

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN VOLUNTARY SPORTS CLUBS: POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN BRITISH TENNIS

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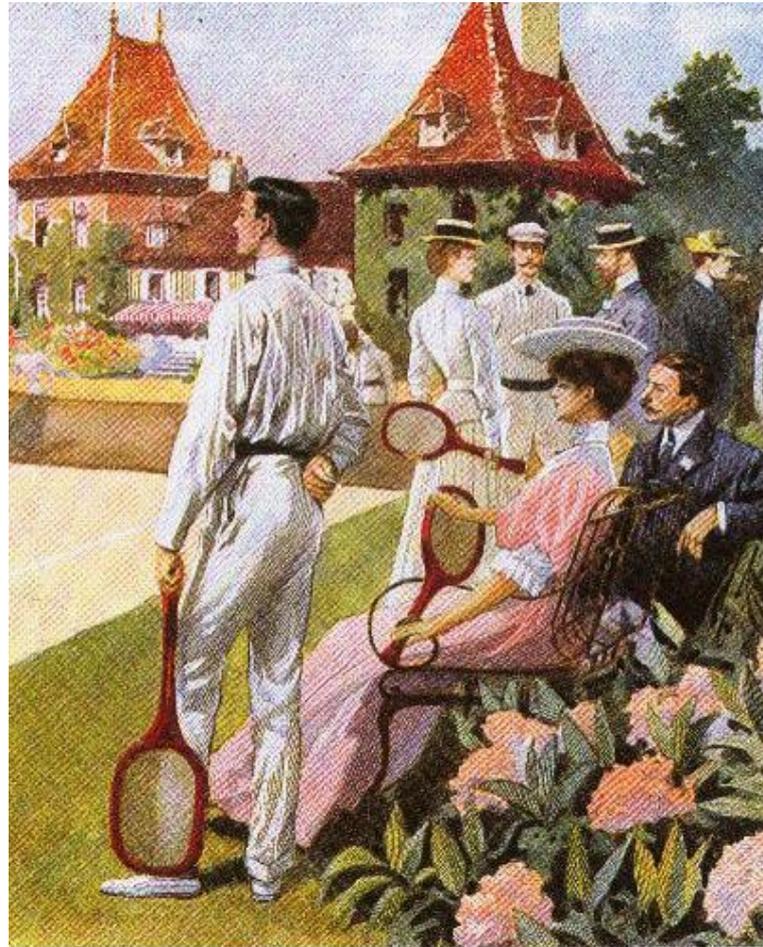
PRESENTATION AIMS

- Consider the changing relative autonomy of clubs throughout history
- Outline the issues surrounding social exclusion in British tennis clubs
- Consider changing LTA policies in this area
 - Rationale and theoretical underpinning
- Findings from ethnographic research 2005/06
 - Implementation in clubs
 - Consequences – unintended and undesired?
- Recent developments – steps in the right direction?



BRITISH TENNIS: 1870S-1960S

- Clubs – the ‘backbone’ of tennis (Holt, 1989):
 - Voluntary-run, amateur, self-selecting oligarchies
 - Private, members-only, socially exclusive
 - Purposeful selection of membership and leadership
- Outside the jurisdiction of gov’t or LTA



EARLY YEARS: CLUBS AND THE LTA

- LTA was the umbrella association for clubs
 - Subscription fee paid was for:
 - Assistance in organising tournaments and competitions
 - Maintaining facilities
 - Offering advice on retaining and attracting members
 - LTA made no stipulations with regard to:
 - Particular groups they could or could not exclude
 - Procedures for accepting new members
 - Regulations regarding playing attire, e.g. an 'all-whites' rule
- LTA's main goal was the standardisation of rules and playing procedures across its clubs



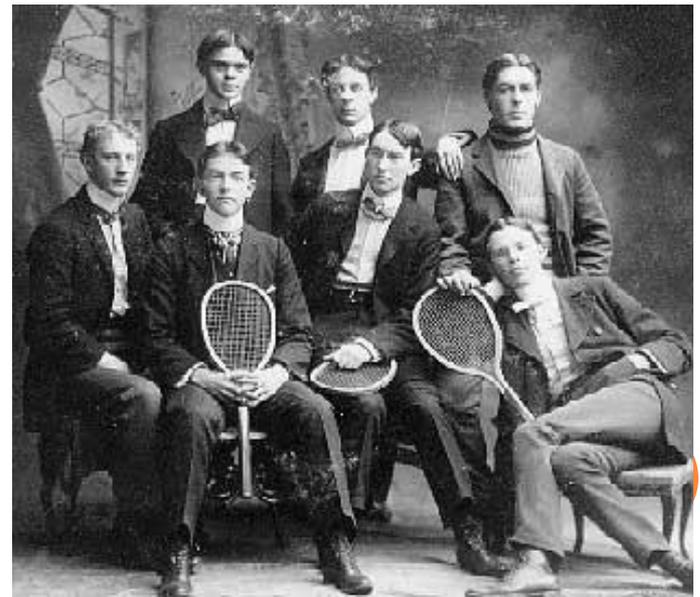
EARLY TENNIS CLUBS

- What was the role and purpose of clubs?
 1. A 'social function' – permitting socially-acceptable interaction between young and often unmarried men and women in a safe and healthy environment
 2. A 'sporting function' – permitting the practice and enjoyment of tennis whilst adhering to amateur rules and strict codes of behavioural etiquette
- Why were clubs valued by their members?
 - Symbolic representations of an individual's position in society (Lowerson, 1993)
 - Opportunities for social mobility and status enhancement – mixing with highly-placed people



BRITISH TENNIS: PRE-PROFESSIONALISM

- Inter-war years – New clubs formed that were:
 - More egalitarian in membership
 - More ‘performance’ driven
 - Competitions, coaches and ‘playing-in tests’ introduced
- Autonomy of voluntary clubs ensured by:
 - Prevalence of ‘old boy network’ (McKibbin, 1998)
 - Presiding over voluntary-run clubs as a natural extension of philanthropic duties
 - Continuous gov’t support/protection



OPEN TENNIS

1968 ONWARDS

- 1970s – Global tennis ‘boom’

- Professionalism, new commercial investment and TV exposure (Holt & Mason, 2000)
- The tennis celebrity:



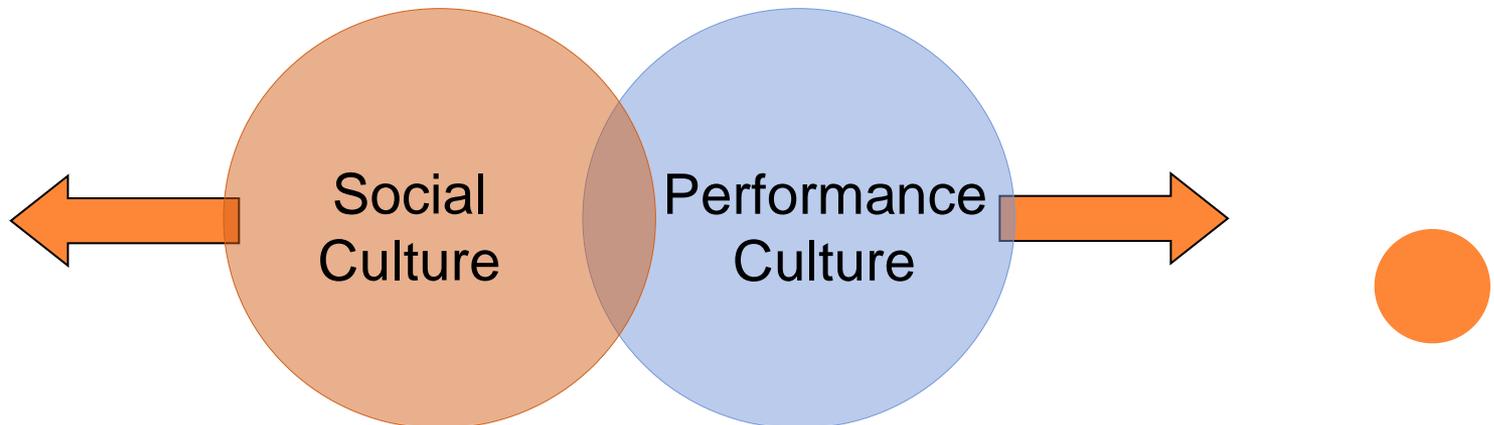
- 1980s – Consumerism

- Declining trend of voluntarism
 - Lusia (1998, p.67) wrote: “*With people indoctrinated in the ways of consumerism, many expect their leisure pre-packaged and off the shelf. They do not want to spend time painting clubhouses or mending fences before they can play tennis*”.
- New ‘commercial’ tennis clubs
- Increasing sector competition



COMPETING TENNIS CULTURES

- Tennis began to be pulled in two directions:
 - Lingering 'Social' culture
 - Driven by club members
 - Emphasis on adult's enjoyment and attaining social recognition
 - Burgeoning 'Performance' culture
 - Driven by LTA and commercialism
 - Emphasis on developing children's talent and promoting competition



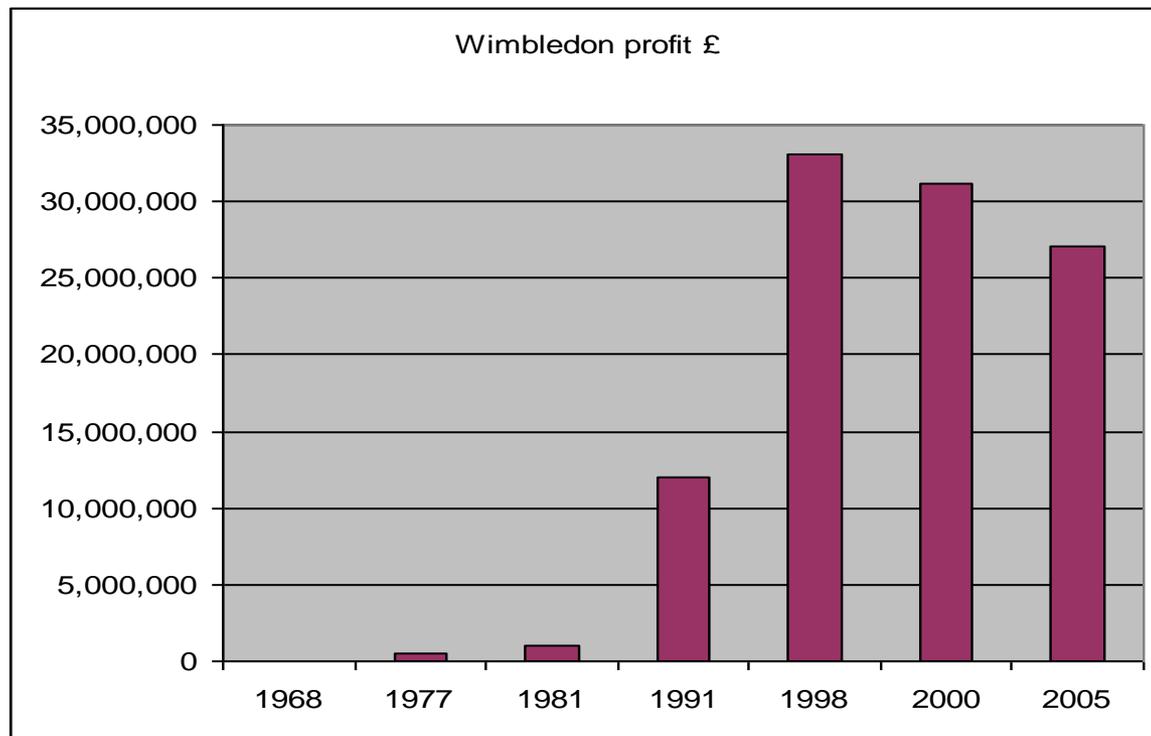
SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND PRESSURE FOR CHANGE

- The denial of tennis resources and playing opportunities for certain groups became an issue:
 - Facilities and equipment
 - Coaching and competition
 - Participation and club membership
- The LTA were forced to take this issue more seriously
 - Continuous failure at Wimbledon and Davis Cup
 - Falling international rankings
 - Pressure from external groups
 - Fans, media, sponsors, Wimbledon



BRITISH TENNIS: 1980S ONWARDS

- LTA finances improved with commercial success of Wimbledon, giving them more 'muscle' and influence, but also more responsibility



THE LTA'S CHANGING FOCI

- 1980s
 - Short tennis introduced in 1980
 - More **children** playing “to help widen the base of tennis in Great Britain” (LTA Annual Report, 1982, p.23).
 - **Elite-level objectives** always in mind
 - LTA did not want participation for its own sake, but in order to develop elite-level players
 - **Facilities**: Indoor Tennis Initiative - 1986
 - Goal of producing a ‘**Wimbledon champion**’ – first mentioned by LTA in 1989 Annual Report



THE LTA'S CHANGING FOCI

- 1990s
 - **Talent ID** through regional coaching structure
 - Developing the Junior Championships and expanding **junior tournaments** (LTA, 1990)
 - Rover tennis scheme – 1991
 - 1995 LTA strategy document: '*The Development of Tennis in Great Britain 1996-2001*', emphasised:
 - The shift from mass to **elite-level** objectives
 - "*The retention and progression of **children** is at the heart of this Development Strategy*" (LTA, 1995, p.7)
 - The first of nine 'action points' appeared "*the creation of a new **tennis club environment** open to all those wishing to play tennis*" (LTA, 1995: 5).
 - LTA 'Play Tennis' scheme – 1998
- 

THE LTA'S CHANGING FOCI

○ 2000s

- **CLUB VISION** – 2000, **clubs** to change internal structures:
 - Remove **membership restriction** and **dress codes**
 - Recruit qualified and licensed **coaches**
 - Develop **school-club links**
- **Mini-Tennis** – 2001
 - Re-launch of 'short tennis'
- **City-Tennis Clubs** – 2001
- RAW tennis (10-18 year olds) – 2005
- Strategy Doc: '*Blueprint for British Tennis*' – 2006
 - Reemphasised need to 'change **club culture**'
- 'Clubmark' – Adopted by LTA in 2007



LTA BARRIERS AND TARGETS – 2000-2010

Main Barriers for the LTA

- Cost of tennis
 - Or perceived cost of tennis
- Access to tennis
 - Clubs and restrictions
 - Coaching
 - Quality and cost
 - Talent ID
- Image of tennis
 - White, middle-class, stuffy and 'uncool'

Main Policy Targets

- Children
 - Inner-city children (social class barriers?)
 - Teenagers (high attrition rate)
- Clubs
 - Membership and dress restrictions
 - Subsidised coaching and subs for children
 - Exclusive and unwelcoming
 - 'Changing the 'club culture'



CHANGING AUTONOMY OF CLUBS

- Clubs were vital to LTA plans, so demands were placed to develop children's talent and encourage competition
 - Talent development vs. social exclusion
- Provision of funding was tightened, and benefits depended on clubs 'ticking boxes' to receive gov't funds



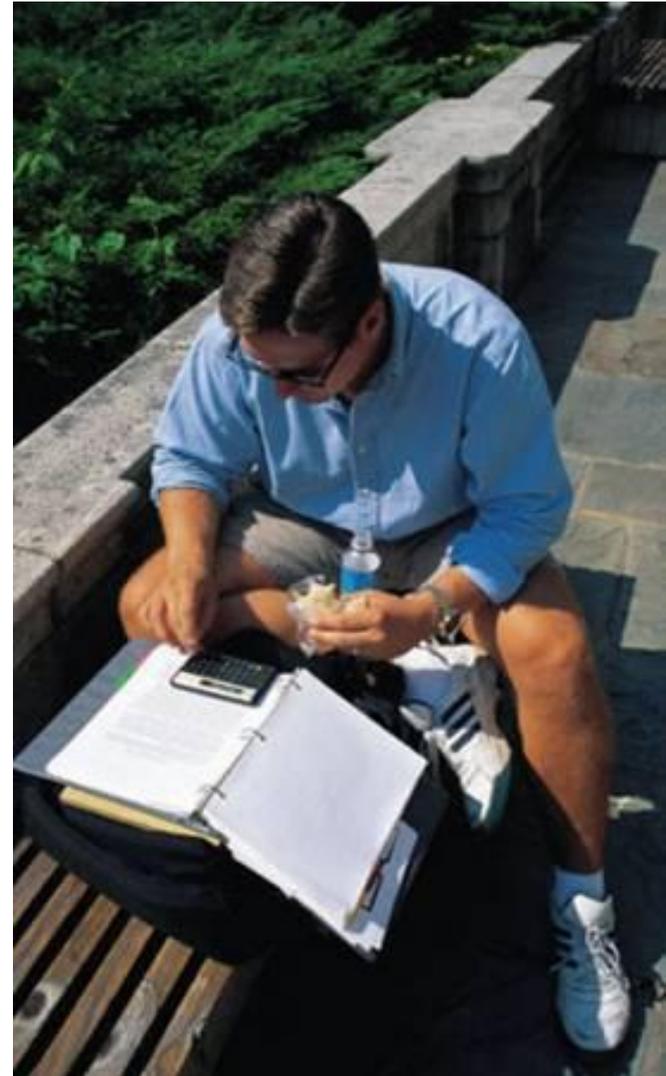
CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASING INTERVENTION

- Questions worth asking...
- How have LTA policies played out ‘on the ground’?
- Has social exclusion been tackled in tennis clubs?
- Are there swathes of potential champions in the making?
- Have relations improved between clubs and the LTA?



‘ETHNOGRAPHY’ IN A TENNIS CLUB

- Capturing over time:
 - Everyday routine
 - Norms and values
 - Hierarchy
 - Power relations and interdependencies
 - Going ‘beneath the surface’



ETHNOGRAPHY IN A TENNIS CLUB

- The club: *'West Regency Tennis Club'*
 - Known by county LTA to be socially exclusive and 'unfriendly' to children
- Methodology
 - 10 months full 'active' membership
 - My experiences as a new member were findings themselves



WHO IS EXCLUDED?

- Clear member stratification
 - Internal social hierarchy central to how the club functioned
- On the surface:
Adults vs. Children



- In reality:
'Established' vs. 'Outsiders'

GROUP IDENTITIES: THE 'ESTABLISHED'

- Shared history, strong bonds
- Internalised superior view of themselves
 - The 'core' members
- Identity based on 'minority of the best'
- Socially aspirational
 - Members recognise status attached to membership and hierarchical position
- Strict regulation of behaviour, especially...
 - When interacting with outsider groups
 - 'Pulling rank'
 - When in the presence of higher-status peers

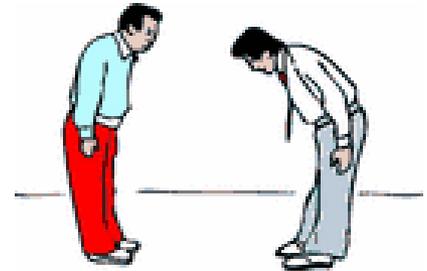
GROUP IDENTITIES: THE 'OUTSIDERS'

- No shared history
 - Little cohesion
 - High member attrition
- Internalised inferior view of themselves
 - Determined by established measures
 - Few means to create their own identity
- Identity based on 'minority of the worst'
- Less socially aspirational
 - They are there to play tennis and make friends
- Little understanding of group norms and values



HOW ARE THEY EXCLUDED?

- Embedded social hierarchy, based on:
 - Length of membership
 - Playing standard
 - Behaviour/etiquette and showing deference



- Structural: denied access to resources
 - Peak court usage, particularly the grass courts
 - Competitions and club teams
 - Play with all members
 - Invitations to social events
 - Equality within the clubhouse and bar
 - E.g. going rounds with drinks



- *“These guys are oblivious... or at least they don’t really care that other members are not getting the value for money that they are”* (David, new member)



HOW ARE THEY EXCLUDED?

- Social: denied share of the celebrated established group identity – a ‘sense of belonging’



- *“You walk in the door of the clubhouse and suddenly all eyes point at you. They don’t say it but they most definitely think it - ‘who are you, what do you want?’ They won’t come and talk to you and introduce themselves. You have to approach them and even when you do, you can see it in their eyes” (new member).*



THE STRUGGLE FOR ACCEPTANCE

- 'Fitting in' requires members accepting their subordinate positions
- Challenging the status quo or causing conflict goes against norms of acceptable behaviour
 - Aspiring outsiders sometimes accepted inferiority with 'puzzled resignation'
 - *"The club is for [the established members] and not us. But, I'm beginning not to mind"* (Wayne, new member).
- Established members made no attempt to help educate new members
 - Using their lack of knowledge of rules against them



THE FUTURE FOR WEST REGENCY TC

- ‘Social class’ was a determinant of access, but this only tells half the story
 - Once membership is paid for, methods of exclusion became more sophisticated and under the LTA’s radar
- Exclusion in the past helped bring members together, but now it threatened to destroy the club
- Paul, an established member who recognised the club’s plight – it needed funding but was unwilling to change – ran for chairman at the AGM:
- *“The resistance to change as evidenced tonight was huge. ‘The incumbent is always at an advantage’, Paul said to me after his loss... Before the election, members actually came up to Paul and challenged him: ‘You can’t do that. You can’t challenge him. This isn’t what we do here’”* (Paul, established member).



THE FUTURE FOR EXCLUSIVE CLUBS

- The need for *better* LTA policy – qualitative measures of investment suitability:
 - Considering respective histories of clubs
 - Investigating member, coach and committee relations, and possible effects of change on club ‘atmosphere’
 - Meaningful data gathered from new members
- Short ethnographic analyses or interviews perhaps?
 - Highlighting the problem in many sports where talent development is ‘supposed’ to stem from clubs
 - ‘Short-termism’



CONSEQUENCES OF LTA POLICY CHANGES

- Questions worth asking...
 1. How have LTA policies played out 'on the ground'?
 2. Has social exclusion been tackled in tennis clubs?
 3. Are there swathes of potential champions in the making?
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SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN TENNIS CLUBS

- Social exclusion has not been tackled!
 - It has become increasingly covert and hidden from the LTA's radar, giving them an even greater challenge
- LTA claim more juniors playing tennis now than ever before, but why should regular voluntary-run clubs be the main locations for talent development?
 - Pathways set out for them
 - Progression from child to adult player, via teenager
- *“Why do the LTA think tennis clubs will be able to produce performance players? Why do they put so much of their money into clubs? I mean, we’ll take it, because we have to, but we’re not a club to produce performance players. We’re here to have a good laugh”* (WRTC president).



WEAKENING LTA RELATIONS

- 'Bullying' tactics of the LTA
 - Impatient, over-expectant and aggressive stance
 - Forcing clubs to be Club Vision assessed
 - Alienating clubs that did not fit their funding criteria
 - Persuading clubs to employ a coach or adopt a programme, without consideration of its want by members
- Thoughtless funding
 - Spoiling players
 - Removing them from coaches, thus undermining their social position
 - Weakening relations between clubs and LTA



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