

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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1:0 for the environment

– Engaging football fans on tackling climate change

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Abstract

In general, the existence of anthropogenic climate change and the need for deeper societal transformations are widely accepted. Less agreement exists on how to best motivate the public to act in a way that allows for these transformations to happen. Currently, research stresses the potential of existing communities. This thesis argues that particularly one existing community has not been considered yet when it comes to engaging the public to take climate action: football fans. Coming together regularly in support of and showing a high level of identification with their team, fan groups have increasingly become an area of political mobilisation. However, until very recently, climate change has not been a major concern for fan groups, hence literature connecting football fans and climate change is rare. This study intends to fill this gap by assessing the potential of an environmental campaign called ‘Pledgeball’ encouraging football fans to commit voluntarily to pro-environmental lifestyle changes (ranging from buying seasonal food to installing solar panels) in support of their team. The thereby saved emissions from all fans are tallied, compared to the opposition, visualised in a league table and translated into cars taken off the road. Using surveys and in-depth interviews, the case study analysis shows that engagement with Pledgeball makes fans realise the impact they can have as a group. This makes them re-evaluate their role in tackling climate change resulting in further engagement with the topic, thus indicating a lot of untouched potential for mobilising existing communities to take climate action.

Keywords: mobilising climate action; collective action; public participation; social transformation; pro-environmental behaviour change; football fandom; non-league football; community

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1. Introduction

Numbers in football are crucial – which team scored more goals, how many minutes of the game are still left, how much money was spent on the club’s latest transfer? A different set of numbers within football is the foundation of the strategy of Pledgeball, an environmental initiative which connects the immense numbers of people passionate about football to climate action. This runs through their social media channels as follows:

400 fans watched Whitehawk beat Barton Rovers – 400 fans buying 2nd hand clothes equates to taking over 30 cars off the road (Pledgeball 2020a)

Just 2,000 fans halving the amount of meat they eat per week saves the same amount of carbon emissions as taking over 260 cars off the road (Pledgeball 2020b)

Over 11 million people play football in the UK – 11 million people limiting their showers to 5 minutes would save the same amount of CO2e¹ as taking over 831,700 cars off the road (Pledgeball 2020c)

These stats illustrate the huge impact seemingly small individual actions can have, especially when carried out by a larger group of people, such as the football fan community. In general, the existence of anthropogenic climate change and the need for deeper societal transformations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to keep global warming below 1,5°C are widely accepted. Yet less agreement exists about how to best motivate and support the public to act in a way for these transformations to happen. While a huge amount of people seems genuinely concerned about climate change, this concern does not necessarily translate into people restraining from carbon-intensive behaviours, also referred to as ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ (e.g. Gifford, Lacroix, and Chen 2018). On the contrary, when confronted with one of society’s biggest issues, people tend to feel overwhelmed and powerless, hence not taking action (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009; Roser-Renouf et al. 2014). Arguably, it is less about producing more and more knowledge, but about finding more successful ways of translating existing knowledge into actual climate action. As a result, a shift in analysis from the individual to the collective level is suggested, acknowledging in particular the significance of existing groups for mobilising collective climate action (Jans and Fielding 2018).

One of the largest forms of contemporary collective behaviour in many countries around the world is constituted by football fans (Lestrelin 2012; Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert 2020). Football fans represent a very interesting, yet not considered collective when it comes to

¹ CO2e stands for carbon dioxide equivalents (CO2e) which “is a term used for describing different greenhouse gases in a common unit. For any quantity and type of greenhouse gas, CO2e signifies the amount of CO2 which would have the equivalent global warming impact” (Brander 2012).

mobilising people to take climate action not at least because football itself is both a contributor to and victim of climate change (Goldblatt 2020). Coming together regularly in support of their team showing a high level of emotional attachment and identification, fan groups have increasingly become an “area of political mobilization” (Cleland et al. 2018, 9). Fan mobilisations have so far emerged around both topics directly related to football, the most recent one challenging the creation of a so-called European Super League (Ward 2021), and wider societal and political issues such as campaigns tackling racism or homophobia (Numerato 2018). Climate change, however, has until very recently not been a major concern within fan groups. In 2020 and 2021, environmental advances by fans have become apparent in, for example, the organisation of an online panel on fans and climate change by the European football network Football Supporters Europe (Football Supporters Europe 2021), the German fan initiative *Zukunft Profifußball* integrating ecological sustainability within their demands for Germany’s professional football governing bodies (Zukunft Profifußball n.d.), and the fan initiated sustainable stadium campaign of United Kingdom (UK)-based Huddersfield Town Supporters’ Association (HTSA 2021). Taking this as well as the in the aforementioned immense numbers in football into account, there seems to be a lot of untouched potential in terms of climate action mobilisation.

1.1 Aim and research questions

It is against this background that in 2019 an environmental initiative called Pledgeball was founded. Leveraging football fans’ potential to drive change and, making use of the regular fixture list, Pledgeball asks fans to make pro-environmental lifestyle ‘pledges’ in support of their favourite team. Their aim is it to demonstrate to fans the huge impact their even seemingly small individual changes can have for their own benefit, their football community and the environment, especially when carried out by a fan group as a whole. This study will focus on Pledgeball’s collaboration with their first pilot club, Brighton-based Whitehawk Football Club (FC) and argue, that looking into football – being a meaningful cultural pursuit for millions of people from the most diverse backgrounds who engage with their club on a regular basis – can provide a new opportunity “for reflecting on (...) how our actions collectively influence the planet and ourselves” (Leichenko and O’Brien 2019, 76). Therefore, this study can enrich the debate on how to mobilise a broader public to take climate action.

The purpose of this study is twofold: Firstly, to explore the significance of football fans as a promising yet so far understudied collective when it comes to motivating a group to engage in

pro-environmental action. Secondly, to assess Pledgeball as one of the first initiatives to try leveraging the potential of football fandom to mobilise climate action. The central questions guiding this thesis are therefore:

- 1) What characteristics of the football fan community does Pledgeball seek to leverage to mobilise climate action?
- 2) How have Whitehawk supporters experienced their engagement with Pledgeball?

1.2 Relevance to Global Studies

Climate change and related environmental issues are commonly referred to as global problems or risks and (most) relevant actors agree on the urgency of a joint effort to tackle those (Nederveen Pieterse 2013; Darian-Smith and Mccarty 2017). Although environmental concerns have been discussed by the United Nations since at least the 1970s, problems have arguably only grown and a real solution is still lacking. Therefore, new ways of addressing but also understanding climate change need to be considered. “Identifying global-scale issues, finding patterns in and connections between them, and proposing new ways to address these issues are some of the core functions of global studies as a field of inquiry” (Darian-Smith and Mccarty 2017, 30). Despite the global dimension of climate change, its causes “operate at a much smaller scale” (Ostrom 2016). Therefore, to truly tackle this global phenomenon we need innovative national, regional, and local efforts, not only because it takes too long to find a common strategy on the international level (*ibid*).

This thesis proposes to look at football and particularly its fans – with football being a game that is known globally yet played at the local, regional, national and international level – recognizing that on a regular basis many people across the world from the most diverse backgrounds come together, united by the passion for their football team often taking this passion into their everyday lives. Despite previous mobilisations around broader societal issues, this crowd has not mobilised around climate change yet, even though its impacts on the game are already present today (e.g. matches getting cancelled due to extreme weather conditions, or impacts on training conditions for players). Of course, it should not be concealed that the structures of professional football in particular also contribute to climate change. However, I argue that in terms of mobilising a broader public to take climate action, within football fan communities which represent one of contemporary society’s largest forms of collective behaviour there is still a lot of untapped potential offering an opportunity for both “[g]lobal reflection and local resonance” (Nederveen Pieterse 2013, 511). More generally,

Gillard et al (2016, 260) state that “certain conceptual blind spots (particularly regarding politics, power, agency, and ideas) have not only limited the scope of their analyses but have also led to problematic governance prescriptions” in terms of achievable and desirable climate-friendly futures. It is necessary to “address these interrelated aspects of social change in a balanced and interwoven way” (*ibid*, 252). With its “critical reflexivity and awareness of complexity; interdisciplinary synthesis (...); and thinking plurally” (Nederveen Pieterse 2013, 511) a global studies perspective is best suited to help achieve this and enable not only a more sustainable but also a just global future.

1.3 Delimitations

The choice was made to focus on one particular case, namely Pledgeball’s collaboration with Whitehawk FC (in the following also Whitehawk), particularly because Pledgeball is still in its early stage in which its strategy is constantly developing. This choice was also necessary with regards to the thesis’ time and space constraints. Consequently, ‘only’ the experiences of the Whitehawk supporter group are considered, even though supporters of other teams have been engaging with Pledgeball as well. Although this thesis may find some indications about Pledgeball’s impact, its purpose is not to assess actual, quantifiable outcomes in terms of, for example, savings in greenhouse gas emissions; nor does it assess to what extent people stick to their pledges. Instead, the thesis’ focus is on studying how people experience the initiative and engaging with the provided mechanism. Writing a thesis to inform an initiative’s strategy automatically sets some boundaries regarding the thesis’ direction. The process itself, however, remained independent. More generally, studying football fans during a global pandemic while not being able to be physically present and with matches being cancelled is a challenge in itself. Above all, these circumstances resulted in limited opportunities to reach out to fans. Due to this restriction and an overwhelming majority of survey respondents being generally in favour of taking environmental action, it was decided against including demographic factors (e.g. level of education or profession) into this study.

2. Background

2.1 Pledgeball

As part of my virtual research internship with the University of Brighton, I was introduced to Katie Cross, the founder of the environmental campaign Pledgeball in November 2020 that has started to collaborate with the Brighton based non-league football club Whitehawk in September 2020. Back then, most of the work has been done by the founder herself with

occasional voluntary support through family members and university students. At the time of writing, the Pledgeball team has grown, and the core team consists now (beginning of May 2021) of Katie Cross and two volunteers who look after Pledgeball's social media accounts. Just recently, Pledgeball's charity application was approved, yet the campaign is still unfunded. Since Pledgeball's launch in 2019, carrying out research assessing its impact became a crucial part of the strategy. Through my research internship, I have started carrying out research on behalf of Pledgeball and their partnership with their first pilot club Whitehawk FC. Whitehawk FC and Pledgeball launched their collaboration on the club's first home game of the season 2020/21, hence, despite the pandemic, fans were introduced to Pledgeball offline and were able to see an eco-banner saying 'Whitehawk are Pledgeballers' put up by the club in the ground (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Pledgeball eco-banner at the enclosed Whitehawk FC ground.²

Shortly afterwards, matches were postponed before the season was cancelled altogether which impacted the strategy for the pilot project and consequently my study. Pledgeball's general approach, however, remained untouched: to ask fans to go to the Pledgeball website, choose from a list of currently 65 environmentally friendly behaviours (see Appendix I) – ranging from using a reusable cup or a shampoo bar to installing solar panels or switching to a green energy supplier – and pledge to carry them out and maintain them (throughout the period of a year and ideally beyond that) in support of their team. After submitting their pledges, fans receive an email with a pledge summary. Pledgeball uses the quantity carbon dioxide

² This picture was provided by Katie Cross, Pledgeball.

equivalents (CO₂e) which “is a term used for describing different greenhouse gases in a common unit” (Brander 2012) to measure pledges’ impact. The CO₂e pledged to be saved by (individual) fans are then tallied and compared to the savings of the opposition (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: (Virtual) ‘Pledge-Off’ between the football clubs Peckham Town and Whitehawk (Pledgeball n.d.).

These savings are then further visualised in a virtual Pledgeball league table that shows fans how much they saved collectively and equates the number to cars taken off the road to make the abstract entity more tangible. The club whose fans pledge to save more CO₂e climbs up in the virtual league table. The initial plan, also for this pilot, was to connect the ‘Pledge Offs’ to the club’s fixtures making use of this inherent regularity within football to encourage and remind fans on every match day, particularly the home games, through, for example, announcements, supportive social media postings, the club’s newsletter or the match day programme to pledge. Incentives would be provided by the club and facilitated through Pledgeball in the form of prize draws. Ideally, competing clubs would get on board as well and encourage their fans to support them with pledges, hence making use of the competition element within football. Drawing on the language of football enabling a regular, competitive way of engaging a very heterogenous group of people on climate change, Pledgeball hopes to provide a solution, especially to people who tend to feel overwhelmed and powerless in the face of climate change and also appeal to those people who haven’t engaged with the topic yet. However, the pandemic prevented this offline plan to happen. Instead, to make the online Pledgeball experience as similar as possible to the offline strategy, Pledgeball and Whitehawk FC created the *Pledgeball Virtual Lockdown League*. Here, Whitehawk supporters were asked through a social media campaign to compete virtually in support of their team (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Instagram post encouraging Whitehawk fans to take on Peckham Town fans (Pledgeball 2021).

A Pledgeball introduction video was integrated into the Whitehawk FC TV show, which was newly established during lockdown running Friday evenings in the local Brighton TV. To represent Pledgeball, Katie Cross was furthermore invited to join the club's virtual weekly quizzes and, together with the club's commercial manager Kevin Miller, was invited onto a podcast to spread the word. In total, seven virtual matches were organised between January 30 and March 13, 2021, in which all fans together pledged to save 381666 kgCO₂e over the period of a year equating to taking 82 cars off the road. The Whitehawk fan base was responsible for 182612 kgCO₂e and thus over 39 cars taken off the road³.

2.2 Whitehawk FC, non-league football and the role of Brighton

Whitehawk Football Club (FC) is a “members’ club owned by a coalition of fans but with financial support coming from [a group of] directors” (Cleland et al. 2018, 75) based in East

³ This information stems from anonymized data collected through the Pledgeball website.

Brighton, United Kingdom. They currently play in the men's non-league (Isthmian League)⁴ and have an active fanbase of around 100 people. In the 2019/20 season the average crowd at home matches was around 325 but increased to 400 during the pandemic (which is probably partly a result of fans not being allowed at matches of the professional clubs and pubs and other places where people usually socialize being closed). Over the last years, non-league football has become more popular in general, and especially in England, when compared to the professional leagues, it stands out for its accessibility (Gerald 2020): Tickets are affordable and can be purchased on the day of the match, the atmosphere is friendly as there tend to be less rivalry and hatred, and players and club representatives are approachable. In addition, the clubs are often located close to where fans live as people commonly choose to support one of their local non-league teams. That is also an important distinction. Whilst fans supporting a professional football club are mostly 'born into it' meaning, for example, the whole family supported a particular club over generations and one was taken to matches by family members from early on, supporting a local non-league team is often an active decision (Cleland et al. 2018).

It is not necessarily the success of the team that influences people's decision. Often the social interaction on and off the pitch is more important, which is facilitated by the comparatively small crowds, so people know each other as one gathers and interacts on a regular basis on match days and can choose freely where to position oneself to watch the game (*ibid*). The regionalized organisation and hence the physical proximity between the clubs makes it easier for fans to also socialize with away fans (Gerald 2020). As non-league clubs like Whitehawk often have strong ties with the local community and support, for example, local foodbanks, supporters' voluntary commitment – without which non-league football would not be possible as they basically are responsible for most of the activities needed to keep the football going – goes beyond football (Cleland et al. 2018). And equally, a club's values often visualised in its activities in the local community can have an influence on people's choice to support a particular club. At Whitehawk, for example, both supporters and the club stress the importance of anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist values and beliefs, which is also visualised on the concrete stairs at the enclosed ground (see Figure 4). Consequently, football is approached as something that is for **all** people.

⁴ For an overview of the English Football Pyramid System see MyFootballFacts' detailed chart (MyFootballFacts n.d.). In the season 2021/22, Whitehawk FC plays at the 8th level.



Figure 4: Visualised values of Whitehawk FC and its supporters.⁵

These inclusive, tolerant stands, at least among the more active Whitehawk supporters and particularly the self-declared group of ‘Ultras’⁶, is important to keep in mind in view of this study, as it is likely to influence how people respond to a partnership with an environmental campaign.

Another factor with the potential to influence people’s receptiveness to an environmental campaign in the context of this study is the role of the city the pilot football club is based in. Even though I was not able to travel to Brighton physically, through the conversations I had with my internship supervisor, people we have been working with and the interviewees, I got a sense of the special role of the city. It was often mentioned that, in 2015, Brighton and Hove became the first city in the United Kingdom with a Green-led council (The Green Party n.d.) and is also currently run by the Greens (BBC 2020) indicating a certain pro-environment electorate among the citizens. The city on the English south coast is known for its inclusivity and tolerance and is sometimes referred to as ‘LGBTQI capital of the UK’ (e.g. Holtz 2019) or an ‘epicentre of freedom’ (Miller 2020) likely attracting people to whom these values are important. These people may in turn influence the self-conception of a local football club like Whitehawk FC. Unlike the rest of the city, Whitehawk is an area in East Brighton which is seen locally as having a bad reputation being considered “one of the most [socio-economically] deprived areas of the country” (Drew 2010). The club does not only see a geographical

⁵ This picture was provided by Kevin Miller, commercial manager of Whitehawk Football Club.

⁶ Ultras represent “an organised [and highly emotional] style of fandom, typically associated with football” (Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert 2020, 3).

responsibility to tackle this reputation and dedicates a lot of its activities to that purpose, hence the inclusion of the people living in the Whitehawk estate in particular.

3. Previous research

3.1 Mobilising the public to take climate action

Over the last years, many different strategies have been developed and implemented to raise people's awareness on climate change and the necessity to do something about it. Many of these strategies did not achieve more than a short-term effect (Abrahamse et al. 2005; Rees and Bamberg 2014). While some campaigns were based on the assumption that people lack information, ('information-deficit model') resulting in simply providing people with more information (Moser and Dilling 2011), other campaigns targeted individuals without recognizing the broader social context they are embedded in (Kenis and Mathijs 2012), and yet others hoped to provoke pro-environmental actions through fearful messaging (O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009). To make strategies more successful, the reasons of people's inaction have been analysed (e.g. Gifford 2011; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Landry et al. 2018; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, and Whitmarsh 2007) as well as efficient means in terms of motivating people to take action (e.g. Grilli and Curtis 2021; Moser 2016; Steg and Vlek 2009; Sussman, Gifford, and Abrahamse 2016) revealing that people are generally concerned about climate change, yet this concern has not translated into action ('attitude-behaviour-gap') (e.g. Bouman et al. 2020; Gifford, Lacroix, and Chen 2018; Whitmarsh, Seyfang, and O'Neill 2011). It further made apparent barriers on a personal, practical and structural level.

As one result, strategies increasingly started to draw on the positive influence of group processes. It is particularly comparisons with trusted in-group members that, if the individual's identification with the group is high, seem to increase the likelihood that a person adopts behaviours and norms of the respective group "which may support or undermine pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours" (Jans and Fielding 2018, 236). This observation underscores the increasing shift from individualistic to collective approaches with climate change being increasingly framed as an issue that relies on collective rather than individual efforts. The growing integration of social sciences and humanities with its literature on social transformations and change into the climate change discourse long being dominated by the natural sciences, further encouraged this shift towards the collective (Leichenko and O'Brien 2019). Informed by this and the lessons learned from previous attempts to mobilise people around climate change, Stoknes (2015, 107), for example, concludes that new strategies need

to be “as social, interactive, and local as possible”. In line with that, researchers advocate for the integration of dialogue and participatory processes (e.g. Gramberger et al. 2015; O’Brien, Hochachka, and Gram-Hanssen 2019; Poulter et al. 2009) and by doing so stress people’s agency and therefore their role as subjects of rather than objects to change. It is also important to acknowledge that there is no one size fits all strategy, thus messages and strategies need to be tailored to a specific group’s needs, their worldviews, values and beliefs (e.g. Abrahamse and Matthies 2018; Moser 2016; Moser and Dilling 2011). Worldviews are thereby understood as people’s “general way of viewing themselves and the world around them” (Schlitz, Vieten, and Miller 2010, 18) being shaped by “[g]enetic tendencies, religion, culture, and geographic region, together with all the experiences people have both internally and in relationship to their environments” (*ibid*). Furthermore, the significance of narratives and the influential power of stories we tell about climate change is stressed (e.g. O’Brien, Hochachka, and Gram-Hanssen 2019; Stoknes 2015; Veland et al. 2018) as well as the role of emotions and identities (e.g. Chapman, Lickel, and Markowitz 2017; Taufik and Venhoeven 2018; Thomas, McGarty, and Mavor 2009; Veland et al. 2018). Linking this to the above identified barriers, these recommendations address mostly the personal and practical level. Yet, for these to have a meaningful impact, structural support in the form of policies, infrastructural and other incentives is argued to be crucial (e.g. Moser and Dilling 2011; O’Brien 2018; Woiwode et al. 2021).

Despite these findings and the tendency to focus increasingly on groups, “many practical behaviour change initiatives still focus on individual contexts, demonstrating a fundamental knowledge gap between what is known to create meaningful behaviour changes with what is applied in practice” (Axon et al. 2018, 584). However, there have been alternative strategies developing over time taking the above-mentioned recommendations into account. The *Transition Towns* movements aimed “at mobilizing community action and fostering public empowerment and engagement around climate change, with the objective of preparing for a transition to a low-carbon economy” (Rees and Bamberg 2014, 467) is a very prominent example for so-called community-based strategies. Moreover, there are also smaller scale projects applying dialogue-enhancing measures like the UK-based carbon conversations (Carbon Conversations n.d.), initiatives that are using, for example, arts as a facilitator to communicate climate change highlighting the importance of passion and emotions for successful behavioural change (e.g. Gabrys and Yusoff 2012; Galafassi, Tàbara, and Heras 2018; Lesen, Rogan, and Blum 2016; Shrivastava, Ivanaj, and Ivanaj 2012), and change

facilitating experimental approaches (e.g. cChallenge n.d.; Klimaschutz Gemeinsam Wagen n.d.).

What most of these approaches have in common is that they make use of existing groups and communities. This does not only allow to make use of the group processes and tailoring the campaign to the group's needs, in most cases it creates a safe environment for people to talk about their experiences and ask questions. Another similarity is their focus on, intentionally or not, shifting individual and collective values, beliefs and worldviews which have been identified as both significant motivators and constraints to people's attitudes and behaviours (not just in the environmental context). It is argued that changes regarding people's worldviews and beliefs cannot be forced (O'Brien and Sygna 2013). To facilitate such changes, Stoknes (2015, xiv) emphasizes the significance of creating "curiosity, empathy, and focus on finding some common ground". Consequently, the aim of most of the just introduced approaches goes beyond the reduction of carbon-intensive behaviours by actually addressing underlying drivers of climate change through "challenging mindsets, norms, rules, institutions, and policies that support unsustainable resource use and practices" (Leichenko and O'Brien 2019, 43). Such 'integrative approaches' draw particularly on "human agency and collective action" (*ibid*, 192).

3.2 Football and football fandom

Having outlined the importance of engaging existing social communities on collective climate action, especially the ones with which individuals' level of identification is high, it is quite surprising that only one study (Baldwin 2010) has linked one of the largest forms of collective behaviours in contemporary society worldwide, football fans (Cleland et al. 2018; Lestrelin 2012), to this debate – despite the huge body of literature especially within the field of sociology on football in general (e.g. Brand, Niemann, and Spitaler 2013; Burdsey 2011; Cleland 2015; Doidge 2015; Giulianotti 1999; Goldblatt 2007; Hughson et al. 2016) and football fans in particular (e.g. Cleland et al. 2018; Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert 2020; King 2000; Millward 2012; Numerato 2018). Against the background of a seemingly increasingly individualistic society, Delanty (2018) argues that new forms of community are forming around faith, ethnicity, gender, lifestyles and consumption through which football can be included. Consequently, millions of people all over the world come together on a regular basis to collectively watch a football game. According to Mason (1988, 118), football "often contributes to an individual's sense of identity with or belonging to a group or collectivity". Many supporters would probably agree that "being a supporter is a key part of their 'real' lives:

a regular, *structuring* part of their existence that enables them to feel belonging in the relative disorder of contemporary social formations” (Brown, Crabbe, and Mellor 2008, 308) indicating a high level of identification and deep (emotional) attachments to their team. Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert (2020, 22) refer to football fandom as “an extension of the self”. They argue that “[o]ntologically, the team becomes an extension of the individual.” This indicates not only a high emotional involvement of many supporters but also football playing a key role in people’s everyday lives off the pitch (Stone 2007), explaining why “supporters do ‘throw themselves’ into football communities, and do so with varying degrees of commitment and enthusiasm” (Brown, Crabbe, and Mellor 2008, 309). This holds true especially for the context of non-league football, which could basically not exist without the voluntary commitment of the supporters that often continues off the pitch (Cleland et al. 2018). At this level in particular, although football is the reason for people to gather on a regular basis, the social aspect of meeting “friends and acquaintances, combined with passionate atmosphere” (*ibid*, 86) helps to establish a sense of belonging among the individual supporters and keeps the group together. While literature on the phenomenon of hooliganism (e.g. Armstrong 1998; King 2001; Kossakowski 2017) shall not be concealed, it is research on supporters’ previous mobilisations that is of interest in the context of this study. In addressing both topics directly linked to their football experience (e.g. ticket prices and allocation, policing, plans to reorganise leagues) (e.g. Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Millward and Poulton 2014) and wider societal and political issues (e.g. campaigns to tackle racism or homophobia) (Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert 2020; Numerato 2018) football fan groups have already shown to be “an area of political mobilization” (Cleland et al. 2018, 9), yet hitherto not in terms of climate change.

My literature research only yielded one study connecting football supporters with climate change. Although Baldwin (2010) looked at a campaign that linked supporters of a (professional) football club to an environmental campaign and identified the football supporter community as a promising unit of analysis – due to their group characteristics, previous mobilisations around social issues and their potential to positively influence the creation of social capital defined as “shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” (OECD 2001, 41) – in this campaign supporters only played a passive role. Moreover, Baldwin’s assessment of the campaign does not go beyond the level of individual behavioural change which has also to do with the campaign’s nature. It followed a top-down approach with climate change being framed as an energy-saving issue prioritizing

people's desire to save money over their environmental concerns. The study's focus was on immediate, short-term effects, neglecting fans' agency as well as the impact the campaign might have had beyond the stated goal of the campaign. Similarly, the report on supporter's environmental awareness by Daddi et al. (2020, 11) which assessed 1423 fans in Sweden and Italy and is seen by the authors as "the first step for a process that aims to trigger positive behavioural change on people" seems to follow a rather passive understanding of fans. It is this remarkable dearth in the scholarship – the potential of mobilising football's social community for climate action – that this study seeks to start addressing. It will do so with a case study of a pioneer in this field, Pledgeball, operating in what is arguable a particularly conducive environment: an engaged football club (Whitehawk FC) in a relative green and progressive British city (Brighton).

4. Theoretical framework

After outlining the thesis' understanding of climate change, in a first step, Rees and Bamberg's (2014) model of determinants for participation in collective climate action is discussed that will help to answer the first research question in a relatively straightforward way. The second part of the theory chapter aims to situate Pledgeball within approaches aiming at tackling climate change drawing on O'Brien and Sygna's (2013) three spheres of transformation framework. Moreover, informed by the collected data as well as previous research in the field, the concept of transformative learning is used to make sense of people's experience with Pledgeball.

4.1 Climate change

Before the individual concepts are discussed below, this section briefly attends to this thesis' understanding of climate change which, in addition to Pledgeball's design and the gathered data, informed the choice of the concepts. Increasing greenhouse gas emissions, stemming to a huge extent from human activities, are identified as the "main driver of climate change" (European Commission 2016). Consequently, the predominant discourse stresses the reduction of those emissions (e.g. the need to keep global warming below 1,5°C (*ibid*)) focusing on the environmental dimension of climate change. This thesis, however, understands climate change as both an environmental and social issue, hence tackling it "requires challenging mindsets, norms, rules, institutions, and policies that support unsustainable resource use and practices" (Leichenko and O'Brien 2019, 43) in addition to rather technical solutions focused on humans' carbon-intensive behaviours. Applying an interdisciplinary approach to solve a complex issue like climate change is also in line with the field of global studies. This also influences what is

considered an appropriate, realistic and desirable response to tackle climate change. Building on Wright, Taylor and Moghaddam's (1990, 995) understanding of collective action as something that a group member engages in "anytime that he or she is acting as a representative of the group and the action is directed at improving the condition of the entire group", this thesis considers all activities benefitting the environment (e.g. behavioural changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or the participation in a protest to pressure politicians to act) and carried out by a group of people as collective climate action.

4.2 Determinants for collective climate action

Building on collective action literature and particularly on the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) (Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008), Rees and Bamberg (2014) analysed a sample of 538 German citizens' intention to participate in a community-level climate protection campaign. Figure 5 shows the four key determinants identified with a potential to mobilise "people to actively participate in collective climate protection action" (467), especially those who have not been engaged in the topic of climate change yet: "**collective efficacy beliefs** and **group-based emotions** qualified as significant predictors of participation intention and were, in turn predicted by **social identity**, which also retained a direct link with participation intention. However, **perceived participation norms** [(social norms)] fully mediated this direct link and were by far the most powerful predictor of participation intention in the full model" (*ibid*, 470-71).

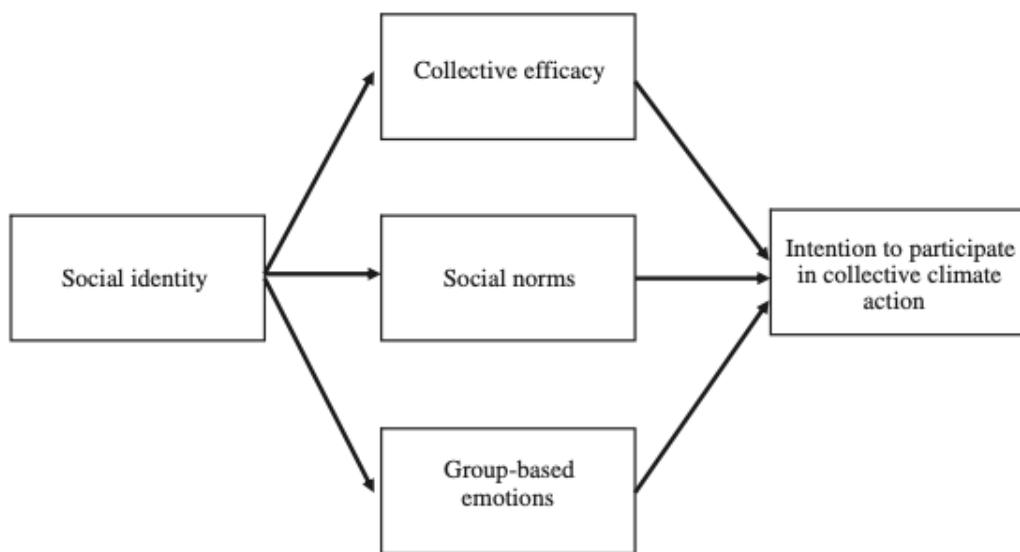


Figure 5: Determinants of the intention to participate in collective climate action (Rees and Bamberg 2014, 469).

Social norms are commonly referred to as informal "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain human behaviour" (Cialdini and Trost

1998, 152). The influence of these norms (not just) on pro-environmental actions depends on, for example, the norm's salience but also the extent to which the individual identifies with this particular group – suggesting that comparisons with in-group members are quite powerful in terms of influencing individual actions (Keizer and Schultz 2018). Rees and Bamberg made use of this and found that expectations of significant reference persons in one's group have an impact on our intention to participate in collective climate action.

The perception that a person has about a collective's efficacy which is tied to a person's belief that a group is capable of achieving its goal(s) through a joint effort "will influence what people choose to do as a group, how much effort they put into it, and their staying power when group efforts fail to produce results" (Bandura 1982, 143). Within the context of collective climate action such goals that are to be evaluated in terms of collective efficacy can be pressuring politicians to pass regulations to protect the environment but also motivating more people to adapt and maintain pro-environmental behaviours.

While collective efficacy beliefs cover a rational pathway, with the integration of group-based emotions the authors acknowledge that particularly environmental behaviour does not always follow a rational motive (Taufik and Venhoeven 2018). Often, positive or negative feelings associated with a certain behaviour seem to have a bigger impact on whether or not (groups of) people behave in a certain way than fact-based arguments (*ibid*). In the context of collective climate action, for instance, evidence suggests that the underlying motivation to engage in a collective activity is driven by guilt and shame leading people to "critically reflecting own behaviors or repairing damage that has been done" (Bamberg, Rees, and Schulte 2018, 192).

A denominator with potential to influence the just described predictors and people's intention to participate directly is social identity, "the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1974, 69). Rees and Bamberg consider a specific form of social identity, namely 'sense of community' as having an influence on whether or not people engage in collective climate action. It is defined as "the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure" (Sarason 1974, 159 cited in Rees and Bamberg 2014, 468). While in their model, this determinant had only moderate explanatory power as identification with their neighbourhood was for a majority of

the sample rather low, evidence from other studies suggests, that the higher a person's identification with a group, the more influence a group membership and the interaction with people belonging to one's in-group has on, for example, individual behaviours and attitudes (Jans and Fielding 2018). Hence, finding the communities people identify with very strongly seems promising in this respective.

4.3 The three spheres of transformation

Pledgeball's officially stated aim is to prompt people into pro-environmental lifestyle thus behavioural changes. However, as this study is the first one to assess Pledgeball's impact, a more holistic framework, that goes beyond the behaviour change dimension, is needed to first of all situate Pledgeball within the various approaches aimed at tackling climate change. O'Brien and Sygna (2013) offer a framework that comprises three spheres of transformation heuristic. As such, it does not only acknowledge different dimensions for transformation or change to happen – practical, political, and personal – but also emphasizes their constant interplay. In short, what is considered a meaningful response in the practical sphere influences and is influenced by broader systems and structures that make up the political sphere. Also, the way how we as individuals and collectives interact with each other, how we understand the world around us, the personal sphere, equally influences the practical and political sphere. Figure 6 visualises this interdependency of the three spheres. Following the authors, although it may not become visible on paper, these spheres are not flat but "embedded within one another" (O'Brien and Sygna 2013, 5) with the order being as follows: "the practical sphere is at the core, where the targets or goals are located; the political sphere represents the enabling/disenabling conditions; and the personal sphere captures individual and collective "views" of systems and solutions" (*ibid*).

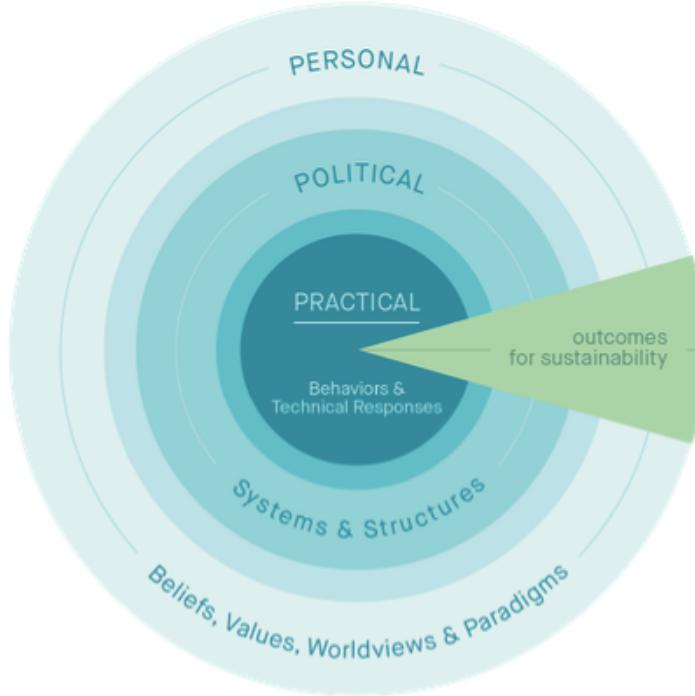


Figure 6: The three spheres of transformation framework (O'Brien and Sygna 2013, 5).

In detail, this means that the **practical sphere** comprises all sorts of behavioural and technical solutions aiming at contributing to tackling climate change including “behavioral changes, social and technological innovations, and institutional and managerial reforms” (O’Brien and Sygna 2013, 4). What all of these proposed solutions have in common and what makes them so attractive is their production of easily observable results which can be quantified and hence follow the predominant logic of success measurement (e.g. GDP). However, purely focusing on for example changing people’s diets or promoting sustainable transportation without taking into account potential constraints at the political or personal sphere bears the risk to impede the successfulness of practical responses to climate change. If one, for example, decides to use public transport instead of one’s own car (practical sphere), the provision of supportive structures at the political sphere has an influence on the likelihood of committing to this behavioural change.

It is “social and cultural norms, institutions, and governance systems that shape behaviors, actions and investments” (Leichenko and O’Brien 2019, 181) and that make up the **political sphere**. Consequently, it is the place where roadmaps such as the Paris Climate Agreement are negotiated and where then, for instance, regulations and laws are passed that either create enabling or disenabling conditions for responses at the practical sphere. With regards to the example of switching to public transport, the creation of supporting (infra)structure including

a bus stop nearby, good connections, and reliable departure times can facilitate the behavioural change at the practical level. The absence of such structures would make the practical transformation more difficult.

However, a decision like using public transport instead of one's private car depends to a huge extent on both our individual and collective beliefs, values and worldviews that determine our understanding of and interaction with the people but also the broader environment, including nature, around us (O'Brien and Sygna 2013). Whether or not we consider switching to public transport at all depends on whether or not we consider, for example, environmental protection as important. At this **personal sphere**, it is very difficult to force change. At best, people come to the realisation themselves or are enabled to see that change is necessary through, for example, transformative education (*ibid*).

4.4 The concept of transformative learning

Based on the literature review and the content of the data collected, a further concept, the concept of transformative learning, is introduced to help making sense of people's experience with Pledgeball. “[P]rocesses that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualises and interacts with the world” (Hoggan 2016, 77) are thereby referred to as transformative learning which comprises “theories that address personal, social, or cultural transformation” (*ibid*). It is particularly the learning outcomes that are of interest to this study. Reviewing 206 articles, Hoggan found 28 recurring outcomes that he, based on their appearance, ranked and grouped into the often overlapping categories of worldviews, self, epistemology, ontology, behaviour, and capacity. *Worldview*, in line with Schlitz, Vieten and Miller's understanding of a worldview as combining “beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values and ideas to form a comprehensive model of reality” (2010, 19), comprises “shift[s] in orientation, which emphasizes what a person is paying attention to” (Hoggan 2016, 70). This can, in turn, result in an increased awareness about a new topic. More *self*-centred changes that could be observed were for example a re-evaluation of people's relationships with others but also the world, including the environment around them. Related to that, regular outcomes were “a greater sense of empowerment and responsibility” (*ibid*, 72) as well as changes with regards to how individuals perceive themselves not seldomly resulting in shifts to their identities. Changes related to epistemology and thus the cognitive processes of knowing can be caused through a “profound engagement with unfamiliar places and experiences” (Morgan 2010, 249) while the ontological dimension comprises particularly changes in

emotional reactions to a person's experiences. Another recurring outcome is changes in *behaviour* that can be the result of the confrontations and changes in the above-mentioned areas leading to new perspectives that people then start to act to accordingly. The last theme, *capacity*, includes changes to people's consciousness which Newman (2012, 43) describes as "shift from unthinking, unspoken acceptance of things as they are to an articulate and passionate participation in a world that can change". Coming back to Hoggan's definition of transformative learning one can then link particularly outcomes in reference to *ontological* and *self* to changes in the way a person experiences, outcomes in reference to *worldview* and *epistemology* to the way a person conceptualises, and outcomes related to a person's *behaviour* to the way a person interacts with the world (Hoggan 2016).

Additionally, O'Brien, Hochaka, and Gram-Hanssen (2019, 276) identify factors that seem to have a positive impact on people's engagement with change and hence its realisation and maintaining in a "facilitated change experiment"—the *cChallenge*—conducted with 82 students at the University of Oslo: Allowing people to choose the change they want to commit to was found to be crucial and so was the facilitation of change through an experimental design that created a safe, non-judgemental space to explore and ask questions. Thus, dialogue among (not only) the participants was enabled, and it provided them with a less controversial 'justification' for their behavioural changes further generating curiosity even among people who don't care about climate change. Social norms were found to both encourage and restrain people from changing and at least equally important was the existence of supportive structures providing, for example, attractive alternatives to using one's own car. It is particularly in conversations with others that participants realised how they mutually influenced not only each other but also people who were not part of the experiment. Providing the students with the opportunity to reflect on the experience helped them to re-evaluate their approach towards change (e.g. that it is not about perfection) and to see the interplay of practical, political and personal spheres. The *cChallenge* has been applied to different, also non-academic contexts such as municipalities in Norway (*cChallenge* n.d.).

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design and methods

This study follows an abductive, case-centric design, using Pledgeball's collaboration with their first pilot club Whitehawk FC, particularly the period of the *Lockdown League*, allowing to focus on a selected group of supporters and their engagement with Pledgeball. Information

drawn from a specific observation, as suggested by Gerring (2004), can allow for conclusions to be drawn about similar cases which, in this context, could inform Pledgeball's and other initiatives' strategies aiming at engaging football fans from other clubs in climate change. To obtain such specific information, qualitative methods such as participant observations and interviews are typically applied (Bryman 2012). In this case, two rounds of interviews, one at the beginning and one at the end of the *Lockdown League* were conducted through Zoom. With the officially stated aim of Pledgeball to bring about behavioural change by asking fans to make pro-environmental lifestyle pledges in support of their favourite team, integrating surveys (one prior to and one at the end of an intervention) to assess whether or not people's behaviour changed, seemed necessary (Gatersleben 2018; Gifford 2015). With matches being cancelled as a consequence of the pandemic, the survey was also expected to help approaching and identifying potential interviewees who otherwise would have probably been met during a football game. As a result, this study applies a mixed-methods approach using the quantitative method (surveys) to get a broader understanding of the fans perceptions on both their fandom and their environmental attitudes and identify people willing to take part in the qualitative follow-up interviews as the study's main aim is to get deeper insights into a certain group of people (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

5.2 Data collection

Surveys

The surveys were conducted using *Jisc online surveys* (Jisc n.d.). As the decision to write the thesis on Pledgeball was made shortly before the *Lockdown League*'s launch, the first survey (see Appendix II), had to be put together quite quickly and consisted of three parts: 1) People's fandom, 2) People's environmental awareness and attitudes, and 3) Demographics. The structure and questions were mostly informed by previous research on changing people's environmental attitudes and behaviours (Gatersleben 2018; Hine, Kormos, and Marks 2016; Taddicken, Reif, and Hoppe 2018) as well as an empirical study conducted by Daddi et al. (2020) who happened to assess professional football club supporters' environmental concerns in Italy and Sweden. Furthermore, my internship supervisor informed the questions about people's fandom and both the club and Pledgeball were able to add questions that partly overlapped with my own questions. This allowed for the survey to be framed as the club's first annual survey, which probably influenced the response rate in a positive way. Closed-ended items providing respondents with a selection of pre-determined options to choose from (Hine, Kormos, and Marks 2016) were particularly applied in the environmental awareness part of the

survey. Here, a rating scale response format was used which asked people to choose from a five-point Likert scale varying depending on the question from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, *not at all concerned* to *extremely concerned*, *never* to *always*, or *very difficult* to *very easy*. In some cases, open-ended questions were added to give respondents the chance to explain their choices in their own words (*ibid*). Five people, including both my internship and thesis supervisor, tested the survey before it was sent out and promoted through the club's social media channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook), its website, the member's WhatsApp group as well as the email newsletter on January 2, 2021. Participation was incentivised with entering a prize draw. In total, 65 people filled out the first survey, ten female and 55 male respondents. The majority of respondents stated to be 45 and older (see Figure 7).

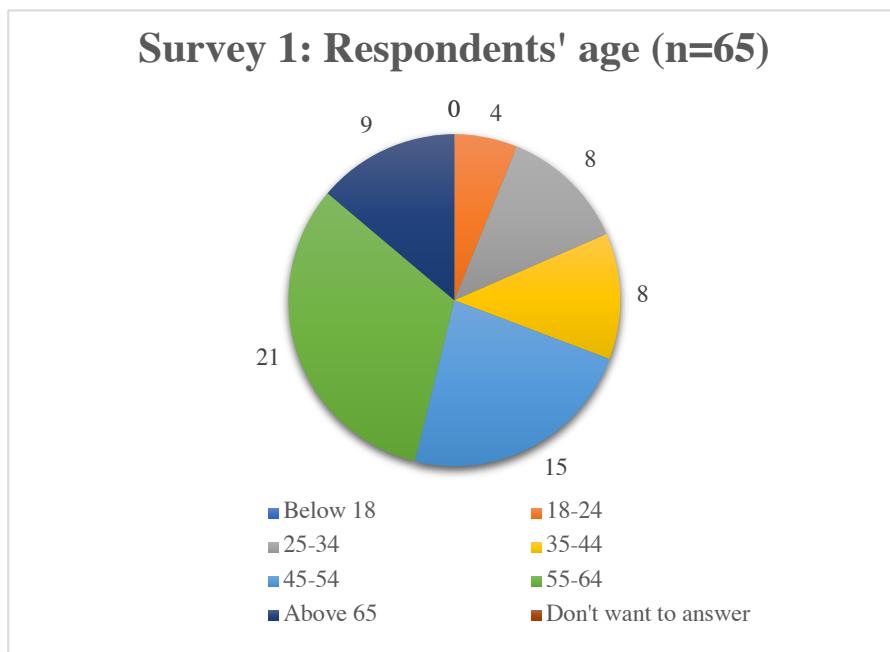


Figure 7: Age of first survey respondents.

The second survey's purpose (which was initially to assess whether participants' environmental perceptions have changed by asking the identical part 2 questions of the first survey) slightly shifted after gaining more insights into the initiative through participation in work meetings and having conducted the first interviews revealing that Pledgeball seems to provoke something that goes beyond behavioural change. Nevertheless, the second survey (see Appendix III), incorporated the identical part 2 questions and asked people more specifically about their Pledgeball experience. It was sent out after the end of the Lockdown League on March 26, 2021, incentivised and promoted through the same channels as the first survey, and completed by 15 people, four women and eleven men. Respondents of the second survey were

all 45 years and older (see Figure 8). Again, people could leave their email behind for follow-up interviews.

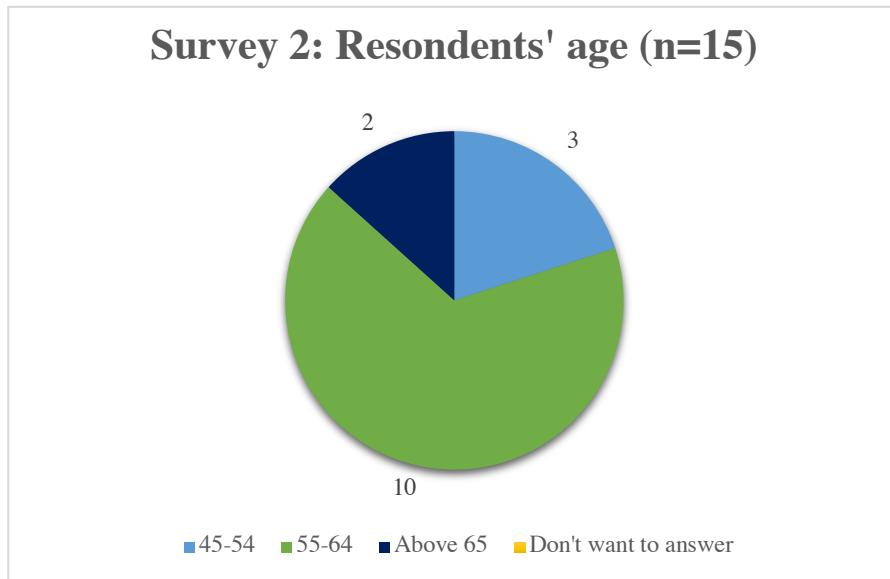


Figure 8: Age of second survey respondents.

Semi-structured interviews

As mentioned above, the surveys were used to identify potential interviewees. Although 29 people indicated their willingness to take part in follow-up interviews, ‘only’ 12 replied to the interview invitation sent to schedule an interview on Zoom. Most interviewees were familiar with Zoom – due to almost one year of lockdown – meaning that only minor technical difficulties such as occasionally frozen screens or empty batteries occurred. At the time of the second round of the interviews, I had gained more insights into the club, its supporters as well as the Pledgeball mechanism, which was not only beneficial in terms of rapport, it also allowed me to concretise my questions. Among the interviewees there were eleven supporters who can be differentiated in two ‘engaged volunteers’ with an active role at the club (Interviewee 1 and 2) while the others are referred to as ‘fans’. One interviewee was the club’s commercial manager. Of those twelve interviewees, ten of them men and two women, seven signed up and pledged. The majority of the interviewees was between 55 and 64 years old (see Figure 9).

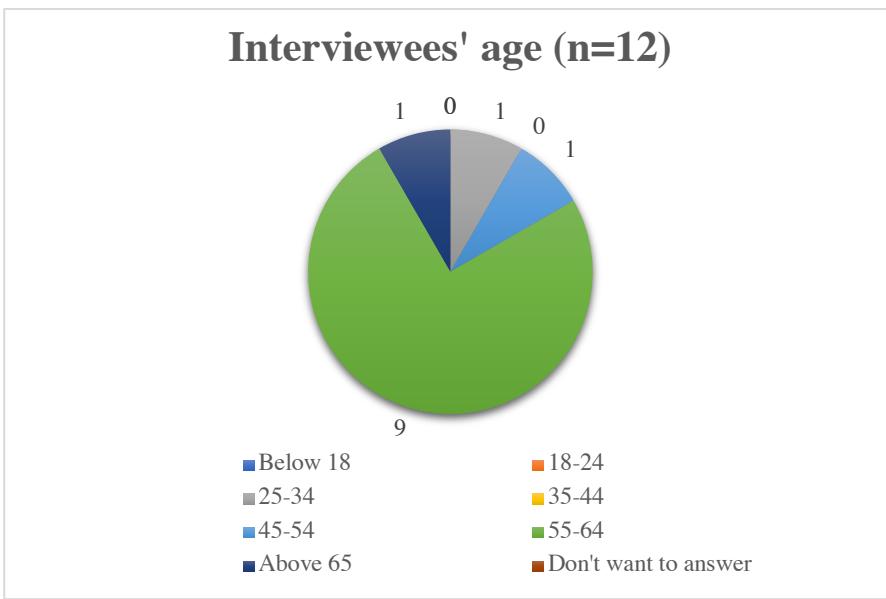


Figure 9: Age of interviewees.

In preparation for the interviews, I developed an interview guide (see Appendix IV) that was discussed with both my internship and thesis supervisor. Its structure followed the first survey closely, hence starting with questions about people's relationship with the club – a topic which they were expected to feel comfortable talking about, thus beneficial for creating rapport – before switching to more general questions about the environment, its connection to football and finally people's Pledgeball experience. Being included into the club's weekly quizzes on Zoom helped in terms of creating rapport as supporters were able to meet me before agreeing to an interview. The interviewing followed a semi-structured style in order for participants to be able to answer questions quite freely but still in a way that would allow the researcher to make comparisons between people's answers (Bryman 2012). This also allowed to adapt the question order and/or make use of probs which has turned out to be crucial as people's relationship to the club but also to the environment and Pledgeball differed. The first round of interviews was conducted at the end of February/early March. Unexpectedly, while of the eight interviewees only three had heard of Pledgeball before, two of them – the 'engaged volunteers' – pledged which can partly be explained with the club's failure to publish a statement informing and encouraging fans (especially the ones who are not that active on social media) to support their team in the *Lockdown League*. Consequently, the interview process had to be adapted in six cases and instead of asking people about their Pledgeball experience, a short introduction to Pledgeball was given and interviewees were asked about their immediate thoughts on it. Additionally, those non-pledgers were asked to engage in the next virtual fixture and talk about their experience at a later stage. After the last *Lockdown League* fixture, a second round of

interviews followed. Four people were interviewed a second time, of who two had not come across Pledgeball at the time of the first interview, whereas for four people it was the first interview. This time, all of them had heard of Pledgeball. Depending on whether it was the first or second interview, questions slightly varied, yet the focus of this second round was people's experience with Pledgeball over the course of the Lockdown League. During the interviews, notes were taken and all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

5.3 Data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have their 'own' ways of analysing the collected data. However, this does not mean that the data in the following has to be interpreted separately from each other, rather the opposite is true with the gathered data being able to inform one another. After realising that truly assessing Pledgeball's impact would require a different approach than comparing people's environmental perceptions before/after their engagement with the initiative, only the still relevant data from the survey was extracted. Yet, making robust quantitative statements was never the study's intention, hence the analysis of the survey data was limited to providing an overview of the fan base as well as a rather general understanding about their perceptions regarding the environment and Pledgeball. Particularly the open-ended questions were expected to result in guidance for the interviewing and potentially already reveal some relevant themes. Consequently, no real distinction was made regarding the analysis of the survey and interview data. As a result of the misunderstanding regarding the communication of the *Lockdown League* and hence ending the data collection process later than expected, the decision was made to not fully transcribe the interviews but instead to focus on the most relevant parts for this study which Creswell and Creswell (2018, 192) refer to as 'winnowing'⁷. Taking notes during and after the interviews facilitated the identification of the 'most relevant parts' that were, in a next step, transcribed and through which reoccurring themes became visible. Similar parts were then collected, categorised and labelled with a summarising term. Likewise, connections to the research questions but also the broader problem description were made. The gathered themes were visualised in a mind map which, together with the transcripts, provided the foundation for writing up and interpreting the findings. In doing so, the analysis was guided by the recommendations for qualitative data analysis by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Both being associated with Pledgeball and the

⁷ According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (n.d.) to winnow literally means "to blow the chaff (= the outer coverings) from grain before it can be used as food".

emerging data guided the research process also with regards to the theory being used to interpret the answers, therefore following an abductive approach (Bryman 2012).

5.4 Research quality

Reliability and validity

With regards to reliability, in a study on attitudes and behaviours relying predominantly on self-reports, there is always the risk of people presenting themselves in a slightly more positive light than it is actually the case in reality (Gatersleben 2018). Participant observation is a way of countering the self-report issue but was not possible due to the pandemic. Instead, this study sought to limit this challenge by being completely transparent about the study's purpose, particularly the fact that Pledgeball is interested in fans' honest feedback asking them to co-develop and improve its strategies. In terms of validity, a potential sampling bias (Bryman 2012) needs to be discussed. The decision of Pledgeball to partner with Brighton-based Whitehawk FC determined the case study's setting. The progressive profile of both the city and the club might impact the ability to generalise findings towards (UK) football in general. The fact that participation in the surveys and interviews was voluntary may further contribute to a sampling bias, since there is a risk that only the people having an affinity for environmental issues respond. Therefore, one may get the impression that on average people are more engaged. However, with the ability to frame the first survey as the club's annual survey and discussing people's relationship with the club and the environment in interviews measures were taken to counteract the mentioned risk.

Positionality and ethical considerations

The position of the researcher which may inadvertently influence a study's findings, particularly when the researcher is a "primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Reis 2009) needs to be discussed. Even though, people were informed about the independence of this study, in the interviews it became apparent that interviewees associated me directly with Pledgeball. I perceived this initial notion in alignment with the club promoting Pledgeball and the affiliated research as a benefit because all of it helped to gain rapport. However, it needs to be mentioned that interviewees perceived both survey and interviews as a valuable addition to the core Pledgeball activity of asking people to 'pledge'. Whenever people's opinions inform a study, ethical considerations should be reflected in the whole research process (Bryman 2012). As the topic of climate change can be quite controversial and because no particular added value for this study was seen in using people's names, I decided to only let anonymised

data inform the study. Information stemming from Pledgeball or the football club represents an exception.

6. Results

As the purpose of this study is twofold, the following presentation of the results is divided into two sections. The first part consists of research findings from the first survey and in-depth interviews providing information about fans perception of the club as well as the environment. Whitehawk supporters' experience with Pledgeball mostly assessed through the second survey and interviews constitute the second part of the results⁸.

6.1 First half: People's fandom

In the first survey (n=65) aiming to give a general overview about people's fandom and their attitude towards climate change, 57 respondents considered themselves as active supporters of Whitehawk.

Tell me more about your relationship with the club...

Apart from the most obvious reason for attending a match, people's answers highlight the social experience that comes with watching a game.

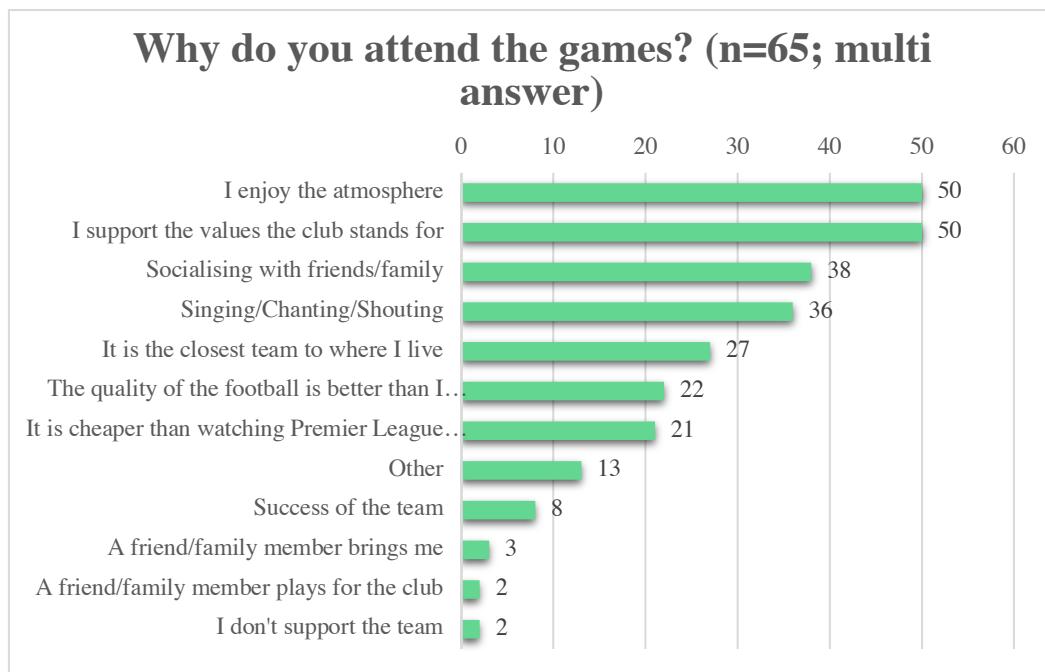


Figure 10: People's motivations for attending a match.

⁸ Drawing on football terminology, the two parts are referred to as 'first half' and 'second half'.

Two thirds of the respondents mentioned the atmosphere and the values the club stands for (see Figure 10). When asked to specify the values in a ‘free text question’ people referred to values that can be broadly categorized as community and inclusivity. Thereby, 32 responses made direct or indirect reference to the club’s stands on “inclusivity” trying to create a place “where everyone is welcome” as “football is for all”. The club’s values are also visible at the stadium on stairs that fans painted and labelled with *LOVE, PEACE, NO RACISM, NO SEXISM, NO VIOLENCE, NO HOMOPHOBIA* and were emphasized in the interviews as well. Additionally, for more than half of the participants it is about ‘Socializing with friends/family’ and/or ‘Singing/Chanting/Shouting’, further strengthening the importance of community but also bringing in an emotional aspect. This sense of community goes beyond football as can be seen in, for example, the club’s weekly quizzes on Zoom, a podcast and a TV show that have been started during lockdown but also a supporter’s group chat on WhatsApp enabling the fans to further engage with the club, but more importantly with each other. Even though connecting virtually cannot fully replace offline encounters and not all fans made use of the virtual gatherings that club and fans jointly initiated, interviewees stressed the importance of these opportunities:

[During lockdown we k]eep it going. We engage with each other. We understand that we need each other. (Interviewee 1)

It’s been great that supporters have been able to meet together on Zoom weekly, but it’s not the same as going in person and seeing the games and having the fun and the camaraderie there. (Interviewee 9)

[The quizzes] have been good because we still see each other and we can still have a bit of a laugh and keep in touch in the chat, but it’s not the same. (Interviewee 11)

Through the interviews it also became apparent, that all interviewees made an active choice to support Whitehawk after they had been made aware of it as opposed to being brought up with supporting a particular team. Consequently, three quarters of the survey respondents stated to support at least one more team – in most cases a professional football club. Summing up the interviews, one can say that people were either actively looking for a club to support as they were frustrated with developments within Premiership football (e.g. too expensive, too difficult to get tickets, “too divorced from the fans and the community” (Interviewee 2)), taken to games or told by friends or colleagues, and/or were looking to make some connections after moving to Brighton.

When you're new to a city, of course, it's not only the football you want to watch. [...] It's nice to get to know people. And you cannot go to Albion⁹ for the next game and expect to meet the same people. That's impossible. (Interviewee 3)

Despite the fact that for many the quality of football is better than expected, all interviewees (in)directly stated that the social aspect of supporting Whitehawk is what they miss or look forward to the most in the prospect of matches returning.

The football doesn't really matter, I mean like it is not irrelevant. But the football is just an element of why we come together. It's a place where we gather. (Interviewee 1)

[...] just being able to go there and yeah, just enjoy the game and enjoy the company and enjoy the community thing and the fact that is, I think, you know, it has a meaning that goes beyond just a football match. (Interviewee 2)

The football has been really surprisingly good for the most part. But it is definitely the other supporters and the atmosphere down there. (Interviewee 6)

The football itself, I mean, it's important and we all love it. But it kind of seems to be secondary to all the other things that we do as a group for the community. (Interviewee 10)

Not only do these answers confirm the broader findings from the survey emphasizing the significance of community, but it also became apparent that there is something 'special' about the Whitehawk supporters themselves and a matchday experience. As the pandemic did not allow for me to watch a match and observe fans directly, I asked people to explain what they think makes Whitehawk supporters stand out compared to other fan groups. And again, all interviewees answered very similarly, stressing that they have been feeling welcomed from the very first match they attended and that they now feel like 'they have become part of something'.

I now feel part, when I go back [to Brighton], I now feel part of the community and I think the club is responsible for that for me. (Interviewee 1)

So what's special about Whitehawk fans is, like, that they come in such a big amount and go to the away matches and all that. And I think it's the community experiences, the work that people like Odds and Kev do to encourage people to be involved and to make people feel as though they are part of something. (Interviewee 2)

It's always the same characters that are starting the chants or getting people involved for bits and pieces. There's this one dude, like, if it's your first time, he'll make the entire stand, like, sing some chant to welcome you. (Interviewee 4)

After you've been there three or four times, people assume that they met you before and talk to you anyway. So yeah, random conversations with people that are treating you like a long-lost brother. (Interviewee 6)

⁹ Brighton & Hove Albion FC is Brighton's professional football club playing in the Premier League.

I also asked for a description of a typical matchday experience. The following statement sums up the other answers quite well, which all directly or indirectly referred to positive emotions: “It’s unbelievably friendly and welcoming and funny.” (Interviewee 7)

And because it’s fun, you know, we sing songs like ‘we have more fun than you’ and it’s true, nobody takes it too seriously. (Interviewee 2)

In my experience, football, in a way, has always to do with hatred. [...] With Whitehawk, in the Whitehawk stadium, well with Whitehawk supporters it’s just acceptance. (Interviewee 3)

It’s just a great atmosphere, it is a community club, it is a family club. We don’t allow any swearing or offensive chanting. We get on well with opposition fans and that doesn’t happen in the top leagues football. There’s always some hostility. (Interviewee 9)

These findings were confirmed by the second survey in which respondents had to indicate in a free text question how thinking about the club makes them feel. Answers ranged from “joyous”, “hopeful” and “sometimes frustrated”, and “connected”, to “positive”, “(very) happy”, “excited”, and “proud to be associated with it”. These findings also underline a certain understanding that the interviewees, but also a huge majority of the survey 1 respondents (84,6%), seem to have about the club, namely that it is an important part of the community. Being part of but also supporting the broader local community is reflected in the answers given as part of a free text question in the first survey that asked people to explain why they feel that the club is (or is not) an important part of the community. This aspect was further emphasized in the interviews: not only are fans very hands-on when it comes to making sure the ground is ready for matches returning, but their commitment goes beyond what is happening on the pitch, which might be also partly due to the club’s location – Whitehawk being an area of Brighton whose reputation is still rather poor and which the club is trying to change.

And the attitude when we have a special day, right? It’s Whitehawk food bank weekend. [...] And in the end, it took them three carloads to get the stuff that the Ultras brought for the food bank, to carry on. (Interviewee 8)

Community means involving people living around the area to wanting them to be actually involved, like supporting the food banks and having children to come into the ground and visit, and have photographs taken with the players and be able to stand on the terraces with us and play our drums and instruments. [...] It’s just to do thing for Whitehawk and for East Brighton in general. (Interviewee 9)

The values of the club that, you know, just tries to embrace and encompasses every person and tries to give them something to look forward to and to feel part of. [...] It’s just amazing, every game tends to be something, either a collection for a charity or everyone that comes in bring something for the local food bank or we’re working towards making people aware of campaigns. (Interviewee 10)

...and what about the environment?

One interviewee who has only been to one Whitehawk match (because of the Covid related lockdown) made a very interesting observation about the supporter community: “They seem switched on and quite considerate of a lot of issues, not just specific football ones.” Hence, the interviewee was not surprised to hear about their engagement with Pledgeball stating that “the fans and the club generally seem very aware of a lot of social issues and [...] it, kind of, confirms that the fans in the club care about the environment” (Interviewee 4).

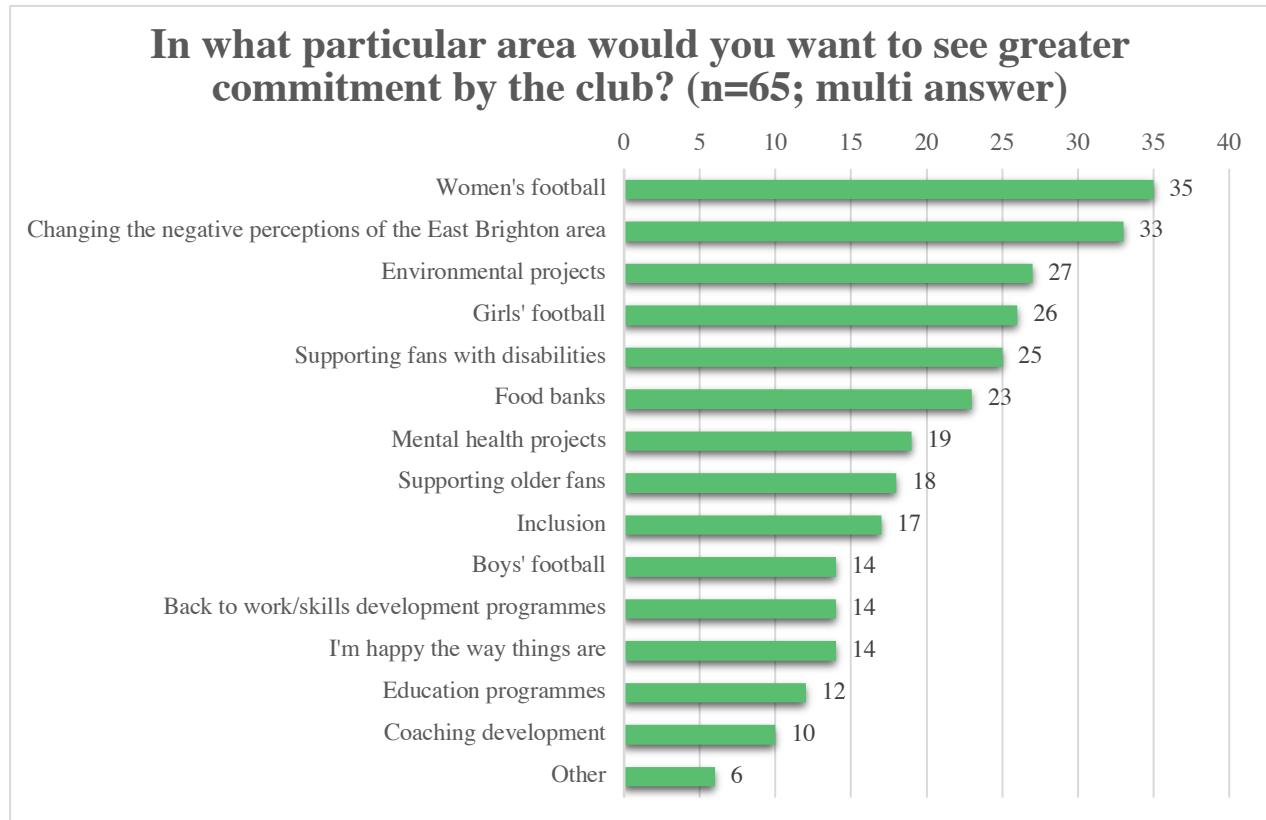


Figure 11: Respondents' views on what the club should focus on (more).

This is also reflected in respondents' answers regarding the area in which they want to see greater commitment by their club: ‘Environmental projects’ comes in third right after ‘Women’s football’ and ‘Changing the negative perspective of the East Brighton area’ (see Figure 11). Furthermore, the first survey was able to demonstrate that climate change and its negative impacts are a concern for many supporters, that an awareness of environmental issues exists, and that most fans indicated that they are willing to take action and/or are already engaging in environmentally friendly behaviour. Being asked to rank ten events in view of their impact on people’s quality of life on a 5-Point Likert scale (ranging from not at all concerned to extremely concerned) only three respondents stated to be ‘not at all concerned’ by negative

impacts of climate change whilst 45 are very/extremely concerned. Figure 12 shows that only one issue ranked higher: ‘My country’s political situation’.

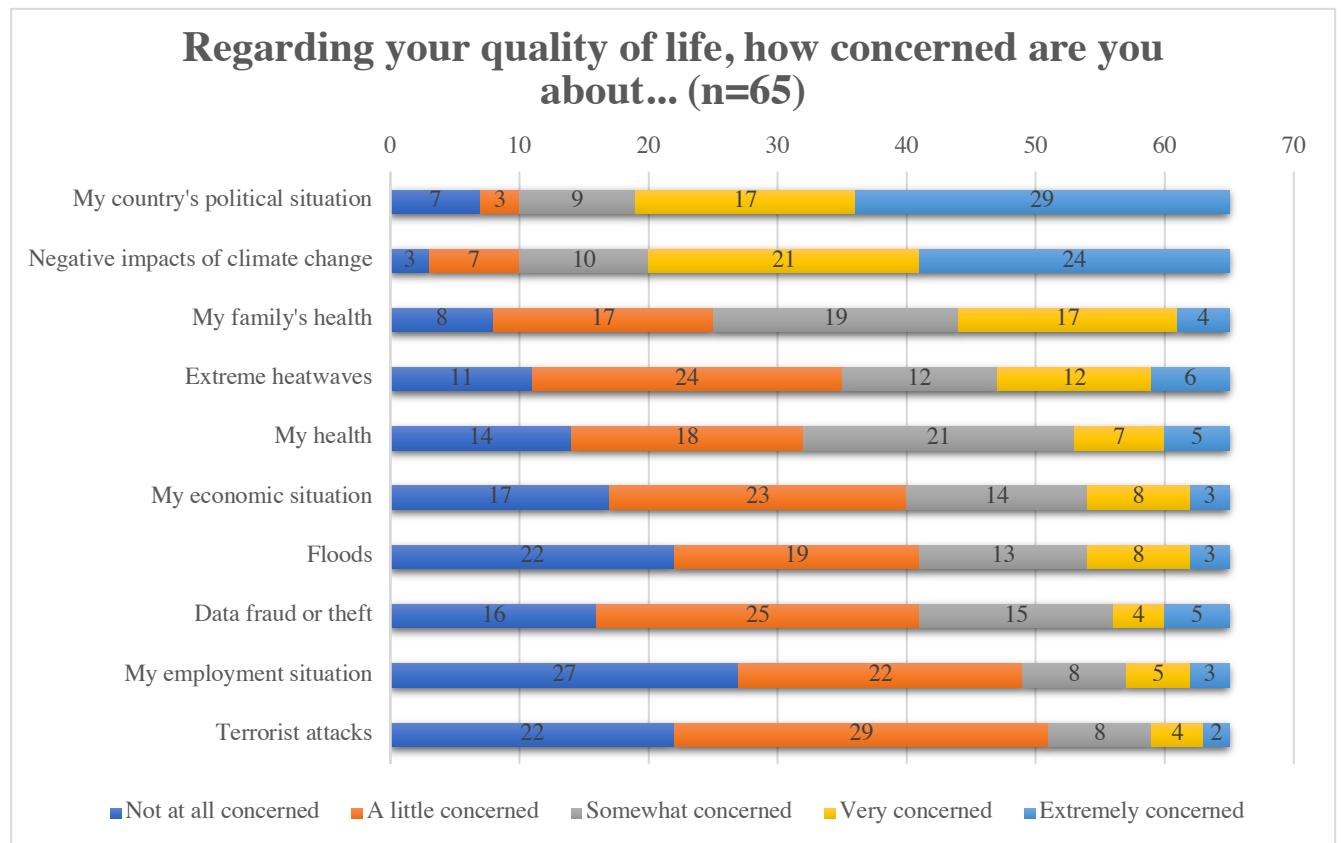


Figure 12: Respondents’ concerns regarding their quality of life.

To further evaluate supporters’ attitudes towards environmental issues, they were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with selected statements in the survey. Figures 13 and 14 provide excerpts of these statements and supporters’ views demonstrating, for example, that around three quarters of the respondents are worried about climate change, the impacts of which they consider as already being visible today.

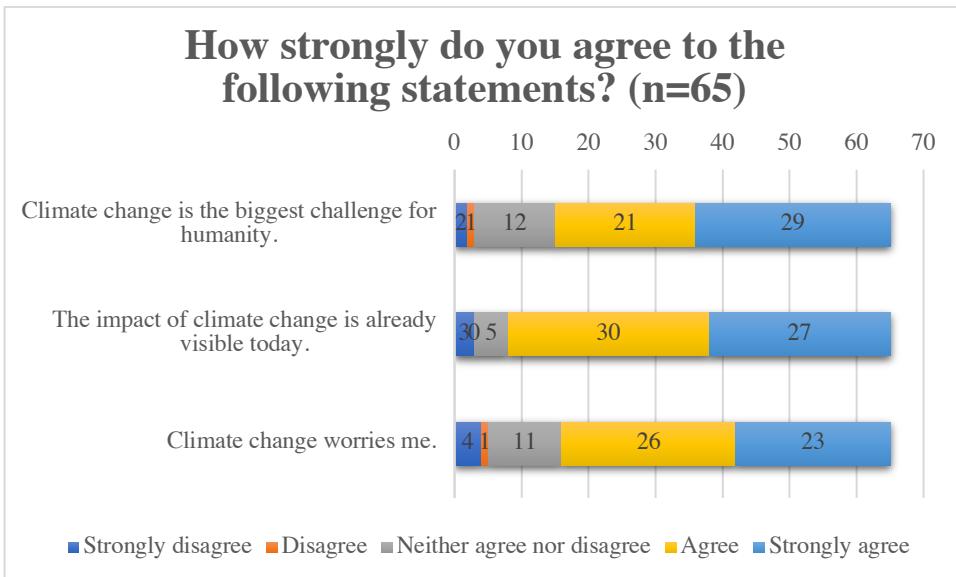


Figure 13: People's attitudes towards climate change part 1.

Statements that viewed climate change as something annoying or a not so urgent issue received (strong) disagreement from most supporters, only four stated that climate change annoys them and that they (strongly) agree with the notion of climate change being not as bad as one is made believe.

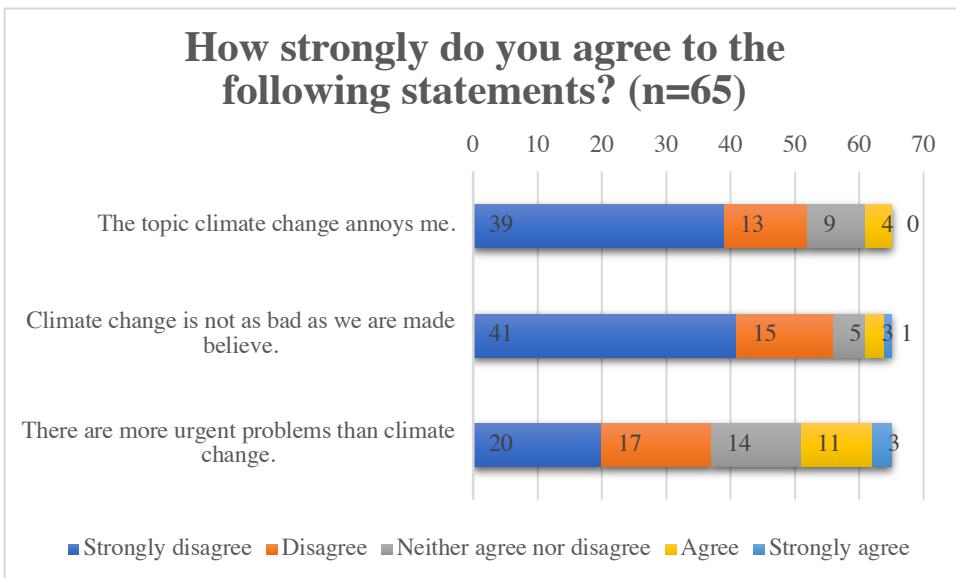


Figure 14: People's attitudes towards climate change part 2.

Additionally, a vast majority of survey respondents (60 out of 65) stated that they would want to make changes to protect the environment and almost the same amount of people (56 out of 65) would want their club to promote and implement measures to protect the environment. As part of a free text question supporters were asked to explain their answer (optional). Through the survey responses it became obvious that many supporters see a shared responsibility to

protect the environment and have an understanding and a wish for (more) efforts to protect the environment to no longer be the exception but the rule:

This should be the default role for all peoples [sic!] and organisations going forward

We all have to do our bit – we have to – it shouldn't be a choice

I think the club, like everyone and every company, should take steps to minimise waste and recycle where possible.¹⁰

Some survey respondents referred to environmental protection as being in line with the club's existing values (e.g. "It would fit the values of the team" or "Seems in keeping with the club ethos") and so did interviewees when being asked about how they perceive the club's collaboration with Pledgeball and whether they see environmental protection as something matching the club's values.

I think that we are just the right club to partner with in terms of our fans who will engage with it eventually. [...] I just think the majority of people that come to Whitehawk will engage with it. (Interviewee 1)

It just fitted in so naturally [...] it's just another natural process and embracing the values and aims and visions ... (Interviewee 10)

I don't see why it couldn't fit, because it's all about sort of diversity and building a better world and all that. (Interviewee 11)

Out of 50 survey respondents who chose to further explain their answer, five were more sceptical or refused the club to promote environmental measures giving the following explanations:

It is difficult to see how clubs on very thin budgets can find the money to pay for environment changes

Football is football leave politics out of it

Sometimes going football is just about getting away from life in general

The club needs to concentrate on its core reason for existence. Men's football.

It is not the responsibility of the club¹¹

The majority of both survey and interview respondents is concerned about environmental issues and states a willingness to take action (and/or is already taking action). Despite their general awareness, a direct connection between football and climate change is not really apparent to most interviewees. If they saw a connection at all, most of them referred to

¹⁰ These are answers from survey respondents, hence no assignment to a specific interviewee was made.

¹¹ See footnote 10.

particularly professional football as being a contributor to climate change, after some hesitation and/or prompting. Some of them mentioned football's potential to help tackle climate change, yet no one viewed football as something being negatively impacted by climate change – at least not more than anything else.

I want to answer, I would like to answer that really clever, but I don't really have one, I'm not sure. You can't predict what's going to happen, but I mean the way we're going, it could be disastrous. (Interviewee 1)

Being a football fan you kind of have to say, well, the amount of electricity. [...] You know, if I watch United on television, well, how many cameras are there? What is the carbon footprint for Manchester United to be filled? And shown on television? [...] But environmentally I think, football has the advantage of being a game that can be played almost literally in all weathers. (Interviewee 2)

Well, climate change will affect everything. So it won't affect football in a special way or something, but it will affect football as it affects everything. (Interviewee 3)

Teams further up the pyramid where they fly around to the games. (Interviewee 6)

I haven't really thought about it much until recently with doing the pledges. But I can see that it can make a difference now [...] looking back and seeing what we've been doing [making environmental lifestyle pledges in support of the club] and what we can achieve through it. (Interviewee 11)

6.2 Second half: Whitehawk fans' Pledgeball experience

As the statement of Interviewee 11 revealed, the engagement with Pledgeball made the individual more aware of football and its (reciprocal) relationship with climate change, already indicating some sort of impact that Pledgeball has on those fans who have engaged with it. During the *Lockdown League* 20 Whitehawk fans signed up at pledgeball.org and made one or several pro-environmental lifestyle pledges in support of their team. During the period of the Lockdown League, Whitehawk supporters pledged to save 182612 kgCO₂e per year in total which equates to taking over 39 cars off the road. And by doing so, they helped their team win the virtual league.

Team	Total CO ₂ pledged to be saved (kg per year)
Whitehawk FC	182612
Peckham Town FC	87452.2
Eastleigh FC	86288.1
Rainbow Rovers	25312.9

Figure 15: Pledgeball Lockdown League Table.¹²

It is particularly the second half of the interviews as well as the second survey (n=15) that focused on fans' Pledgeball experience. What became visible throughout all interviews is that the simple act of 'pledging' influenced how the respondents engaged with the topic of climate change. Once people have made the effort to visit the Pledgeball website and have gone through the list of pledges, their immediate reaction can be summarised in realising that they already do at least some of the suggestions listed and that there are changes they could easily adopt.

First time I thought no, I'm not doing it. Second time, and I think what's important is the time that you look at these things [...] I revisited and then I actually pledged, looked through it and pledged. And I think the list is long but if you spend time, if we can get people to spend the time and to actually go through the list, there's quite a lot on there that you can do, or something that you already did. (Interviewee 1, pledged)

I'm not changing anything about what I do, really, because I'm kind of ticking things I already do [...]. But even for me there's still a few things on there that just made me think, hold on, I could do something a little bit more. (Interviewee 2, pledged)

It was just interesting when you put up the picture on my screen and I just read a couple of sentences. Of course, I did not read it properly. [...] When you scroll over it you see that this is something I could do or this is something I could improve on. (Interviewee 3, engaged with the website, hasn't signed up)

And then I read what the Pledgeball was about and I said, oh I could turn my switches off at night. Oh, I could do this, I could do that. I thought of loads of ways just quickly when I read it last night. (Interviewee 5, has signed up and pledged after the first interview)

Consequently, going through the list of pledges has made people not only interested but actually motivated them to pledge and carry out even more of the activities listed which in turn made them feel good about themselves. Of the fifteen survey 2 respondents, eleven have signed up to pledge and stated in a free text question that 'pledging' made them feel "[g]ood", "[p]roud", "[g]reat!", or [v]ery happy". Reasons for not signing up were, for example, time and financial constraints. The in-depth interviews with people who have signed up and pledged confirmed the positive feelings related to 'pledging'. While some mentioned, that they

¹² This Lockdown League table was provided by Katie Cross, Pledgeball.

increasingly feel guilty now when doing the opposite of what they've pledged (e.g. showering for more than five minutes or taking the car), most stated having positive feelings when sticking to the pledges:

I feel personally like I've achieved something. [...] On a personal note, I do have an extreme feeling of pride when I get home and I've done it [the journey to the game] by train. I feel really, really good. (Interviewee 1)

I carry out the pledges not because of the football, but just because actually I'm happier that way. [...] I praise myself on a daily basis more than once for things I'm doing. It's making me feel better about myself, because I am very short of money [...] but the Pledgeball made me feel really good about myself because I was thinking, well, [...] the fact that I don't have a car is really good. The fact that I'm growing my own food is really, really good. (Interviewee 5)

You have that sense of self-gratification, that you are actually [taking action], it's like the proof that people need to be able to say 'by doing this, I'm actually contributing'. (Interviewee 10)

Looking back at their Pledgeball experience, most interviewees mentioned that getting involved with Pledgeball – some did not sign up but had a look through the website and the list of pledges and came to the same conclusion as people that actually pledged – has 'made them think':

It has made me think about my recycling, it's made me think about five minute showers and it's made me think about traveling to the game, so I'll get the train now. (Interviewee 1)

But what it is doing is making people think about what they do and what the environmental impact is, what they do as individuals, and then what they do as families, and then as community and actually, oh hold on, this does get pretty big. (Interviewee 2)

It helps people just starting to think about changes they could do. Anyway, I don't think anybody will read all this and say alright, I'll do everything tomorrow. That won't work but maybe a little bit by tomorrow and next week another little bit, and so on. (Interviewee 3)

Drawing on the characteristics of football by providing the Pledgeball community with a league table, asking fans to make their pledges connected to (virtual) match days, as well as asking fans from different fan groups to compete against each other had several effects on supporters. For example, the visualisation of aggregated CO₂e-savings in a league table made people realise the impact their individual actions have, especially when also carried out by fellow fans. The league table also made other fans' pro-environmental commitment visible which some interviewees perceived as encouraging.

I mean losing against Peckham Town¹³. It's really, really upsetting to be honest. So I'm gonna be having a word, I think, the Whitehawk Pledgeball team needs a manager, a coach. (Interviewee 1)

I think it's something that maybe people were doing anyway but because of Pledgeball we are much more aware that people are doing things consciously and we're all working towards a common goal. It's great. (Interviewee 10)

Initially, you don't realise that just one person can make a change. But because of the way it's put out in Pledgeball and shows you at the end of your pledge how much you have potentially saved, I think that actually gives you a bit more ownership towards it and then makes you realise you can make a difference. And if everybody made just small changes or more than it is going to make a bigger difference. (Interviewee 11)

Pledging and knowing about other fans engaging with it as well resulted in people feeling part of something bigger.

[It is i]nstilling a sense of value and community and a feeling of belonging to something important and something meaningful beyond football. But it says something about your club. And so by extension says something about you and the fans you watch the game with. (Interviewee 2)

It made me feel part of a global movement I think, part of a global course. [...] It makes you feel part of a community I guess as well. (Interviewee 10)

I think it's really, really good that it is something that we can all do together as a family, as a community or whatever you want to call it really. (Interviewee 11)

Also perceived as encouraging was the translation of CO2e-savings into cars taken off the road as it provided even for the very engaged ones a very welcome tangible way of quantifying their actions which they did not have before. With matches returning, interviewees see a potential for Pledgeball to become even more meaningful. Having some sort of visible offline presence at the enclosed ground was an often suggested measure perceived as something positive since it provides a visual reminder for fans to carry out their pledges but also allows for conversations and exchange.

I feel it needs to have like a permanent place in the ground so that there are stands, like we've got the shelf where we buy merchandise. There needs to be somewhere where it just becomes part of the infrastructure of the club and more people can, instead of buying a scarf or a hot dog, they can go and make a pledge. [...t]hat would make it really exciting. (Interviewee 10)

Several interviewees also suggested to use Pledgeball beyond the football context, for example in schools or the broader community. For the fans who have signed up on the Pledgeball website, 'pledging' has not only become part of their (so far only virtual) matchday routine –

¹³ Peckham Town Football Club is one of the clubs Whitehawk was competing against in the Virtual Lockdown League.

eight out of 20 fans have pledged more than once – but it made them more conscious in their everyday life.

So now in my mind it's like: OK that goes there [recycling]. Do I really need to use the car? Do I actually need the car? So I'm thinking along the right lines. Do I need to wash that? Could I do that by hand? So it's in my thinking and I take it into my work now, because I work with young people. (Interviewee 1)

It does make you think, you know, going around the house, turning off lights, for example. I'm always thinking of how much the pledges I've made save. It's that kind of being conscious of it a lot more. [...] It raises awareness all the time because it's at the forefront of our thinking. (Interviewee 10)

I'm still doing all the stuff that I've pledged to do, so it's not just pledging and doing it that one week or whatever. I have continued to do what I had pledged. It's become part of the routine. (Interviewee 11)

Some interviewees also mentioned that they have become more aware of related newspaper articles. These answers are in line with responses from the second survey in which people generally referred to an increased awareness of how even seemingly small individual actions (e.g., consumer choices) impact the environment. The following survey response stood out in terms of its profoundness:

It is very difficult to pull out of consumer culture when its [sic!] the only thing that is offered. The alternative has to be more attractive and therefore easier to administer.¹⁴

Additionally, the involvement with Pledgeball impacted how people engaged with change in a more general way.

Allowing people to make small adjustments to themselves and to their own lives and to make them therefore feel good about themselves. [...] I think, the way to deal with environmental problems is there being enough people making these changes for themselves who then are more likely to think, ‘well, hold on a minute, why are these companies not making these changes? Why is this political party not arguing for these changes?’ (Interviewee 2)

It's made me realise that I can change the Pledgeball things like the recycled loo rolls and all the things. But especially the diet, if I could change that that easily and enjoyably, then maybe there's other new things I don't know about that I'd get just as much pleasure, so it's been a big learning curve. [...] What I hadn't realised is that change can be not a difficult thing. It can be something that is pure pleasure, that you want to do the new thing so much. Then you just love it. (Interviewee 5)

The involvement also made people reflect on their relationship with nature and other people around them. Some re-evaluated their stands on the matter.

¹⁴ See footnote 10.

You know, if I stop having long showers, that's not suddenly going to solve the climate crisis. It's not the point, it's actually that I'm thinking about what I'm doing and I'm thinking about how engaged I am with the world around me and so on. And then that leads you [...] to think about how you engage with people. (Interviewee 2)

I wouldn't say I wasn't interested before. But I was disconnected. So now I don't just feel connected, I feel part of it. I have a much smoother coexistence with the environment. I'm more in tune with it. (Interviewee 5)

From participant observations, it needs to be added that among the core fan group 'pledging' created a life of its own, to the extent that fans have started to talk about making pledges, thus reminding each other, which further enabled non-judgmental conversations or the sharing of vegan recipes in, for instance, the supporters' WhatsApp group. Furthermore, some interviewees used the interviews for reflection and exchange asking, among other things, for a sustainable alternative for cling film. But not only fans seem to have embraced the partnership with Pledgeball. It also impacted the club. Although the club's commercial manager stated that environmental concerns have already played a role in the club's decisions before the collaboration with Pledgeball, he confirmed that it has brought the issue into focus even more than before. Engaging with and tackling environmental issues is seen to open up new opportunities. Consequently, with the return of matches, drinks will be served in reusable cups, the club looks into keeping bees and is conversing with the local public transportation company to make it easier for fans to travel to the ground by bus. Additionally, on May 8, 2021, the club announced a new kit supplier for the next two seasons. The new shirts are made entirely of recycled bottles meaning that also the replica shirts the club will sell are made from 100% recycled material.

7. Analysis and discussion

At this stage of the thesis, the just outlined empirical findings are to be analysed and interpreted with the help of the theoretical concepts described in the fourth chapter. As the purpose of this study was twofold, in a first step, Whitehawk supporters' Pledgeball experience is going to be assessed which will then inform the initiative's situation within other approaches aimed at responding to climate change, hence answering the second research question: *How have Whitehawk supporters experienced their engagement with Pledgeball?* Building on this, the presence of determinants for participation intention in collective climate action within the community of Whitehawk fans is examined. This is expected to answer the first research question: *What characteristics of the football fan community does Pledgeball seek to leverage to mobilise climate action?*

7.1 It's 'pledge' day!

One interviewee referred to the Pledgeball experience as an 'instant awakening' – the question now is, how these overwhelmingly positive reactions can be explained. Comparing interviewees' descriptions to other initiatives, particularly the outcomes of the in chapter 4.4 described facilitated change experiment *cChallenge* (O'Brien, Hochachka, and Gram-Hanssen 2019), it seemed reasonable to look into the concept of transformative learning. The structure of analysis follows Hoggan's (2016, 77–78) definition of transformative learning as "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualises and interacts with the world":

Experience

Just going through the list of pledges and realising that one does already – intentionally or not – commit to pro-environmental behaviour, encouraged people to further engage with the topic of climate change. As the Pledgeball mechanism provides a very tangible way of communicating environmental impact, people became (even) more aware of their individual and collective impact through their involvement in the *Lockdown League*. An increasing awareness or consciousness became also apparent in interviewees' descriptions of being more mindful in their everyday life. As examples they mentioned being more likely to notice and read a related newspaper article, switch off lights in the house or to think carefully about whether using the car is necessary. In line with this, interviewees' answers revealed for some an increasing feeling of responsibility for the world around them including the environment. This had also had to do with the realisation that one's individual actions do matter and thus, one can do something to tackle climate change resulting in a feeling of empowerment. Knowing about other fans pledging encouraged interviewees and made them feel part of something bigger. All in all, the interviewees seemed to become more aware of their embeddedness in the world, making them reflect on their relationship with other people around them and nature.

Conceptualise

Even the ones who in the end did not sign up to pledge acknowledged that just browsing the Pledgeball website and looking at the list of potential pledges 'made them think' – about their recycling and long showers, their individual and collective impact and behaviours they could commit to (more often). Doing these pledges in support of their favourite football team – being provided with a very tangible translation and visualisation, and thus some sort of proof for the impact their environmental actions have – was a new and meaningful way of engaging and learning (more) about the topic even for the environmentally very aware ones. But most

importantly, the way how Pledgeball is structured, gave people engaging with it some sort of ownership as they were asked to profoundly address certain patterns of behaviour and explore new, sometimes unfamiliar ways of doing things (e.g. going vegan, taking public transport). Besides, they were asked to act as a team – even though everyone is free to choose the particular change they pledge to make – which enables dialogue with others. It is particularly the conversations with others that further motivate people to take action and help them to reflect on their behaviour and attitudes resulting also in an increasing awareness of barriers to pro-environmental action.

Interact

While the initial reason to get involved with Pledgeball was somehow connected to the club and/or some fans promoting it, the reason why people continued to engage with it seemed to be linked to changes at the other two levels. For example, one interviewee explained to stick to the pledges as they actually resulted, in addition to environmental benefits, in personal health improvements. They also seemed to be connected to the increased feeling of responsibility and the realisation that one can do something about climate change, thus indicating changes on a more profound level including people's beliefs, values and worldviews that are usually hard to change. Furthermore, the lived experience of 'pledging' and eventually carrying out the pledge sharpened people's understanding of potential barriers they need to overcome. While some participants tried to not think about climate change too much, the engagement with Pledgeball has actually resulted in them becoming quite passionate about the environment.

Mechanism

In line with the preliminary findings from the *cChallenge*, asking people to voluntarily sign up and let them choose from the list of pledges themselves represented an easy entry point for fans once they have made their way to Pledgeball's website. Supporting their team, even though it provided the reason for people to sign up, was not the main motivator for people to engage with Pledgeball. For many it was the realisation that doing something good for the planet does not necessarily have to be hard and especially when done by a whole group of people one enjoys interacting with, it can also be a fun group activity. Making these pledges together with like-minded people in support of the team created for some interviewees a less controversial justification for committing to pro-environmental behaviours such as reducing their meat consumption. As the weekly fixtures and the league table visualised the collective efforts, for example the WhatsApp group chat and the weekly quizzes on Zoom became a safe, non-judgemental space where supporters felt comfortable enough to remind each other to pledge

but also to share their experiences or recipes. Hence, the engagement with Pledgeball enabled conversations among the supporters but also beyond that, as some introduced Pledgeball to their families, friends and workplaces who, in general, reacted quite positively. As a result, Pledgeball is going to do a project with a school now. So, not only did the interviewees realise the environmental impact they can have as a group, but the influence they can have in terms of encouraging other people to sign up and pledge as well.

Whilst already environmentally very aware people appreciated Pledgeball as a way to be reminded and pushed to go even further, people not as engaged perceived choosing from the long list of pledges as an easy entry point to deal with the topic of climate change in an encouraging and motivating way. As part of the interviews, it became apparent, that for some participants the pandemic and the resulting little contact with other people made committing to pro-environmental changes such as going vegan easier, since there was no one there to judge. This underscores the significance of social norms. When being asked about support in order to behave in an environmentally friendly way, many referred to financial but also structural constraints such as poor connection to public transport, or vegetables in the supermarket being wrapped in plastic. Although or maybe because not all participants managed to carry out their pledges perfectly all the time, a more profound engagement with change was possible that allowed people to reflect and consider personal but also more structural barriers to change. Both the surveys and interviews were seen as a critical part in this process of reflection in addition to the Pledgeball mechanism.

To conclude, it was a combination of all of the above that stimulated changes in interviewees' general attitudes towards environmental issues and their ability to contribute to tackling climate change. As pro-environmental behaviour is commonly equated to having to give something up (e.g. flying, meat, hot showers, ...), for some people, Pledgeball provided a 'good enough' reason to try something new or focus on a particular behaviour. As a result, people realised that changes to protect the environment can even be fun and have the potential to result in positive outcomes such as, next to environmental benefits, individual health and financial advantages, or simply a better conscience. But it also made people curious about other things they could change which they have not questioned before as the discourse around change highlights the difficulty and inconvenience of it rather than the new opportunities it entails.

7.2 Let's talk tactics: What *position* does Pledgeball play?¹⁵

The above-mentioned structuring and making sense of people's answers feeds into Pledgeball's further assessment using O'Brien and Sygna's three spheres of transformation framework.

Practical sphere

The very core of Pledgeball – asking football fans to choose from a list of behavioural changes in support of their team and the environment – sits within the practical sphere. Tallying the greenhouse gas emissions pledged to save by fans, comparing them to competing teams and visualising the savings in a league table provides easily observable results. The crucial thing is that no one is forced to commit, and people are trusted to carry out the pledges. While this may impede the significance of the figures regarding total CO₂e-savings, it recognises that truly tackling climate change is not about numbers or perfection. What distinguishes Pledgeball from other campaigns is that they accept this flaw of not producing results that are 100% in line with the mainstream indicators for measuring 'success'. Instead, Pledgeball makes it easy and fun for people to engage with the topic of climate change. As a result, all interviewees who pledged have started to reflect (even more) on their behaviours and their agency realising constraints in the political sphere and facilitating necessary transformations in the personal sphere.

Political sphere

The core Pledgeball mechanism is not targeted towards the political sphere. However, it does facilitate transformations at this level through working together with the clubs and the local community. For example, Whitehawk is now providing structures at the enclosed ground making it easier for people to carry out pledges as drinks are now served in reusable cups and the new kit and the replica shirts fans can purchase are made from 100% recycled material. Encouraged by the fans' positive feedback regarding the collaboration with Pledgeball, the club is also conversing with the local public transportation company to make it easier for fans to travel to matches by bus. Through the clubs' ties to the local community, Pledgeball plans to offer participants, for instance, discounts for local vegan restaurants or bicycle services to make it easier to carry out their pledges.

Personal sphere

Whitehawk supporters' above discussed experience with Pledgeball demonstrates that Pledgeball also impacts the personal sphere. The whole process that kicked off through simply asking people to engage in some environmentally friendly behaviours in support of their club

¹⁵ Football terminology.

– including the conversations supporters started to have or the club’s supportive stands on the collaboration – went far beyond what Pledgeball’s founder and I expected to discover. While some interviewees tried not to worry too much about climate change prior to their involvement with Pledgeball, through ‘pledging’ they re-evaluated their relationship with nature and started to engage very passionately. It seems as if the environmental consciousness of both environmentally aware and less aware fans has increased, and a shared feeling of responsibility among the interviewees has emerged, indicating a potential for environmental concerns to become part of the club’s inclusive ethos.

To sum up, trusting people to make changes, hence applying an understanding that acknowledges the supporter community’s agency and – apart from providing them with the list of pledges, fixtures and a league table (practical sphere) – allowed for fans to collectively own and form the project in a way that supports their specific community on its journey towards more environmental sustainability. Within the Whitehawk supporter community, this strategy facilitated changes on the personal sphere not least by visualising that climate change is a matter of concern to a bigger part of the fan group. These findings are in line with the conclusions drawn from the *cChallenge* experiment suggesting that bringing about meaningful sustainable outcomes requires taking into consideration the constant interplay between the practical, political and personal sphere of transformation.

7.3 United behind the team... and the planet?

Analysing the data through Rees and Bamberg’s model of determinants for participation intention in collective climate action is expected to answer the extent to which Whitehawk fans’ support for the team translates into support for the planet. Hence, in the following I try to link the collected data to the identified determinants in the model.

Sense of community/Social identity

The importance of community has been highlighted in both surveys and interviews even to the extent that football was considered as secondary to the sense of belonging that exists within the supporter community. Particularly the fact, that at least a core group of people were sticking together during lockdown despite the fact that matches were cancelled demonstrates a high level of group identification. Even people who just recently started to go and see Whitehawk play referred to feeling welcome and ‘feeling part of something’. It is interactions with other acquaintances and friends on a matchday and doing something together as a group for the broader community that interviewees were looking most forward to in the prospect of matches

returning. Furthermore, I got the impression that respondents were very proud to be associated with this group.

Social norms

This feeling of pride has to do with the shared understanding that fans and the club have about their role for the local community and the values of inclusivity they jointly promote. Both a strong sense of community and the salience of social norms make an individual's orientation towards other group members more likely, which, for example, leads to curiosity being aroused when others talk about Pledgeball. For some interviewees, the initial reason to engage with Pledgeball was the fact that they heard from it through the 'engaged volunteers'. Since in-group members and club officials considered Pledgeball worthy of support and were pushing it, they had an impact on other supporters referring to 'pledging' as an addition to what they can achieve together as a group.

Collective efficacy

Through fans' voluntary commitment on and off the pitch and even beyond football (e.g. support for local foodbanks or other local organisations) it can be assumed that they do share the belief that together they can make a difference because this is a prerequisite for people to participate in collective action more general (Tosun and Schoenfeld 2017). The general understanding in both surveys and interviews was that individual actions will not matter that much but that the effort of a bigger group is required to truly tackle climate change which can be seen as a further indicator for the existence of collective efficacy beliefs within the selected group.

Group-based emotions

Particularly emotions of guilt and shame are said to motivate a person to participate in collective climate action. When being asked how 'pledging' (and carrying out the pledge) made people feel, answers ranged from proud over happy, to feeling better about themselves. Some interviewees also stated that doing the opposite of what they have pledged to do, for example taking the car or eating meat, makes them feel guilty. One interviewee even stated to have some general pledges and some 'go to pledges' (in this case taking a shower for less than five minutes) for when the person failed to carry out the more general ones.

The application of Rees and Bamberg's model to this specific case showed that the determinants for collective climate action participation intention are definitely present within the studied Whitehawk supporter community. The degree to which these findings can be

generalised is questionable. However, given a similar setting, for instance in the context of non-league football being heavily dependent on supporters' voluntary commitment and often having ties to the broader local community, it can be assumed that similar results may be obtained. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the club's location (Brighton), as well as the values it represents, may have had an influence on the crowd the club attracts. Furthermore, among the interviewees there were only individuals who are to some extent committed to the club's activities and happened to be more or less environmentally aware which may have further impacted the answers received. Yet, reaching the more engaged people first seems to be quite common and does not necessarily have to say anything about a campaign's potential to reach a broader audience. In the long term, the less engaged ones might get involved too or at least 'start to think' when being confronted with, in this case, Pledgeball, either through a visible presence at matches and/or the comparison with in-group members.

8. Conclusion

By looking into Pledgeball, an environmental initiative drawing on the language and characteristics of football, and particularly its first collaboration with the Brighton-based Whitehawk Football Club, this study tried to connect and enrich two strands of literature: collective climate action mobilisation and football fandom. The purpose thereby was to explore the significance of football fans as a promising yet understudied collective for mobilising climate action and to assess Pledgeball as one of the first initiatives trying to leverage the potential of football fandom to bring about such action.

In relation to research question 2 (*How have Whitehawk supporters experienced their engagement with Pledgeball?*) the study found that both environmental 'newcomers' and 'experts' perceived making pledges in support of their team on a regular basis as a new and motivating way to engage with the topic of climate change. Through the voluntary commitment and being able to choose from a list of behaviours, Pledgeball made it easy for the fans to get involved once their interest had been sparked and they had made their way to the Pledgeball website. For this to happen, the influence of the club and some engaged fans supporting it, should not be underestimated. Interviewees found the league table (which showed that other members of the fan group are concerned about environmental issues and taking action as well) very encouraging. It enabled conversations and made people realise that their individual actions do make a difference, especially when scaled up to the group level. Engaging with those pro-environmental changes also resulted in fans re-evaluating their relationship with the world

around them, including people and nature. Not only did people become more aware of their responsibility and agency but making these pledges and actually following up on them shifted their perceptions of change in a more general way: Change does not necessarily have to be something drastic, difficult and unpleasant, but on the contrary, it can be enjoyable leading to beneficial results for oneself, the broader (football) community and, in this case, the environment.

Building on this and thereby answering research question 1 (*What characteristics of the football fan community does Pledgeball seek to leverage to mobilise climate action?*), the study indicates that all of Rees and Bamberg's determinants for participation intention in collective climate action – sense of community, social norms, collective efficacy beliefs and group-based emotions – exist within the Whitehawk supporter community. The level of identification with one's community is said to be crucial in terms of leveraging group processes for mobilising climate action. Hence, it is particularly fans' often high level of identification with and emotional attachment to their favourite team and their fellow fans that represents an interesting leverage point for environmental campaigns like Pledgeball. Knowing about fans' potential to mobilise around societal topics, it is above all the element of competition as well as football's natural regularity due to its link to a fixture list that was expected and found to positively impact a campaign's ability to provoke climate action – even in the context of virtual matches.

The extent to which these findings can be generalised could be the subject of another study. The same holds true for the transferability of the results to the 'offline' experience. As literature on football fandom suggests that the identified determinants for people's intention to participate in collective climate action are typical characteristics of football fan communities, it can be assumed that similar potential exists within football fan communities in general; particularly in those fan groups with a strong sense of community. Therefore, despite the potential positive influence of the city of Brighton, football in general might pose a fertile ground for climate action mobilisation. Against the background of the need to ideally mobilise a huge amount of people in a very short period of time to, above all, keep global warming below 1,5°C, football with its huge numbers of people involved should be more in the focus of efforts to mobilise collective climate action.

Not many would deny the importance of the ground-breaking reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or frameworks such as the Paris Agreement. Yet, when it comes to creating acceptance for and realising social transformations

which are desperately needed to tackle climate change, there is still room for improvement in terms of developing strategies. It has been argued to include the ‘target groups’ into the creation of strategies and tools as well as making these as local, social and interactive as possible. Instead of trying to understand and analyse a community and its needs from the outside, actively engaging people should be approached through dialogue and participatory measures. Consequently, leveraging their agency seems the way forward. Thereby, creating solutions that directly or indirectly affect all three spheres of transformation – practical, political and personal – are expected to facilitate the realisation of more sustainable outcomes. This study’s findings indicate that Pledgeball, being one of the pioneers in terms of mobilising the football community to take climate action, follows these recommendations. The short-term findings are encouraging. However, in order to predict long-term effects, the extent to which other fan communities will respond in a similar way as Whitehawk supporters did, or Pledgeball’s potential to find application beyond football, further research is required.

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Appendices

Appendix I List of pledges

- Use a shampoo bar instead of a bottle
- Use a flannel or reusable face wipes instead of single-use wipes.
- Use ecofriendly menstrual products (cups, reusable pads, underwear etc.)
- Use eco-friendly nappies
- Use recycled toilet paper
- Calculate your carbon footprint and make the change that would reduce it the most
- Pay into a carbon offsetting scheme
- Plant some trees
- Use a milk alternative, or no milk at all!
- Reduce your dairy consumption by 50%
- Plant your own vegetable garden
- Go vegan for two days a week.
- Reduce meat consumption by 50% (especially beef and lamb)
- Go vegetarian
- Go vegan
- Buy groceries only from UK suppliers
- Buy only seasonal, locally-produced food
- Cook your leftovers and minimise your food waste
- Compost your food waste
- Buy a food and garden waste bin like HotBin
- Do a litter pick on your street
- Do a beach clean
- Hang your washing out instead of using the tumble dryer
- Wash at 30°C
- Set a 5-minute timer for your showers
- Defrost your freezer and descale your kettle
- Draft proof your home
- Get a home energy audit
- Install a programmable thermostat and thermostatic radiator valves
- Keep your thermostat at 19°C
- Keep chargers, TVs and computers off at the wall
- Switch to energy efficient light bulbs
- Only buy appliances with a good energy efficiency rating
- Install solar panels or solar thermal
- Replace kitchen roll with cut up rags or reusable kitchen towels
- Use a reusable bottle instead of buying bottled water
- Use an eco-cup for hot drinks on the go
- Take bottles, jars and tupperware to shops for refills of dry goods, fruit, veg and home cleaning products
- Buy big packs of snacks instead of multi-packs, and split them into reusable containers at home
- Recycle everything you can
- Put a sign on your door to ask for no junk mail.
- If you think the council could offer more recycling services, write and tell them
- Turn down plastic freebie toys or return them to shops
- Gift green – buy only eco-friendly or second hand presents
- Buy vintage and second-hand clothes
- Buy only second-hand items where possible
- Buy wood etc from reclamation yards etc
- Buy breakdown cover from a carbon neutral company
- When staying in holiday accommodation, write and ask them to take measures to be green
- Switch to a green energy supplier

Switch to an environmentally-friendly bank
Invest your money in environmentally friendly companies
Walk or cycle if the journey is under 2 miles
Cycle to work
Car share
Use an eBike instead of driving for journeys around the city
Use public transport instead of driving
Commit to no more than 1 return flight per year, and offset your emissions for it
Make your next car an electric car
Give up flying
Install a water butt to water the garden
Install a water meter
Use waste water (eg from cooking vegetables) for watering plants
Install a rainwater recycling unit
Install a grey water (water from baths and sinks) recycling unit

Appendix II Questions survey 1

1. If you are happy with the information provided above, including the data protection regulations, and want to take part in the survey, please indicate this by ticking the corresponding box below and let's start.
2. Do you see yourself as a Whitehawk FC fan?
 - 2.a. Are you a season ticket holder?
3. How frequently do you visit the club to watch matches?
4. When was your first Whitehawk FC experience?
5. Why do you attend the games? Tick all that apply.
 - 5.a. Which values are particularly important for you?
 - 5.b. If you selected Other, please specify:
6. Do you see the club as an important part of the community?
 - 6.a. Why do you feel this?
7. In what particular areas (if any) would you want to see (greater) commitment from the club?
 - 7.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
8. Do you support any other teams?
 - 8.a. Which ones?
9. Have you visited other non-league teams in the region?
 - 9.a. Which ones?
- 9.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:
10. Regarding your quality of life, how concerned are you about
 - 10.1.a. My health
 - 10.2.a. My family's health
 - 10.3.a. My economic situation
 - 10.4.a. Negative impacts of climate change
 - 10.5.a. My employment situation
 - 10.6.a. My country's political situation
 - 10.7.a. Floods
 - 10.8.a. Terrorist attacks
 - 10.9.a. Data fraud or theft
 - 10.10.a. Extreme heat waves
11. How strongly do you agree to the following statements?
 - 11.1.a. Climate change is the biggest challenge for humanity.
 - 11.2.a. Climate change will have a major impact on human's lives in the future.
 - 11.3.a. In principle, climate change concerns everyone.
 - 11.4.a. The topic climate change annoys me.
 - 11.5.a. The impact of climate change is already visible today.
 - 11.6.a. Climate change is not as bad as we are made believe.
 - 11.7.a. There are more urgent problems than climate change.
 - 11.8.a. Humanity will perform well coping with the challenges of climate change.
 - 11.9.a. Climate change does not have any impacts on my own life.
 - 11.10.a. Climate change is a threat for me and my family.
 - 11.11.a. Climate change worries me.
12. Have you noticed particular environmental changes recently or are worried about particular environmental changes in the future?
 - 12.a. Could you give (an) example(s)?
13. What are your main sources of information regarding climate change?
 - 13.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
14. Have you heard about any of the following organisations/initiatives?
15. Would you want to make changes to protect the environment?
 - 15.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
16. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?
 - 16.1.a. Individuals can substantially contribute to climate protection by environmentally friendly behaviour in their everyday lives.

- 16.2.a. Pressure by individuals on politics can induce effective actions of climate protection.
- 16.3.a. Individuals can substantially contribute to climate protection through their engagement in environmental and climate protection organisations.
- 16.4.a. A single individual cannot do a lot for the protection of the climate.
- 16.5.a. Protection of the climate has primarily to be promoted by politics.
- 16.6.a. Industry is responsible for the implementation of climate protective actions.
- 16.7.a. Actions for climate protection have to be developed by science.
- 16.8.a. A joint effort of individuals, politicians, companies, ... is needed to protect the environment.
- 16.9.a. I feel able to contribute to climate protection.
- 16.10.a. If I tried to behave in a climate-friendly way, that would surely have a positive effect on the climate.
- 16.11.a. I have the necessary knowledge to make climate-friendly choices.
- 16.12.a. I am aware of my personal carbon footprint.
17. Whenever possible, how frequently do you...
- 17.1.a. sort out recycling from the general waste at home and in the workplace.
- 17.2.a. buy food that is more environmentally friendly (e.g. oat milk, vegan/vegetarian options, locally sourced food).
- 17.3.a. prevent food and water waste.
- 17.4.a. reduce energy consumption at home and in the workplace (e.g. turn off lights, shower less than 5 minutes, turn the thermostat down to 19 degrees, wash at 30 degrees).
- 17.5.a. use public transport or take the bike.
- 17.6.a. purchase sustainable products (e.g. buy second-hand; recycled products; eco-friendly option
- 17.a. Can you think of anything that would support you do these activities more frequently?
18. How difficult would it be/is it for you to integrate the following activities in your daily life?
- 18.1.a. Recycling everything possible.
- 18.2.a. Changing my diet to make it more environmentally friendly (e.g. eating less meat; eating less dairy; shopping for local, in-season produce).
- 18.3.a. Reducing the amount of food I waste and water I use.
- 18.4.a. Reducing my energy consumption (by, for example, reducing the time I spend in the shower, turning down the heating, turning off sleeping appliances).
- 18.5.a. Switching to a green energy tariff.
- 18.6.a. Reducing the amount that I use the car by taking public transport/cycling/walking.
- 18.7.a. Buying environmentally-friendly products where possible (e.g. second-hand; sustainably-made clothes).
- 18.a. If you chose (very) difficult, can you give an example of general problems you have when trying to integrate these activities into your daily life?
19. Would you like to see your club promoting and implementing measures to protect the environment?
- 19.a. Can you explain your answer?
20. How old are you?
21. What gender do you identify as?
22. Where do you live?
23. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
24. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
25. I want to take part in the prize draw.
- 25.a. Please leave your email address here. Your email address will only be used for the permitted purpose and will be kept separately from your responses.
26. I am available for follow-up questions as part of a virtually conducted interview (about 30 minutes).
- 26.a. Please leave your email address here. Your email address will only be used for the permitted purpose and will be kept separately from your responses.

Appendix III Questions survey 2

1. If you are happy with the information provided above, including the data protection regulations, and want to take part in the survey, please indicate this by ticking the corresponding box below and let's start.
2. Did you fill out Whitehawk FC's first annual survey in January?
3. Do you see the club as an important part of the community?
4. How does thinking about the club make you feel?
5. Were you able to stay connected with the club during lockdown?
 - 5.a. How?
 - 5.b. Why not?
6. Do you plan to come to a football match of the club as soon as it is possible again?
 - 6.a. Have you been to the ground before?
7. Have you heard about the club's partnership with Pledgeball?
 - 7.a. How did you hear about it?
8. Do you think it is good for the club to partner with Pledgeball?
 - 8.a. Why?
 - 8.b. Why not?
9. Did you hear about Pledgeball's Virtual Lockdown League?
 - 9.a. How did you hear about it?
10. Regarding your quality of life, how concerned are you about
 - 10.1.a. My health
 - 10.2.a. My family's health
 - 10.3.a. My economic situation
 - 10.4.a. Negative impacts of climate change
 - 10.5.a. My employment situation
 - 10.6.a. My country's political situation
 - 10.7.a. Floods
 - 10.8.a. Terrorist attacks
 - 10.9.a. Data fraud or theft
 - 10.10.a. Extreme heat waves
11. How strongly do you agree to the following statements?
 - 11.1.a. Climate change is the biggest challenge for humanity.
 - 11.2.a. Climate change will have a major impact on human's lives in the future.
 - 11.3.a. In principle, climate change concerns everyone.
 - 11.4.a. The topic climate change annoys me.
 - 11.5.a. The impact of climate change is already visible today.
 - 11.6.a. Climate change is not as bad as we are made believe.
 - 11.7.a. There are more urgent problems than climate change.
 - 11.8.a. Humanity will perform well coping with the challenges of climate change.
 - 11.9.a. Climate change does not have any impacts on my own life.
 - 11.10.a. Climate change is a threat for me and my family.
 - 11.11.a. Climate change worries me.
12. Have you noticed particular environmental changes recently or are worried about particular environmental changes in the future?
 - 12.a. Could you give (an) example(s)?
13. What are your main sources of information regarding climate change?
 - 13.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
14. Have you heard about any of the following organisations/initiatives?
15. Would you want to make changes to protect the environment?
 - 15.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
16. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?
 - 16.1.a. Individuals can substantially contribute to climate protection by environmentally friendly behaviour in their everyday lives.
 - 16.2.a. Pressure by individuals on politics can induce effective actions of climate protection.

- 16.3.a. Individuals can substantially contribute to climate protection through their engagement in environmental and climate protection organisations.
- 16.4.a. A single individual cannot do a lot for the protection of the climate.
- 16.5.a. Protection of the climate has primarily to be promoted by politics.
- 16.6.a. Industry is responsible for the implementation of climate protective actions.
- 16.7.a. Actions for climate protection have to be developed by science.
- 16.8.a. A joint effort of individuals, politicians, companies, ... is needed to protect the environment.
- 16.9.a. I feel able to contribute to climate protection.
- 16.10.a. If I tried to behave in a climate-friendly way, that would surely have a positive effect on the climate.
- 16.11.a. I have the necessary knowledge to make climate-friendly choices.
- 16.12.a. I am aware of my personal carbon footprint.
17. Whenever possible, how frequently do you...
- 17.1.a. sort out recycling from the general waste at home and in the workplace.
- 17.2.a. buy food that is more environmentally friendly (e.g. oat milk, vegan/vegetarian options, locally sourced food).
- 17.3.a. prevent food and water waste.
- 17.4.a. reduce energy consumption at home and in the workplace (e.g. turn off lights, shower less than 5 minutes, turn the thermostat down to 19 degrees, wash at 30 degrees).
- 17.5.a. use public transport or take the bike.
- 17.6.a. purchase sustainable products (e.g. buy second-hand; recycled products; eco-friendly option)
- 17.a. Can you think of anything that would support you do these activities more frequently?
18. How difficult would it be/is it for you to integrate the following activities in your daily life?
- 18.1.a. Recycling everything possible.
- 18.2.a. Changing my diet to make it more environmentally friendly (e.g. eating less meat; eating less dairy; shopping for local, in-season produce).
- 18.3.a. Reducing the amount of food I waste and water I use.
- 18.4.a. Reducing my energy consumption (by, for example, reducing the time I spend in the shower, turning down the heating, turning off sleeping appliances).
- 18.5.a. Switching to a green energy tariff.
- 18.6.a. Reducing the amount that I use the car by taking public transport/cycling/walking.
- 18.7.a. Buying environmentally-friendly products where possible (e.g. second-hand; sustainably-made clothes).
19. Would you like to see your club promoting and implementing measures to protect the environment?
20. Have you signed up on pledgeball.org and pledged?
- 20.a. Why not?
21. I signed up
- 21.a. If you selected Other, please specify:
22. What motivated you to sign up and pledge?
23. After having pledged, have you actually carried out the pledge(s)?
- 23.a. What have you pledged?
- 23.b. Why not?
- 23.c. If you selected Other, please specify:
24. Can you describe your 'pledge' experience?
25. How did pledging make you feel?
26. Has pledging affected your thinking about climate change?
- 26.a. Can you explain your answer?
27. Did you talk to others about making 'pledges' to support your team?
- 27.a. How did they react?
- 27.b. Why not?
28. Do you have feedback for Pledgeball (e.g. what needs improving, what did you like)?
29. Do you have recommendations for the club to help you and other fans who want to do more for the environment?

30. Do you think with matches (hopefully) returning soon Whitehawk fans are able to defend their victory in the Pledgeball league?
31. How old are you?
32. What gender do you identify as?
33. Where do you live?
34. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
35. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
36. I want to take part in the prize draw.
- 36.a. Please leave your email address here. Your email address will only be used for the permitted purpose and will be kept separately from your responses.
37. I am available for follow-up questions (as part of a virtually conducted interview or sent via email) to speak about my personal Pledgeball experience.
- 37.a. Please leave your email address here. Your email address will only be used for the permitted purpose and will be kept separately from your responses.

Appendix IV Interview guide

Demographics

- Brief introduction (how old, household situation, profession)

People's fandom

- Why do you support Whitehawk? (values, identity, community aspect, ...)
 - Does Whitehawk stand out for something in particular?
 - Values - Why are these values important?
 - What does community mean to you?
- When did you first come down to see a match?
 - Any anecdote that represents your relationship with the club?
- How does thinking about Whitehawk make you feel?
- With the pandemic and not being able to go to matches, what is it that you miss the most?
 - Did you still find ways to engage with the club/other fans?
- What is special about Whitehawk fans?
- How is the relationship between club and fans?
- Do you also support another (not non-league) club?
 - What's different about supporting those teams?

People's opinion about climate change and Pledgeball

- Do you think climate change is impacting/will impact your football experience?
 - Do you see a connection between climate change and football?
- What's your opinion about climate change in general?
 - Do you think we can do something about it?
- Have you heard of Pledgeball and its virtual lockdown league? (Give some background about the initial plan)
 - What do you think about it?
 - Anything you really liked/that needs improving?
- Do you think it's good for Whitehawk to partner with Pledgeball?
 - If so, why?/If not, why not?
- Have you been environmentally engaged prior to Pledgeball?
 - Where do you see differences) to other environmental campaigns?
 - If not, what did prevent you from engaging so far? / Why are you pledging now?

The act of 'pledging'

- Have you done pledges?
 - Which ones?
 - Did you actually carry them out?
- What happened in your everyday life when you started pledging?
 - What did you think when you went through the list of pledges?
 - How does pledging make you feel?
 - Have you talked with others about your pledges?
 - How did they react?
- What motivated you to do sign up and pledge? (Club, environment, prize draw, ...?)
 - Are you intending on continuing to make pledges/carrying out the pledges?
- Did you face any difficulties in pledging/carrying out the pledges?
- Are there any recommendations you think the club could do to help fans that want to tackle climate change?
- Do you think the FA, Leagues, Brighton & Hove Council or anyone else should be doing anything to help fans or the club to take climate action?
- Do you think Whitehawk fans will win the Pledgeball lockdown league?
- Is there anything we did not discuss that you want to mention?