of people with disabilities on the Equality Act 2010, and their main finding in relation to disability was that combining disability with the other characteristics of discrimination in on Act did not, in practice, benefit disabled people. The rights of disabled people were more protected under the previous legislation, and the committee concluded that it would be impractical/time consuming to try reverse the legislation and therefore tried to examine how they could improve the Equality Act towards the disabled people better (*Equality Act 2010 Committee*, 2015).

Manchester United plays their home games at Old Trafford, known as “*The Theatre of Dreams*”. The stadium was initially opened in 1910 and has been their home ground ever since (Manchester United, n.d.). The latest stadium expansion was in 2006 and seats 76.000 fans, making it the second biggest football stadium in England, falling short of Wembley Stadium (Bird, 2023). An issue with such an old stadium is that it can be challenging to build new facilities for disabled individuals. With Old Trafford being that old and the second biggest stadium in England, it could prove problematic for them to improve and expand their stadium.

The Norwegian Football Association has posted its safety regulations about facilities for disabled people. These regulations mention that universal design should follow local needs for facilities. The points mentioned in these regulations are unobstructed views, access to kiosk and ticket stands, wheelchair ramp, relative access to stadium, and easy access to toilets near their seats (NFF, n.d.).

The regulations also state that for every 1000 seats, they recommend 5 spaces for wheelchair-

dependent fans with their helpers. Brann Stadium in Bergen, Norway, has 16,750 seats (Sportsklubben Brann, 2016). That means they would need approximately 83 seats available in the stadium for wheelchair users and their helpers to comply with NFF's infrastructure guidelines (NFF, n.d.). Sportsklubben Brann (SKB) facts about the stadium show they only have 31 wheelchair seats (Sportsklubben Brann, 2016).

These regulations only include people in wheelchairs. They do not mention any other form of facilities for different kinds of disabilities.

In Norway, it is illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities (cf. the Equality and Discrimination Act §6 (Lovdata, 2017)). This act also mentions a law on universal design, which is the design of the physical aspects of a building and should be designed so that most people can use it. This means that the law covers most people's accessibility but does not include every type of disability.

FIFA's official text on accessibility emphasizes ensuring that the stadiums' facilities and aids are easy and intuitive.

FIFA acknowledges that the terms used in the accessibility field differ depending on region and organization. The use of "disabled people" and not "people with disabilities" or any other term is based on the notion that it is important to see the person and not the disability (FIFA, n.d.).

UEFA, the Union of European Football Associations, has set objectives in their financial fair play regulations to benefit disabled people's participation in events that appear under UEFA's jurisdiction (UEFA, 2017). These regulations include clubs' legal and moral obligations to disabled people. They also mention encouraging national associations, clubs and stadiums to integrate access and inclusion in their core strategies and values (UEFA, 2017).

FIFA suggests that three different segments benefit from a stadium being designed in such a way that it is accessible for wheelchair users. The first segment is disabled people, which

includes wheelchair users, ambulant disabled people, partially sighted and blind people and hard of hearing and deaf people. The second segment is people with limited mobility, which includes obese people, injured people with limited mobility and people with breathing or heart conditions. The last segment is where they do not need the extra facilities and aids but they are beneficiaries of reasonable access. This includes elderly people, pregnant women, injured people whose mobility is not limited, parents with young children and color-blind people (FIFA, n.d.).

UEFA's Financial Fair Play rules are a set of standards that European football clubs must abide by if they are to play in the top divisions of football. The standards are separated into five principal categories: sporting, infrastructure, personnel, legal and financial. (Franck, 2014).

Having infrastructure included in the financial fair play rules indicates that UEFA thinks it is important for everyone to feel included and able to participate in their events.

2.4 Level Playing Field

"Level Playing Field is a registered charity in England and Wales, and acts as a campaigning and advisory organization to its membership and other parties across all sports." (About, n.d.)

Level Playing Field (LFP) gives you an overview on disabled fans facilities at clubs and stadiums, along with valuable resorts, guides, and information to help disabled supporters. They believe that disability is primarily a social issue, further exacerbated by barriers related to society, attitudes, and the environment. This perspective is commonly referred to as the social model of disability.

This model was developed by disability rights activists in the 1970s and 80s, suggesting that if societies were designed and structured to be inclusive for individuals with disabilities, these individuals would not face the limitations we see today. Meaning that the social model of disability views disability as a consequence of social attitudes and physical environments and not as a result of individual impairments. The root to this problem lies in the failure of society to provide the right approaches and support to ensure the inclusion of these individuals. An easy example of an improvement could be to ensure that sidewalks are wheelchair accessible

and that results in a disability becoming an ability instead (Buder & Perry, 2021).

The charity has principles including anti-discrimination, equality of opportunity, increasing the independence that a disabled individuals have, diversity/individual needs, integration/inclusion and involvement in decision-making. They take the issue of abuse very seriously and have their own page where fans can report abuse. They would then contact the venue or organization in question and work with them to try and stop the abuse (Level Playing Field, n.d.).

LPF focuses on removing all these different barriers and they say that the member will know they have succeeded when:

- All fans can enjoy an equal experience at live sports events.
- All stadia and sports venues are fully accessible and inclusive.
- All customer and/or fan services are equal and inclusive.
- Disabled people are seen as customers with a commercial value.

With these things said, Level Playing Field has an annual survey which helps the charity to gather information from the supporters. This is the third year they have run this survey and this year it had almost 1800 responses resulting in the biggest number of answers compared to the previous years (Level Playing Field & Taylor, 2023).

The key findings in the survey from 2023 was:

Travel barriers: The proportion of disabled fans facing challenges with “inaccessible public transport” has shown that it has increased from 16% in 2021 to 20% in 2023. Simultaneously, individuals having difficulties with “unable to travel to stadiums” have increased from 15.5% to 18% in 2023.

Disability abuse: Another factor that has risen year-on-year is the number of disabled fans reporting “abuse referring to disability”, escalating from 5.5% to 7%. The “attitudes of others” remains also a big part, around 25% of the respondents.

Additional costs: The respondents were asked about additional costs when attending live sports. Over half of the respondents identified additional costs; the average was around 66

euros for home games and 111 euros for away games.

The respondents also were asked to identify all the disability-related barriers they face when attending live sports events. The ten most-selected barriers from the survey were:

- 1) Physical access at stadiums - 29.5%
- 2) Attitudes of others - 25.5%
- 3) Difficulty purchasing tickets - 23.5%
- 4) Anxiety or lack of confidence - 23%
- 5) Inaccessible public transport - 20%
- 6) "I don't think stadiums are inclusive for disabled people" - 18.5%
- 7) Unable to travel to stadium - 18%
- 8) Cost of attending - 17%
- 9) Lack of information - 15.5%
- 10) Lack of support from club staff - 11%

To have success in the answers, we need a wide range of different respondents who can represent all the different age gaps, disability types, etc. The three first questions in this survey were age, type of disability and how often they attended live sport and under can you see the results in tables:

Figure 1: Types of disabilities represented: (Level Playing Field & Taylor, 2023)

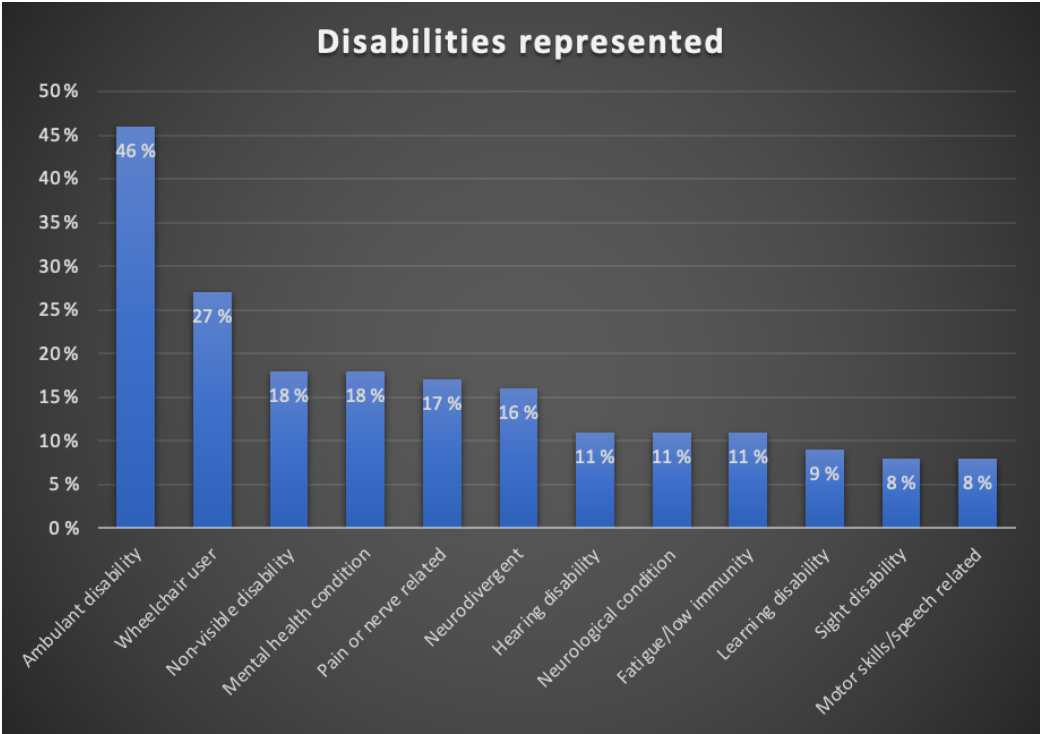


Figure 2: Ages represented in the survey: (Level Playing Field & Taylor, 2023)

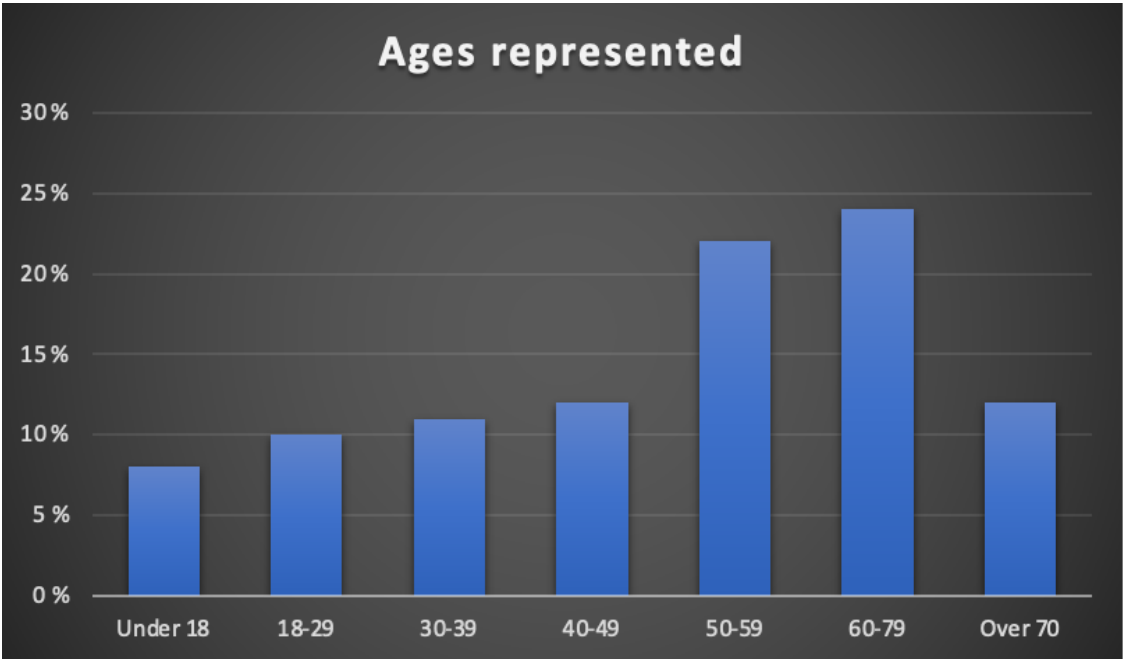
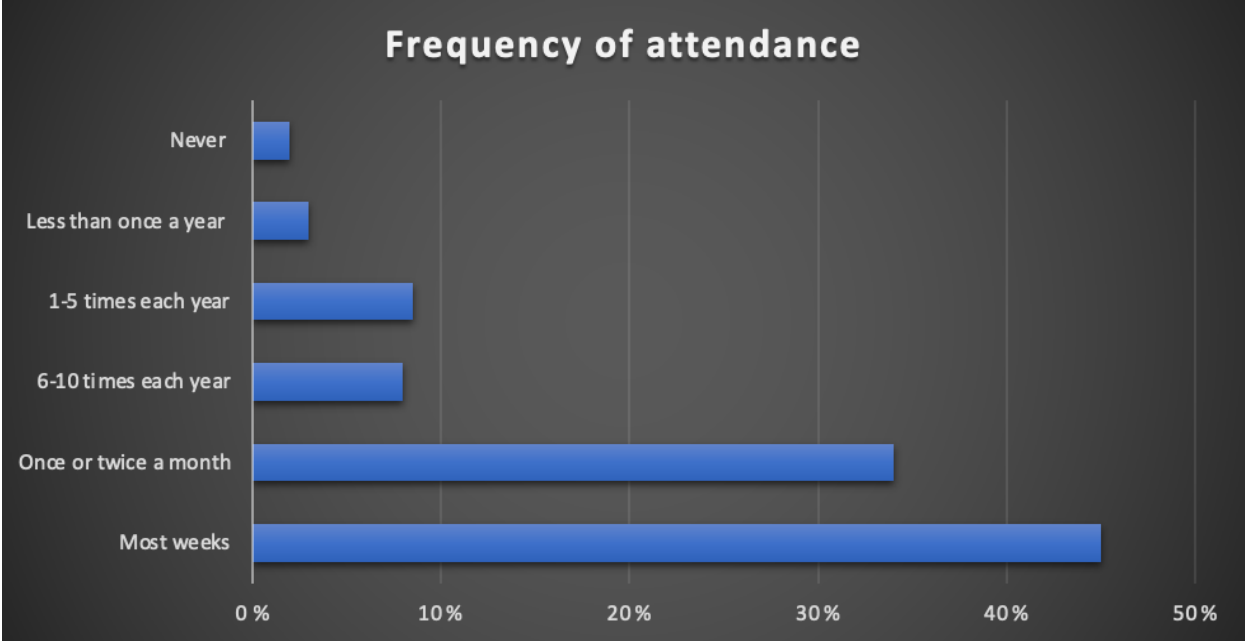


Figure 3: How often the respondents attend to a live game: (Level Playing Field & Taylor, 2023)



Manchester United Football Club is a stadium with a capacity of almost 75,000 fans, and despite being an old stadium, the club has a variety of locations for supporters to choose from. The football club strives to ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion throughout Old Trafford to be free from discrimination. They have their own program, #alldallequal, which shows all the hard work done by United players, staff, and supporters. Manchester United also works closely with many organizations, such as Level Playing Field, MUDSA, and Stonewall (*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, n.d.).

2.5 Case studies

2.5 (1) Major sporting events are rarely accessible to disabled fans, but the Women's World Cup, FIFA is trying to reverse that trend

Elisabeth Wright had attended a sports event with her friend and had bought their own “accessible” seats, but these seats were given away before they arrived. The couple who got their seats had mobility issues and had struggled to access them. The organizer’s solution was to grab portable chairs and squish Elisabeth and her friend beside the couple. This solution

resulted in different challenges, such as less space between the seating, which made it more difficult to leave for toilets and food.

To return to the FIFA World Cup, FIFA gained criticism for its accessible ticketing system because disabled fans were being allocated seats away from their companions in the lead-up tournament.

The general manager for Disability Sports Australia says, “One of the most difficult things about major events is that there aren't standard guidelines to dictate what an event has or does not have to do” (Crowley, 2023). This is also an argument in favor of our research, as the guidelines/laws that are already implemented are not as inclusive and do not cover all types of disability.

2.5 (2) What are you gaining on being accessible?

A study published in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* concluded that attending live sporting events improves levels of well-being and reduces feelings of loneliness. This study was carried out by academics from Anglia Ruskin University’s School of Psychology and Sport Science and used data from 7,209 adults ages 16-85 living in England. This group also participated in the Taking Part Survey, commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Keyes, 2023).

The results show a higher score of two significant measures of subjective well-being (SWB): life satisfaction and a sense of “life being worthwhile.” These are significant findings from previous studies showing that higher life satisfaction is often associated with better physical and mental health, successful aging, and lower mortality rates.

This could be one of the reasons football clubs want to be more accessible. It would allow them to include all kinds of people to their events, including people with different kinds of disabilities. These people may already be having a hard time. Still, they can attend live sports, which statistically shows that it improves their sense of “life is worthwhile” and life satisfaction. Another factor that could impact organizations’ accessibility is that all brand builders' most important tasks are to create growth within the branding. The possibility for

disabled individuals to participate in live sporting events would be a very positive factor for the main brand.

3.0 Method

3.1 Methodology

The methodology is described as a procedure or way of doing something, especially following a definite plan (*METHOD Definition & Usage Examples*, n.d.). The method will tell us how to gather the same information as we have and why we have chosen this specific type of information to answer our research question.

The methods chapter presents approaches to investigate how people with disabilities participate in football events. We are focusing on accessibility and inclusion. Social science research is divided into qualitative and quantitative data.

3.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative method

Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research (Bhandari, 2020).

Quantitative research is the opposite of qualitative research, which involves collecting and analyzing numerical data for statistical analysis (Bhandari, 2020).

The benefits of qualitative research are that it allows for creativity, varied interpretations, and flexibility, and simultaneously, the scope of the project can change as more information is gathered. In contrast, quantitative research provides more objective data that can be communicated through statistics and numbers (Journey, 2023).

3.2 Research design

In this study, we have been using both qualitative and quantitative research design to explore the fans' experiences and perspectives, along with how the organizations facilitate for disabled people.

The reasoning for using both is to gain a more in-depth understanding of how people with disabilities perceive the experiences of a football event and a more overall view of how people find the overall experience.

We have used qualitative research, conducting two interviews with a Manchester United Football Club representative and one with the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association. We have also used two case studies because they give us more arguments in our conclusion.

Quantitative “research” has been used by collecting data from Level Playing Field’s annual survey of fans around the UK about what and how they face barriers to accessibility in sports stadiums. We decided to use the newest survey, but the data will be compared with those from previous years.

3.3 Population and sampling

In our thesis we chose to interview two individuals, who are our units. These two individuals are Michael Leneghan and Chas Banks, who are directly connected to Manchester United as an organization and also close to the fans. The criteria for our chosen units is information, meaning that they can give us relevant information.

At the start of our process, we decided to try to get in contact with someone who works close to Manchester United because we already have a connection with Manchester United Supporters Club Scandinavia. We were thinking about doing our own survey as well, but we decided to use the Level Playing Field annual survey of fans attending live sports.

We contacted Manchester United because of our connection with the organization. At first, we thought we only got an email with answers, but they wanted to meet us face to face. A big

thanks to Manchester United Supporters Club Scandinavia, who was our contact and helped us gather information and conduct the interview with both Chas and Michael.

Respondents:

Michael Leneghan is the D.L.O of Manchester United Football Club and is mainly responsible for the overall experience for individuals with disabilities who want to participate in a football match at Old Trafford.

Chas Banks is secretary of Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association and collaborates with the football club to give disabled fans all the information they need so that they can have a good experience at Old Trafford.

We have also used media and communication methods in our data collection, like articles on the Internet. Secondary data is also a big part of this task because, using this method, we expanded our research and got access to much more information and data on accessibility and facilitation. The disadvantage of using secondary data is that you do not have full control over which variables to measure or how to actually measure them.

3.4 Preparatory work

We use our theory part, including books, articles, and other secondary data, and mainly our research questions to make relevant questions for our respondents. The topics our interview was based on were what Manchester United is doing around accessibility, whether the information is good enough for the ones who need it, plans with heart or minimum, collaborations, and away games. We also prepared by making a list of questions for the two respondents. Some of these questions differed for both respondents and were directed toward their jobs and expertise. Preparing for our trip to Manchester, we also needed approval from Sikt about potential personal data we were to collect during the interviews.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection is the method used to measure variables and gather information directly. We have used surveys as the primary methods because they allow us to collect data about, for example, opinions, behaviors, experiences, and even characteristics by asking people directly.

There are two main types: questionnaires and interviews. We decided to have two personal interviews with one representative from Manchester United Football Club and one from Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association.

“Using an interview in a research paper is an effective primary source because you talk straight to the individuals you want to get information from” (Using an Interview in a Research Paper / Writing & Speaking Center, n.d.). We started by determining who we thought would have an impact and could help us understand more about our research questions, and it landed on Michael Leneghan and Chas Banks. Michael Leneghan is the Supporter Liaison Coordinator for Manchester United Football Club, MUFC, and Chas Banks MBE is the Secretary for the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association or MUDSA.

We traveled to Manchester at the end of February together with Bernt Hjørnevik, CEO of Manchester United Supporters Club Scandinavia. We had previously been in contact with Chas and Michael regarding an interview with them, so we anticipated meeting them greatly.

The meeting occurred at Manchester United's stadium, Old Trafford, before the game against Fulham. The meeting was held at “The Phil Downs Ability Suite” (MUDSA, n.d.). This is a meeting place where disabled people have a place to stay, eat and drink, before the match starts. We prepared some questions for each of them and sat down with Michael Leneghan first and Chas Banks after. They were both polite and interested in our work towards disabled individuals attending live sporting events. They were also impressed and grateful that we chose Manchester United as a club to inspire other clubs to focus on the facilitation and accessibility.

After the meeting, they also said that we were more than welcome to email them if there was anything else we needed answers to or help with. They also offered to connect us with some partners, including Level Playing Field and others within Manchester United. Both Chas and

Michael were good sources of inspiration as they enabled us to get information straight from the source rather than information that might need to be more accurate.

The day after the match we were fortunate to attend a stadium and museum tour at Old Trafford. This tour is for fans who want to see more of the stadium and also visit the museum, where the club's history shows. Michael explained to us during the interview that the tour can be adjusted so that people in wheelchairs can be brought with them.

3.6 Ethics

Ethics is very important in research because it is about providing information that can be useful for other researchers and organizations. Research ethics are built on respect for human dignity, and it's based on general ethics and basic human rights, meaning that the individual's interests and integrity are more important than the research (Buttarelli, 2018).

To research in Norway as students, we need to apply to SIKT, a Norwegian agency for shared services in education and research. They must approve our research, including interview questions, consent forms, and research purposes. This allows us to gather information such as the identity and occupation of the people we interviewed. It's also extra strict because our respondents are outside of Europe, so there are more rules around personal data.

The consent form we had to submit needed to be signed by us. Chas and Michael also needed to sign it so we could use this/their information in our research. This consent is essential because it respects what our respondents want to potentially have out in public around topics, they are very focused and engaged in.

Using SIKT and getting their approval helps us with several important factors: protecting human subjects, maintaining trust and integrity, promoting scientific advancement, complying with legal and regulatory requirements, mitigating risks, and ensuring equity and fairness. In our research, we also have to consider the people that we interview and the people whom our research may impact.

Since we have used both qualitative and quantitative research, it is important to consider reliability and validity. These are two factors which strengthen the credibility of the research.

Reliability can be described as how consistently a method measures something. If the same result can be achieved by someone else by using the same method, it is considered reliable (Middleton, 2019).

Validity is described as how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure: for example, having a high validity means that the research produces results that correspond to the real world (Middelton, 2019).

In relation to our respondents, Chas and Michael, can we conclude that their reliability and validity are real because they both work closely with or within Manchester United and have competence within this area. Our questions were also carefully selected and made relevant for our research, so we did not get answers that we could connect to our research questions.

We need to consider all of these factors in our research, not just the data collection.

3.7 Our own reflections

When writing a bachelor's thesis, you must be critical about what and how you present and gather information. The first thing that could influence our work is that this is our first time writing such a big thesis, and we know that some parts will not be all correct. Researchers need to ask questions about credibility and validity, and an example could be our already influenced opinion on Manchester United as a football club.

In terms of the interviews, did we, in hindsight, maybe want to have them in a quieter place instead of in the waiting/bar room for the disabled fans. We also decided not to use a sound recorder because of the other people around; it would probably be a waste of time. We had our notebooks with us, together with the questions, so we went with writing keywords and rather wrote everything down after the interviews.

For us it was essential to get as much of our information straight from the source. At least the information we got from them is as accurate and up-to-date as it can be. If we were to recommend or change the way we did now, in hindsight, we would maybe have a quieter and separate room with just the interviewer and the participants.

We are grateful for Michael and Chas for taking their time and answering our questions. Fortunately, we have found such an exciting topic with a theme that interests us but has been challenging to gather information about.

4.0 Result

Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p.37) say that the interviewer and the participants are together to produce the knowledge. The interviewer must be respectful and empathetic towards the participant. The main goal of these two interviews was to generalize the answers to help us and the reader understand more about the experience of a disabled individual. Regarding the questions, we prepared some topics we wanted more information about, but both Chas and Michael were very open and began telling us other things we could use in the thesis.

During the interview, we wrote down keywords/sentences, and after the interview, we sat down and wrote whole sentences with the respondents' main points in focus. As we mentioned earlier, credibility and validity are important. Because of both respondents' professions, they appear truthful and have the right competence to give correct and relevant answers to us.

Based on the analysis, we present the results in the following paragraph.

At Old Trafford, they have 278 seats for disabled supporters and their helpers, and out of those seats, they also have some different seats for deaf and blind supporters as well. Michael Leneghan, the supporter liaison coordinator, showed us another offer the blind and visually impaired supporters get at every game. These supporters get headsets with a dedicated commentator who, even more than regular commentators, tries to describe the situation on the pitch more accurately for the blind and visually impaired. This is an offer that also includes away games as well. They can bring the headsets to away games to ensure they get the same experience at home and away games.

Us being able to get into the stadium before the game was also very hospitable by the club. They brought us into the hospitality area for the supporters with disabilities. "The Phil Downs

Ability Suite" (MUDSA, n.d.) had a bar, snacks, seating, toilets, and close proximity to the 2 changing rooms they have in the stadium. These two expensive changing rooms are facilitated for individuals with different needs, and this is a gesture from Manchester United because no laws require or regulate these types of rooms.

Chas Banks became disabled in 1996 and later became part of the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association. He has helped and improved the experiences for disabled fans massively. When he started working in MUDSA, the organization was already looking for expansion and wanted to get involved with more social stuff. It all started with a celebrity quiz night with some of the players from that time, and today, MUDSA has many different social meetings etc. In 2016, Chas became secretary of Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association.

He told us about the accessibility, which has not always been a good alternative for those who need it. The improvements have improved, but Chas wants more transparency from the main organization and a more open conversation. He has been back and forth regarding the renovation of Old Trafford, but he has decided that a new stadium is probably the best option. In 2022, Chas was awarded with an MBE for his services and the help he provides people with disabilities in Greater Manchester and Northwest England (MUDSA, 2022).

What are the main barriers to attending sports events for disabled people? Level Playing Field's annual survey on access showed us some worrying numbers, with an increased level of not attending events and an increasing number of disabled people reporting that they struggle to get to games due to inaccessible public transport. In fact, the number of people reporting this has risen from 16% in 2021 to 20% in 2023.

The number of disabled people reporting they do not participate due to their inability to travel to the stadium have risen from 15.5% to 18% in the same timeframe. In the top ten most selected barriers, we also find attitudes of others at 25.5%, difficulty buying tickets at 23.5%, and anxiety or lack of confidence at 23%.

If we look at the top 10 of these barriers, five of them are directly influenced by the club. The biggest one is the respondents complaining about physical access to the stadium, which was 29.5% of the respondents. It is worth mentioning that 23.5% answered that it is difficult to

purchase match-day tickets. This shows that the event organizers need to make some improvements.

Sports event organizers leverage access to sports facilities by mainly following guidelines on what the venues need to provide. Facilities like disabled parking, special toilet facilities etc, are regulated by laws. Facilities or offers like headphones with dedicated commentators for blind people, sensory rooms for autistic people, or a dedicated cafe for disabled supporters are not regulated by any law and only functions as guidelines, not rules that the organization needs to enforce. More on this topic in the next paragraph.

In terms of the different strategies depending on types of disabilities are Manchester United doing several initiatives. The blind sports fans have, for example, the opportunity to have a headset with a dedicated commentator, who is trying to describe the situation on the pitch. Old Trafford also offers a hospitality area with a bar, snacks, seating, and toilets for supporters with disabilities. The organization is trying to make it as normal as possible for the individuals that may need some extra help, like, for example, having the same ticket system for regular seats and disabled seats.

MUDSA is also a good partner for Manchester United because it has extensive experience with people with these impairments. MUDSA also helps arrange events and ensures that the disabled fans have a overall good experience.

The Norwegian Football Association has set some infrastructure guidelines, which the clubs are not obliged to follow. As the clubs are not obligated to follow these guidelines, you can have quite different offers at each stadium.

Concerning the research question about what can be done on the organizational, legal, and practical levels to foster truly accessible event venues, we are primarily developing better guidelines that are required and not just recommended on a legal level.

Throughout our research, we believe that good collaborations with other clubs and charities/communities focusing on becoming more accessible are essential in fostering the same opportunities for everyone.

Practically, it would be physical modifying event venues, like ramps for wheelchairs and lifts.

An organization needs to cooperate with organizations and charities with expertise on the various tools and other physical modifications that could be made at their venue. An organization like Level Playing Field has expertise in many kinds of disabilities. It works closely with the football clubs in England to ensure they follow the rules and guidelines and improves access, making their venue and organization genuinely accessible and inclusive.

On an organizational level, do we believe those who work at, for example, a sporting venue need to start with being obliged to make their events as accessible as possible for everyone who wants to participate? They could also have a regulatory measure of the current situation and how they can identify the problems and try to improve these areas.

On the legal level, there are some required laws for accessibility that sporting organizers need to follow. However, these are not as compliant with what disabled fans need to make it easier for them to attend games. Therefore, a law or guidelines around making sporting venues/events accessible be one of the top priorities on a legal level because it is becoming a more important topic, but also by being accessible gives equal opportunities for everyone who wants to attend.

5.0 Discussion

In the following chapter, we present the main findings from our research. Following these showings, we discuss the findings with the theory and previous research.

At first, we start discussing how suited the legislations and regulations for accessibility and facilitation are in terms of what the disabled individuals perceive at live sporting events. Simultaneously, if the provided guidelines cover the importance of making stadiums accessible. Secondly, we are discussing why and how facilitation for everyone is becoming increasingly important from both an organizational and spectators' point of view, and that is one of the reasons for focusing more on this topic.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, thanks to the LPF survey, half of the top 10 answers were something that the event organizers could directly influence. Improvements can

definitely be made on an organizational level at most clubs with marketing, easier access to tickets, and improved facilities etc.

In terms of the improvements to be made on a legal level, there is not much that needs to be said. The governing bodies of the football leagues, governments, and sporting organizations need to set clear rules that they need to follow, and they can enforce them by issuing fines and different punishments to make the clubs compliant.

An important step in the right direction is the fact that FIFA has included accessibility in their financial fair play rules. We firmly believe that if sporting organizations were forced to follow a set of rules that include how, when and where to facilitate as well as who to facilitate for, it would create a better product for the organizations, as well as promote real inclusivity for all. Universal design is great as it includes as many people as possible in their design, but there will always be someone who cannot attend due to it not being designed for them.

5.1 Main findings

- a) In our search for some legislation and regulations regarding accessibility at sports stadiums, we found that the rules that are already implemented are not as inclusive and do not cover all aspects of disabilities, like the Equality Act 2010. Most of the guidelines merely advise having accessible seats.
- b) More organizations have focused on this topic and it seems to be becoming a more and more important topic in the future, and charities like LPF are becoming an important supporting player.

5.1.1 Compliant or extra?

The legislation and regulations concerning accessibility and facilitation are mostly just compliant and are not doing it with their “heart.” It means that organizations are doing the absolute minimum of requirements, which are often not as good and inclusive as they should be. For example, clubs offer the required seats, disabled parking, and required bathrooms, but these offers do not include every type of disability. As we stated in our intro, we believed that

many of these organizations were making it accessible for all, still, as we have found out, some are only doing what is required by law, and not trying to be at the forefront of inclusivity.

The rules and regulations covered in NFF's infrastructure guidelines mention universal design and how to accommodate for as many people as possible. That means that there will always be some group of people that cannot attend the event as it is not facilitated with their disability in mind. What would help in this case is a set of rules that specifies what infrastructure improvements that need to be made to cover all disabilities.

For example, the Norwegian Football Association are recommending wheelchair-accessible seats, because these are not required. They recommend having 5 wheelchair-accessible seats for every 1000 regular seats. SK Brann, a football club in the highest division, has 16.750 seats and has 31 wheelchair-accessible seats. If they were to follow the recommendations from the NFF, they should have around 83 wheelchair seats. Moreover, like in the case study about the Women's World Cup, the general manager for Disability Sports Australia said that significant sports events do not have specific/standard guidelines to dictate what the event has to do and does not have to do. This is an improvement that we think is really important to get in order; having a separate disability accessibility guide, including everyone, is required by law, and every big event needs to be followed to make it as accessible as possible for everyone.

Universal design is the purpose of designing a physical place to be as accessible as possible for most people. A law like this would be great if it included different tools and means of action to be implemented for the different kind of disabilities we see today.

Today, many of the big organizations have a specific job title who have the main responsibility towards making the best possible overall experience for those fans that need some extra help. Michael Leneghan is the D.L.O of Manchester United Football Club, and we think that having a specific job to address these barriers is a really good improvement for any organizations that faces situations in which they need to think differently and make it accessible for any needs.

Chas Banks, who became disabled, has perspectives from both sides. He says that Manchester United has become much better at accessibility, and other clubs could learn a lot from them, even when they got an old stadium.

Old Trafford is an old stadium, but still, the club is doing many good things for disabled supporters, like installing two expensive changing rooms specific for those who need them, even it is not required by any law. They also have “the Ability suite”, a cafélike gathering place inside the stadium for disabled fans and their companions. Both Chas and Michael agreed that Old Trafford needs a big renovation or even a whole new stadium to keep up with the other big clubs in England, which have already done massive upgrades.

The ethical implications of inadequate accessibility and the moral obligation of football stadiums to provide equal access to all fans should be taken more seriously, because it is easy to forget about other individuals with other needs than yourself.

5.1.2 Growing importance topic

The social model of disability, together with the social attitudes towards disability are showing a much more improved behavior towards these individuals. As mentioned earlier, “a disability is only disabling when it prevents someone from doing what they want or need to do”, and we think this a significant statement to have in mind, especially regarding accessibility. Becoming disabled or having any form of impairments could happen to anybody at any time, and it should more facilitate society for these kinds of barriers.

Being accessible for everyone is a topic that has been researched around, specifically attending live sporting events, which improves levels of well-being and reduces feelings of loneliness. These results are important findings because previous studies have shown that higher life satisfaction is associated with good physical and mental health. If attending live sporting events is making people who may already have a hard time in life likely to have a higher life satisfaction, is this a critical topic that needs to be more focused and researched around? Another important factor is the exclusion of certain groups, that do not have the opportunity to attend the games even if they want to.

It is worth mentioning that FIFA suggests that not only people with permanent disabilities benefit from handicap facilities. The three segments that benefit are disabled people, people with limited mobility and the last segment is for people that do not necessarily need the facilities but benefit from them anyway.

After reading about the charity called Level Playing Field, do we believe that accessibility and facilitation will become more and more important in the future. LPF gives an overview of disability facilitation and is sort of a guide to help disabled supporters. This charity is also a good pointer for other organizations to improve their accessibility, because LPF has an annual survey to show which barriers the different types of disabled people face. The main findings in the annual survey are the physical access at the stadiums, attitudes from others, purchasing tickets and lack of confidence. This shows what clubs generally need to improve to get more accessible stadiums for everyone.

5.2 Strengths and weaknesses

Concerning our sampling and population, we could have spoken to some other representatives from a different club than Manchester United or from a different sport's perspective. This could have given more in-depth information about the other organizations and other types of live sports.

A strength in this thesis is that we have good and valid information from the perspective of Manchester United, because of both Chas and Michael working with the organization. We also used LPF survey, which saved us a lot of time if we had to make our own survey. This survey had a lot of respondents, so it gave us a good pointer on what the main barriers and problems disabled individuals are facing. Another thing that we found is the information on how the facilities at all the different stadiums in England were on another level than what you would find here in Norway. Level Playing Field have their webpage where you can find contact information about who to contact at each football club in the Premier League. They are also now expanding their services to include women's football, Cricket, Rugby, and Tennis.

Regarding the survey from Level Playing Field, we couldn't choose our own questions, so we couldn't ask about specific things more related to this thesis. There will also always be wrong answers or misunderstandings in such a big survey, so the quality is maybe not a hundred percent representative from all the disabled supporters.

Us being Manchester United fans could also give the organization a more positive spotlight, unlike maybe if we research Liverpool FC (rival). We think we have been as neutral as possible

and based our thesis on facts and theory we have gathered.

The fact that Manchester United have a more outdated stadium compared to the other big clubs in England can be a disadvantage for MUFC because newer renovation could be able to require and facilitate inclusivity and accessibility better than an old stadium.

6.0 Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, we would like to highlight the findings that we have found.

Our research problem in this bachelor's thesis is that the complexity of disabilities as a physical and social phenomenon requires in-depth research and accessible tourism, where we have used attendance at sports events as the main element.

Firstly, the disability facilities that sporting events must have are only minimum requirements, like handicap parking close to the venue and toilets arranged for disabled people. Any other facilities which would help a disabled person are only recommended. We would urge the governing body of the sporting association or the governments that they need to make clear and separate rules that sporting organizations need to follow that includes every type of disability because, for now these guidelines seem too lenient and do not foster real inclusivity. We believe that organizations need to cooperate more with different organizations and charities that have expertise on the various types of tools and other physical modifications that could be made at the venues.

We firmly believe that improving rules and regulations to include different offers and means of action for different disabilities would improve the stadium and fan experience for people with disabilities. Furthermore, it would lead to more inclusivity as it would lead to a more diverse offer for different types of disabilities.

To emphasize our own contributions, we believe that writing about accessibility in sporting events could make an impact on especially the importance of being accessible as an organization to give the equal opportunity to each individuals regardless of their disabilities. Although, our research focuses mostly on England, we think that sporting venues in Norway

also could learn about the importance of being adequate accessibility. We hope our contributions emphasize how significant this topic is becoming and why it is so valuable to be able to facilitate for all types of fans.

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8.0 Attachments

Do you want to participate in the research project?

[Disable people in football events]

This is a form regarding a bachelor test, where the goal is to research around disable people in football events. In this form will we describe our goal for this project and what your participation implies for you.

Purpose

The purpose on our bachelor's thesis is to enlight and inform more around the topic on how to deal with people with different needs. We both love football, and our favorite team is Manchester United, and that's why we wanted to interview employees working for this club. We would like to ask questions around how Manchester United facilitates for this kind of people, why United pay so much attention to disability, collaborations with other companies etc.

Who's in charge for this project?

Western Norway University for Applied Sciences are in charge for this project. Our supervisor Gregory Kwiatkowski; e-mail: Gregory.Kwiatkowski@hvl.no

Why do you get the asked to participate?

The reason you get ask to participate in this interview is to get a more specific view on how a big club, like Manchester United are facilitating for people with different needs. We hope to get a more insightful understanding when we talk with a source in Manchester United Football Club.

What are we going to use answers to?

The method is an interview face to face. We would use your answers to understand more on what a big club like Manchester United are doing for people with different needs and we are maybe going to compare with other football. We would like to publish the article when it is finished, and it would also possibly be used as curriculum.

It's voluntary to participate.

It is voluntary to participate, and you can withdraw the consent at any time.

Your privacy

We will use your information in terms of what we already have told you in this form. We are going to treat this information with care and follow the privacy regulations.

What happens to your information after the project ends?

Our deadline is 8th May 2024. We have been told that if this bachelor thesis is as good as we want maybe Manchester United would like to read or publish it. We as students are also thinking about publishing it after the project ends.

The Project ends at 08.05.2024. After the project has ended, all files and data will be deleted.

What gives us the right to use your information?

We treat the information based on your consent.

On a mission from Western Norway University of Applied Sciences have «SIKT» considered that the personal information is been treated in accordance with the privacy regulations.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- Access to the information we process about you, and to receive a copy of the information.
- Have information about you that is incorrect or misleading corrected.
- Have personal data about you deleted.
- Lodge a complaint with the Norwegian Data Protection Authority about the processing of your personal data.

If you have any questions around the study, could we be contacted by:
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
Jonas Hjørnevik Pettersen - +47 907 00 933

Data protection officer: Trine Anikken Larsen
Tlf: +4755587682
Email: Trine.Anniken.Larsen@hvl.no

If you have any questions regarding the assessment of the personal information:

- E-mail: personvertjenester@sikt.no or phone: +47 73 98 40 40.

With best regards

Gregory Kwiatkowski
(Supervisor)

Even Hetlebakke
(Student)

Jonas Hjørnevik Pettersen
(Student)

Declaration of consent

I have received and understood information about the project «Disable people in football events». I consent to:

- Participate in the interview
- My information been use in this bachelor thesis.

(Sign by the participant, 24th February)