# Birkbeck Sport Business Centre

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## Cultivating and tending social capital: A case study of Arsenal in the Community

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**Abstract**

This study seeks to establish whether, and, if so, how, 'Football in the Community' can be an important source for cultivating and tending social capital. Previous research has paid much attention to the role of sports and leisure pursuits in the development of social capital and the benefits which can be attained through participation in and involvement with sport, sporting organisations and community sports development (CSD). Using the 'social capital cycle' as a framework for analysing the case of Arsenal in the Community and drawing on previous analytical frameworks, the findings suggest that social capital is being cultivated and tended within Arsenal in the Community, particularly as a result of the environment created through their CSD programmes and the networks developed in partnerships with other organisations. In some cases, this development of social capital has helped to achieve outstanding results. The Holy Grail of CSD research and practice is a credible mechanism for evaluating and measuring seemingly intangible values. While previous studies have emphasised the intangibility of CSD and social capital, the discussions raised in this research suggest two important conclusions. First, that the power of an elite football club brand, such as Arsenal, presents opportunities to add and receive value through reciprocal benefits with its community department. Second, that the positive impacts of this mutual benefit can be recognised within a social impact measurement that has both wider relevance and contemporary resonance for global business strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

"Prosperity requires not just investment in economic capital, but investment in Social Capital" (Mark Carney, 2014. Governor of the Bank of England)

Aside from defining a country's principal city, when we consider the word capital, what immediately springs to mind? In general terms, it can be described as, or associated with, an accumulation of wealth in the form of an asset held either by an individual, a business, an organisation or even a city or a country. It follows then that the term economic capital is relatively easy to digest as wealth associated with money, a tangible asset that can be counted and measured, a vital asset as '*money makes the world go round'*. We then move to other forms of capital, human capital for example; the accumulation of knowledge and skills. This seems to make sense, as a person or a group of people who are recognised as having many skills and much knowledge will have more human capital than a person or group of people who possess fewer skills and less knowledge. Physical capital in the form of possession of tools, machinery and electronic equipment is also relatively easy to explain as the benefits of accumulation and the ability to produce something of value with these physical objects. It follows neatly that a concept associated with a healthy stock of physical capital (the physical resource needed to produce something), along with high levels of human capital (the skills and human resource needed to produce something), can then generate economic capital. So what about other sorts of capital? Cultural capital: what constitutes one group having more culture than another? Or social capital: what does this even mean? Clear definition and accepted meaning are not as easy to recognise.

So why is social capital such a 'hot topic'? It is recognised by governments and powerful international bodies such as the Word Bank, so much so that some authors have observed that to many people in these organisations social capital is considered "the missing link in global and economic development" (Harris and de Renzio, 1997, cited in DeFilippis, 2001: 784). The recent Great British Class Survey[1] in 2011 claims to have re-defined the UK class system based on an interpretation

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[1] See also http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/21970879

and measurement of social, cultural and economic capital. Social capital is also a concept so fiercely contested throughout academia it would be no exaggeration to say that few things remain uncontested in the debate. Not only does it mean different things to different groups, communities and individuals, but the theoretical perspectives, within which the concept of social capital is perceived to be applied, are as diverse as the theories that have attempted to define its meaning. As Ben Fine states; social capital is "definitionally chaotic, as it is imbued with so many different variables, approaches and applications" (Fine, 2010: 5).

The research relating to social capital is extensive and, as Fine suggests, applies a pluralist approach to defining the concept. Much of the literature and research retains a commitment to exploring common threads, such as trust, reciprocity, moral values, community cohesion and access to resources and network-related benefits that can be acquired through social exchange and through social pursuits. It seems, then, to flow naturally that sociability and leisure and, for our purpose, sport in particular, are given credence as important environments for the development of social capital and the benefits that can be attained through participation in and involvement with sport and sporting organisations (Blackshaw & Long, 2005; Coalter, 2005; Coalter, 2012; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1995; Skinner *et al*, 2008; Tacon, 2014). So much so that the attention to sport and its prominence in this context has been criticised as diverting attention away from other important sources of social capital (Siisiäinen, 2000).

As Alejandro Portes (1998: 6) states, "the consensus is growing in the literature that social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures". However, the basic premise of social capital, which suggests that an involvement in groups can lead to benefits for an individual, does not necessarily reveal anything particularly new or insightful. And, as Portes (1998) further identifies, the increasingly diverse application of the term social capital runs the risks of undermining its potential "heuristic" value.

So, as society settles into the second decade of the new millennium and in the aftermath of what could possibly be described as humanity's closest shave with a global economic apocalypse, our governments are beginning to breathe life back into

the neo-liberalist and modernisation agendas that have been responsible for the liberation of capitalism from the shackles of pre–Thatcherite regulation and have slowly but deliberately started to unpick the threads that conjoin public services with the state. Neoliberalism and modernisation agendas within a global society are both responsible for and inextricably linked to the delivery of sport and leisure and also the increasing polarisation of communities and the effect that this has on widening the gap between rich and poor, which creates pockets of deprivation and social exclusion (Hoye & Nicholson, 2008; Skinner et al., 2008). It is in this context that community sports development (CSD) was initiated "as a response to enduring concerns about issues around equal opportunities and participation in sport" (Hylton & Totten, 2008: 77). These concerns constitute one of the principle reasons why Football in the Community (FitC)[2] was conceived and has become the vehicle through which football clubs engage with local communities, and ostensibly the way in which professional football clubs satisfy their corporate social responsibility and contribute to community development (Walters, 2009).

By selecting the case of Arsenal in the Community (AitC), the football in the community department of Premier League football club Arsenal, we will set the research within the context of community sports development. It will give us an understanding, which will be developed though a critical analysis of the concept of social capital, that will enable us to suggest whether AitC's programmes can be identified as being effective in accumulating and cultivating social capital; and if so could be conceived as contributing and adding value to the commercial entity of Arsenal. The immediate focus of the research will be towards participants, community members, the AitC organisation itself and also the many partners and organisations that work with and alongside AitC to deliver both community, and community sports, development. Further to this initial inquiry, a discussion will also be developed in relation to Arsenal Football Club and the positioning of their community department relative to an internal perception within the organisation. The discussion will also examine the potential value of AitC's community work in the context of a sustainable business model that measures value not only in direct

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[2] Football in the Community had its genesis as a partner for delivering community programmes which were part of an initiative called Action Sport, derived by the English Sports Council primarily as an attempt to engage young people (particularly the unemployed) after civil unrest and rioting in the 1980's.

commercial terms, but also in terms of a social metric (Longfills, 2014) and the potential value this may have to the commercial brand itself.

This research has two broad aims. First, to further our understanding of the nature of social capital and to evaluate its relevance to Football in the Community. Second, to examine social capital within a mainstream business and corporate environment, in order to contribute to discussions around social impact measurement and adding commercial value.

## 2. Literature review

This chapter critically reviews literature around social capital and it is structured in the following way: first, I undertake a critical analysis of the theory, drawing on articles from key authors in the field of social capital and other relevant fields. Second, I critically reflect on the concepts of community and community sports development, evaluating contesting views on how social capital is relevant to participation and the policy around access to sport and sport-for-development programmes. Finally, I seek to define, or, more accurately, create a focused understanding of the term social capital, which I will then use as the basis for the case study.

*A critical analysis of 'The Putnam Project'*[3]

Robert Putnam rose to prominence following a paper published in 1995 (Putnam, 1995) and later a book, entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" (Putnam, 2000). Recognised by his dedicated followers as pioneering a contemporary theory of social capital, any study in this field would be remiss not to acknowledge Putnam's contribution to both academic study and his influence on policy makers (Blackshaw & Long, 2005; Tacon, 2014). His approach, however, has come under increasing criticism, particularly within the academic literature, which has identified conceptual and methodological flaws in his approach and his perception of the precepts and products of social capital (Adams, 2011; Blackshaw & Long, 2005; DeFillipis, 2001; Tacon, 2014). While *Bowling Alone* is by no means Putnam's only inquiry into social capital, his previous studies (e.g. Putnam, 1993) suggest that his views have not undergone fundamental change (DeFilippis, 2001).

Embedded within 'Putnamian theory' is an assertion that attitudes and behavioural norms are responsible for engagement with civil society and are directly correlated to the development of social capital. Putnam's 'attitudinal approach' and 'benchmarking' of a functioning society appear to be buried deep within notions of a nostalgic American utopia. Indeed, he claims in Bowling Alone that such an America is an exemplar of a strong civic engagement, something he emphasises with

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[3] The 'Putnam Project' is a term coined in Blackshaw and Long (2005).

reference to Alexis de Tocqueville's (1835) 'Democracy in America' and the links that de Tocqueville made between American civic society and American democracy. Putnam thus focuses on the strength (or more recent weakness) of American participation in specific membership organisations, volunteering, civic actions and events, using these examples as aggregates of civic engagement and therefore stocks of social capital. Putnam's identification of a link between social capital and an engagement with civic society may be correct and is also suggested by other authors (e.g. Portes, 1998). His argument positing a connection between a strong civic society and a functional society are also plausible. His explanation, however, of how and why they are connected appears to be flawed in a number of ways.

First, by determining attitudes as the key 'measure' of social capital and by aggregating attitudes through survey data covering a wide sample range (regional and national), Putnam's results provide a macro and meso level analysis, whereby an individual is measured as either possessing or lacking stocks of social capital; and this capital does not fluctuate relative to place (Tacon, 2014). By design, this research approach does not appear to take into consideration the social conditions to which respondents are subject, or the context within which they are acting. Perhaps it is Putnam's focus on democracy as a key function of civic engagement, together with his preference for empirical study through statistical analysis, that resonates with government leaders, politicians and policy makers who are on the look-out for ways in which to determine social control and reduce the costs of solving social problems (Hylton, 2013; Hylton & Totten, 2008; Portes, 1998). However, trying to explain social capital as a set of attitudes, measured through survey data and reconciled through statistical analysis, is problematic. This research approach, as Tacon (2014: 238) states, "often fails to take account of the contexts and social structures in which norms and attitudes are embedded and in which they might facilitate access to resources".

Second, Putnam concentrates his analysis on a very specific group of large membership organisations, focusing on the reduction in participation within these groups where he believes social capital has historically been cultivated and moreover where he believes institutional civic society resides. By focusing on these organisations, I argue that he does not adequately explain or seek to inquire if and

how social capital and a civic society can be maintained and developed within contemporary groups and 'new' communities. This lack of 'peripheral vision' is evidenced in Putnam's suggestion that women in the workplace are a possible cause of the demise of civic society and therefore the decline in social capital (Putnam, 1995). On this point, he fails to acknowledge that while there may be a decline in some voluntary and civic activities as a result of women taking up employment, there is also a potentially significant added value and greater social connectedness that may have been brought to the workplace through the rise of women taking up employment. Putnam also seems to ignore, or at very best just gives a cursory mention to, the potential value of partnerships which can provide vital links between smaller groups who share similar values and interests or who can be of mutual benefit. Putman cites these as poor substitutes for the 'real thing', again favouring, instead, larger and more established institutional groups.

Despite this critique, it must be recognised that Putnam is seen by many as the public face of social capital (Gauntlett, 2011): for example, his approach is evident in relevant sections of the UK's Office for National Statistics database and he is referenced frequently within World Bank publications (Fine, 2010). This prominence has, as we have mentioned, had a significant influence on public and government policy, so much so that Putnam's seminal work, *Bowling Alone*, is considered "required reading in Downing Street" (Hall, 2003, cited in Blakshaw & Long, 2005: 239). The danger here is that if a trend develops whereby policy makers seek to 'force' social capital, there is a risk that the essence of sociability that supports pockets of social connectedness could be lost. Rather, a bottom-up and empowered community identity that informs and responds to the nature of needs, and which is more likely to develop community cohesion, might better provide a self-regulating control over its members (Skinner et al., 2008).

*A Network Theory*
As Tacon states, "There is now a widely accepted distinction in the social capital literature between 'network' and 'attitudinal' approaches" (Tacon, 2014: 238). Tacon continues by identifying the attitudinal approaches as being driven, in the main, by Putnam, and the network approach being influenced by the work of authors such as Coleman (1988, 1990) and Lin (2001). To these latter authors might also be added

Bourdieu (1986) and Loury (1971). It should be noted that much of the literature that supports a network approach and which post-dates *Bowling Alone*, tends, in the first instance, towards a comprehensive critique of Putnam's views. In what is, perhaps, one of the more vehement attacks on Putnam's theory, DeFilippis' polemic appears to supports much of the theoretical and methodological weaknesses discussed earlier in this review. In addition, DeFilippis (2001) suggests that the very use of the word 'capital' requires recognition of an economic context and the influences of status and power. He recognises Bourdieu's early contributions to the research on social capital, which focus on the different forms of capital and how these interact relative to social positioning (Bourdieu, 1986). When taken at face value, perhaps Bourdieu's own beliefs may appear somewhat depressing as the cliché '*it's not what you know, but who you know*' appears to echo subliminally throughout his chapter in the 'Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education' (Bourdieu, 1986). His assertion is that social capital is at its strongest and most useful for actors of high standing and important social status, suggesting that social capital is retained principally by the powerful and wealthy, an idea which is also identified by Loury (1979), who recognises the issues relating to societal inequalities that affect an individual's ability to access resources.

Loury also stresses the collateral effects of these inequalities that can develop into a negative feedback loop and lead to social exclusion and deprivation. Bourdieu and Loury's analysis provides an interesting base-line for the subsequent work of Alejandro Portes, who argues that Bourdieu's research provided the "first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital" (Portes, 1998: 3). Through his own analysis, Portes's deconstruction of Bordieu's definition of social capital is very succinct: he defines it as "the benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource" (Portes, 1998: 3). Portes (1998) identifies four principal mechanisms – reciprocity exchanges, enforceable trust, value introjection and bounded solidarity – and classifies these as either instrumental or consummatory sources of social capital, according to the motivations and social behaviour that drive them (see Table 1 below). In this way, Portes is able to explain and provide a framework for analysing the processes associated with social capital. Using his framework, Portes (1998: 9) focuses on the plural sources and consequences of social capital towards, as he

states, three basic functions, namely social control, family support and network-mediated benefits, identifying the latter as the most common.

**Table 1: Adapted from Portes (1998), showing the mechanisms and behaviours that develop social capital**

| Mechanisms | | Behaviours |
|---|---|---|
| **Consummatory** | Value Introjection | An obligation to behave in a certain way in order to comply with the norms of a group |
| | Bounded Solidarity | Identification of "self" and belonging within a group |
| **Instrumental** | Reciprocity Exchanges | Exchanges of benefits and favours. An accumulation of chits that motivates reciprocity |
| | Enforceable Trust | The way in which exchanges of benefits and favours are motivated by the desire to become accepted by a group |

Portes's model (see Figure 1 below) resonates profoundly, not only as a framework for understanding both access to resources and the consequences of this access (Portes, 1998; Tacon, 2014), but also as an opportunity to identify the consequences of social capital as either positive or negative. This removes some of the ambiguity of the attitudinal approach, which, although identifying potential 'dark sides' (Putnam, 2000), typically presents social capital as positive (DeFilippis, 2001; Tacon, 2014).

**Figure 1: Model showing "actual and potential gains and losses in transactions mediated by social capital"**
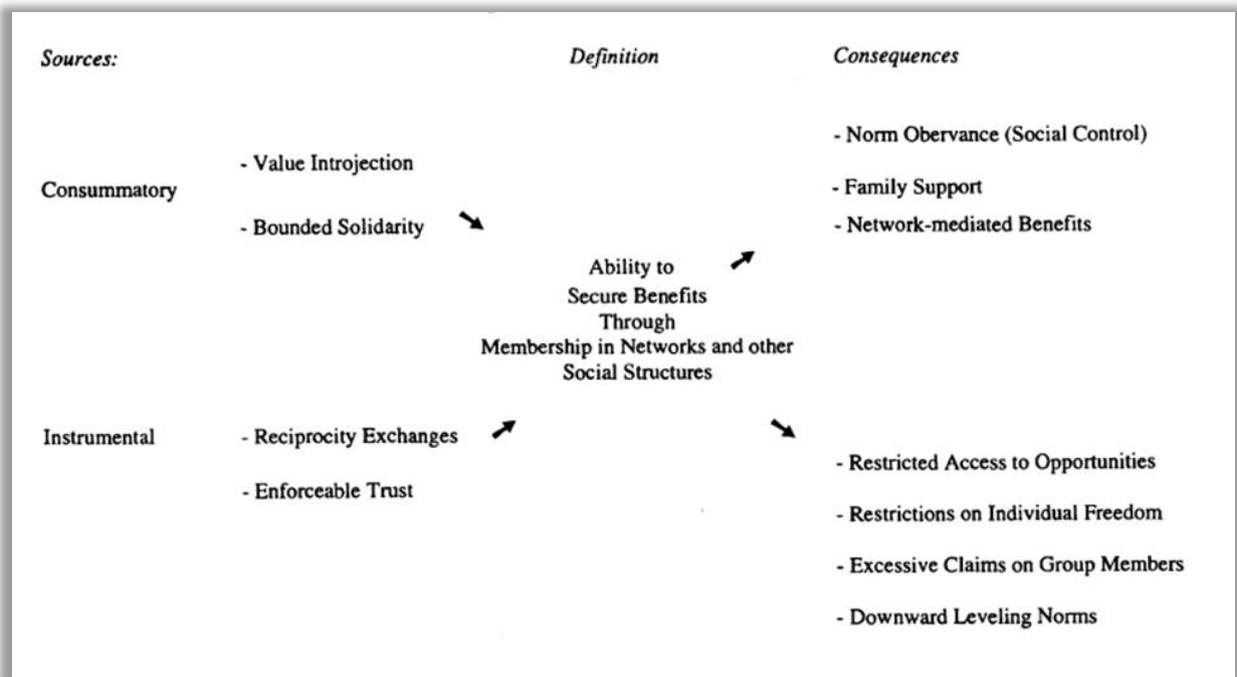


Source: Portes (1998: 8)

Portes describes social capital as a contemporary phenomenon that has developed through earlier social economic theory from authors such as Bourdieu, Loury, Coleman and Lin who all introduce the concept in the context of human, physical and economic capital. This proves useful, as the 'fungibility' of the different forms of capital within social networks (Bourdieu, 1986).is something we draw upon later, particularly when we scrutinise social capital with respect to measurement and value. However, the theory developed initially by authors such as Lin and Coleman appears underpinned by the concept of rational action, whereby an individual makes decisions largely motivated by a conscious cost-benefit calculation to maximise personal gains (Lin, 2001). This research will argue that the processes and consequences of social capital and the perceived value of its development may be better explained through reference to the context within which actions are formed.

*Social capital and community development: the relevance to community sports development and Football in the Community*

So far we have looked at the mechanisms of social capital through a critical analysis of the literature from proponents of both the 'attitudinal' and 'network' schools of thought. This analysis has suggested that the network approach "is more theoretically coherent" (Tacon, 2014: 239) and that the work of Portes (1998) provides a useful analytical framework from which the sources, the types and the consequences of social capital can be examined. As has been suggested, knowing the context and having an understanding of the environments that support the development of social interaction are imperative.  Social capital is not something that appears out of nowhere and "as with any form of collective resource it must be created and nurtured" (Kramer, 2006: 37). As Kramer (2006: 26) also states, "If social capital derives from networks of associations linking interdependent actors, an important question concerns the conditions under which those actors will invest in the creation and maintenance of such networks". The literature review therefore continues by looking at the environments within which social capital is, or might be, developed and, particularly relevant here, the way in which community development and community sports development is inextricably linked to the concept of social capital.

The *Football and its Communities: Final Report* (Brown et al., 2006) presents a broad definition of community with three dimensions:
1. Community as locality, based around specific geographical locations;
2. Community as part of a social network, such as personal relationships, group relationships and as 'communities of interest';
3. Community as communion, including feelings of shared values, collective identity and senses of belonging.

As the report suggests, society increasingly presents itself with a diverse ethnic and cultural eclecticism, within a broad social demographic and often within a close geographical proximity (Brown et al., 2006). While a geographical location is certainly of interest when considering community, arguably the real essence of community is more than a structured association through geographical location. Indeed, as Skinner et al. (2008: 255) put it, "a sense of community arises out of the fundamental human need to create and maintain social bonds, to develop a sense of belonging and to further develop a self-identity" They go on to suggest that the formation of a community delineates theoretical boundaries and makes a distinction

about who does and does not belong. This intimacy between group members can create security, safety and an environment where closeness and bonds can be developed (see also McMillan & Chavis, 1986). A secure environment can be of vital importance to some communities, particularly to vulnerable groups, and, on the one hand, it must be acknowledged that this cohesive bonding can be considered as positive for group members. Conversely, when we examine Skinner et al.'s proposition, we must also be aware of the undesirable aspects of exclusivity and potential barriers to entry that Putnam (2000) describes as the 'dark side' of social capital and which he explains through the potential negative effects of 'bridging and bonding'[4].

Creating a controlled and safe environment that fosters the development of networks and builds relationships through respect, trust and reciprocity is evidenced in Coalter's (2012) study of community sports development programmes aimed at high-risk youth in the UK. Interestingly, Coalter's paper appears to make a conscious decision to avoid referencing the term social capital *per se*. However, it is clear from his research that these components, which are key to functional programme delivery, are also components of social capital and can be developed through sporting programmes, particularly grass-roots participation and the third sector organisations which are also explained as a rich seed-bed for the cultivation of social capital in other research (Skinner et al., 2008). In another study, Coalter (2005) suggests that sport-based community development encourages group-based volunteering, which maintains a high social value and can offer opportunities to develop a sense of self-esteem and confidence, so helping to encourage a social purpose and a sense of belonging. This is also recognised by Sport England (2003: 13), who state that "volunteering can help young people gain a degree of empowerment and recognition".

As outlined at the outset of this review, we have concentrated attention, in the first instance, on Robert Putnam, due to his status as a leading figure within the field of social capital, and due to the fact that his approach appears to be embraced by

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[4] In very broad terms, bridging and bonding refer to social networks between either socially heterogeneous or socially homogenous groups (Putnam, 2000). For a succinct analysis of Putnam's theory see also http://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/bonding-and-bridging

numerous influential and powerful global organisations and government bodies. In fact, the socio-political climate is highly relevant to our research, both with respect to the policy that determines much of the provision and access to sport and sport-for-development programmes, but also the divisions and inequalities that exist within society.  These factors are consistent with the needs to which these programmes are responding. In this context, policy development, community development and social capital development, are inextricably linked. Taking into consideration the analysis of Putnam's attitudinal approach and the methodological issues with the data he used to analyse and explain the mechanisms of social capital, the literature review has led us to suggest that a context-driven approach that considers the nature of networks and social relationships as more relevant to understanding the development of social capital and the attitudes that drive these mechanisms. Portes (1998) provided a useful framework through which to analyse the mechanisms and consequences of social capital development and this approach has been used successfully within micro-analyses of voluntary sports clubs (Tacon, 2014). In addition to the structures, mechanisms and consequences, the review has argued that an understanding of the environment, within which social capital is created and nurtured, is critical. It is suggested that this environment is the 'seed-bed' for developing relationships and networks of communication that support the very structure of a group and that can facilitate and enhance the access to resources.

Figure 2 below attempts to capture this notion of the growth and development of social capital.

**Figure 2: The Social Capital Tree**
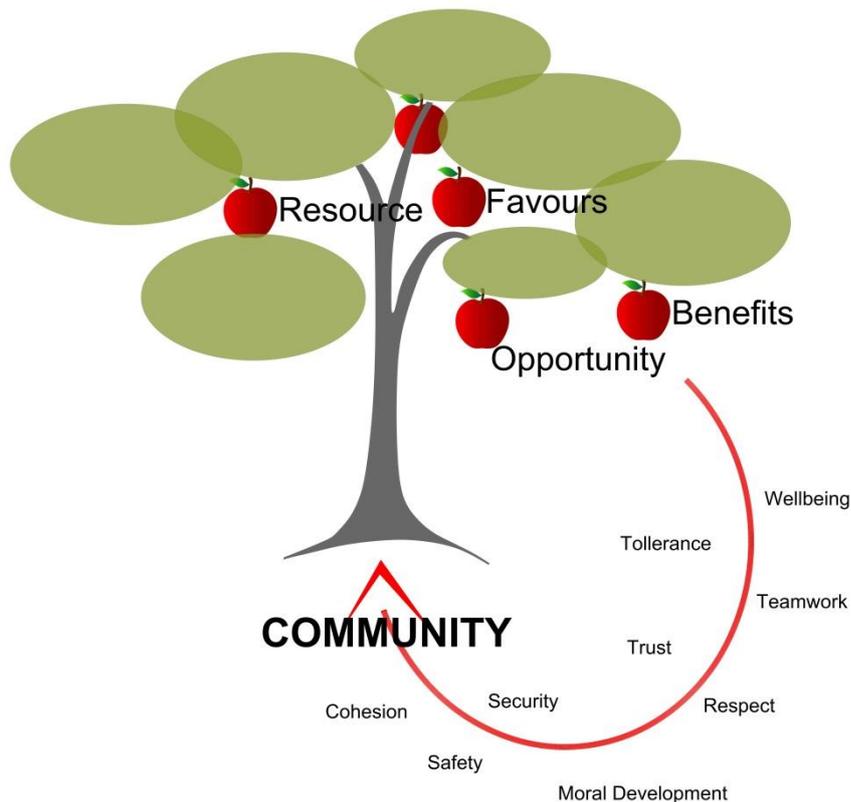
The representation of the social capital tree suggests that the community is the **environment** and seed-bed for the growth of networks and **structures**, which are represented by the form of the tree itself. The **products** of the tree are the fruits, which represent opportunities, resources, benefits and favours. When the fruits are consumed, there are social **consequences**, which trigger behaviours and emotions that in turn can enrich and fertilise the seed-bed of the community, which in theory helps the tree to grow and produce more fruit. The social capital tree provides a useful metaphor to illustrate some of the salient components and processes of social capital; in particular, that social capital should be viewed as a holistic process. From this illustration, a framework can be developed to analyse Arsenal in the Community and the components of social capital in four stages;

1. The **environment** within which the programmes and events operate and the effectiveness of this environment in developing networks, relationships and partnerships.

2. The **structure** of these networks, relationships and partnerships.

3.   The **products** of these structures, including any benefits and access to resources made available to actors.

4.   The **consequences** of these products and how these affect both the actors and the environment within which they operate.

By explaining our framework as a cycle, it is suggested that the four stages operate as a whole and feed into each other. When functional, these stages help develop and strengthen the cycle and enhance the development of social capital. When dysfunctional, the stages can regress or cease to function and the cycle and social capital will decline. Figure 3 below presents this cycle.

**Figure 3: The Social Capital Cycle**
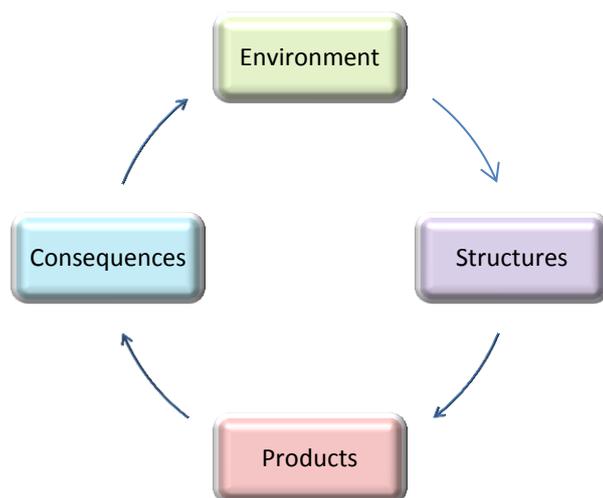
## 3. Methodology

The literature review has argued that a quantitative approach to investigating social capital can be problematic, due to the context-dependent nature of the phenomenon and the importance of process. As such, this research seeks to investigate social capital through a primarily qualitative approach.

*A Qualitative Approach*

The basic objective of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of a particular social phenomenon through an in-depth study of human behaviour, in the context of a particular situation (Panton, 2010). Interpretivist epistemology suggests that knowledge is created through our interpretation, subjective observations and experiences rather than being determined by an objective truth (Neuman, 2004). Following a detailed review of previous research, for the purpose of investigating social capital, a qualitative case study design is considered appropriate, as this allows us to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within a relevant context. Tacon (2014: 238) supports such an approach and argues that, "Social capital needs to be examined through intensive research, which takes account of the mechanisms through which it develops and the socio-political contexts in which they operate".

*Case study*

Discussing case studies, Gilbert et al. (2008: 1466) argue that "A key difference with other research methods is that case studies seek to study phenomena in their contexts, rather than independent of context". Yin (1994: 13) defines a case study as "An empirical enquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when; the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" Flyvbjerg (2006: 236) also states "the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied". This implies that in-depth contextual knowledge is required for unambiguous interpretation.

*Selecting the case study*

It can be argued that a multiple case study design is more robust than a single case study, as it can deliver compelling and reliable evidence through the triangulation of data from different sources (Thomas 2011). As Yin states, "theory triangulation enables a researcher to verify findings by adopting multiple perspectives" (Yin, 1994 in Gilbert *et al* 2008: 1466). There are numerous examples of a multiple case study approach being used for this type of research (e.g. Coalter, 2012; Panton, 2010; Tacon, 2014)[5]. Notwithstanding that a multiple case study appears to be a favoured approach, a single case study design is appropriate when a typical case is identified or when the limitations of time and resource dictate (Yin, 1994). The overriding decision to choose a single case study design was the constraint in resource and time and by concentrating the study on a single case, it was possible to maintain a definitive focus and concentrate on gaining the deepest possible understanding of the organisation and thereby maximising our knowledge (Stake, 1995).

*Arsenal in the Community - A Brief Overview*

Arsenal in the Community (AitC) was founded in February 1985, alongside a national programme – Football in the Community – which encouraged professional football clubs throughout the UK to provide community-focused initiatives aimed at encouraging young people, particularly the unemployed, to participate in recreational and competitive sport. The AitC organisation has grown in stature to a place that is now unrecognisable from its humble beginnings, when AitC ran a handful of community sports programmes from the JVC Sports Centre at the old Highbury Stadium. According to figures provided by AitC, within Islington alone, the organisation runs 40 different programmes that engage 2,160 people in 55 different venues each year (Arsenal, 2010). (Table 2 below provides a summary of various AitC programmes.) AitC presents a worthwhile and interesting case for the research of social capital, as the multiple stakeholders involved in the current 40 AitC programmes will all have individual goals, motivations, expectations and a perspective within which they engage with and may gain benefit from the organisation (Hoskin, 2013).

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[5] For example, Tacon (2014) uses three different voluntary sports clubs from which to collect data. Panton (2010) structures interviews with representatives of five different community schemes of football clubs in his research into corporate social responsibility. Coalter uses multiple cases in his inquiry into community sport development.

**Table 2: Framework of AitC projects, sectors, provisions & partners (Arsenal, 2010.)**

| AiTC PROJECTS | SECTORS | | | LEVELS OF PROVISION & PARTNERS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | VOLUNTARY | PUBLIC | COMMERCIAL | LOCAL | GREATER LONDON | NATIONAL | TRANS-NATIONAL |
| SPORTS | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| ENTERPRISE EDUCATION & TRAINING | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| COMMUNITY & SOCIAL COHESION | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | |
| VOLUNTEERING | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ |
| DIVERSITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| HEALTH | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| CHARITY | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | ■ |
| | | | | | | | |

*Data Collection*

Data collection was structured around a series of interviews and intensive fieldwork, which included observations of programme delivery and attendance at specific events organised by AitC. Interviews were electronically recorded using two devices (one to act as a back-up), following which all recordings were downloaded and added to an electronic research database. An overarching observational approach was maintained at every opportunity during the research, and fieldwork was recorded with hand-written notes in a bound notebook. This log was maintained for every observation, interview and event attended throughout the research and a scanned copy of each page of this log has been retained as a digital version of the hard copy.

Observation of the programmes formed an important part of the research and the events provided vital insight into the organisation and added context to the interviews. A record of all the events attended is shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 2: Attended Events**

| EVENT NAME | METHOD of DATA COLLECTION | TYPE of EVENT | ORGANISATION | EVENT DATE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Event A** | Hand written notes | Programme Delivery | AitC & School Partner | 27th May 2014 |
| **Event B** | Hand written notes | Participant Review | AitC & Charity Partner | 27th May 2014 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Event C** | Hand written notes | Football Tournament | AitC | 27th May 2014 |
| **Event D** | Hand written notes | Programme Delivery | AitC | 23rd June 2014 |
| **Event E** | Hand written notes | Annual Awards | AitC | 14th July 2014 |
| **Event F** | Hand written notes | Programme Delivery | AitC & Charity Partner | 1st September 2014 |
| **Event G** | Hand written notes and electronic recorder | Programme Delivery | Aitc & Charity Partner | 11th September 2014 |

Potential interviewees were selected and requests stimulated through initial fieldwork and formative meetings with practitioners and organisation members. Attendance at the events also solicited informal introductions. The research planning stage raised questions about how to select interviewees and the validity of the selection process, the concern being that selection could be biased. However, taking into consideration the constraints on time and resource it is considered that identification by the researcher of potentially useful and willing participants can contribute to more in-depth and comprehensive understanding (Stake, 1995). Formal requests for interviews were made via email and a chain of correspondence has been copied to the research database for future reference. Email requests included an information document, which outlined the research objectives and any implications of taking part and contributing. A consent form was also submitted at this stage to ensure that all participants understood the criteria and relevant details of the interview process and ensured that each respondent explicitly opted into the research (Thomas, 2011). Table 4 below provides further details of the interviewees.

**Table 3: Interviews Conducted**

| NAME | METHOD of DATA COLLECTION | ROLE or TITLE | ORGANISATION | INTERVIEW DATE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Interviewee 1** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Participant | AitC | 1st July 2014 |
| **Interviewee 2** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Head of Organisation | AitC | 9th July 2014 |
| **Interviewee 3** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Practitioner (ex-participant) | AitC | 14th July 2014 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Interviewee 4** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Mentor of vulnerable adult | AitC & Charity Partner | 15th July 2014 |
| **Interviewee 5, 6 & 7 (Group)** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Participants | AitC & Charity Partner | 1st September 2014 |
| **Interviewee 8** | Digital recording on 1 device | Participants | AitC & Charity Partner | 1st September 2014 |
| **Interviewee 9** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Teacher | AitC & School Partner | 8th September 2014 |
| **Interviewee 10, 11 & 12 (Group)** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Participants | AitC | 11th September 2014 |
| **Interviewee 13** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Council Department | London Council | 17th September 2014 |
| **Interviewee 14** | Digital recording on 2 devices | Practitioner | AitC | 17th September 2014 |

The number of interviews was not specifically defined in advance, although the research planning stage set an objective of no less than eight interviews to ensure that sufficient data was gathered across the key stakeholder groups. In total, 11 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 14 interviewees (eight individual interviews and two small groups of three). The duration of interviews ranged between 25 and 60 minutes and included contributions from participants, practitioners and stakeholders, who are external to the organisation, but who are involved both directly and indirectly with AitC and are linked through partnerships maintained as part of community development programmes.

To help structure the interviews a set of themes was generated to act as a guide and also to help stimulate further discussion. This thematic approach helped in situations where respondents were nervous or guarded, although in the main the guide provided a catalyst and stimulation to more in depth and meaningful informant participation. This semi-structured approach allows a researcher to guide the flow of the interview but provides flexibility to engage in more in-depth inquiry when appropriate or required (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Using the social capital cycle as framework for analysing the data, we have used the organisation of AitC as the main unit for analysis within which triangulation of data can be drawn through information collected across our three groups of contributors (or actors), namely participants, practitioners and partners. This data was then positioned against the components of social capital developed by the organisation, events and actions of the actors operating within the objective structure proposed. As such, the findings section below is arranged in relation to the social capital framework above, i.e. environment, structure, products and consequences.

## 4. Findings

*Environment*

The first stage of the cycle is the <u>environment</u> within which the programmes and events operate and the effectiveness of this environment in developing networks, relationships and partnerships.

> *My background is very much community involvement in sport with an emphasis I suppose on the power of football and the influence and affect that football, primarily through professional football, can have on individuals and communities.* (Interviewee 2)

The interview conducted on 9 July was held with the head and founder member of AitC who has seen the department develop from a focused initiative targeted at unemployed youth to what is now an extensive and overarching outreach utility for Arsenal, aimed at delivering community-focused engagement through a wide range of programmes. Recounting commonalities between some of the current programmes and the original Action Sport government strategy designed to combat social unrest in the early 1980s, the head of AitC felt strongly that, from the conception of the AitC department and even before that time, the club have always felt a responsibility to its community. This sense of responsibility, he believes, has amplified over time to provide an environment that enhances the ongoing development of this community. In this context he went on to say:

> *….so it (the club) was always at the heart of the community but it is since that time and now, that it is at the heart of the community in so many different ways.* (Interviewee 2)

The research found that AitC programmes were multi-dimensional insofar as engaging as many age groups as possible[6], ranging from primary school children aged 9+ at Event A through to middle aged participants of 40+ years attending Event F. The observations and interviews also revealed very mixed social backgrounds where the needs of the participants varied. For example a secure environment appeared to be of particular importance to vulnerable groups and individuals. This was evidenced during the research where one of a group of participants at Event F explained:

> *The main thing was to feel the security and safety… and that is what we have here. Apart from the group, we don't have many friends outside.* (Response from interviewee 6; recorded on 1st September 2014 at Event F)

Evidence of inclusive and cohesive bonds being developed within the organisation was also recorded during an interview. Speaking of his time as a participant as a 'high risk'[7] youth while on parole:

> *……….everyone was just, was, was just, was just welcoming…. just, just, just greeting you in a nice way. It was such a welcoming place to be, and like, it was like definitely…..how can I explain it. It was like a community that you wanted to be part of.* (Response from interviewee 3; recorded on the 14th July 2014)

The research also noted AitC's sensitivity and attention to specific needs which would be required to maintain existing structures and make available new resources. This was demonstrated when AitC practitioners engaged with a vulnerable young adult with specific learning difficulties. During observations at Event B, the participant was encouraged to take part in a variety of voluntary coaching programmes in which he showed an interest. The AitC practitioners reassured him that they would remain a consistent presence throughout the coaching programme so that there would

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[6] Although programme delivery involving older age groups wasn't specifically observed as part of the research it was noted from documents and interviews that AitC also encourage more senior participants through sporting initiatives such as short mat bowls.
[7] In this context the term 'high risk' relates to an individual who is considered at risk of re-offending or committing a crime.

continue to be support from familiar faces with whom a relationship had already been developed.

Interviews also found evidence of a culture within the organisation that promoted inclusivity and group bonding:

> *When I walked into the office like, no one used to look down on me, like everyone like in the office, everyone's a family, everyone helps everyone out. There's something that needs covering, someone would cover it, everyone just looks out for each other 'cause at the end of the day everyone wants to represent the badge in a good way.* (Response from interviewee 3; recorded on the 14th July 2014)

In this interview, it was interesting to note the reference to "representing the badge" and what this may mean. With AitC operating as an integral component of Arsenal Football Club, it would be natural to expect that allegiances to supporting Arsenal may be relevant. Indeed, this proposition was raised by interviewee 2, when responding to a question as to whether supporting the club mattered when engaging with AitC:

> *My sort of view on that is….. that….that is one of the downsides. It's a plus side and a downside with football, in that it is very tribal, and initially on first coming into contact with our programmes people might say; oh, it's Arsenal...nahhh, I'm not a supporter, I'm not getting involved in that. But once they get into it they see that's only one side of it. I suppose if you are looking at it from where I started to explain things, it is certainly more attractive to people who support Arsenal.* (Response from Interviewee 2 on the 9th July 2014)

This response and view was not surprising, but further observations and inquiry revealed interesting results on this point;

> *Researcher:*       *Are you an Arsenal fan?*
> *Interviewee 3:*    *Nahhhhh…. I'm a Spurs fan!*

> *Researcher:*           *Ahhh that's interesting. How did it make you feel coming to…(Interviewee 3 interrupts)*
>
> *Interviewee 3:*        *To be honest it's not that deep for me. I have to say, to be honest, I was just happy to come out and get straight into work.*

(Questions from Researcher and responses from interviewee 3; recorded on the 14th July 2014)

Further observations and interviews showed that a wide range of supporters of different clubs participated in programmes and activities and that their allegiances did not appear to have a negative effect on the environment for developing social capital. For example, the participant observed at Event B was a Chelsea fan and his mentor (interviewee 4) confirmed that the mentee had never disclosed any displeasure at being involved in a rival club's programmes. The participants observed at Event G and then interviewed thereafter comprised of one Spurs fan, one Newcastle fan and one Arsenal fan. An interview with the P.E. teacher of a school partner mentioned the 'healthy banter' that was instigated during coaching sessions between the varieties of fans within the school sports groups. The reference to healthy banter was also identified on a number of occasions across other groups and this appeared to be encouraged as an acceptable lubrication for social intercourse. While many programmes such as the employability and educational initiatives include a formal structure and attainment goals, a sense of fun and having fun was consistently evidenced, as shown in the next example:

> *From our point of view what the girls love to do is if it's a session when we've got the Arsenal coaches in…they'll do drills you know….jump up and shout Arsenal as if you're heading a ball. So they'll be running along and the majority of the class jump up and shout Arsenal but…. and myself included…….I will jump up and shout "Newcastle". Or the Chelsea supporter jumps up and is the loudest one you can hear and shouts "Chelsea"…… but they still all take part one hundred percent.* (Response from interviewee 9; recorded on the 8th September 2014)

The respondent continued to explain, that the overwhelming response to Arsenal was demonstrated through a kudos and sense of pride to be involved with the organisation and that the AitC coaches, who all attend programmes fully branded, gave an air of importance to the activities and that, in turn, created self-esteem among both staff and pupils, regardless of what football team they supported. A similar sentiment was also expressed from the group of interviewees at Event G, who we have already identified as having mixed allegiances. This group all agreed about feeling positive towards being involved with the Arsenal brand and were impressed that the venues for programme delivery were in close proximity to the Emirates stadium, Arsenal's home ground.

Many components for a healthy seed-bed for developing social capital were in evidence during the research, such as social inclusion, trust, community cohesion, self-worth, belonging and safety. This was possibly most poignantly expressed by a participant at Event F:

> *Once we are here we are with family and friends and so all the stresses and difficulties are put aside. When we are here we really have a sense of belonging, so Arsenal in the Community is doing very well for us, we cannot express how grateful we are……. Whatever we say will be underestimating because we know the backgrounds we come from and it is through sport that they bring us together and yes, it is true, Arsenal in the Community brings us all together. _____ and _____ (those) who oversee the group really are extremely good because they always see to it that we are having smiles on our faces.* (Response from interviewee 6 at attended Event F; recorded on 1st September 2014)

*Structure*

The second stage of the social capital cycle is the structure of the networks, relationships and partnerships.

> *…….it's not necessarily easy to get our messages across to people about the number of different activities that we can do…… but!, having said that and what I wanted to say originally is….. a lot of this is about partnerships and*

*therefore we partner other organisations to help get our message across.*
(Response from Interviewee 2 on the 9th July 2014)

For the most part, the access to multiple resources within the AitC organisation and the referrals to, from and between partnership programmes is structured and follows a natural progression of association. To explain this, interviewees shared their experiences of multiple resources being made available through participation.

For example, interviewee 1, a student on the BTEC module programme referred to extracurricular opportunities such as youth coaching at local leisure centres and primary schools. This was articulated as facilitating work experience and gaining "life skills". The interviewee continued to explain the opportunity to join the AitC "gappers" programme, which is run as a placement in one of Arsenal's international development programmes and designed as work experience before further education or professional employment.

Other examples of initial associations giving rise to the development of additional networks and structures were demonstrated during observations and interviews with school partners:

> *Researcher:       What programmes do they (AitC) run with you?*
> *Interviewee 9:      Well initially ____ would come in and he would just deliver some football sessions within our curriculum under the KICKZ[8] programme. We would then hold inter-form competitions and ____ would get some of the other coaches down for the day….some of them would referee….they brought Arsenal banners down and we had our pictures taken and I even think that we had one of our pictures in the Arsenal match day programme.*
> *Then ____ put us in touch with Arsenal in the Community a bit further. He put us in touch with ____ who oversees the Premier League for Sport programme…..so we have been running for about 4 years now; volleyball and*

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[8] KICKZ is a social inclusion programme that partners the police with the football industry and involves the delivery of 100 schemes by professional football clubs. Arsenal in the Community manages six separate projects across four London boroughs: Islington, Hackney, Camden and Westminster (AitC, 2013).

*badminton and we took on netball 2 years ago. We now have coaches who come in and deliver after schools sessions in sports we perhaps don't have the capacity to run.*

*We've had the same volleyball coach now for four years and the girls love her. What's brilliant about volleyball sessions is that _____ knows other volleyball coaches within North London and they would then pass on the message that that there was volleyball taking part in our school, so on Wednesdays we have girls coming from _____ which is another secondary school in Camden and also girls from _____ would also come down, so all of a sudden our girls would be mixing with girls from other schools having this volleyball team united through the Arsenal.* (Response from interviewee 9; recorded on the 8th September 2014)

What was particularly refreshing about the many ways in which AitC and this secondary school actively developed strong and plural networks was that, in this case, the participants were mainly female. In other areas the research made observations that with the exception of the AitC educational programme (Event A), male and female representation was not generally proportionate, either within the programmes or within the AitC team themselves. Whilst it must be noted that this recognition represents a research finding rather than a criticism, this point was also raised by a respondent when explaining the limited resource available in the form of female role models in trying to combat specific issues with anti-social behaviour and increasing problems with female gangs. Conversely, when discussing a partnership between AitC and the local council resident engagement team, a manager described some of the programmes and initiatives available to the local community and the outreach role that AitC play in helping the council deal with anti-social behaviour. Describing how the practitioners in the football coaching programmes engaged on this level, interviewee 13 explained:

*They are all very aware of the youth worker profile….. the coaches. So if they see any other issues I think they are like… the big brother approach where…. come and talk to me…….tell me. Also the senior members in Arsenal in the Community have got very good connections within other people in Islington*

> *Council to make a referral onto them….. so it's very important that they connect in this way.*

Furthering an understanding of the ways in which the different programmes integrate, she continued:

> *The other bit is the youth employability programme that they (AitC) run and we now deliver it on estates. So every quarter we move the programme to different estates so different kids can access it. So ____ and his colleague at Arsenal in the Community will generally get about 12 youngsters through a 12 week programme….. the success of this is, that if they are good, Delaware North, the Co-op and the good contacts _____ has got will give them a job and that's brilliant………. Next time you go to a game and you see a really young person serving drinks, well that's what they do…… it's all about opportunities and choices.* (Responses from Interviewee 13; recorded on the 17th September 2014)

Predominantly the networks of association revealed mostly positive results. However, there were also some negative results reported. The research found that on two occasion respondents complained that they were waiting to receive their attainment certificates. While it was noted that the disappointment was motivated by a value placed in the accreditation, which reflects positively on the organisation, it must also be noted that there is a danger that some of the value added maybe eroded by falling at this last hurdle. The research also found evidence that the corporate entity of Arsenal contributed to conflicts of structural interest on two notable occasions. First a practitioner mentioned an increasing difficulty in gaining permission to accept 'high risk' individuals onto programmes due to restrictions being placed by HR departments within the club. Further to this, a worker within one of the council partner programmes who requested complete anonymity mentioned tensions between Arsenal and the local council, specifically a feeling that relationships and partnerships were being restricted and manipulated due to unrelated disputes between the club and the local authority:

*Anonymous: ….so it's not easy…. not being able to use the Arsenal players as role models*

*Researcher: so you think it would help?*

*Anonymous: I think it would definitely help…. definitely help*

*Researcher: and the club don't offer that?*

*Anonymous: well…….there is…errr…..well you just get in line really and the relationship between Arsenal as a corporation and the council isn't great.*

(Anonymous contribution offered to the research without prejudice)


*Products*

The third stage of the social capital cycle is the <u>products</u> of these structures, including any benefits and access to resources made available to the actors. The research has found evidence of a wide range of benefits available to multiple stakeholders throughout all the programmes run by AitC. Whether these benefits can be explained as social capital will be discussed in the next chapter. However in this section the research results will present a summary of some of the specific benefits observed.

For instance, interviewee 1 expressed the benefits of training and coaching skills developed over and above his BTEC curriculum. As mentioned previously, this was articulated as gaining a "life skills" benefit that would enhance personal development. Friendships developed during sessions with AitC also facilitated *ad hoc* social exchanges such as games of recreational football in a park. Participants in the sports programme, Event F, expressed a sense of privilege and associated a value with benefits such as meeting players, playing football at the Emirates stadium and being given free tickets for Arsenal games. The reward value of free tickets to watch the team play at the Emirates was expressed consistently throughout the research and is an example of the ways in which the corporate entity of the Arsenal provides a valuable resource which AitC converts to benefits for participants and community members. In one case a respondent claimed to have received as many as 200 free tickets for one game to distribute throughout her school.

Additional sports programmes were provided at Interviewee 9's school, which it is argued is a benefit in itself, and was enhanced further with trips to sporting events

organised by AitC where the pupils were treated to travel on a player's coach. The instances of reward and token benefits in the form of kit, water bottles, mascots and so forth continued to be present throughout the research.

As shown above, the respondents interviewed at Event F acknowledged the benefits provided by the club in the way of access to games and pitch time. One of the participants also articulated clearly the value of the benefits he felt had been gained through participation on the programme:

> *Researcher: _____ told me that you are going to university. Tell me how did that come about?*
> *Interviewee 7: Well….. I have interest in sports and when I was back home in my country I was part of a regional sports committee, part of the _____ football association. So when I came here, when I found out this group, I became more interested in sport and I feel that there are many opportunities at this level and at university. So I feel I need to upgrade myself and I couldn't have done this for the past year because I was on the asylum process. But now I have my refugee status I can go to anything…. and all this, thank god, to Arsenal in the Community.* (Questions from Researcher and responses from interviewee 7; recorded on the 1st of September 2014 at Event F)

*Consequences*

The fourth stage of the social capital cycle is the consequences of these products relative to the structures and how these affect both the actors and the environment within which they operate. To conclude the findings of the research and to complete the analytical cycle, what are the consequences of the three stages? To turn for a moment back to the social capital tree (Figure 2), the consequences of our cycle could be linked to consuming the fruits of the tree and if this leads to or represents a development or diminution of the cycle.

For the participants at Event F, there was a clear response to the perceived benefits and consequences of participation in and involvement with AitC programmes. This was expressed by some respondents who felt that AitC supported the successful progression through the asylum process and the life changing opportunities that

accompany this transformation. Interviewee 3 also expressed a life changing experience over a five-year journey with AitC finally concluding with a job offer outside the AitC department and as a football coach in one of Arsenal's international development schools. Interviewee 3 summarised his journey:

*I just feel like when I look back four, five years from now and how my life has changed and how my mentality was, it's like I don't know who that person was. It's just like I've just…just felt like I've developed and become a whole new person where my whole mentality is just completely different to how I used to think before, Just by being in the building, just by being involved with Arsenal where going from jail, to going on an apprenticeship then going part time, then going full time then only recently being offered a job in _____ which is a four year contract which I'm taking and leaving…..it's like, like, I don't know…..it's like a dream.*

Interviewee 3 also explained how the programmes he has helped develop though his experience has, he believes, encouraged life-changing experience for other participants;

*Interviewee 3:      A lot of them from the gangs are starting to realise, that it's not the life that they want to live. So by me being involved in Arsenal and going there and seeing me actually doing something…… 'cause a lot of them have never ever had a job in their life, never ever paid taxes and that…. and that was one of the quotes when he got his first job. It was like wow! This is the first time I ever paid tax!*
*Researcher:      So it felt like he was contributing?*
*Interviewee 3:      Exactly!…exactly that.* (Response from interviewee 3; recorded on the 14th July 2014)

The consequences for Interviewee 9's school were expressed as an enhanced sports programme that has become integral to the curriculum and the effect of the networks developed through AitC that has broadened horizons and supported pupils through transitions such as leaving secondary school to further education or vocation.

The research has not ignored the potential negative consequences arising from tensions and also the potential contradictions between the objectives of some AitC programmes and the commercial objectives of the club. Conversely, we have identified the positive association with the Arsenal brand, which also provides valuable resource and leverage utilised by AitC. In this context, the AitC annual awards (Event E) provided a valuable snapshot of the organisation with the celebration of the achievements of those involved in AitC. It was the scale and atmosphere of the occasion that individually accredited 264 participants and volunteers and acknowledged the work of 65 partner organisations, that the catchment and reach of AitC was truly elucidated. It was also noted that presentations by celebratory guest comperes, ex-Arsenal playing 'legends' and video messages from players helped to boost the grandeur of the day. Placed within the venue of the Arsenal stadium and with the foyer to the presentation hall boasting panoramic views of the pitch, this event both instantiated and punctuated an association with the aspirational premiership football brand Arsenal.

## 5. Discussion

In what ways do AitC's community development programmes contribute to the cultivation and development of social capital? By using the social capital cycle framework, the processes for developing and accumulating social capital are broken down into stages: Environment, Structures, Products and Consequences. As the analysis of the data moved through the framework, it became apparent that making a clear distinction between the different stages proved difficult. For example, the boundaries between structures and relationships that produce resource and benefits are not clearly defined; similarly, the distinction between products and consequences was, to some extent, impossible to make. It is argued that trying to force the complex components of social capital into divisible parts is counterproductive to gaining an understanding of the phenomenon. Rather it is the fluidity of social actions and the mobility of the structures within which they operate that creates the synergy of the cycle. In this way the stages must be considered as operating as a whole.

*Environment*

First, the research sought to gain an understanding of the environments that support the development of social interaction. The literature, particularly that which supports the network theory of social capital, has highlighted the significance of the conditions under which AitC programmes may create and maintain networks and relationships (Kramer, 2006; Tacon, 2014). The environments continue to have relevance when explaining the mechanisms of social capital and CSD and also when considering a methodological approach to an appropriate research design (Coalter, 2005;, 2012; Portes, 1998; Skinner et al., 2008; Tacon, 2014).

It is suggested that to enhance social interaction, a secure environment can be of vital importance to some groups and potentially vulnerable individuals. This observation is supported by suggestions made in previous research (Coalter, 2012; Skinner et al., 2008). The results identified that for a number of participants, for whom this was particularly important, the need for intimacy and safety within a group was being met by the AitC programmes. Further results showed that self-worth and belonging was achieved from an association with Arsenal and that this contributed to the both the development of a suitable environment for programme delivery and also

contributed to further development within the groups. We can reference these results against Portes' (1998) mechanisms of social capital development; in particular, where Portes identifies bounded solidarity as an identification of "self" and belonging. Respondents also identified that they were motivated to behave in a certain way because of the kudos associated with the Arsenal badge. This behaviour can also be referenced against Portes' (1998) value introjection, which he describes as another mechanism of social capital. Findings which proved surprising were that a wide range of football supporting allegiances was present within participants in AitC programmes. While it was expected that the "tribal" nature of football would reveal some negative and exclusive aspects to AitC, indicating what Putnam refers to as one of the 'dark sides' of social capital (Putnam, 2000), the findings proved to the contrary that rather than creating tension, this variety stimulated cohesion through what was referred to as 'healthy banter'.

*Structures*

The results show that through CSD programmes, AitC provides a dense network of communication through a variety of large and small, formal and informal groups and that these are established as structures both internal to the organisation and through partnerships with external groups. Perhaps one of the most outstanding and holistic observations made during the research of AitC was the commitment and understanding of the organisation in the value of partnerships which can facilitate and enhance opportunities. The results suggest that AitC actively develop a circulatory system of organised *communitas*, which provides dense networks of communication between groups both internal and external to the organisation and that these associations act as a passport to access resource and benefits. The extent of this social circulation was observed at the AitC annual awards (Event E), which celebrated the achievements of 264 participants and volunteers plus the work of 65 partner organisations. On this point, it is interesting to draw reference back to the critique of the 'Putnam Project' and Putnam's focus in *Bowling Alone* on large institutional membership organisations, where he believes social capital has historically been cultivated and moreover where he believes institutional civic society resides. It is argued that results support the proposition that Putnam does not adequately recognise the potential value of partnerships, which can provide vital links between smaller groups.

For the most part, the findings suggest that participation in AitC programmes created access to further networks and relationships and fulfilled a positive feedback loop through association. Conversely, the findings highlighted conflicts between the community department, their council partners and the commercial departments of Arsenal and this conflict produced some negative consequences, which will be discussed in more detail below. Putnam (1993: 169) suggests that social networks "allow trust to become transitive and spread". I would argue that the findings imply that it is more theoretically coherent to suggest that trust allows social networks to become transitive and spread. It is therefore feasible also to suggest the opposite and that when trust breaks down, this puts the networks and social structures at risk of breaking down also.

*Products*

It is noted that referring to the resources and benefits of social capital as products is potentially problematic, as the term suggests a physical or tangible entity. It is argued that by identifying a product of social capital, this implies that rather than trying to define what social capital is, it is more useful to concentrate on what social capital actually does.

The findings showed evidence of a wide range of benefits that are accrued, retained and shared as a result of participation in AitC programmes and, in some cases, these benefits were considered as contributing to life-changing experiences. It would be reasonable, however, to raise the question as to whether these benefits have been established purely through social exchange, or whether market transactions and commercialisation play their part in facilitating this exchange. The results showed that some of the benefits accumulated or retained by participants were in the form of free tickets to games, pitch time, Arsenal kit, mascots etc. These "freebies" would not necessarily differentiate Arsenal's ability to contribute benefit over and above a gift or charitable donation. This research argues, however, that the ability of AitC to leverage and use CSD as a mechanism to distribute benefits is a form of 'reciprocity exchange' with the community and also, through tacit reciprocation, within the club itself, as AitC is deployed to gain favour within the community and to compensate for any inconvenience caused to residents through the clubs commercial activities:

*Interviewee 2:* *There is certain discomfort and sacrifices in living close to the football club that might be noise pollution, that might be traffic pollution, that might be lots of things. The club and the council feel that we owe them (the community) something to compensate for this. Living local we can reciprocate and give you advantages, we can come to your school…….. we can deliver all sorts of things…… every sector of the local community we can and probably do have a relationship with.* (Response from Interviewee 2 on the 9th July 2014)

Reciprocity exchanges are evidenced in other studies of social capital (Tacon, 2014) and referenced explicitly in Portes' framework, as one of the consequences mediated by social capital (Portes, 1998). Conversely, questions can be raised as to whether AitC's primary activity of CSD, which "arose as a response to enduring concerns about issues around equal opportunities and participation in sport" (Hylton & Totten, 2008: 77.), renders the community department no more than the commercial entity of Arsenal discharging its corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Walters, 2009), rather than AitC adding value as a source for cultivating social capital. This research argues that whilst the question of CSR and its relevance to CSD has been the subject of empirical debate (Panton, 2010; Walters, 2009) and is indeed of interest in this context, whether CSD and CSR are inextricably linked, does not preclude the influence and relevance of social capital in this sphere.

*Consequences*

Proponents of social economic theories argue that social capital should be considered in relation to economic, cultural and human capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Loury, 1977; Lin, 2001). The findings of this research would not necessarily disagree and certainly the "fungibility" of the different sources of capital becomes relevant to our discussions. However, while authors such as Bourdieu and Loury emphasise social positioning and status as prerequisite for establishing or recognising the value of social capital, this research suggests that social capital should not be aggregated in this way. To draw on two examples that explain this proposition, we can look first at the results from Interviewee 3. In this case, and mediated in the first instance through social interaction, the respondent discussed an accumulation of benefits, which can be recognised as human and cultural capital,

while participating in the AitC sport and training programmes. He also clearly articulated the ability to increase economic capital through personal development and promotion within the organisation. This respondent also gives the research an opportunity to scrutinise the measurement and a relative value of social capital from another perspective and through an insight into gang culture in the UK. Research into gang culture in the UK has identified it as an environment rich in social capital development (Deuchar, 2009, 2010) and arguably the accumulation and development of other forms of capital. In his response, Interviewee 3 explains his experience of a custodial sentence as a result of activities and obligations placed on him as a gang member. The interviewee also explained the difficulty of breaking out of the cycle of crime perpetuated by the obligation to conform to the gang's group norms. This behaviour can be identified again as mechanisms and consequences of social capital within Portes' framework for analysis. Interviewee 3 described the use of CSD programmes and his own experience as a positive role model to encourage gang members to make better decisions and the following quotes are copied again:

> *Interviewee 3:* *A lot of them from the gangs are starting to realise, that it's not the life that they want to live. So by me being involved in Arsenal and going there and seeing me actually doing something…… 'cause a lot of them have never ever had a job in their life, never ever paid taxes and that…. and that was one of the quotes when he got his first job. It was like wow! This is the first time I ever paid tax!*
>
> *Researcher:* *So it felt like he was contributing?*
>
> *Interviewee 3:* *Exactly!…exactly that.* (Response from interviewee 3; recorded on the 14th July 2014)

These results exemplify the positive outcome from an involvement in AitC, as opposed to the negative outcomes described from an involvement in organised criminal gangs. The point being that contrary to the social economic theory, social capital can be developed in a variety of social conditions and can contribute significantly towards both negative and positive outcomes. The findings highlighted here will also be of interest to policy makers looking for evidence of social capital and CSD determining social control and democratising culture (Hylton & Totten, 2008; Portes, 1998).

Event F's participants provided the second example for an interesting opportunity to analyse the relative value of social capital. Speaking little or no English and living, in the first instance at least, in isolation, the group's backgrounds and circumstances of arrival into the UK deemed that they joined the AitC programmes with little or no stocks of social capital. Moreover, their status placed restrictions on integrating and developing social ties. The respondents revealed, that through their involvement with AitC, they experienced not only a feeling of safety, happiness, trust and belonging, but also access to a variety of network-related benefits which can also be identified as contributing to human and cultural capital development. Despite their status within the asylum process, which restricted the ability of some individuals to realise and explore the full potential of the benefits, these participants, through describing their experience whilst with AitC, have provided the research with evidence that they have accumulated relatively high stocks of social capital which has in turn helped to develop positive outcomes. As with the previous example, it is the relative change evidenced here that is significant. It is argued that by focusing on measurement and value relative to context, the mechanisms and consequences of sociability become more useful to understanding and establishing a value of social capital rather than the definition, as some social economists may suggest, of specific networks and benefits that vary relative to social positioning and power.

*The Bigger Picture*

The issues relating to the conflicts between the community and commercial departments of the club provided findings that identify negative consequences within the social capital cycle. This raises discussions as to the relative positioning of AitC and the perceived value and role within the Arsenal brand. This discussion also raises questions and is relevant to the wider socio-political climate and also the nature of business development in a global context. From its inception in the 1980s, AitC's primary objective has been to deliver CSD programmes aimed primarily, although not exclusively, at disadvantaged and marginalised groups. This objective was and continues to be supported by government-funded initiatives which are designed to ameliorate societal malaise, determine social control and maintain a functional (or at least passive) society. The objectives and any positive outcomes resonate and draw support from external organisations, including government and

also satisfy a social responsibility which is placed on Arsenal football club. Unfortunately this leaves AitC precariously placed and sandwiched between the agendas of three powerful forces:

1. The needs of the community.
2. The agenda of government and servants subordinate to it.
3. The corporate Arsenal brand and subordinates charged with realising the club's commercial objectives.

AitC's commitment to support those in the community most in need was observed during interviews with AitC participants, practitioners and also with local council members. As the results show, this commitment can produce exceptional results. These cases are described by one AitC practitioner as "the stories", but as we have identified, the club has started to restrict the numbers of 'high risk' youths on the AitC programmes and display a more cautious and risk adverse approach to CSD. At the same time AitC practitioners complain of a contradiction and that the commercial departments frequently request "the stories" of salvation that they can use to enhance the brand and market their social responsibility.

The research has also highlighted the tensions between the commercial entity of Arsenal and the local council, which AitC are charged to broker and mediate. These tensions arise periodically through a variety of self-serving agendas between council residents groups and the commercial entity of Arsenal. However, it is important to acknowledge here, the role that the community department played and continues to play in satisfying and releasing some of the council's Section 106 requirements that facilitated planning permission for the Emirates stadium.

Whilst it is impossible to simplify the complex forces at play and that to a large extent remain, for the time being at least, separately motivated, it is argued that the role of AitC and the value of the social connections and community development can (and possible should) be considered more as an integral part of the Arsenal business model. It is argued that in this context, social impact and the relationship between funding mechanisms, the changing landscape of global economic theory and the

changing nature of corporate social responsibility relative to social impact measurement becomes interesting and relevant.

While a subject for study in its own right, as a summary, there appears to be a turning tide with respect to the focus of the global economy and the last ten years (with a particular acceleration within the last five) has seen an increasing move away from a capitalist model as a structure for the world economy. The movement promotes impact measurement in the context of a social metric and this is expanding significantly beyond the social economy and into mainstream economy (Longfils, 2014). As Clarke and Clegg (2000: 6) state: "Reciprocity and partnership increasingly typify business relationships with a wide constituency of stakeholders. Sustainability is becoming a key business imperative, as the eternal search for domination over nature is replaced by the challenge of achieving environmental balance."

As we have identified previously, government leaders, politicians and policy makers are always on the look-out for ways to reduce the costs of solving social problems (Portes, 1998). However, looking for alternative and sustainable solutions to solving society's toughest problems is not just the preserve of politicians. The academic world is also engaging in this principle (Eggers & MacMillan, 2013), as is the economic sector. Deloitte (2013) refer to impact investment as "an investment approach that intentionally seeks to create—and measure—both financial return and positive societal impact". PwC business analysts are pioneering the revolutionary accounting system TIMM (Total Impact Measurement and Management) that turns traditional business accounting on its head and uses impact rather than profit to explain company performance (Balch, 2013).

There is already case study research that investigates social impact and successfully identifies examples of social entrepreneurship that display evidence of cultivating consummatory and instrumental social capital in abundance (Braw, 2014; Eggers & MacMillan, 2013). These social enterprises use social capital as vital mechanisms to promote their business operations and deliver capital asset and community development through sustainable social connections. This research suggests that AitC appears perfectly placed to affect social impact through their CSD programmes

and, by leveraging the mechanisms of social capital, can contribute to the commercial strategy of Arsenal and help develop capital assets through community development and positive social impact.

*Suggested improvements and further research*

The research has argued that a single case design is appropriate for this study. Further research using multiple cases and investigating other Football in the Community departments may strengthen this research. This is particularly relevant as "AitC are now the only FitC providers that operate 'in-house' and as part of the club structure"[9] (Singh, 2013. cited in Hoskin, 2013). For this reason, it is suggested that through a multiple case study design, the tensions discussed between AitC and the commercial entity of Arsenal may be further investigated and better understood.

It is noted that all respondents were identified and selected as willing participants and that interview requests were mediated through AitC. It would be reasonable to argue that these participants may offer information that placed AitC in favour. To mitigate this potential issue and retain validity, the interview questions and approach were designed, and particular care was taken, not to ask "leading questions". That said, further research over a longer timeline may identify participants who drop out or expressed resistance to the programmes and may also further our understanding of the structures and processes of social capital development.

The discussions that have been raised in relation to social impact and triple bottom line accounting would form an interesting and worthwhile research project in relation to community and social capital development. This research would also help further our knowledge of the mechanisms of social capital relative to social impact and the potential value to the wider economy.

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[9]Arsenal is now the only club to hold their FitC operations in-house. Previously Arsenal & Aston Villa were the only 2 clubs in the Premier or Football League to hold their FitC operations in-house and funded directly (although not entirely) by the commercial entity of the football club.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to gain an understanding of the concept of social capital and through this understanding to establish whether sport and football in the community, in this case Arsenal in the Community (AitC), is an important source for cultivating and accumulating social capital, and if social capital is a valuable asset. Through a detailed analysis of previous research, it is clear that social capital is a contested concept. Theoretical perspectives on social capital are diverse and the very meaning of the concept is contested, so much so that the plural application of the concept of social capital risks undermining its potential value (Portes, 1998). While it is clear that the issues and theory are fiercely debated throughout the literature, there appears to have emerged two relatively distinct schools of thought, which examine social capital through either a network or an attitudinal approach (Tacon, 2014). This study suggests that a context-driven network approach to social capital research, which considers the nature of networks and social relationships, and understands the environment within which social capital is created and nurtured, is critical.

Using the social capital cycle as a framework for analysing the case of AitC and by referencing previous analytical frameworks and research, the findings suggest that social capital is being developed within AitC particularly as a result of the environment created through their CSD programmes and the relationships and networks developed in partnerships with other organisations. In some cases this social capital has helped to achieve outstanding results. Previous research on social capital also pays much attention to the role of sports and leisure pursuits in the development of social capital and the benefits which can be attained through participation in and involvement with sport, sporting organisations and particularly CSD. In this way social capital and CSD are inextricably linked. The socio-political climate is also highly relevant to the research. First, with respect to the policy that determines much of the provision and access to sport, and sport-for-development programmes. Second, towards the divisions and inequalities that exist within society and that drive the needs to which AitC's programmes are responding. It is in this

context that AitC prioritises key groups and allocates funding and resource for their community work.

While previous studies have offered robust theoretical reasoning supporting the intangibility of CSD and social capital, the quest to establish a credible mechanism for the evaluation and a measurement of value continue to be the elephant in the room. The discussions raised in this research suggest two important conclusions. First, that the power of an elite football club brand such as Arsenal presents opportunities to add and receive value through reciprocal benefits with their community department. Second, that the positive impacts of this mutual benefit can be recognised within a social impact measurement which has both a wider relevance and a contemporary resonance to global business strategy within a business management paradigm for the new millennium (Clarke & Clegg, 2000).

Based on the research and this study of AitC it is suggested that the answer to the question 'do AitC's community development programmes contribute to the cultivation and development of social capital?' is yes. The research also suggests that the social capital developed by AitC is certainly considered as a valuable asset for the actors involved in the AitC programmes. Although it cannot be conclusively argued that the value of the social capital cultivated and accumulated by AitC is ignored by the commercial entity of Arsenal, the research has argued that there may indeed be opportunities to extract much more strategic value through AitC and in alignment with a common goal, to promote the Arsenal brand.

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**Appendix 1 – Case Study Background**


Below is a brief description and case study background of the respective events and interviewees from Table 3 and Table 4 listed in Chapter 3.


**Event A** was part of an AitC educational attainment programme that was being run in partnership with a local school that provided the venue for a full week of mixed sport and classroom learning during summer half term. The group of primary school children mainly from year group 4 & 5 (but some year 6), were made up from 10 local schools who had been given an opportunity to select 6 children who they thought would benefit from some extra tuition in English and Maths. The learning, both in the classroom and on the school all-weather pitch was structured and ran from 10am till 1pm each day.

**Event B** was a periodic review with a young adult male with particular needs and who is participating in a number of AitC programmes, the main aim of which is to attain employment through participation in one of the employability initiatives run by AitC. This programme involves a partnership scheme with the local authority and also a charity partner that provides a mentor who works closely with a vulnerable young adult. The role of the local authority is to provide an oversight to a young adult following release from care with the intention of providing a successful transition from care into the community.

**Event C** was an annual Football Tournament held on the pitch at the Arsenal stadium. The event was a round robin 6-a-side tournament that involved male youths between the ages of 14 to 18 that are participants in one of the AitC programmes.

**Event D** was an AitC employability programme which included participant's referred from either local government job centres or from a referral through another AitC programme or partner. The programme is run as a 12 week course. Participation to this course was purely voluntary although attendance was mandatory to achieve and receive a completion certificate. The course was structured to give participants an insight into the employment landscape and also to develop skills in formal communication through written and electronic formats.

**Event E** was the AitC annual awards ceremony which was held in the Emirates Stadium. The event celebrated and honoured participants and partners who had

been part of the organisation's community and community sport development programmes and included presentations from prominent members within the structure of AitC and also T.V. personalities and ex-Arsenal players.

**Event F** was an AitC weekly football session at a local all-weather council maintained facility and was run in association with a local charity partner who look after the interests of individuals seeking asylum and freedom from oppressive and dangerous situations in their home countries. The session included structured coaching drills for the first half of a one and a half hour session and concluded with a series of 5 or 6 -a-side games. These weekly sport sessions were part of a dual sport and educational attainment programme which include a weekly classroom session later in the week where participants learn English.

**Event G** was a structured employability workshop which is run off the back of the employability programme observed in **Event B**. This workshop was voluntary and was structured around a presentation given by 2 members of a voluntary organisation who provide an on-line support platform for people seeking employment.

**Interviewee 1** is a male participant on an educational programme that includes BTEC level 3 modules run by AitC and is part of a BTEC course at a local 6th Form College. This participant was in his 2nd year of the course.

**Interviewee 2** is the head, and one of the founder members, of AitC with over 30 years' experience in CSD delivery and almost 30 years within the Arsenal organisation.

**Interviewee 3** was at the time of interview a practitioner within AitC delivering CSD programmes aimed at high risk and NEET[10] youth. Interviewee 3 had originally been referred to Aitc as a participant on a course through a probation partner and has worked his way through participant courses, volunteer programmes, and part – time practitioner work through to a full time practitioner role with AitC. Through his educational attainment and personal development during his 4 years at AitC he has now left the department to start a 3 year contract in one of Arsenal's Development Schools in the Far East.

**Interviewee 4** is the mentor for a the participant described in **Event B** and works closely with the mentee over a number of years and to provide support and to help

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[10] NEET refers to young people **N**ot in **E**mployment **E**ducation or **T**raining

facilitate opportunities offered to the mentee during his participation with the AitC programmes.

**Interviewees 5, 6, 7 & 8** are participants of the programme described in **Event F**. The respondents were all male and of mixed ethnic background and ages varying from 20+ to 40+. The group in general had mixed asylum status

**Interviewee 9** is a P.E. teacher in a local state run secondary school. The school is all girls in year groups 7, 8 & 9 and is co-ed in 6th form (years 10 & 11). AitC run a number of programmes and events in partnership with the school and also use their association to access primary (feeder) schools to provide further programme reach.

**Interviewees 10, 11 & 12** are participants described in Event G and who have all completed programmes described in Event D. The respondents are all young males.

**Interviewee 13** is a manager of a local authority resident engagement who partner with AitC to deliver sports and CSD programmes within housing estates in the local borough of Islington.

**Interviewee 14** is an AitC practitioner responsible for an educational attainment programme and was the leader of the programme described in **Event A**