

Stockholm's 17 SK: a case study in community football

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17 SK is a community sports club based in Stockholm, Sweden. Its members play different sports, but the football groups are by far the most popular. In this paper, we want to sketch the history of the club and reflect on the aspects of its football activities that seem most relevant from a social and political perspective: gender, integration, community building and matters of organization. We are both co-founders and board members of the club and regularly partake in its activities. The article is therefore mainly based on participatory observation and on numerous discussions we have had with other 17 SK participants over the past three years.

17 SK: an introduction

17 SK emerged from Nätverket Linje 17, a network of community projects along the southern end of Stockholm's subway line 17, which includes the suburbs of Hammarbyhöjden, Björkhagen, Kärrtorp, Bagarmossen, and Skarpnäck. Nätverket Linje 17 was founded in the fall of 2010 after Sweden's centre-right government had been confirmed in national elections and the right-wing, anti-immigration party Sverigedemokraterna (The Swedish Democrats) entered the Swedish parliament for the first time. Nätverket Linje 17 is a grassroots community initiative not tied to any political party or institution. On its website, it describes itself as 'an umbrella for different initiatives and activities of local groups aiming to fill everyday life with a sense of togetherness, joy, and empowerment'.¹

The network's main intention is to counteract the government's neoliberal policies and the dismantling of the Swedish welfare state. The strategy employed is two-fold: on the one hand, government and city council policies, especially the privatization of council flats, schools, pharmacies and health centres, the lack of funds for non-commercial meeting places and development plans for forest and park areas are confronted with campaigns and direct action; on the other hand, collective life in the suburbs is invigorated by establishing self-run community centres, organizing social and cultural events and sharing resources from neighbourhood fruit trees to cars. The emergence of Nätverket Linje 17 and similar initiatives under the banner of 'local organizing' must also be understood in light of the ongoing centralization of Stockholm's urban landscape, where services, entertainment and employment opportunities are increasingly moved to the inner city or to strategically placed business and shopping districts, leaving many suburbs socially, economically and culturally neglected. The 'suburban riots' that rocked Stockholm in May 2013 were a direct consequence of this (For an interesting analysis of the riots in English see Thörn 2013).²

At the time of writing, Nätverket Linje 17 includes eight different groups. The sports club 17 SK is one of them, and, arguably, together with Folkodlarna, a local organic

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gardening collective, the most active. The club was founded in the context of Nätverket Linje 17 because we considered sport to be one of the most promising means to strengthen community life according to the network's ambitions. This for several reasons: sport as an activity does not carry any political burden that might alienate people who do not want to associate with the 'activist crowd'; sport unites people across a wide range of social boundaries, whether they relate to gender, class, ethnicity or language; and, last but not least, sport combines valuable community building with a lot of fun. Some of us were also strongly inspired by the example of community sports clubs such as the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls of Bristol, England.

17 SK was always meant to include different sports, but Sweden being a European country, football seemed the most obvious choice to get things started. Furthermore, while a variety of other sports have been added to the schedule during the three years of 17 SK's existence, football has always remained the most popular. No other activities have drawn anywhere near as many participants. 17 SK – literally – kicked off in April 2011. At the end of Stockholm's long winter, preparations got underway to organize a weekly gender-mixed football game next to the local sports ground in Kärrtorp. The game was advertised on the Nätverket Linje 17 website and mailing list, and a few hundred flyers – in both Swedish and English – were put up in Kärrtorp and the neighbouring suburbs of Björkhagen and Bagarmossen. The content of the flyers outlined the basic principles of 17 SK. It read:

We want to create an environment in which people can play sports with a sense of community and no competitive pressure. We also want to use sports' potential to bring people together, to get to know one another, and to share joy, laughter, and exercise.

Attendance at the first game exceeded all expectations. About 25 people came to the sports ground specifically for the game, with an extra few passers-by dropping in. The game started with one of us explaining the purpose of the project and the basic guidelines for play. With slight modifications, these guidelines remain the same to this day. On the 17 SK web page,³ they are listed as follows:

1. No hard physical play: no tackles, no high kicks, no hard shots on goal, etc.
2. Encouragement between players rather than critique.
3. The responsibility to include everyone in the game, regardless of individual experience and skill level.

Despite being unprepared for the high attendance, the first game went well. However, it already revealed what would become one of the most difficult issues to tackle for 17 SK, namely gender balance. Out of the 25 people who came to the first game, only 2 were women. We will discuss the issue of gender in more depth below.

Attendance at 17 SK games dwindled during the first few weeks. Many young men did not seem to appreciate the non-competitive character of the club. Them staying away was not seen as a big loss. There are plenty of opportunities for competitive young men to play football. 17 SK wanted to create a different environment – one that made it appealing to play even for those with little experience and a feeling of unease in stereotypical, testosterone-driven football circles.

The first half-year included much experimenting, with attendance being unsteady and many players appearing and disappearing. By the fall of 2011, however, a steady core of about 10 players had been established. With irregulars and occasional visitors dropping in, there were 12–16 players at every game. This, in fact, turned out to be a very convenient

number for 17 SK, as it allowed for games filling the pitch without making it too crowded or any need of dividing participants into three or four teams.

Meanwhile, the probably most significant development in 17 SK's history occurred when a second group, open only to women and transgender people, started to play once a week, also at the Kärrtorp sports ground.⁴ The group called itself 17 Sisters, and its foundation was not least a reaction to the lack of female participation in what was now called 17 Mixed.

Attendance at 17 Sisters' games averaged at about 10 players, but support for the initiative spread much wider, with a *Facebook* group soon having more than 50 members (today, it has more than 100). 17 Sisters was also featured on a radio programme by plank.fm, an independent Stockholm media project.⁵

The momentum in 17 Sisters was high enough to raise funds for indoors training during the winter of 2011–2012, when a local sports hall was rented once a week. The necessary funds were raised by individual contributions and donations. Funds for the entire club were raised at a table at the Kärrtorp Festival and Flea Market. These were used to buy jerseys, footballs and other training equipment.

In the spring of 2012, 17 SK was officially registered as a non-profit association, which, most of all, made booking sports halls cheaper and bookkeeping more transparent. In addition, it created a formal framework that allowed for a wider range of activities. The association has a board whose members take care of administrative duties and represent the club publicly.

During 2012, 17 SK activities expanded. In addition to 17 Mixed and 17 Sisters, there was a third football group, 17 Youngsters (*17 ungar* in Swedish), a parents-managed football school for children younger than six years. 17 Youngsters started to meet at the Kärrtorp sports ground, but soon moved to the suburb of Skarpnäck, where the majority of the participants lived. Meanwhile, 17 Mixed held a second weekly game on Saturday mornings. It attracted less people than the regular Tuesday evening games, but it allowed for more relaxed play and often had significantly better gender balance. Beyond the football activities, a running group formed with Björkhagen Swoosh (today, it has nearly 80 members), and a group of parents with toddlers regularly met for gymnastics in a local sports hall. There was also a short-lived basketball group and the occasional volleyball, table tennis and ice bandy game (ice bandy is a blend of ice and field hockey popular in the Scandinavian countries). In the winter of 2012–2013, both 17 Sisters and 17 Mixed met for weekly games during the entire indoors season. Meanwhile, 17 Youngsters had to be discontinued, since the two people who had taken most of the responsibility were no longer able to do so and could not be replaced.

In May 2013, construction work at the Kärrtorp sports ground forced 17 Mixed and 17 Sisters to move their games to a small football pitch in the Nacka Nature Reserve, next to the suburb of Björkhagen. All 17 SK games have been held there since. The change of location also attracted new players who had been unaware of the project before. 17 Mixed now has often more than 20 players at its games.

Gabriel has been playing regularly with 17 Mixed and Klara regularly with 17 Sisters. Klara has also been playing fairly regularly with 17 Mixed. These two groups will therefore be at the focus of our analysis. It is important to note that there exist a few significant differences between them:

1. 17 Mixed has always consisted predominantly of players who have been playing football since childhood. Many players in 17 Sisters had none or very little football experience before joining the group.

2. 17 Mixed only gets together to play games. 17 Sisters regularly introduces their sessions with training exercises.
3. 17 Mixed is more heterogeneous in terms of age and national background. Age ranges from 12 to 65 years and players from at least 20 different countries have participated. Players in 17 Sisters are almost all in their 30s and are Swedish-born.
4. Referencing the above-mentioned guidelines for play in 17 SK has had an important role in shaping 17 Mixed's profile (especially in distinguishing it from 'regular pick-up games'), while it has been far less relevant in 17 Sisters.
5. 17 Sisters has always had a stronger communal aspect, as the administrative and organizational tasks were divided between several people, while, in 17 Mixed, they were carried by one person for a long time. In 17 Sisters there has also been more internal discussion about the character and the perspectives of the group than in 17 Mixed.

We will try to distinguish between 17 Mixed and 17 Sisters as much as possible in our analysis, but these general differences always need to be taken into account when we speak of 17 SK's football activities in a more general manner.

Gender

With more than 30%, Sweden has among the highest percentage of women among registered football players in the world.⁶ Yet, even in Sweden, football is still very much a men's game. Media coverage of men's football outweighs that of women's football by far, while, in their clubs, women's sides constantly have to struggle for at least near-equal opportunities in terms of funding and training facilities. This despite of Sweden's women having been much more successful internationally than their male counterparts, with one European championship title for the national team and two UEFA Women's Champions League titles for Umeå IK. Male dominance is also reflected on the grassroots level, where it is strongly tied into general patriarchal patterns. For example, there is a big difference between more than 30% of all registered football players being women and having a 10:1 male–female ratio at 17 Mixed games. The following aspects all need to be considered in order to explain this.

1. In general, women feel less comfortable than men playing football in mixed settings. As soon as men are involved, traditional male football culture sets the tone, which is reflected in attitude, style of play and rhetoric. For men coming to a mixed game usually means coming to a regular football game that includes women. For women coming to a mixed game often means entering 'foreign territory' and the need to adapt to rules set by men. Most importantly, perhaps, women have much more to prove than men. While for men it is often considered chivalrous to play with women, women must prove that they are worthy of playing with men. Many women do not want to place themselves in such an environment.
2. It comes much more easily for men to occupy central roles in mixed-gender settings. In football, this means that men are seldom afraid to demand the ball, attempt dribbles, look for scoring opportunities, and so forth, even if they often fail. Repeatedly, men with fairly low skills have shown much greater confidence in 17 Mixed than women with high skills.
3. It also comes much more easily for most men to occupy public space. For example, playing next to a municipal sports ground where numerous other athletes train and spectators linger is no big deal for most of them, especially if they have experience

with playing football in public, which most men who are at least somewhat interested in sports do. Many women, however, feel scrutinized and judged. This might be a main reason for the almost complete absence of girls and women playing football on schoolyards or in parks, even if they do play football in a club. Girls do not learn to play football at will in public, while boys are seen kicking the ball around all the time. In this respect, it is perhaps no surprise that attendance at 17 Sisters indoors games has generally been higher than at 17 Sisters outdoors games – in 17 Mixed, the opposite is the case. Likewise, the outdoors games on Saturday morning – when the Kärrtorp sports ground mainly held games for kids, with many families in attendance – seemed a more comfortable environment for women than the more competitive weekday nights with male coaches bellowing aggressive commands across the pitches. During the indoors games, there are no spectators and the players are by themselves.

Since the beginning of 17 SK, we have had many discussions about how to most effectively counteract these patterns and engage more women in the club. Little can be done regarding the indoors/outdoors divide. During the summer months, playing outdoors is the obvious choice – many indoors facilities are not even available during that period. Furthermore, we do not see abandoning public space as an adequate answer to women not feeling as comfortable as men to occupy it – after all, it needs examples in order to make a change. In other words, to train and play outdoors as an exclusively female and transgender football team is an important statement and a possible source of encouragement for others.

In terms of the social environment, it is obviously mandatory to make 17 Mixed as welcoming as possible for women. Most importantly, it needs to be assured that the ‘neighbourhood’s football lads’, some of whom showed up for the first couple of games, do not take over the event. This is mainly done by taking the 17 SK principles seriously and repeatedly reminding players of them. So far, this strategy has proven fairly successful. The lads who do not want to play under such premises have left and a core of players embracing – or at least respecting – the principles remains. That this makes at least some difference has been confirmed by a number of women participating in 17 Mixed games who felt that the environment was welcoming and inclusive. However, although gender balance got slightly better over time, women never averaged more than 20% at 17 Mixed games. This goes to show that, unsurprisingly, a few adjustments and good intentions cannot do away with power structures that are deeply ingrained into the social fabric. It also explains why the launch of 17 Sisters seemed necessary to secure more women participating in 17 SK’s football activities overall.

As mentioned above, 17 Sisters has been a very successful project. Some participants played in clubs as children and teenagers before ending their careers because there were no serious prospects; while football might have been considered a suitable pastime for girls, it was not seen as an activity that promised future fame and fortune, as it has done for boys for almost a 100 years. These women have found great joy in rediscovering one of their childhood passions. There are also women who have always wanted to play football but never found an environment in which they felt comfortable doing it, and women who, now in their 30s, wanted to conquer a game that always seemed out of reach and therefore never interested them much before. Finally, there are some experienced players who simply enjoy the positive and inspiring atmosphere.

There was hope that 17 Sisters would motivate more women to come to play with 17 Mixed as well. This has not really happened. On occasion, women from 17 Sisters join a

17 Mixed game – this mainly occurred during the 2012–2013 indoors season, when the teams played in the same hall after one another. But on the whole, the groups remain very separate; there are only very few women (less than a handful) who have played regularly in both 17 Sisters and 17 Mixed, and out of the women who have played regularly in 17 Mixed all but one have a male partner playing there as well.

We have no explanation for many more women choosing to play with 17 Sisters rather than 17 Mixed other than that, all considered, most women simply find it more enjoyable to play with 17 Sisters. In fact, the existence of 17 Sisters might make it even harder for 17 Mixed to become more gender-balanced, since most women who want to play football in 17 SK directly turn to 17 Sisters. However, it is highly unlikely that women's participation in 17 Mixed would increase significantly if 17 Sisters did not exist; most women and transgender people would otherwise simply not play at all. Therefore, we do not consider it reasonable to challenge the existence of 17 Sisters from a gender-conscious perspective.

Discussions about how to make 17 Mixed more gender-balanced continue, as clear-cut solutions are still far away. However, there has been some success. In 17 Youngsters, for example, gender was consciously avoided as a category determining the children's play or their perception of the game. Among other things, this led to kids identified as boys to name members of the Swedish women's national team as their favourite players. While this might seem trivial, in a deeply gendered football world, it is a huge step.

Integration

In many ways, 17 SK has proven that football can indeed function as a 'universal language', bringing together people who might otherwise never meet. Particularly in a situation where migration is one of Europe's most heated topics, the political significance of this must not be underestimated. 17 Mixed games have been attended by people with backgrounds in a variety of countries, among them Argentina, Austria, Colombia, England, France, Gambia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Somalia and the USA. This was not lost on organizations working to improve intercultural relations either. In early 2012, a 17 SK member was invited to a meeting with the Swedish Expo foundation, which was initiated in 1995 by the now famed Swedish novelist Stieg Larsson and is described on its website as a 'privately-owned research foundation founded in 1995 with the aim of studying and mapping anti-democratic, right-wing extremist and racist tendencies in society'.⁷ The foundation got in touch with us because it was establishing a research group to explore the potentials of football as a tool for social integration.

Collaboration with city council employees has proven more difficult. In the summer of 2012, 17 SK tried to expand its integrative potential by reaching out to two municipality-run facilities in southern Stockholm: a home for unaccompanied refugee minors, and a temporary housing unit for refugee families. In both cases, the opportunity that football offers immigrants and refugees to engage in community activities and to establish relationships with the local population was emphasized; we also stressed the fact that a social security number is not required to join 17 SK activities, contrary to the situation in most other sports clubs. While we received positive responses, with individual social workers showing a sincere willingness to cooperate, we were never actively supported in informing the refugees about our games, aiding them with transport to the Kärntorp sports ground, or arranging extra sessions at a location that was easier for them to reach. It seemed to us that the municipal social workers were overwhelmed with administrative duties and bound by formal regulations and red tape. In the end, this rendered collaboration impossible and seemed to confirm the limitations of institutional

frameworks when it comes to matters of everyday integration. In order to make progress in this area, we consider it mandatory that the relationship between formal institutional programmes and self-managed initiatives such as 17 SK is made easier and more flexible.

As mentioned above, 17 Mixed has a much higher diversity than 17 Sisters when it comes to national background. In our perspective, the following aspects all contribute to this:

1. While 17 Mixed has attracted most participants through open advertising and random encounters on sports grounds, 17 Sisters grew mainly from a fairly homogenous network of friends.
2. 17 Sisters has closer ties to Stockholm's activist community, which is also fairly homogenous.
3. Football as an athletic choice for girls and women is more common in Sweden than in most other countries.

So far, no particular efforts have been made in 17 SK to change this. However, it is an issue that the club will have to address in the long run.

Community building

In 17 SK, the integrative potential of football has not only proven true with respect to nationality. Participants also cover a wide range of age. While toddlers played with adults in 17 Youngsters, 17 Mixed has seen players between the age of 12 and 65 years. Language has rarely been an obstacle either. Many players have participated who did not speak Swedish, and in some cases not even English, which is the usual language of communication for non-Swedish speakers. This never caused any problems beyond, perhaps, communicating the guidelines for play properly. There also appears to be a fairly wide range of class identity, although middle-class backgrounds seem to dominate. In all of these categories, 17 Mixed has shown more diversity than 17 Sisters. Yet, even in 17 Sisters, far from all participants have ties to the Stockholm activist community, contrary to most other Nätverket Linje 17 groups. As a very simple rule, long meetings, ideological discussions and plenty of dos and don'ts keep people away from community activities, while the prospect of doing something fun, for example playing football, attracts them. This, however, does not mean that 17 SK has no political dimension.

17 SK has very much proven what many grassroots football advocates have been claiming for a long time: grassroots football strengthens self-management, horizontal organizing, mutual aid, a rejection of consumer culture and a strong sense of community. In other words, it reflects and lives up to many values and principles of general grassroots organizing.

17 SK organizes football at the most basic level. It provides a reliable schedule, scouts and (in the winter) reserves playing fields, supplies equipment (balls, jerseys, etc.) and enables communication (mainly online). Meanwhile, the casual character of the game does not change: scores are kept only loosely (if at all), sides are switched around and referees are replaced by self-responsibility. There are no specific rules for the games either; in other words, how to handle throw-ins, corner kicks, the goalkeeper's role, etc. is decided collectively on the spot; the decisions depend on the number of players, the size of the field and other factors. In the case of 17 Sisters, the preparation of the training sessions rotates between different participants and the choice of exercises is usually the result of a democratic decision. This self-governing aspect of 17 SK has functioned very well.

Another aspect that seems important with respect to community building is the usage of undervalued public resources. Both the grass pitch next to the Kärtrorp sports ground and the football pitch in the Nacka Nature Reserve are open to the public, yet they are not used much. Instead, many clubs rent private pitches. Over the past three years, 17 SK has proven that regular collective outdoors activities are indeed possible using public facilities only. This does not only help to keep costs down, which, in turn, makes the club's activities more accessible, but it also provides a strong argument for expanding the public resources that make projects like 17 SK possible to begin with. Furthermore, it proves that private sponsorship and plenty of funds are not the only possible means to organize community activities.

Roger Wilson, a founding member of the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls Sports and Social Club, has summarized the political significance of community sports projects in an article written for the book *Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics*. Calling 'soccer the lubricant, progressive ideas the engine', Wilson explains:

Football (and other sports) can go some way to breaking divisions of nation, race and culture whereas overtly Political interventions often fail. Ideas such as autonomy, popular democracy, inclusivity, and internationalism can be practically explored outside of the confines of Political organizations. It can be easier to test ideas like these when there is no overt Political approach. The ideas themselves are more important than political stances or labels. It is useful to break out of your Political community and enter the political Community, and 'expanded' sports clubs can be a short-cut to doing this. Organizations such as sports clubs can provide social spaces for people to meet, which can overcome some facets of sub-cultural, race, class and gender divisions. Clubs such as the Cowboys should not be judged on their ability to achieve Political objectives but in their capability to put radical ideas into practice and act as conduits for their spread both locally and globally.⁸

Ideally, grassroots football clubs can bring a unique combination of social learning, political education and sheer pleasure come to life.

Facilitation

The fact that 17 SK is run on very basic principles is of great importance to us. This for various reasons:

1. It strengthens the democratic aspirations of the project, as all participants can actively contribute to shaping the club's activities.
2. It reduces the danger of alienating people who are not familiar with activist jargon.
3. It minimizes the risk of burdening the fun of playing football with too many regulations.

We have had good experiences with this minimalistic approach. The absence of any explicit proscription against the usage of discriminatory language, for example, has not led to discriminatory language being used. We believe that the overall environment and spirit in which 17 SK games are held have done enough to prevent this.

However, in 17 Mixed, continuous efforts have been needed to uphold the club's principles. We see mainly two reasons for this: First, there is a tendency for experienced footballers, especially men, to play fairly rough. If there are enough such players on the pitch, it can quickly lead to a rougher style of play overall, as others follow suit. Sometimes, the arrival of two new players not accustomed to the usual kind of play with 17 Mixed can be enough to significantly alter the game for all. Second, we have to acknowledge that most players come to 17 Mixed games because they want to play football. They understand – and might also appreciate – the aspirations of 17 SK, but they

do not necessarily feel strongly about them. Hence, it is easy to slip into a different playing mode when the environment suggests it.

This is why we still recall the basic guidelines for play before every 17 Mixed game (which does not take more than 30 seconds), collectively welcome new players and have a quick round in which all players introduce themselves by first names. In general, this low-key routine seems sufficient to ensure a friendly and positive atmosphere. In addition, the guidelines for play are also passed on as a matter of practice. New players usually adapt quickly. Of course, there can be disagreement about the exact boundaries of, for example, rough play, but there has only ever been one incident where this has led to an argument between two players, and the situation was soon resolved. We have never received reports from players staying away from 17 Mixed games because of rough play.

A bigger problem is that certain aspects of play are simply hard to facilitate. They mainly concern quality and pace. While it is relatively easy to agree on what rough play is once you've established certain guidelines (such as 'no tackles, no high kicks, no hard shots on goal, etc. '), it is much more difficult to decide when the quality and pace of a game begin to exclude certain people. And, in any case, it is difficult to facilitate this. For example, it comes rather easily to tell someone to back off in one-on-one situations or to stop extending those elbows; it is much harder to scold someone for an exceptional pass or a fine trick. Yet, if too many players produce too many exceptional passes and fine tricks, then some will inevitably end up on the sidelines.

There are, of course, certain means to curtail this, of which the most important is the 17 SK guideline calling for 'the responsibility to include everyone in the game, regardless of individual experience and skill level'. If this is taken seriously, no one will end up on the sidelines, and players with higher skills will ensure that their style of play does not exclude others – which does not mean they cannot show-off on occasion, which usually only adds to a game and seems appreciated by everyone.

It is a big challenge in any sport to keep all participants happy over an extended period of time if their respective skills (or the physical shape they are in) largely differ. To achieve this, it needs a willingness to compromise from all sides. The biggest responsibility, of course, lies with those for whom it is easiest to adjust, that is the players with the best skills. The claim that this makes all the fun disappear for them is simply not true – unless, having fun means to always stretch one's individual limits. As we have already mentioned, for players with such an understanding, 17 SK is simply not the right club.

More relevant is the fact that people have different sensitivities when it comes to social etiquette. An example is the selection of sides. While for some it is very important that no player has to join a side as a 'weak' player one compensating for a 'good' one, others do not hesitate to say things like, 'No, this side is too strong, so, Simon, please swap with Arvid'. Similarly, people have different sensitivities (or simply different levels of knowledge), when it comes to some of the unwritten rules of pick-up games, such as stopping play when someone gets hurt, not scoring on an empty net from a great distance and not chasing down inbound passes. It is difficult to resolve these issues by formal regulations, as much depends on personal perception. The most promising option seems to simply establish a rough consensus on what's okay and what's not. In order to do this, however, common discussion around these matters is needed. While there is some such discussion in 17 SK, it is limited to a small group of people. The biggest obstacle for it extending further – apart from the sheer lack of interest of some participants – relates to an aspect mentioned above: the fear of burdening the joy of play with too many regulations of individual behaviour. This is less of a problem in 17 Sisters, where participants more

regularly engage in discussions about group dynamics, which might partly be the result of a fair number of participants being more used to activist culture, and partly of general differences in communication among male-dominated groups on the one side and all-female/transgender groups on the other. In any case, a reasonable balance between collective discussion and carefree individual fun needs to be found in all groups.

Finally, there is the question of responsibility for upholding the principles. This has been a particular issue in 17 Mixed where much of the overall responsibility has rested with one person. Apart from the fact that this person dislikes regularly acting as an arbiter on the football field, it also means that if he is absent, or simply not in the mood to intervene, no one will.

The main reason for the situation is that the responsibility for facilitating 17 Mixed's activities was not distributed more equally from the beginning. This concerns not only upholding the club's principles but also the practical side of things: purchasing and storing the equipment, starting and ending the games, taking care of paperwork, etc. One aspect that seems difficult to resolve for any single individual with too much responsibility is the split role between facilitator and participant. It is hard to solely focus on and enjoy a game of football when you always need to be aware of other things: Is everyone receiving enough passes? Is anyone playing too rough? Does anyone seem unhappy? Which team shall the new arrival join? When is the right time to suggest calling it a day? Of course, all of this just confirms that responsibility really needs to be shared more equally. However, as everyone with organizing experience knows, this is often easier said than done. Yet, this is no excuse not to take on the challenge, especially when it is mandatory for a project's long-term success.

Competitiveness

The original call for 17 SK announced a sports project with 'no competitive pressure'. This never meant that a side was not allowed to score on another. However, sides are always switched around, or they constantly change as a mere result of a various people dropping in and out. Usually, at the end of a regular 17 SK session, there are no 'winners' and 'losers' going home. In this sense, competitiveness has never been a big problem in 17 SK. There have also never been any major arguments about whether a goal should count or not, whether a penalty kick should be given or not or anything similar. At times, competitiveness becomes an issue when two players fight for the ball, try to dribble past one another, etc. However, this almost always happens in good fun and between players who know each other well, and gentle reminders of the guidelines for play usually suffice if such personal micro-contests appear to get out of hand.

The more urgent question with regard to competitiveness is whether 17 SK should field teams in amateur tournaments and Sunday Leagues. In the summer of 2013, a 17 Sisters side joined a competition for the first time, when Club KG, a Stockholm DJ duo, organized a tournament in the fan zone near Sweden's national stadium during the Women's European Football Championships. 17 Sisters members have also discussed joining Stockholm's Women's Sunday League. 17 Mixed also wanted to participate in a tournament in the summer of 2013, namely the long-standing Stockholm Libertarian Football Cup; however, since the organizers had tightened the rules regarding female participation (each team was supposed to consist of at least 50% women), not enough teams registered and the cup was cancelled. This highlights the problems of gender balance in football even in radical circles.

The question of how participation in tournaments and leagues fits in with the non-competitive 17 SK ethics seems fairly easy to resolve. There is not the slightest indication

that such a participation would replace the weekly community games as the club's mainstay. If there are enough players who, on top of that, want to join competitions, why not? No one will be forced to. Besides, one's values do not have to be abandoned in tournament or league settings either. For example, playing time can be shared equally among all team members regardless of skill level. Wanting to win your games is natural and always makes competition more fun, but it does not have to outweigh the ambition of giving everyone a good time.

At this point, it is unclear whether a 'competitive wing' of 17 SK will develop and, if so, which form it might take. However, this hardly needs not be answered in advance, as the ones pursuing such a step will answer it themselves. In his piece about the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls, Roger Wilson writes thus:

There's a sense in which the club is one ever-unfolding social experiment. Most sports clubs or social organisations have a limited lifespan and often rise and fall pretty quickly, but nearly twenty years into the Cowboys I have no idea what or where it might lead to next or what the shape of the club might be in five years' time. Which, after all, mirrors the excitement of playing the 'beautiful game'. You never quite know what might happen next ...⁹

Conclusion

There are values inherent in football that can help us form and establish communities based on direct democracy, solidarity and, not least, fun. Under ideal circumstances, football is a great environment in which to experiment with the fusion of individual freedom and social responsibility. Football teaches people to combine their individual talents in the way most beneficial to the social good, and people with many different skills have to work together to make a team successful. Football also brings people together who might not get together in a social setting otherwise. It transcends language and class barriers, and is a much healthier social lubricant than alcohol. When opponents, spectators and the social environment of a team are included in this ethos, football can become an important part of community organizing in general. Last but not least, the fun aspect might appear trivial, but it is a crucial element of the grassroots football experience and must not be belittled as 'non-political'. The US Anarchist Football Association's variation on the famous Emma Goldman quote about not wanting a revolution in which she cannot dance, is telling: 'If I can't play soccer, I don't want any part of your revolution.'¹⁰

17 SK proves much of the above, but it also reveals the many challenges involved in any social community project: dismantling social norms, defining one's relation to formal institutions, developing appropriate organizational structures, and others. In any case, the activities of 17 SK have been a tremendously valuable learning experience: on an athletic level, many people have become better football players; on a social level, power dynamics have manifested themselves in ways that gave even seasoned activists new perspectives; on an activist level, it is rare to see projects flourish that have a clear political edge, yet exist outside of activists' usual comfort zones. The club has brought many positive results both for participants individually and for our neighbourhoods. We very much hope that we have not seen the end of the journey yet.

Notes

1. <http://forsjutton.se>.
2. For an interesting analysis of the riots in English see Thörn, "The Stockholm Uprising."
3. http://forsjutton.se/?page_id=252.

4. The role of transgender people in sports demands in-depth analysis, something we can, unfortunately, not provide within this text. We will therefore focus on male/female identities. This is not to neglect other identities, but to address issues we feel most competent to address.
5. Planka.fm is an offshoot of Planka.nu, one of Stockholm's most influential activist projects of the 2000s; Planka.nu provides a 'freerider insurance fund' and advocates a 'struggle for free public transportation' (<http://planka.nu/eng>).
6. Riksidrottsförbundet, "Idrotten i siffror 2012."
7. http://expo.se/2010/about-expo_3514.html.
8. Wilson, "The Easton Cowboys," 198.
9. Ibid.
10. Quoted from the US Anarchist Football Association website, anarchistsoccer.pbworks.com, which went offline a few years ago. The association's banner, which includes the quoted slogan, can still be viewed at <http://www.infoshop.org/anarchist-football> (accessed September 17, 2013).

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