

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

GOVERNANCE OF THE RUSSIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

STUDIES ON MANAGEMENT AND FAN
PERSPECTIVES

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“This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved brother Isko, who passed away in a car accident while I was conducting my doctoral research. Words cannot fully express how vital you were to my life. Life feels incomplete without you, and not a day goes by that you are not in my thoughts. This work is dedicated to you as a sign of respect for the bond that connected us.”

Ilia

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	II
List of Abbreviations.....	V
List of Figures	VI
List of Tables.....	VII
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical framework.....	8
2.1. Institutional theory.....	8
2.2. Football and league governance	10
2.3. Commercialization, fans as stakeholders, and trust.....	11
3. Research Context: Europe, China, and Russia	13
3.1. The European context.....	14
3.1.1. Sociopolitical conditions and sports in Europe.....	14
3.1.2. Milestones in the professionalization of European football	15
3.2. The Chinese context	16
3.2.1. Sociopolitical conditions and sports in China.....	16
3.2.2. A deliberate strategy for the footballization of China	16
3.2.3. Mixing sports and economic policy	17
3.3. The Russian context.....	18
3.3.1. The socioeconomic context within Russia.....	18
3.3.2. Institutional governance of professional football in Russia.....	19
3.3.3. Fans in the Russian context.....	21
3.4. Rationale for the three studies	22
4. Methods.....	22
5. Studies.....	26
5.1. Study 1: Regional Embeddedness and Ownership of Football Clubs in Russia: Deinstitutionalisation Towards a Market Approach?	27
5.2. Study 2: More Market and Less Regulation? Fan Attitudes toward the Governance of the Russian Premier League	29
5.3. Study 3: Trust and Mistrust in Fan Relationship Management: Survey Evidence on Russian Football Fans.....	30
5.4. Dissemination of Findings.....	31
6. Discussion.....	31

References	41
Appendix I.....	56
Study 1	57
Study 2.....	58
Study 3	78

List of Abbreviations

CSL	Chinese Super League
EC	European Championship
EU	European Union
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
IOC	International Olympic Committee
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MCMMG	Media-corporate-merchandising-markets-global model
PRC	People's Republic of China
RFA	Regional Football Association(s)
RFU	Russian Football Union
RPL	Russian Premier League
SOEs	State-Owned Enterprises
SSSL	Spectator-subsidy-sponsors-local model
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
URF	Union of Russian Fans

List of Figures

Figure 1. The main contents and context of the scientific studies included in the dissertation	6
Figure 2. Institutional positioning of Asian and European football markets	18
Figure 3. Institutional positioning of Asian, “Eurasian” and European football markets.....	34

List of Tables

Table 1. Methodological framework of the empirical studies included in the dissertation	23
Table 2. Author contributions	27
Table 3. Key insights from three studies, including comparisons to leagues and fans in Western Europe and China.....	37

1. Introduction

The international significance of Russian sport

Sports are an integral part of Russian society, serving as a means of maintaining physical activity, strengthening national pride, and acting as a vehicle for Russia to secure international prestige (Riordan, 2007). Over the years, Russian sport has frequently been in the global spotlight. In some instances, the attention has been positive, coming as the result of athletes' successes (Lee, 2021) or hosting mega-sporting events (Gorokhov, 2015). In other instances, the attention has been negative, though, coming as the result of doping scandals (Harris et al., 2021) and political sanctions against Russian athletes (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2024). Despite all of these developments, Russia has gone to a great deal of effort to strengthen its international position by hosting the 2014 Winter Olympic Games and the 2018 FIFA World Cup (Bogolyubova et al., 2023). Presently, however, Russian sport is in isolation due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. This is the result of sanctions imposed by international athletic governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and Russia's subsequent exclusion from international athletic competitions. These geopolitical circumstances have had a negative impact on athletes and teams (Adair, 2023), as well as raised questions about the relationship between particular sports (e.g. football), politics, and global governance structures.

Despite these challenges, Russian football, as one of the most popular sports in Russia, still attempts to maintain its influence in the sports world through international player transfers (Erdnieva, 2024), institutional ties (Suleymanova, 2023), and domestic investments in professional football (Karibekova & Teloyan, 2025; Solntsev, 2020). Overall, Russian football represents a unique case, as the structure of Russian professional football differs considerably from other well-developed European professional football systems (Kireenkov, 2024). The Russian football system has a governance model in which state and state-affiliated funding largely diverge from market logic. Such an approach to football governance forms a complex network of interests among the various stakeholders, linking local and federal policy, business interests, the broader economy, and football fans (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025). In Russian professional football, this state-linked model has developed within the broader post-Soviet institutional and political landscape.

The state of Russian professional football

Football is one of the most important sports in Russia. It was popular during the Soviet era and has remained so since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Russian Federation. As the USSR's successor state, Russia has a rich football heritage, including victory at the European Championship (EC) in 1960, runner-up finishes in 1964 and 1988, and a bronze medal at the 2008 EC (Van Reeth & Osokin, 2020).

Following its success in 2008, the Russian men's national football team did not perform well at the international level until it reached the quarterfinals at the 2018 World Cup. Meanwhile, Russian football clubs found much of their success in the early 2000s. CSKA Moscow (2005) and Zenit Saint Petersburg (2008) both won the UEFA Cup (Nunes & Valério, 2020). These successes led to a rise from 21st to 6th in the UEFA rankings, contributing to the clubs' stable position in the rankings over the years (UEFA, 2017). There was also significant growth in the economic potential of the Russian Premier League (RPL) concurrent with the improved performance of club teams. As a result, RPL clubs have been ranked 6th in the league income rankings for many years, only failing to surpass the "Big Five" European football leagues. Renz (2020) classified the Russian Premier League and the Turkish Super League as "transformational leagues" that could someday rival the Big Five economically.

Moreover, there are many resources in Russia to support professional football today. Clubs may be funded directly by the state or by state-owned corporations, and players have opportunities to train and compete in world-class stadiums built for the 2018 World Cup. However, in recent years, these resources have not been used effectively, leading to the Russian clubs falling in the UEFA rankings for the first time in over twenty years, which began even prior to the introduction of geopolitical sanctions¹. In view of Russia's conditions and capabilities, these rankings and results are far below average and do not reflect the socio-economic potential of the world's largest country (Renz, 2020).

In Russian public discourse, the main reason for this shortcoming has been seen as inefficient organization and mismanagement (Kireenkov, 2024). For example, Alekseev (2009) states that

¹ Prior to the sanctions, Russian football clubs fell from 6th to 10th place in the UEFA ranking, behind the much smaller and economically weaker football leagues of Portugal, The Netherlands, Scotland and Austria. Following the introduction of sanctions, their position declined further, dropping from 10th to 28th place as a result of non-participation in UEFA competitions.

the mistake made by many football managers in Russia is attempting to apply management experience from the West to Russian football clubs by simply adapting foreign models to Russian clubs without paying enough attention to key differences that limit their effectiveness in the Russian context. Similarly, Dmitriev (2011) complains about a lack of competent and modern management in Russian football. For these reasons, researchers have called for fundamental reforms in Russian football that consider the results of recent studies on the topic (Bagatyrova, 2013).

International research, however, addresses different structural problems, such as significant state involvement in financing football clubs. State involvement in financing contributes to financial instability and distinguishes Russian football leagues from leagues operating in developed market economies, leading to economic inefficiency and Russian clubs' vulnerability to shifting regional political priorities (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025).

Beyond state financing, issues related to the current lack of competitiveness and effective governance in Russian football reveal further differences between fans' perception of the "Big Five" European football leagues and the RPL. Unlike most European models of football governance, the Russian football industry does not view fans, spectators, and sports enthusiasts, the consumers of the final product, as the economic foundation of the industry (Krasnova, 2021). In 2019, only 7% of RPL revenues were generated by ticket sales (Valiulin, 2020). Moreover, A. A. Aliev et al. (2021) suppose that a business model in which fans are professional sports leagues' primary customers would generate the greatest amount of revenue for Russian football clubs.

Although Russian fans do not substantially affect football clubs' bottom lines, they remain key stakeholders influencing the contemporary political landscape surrounding Russian football (Tsyganova, 2017). Moreover, the recent introduction of Fan ID (Troshev & Karagodin, 2022), the fan community's boycotts (Sports.ru, 2022), and international sanctions (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2024), have raised various concerns among fans, undermining the trust between fans and local and international football governing bodies.

Research overview

Within this framework, and given the scarcity of international research on smaller or less internationally important professional leagues, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of professional football governance in Russia, addressing financial structures, political factors, and the role of fans, with a particular focus on their perceptions of commercialization and trust in football governing bodies. Additionally, since Russia straddles Europe and Asia and historically has been influenced by developments on both continents, this research aims to investigate whether the governance of Russian professional football is more closely aligned with Asian or European models. Thus, this study compares the governance of the Russian league with the governance and fan culture of the Chinese Super League (CSL), another developing Asian league in global football, which reflects a similar post-socialist sports landscape (Ma et al., 2022; Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a). In a broader economic sense, China has also been described as one of the closest emerging-market parallels to Russia (Klishevich & Panibratov, 2024). This, combined with comparing the RPL's governance to the diverse governance practices found across European leagues, helps to shed light on the idiosyncrasies of Russian football governance. Such an approach will provide a more integrated understanding of the governance issues in Russian football in international scholarship. Currently, the majority of studies on football governance as well as fan culture focus on the "Big Five" European leagues (England's Premier League, Germany's Bundesliga, Spain's La Liga, Italy's Serie A, and France's Ligue 1) (Hösl, 2020), covering individual cases in Western European countries (Winell et al., 2023). Professional football governance in other European leagues is rarely the subject of research (Renz, 2020), although a handful of scholars have addressed it (Bairner, 2004; Gammelsæter & Jakobsen, 2008; Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2011; Kossakowski et al., 2025; Winell et al., 2026). In particular, football leagues in Eastern Europe and former socialist bloc countries have attracted little academic attention (e.g. Woźniak & Chmielewski, 2025), despite the distinctive features of their governance, such as heavier state investment and state-linked ownership models, as well as diverse dynamics and contradictions in stakeholder interactions. This gap in the academic literature highlights the limited knowledge about football governance structures in countries such as Russia, which hinders a broader analysis of global football governance structures. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to fill gaps in the existing research and expand the study of governance in Eastern European football leagues, identifying their peculiarities in light of their socio-cultural, geopolitical, and sports-political contexts.

Moreover, research on Russian football exists, but its scope generally remains limited, and it tends to address specific aspects. In the international literature, the focus has been on fan culture (Arnold & Veth, 2018; Glathe, 2016; Tsyganova, 2016; Zeller, 2015), mega-events (Arnold, 2021; Müller, 2014, 2017; Wong & Chadwick, 2017), certain financial issues (Baydina et al., 2021; Coates et al., 2017; Zelenkov & Solntsev, 2017) and governance structures (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025), while domestic studies focus on management (Alekseev, 2009; Dmitriev, 2011; Kazakov, 2024), economics and commercialization (A. A. Aliev et al., 2021; Karibekova & Teloyan, 2025; Krasnova, 2021; Solntsev, 2020; Solntsev & Baranov, 2025), fans (Artamonova & Barsukov, 2022; Troitsky & Pavlov, 2018; Tsyganova, 2017), and Russia-specific issues, such as FAN-ID, a fan registration system for match attendees (Gorokhov & Naryshkin, 2025; Troshev & Karagodin, 2022). However, there have been no studies that address the interconnected aspects of governance structures, ownership models, commercialization, and trust among fans within a single project, showing various perspectives on governance dynamics in the RPL.

Hence, the aim of this doctoral project is to gain a more thorough understanding of governance in Russian professional football by analyzing the governance structure of the RPL, which is characterized by the interplay between government regulation, market dynamics, and evolving relationships with fans. The main contents of this PhD project are summarized in *Figure 1*.

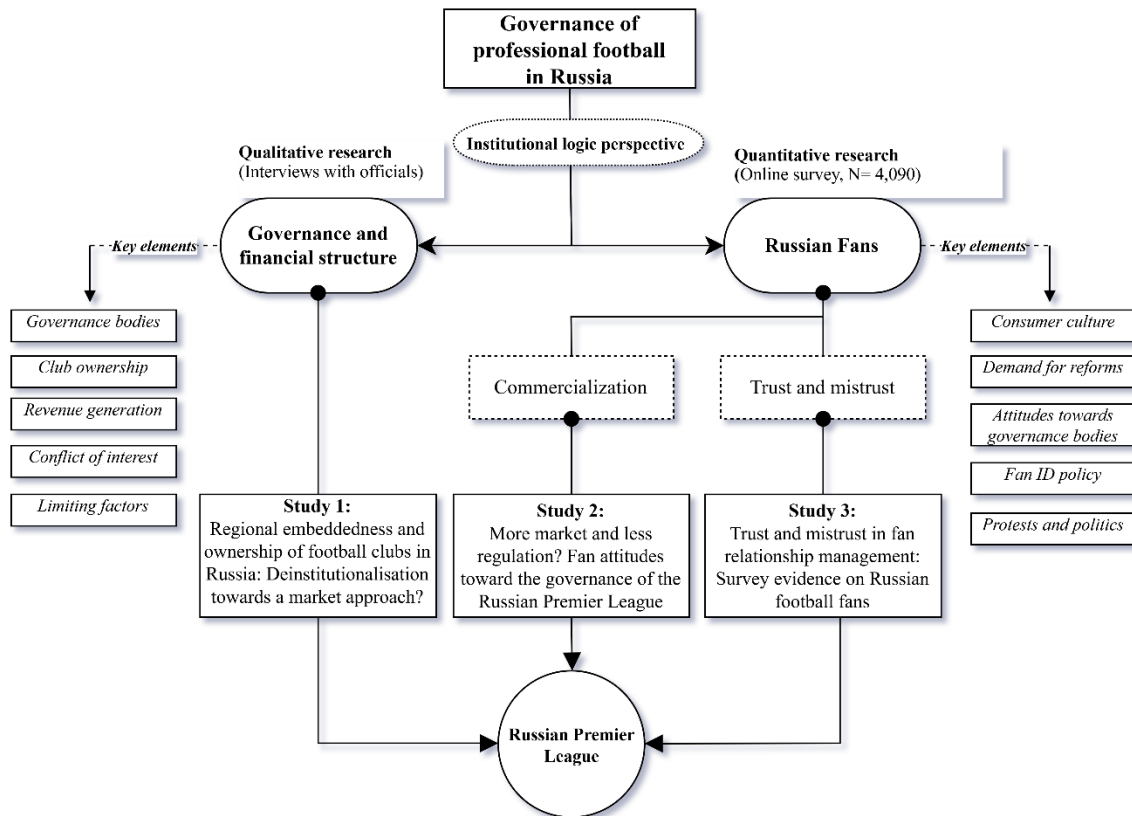


Figure 1. The main contents and context of the scientific studies included in the dissertation

According to Figure 1, this dissertation explores the governance of professional football in Russia from an institutional logic perspective, combining both supply-side and demand-side perspectives. On the supply side, the focus is on governance and ownership structures, as well as institutional constraints. On the demand side, the study investigates football fans' attitudes, trust in governance actors, and perceptions of ongoing reforms. The interaction between these two dimensions forms the central analytical framework of the dissertation and is explored through three empirical studies.

Study 1 examines the institutional dynamics underlying the shift to a state-owned corporate model in Russian professional football, highlighting the resulting consequences and challenges associated with the latter.

Study 2 focuses on a key stakeholder in Russian football, Russian fans, and examines their perceptions of RPL governance in light of commercialization, as well as offers a comparison

with prior research on European fans (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; Dubal, 2010; García & Llopis-Goig, 2020a, 2020b) and survey research on Chinese fans (Ma et al., 2022).

Study 3 explores fans' trust in clubs and fan organizations in the context of both local (RPL and Russian Football Union (RFU)) and international football governing bodies (UEFA and FIFA), by comparing its results with the findings of García and Llopis-Goig (2020b), who studied European fans' trust in various governing bodies.

Three key research questions are addressed, which will be examined in three publications:

- 1. What factors contribute to the deinstitutionalization of state involvement in Russian professional football clubs?*
- 2. How do fans perceive and evaluate the governance and commercialization processes of the RPL?*
- 3. What factors influence fans' trust and mistrust toward football organizations and governance institutions?*

Together, the three studies provide a multidimensional analysis of the RPL governance, contributing to a broader understanding of professional football governance in Russia in relation to contemporary approaches to football governance.

The following section of the dissertation outlines a theoretical framework within a broader context. This section covers institutional theory, institutional logic, the governance of football leagues, and commercialization processes, as well as the related factors contributing to mistrust among football fans. Section 3 outlines the research context focusing on European, Chinese, and, finally, on Russian socioeconomic conditions, as well as Russia's football governance structure and fan culture. Section 4 provides a brief overview of the methodological approach. Section 5 presents the findings based on three scientific studies. The dissertation concludes with a discussion in Section 6.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Institutional theory

This section introduces institutional theory as the theoretical framework for this dissertation. The concept of institutional logic acts as the primary analytical tool for understanding the governance of professional football in Russia. This chapter first introduces the key elements of this approach, then provides an examination of the governance of football leagues, commercialization, and elements that drive mistrust among football fans.

Institutional theory is one of the most widespread theories in the field of management (Daddi et al., 2021). It explains organizations, their changes, and internal logic, and how they make decisions, not only from a rational perspective, but also through the social processes that shape their structure. Over time, organizations have become increasingly similar: rather than acting solely in their own interests, they increasingly adapt to external demands and expectations (Aksom & Tymchenko, 2020). This is particularly relevant for understanding organizations that face external pressures from multiple sources. In recent years, institutional theory has been increasingly applied in sports research (Adams et al., 2025; Nite & Edwards, 2021; Oliveira & Costa Oliveira, 2025; Pedras et al., 2020), which enables researchers to explain organizational and institutional changes within sport organizations and institutions (Gilmore & Sillince, 2014). Robertson et al. (2022) reveal over 180 sports-related institutional studies, analyzing the population and the application of institutional constructs, such as legitimacy, isomorphism, change, and logic. Drawing on this theoretical framework, this dissertation analyzes professional football structures through the lens of institutional logic.

One of the components of institutional theory is institutional logic, which provides a valuable perspective on governance patterns and organizational changes (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Institutional logic offers a conceptual framework for examining the connections between institutions, people, and organizations within a social system (Thornton et al., 2012), built on the values, beliefs, and rules that regulate organizational behavior (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Jackall, 1988; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Alford and Friedland (1985) first conceptualized institutional logic, seeking to explain the contradictions between different institutional categories within society and the organizational landscape of the time. Building on Friedland and Alford (1991), a later study argued that fundamental social institutions – the market, the

state, corporations, various professions, religion, and the family – offer a clear set of often conflicting logics that shape political conflicts (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Furthermore, individuals and organizations exploit these conflicts to change institutional arrangements in society (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Hence, complex issues may expose tension between various institutional logics that shape decision-making in various areas (Goldschmeding et al., 2025).

Studies on professional football reveal that football organizations operate under the influence of several institutional logics (Adams et al., 2025; Baumeister et al., 2025; Gammelsæter, 2019; Jacobsen, 2026). Gammelsæter (2019, 2023) highlights state logic, in which political goals may conflict with sporting priorities. Within this context, governments have tightened their regulation of football processes, and football governing bodies have lost part of their autonomy. Moreover, Carlsson-Wall et al. (2016) mention sports and business logic, which underlies sporting and financial performance. In this context, structural differentiations could reduce the tension between different governance approaches within football organizations and, consequently, improve the balance between these logics (Jacobsen, 2026). Furthermore, Baumeister et al. (2025) analyze institutional logic within the context of German professional football, identifying competing logics which determine the organizational structures of clubs and form contradictions between different governance models. Finally, Adam et al. (2025) refer to community logic, emphasizing the value of encouraging fan engagement, preserving traditions, and fostering a sense of belonging among supporters.

Overall, examining football governance through the lens of institutional logics offers a clear advantage: it allows this dissertation to analyze key principles guiding stakeholders, governing bodies (i.e. football authorities and the state), communities (fans), and commercialization (business/market), revealing the interplay between these factors (Gammelsæter, 2019, 2023). Given the multifaceted application of institutional logic in professional football and sports governance in general, institutional theory provides an excellent theoretical foundation for this dissertation. More specifically, the study examines the interaction between state logic, which is reflected in political influence and state-linked resource allocations, market (business) logic, which is manifested in commercial development and market-oriented mechanisms, sporting logic, which is centered on a club's performance, and community logic, which is associated with fan identity and legitimacy. Thus, institutional theory is an appropriate theoretical

framework for the three selected studies, considering that Russian football operates under conditions of competing institutional logics.

2.2. Football and league governance

Governance is a concept that requires consideration of various institutional logics. In football, governance revolves around power, authority, structures, and management (García, 2008, p. 177). Most of the existing research on football governance is on Western European leagues (Andreff, 2007; Baumeister et al., 2025; Hamil, Morrow, et al., 2010; Llopis-Goig, 2012; Michie & Oughton, 2005; Rohde & Breuer, 2018; Sánchez et al., 2021), with a particular focus on football governance and ownership structures, commercialization, and fans as stakeholders.

Furthermore, a great deal of attention is dedicated to how ownership structures specifically affect club operations. For instance, Hamil, Morrow, et al. (2010), in their study of Italian football, identified a significant degree of power within clubs and a deep overlapping of personal, business, and government interests, which may affect their financial sustainability. Sánchez et al. (2021), meanwhile, note a significant shift in ownership structures across leading European leagues over the past decades, driven by the entry of both local and foreign shareholders: 30% of the “Big Five” clubs are now under the full control of foreign investors who hold the majority of shares. A study by Rohde and Breuer (2018) revealed a correlation between governance structure and sports performance in European football, with ownership consolidation potentially reducing club efficiency: for example, in France, private majority owners have a negative effect, while in England, foreign investors have a negative impact. Analyzing German professional football, Baumeister et al. (2025) point out that variations in ownership models, voting rights, and stakeholder participation lead to heterogeneous governance structures, which reflects the diversity of institutional models in European professional football.

Meanwhile, other European leagues remain comparatively under researched. This gap is particularly striking given the growing body of research on football leagues outside Europe, including studies from Asia (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a; Ma & Zheng, 2022; Weinberg, 2012), the Middle East (Amara & Al-Emadi, 2019), Australia (McLeod et al., 2025), South America (Brinkmann et al., 2025), and North America (Brandt & Negroe, 2025).

Building on this understanding, football governance refers to a global regulatory system that encompasses strategy, management, policy, and development. It relates to all stakeholders, including national associations, leagues, clubs, fans, and the state (Boillat & Tallec Marston, 2016). On the world scale, football is divided into international, regional, and national governing bodies (Grant, 2007). These governing bodies do not operate in isolation but are linked by a shared institutional logic that determines the distribution of authority, norms of interaction, and decision-making mechanisms within the football governance system. FIFA is regarded as the leading global football governing body and has considerable power and influence (Pouliopoulos & Georgiadis, 2021). It oversees six continental confederations, including Africa's CAF, Asia's AFC, North America's CONCACAF, Oceania's OFC, South America's CONMEBOL, and Europe's UEFA, the most powerful of the confederations. Each confederation develops and organizes professional football in its region, holds tournaments, and represents national associations. However, leagues within individual countries are often managed by separate organizations (Bason & Senaux, 2023). On the national level, the National Federation and the Professional League possess authority and legitimacy (Senaux, 2008, p. 12). Top-tier competitions are organized by the league 40% of the time and by the federation (association) 60% of the time (FIFA, 2026). As a rule, professional league systems operate under governing bodies separate from national football associations, whose primary responsibility is the amateur or regional leagues lower in the football hierarchy (Bason & Senaux, 2023, p. 10).

Amara et al. (2005) investigated football governance systems in five different countries, covering European, Asian, and African approaches in England and France, China and Japan, and Algeria respectively. They revealed that football systems share similar global commercial trends, which are manifest in the importance of merchandising, the role of TV rights, and the impact of players. Moreover, these global trends exist despite distinctive local differences in governance structures and various forces that may influence the development of professional football leagues.

2.3. Commercialization, fans as stakeholders, and trust

In this context, commercialization has become a driving factor that exerts pressure on governance structures and clubs, while simultaneously contributing to expansion of the market and new possibilities for the growth of professional football. Commercialization is the process

of modifying resource allocation structures in favor of market forces (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2022). The process of commercialization is uneven; likewise, there may be a lopsided relationship between football's role as a business and its role as a cultural phenomenon (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012). New forms of commercialization are reshaping the football landscape, and these changes often affect the largest group of stakeholders, the fans.

Commercialization is closely associated with market-based business logic (Baumeister et al., 2025). In contrast, fans are often guided by a different, more traditional set of values and practices. As a result, the role of supporters, commonly referred to as fans, has become increasingly central to the discourse on the governance of European football (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020a; García & Welford, 2015; Kaden, Bauers, & Hovemann, 2026). Senaux (2008) points out that supporters and spectators are the most important stakeholders in football governance. Moreover, fans have a significant impact on the commercialization of football (García & Welford, 2015). Their money, time, and emotion fuel this process (Winell et al., 2023). They make significant contributions to the value created at sporting events (Woratschek et al., 2014), generating considerable revenue for clubs through the purchase of match tickets and merchandise, as well as through TV viewership and attracting sponsors (Biscaia et al., 2018; Koenigstorfer et al., 2010).

However, the growing commercialization of football presents a more complex issue. On one hand, football profits from its commercialization (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022), but on the other hand, increasing commercialization may also negatively impact fans (Tinson et al., 2023). Edensor (2015) asserts that increased commercialization has raised concerns among English fans that the sports atmosphere is worsening. Likewise, Merkel (2012) points to German fans' resistance to the commercialization of football and the so-called “modernization” of the game. The game has become heavily commodified, and this commodification manifests itself in the sale of television rights for matches in the most popular leagues and dramatically increasing salaries for star players (Hognestad, 2012). Brandt and Kurscheidt (2022) also argue that top players are receiving higher salaries and spending more time in the spotlight while fans are earning considerably less money and are receiving even less attention, widening the divide between players and fans in the social hierarchy. Additionally, Giulianotti (2005) highlights the high cost of attending events and purchasing television subscriptions. These developments have influenced how supporters engage with and identify with their clubs. Giulianotti (2002)

indicates a change toward a more detached, consumer-orientated fan identity. Local fans feel that global marketing has shifted their clubs' focus away from them, while many fans are simultaneously concerned about the loss of fan culture and traditions (Busse & Damiano, 2019). Recently, there have been growing concerns in the media about decreasing loyalty, growing disaffection, and some fans even leaving the football scene altogether (Kaden, Brandt, et al., 2026). The increasing commercialization of football, governance issues, and globalization are also among the potential reasons for fans leaving their clubs behind (Kaden, Bauers, & Hovemann, 2026). Therefore, commercial activities should be conducted in collaboration with fans, considering their perspectives and involvement (Winell et al., 2026). However, these concerns extend beyond commercialization. Fans' concerns can also be understood in the context of broader questions of governance, since commercial decisions shape how fans perceive the priorities and legitimacy of football institutions (Baumeister et al., 2025).

Moreover, fans' dissatisfaction with the commercially-driven aspects of professional football governance has also given rise to new political debates within fan communities regarding their trust in football's governing bodies (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020a, 2020b). In particular, the validity of decisions made by international (e.g. FIFA) and local football governing bodies is often questioned by fans and discussed within a political context (Kassimeris, 2024). One factor contributing to such skepticism is the perceived lack of transparency and communication of football organizations (Reichel et al., 2026). Furthermore, fans' limited influence on club decision-making processes is another source of mistrust (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020b). However, in some cases, fans are involved in the ownership structures of their clubs as shareholders (Sánchez et al., 2021). This reflects the broader role of fans as stakeholders, who significantly contribute to value co-creation and can influence the decisions and behaviors of football clubs (Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2010). Additionally, stakeholder involvement contributes to building trust, since fan participation in governance increases transparency and enhances fan loyalty. Consequently, football fans should be regarded not merely as consumers of professional football, but also as stakeholders, given that their perspectives on commercialization, as well as on issues of trust and legitimacy, are crucial to the governance of modern football.

3. Research Context: Europe, China, and Russia

This dissertation uses a comparative approach, analyzing Russian professional football based on two other cases to contextualize Russian football governance: the Western case, European

football governance, and the Eastern case, Chinese football governance, the latter being an example of a more strongly state-led model. The purpose is not to treat China as being representative of all Asian football governance models, but rather to present it as a useful point of comparison for Russian football governance. Comparing Chinese football with Russian football provides a better understanding of the influence of sociopolitical and economic factors on the development of sport systems in two distinct post-socialist countries. In terms of institutional economics, the different organizational models are characterized by certain advantages and disadvantages (Renz, 2020).

Geopolitically, Western and Eastern, i.e. post-socialist, ideologies are fundamentally different from one another, although systems have clearly softened in recent years or decades, at least in certain aspects of life. While Western approaches have traditionally placed more emphasis on the free market, Eastern approaches have placed more regulatory responsibility on the state. These political conventions directly carry over to sports.

To understand and classify the characteristics of professional football governance in Russia, for example, those due to Russia's unique geography (i.e. Russia's location straddling two continents) and political circumstances (e.g., Russian football is governed by a post-Soviet sports system, yet Russia is a member of UEFA and FIFA), the characteristics of European and Asian football (illustrated by China) are presented and compared below. The fan-related aspects of sports in Europe and Asia are not included in the research context for Europe and China, as the subject has already been addressed in Studies 2 and 3.

3.1. The European context

3.1.1. Sociopolitical conditions and sports in Europe

At the end of the Second World War, Europe became dominated by a free market economy, ultimately institutionalized by the European Union, as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, and by the social market economy. This change came as the result of economic liberalism, private ownership, and decentralized market planning.

Consequently, the European professional football system has relied on autonomy from national governments. National and supranational football federations act independently from governments and abide by their own statutes. The European football system is based on national

football clubs, which are hierarchically organized and participate in decision making within the football governance structure.

At the same time, the European football system is characterized by significant differences across national and local contexts. These are reflected in the role played by supporters in club ownership and governance. Kennedy and Kennedy (2012) point out that football clubs and their supporters are each rooted in specific national and local contexts. For instance, the ownership structure and governance approach of German clubs provide a good example, where the “50+1” rule is used, whereby members (fans) must have a controlling interest in all German clubs competing in the Bundesliga (Acero et al., 2017). In contrast, in English football, the dominance of private and corporate investors limits the scope for the development of supporters-owned clubs (Irving, 2020). Spain represents yet another model, exemplified by FC Barcelona, where a membership-based ownership structure enables club members to participate in governance (Hamil, Walters, et al., 2010). At the supranational level, clubs operating under these different national ownership and governance arrangements compete in international football competitions, such as the Champions League, which are organized by UEFA.

3.1.2. Milestones in the professionalization of European football

In Europe, the establishment of many national football leagues in the 1960s marked a change from amateurism to professionalism, whereby athletes signed contracts with their clubs and became paid for their sporting activities; likewise, the nonsporting environment within the clubs also became increasingly professional.

Historically, the financial structure of professional football represented the traditional “spectator–subsidy–sponsors–local” (SSSL) model (Andreff & Staudohar, 2000), in which clubs’ revenue was based on ticket sales, local subsidies, and sponsors (Dejonghe & Van Opstal, 2010). Since then, the business of European professional football has evolved. These changes have encouraged the top clubs and leagues to change their structures and move toward a media–corporate–merchandising–markets–global (MCMMG) model (Andreff & Staudohar, 2000; Dejonghe & Van Opstal, 2010). Thus, in football leagues, the relationship between football and profitability has developed as part of an overall trend toward professionalization and commercialization (Hösl, 2020), which has led to increased revenues for the top clubs and created a large economic and competitive gap between the top clubs and mid-level clubs

(Saldsieder, 2016). Therefore, European football today tends to be dominated by the Big Five, as the top clubs from these leagues have effectively monopolized the football market, weakening the other leagues and clubs, which have been forced to modernize their approaches to professional football governance. A similar tendency has been observed in Asian leagues, including Chinese leagues, which are striving to Westernize their approach to football governance (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a).

3.2. The Chinese context

3.2.1. Sociopolitical conditions and sports in China

In the planned economy era, the People's Republic of China (PRC) adopted a Soviet-style model of industrialization (Lin & Blanchard, 2017). The PRC's preference for a Soviet-style governance structure was also mirrored in the sports domain. The governance structure of Chinese elite sports was state-organized and largely directly borrowed from the Soviet model (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2007). Specifically, in 1956, a competitive sports system was formalized, officially recognizing 43 sports and disciplines, including football. Furthermore, professional teams were consequently established at provincial level (Hong & Zhouxiang, 2013). Under this centralized elite sports system, which operated based on a top-down logic (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019b), male and female football players and coaches recruited from the provinces received permanent contracts from their respective provincial sports bureaus.

3.2.2. A deliberate strategy for the footballization of China

The political elite of the PRC has long recognized that spectacular sporting achievements serve as a prerequisite for attaining non-sporting objectives deliberately embedded in sport (Connell, 2018; Lemus Delgado & Valderrey Villar, 2020; Preuss & Alfs, 2011; Tan & Houlihan, 2012). The PRC has long aspired to become a football power, like its predecessor, the Republic of China, was in the 1920s (Sullivan et al., 2019). According to Junior and Rodrigues (2019), the PRC's Olympic strategy reached its zenith at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where China won the highest number of gold medals of any country and demonstrated that the center of global sport could shift. Building on this success, the PRC subsequently sought to challenge "Eurocentrism" in world football (Junior & Rodrigues, 2019).

Manzenreiter and Horne (2007) introduce the concept of the "footballization of China", which refers to the strategic use of football to pursue broader non-sporting political objectives (Ma &

Zheng, 2022). In this context, following Xi Jinping's accession to power in late 2012, China has implemented a series of policies aimed at dramatically accelerating the development of football at the national level (Liu et al., 2017; Peng et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2016). This ambition was codified in April 2016 with the launch of China's Football Medium- and Long-Term Development Plan (2016–2050), which set specific objectives for the following three decades (Cockayne et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2019).

3.2.3. Mixing sports and economic policy

In their analysis, Sullivan et al. (2019) examine the PRC's efforts to recalibrate its traditional manufacturing-led economic model. The Chinese economy had already rebounded from two downturns, one following the Tiananmen Square protests (1989) and another following the Asian financial crisis (1998) (Shirk, 2007, p. 20). The PRC used this experience to deliberately prioritize the service industry as a new pillar to confront the economic downturn and prevent widespread unemployment that could result in large-scale labor unrest. Within this framework, passive sports consumption was actively promoted and the development of professional sports – football in particular – was placed at the center of the strategy (Ma & Zheng, 2022). Ma and Kurscheidt (2019a, p. 20) interpret this shift as the “Westernization of Chinese professional football.” More specifically, it represents a novel governance approach that integrates sports policy with economic policy through the accelerated marketization of football. Notably, in contrast to the PRC's historical resistance to certain Western cultural and political influences (Jarvie et al., 2008), the country has deliberately adopted and adapted Western models in its governance of professional sports.

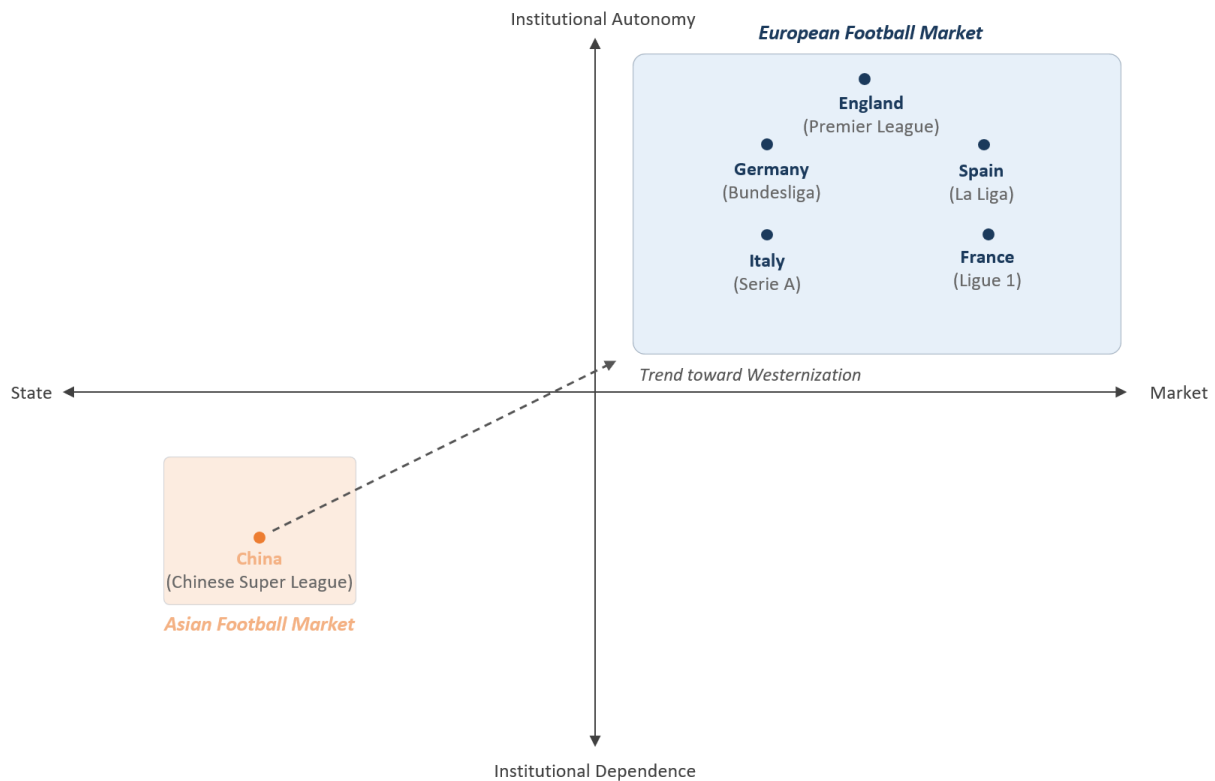


Figure 2. Institutional positioning of Asian and European football markets

As mentioned previously and illustrated in *Figure 2*, the CSL seems to be shifting toward Westernization and adopting market-based practices. Nevertheless, considerable institutional dependence on the state and the political system persists. By comparison, European football leagues operate within a more market-oriented and autonomous system. A more detailed examination of these similarities and differences is provided in the discussion section.

The next section examines the Russian research context, drawing on the analytical context which previously focused primarily on European and Chinese approaches to sports and football governance. This section first analyzes the socioeconomic conditions influencing the development of sports in Russia, then explores the structures governing professional football, and finally provides a characterization of Russian football fans.

3.3. The Russian context

3.3.1. The socioeconomic context within Russia

The Russian socioeconomic system differs from Western countries' systems due to its Soviet legacy and its predominantly state-oriented approach. Economic growth and stability remain

heavily dependent on revenues from oil and gas, while innovation and the independence of the private sector remain relatively limited, and key sectors of the economy continue to be regulated by the state (Mizobata & Hayashi, 2022). These structural characteristics also affect sports.

First, Russia's national sports system is primarily financed by the state. This funding system is not sufficiently diversified and relies heavily on the government, as private investors prefer to invest in sectors that offer a quick return on investment rather than professional sports, which typically does not (Bobrovskiy, 2020). At the same time, the government is seeking to reduce public spending on sports and reallocate budgetary funds to higher-priority sectors (Varich & Luchinina, 2023). Thus, dependence on state funding is a structural characteristic embedded in the economics of Russian professional sports, including professional football.

Second, the sociocultural aspect of sports gives them the power to serve as a tool for strengthening national identity and exerting soft power abroad. In recent decades, Russia has invested a great deal in sports to improve its athletes' performances and host international sporting events such as the 27th Summer Universiade in 2013, the 22nd Olympic Winter Games in 2014, the FIFA World Cup in 2018, and the 29th Winter Universiade in 2019. Cleland (2015) states that an increasing number of countries (including the BRICS countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have used the power of football for political and economic purposes by hosting major tournaments.

Besides hosting events, Russia exerts "soft power" by sponsoring international sports teams, such as Schalke 04 or FK Crvena Zvezda, and championships (UEFA Champions League or EURO 2020). Thus, this dissertation argues that sports in Russia are of strategic political value in addition to their economic value. This helps explain the structural foundation of professional sports in Russia, including extensive government involvement, limited market mechanisms, and a political dimension.

3.3.2. Institutional governance of professional football in Russia

The Russian Football Union as the central governing body

The RFU is the main institution governing football in Russia. It is a member of the UEFA and FIFA, and it organizes and coordinates major Russian football competitions from the amateur level to the professional level (RFU, 2022). The RFU operates closely with Regional Football

Associations (RFAs) across the country (Alekseev, 2009). Due to Russia's massive land area, the RFU oversees a vast territory, including the European and Asian regions of the country, extending from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok (approximately 10,000 km) across all federal regions, which have sharply differing demographic, climatic, and economic characteristics, each with its own local RFA (Solntsev & Osokin, 2018).

At the national level, the RFU is a public organization, accredited by the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation. The RFU President is its highest officer, who is elected by the organization's members at the RFU Conference, its highest governing body, which includes regional federations, interregional associations, leagues, and clubs (RFU, 2022). The position of RFU President has often been held by functionaries formerly employed by FC Zenit. Through these networks, major state-owned sponsors such as Russian Railways, Novatek and other large corporations partnered with the RFU. As a result, the RFU has maintained relative financial stability despite the changing revenue streams and geopolitical sanctions affecting Russian sports.

Governance of the Russian Premier League

The governance structure of professional football in Russia is organized in a pyramidal three-tier system of leagues arranged hierarchically based on inter-league relegation and promotion procedures. Under this system, the RFU delegates its rights to organize national championships to two separate organizations (Interfax, 2021). Together, they form the three professional football leagues of Russia: (1) the Russian Premier League, (2) the First League and (3) the Second League. The leagues are nonprofit, membership-based organizations recognized by the RFU (2022).

The top tier of Russian professional football is the Russian Premier League. The RPL is responsible for the operational management of the championship, while the RFU is charged with overseeing its implementation and holds exclusive rights governing how the championship is run (RPL, 2025). Formally, the league operates as an association of RPL clubs, with key decisions being made collectively by the league's General Assembly (RPL, 2024).

An important feature of the RPL's governance system is the high level of state involvement within football clubs. The majority of football clubs operate not as independent business entities, but as state-dependent organizations that, with any reduction in public funding, face

significant financial instability (Badoev & Kalitsov, 2016, p. 250). Thus, the RPL is a key case that sheds light on state dependence on professional football governance. Moreover, the league is characterized by government-related ownership models, sponsorship structures, and institutional dependencies, forming the basis for analyzing governance challenges within Russian professional football.

3.3.3. Fans in the Russian context

The first fan communities in Russia formed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s (Katzner, 2018). The fan subculture emerged more actively in the 1980s under the influence of Western European, particularly British, football culture (Veterkov, 2011). Soviet fans began organizing supporter groups and attending away matches, primarily in Moscow, Kiev, and Tbilisi (Tsyganova, 2017).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 initially disrupted the development of fan culture (Brimson, 2003). However, increased contact with foreign fan movements contributed to the emergence of organized fan groups and hooligan groups modelled on British fan culture (Gloriozova, 2018; Zhuravkov, 2009). By the end of the 1990s, organized fan culture had become an established part of Russian football (Veterkov, 2011).

As fan communities became more organized and visible, political actors increasingly sought to engage with them. Artiushin (2008) notes political interest in young fans, as they might serve as potential voters in political elections, although Russian fans infrequently show political allegiance to any particular political party (Tsyganova, 2017). However, political parties have periodically attempted to engage with fan communities (Artiushin, 2008), although evidence suggests that these efforts achieved only limited success. For instance, in 2007 Zenit fans flew a banner with the words “United Front is out of politics!” in response to a political party’s attempt to hang a banner at a match (Gorynov, 2015, p. 89).

However, relations between football supporters and the state became increasingly institutionalized and regulated in the following years. The introduction of Fan ID has led to fan boycotts and declining attendance of RPL matches (R. Aliev et al., 2022; Sports.ru, 2022). In some cases, lower division clubs not requiring Fan ID cards have overtaken many RPL clubs in terms of match attendance (RBC Sport, 2022). The Fan ID system has also generated

criticism among the broader public, despite continued state support for the policy (Shulgin, 2024). This issue is also discussed in Study 3 of this dissertation.

3.4. Rationale for the three studies

Overall, the aforementioned background shows that professional football governance in Russia, in particular the governance of the Russian Premier League, cannot be understood solely by formally examining its structure alone. Instead, it should be viewed as a governance system developed amid heavy state involvement, the financial reliance of clubs on state-affiliated entities, and the limited institutional standing of fans in governance processes.

The existing international literature addresses other aspects of Russian football and fan culture, while football governance, with some recent exceptions such as Absalyamov and Schubert (2025), remains less explored. In particular, Russian fans' attitudes toward football governance and their trust in football organizations have received little scholarly attention. However, as discussed in Section 2.3, fans are key stakeholders in football governance. Therefore, understanding their perspective is necessary for assessing how governance structures are perceived, legitimized, and contested. In conclusion, this research context provides the basis for the three empirical studies that follow. First, Study 1 examines club ownership structures within domestic state entities, with comparisons to China and Europe. Study 2 analyzes post-socialist league governance models, including the Chinese approach, commercialization, and fans' perceptions of such developments in Russian football. Finally, Study 3 explores trust and distrust among Russian football fans toward football governing bodies in comparison with European fans, including fan trust in light of the introduction of Fan ID cards.

4. Methods

As mentioned in the introduction, the overall research design provides the methodological framework for the three peer-reviewed journal articles included in this PhD project. These studies examine the governance of Russian professional football. Conducted between January 2020 and December 2025, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data to examine governance structures from different analytical perspectives. Survey data are used in Studies 2 and 3. Consistent with this mixed-methods design, the qualitative components follow a circular,

inductive model, whereas the quantitative research processes largely follow a linear, deductive model (Baur, 2019).

Table 1. Methodological framework of the empirical studies included in the dissertation

		Research Objectives	Methodology	Data / Sample	Data Analysis
Governance structures	Article 1	Identifying drivers of deinstitutionalization in RPL's club ownership model	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews and document analysis	Seven semi-structured interviews with senior RPL club executives	Thematic approach
Stakeholders	Article 2	Examining fan perceptions of the commercialization and governance of the RPL	Quantitative analysis (convenience sample)	Online survey of Russian football fans (N = 4,090)	Descriptive statistics and ordered logistic regression analysis
	Article 3	Evaluating fan trust in football governance stakeholders			

Study 1 uses semi-structured interviews with top managers as the primary source of qualitative data, which is supplemented by an extensive analysis of various Russian and international documents. The study draws on the institutional approach employed by Ma and Kurscheidt (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a, 2021) in their preliminary work on the CSL and on Chinese Elite Sport. The study's theoretical framework is based on an institutional analysis following Cunningham's (2002) integrative model of organizational change. Qualitative empirical data was collected by the following means: (1) seven semi-structured expert interviews with selected football officials (purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling), (2) a document analysis of association, league, and media publications, and (3) Russian scholarly literature.

The seven semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and August 2021. Subsequent developments in Russian and international football governance were incorporated into the later stages of analysis where relevant. Espedal (2022) indicates that interviews are an effective and convenient way to obtain in-depth information about topics. During the interviews, several key themes were discussed and identified based on the research context and

literature review. Due to the COVID-19-related constraints, all interviews took place online. The length of the conversations ranged from 40 to 80 minutes. The length of the interviews allowed for more open conversations due to the interviewees having more time to elaborate as they responded to interview questions. Furthermore, these interviews were conducted before the onset of a major geopolitical conflict, which ensured the validity and directness of interviewees' responses. Attempting to conduct similar interviews under the current circumstances would make it considerably more difficult to obtain quality data. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed with the software program *f4transcript*, and analyzed with the software program *f4analyse*. During the analysis, the interview data were systematically coded using keywords and grouped into thematic categories. A thematic analysis approach was applied to identify recurring patterns, themes, and relationships within the interview data. Subsequently, the themes identified were compared across all the interviews in order to identify common elements, differences, and recurring patterns relevant to the research questions.

Study 2 and Study 3 employ a quantitative approach, namely online survey research. The survey was conducted using the Qualtrics platform. Online surveys enable researchers to cover a wider range of respondents across a large geographic area, conducting research swiftly and at a relatively low cost (Cleland et al., 2020). A questionnaire-based approach was selected because it offers one of the best tools for collecting large amounts of data from participants, allowing researchers to gather quantitative and qualitative information and identify trends, perspectives, and opinions based on an analysis of the sample (Allen, 2017).

The questionnaire for Russian football fans was developed using standardized instruments adapted from previous research by Ma et al. (2022) and García and Llopis-Goig (2020b) and modified for a Russian context and target audience. The questionnaire draws on well-established concepts in relevant research on sports fans, such as the psychological connection of sports fans to their team (Biscaia et al., 2018; Wann et al., 2001) and various topics that spark debate regarding the commercialization and governance of professional football (García & Welford, 2015; Webber, 2017).

The online survey approach was also particularly valuable for conducting the study during a geopolitical conflict. The survey ensured broad geographical coverage of almost all regions of Russia, with very few exceptions. The survey attracted 4,923 active Russian football fans.

However, 833 respondents (17%) did not complete the survey properly. Therefore, the final sample size was $N = 4,090$. Considering the size of the sample and the regional diversity of the responses, the survey can be considered approximately representative of Russian football fans, consistent with Gratton and Jones's (2004) view that the aim of a sample should be to be representative of the population. All data were analyzed using Stata/SE 17.0 software. Regression analysis was based on data from the comprehensive data sets. The data analysis, conducted using multiple regression, included a total of 37 ordinal variables, six binary variables, and four metric variables relating to match attendance and age. Furthermore, 10 factor variables are analyzed alongside the four sociodemographic variables in more streamlined factor regressions. All four analyses produced consistent results, supporting the robustness and reliability of the findings. While the analysis follows a theoretical model on league governance on the supply-side and fan perspectives from the demand-side, the empirical modelling and data analysis may be also understood as exploratory. The reason for this is that the data had to be tested for (causal) relationships given the lack of evidence on Russian football and attitudes of fans. Hence, the estimation strategy partly followed characteristics of the observed data while operationalizing the theoretically underpinned structures of pertinent league governance models.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data triangulation involved cross-checking interviews and survey findings against documentary sources. All data collection and analysis, for both qualitative and quantitative data, was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bayreuth.

Citavi software was used for all three studies to organize the bibliographic database, which includes more than 500 international sources, encompassing academic articles, books, and analytical materials.

Finally, the researcher's long-standing involvement in football has familiarized him with the institutional and cultural context of the sport, which has facilitated a proper understanding of the governance issues examined in the research. Throughout the research process, the researcher remained aware of potential bias in the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the researcher is neither a fan of nor otherwise affiliated with any of the clubs featured in the study.

5. Studies

This dissertation combines an examination of broad economic trends with specific insights from football governance. The selected journal articles reflect this interdisciplinary approach, covering sports policy, sports economics, and sports management. All articles were authored by several researchers who are primarily from the University of Bayreuth.

The International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics is the leading international journal for sport political issues. Study 1 was published in this journal. The author of this dissertation served as the lead and corresponding author of the publication. He conducted expert interviews with Russian football managers, analyzed interview data, and wrote the initial version of the manuscript. The original research team included Dr. Kristoff Reichel and Professor Markus Kurscheidt. Later, additional experts joined the project to further develop and refine the manuscript. This included international collaboration with recognized scholars, such as Professor Geoff Dickson from Australia and Professor Yang Ma, an early-career researcher from China. The internationally and professionally diverse team of authors ensures reflexivity in data analysis (Berger, 2015).

The International Journal of Sport Finance (IJSF) serves as an international outlet for advancing and communicating research on sport finance to global audiences. The journal is also the official journal of the European Sport Economics Association. Study 2 was published in a special issue of the IJSF. The research team primarily consisted of researchers from the Department of Sport Governance and Event Management at the University of Bayreuth. The author of the dissertation conducted a large-scale survey of Russian football fans. A total of 4,923 respondents started the survey, of whom 4,090 provided sufficiently complete responses and were included in the final analytical sample. He also wrote the first version of the manuscript together with Dr. Christian Brandt. Furthermore, Dr. Kristoff Reichel made substantial contributions to the quantitative analysis. Thus, he is listed as the first author of the article. Meanwhile, Dr. Christian Brandt and Professor Markus Kurscheidt guided the research process through intensive discussions on theoretical and methodological issues.

Study 3 was published in *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. It was submitted to the Sport Management, Marketing, and Economics section as part of a research paper and is available as an open-access article. The author of this dissertation wrote the first version of the manuscript

and shared the first authorship and correspondence with Dr. Kristoff Reichel, who contributed to the interpretation of the results by conducting the quantitative analysis. As in the previous project, Dr. Christian Brandt and Professor Markus Kurscheidt provided guidance for this project and ensured a high-quality publication.

Table 2. Author contributions

Year	Title	Authors	Journal and bibliometric information	Conceptualization	Data Collection	Formal Analysis	Methodology	Software	Investigation	Supervision	Writing – original draft	Writing – review & editing
2026	Regional embeddedness and ownership of football clubs in Russia: Deinstitutionalisation towards a market approach?	Ilia Sannikov (IS) Kristoff Reichel (KR) Geoff Dikson (GD) Yang Ma (YM) Markus Kurscheidt (MK)	<i>International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics</i> Scopus: • CiteScore 4.7 • SJR 2025: 0.969 Web of Science: • ESCI • JIF 2.8	IS KR GD YM MK	IS	IS MK	KR KR GD YM MK	IS	IS	MK GD	IS KR GD MK	IS KR GD YM MK
2025	Trust and mistrust in fan relationship management: Survey evidence on Russian football fans.	Kristoff Reichel (KR) Ilia Sannikov (IS) Christian Brandt (CB) Markus Kurscheidt (MK)	<i>Frontiers in Sports and Active Living</i> Scopus: • CiteScore 3.8 • SJR 2025: 0.825 Web of Science: • ESCI • JIF 2.6	KR MK	IS	KR	KR IS MK	KR	IS CB	CB MK	KR IS CB	KR IS CB MK
2024	More market and less regulation? Fan attitudes toward the governance of the Russian Premier League.	Kristoff Reichel (KR) Ilia Sannikov (IS) Christian Brandt (CB) Markus Kurscheidt (MK)	<i>International Journal of Sport Finance</i> Scopus: • CiteScore 1.5 • SJR 2025: 0.418 Web of Science: • SSCI • JIF 0.5	KR IS CB MK	IS	KR	KR IS MK	KR	KR MK	CB MK	KR IS CB	KR IS CB MK

Note. Author contributions are reported according to the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) framework. The category Data Collection was used to reflect contributions related to survey administration, interview conduction, and empirical data gathering.

5.1. Study 1: Regional Embeddedness and Ownership of Football Clubs in Russia: Deinstitutionalisation Towards a Market Approach?

The first article serves as the starting point for this dissertation. This study applies methods of qualitative analysis, relying on document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The study's main focus is the ownership and financial structure of the RPL, in which the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and regional authorities play an important role. Nearly 80% of the RPL clubs' revenues are generated through state-owned sponsors or regional funding (Solntsev, 2020). These revenue models have been connected to issues in sustaining the RPL's competitiveness, despite the country's substantial financial resources and high-quality infrastructure built for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

The study is based on organizational theory, focusing primarily on the concept of deinstitutionalization. This concept does not imply that institutions will certainly disappear or become weaker, but rather that their nature and legitimacy change over time (Kay & Daugbjerg, 2015). Major changes, such as reforms or crises, can weaken the legitimacy of existing practices (Oliver, 1992). Moreover, deinstitutionalization may develop in response to external pressures, while its progress and outcomes depend on the specific context and characteristics of the situation. Drawing on Oliver's (1992) concept of political, social, and functional pressures driving deinstitutionalization, taken together with Cunningham's (2002) integrative model of organizational change, the article develops an analytical structure for conceptualizing both the challenges facing the RPL and its deinstitutionalization process. Furthermore, the article examines state-owned enterprises in the Russian context, highlighting their commercial, political, and social objectives. These range from prestigious local involvement, such as ownership and financing professional football, to soft power. The study also considers other practices of SOEs in the sports sector, using examples from Europe and China, and compares their features.

The study argues that state-linked ownership structures in Russian professional football are undergoing a gradual process of deinstitutionalization. Within the RPL, state-dependent governance models have evidently reduced their legitimacy. This is because the interplay of political, social, and functional pressures is undermining the sustainability of the governance model in Russian professional football. In this context, political and social pressures are linked to the financial involvement of state-owned institutions or regional governments in Russian football clubs. This dynamic is further evident in the representation of officials in football governing bodies with ties to the Russian government. For example, the president of the RFU doubles as chairman of the management board of Gazprom Neft, a domestic SOE, emphasizing the tight relationship between national institutions and the professional football governance. The final type of external pressure is functional pressure, which results from conflicting social factors, such as fans' negative perception of underperformance on the field, and economic factors, such as domestic football investments and the RPL's relatively stable long-term financial position, including ranking 6th in terms of revenue in UEFA financial reports. Additionally, the current limits on foreign player participation in RPL games have raised questions about competitiveness and regulatory constraints. Therefore, these findings point to the potential benefits of achieving a more balanced relationship between political involvement

at the local level and commercial considerations at the club level. This study represents the first international analysis of professional football governance in the RPL based on institutional theory and interviews.

5.2. Study 2: More Market and Less Regulation? Fan Attitudes toward the Governance of the Russian Premier League

García and Welford (2015) note that there is a lack of empirical research on fans' attitudes toward the governance of football leagues. Given that leagues outside of Western Europe remain largely unexplored in academic literature, the second study of this dissertation draws on the first large-scale survey of RPL fans ever conducted ($N = 4,090$). This study examines fans' perceptions of commercialization within the football governance system and represents previously undocumented attitudes of active fans of the RPL using empirical data. Building on prior insightful findings related to fans in other post-socialist contexts, such as in China (Ma et al., 2022), this analysis investigates the attitudes that shape acceptance of or resistance to commercialization in the Russian Premier League. It explores how these perspectives reflect broader cultural orientations and assesses whether Russia, as a Eurasian country, exhibits patterns more closely aligned with European (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; Dubal, 2010; García & Llopis-Goig, 2020a, 2020b; García & Welford, 2015) or Asian fans (Ma et al., 2022).

The study provides a theoretical framework for post-socialist league governance, including the development of commercialization in Russian football. It also examines Russian and Chinese fans in the context of league governance. For the theoretical approach, the adapted model from Ma et al. (2022) was chosen, which includes two theories: (1) the theory of sports leagues and market supply, and (2) stakeholder and demand theory. This integration provides a more effective examination of consumer culture among Russian football fans than could be provided by using one theory alone.

The results reveal that Russian fans express a significantly higher level of acceptance of commercial development than their European counterparts, and their attitudes are generally similar to those expressed by Chinese fans. This indicates that commercialization tends to be perceived more favorably in post-socialist contexts than in Western countries. Furthermore, the contentious aspects of commercialization are more problematic for European fans than for Russian fans and do not reduce consumption among Russian football fans. Finally, despite the

fact that the customer sovereignty is valuable for Russian fans, they show little interest in taking part in the governance or decision-making process for their clubs.

5.3. Study 3: Trust and Mistrust in Fan Relationship Management: Survey Evidence on Russian Football Fans

Drawing on the analysis of the survey data from RPL fans (N = 4,090) in Study 2, the authors concluded that the atypical pattern of trust among Russian football fans warrants a separate regression analysis in a subsequent study. Consequently, this study focuses on the role of Russian football fans' trust in local and international football governing bodies and identifies emerging tendencies toward commercialization. This study also compares the results with findings in other European countries from García and Llopis-Goig (2020b).

The theoretical framework explores trust generally, trust in professional football, and trust among RPL fans. Overall, trust plays a key role in governance and business processes. It underlies the decisions and behaviors of individuals, as well as the performance of organizations and their governing bodies (Fahrner & Harris, 2021). In professional football, trust between fans and governing bodies is becoming increasingly important as fans are not merely consumers of football, but also key actors who influence both the commercial development of the sport and its regulations. Recent studies also indicate that fans are highly critical of the current state of football and recognize various issues in football governance (Kossakowski et al., 2025). In Russia, the recent introduction of Fan ID, mandated by federal law for attending Russian Premier League matches, has shaken fans' trust in football governing bodies, leading to a united boycott by the fan community and numerous disputes over the passage of this law.

Moreover, the findings indicate that Russian football fans have the highest level of trust in supporters' organizations. Another area of trustworthiness is the clubs. By contrast, the lowest level of trust is observed in football governing bodies, both local governing bodies, such as leagues and associations, and international governing bodies, such as UEFA and FIFA. The reason for declining trust at the national level could be due to the introduction of Fan ID cards. At the international level, the reason could be sanctions imposed against Russian football. Nevertheless, Russian fans trust FIFA slightly more than the RFU. The same phenomenon has been observed in another post-socialist country, Poland, where fans trust FIFA more than the National Football Federation. Additionally, in contrast to Western fans, Russian fans tend to

perceive commercialization positively as they often associate it with modernization. This also suggests that, in a post-socialist context, positive attitudes toward commercial development can be a means of accelerating a league's development and growth, unlike in Western leagues, where this process is often viewed negatively as it is associated with overcommercialization.

5.4. Dissemination of Findings

The results of the studies were presented by the researchers at the following domestic and international conferences:

- The 11th Innsbruck Sports Economics and Management Symposium, March 3, 2022, Innsbruck, Austria
- The 25th Annual Meeting of the German Association of Sport Economics and Sport Management, June 24-25, 2022, Bonn, Germany
- The 14th European Sport Economics Association Conference, August 23-25, 2023, Cork, Ireland
- The 31st European Association for Sport Management Conference, September 12-15, 2023, Belfast, Northern Ireland
- The 27th Annual Meeting of the German Association of Sport Economics and Sport Management & 25th Anniversary Conference of the International Association of Sports Economists, June 20-22, 2024, Bayreuth, Germany

6. Discussion

This dissertation examines the governance structures of professional football in Russia as representative of a post-socialist sports system. The study is built on interviews with top managers of football clubs and a survey of fans, which makes it possible to examine issues related to governance, commercialization, and trust from the perspective of key stakeholders. Particular attention is given to the governance structure of the Russian Premier League, which developed under the influence of government regulation, market factors, and engagement with fans. The dissertation also contributes to the international academic literature on Russian football and sports governance. The main findings of the dissertation are presented below.

Governance structure (Study 1)

Russian professional football is represented at the national level by the Russian Premier League, which consists of 16 clubs, unlike most European leagues. From a governance perspective, Russian football exhibits a mixed structure, in which private corporations are integrated into the state ownership system (Chudaev, 2025). As a result, the ownership structure and financial model of Russian clubs rely heavily on external funding through direct or indirect state support (Averchenko et al., 2023; Solntsev, 2020). This occurs at the regional level via funding from local governments, such as in the case of FC Baltika Kaliningrad, FC Akhmat Grozny, and PFC Krylia Sovetov Samara. At the national level, clubs are often funded by state-owned companies, such as Zenit St. Petersburg, which is funded by Gazprom, CSKA Moscow, which is funded by VEB.RF, Lokomotiv Moscow, which is funded by Russian Railways, and Dynamo Moscow, which is funded by VTB. There are only a few exceptions that are truly privately financed, such as FC Krasnodar and FC Akron Tolyatti.

In this context, it is important to mention that the financial stability of regional clubs is determined by the socio-economic status of the region (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025) and by a combination of institutional and market factors, including regional budgetary resources, the presence of major state partners, and the direct interest of governors. Clubs affiliated with state-owned companies also rely on the economic conjuncture and the political priorities of these organizations.

In light of these facts, this study challenges the findings of previous research, in which Russian football has been characterized for many years as an “oligarchic league” or has emphasized the prominent role of oligarchs in its ownership and governance (Cleland, 2015; Dejonghe & Van Opstal, 2010; Maidano, 2021; Renz, 2020; Veth, 2014; Wilson, 2006). This characterization may have been accurate in earlier years. Moreover, the findings outlined in this dissertation indicate a shift toward state funding in the RPL’s financial model. This approach to governance reflects the historical characteristics of Soviet football, where clubs were linked to state institutions, trade unions, and industrial enterprises rather than to cities or local communities. It can be argued that state-owned corporations currently dominate the country’s national economy, and, in this case, football is no exception.

Furthermore, the state's influence on the football governance system extends to the club management level. As Study 1 reveals, top managers appointed by state-owned companies to clubs' boards of directors often implement their own vision for club management, which sometimes may diverge from the objectives of the sports management or coaching staff. A lack of confidence in professional sports directors and coaches can create potential conflicts of interest between the sports and administrative management of clubs, which ultimately affects the clubs' performance.

Another structural factor impacting clubs is the system of restrictions on the number of foreign players participating in RPL matches. Although these regulations are aimed at increasing opportunities for Russian players, they hinder the development of Russian football and limit its potential for international integration.

Additionally, at the league management level, the RPL and the RFU play a critical role. The league is officially an association of RPL clubs, where key decisions are made by the league's General Assembly (RPL, 2024). However, an asymmetrical decision-making model has emerged within the RPL, whereby five influential clubs effectively set the agenda and lead discussions, while the remaining 11 clubs merely cast their votes. This governance model is characterized by an unequal distribution of influence over the decision-making process. At the same time, though, the RFU has an advantage in terms of governing the process. Overall, the organization seeks to regulate the football sector as closely as possible.

Meanwhile, the president of the RFU serves as a senior executive at one of Russia's largest state-owned enterprises, Gazprom. This inter-institutional relationship illustrates the considerable overlap between corporate and football governance structures in Russian professional football. Such institutional connections have helped the RFU to react faster to both economic and geopolitical challenges. For example, under Dyukov's leadership, the RFU introduced structural changes within the leagues, intensified cooperation with UEFA and FIFA, and involved international experts to develop new approaches to reforming and advancing Russian football.

Thus, the governance of Russian football constitutes a complex system in which the interests of the state, state-owned corporations, regional authorities, private businesses, football officials, and fans intersect (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025). The findings of Study 1 suggest that the

governance model of the RPL is more akin to the Asian CSL than to the European leagues in the sense that the RPL, like the CSL, is largely policy-driven and state-funded. Nevertheless, both leagues have experienced tensions between market-oriented reforms and continued dependence on state support (see *Figure 3*).

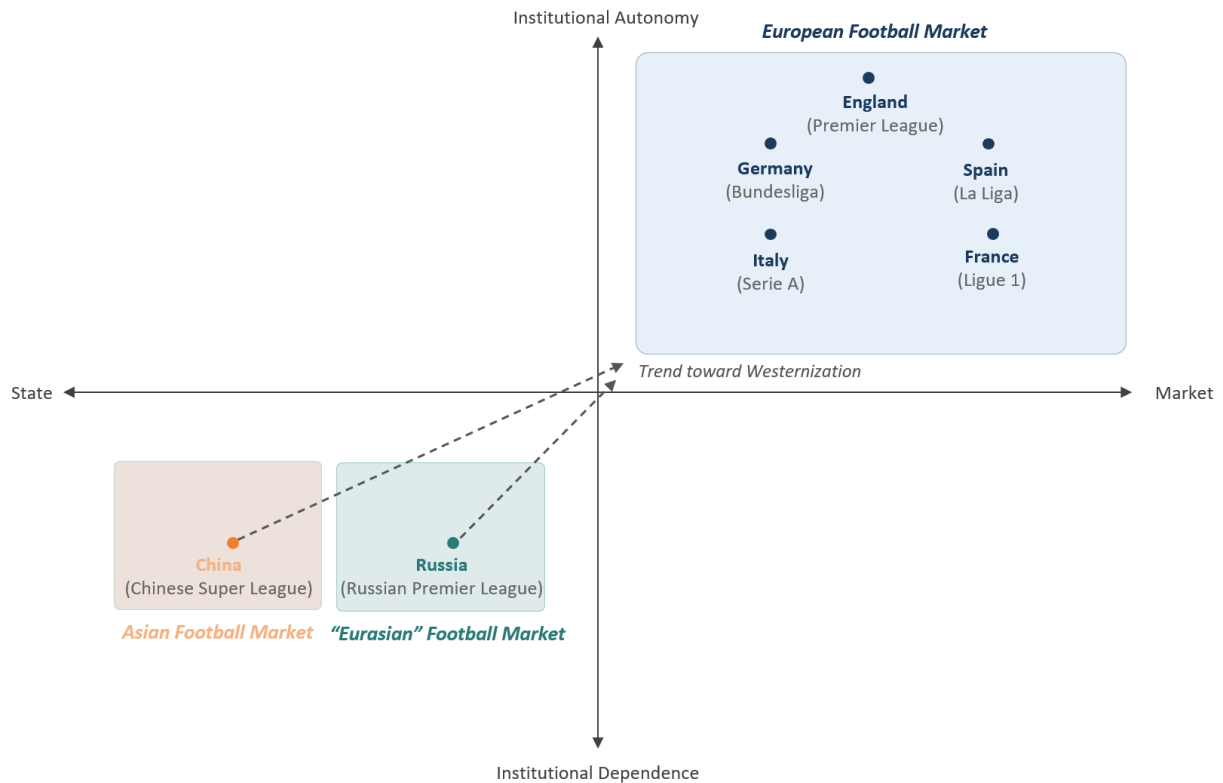


Figure 3. Institutional positioning of Asian, “Eurasian” and European football markets

Comparing these approaches reveals a common pattern among the football systems of post-socialist countries. This observation aligns with Cunningham’s (2002) integrative model of organizational change, which highlights how political, social, and functional pressures can weaken the legitimacy of traditional, state-dependent governance structures. However, internal power dependencies and a limited capacity for action prevent a complete transition to a new institutional model (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a). In China, the uniquely high degree of scrutiny from the President has, paradoxically, reinforced rather than resolved the tension between governmental control and marketization. In Russia, similar dynamics of partial deinstitutionalization are driven more by economic and regional factors, while direct political micromanagement at the highest levels of government plays a less significant role. By contrast, leading European football leagues are characterized by a decentralized governance system, greater autonomy, a higher share of private clubs, and a more market-oriented approach (Ma et

al., 2022; UEFA, 2025). Against this backdrop, the Russian and Chinese governance models demonstrate that in highly state-integrated sports systems, deinstitutionalization often remains fragmented and incomplete. Therefore, these findings offer important theoretical refinement to Cunningham's (2002) integrative model of organizational change by showing that the role of state influence may persist despite processes of institutional change in professional football. This also affects the role of stakeholders, especially fans, whose significance extends beyond traditional support for clubs.

Fans as stakeholders, commercialization, and trust (Studies 2 and 3)

Furthermore, as demonstrated in this dissertation, fans act as valuable commercial and institutional stakeholders within the governance framework of professional football in many European countries (Brandt et al., 2024; García & Llopis-Goig, 2020b; García & Welford, 2015; Kaden, Bauers, & Hovemann, 2026). In the Russian context, they rarely act as commercial actors (Krasnova, 2021) and primarily exert their influence through collective mobilization (Tsyganova, 2017) and public pressure in situations affecting football regulation (Gorokhov & Naryshkin, 2025). Their participation in demonstrations, boycotts, and top-level government meetings reflects their considerable public engagement and institutional significance.

However, from a governance perspective, Russian fans, like most European supporters, have not yet become full-fledged actors within club governance structures capable of directly influencing decision-making processes, such as members or co-owners of clubs. The reasons for this are not only linked to the specifics of governance at the club level, but also to the broader institutional context. In conditions of close interdependence between public institutions and the state, the opportunities for fans to influence decision-making processes remain limited. Russian football fans, like the general public, more often serve as objects of managerial decisions rather than as participants in governance. The empirical results of the fan survey support this argument: only 43% of Russian fans agree that clubs should involve supporters in the decision-making process.

Under conditions of limited participation in formal governance processes, fans continue to exert influence through collective forms of pressure. For example, the introduction of the Fan ID system for RPL match attendees led to a large-scale boycott by supporters of 15 out of 16

Russian Premier League clubs (Sports.ru, 2022), resulting in a significant decline in match attendance and the emergence of a new tension between fans and local football governing authorities (Pogrebnyak, 2024). The survey in Study 2 demonstrates that 91% of supporters do not support the introduction of the Fan ID system. In this case, the tightening of regulations for attending Russian Premier League matches may be perceived by fans as a restriction of their autonomy, which potentially reduces their trust in football governance institutions. In light of those developments, supporters demonstrated the highest levels of trust in fan communities and in their own clubs, viewing them as more representative actors within the football community.

The Union of Russian Fans² (URF) previously made an attempt at partially institutionalizing fans' interests (Tsyganova, 2016) during its operations from 2007 to 2016, which reflected the fan community's partial integration into the political system through official cooperation with the RFU (Tarazanova, 2022). However, at present, there is no centralized fan organization at the national level capable of institutionally representing fans' interests and protecting their rights within the football governance system.

Despite the initial conflict surrounding the introduction of Fan ID, three years after the system's implementation, attendance figures in Russian football are recovering. For example, the 2023/24 season showed an increase of 18%, followed by a further 8% rise in the 2024/25 season³ (Smolentsev, 2025). This trend may indicate fans gradually adapting and/or accepting the new institutional conditions for attending RPL matches.⁴

In addition to issues of institutional participation and regulation, another important aspect of the study concerns fans' attitudes toward the commercialization of professional football. According to the UEFA (2025) report, RPL clubs derive 11% of their revenue from broadcasting rights and 6% from ticket sales, which suggests that commercialization in Russian football is still early in its development. Furthermore, commercialization is generally less pronounced in leagues in post-Soviet countries than in Western European countries (see *Table 3*).

² The organization was originally called in Russian the All-Russian Supporters Association.

³ Information about the last season is not available at the time of writing this dissertation.

⁴ In addition, the Russian government has expanded the use of the Fan ID card to include visits to cup matches, which were previously accessible without the card.

In the context of that trend, the survey demonstrates that fans support commercialization and the related commercial development of football. Moreover, respondents stated that their behaviors would not change even in the event of further commercialization in Russian football. Fans' positive attitudes toward commercialization may therefore be interpreted as an additional stimulus for the commercial development of Russian professional football and for increasing the inflow of private initiatives into the sport.

At the same time, the experience of leading European football leagues demonstrates that excessive commercialization may provoke negative reactions from supporters (Edensor, 2015; Merkel, 2012), potentially alienating them (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; Kaden, Bauers, & Hovemann, 2026) and diminishing their trust in football institutions (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020b). *Table 3* highlights the key differences between Russian, Chinese, and Western European football leagues' governance, fan perceptions, and institutional trust.

Table 3. Key insights from three studies, including comparisons to leagues and fans in Western Europe and China (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; García & Llopis-Goig, 2020b; Ma et al., 2022; Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019a).

Dimension	Russia (RPL)	Western Leagues	China (CSL)
Governance Approach	more state-oriented and hierarchical	decentralized, market-oriented and more democratic	centralized and state-run
Financial Structure of Clubs	state-linked financing	private capital & media revenues	corporate/real-estate financing
Economic Logic	prestige and sustainability	profit and brand maximization	political/image-building goals
Level of Commercialization	moderate	very high (often over-commercialized)	moderate
Fans' Acceptance of Commercial Developments	high	moderate/low among active fans	high
Fans' Participation in Decision-Making	low	limited	low
Fans' Attitudes Toward Commercialization	positive	often critical	moderate, but more positive
Impact of Increasing Commercialization on Fan Behaviors	weak	protests and alienation	acceptable

Fans' Trust in Clubs	high	high	high ⁵
Fans' Trust in Governing Bodies	limited	limited	limited ⁵

According to *Table 3*, the findings of the three studies suggest that the RPL's governance model places greater emphasis on regional political stability than on revenue generation and increasing the league's commercial value. A more effective financing model can only emerge if there is a partial shift away from government funding and increased diversification of revenue streams from other sources (Averchenko et al., 2023). In this context, as demonstrated in Study 1, a large influx of betting sponsors into RPL clubs could help strengthen the league's commercial viability.

Nevertheless, the overall level of commercialization in professional football remains relatively limited in both Russia and China. This may explain the generally positive perception of commercialization among fans in these countries. However, regardless of differences in institutional and political contexts, the level of trust among supporters toward football governing bodies remains relatively low across all the countries examined, while clubs and fan communities are perceived as being more representative actors within the football community.

These patterns also mirror broader discrepancies between state, market, and community-oriented forms of governance, which can be interpreted through the lens of the institutional logic framework applied in this dissertation. Gammelsæter (2019, 2023) conceptualizes state logic as one of the components of the institutional logics shaping the governance of professional football, primarily within the context of commercialized European professional football. From this perspective, governments can view state logic as a tool for achieving social and political objectives through welfare tasks, regulation, and political involvement. In contrast, Baumeister et al. (2025) focus primarily on the interplay between cultural heritage, business, and good governance in their study of institutional logics in German professional football, paying little attention to state logic. These findings suggest that in sports systems characterized by a high level of state involvement, state logic can become a structural element for resource distribution

⁵ The author draws assumptions based on the work of Liang (2014), which highlights the close bond between fans and their club, as well as protests calling for the resignation of the head of the football league due to poor results at national level. A similar situation occurred with Russian fans in 2016, when they called for the resignation of the RFU president for the same reason.

and sports governance. Therefore, this dissertation extends the application of state logic within the framework of institutional logic to regulated sports systems.

In such sports systems, the state acts not only as a source of funding, but also as a key actor shaping the strategic development of professional football. Such state involvement is characteristic not only of several post-Soviet sports systems, but also of systems in countries such as Saudi Arabia (Bataineh et al., 2025) and Qatar (Amara & Al-Emadi, 2019). Moreover, state logic may also extend beyond domestic sports systems through state-linked investments in foreign football clubs, enabling football to be used as an instrument for strengthening a country's international image and exerting soft influence. There are several examples of this in European football: Newcastle United is owned by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Paris Saint-Germain is owned by Qatar, Manchester City is owned by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Sønderholm, 2026, p. 298), and other clubs are linked to foreign, state-affiliated investment structures.

This dissertation suggests that, in the Russian context, state and market logics coexist within a mixed model of football governance. However, institutional tensions persist. Stable state funding for the majority of clubs reduces incentives for commercial development. Such a model also affects the sporting logic of clubs, as performance becomes partially dependent on the external distribution of resources rather than solely on market efficiency. At the same time, the findings of the study indicate relatively limited tension between market and community logics. In contrast, a pronounced contradiction emerges between state and community logics in relation to the Fan ID system, where the state prioritizes stadium security, while supporters emphasize the importance of autonomy and traditional forms of fan culture. In Russian football, state logic ultimately supersedes and dominates market logic, while fan legitimacy remains politically relevant but economically secondary.

Thus, this dissertation demonstrates that the concept of institutional logic is applicable not only to the commercialized models of European football, but also to sports systems characterized by a high level of state involvement.

Taken together, this research contributes to the study of Russian and Eastern European football by combining analysis and comparison with Chinese and European systems of football governance. In the international context, this study represents the first research project to

combine interviews with top football managers with a large-scale survey of Russian football fans. Recent studies (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025) call for future research on the role of stakeholders in Russian football, in particular on fan participation in the decision-making process, and this dissertation incorporates these considerations in its analysis.

Limitations

Although this dissertation provides valuable findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research began in January 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent geopolitical changes significantly affected both the conditions under which the study was conducted and the process of empirical data collection. As a result, both the expert interviews and the survey were conducted online, which may have excluded certain potential respondents, particularly less digitally-active fans.

Additionally, some potential respondents declined to participate in the interviews without providing specific reasons. Moreover, only the more active fan community administrators agreed to publish the survey link, while others expressed skepticism toward academic research conducted by a German university. Nevertheless, the study still managed to include fans from 81 regions of Russia, with only a handful of regions not represented.

Overall, this dissertation shows the reinforcement of the state's role in Russian football governance and how this process influences changes in sports governance. Further research may develop this approach through a comparative analysis of similar processes in other countries. A particular strength of this study is its use of empirical data, which is rarely available in research on Russian football due to the geopolitical context. The results also point to the significance of the relationship between sports governance and fans, which requires further examination in future studies.

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Appendix I

This appendix comprises three studies. Study 2 is reproduced in full, while Studies 1 and 3 are referenced through their publication details:

Study 1: Regional Embeddedness and Ownership of Football Clubs in Russia: Deinstitutionalisation Towards a Market Approach?

Study 2: More Market and Less Regulation? Fan Attitudes toward the Governance of the Russian Premier League

Study 3: Trust and Mistrust in Fan Relationship Management: Survey Evidence on Russian Football Fans

Study 1

Sannikov, I., Reichel, K., Ma, Y., Dickson, G., & Kurscheidt, M. (2026). Regional embeddedness and ownership of football clubs in Russia: Deinstitutionalisation towards a market approach? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2026.2727455>

Study 2

This chapter reproduces the following article, previously published in the *International Journal of Sport Finance*, and is included in this dissertation with permission of the publisher:

Reichel, K., Sannikov, I., Brandt, C., & Kurscheidt, M. (2024). More market and less regulation? Fan attitudes toward the governance of the Russian Premier League. *International Journal of Sport Finance*, 19(4), 208–226.
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More Market and Less Regulation? Fan Attitudes Toward the Governance of the Russian Premier League

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Abstract

Russian football is currently excluded from international competitions as a political sanction due to the military conflict. Despite this, matches in the national football leagues are continuing, and fans still attend professional football matches in the Russian Premier League (RPL). As fans' attitudes toward aspects of Russian football governance are largely unexplored, the question arises how fans evaluate the governance of the Russian Premier League. Therefore, this article presents evidence from the first large survey of RPL supporters ($N = 4,090$) with a focus on consumer culture and requests for reforms of the RPL. The regression results reveal an attitudinal pattern toward the governance of the RPL in line with recent findings on Chinese football fans, which may be characterized as a post-socialist fan culture restricted by an authoritarian league governance. Hence, unlike European fans, Russian supporters associate more consumer sovereignty with commercialization because they mistrust the politicization of the RPL.

Keywords: Russia, football, soccer, supporters, governance, commercialization, consumer culture, stakeholder, post-socialist studies

Introduction

The present military conflict in Ukraine is overshadowing public perceptions of Russia in large parts of the world and particularly from the Western perspective. The resulting geopolitical tensions disrupt international relations and strongly affect exchanges in social, cultural, and business life. The world of sport does not represent an exemption within this highly politicized international environment of socioeconomic turmoil. However, it is a novelty in European football that professional clubs from a large country are excluded indefinitely as a political sanction. At the same time, regardless of this external intervention, the league continues within the country, and thousands of fans attend Russian professional football matches as usual. Therefore, a twofold question arises for sports economics research: First, how do Russian football fans evaluate the governance of the Russian Premier League (RPL)? Second, how can the attitudes of fans toward the governance of Russian football, particularly related to commercialization, be categorized in comparison to existing research on similar attitudes in both European and Asian football?

We confine our study to analyzing the consumer demand side of the RPL market, with a focus on surveying fans' attitudes toward the league governance, for at least two reasons. First, the growing literature on football governance stresses the role of supporters as the key stakeholder group within the business ecosystem of modern football (Biscaia et al., 2018; Senaux, 2008). At the same time, the authoritative reviews of the literature criticize the lack of rigorous evidence on attitudes of football fans and call for a 'governance turn' in the research of the consumer culture of the (European)

supporter movement (García & Welford, 2015). Indeed, previous research basically focused on qualitative and conceptual case studies, with limited implications beyond these cases and the small samples of interviewees (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; Tinson et al., 2023), whereas larger quantitative surveys of fan attitudes appeared only lately (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020, 2021; Winell et al., 2023). Moreover, the crucial or strategic issues that require reform are rarely studied. Often, this line of research concentrates more on describing and understanding the cultural identities and social practices of defined fan communities rather than exploring the active role of supporters within the governance of football (García & Welford, 2015; García & Zheng, 2017).

Second, and most importantly, both in sports economics and sport sociology, the vast majority of the literature is Eurocentric (García & Welford, 2015; Winell et al., 2023). There is not much known about attendance demand and preferences of football fans nor their consumer culture beyond Western Europe. Already (South-)Eastern European countries are under-researched, although they show a vibrant and long-standing fan culture, not to mention established or emerging football markets outside Europe (Brandt et al., 2024; Choluj et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2022). Likewise, the Russian football market and culture is widely uncharted territory in economic and social science research (Baydina et al., 2021; Coates et al., 2017), with the exemption of studies on the subcultural and politicized hooliganism (Glathe, 2016; Kozon, 2018). However, the (post-Soviet) governance and institutions of the Russian football market at large are barely explored (Veth, 2016). Given the geopolitical and socioeconomic importance of Russia as the world's largest nation by land area with a wealth of natural resources as well as the historical significance of its Soviet past, the lack of research on Russian football is surprising—even more so the case when considering the extensive Soviet studies during the Cold War era and the post-socialist research on Russia and other former socialist countries, such as China.

By contrast, the Chinese Super League (CSL) recently attracted more interest in the sports economics and sports management literature (Fan et al., 2023; Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019, 2022; Yu et al., 2019). Against this background, Russian football deserves more attention in the international research, particularly in these troubled times of geopolitical confrontation. One reason is that the Russian football teams are supposed to come back to the UEFA competitions, once a conflict resolution gains momentum, which poses the question of how Russian football, with its supporters, could potentially be a major (European) football market in times of increasing globalization in sport. The other reason is for the basic research interest of sports economics to better understand Russian football governance and the national fan culture. For both research motivations, generating rigorous evidence is imperative.

Therefore, we present in this article the findings of the first large survey ($N = 4,090$) of Russian football supporters regarding their perceptions of the RPL's governance. In particular, we pursue the research question of whether the fan culture in the huge Eurasian country tends to show more characteristics of the European or the Asian type. For this purpose, our results are compared to earlier evidence on European supporters and recent survey findings on Chinese football fans as an informative case of post-socialist consumer culture in Asia (Ma et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Post-Socialist League Governance

Globally different models of sport governance exist, including national particularities (O'Boyle & Bradbury, 2013). A dynamic affecting sport governance globally is commercialization, meaning that modern sports (entertainment) is dominated by commercial enterprises (Slack, 2004). Sports transformation reflects changes in societies, including more time off, higher spending capacity of many people, and, as a consequence, a rise in the demand for entertainment goods (Beck, 1992). Over time, commercialization became an invisible but “driving force” (Chen & Rocha, 2022) in sports, modifying the governance of sport in manifold ways (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022). Commercialization fuels an arms race between sporting contestants, which potentially incentivizes overinvestments (Franck, 2010). Therefore, it is vital that the governance of sports balances commercialization processes in the interest of its diverse stakeholders (Næss, 2018, 2020; Tinson et al., 2023). National sports governance systems respond differently to commercialization's dynamics. They navigate between allowing more market and the need for more regulation. Substantial differences in the national patterns and processes of football commercialization are observable (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2022). While in the United States sports is not

regulated by the state (Green et al., 2013), in the People's Republic of China (PRC), as a communist stronghold, football commercialization remains under control of state authorities (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2019; Yu et al., 2019). Hence, analysis of commercialization allows reflections on sport governance in general (Ma et al., 2022).

To understand the current governance pattern of Russian football, it is essential to consider the institutional and sociopolitical legacy of the past Soviet sport system, which was entirely government-funded and collectivist (Riordan, 2011). As a result, elite athletes were perceived as state-supported amateurs and clubs as socialist people's organizations while actually being professionals and collectivized, state-controlled entities, respectively (Ovsepyan, 2017). The official status of "professional athletes" did not emerge before the Perestroika era of capitalist opening in the late 1980s, marking a fundamental restructuring of Russian sport (Edelman, 1990). This organizational change of the sport system was reinforced both by general sociopolitical developments at the time and the 1986 decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to allow professional athletes at the Olympic Games (Pochinkin, 2005). This decision represents a starting point of commercialization and professionalization of high-performance sport in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Ganiev et al., 2019). Likewise, in football, clubs opened for foreign sponsors, with Ocrim Spa, Nike, Reebok, and Pepsi Cola being the first to enter the Soviet market (Andreff et al., 2012). This development was novel for Soviet sports because private sponsorship and advertising had previously been nonexistent in the USSR due to the exclusive state provision of sports. The advent of advertising marked the beginning of a fundamental organizational change in Soviet football governance toward commodification and commercialization to finance high-quality football (Veth, 2016). In the following years, foreign sponsorships in professional football were expanded, and a domestic market for sport sponsorships developed rapidly (Pochinkin, 2005).

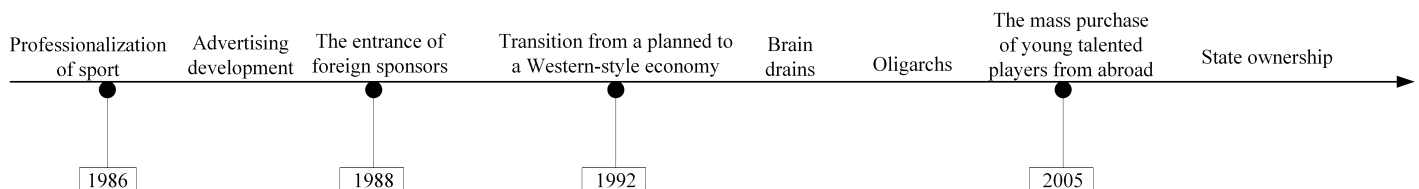


Figure 1. Milestones of commercialization in Soviet and Russian football

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 caused sudden and simultaneous disruptions in politics, the economy, and society (Mishler & Rose, 2007). Professional sports, and notably football, suffered from a massive "brain drain" or "muscle drain," with the best post-Soviet athletes moving to the West in search of lucrative contracts (O'Mahony, 2006). As a result, in the mid-1990s, some 300 football players, 700 ice hockey players, and 100 basketball players had emigrated abroad (Beumers, 2005). Additionally, in 1992, the Russian Federation as the USSR successor state began a major effort to privatize its economy (Gowland et al., 2006). Under the newly implemented market economy, the state no longer financed organizations in elite sports. They had to rely on the usual Western business model of professional sports, generating income by sponsors, broadcasting fees, ticketing at matchdays, and further revenue sources, such as player transfers (Pochinkin, 2005). Both the national economy and the governance of sports were badly prepared for this profound transformation, leading to bankruptcies of multiple sports clubs (Edelman, 1999).

In the 2000s, however, the Russian economy stabilized and began to develop, with the natural resources and energy sectors being the growth drivers. That was the golden decade for clever businessmen who had benefited from the privatizations of the 1990s by taking over formerly collectivized companies, for often underrated amounts, in the now booming industries. These industrialists and bankers made fortunes in a very short time period and became the famous group of superrich and influential oligarchs. To show and secure their economic and political influence, the oligarchs discovered professional football as an effective platform for their networking and image interests (Veth, 2014). As a result, oligarchs began to invest in domestic football clubs (Beumers, 2005; Dejonghe & Van Opstal, 2010) and to buy preferably foreign players, not only to improve the quality of play but also to enhance the prestige of the Russian clubs. In the 2005 season, the RPL clubs had on average a dozen foreign players on their squads (Riordan, 2007). The RPL was tempting for these players at the time

because they were attracted by elevated salaries and luxurious amenities. Actually, beyond prominent exemptions, the foreign players tended, in many cases, to be European average or below and were, thus, considered to be overpaid. Yet, these overinvestments in foreign players (Franck, 2010) were intended to underline the high ambitions of the oligarch club owners and to amend their national standing, given that the privileged oligarchs were and continue to be unpopular with the Russian public (Riordan, 2011). Hence, this short-lived phase of the commercialization of Russian football was comparable to the crony capitalism discussed above and still observed in Southeastern European, post-socialist countries (Perasović & Mustapić, 2017). However, despite these efforts to amend their social standing, members of the oligarchic class continued to be suspected of undermining national cohesion. As a result, steps were taken to limit the authority of these oligarchs under a policy known as governmental alignment. This policy of governmental alignment of not only the oligarchs but also of the general public and the economy led to the establishment of a regime that some have called authoritarian.

Beginning in the 2010s, football governance reflected this political transition with a reversion of the commercialization process by reducing private ownership and revenue sources. Club ownership was shifted from oligarchs to regional governments, state corporations, or individuals closely associated with the state (Sannikov et al., 2024). Today, approximately 80% of club revenue is generated through sponsorships from mostly state-owned companies, regional state budgets, and other related funding sources (Solntsev, 2020).

At this point, it can be concluded that the governance and commercialization of football in Russia went through turbulent times in the decades since the final phase of the USSR. In contrast to the more continuous processes of football's commercialization in Western countries and, for instance, in post-socialist China (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2022), Russian football has seen structural breaks and lately a return to a largely state-owned governance, which even reminds of the past Soviet sport system. Still, the RPL is a professional and commercialized league of modern football. Yet, the control and ownership twisted toward governmental or other entities and individuals that are linked to the state. In a nutshell, the governance of the RPL reflects the specificities of Russia's political and cultural environment. Since the focus of this study is on the perspectives of fans on the league governance, we will review the literature on football fans, considering the special Russian context.

Fans in the Russian Context of League Governance

Fans are a key stakeholder in European football (Biscaia et al., 2018; Senaux, 2008). As a result, manifold literature on their demands and needs exists (Solberg & Mehus, 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2012; Uhrich, 2021; Wann et al., 2001). However, despite the many similarities that occur between fans around the world, regional and national differences between fans still exist (Brandt et al., 2024; Watanabe, 2012).

European sports fans exhibit a keen interest in the governance of their clubs, often expressing strong disapproval of excessive commercialization because fans often perceive commercialization as a threat to their influence within the sporting governance framework. This sentiment arises from the concern that an overwhelming focus on commercial interests might diminish their role and input in decisions and could also undermine their identity, leading to fan alienation (Biscaia et al., 2018; Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022). Fans reject governance dynamics caused by commercialization, although they generally accept the marketing of their sport to a certain degree (Giulianotti, 2005).

A recent study by Ma et al. (2022) researched the attitudes of Chinese football fans toward commercialization and showed differing results. When compared to European supporters, Chinese fans generally show more positive attitudes toward commercialization. The authors interpreted these attitudes as being due to the specific governance dynamics of Chinese football. The early post-socialist commercialization was associated with bad league governance, prone to corruption. Subsequently, the governance of the CSL improved such that fans became more relevant stakeholders. Thus, Chinese fans welcome commercialization as it enhances their role in the league governance (Gong et al., 2015), especially because their speech is already restricted under the country's authoritarian regime. The typical Chinese football fan is under the age of 50, belongs to the middle class, and has a high level of education (Sullivan et al., 2021). According to a survey from 2017, 32% of China's urban population is interested in football. Males (45%) show a higher interest than females (20%), younger (16–24, 42%) more than older (55–69 28%), and higher income earners (36%) a slightly higher interest than lower income earners (30%) (Nielsen, 2018).

In Russia, 52% of the urban population are interested in football. Like China, male (65% vs 40% female) and high-income earners (61% vs 44% low income) are more interested (Nielsen, 2018). Corresponding to that, they enrolled in higher education and work in a wide range of occupational categories (Molchanova, 2018). The group aged 25–34 are slightly more interested in football (57% vs around 50%; Nielsen, 2018). Compared to China, Russian fans are more middle-aged (25–34). The preferences and attitudes of Russian football fans have been little studied in the Russian literature and barely researched in the international literature. For instance, Coates et al. (2017) analyzed determinants of spectator demand in Russian stadiums. They determined that the history of the visiting team is a driving factor in matchday attendance. A second determinant is whether a national team player will be playing in the match. Interestingly, uncertainty of outcome does not seem to be a relevant determinant of matchday attendance for the RPL (Baydina et al., 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, no literature on Russian fans' attitudes toward football governance currently exists. However, an organization known as the All-Russian Supporters' Association was formed in 2007 to protect the interests of Russian fans, and it quickly became quite relevant. This organization had tens of thousands of members all over Russia, and some individuals even became official members of the Russian Football Union, which allowed increases to their power, but they also became co-opted by the Association and by politicians in the process (Tarazanova, 2022). However, the organization did not last for long: State authorities abolished the organization in 2016 because its leaders were involved in riots started by Russian hooligans at the 2016 European Championship in France.

To sum up the insights from the literature review, there is a lack of knowledge on governance and commercialization of football and notably on the perspectives of fans. This dearth of research is particularly the case for football markets beyond the core European countries. The studies of García and Llopis-Goig (2020, 2021) and Ma et al. (2022) have, however, shown the benefits of surveys on fans' attitudes toward league governance. Therefore, this article follows a similar approach to better understand the consumer culture of Russian football fans.

The model (Figure 2), adapted from Ma et al. (2022), considers two opposing but complementary strands of theory: the theories of sports leagues and market supply on the one hand and the theories of stakeholder and demand on the

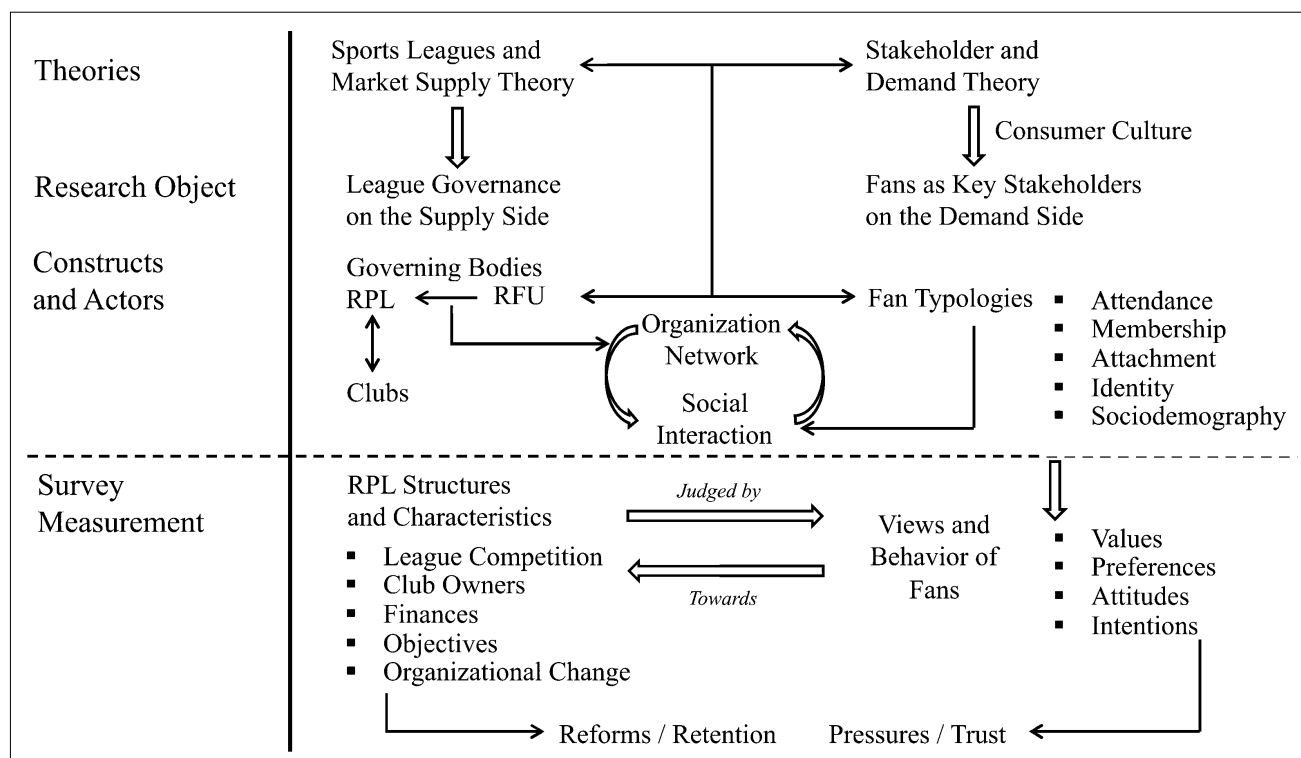


Figure 2. Methodological approach (adapted from Ma et al., 2022)

other. While the former theories focus on the supply side (league governance), the demand side considers fans as the key stakeholder. The different constructs and actors of the governing bodies are evaluated in the measurement by the different fan typologies. Consequently, fans' views and behaviors can exert pressure on the structures and characteristics and thus potentially represent a call for reforms.

Methodology

Research Design and Measurement

This empirical study aims to reflect insights on supporter behavior and attitudes, focusing on the Russian fans' assessment of the current governance structures and forms of commercialization in Russian professional football. We chose a questionnaire as the most sensible research design, which must be broad and adaptable enough to encompass the potentially significant range of opinions, attitudes, and preferences (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). The construction of the questionnaire is based on relevant fan research, such as the psychological attachment of sports fans to their favorite team (Biscaia et al., 2018; Wann et al., 2001) as well as various discussions on the commercialization and governance of football (García & Welford, 2015; Webber, 2017). Furthermore, for a possible comparison with results of the similar survey of Chinese football fans by Ma et al. (2022), we adapt this multipurpose questionnaire with the specifics for Russian football, e.g., the introduction of a fan-ID or the exclusion of Russian teams from international competitions (due to the military conflict in the Ukraine).

The structure of the questionnaire and the resulting (independent) variables are grouped, as displayed in Table 1, into categories of determinants of the overall or general attitude toward football commercialization (i.e., COMMERCE as dependent variable in regressions): (1) self-reported attendance behavior, (2) membership or attachment, (3) fan identity, (4) attitudes toward commercial issues in football, (5) attitudes toward football governance, (6) attitudes toward club governance, (7) behavioral intentions (regarding future fan behavior), and (8) sociodemographic data. Beyond the discrete statements in the questionnaire's item variables, Table 1 displays factor variables that encompass two to six theoretically related item variables (e.g., STADIUM on item variables linked to stadium attendance). These variables are utilized to test broader constructs and to ensure the robustness of the regression models. Factor variables are computed based on the represented item variables, except for ATTACH, which is a quasi-ordinal variable indicating the level of attachment expressed through club or fan group membership. The attitude measurement applies the intuitive five-point Likert scale (1 = disagree to 5 = agree) throughout that has proven to be statistically equivalent to larger scales in recent methods research (e.g., Revilla et al., 2014).

Overall, 37 ordinal variables, six binary variables, and four metric variables for the constructs of games attended and age were included in the exploratory data analysis (47 variables in total), which is conducted through multiple regressions on two dependent variables: COMMERCE (ordinal) and BINCOMM (binary). Additionally, 10 factor variables are used together with the four sociodemographic variables in more condensed factor regressions.

Survey Development, Sampling, and Data Analysis

To adapt the questionnaire, proposed and tested on German (Reichel et al., 2024) and Chinese football fans (Ma et al., 2022), to the Russian context, variables on sociodemographic information and stadium areas had to be slightly modified. The questionnaire was translated into Russian, including minor adaptations to the Russian culture, by one of the co-authors, a Russian PhD student in sport governance. A backtranslation was conducted by a Russian teacher for the German language. Considering the Russian sociopolitical context during the time of the military conflict, as well as with respect to criteria of reliability, validity, and variance of responses, an online sampling was the best choice. After a randomly sampled pretest phase of the translated questionnaire to prove its comprehensibility and consistency for Russian football supporters, the survey was distributed from September 20 through October 24, 2022, by the following social media channels and fan-based internet sport communities (Table 2).

Eight hundred and thirty-three (17%) out of 4,923 responses were either not or only scarcely (less than halfway) completed, such that the final sample comprised $N = 4,090$ (GENDER with 95% ($n = 2,842$) males and 5% ($n = 158$) females).¹ Given the size of the sample and by spreading participation across (almost) the entire country (queried by region), the sample can be understood as approximately representative (Jones, 2015) for Russian football fans, at least for those

Table 1. Overview of the Item and Factor Variables

Variable	N	values	M	SD	Description
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
COMMERCE	4,090	5	2.45	1.18	Commercialization harms the fans (1-5 sc.)
BINCOMM	4,090	2	0.18	0.39	Binary of COMMERCE (1 = (somewhat) agree)
<i>Attendance behavior (self-reported) and season ticket holders</i>					
ATTENDANCE*	3,781	30	4.16	4.01	Attend. pref. (mean of home & away)
HOME	3,781	17	5.17	5.33	Home attendance per season (metric)
AWAY	3,781	16	3.15	4.55	Away attendance per season (metric)
SEASON	3,781	2	0.10	0.30	Season ticket holder (1 = yes)
<i>Membership or attachment (dummy base: no membership or attachment to a group)</i>					
ATTACH*	4,090	4	0.85	0.83	Attachment or commit. (0 = none; 3 = ultra)
PAYTV	4,090	2	0.54	0.50	Pay TV subscriber (1 = yes)
FANCLUB	4,090	2	0.10	0.30	Official fan club member (1 = yes)
ULTRA	4,090	2	0.06	0.24	Ultra group member (1 = yes)
<i>Fan identity (factor variable)</i> <i>(two items: (i) identify with the club, (ii) keep up to date with my club)</i>					
IDENTITY*	4,090	9	4.19	0.87	Fan identity (mean of 2 identification ite.)
IDENTIFICATION	4,090	5	3.89	1.15	Identification with the club (1-5 sc.)
INFORMATION	4,090	5	4.49	0.83	Keep up to date with my club (1-5 sc.)
FAVCLUB	4,090	2		0.26	Favorite club (1 = yes)
ACTIVEPART	4,090	5	2.80	1.53	Taking part in fan chants etc. (1-5 sc.)
<i>Attitudes toward commercial issues in football</i>					
COMNECESS	3,813	5	3.75	1.10	Marketing of football necessary (1-5 sc.)
MODERNFOOTB*	3,813	9	4.07	0.86	Issues of modern footb. (mean of 2 ite.)
COVERAGE	3,813	5	4.26	0.86	Increasing media coverage (1-5 sc.)
SHOW	3,813	5	3.89	1.22	Show elements on matchdays (1-5 sc.)
COSTS*	3,813	9	2.26	0.93	Issues of rising costs (mean of 2 ite.)
TRANSFER	3,813	5	2.23	1.05	Cost of player transfers (1-5 sc.)
SALARIES	3,813	5	2.30	1.10	Level of player salaries (1-5 sc.)
OBJECTIVES*	3,813	12	4.21	0.53	Issues of club objectives (mean of 3 ite.)
PROFIT	3,813	5	4.41	0.80	My club should aim for profits (1-5 sc.)
WINNING	3,813	5	4.87	0.41	My club should aim for winning (1-5 sc.)
STARS	3,813	5	3.36	1.07	My club should buy top stars (1-5 sc.)
STADIUM*	3,813	17	3.91	0.72	Issues of stadiu. features (mean of 4 ite.)
PRICES	3,813	5	3.51	1.12	Ticket prices are reasonable (1-5 sc.)
COMFORT	3,813	5	4.56	0.82	Comfort of new stadia (1-5 sc.)
SPONSORS	3,813	5	4.16	0.95	Presence of sponsors in stadia (1-5 sc.)
NAMING	3,813	5	3.39	1.44	Selling naming rights of stadia (1-5 sc.)

Attitudes toward football governance

REGULATION	3,299	5	1.96	1.16	Footb. needs regul. by authorities (1-5 sc.)
SAFE	3,156	5	4.35	0.91	I feel safe going to a stadium (1-5 sc.)
FANIMPORT*	3,156	13	4.55	0.62	Importance of fans (mean of 3 ite.)
FANID	3,156	5	1.35	0.83	Introduct. of fan-ID card is good (1-5 sc.)
FANRIGHTS	3,156	5	4.30	0.97	Fans' rights are not suffic. consid. (1-5 sc.)
FANSCULTURE	3,156	5	4.68	0.68	Fans' activities import. for Rus. fb. culture (1-5 sc.)
CLUBSEXCLU	3,156	5	1.73	1.28	Agreem. exclus. clubs & nat. team (1-5 sc.)
REFORM	3,156	5	2.59	1.24	Exclusion will lead to reforms (1-5 sc.)

Attitudes toward club governance

INVOLVEMENT*	3,299	9	3.39	0.63	Fan involvem. in club gov. (mean of 2 ite.)
APPROACH	3,299	5	4.60	0.69	Clubs should more approach fans (1-5 sc.)
TRADITION	3,299	5	4.43	0.85	Clubs should strengthen tradition (1-5 sc.)
RELATION	3,299	5	3.57	1.10	Good relation betw. fans & club (1-5 sc.)
DECISION	3,299	5	3.18	1.21	Clubs may involve fans in decis. (1-5 sc.)
NOINFLUENCE	3,299	5	4.33	0.99	My opinion doesn't influence club (1-5 sc.)
CUSTOMER	3,299	5	3.63	1.16	Club owners/presid. treat fans as customers (1-5 sc.)
GOODOWNER	3,299	5	2.47	1.12	Trust club owner/president do right thing (1-5 sc.)
MONEYDEPEND	3,156	5	2.66	1.44	Club is too depending on state funding (1-5 sc.)

Behavioral intentions

LESSDEMAND*	3,556	13	2.09	0.84	Will demand less cl serv. (mean of 6 ite.)
LESSATT	3,556	5	2.43	1.17	Will attend less games of my club (1-5 sc.)
NOMERCH	3,556	5	2.34	1.16	Won't buy club merchand. anym. (1-5 sc.)
LESSCHEER	3,556	5	1.33	0.70	Will cheer less for the club (1-5 sc.)
GIVEUPFAN	3,556	5	1.55	0.85	Will give up lived fan culture (1-5 sc.)
LOWERDIV	3,556	5	1.52	0.90	Would go to a lower division club (1-5 sc.)
TURNAWAY	3,556	5	1.50	0.90	Will quit football (1-5 sc.)

Sociodemographic data

GENDER	3,000	2	0.95	0.22	Gender (1 = male)
AGE	3,000	64	32.3	10.20	Age (years) [14; 82]
AGE2	3,000	64	1148	772	Age (years) squared
EDUCATION	3,067	5	4.54	0.91	Education (1 = no certificate; 5 = master's degree)

Notes: The independent variables are categorized by groups of determinants of the dependent variables representing predominantly the item batteries in the questionnaire. Factor variables are marked by * and appear above the theoretically related item variables on discrete statements in the questionnaire. They are computed by the means of the related two to six ordinal item variables, generating nine to 17 unique values in function of the distribution of distinct means. However, ATTACH and EDUCATION differ from the other factor variables because they are "quasi-ordinal" factor variables for nominal item variables. ATTACH: membership or attachment status, from no attachment to closer attachment, i.e., fan club membership with "ultra" representing the highest intensity of attachment. EDUCATION: from no certificate to master's degree at the highest.

Table 2. Overview of the Survey Sample

The name of the channel	Description	Numb. of channel members	Date published	Numb. of views	Link to the post
Vadim Lukomski	Football observer	24,299	20.09.2022	21,100	https://t.me/lukomski/2341
Insights from Karp	Football journalist	30,536	21.09.2022	14,000	https://t.me/karpinside/24891
Temple of football	Community of Russian football fans	350	20.09.2022	270	https://t.me/alexeevkvchat/255127
Gorodnizkiy Football, money, game	Channel of a Russian football blogger	12,758	22.09.2022	8,081	https://t.me/pgorodnitskiy/8609
Resistance Mustache	Channel about the Russian Premier League	5,179	23.09.2022	2,884	https://t.me/mustacheresist/7002
Football Country	Channel about Russian football	11,191	23.09.2022	13,900	https://t.me/ros_fut/1197
Judging with Igor Fedotov	Channel of the Russian football referee	12,196	27.09.2022	8,000	https://t.me/reffedotov The channel was deleted.
No criminals	Channel about Russian football	12,145	05.10.2022	5,865	https://t.me/nocrime/6726
Ball Money Football, Finance, Transfers	Channel about football statistics, finances and transfers	1,458	05.10.2022	810	https://t.me/MyachMoney The post was deleted.
Notes on site	Spartak Fans' Channel	10,941	05.10.2022	20,300	https://t.me/Spartak_ontour/7787
Football factory	Channel of a Russian football blogger	60,305	06.10.2022	37,300	https://t.me/mborzykin/3739
Ball Production	Channel about Russian and European football	52,981	08.10.2022	1,900	https://vk.com/alex_top10?w=wall-64818082_457162
Allanazarov All about football in Russia	Channel about Russian football	12,900	10.10.2022	11,400	https://t.me/registaJournalista/3058
Aloref	Channel of the Russian football referee	9,700	14.10.2022	4,145	https://t.me/aloref/2089
At Kuzmich's	Spartak Fans' Channel	14,600	18.10.2022	9,220	https://t.me/ykuzmicha/8044
Football Topics Lokalov	Football journalist	3,600	19.10.2022	1,227	https://t.me/artemky/5699

Note: The number of participants in channels/communities is current as of October 2022. It may vary at this time.

supporters organized in social media (see Table 5 in the Appendix), which is reflected by the fact that 92% of respondents have a favorite club (FAVCLUB) in Russian professional football and that, on average, the participants attend more than five HOME matches per season. In contrast, AWAY matches are less attended (on average around three per season), which is comprehensible for Russian fan culture, given the long distances between club locations. In addition, the high mean of IDENTITY (with 76% [rather] agreement) suggests that the respondents tend to be passionate about their favorite club. Moreover, 37% state that they stand in the fan curve and take part in fan chants or choreographies (ACTIVEPART). In contrast to these findings, the results show a low degree of (self-)organization, with at least 10% of official FANCLUB members and 6% of members in an ULTRA group. In addition, only 10% use a SEASON ticket, while more than half of respondents use PAYTV (54%). With regard to the attitude measurement, the above-mentioned item batteries proved to

be reliable and consistent, e.g., variables on aspects of commercialization or effects on fan behavior showing Cronbach's alpha scores of $\alpha = .72$ and $\alpha = .77$, respectively. Other item batteries were not designed to measure consistent constructs (e.g. fan-ID and exclusion of Russian clubs). Further statistics on unique values, means, and standard deviations of the sample can be found in Table 1.

The inference estimation strategy of the data analysis is constructed according to the following logic. The stand-alone key judgement on the dependent variable COMMERCE ("The commercialization of football harms the fans") is explained in multiple regressions by the variables discussed earlier and displayed in Table 3. Since COMMERCE is a Likert-scaled variable, ordered logit models are applied (Wooldridge, 2013). In order to create model variants for robustness checks, models with item and factor variables are specified and run on the binary of COMMERCE, i.e., BINCOMM, that accentuates the relationship between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable toward agreement to the commercialization statement (i.e., 1 = [rather] agree and 0 = modest and [rather] disagree). In other words, the binary models test a statistically condensed and, thus, stricter or tightened variant of the underlying hypotheses regarding explanatory factors of general attitudes toward commercialization. Finally, tests for statistical issues with multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity were insignificant or below threshold values, respectively (Wooldridge, 2013). All data analyses were carried out by programming in statistical package of Stata/SE 17.0. Further details on the survey, data, and analysis are available on request.

Results

Descriptive Findings and Insights

The first descriptive finding of the given sample is that 65% of the respondents state that marketing of football is fundamentally necessary (COMNECESS). Moreover, 82% do not think (disagree to modest) that commercialization harms the fans (COMMERCE). Thus, a clear majority of Russian fans accept or even welcome commercial developments like a raising media COVERAGE (85%). This outcome is underlined by the (rather) agreement (71%) of Russian fans toward entertainment elements on matchdays (SHOW), which are deemed a prominent symbol for (over-)commercialization in the view of most (Western) European football supporters (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022). Obviously, Russian supporters perceive entertainment before or during a football match as an additional service. However, the attitudes toward financial issues of commercialized football are nearly the same as the debate on European football, where the big money circulating in the business is argued to alienate fans (Dubal, 2010). Only a minority of the respondents (rather) agree that the costs of player TRANSFERS (11%) or the level of player SALARIES (17%) are reasonable. These findings are contrary to Chinese fans (Ma et al. 2022), who tend to perceive the high investments of the clubs in (foreign) players as a sign of progress of the CSL and not as a major problem. With regard to the objectives of the favorite club, respondents (rather) agree overwhelmingly that the club should aim for WINNING (99%) rather than for PROFIT (88%).

Commercial aspects related to the stadium experience are rated moderately to (rather) positively. In particular, the COMFORT of the stadiums (91%) and the presence of SPONSORS in the arenas (79%) are rated favorable by a clear majority. Even the ticket PRICES are considered reasonable by more than half of the respondents (55%).

The previous results show that the football fans who were surveyed stated a positive attitude toward commercialization in Russian football. Although, at the same time, 86% (rather) agree that the clubs should strengthen TRADITION. In Western European fan culture, these statements are usually contradictory. Consequently, the majority of respondents claim that increased commercialization would not lead to a (negative) change in their football consumption behavior, such as attending less matches (16%, LESSATT), not buying merchandise anymore (14%, NOMERCH), cheering less for the club (2%, LESSCHEER), visiting matches in a lower division instead (4%, LOWERDIV), or finally giving up lived fan culture (2%, GIVEUPFAN) as well as turning back on Russian professional football (4%, TURNAWAY). In contrast to these results, a higher number of fans in Western European football leagues state that a (too) high level of commercialization would have an impact on their behavior. Regardless of these stated preferences, revealed preferences could be observed, for example, most recently (season 2023/24) in the fan protests about a potential investor entry in the German Bundesliga (BBC, 2024).

A further remarkable descriptive result is found in attitudes toward the relation to the club and the perceived respect of the fans. While 59% of the respondents (rather) agree there is a good RELATION between fans and the club, only a

minority (18%) trust that the club owners or presidents will always do the right thing (GOODOWNER). In addition, 73% (rather) reject the idea that football needs REGULATION by the authorities. Interestingly, there is no contradiction when it comes to dependence on the state because only 30% [rather] agree that clubs are too dependent on state funding (MONEYDEPEND).

The importance of fans is also viewed skeptically, as (rather) 83% believe that fan opinions have no influence on the actions of the club owners or presidents (NOINFLUENCE). Consequently, 93% (rather) demand that clubs should APPROACH fans more often, and 83% (rather) agree that FANRIGHTS are not sufficiently considered in Russian football. This attitude is very clearly reflected in the (rather) strong rejection of the introduction of the fan-ID (91%), an individual ID card for every stadium visitor, from July 2022 (FANID). These results show that customers' sovereignty is important for Russian fans. Above all that, it seems contradictory that the fans surveyed do not wish to participate in football governance matters. Only 43% (rather) agree that clubs may involve fans in DECISIONs. These findings make clear that active fan participation seems to be unusual or uncertain, as it has not been common practice to date.

Against the background of the current military conflict, Russian teams are excluded from international competitions, which 79% of respondents (rather) reject. After all, 24% believe that this exclusion will lead to reforms in Russian football.

Hence, it could be summarized at this point that (active) fans of the RPL have a more positive opinion of some aspects of commercialization in (professional) football, in contrast to most professional Western leagues in Europe (e.g., Reichel et al., 2024), but not as positive as in the Chinese Super League in Asia (Ma et al., 2022).

A general explanation can be found in the history of post-socialist countries, where we did not see such strong market influences in sports governance. Ma et. al. (2022) argued that for football supporters from China, another post-socialist country, commercialization of professional football can be appreciated as organizational progress.

Regression Results and Interpretations

Given the relatively positive overall opinion of Russian fans on the commercialization of the RPL, it is insightful to investigate the explaining factors of these attitudes. Further, it is important to generate evidence that proves the coherence and robustness of the regression findings. This exploration is done as follows and is displayed in Table 3.

To provide a more meaningful interpretation of the results, the values from the (ordered) logit regression are presented as margins. Margins show how changes in an independent variable affect the predicted probabilities of the different categories of the dependent variable, with all other variables held constant.

The ordered logit regression on COMMERCE in Model 3 is considered the key or "target model" as it captures the entirety of the data because it takes into account the full range of the five-point Likert scale. Conversely, Model 4 focuses on the factor variables as explanatory variables. Hence, information on the item level is lost; however, the major theoretical determinants are modeled to detect the coherence of the estimation on the item level. In other words, Model 4 illustrates consistency and robustness of Model 3's findings with its variants. Moreover, following the same estimation strategy, Models 1 and 2 are developed. Further on, we may largely focus on the results and insights given by the "target model" (Model 3). A significant positive relationship between COMMERCE ("commercialization harms the fans") and the explanatory item variable shows that agreement to the statement of the variable tends to contribute to the explanation of critical attitudes toward commercialization.

The following insights may be concluded from this interpretation of the evidence. First, and not surprisingly, a general agreement on the importance of marketing in football as well as the recognition of single organizational elements of commercialized "modern football" explains the overall attitude that commercialization does not harm the fans. Likewise, for instance, fans who (rather) disagree with the increasing media COVERAGE or presence of SPONSORS in stadia tend to be critical toward commercialization in general. These findings are confirmed by the regression results on the factor MODERNFOOTBall. Similar results on commercialization issues can be found in the attitudes of Chinese football fans (Ma et. al., 2022), in contrast to studies on European football fan culture (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022; Dubal, 2010; Numerato, 2015).

Second, the criticism of commercialization in Russian football and the concern that commercialization could have a negative impact on the fan scene is intensified when fans show a high level of INVOLVEMENT with the club. Furthermore, supporters feel that their fan interests are increasingly being undermined when they are only perceived as

Table 3. Regression Results

	(1) Logit item model BINCOMM	(2) Logit factor model BINCOMM	(3) Ordered Logit item model COMMERCE	(4) Ordered Logit factor model COMMERCE
FANCLUB	n.s.		0.290**	
IDENTITY		n.s.		0.167***
IDENTIFICATION	n.s.		0.112**	
ACTIVEPART	0.141***	0.155***	0.097***	0.116***
COMNECESS	-0.810***	-0.714***	-1.113***	-1.021***
MODERNFOOTB		-0.376***		-0.350***
COVERAGE	n.s.		-0.213***	
SHOW	-0.130**		n.s.	
SALARIES	n.s.		-0.087**	n.s.
STADIUM		-0.393***		-0.438***
SPONSORS	-0.214***		-0.250***	
NAMING	-0.097**		-0.087***	
REGULATION	0.095*	0.101*	n.s.	n.s.
SAFE	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.090**
CLUBSEXCLU	-0.154**	-0.177***	-0.100***	-0.124***
INVOLVEMENT		0.697**		0.339*
TRADITION	0.350***		0.207***	
DECISION	n.s.	n.s.	0.103***	n.s.
NOINFLUENCE	n.s.	n.s.	0.131***	0.128***
CUSTOMER	0.245***	0.245***	0.122***	0.118***
GOODOWNER	n.s.	n.s.	0.098***	0.096***
LESSDEMAND		0.660***		0.678***
LESSATT	0.330***		0.216***	
NOMERCH	0.133**		0.235***	
TURNAWAY	0.147*		0.106*	
AGE	-0.112***	-0.103***	n.s.	n.s.
AGE2	0.002***	0.001***	n.s.	n.s.
EDUCATION	n.s.	n.s.	-0.137***	-0.139***
<i>N</i>	2,849	2,849	2,849	2,849
<i>McFadden's R²</i>	0.332	0.321	0.253	0.247

Note: All models were estimated in Stata 17.0. Only significant variables in at least one model are displayed. n.s. denotes nonsignificant. A blank cell means the omission of this variable in the model. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4. Regression Results (Predicted Margins and SD)

	(1) Logit item model BINCOMM	(2) Logit factor model BINCOMM	(3) Ordered Logit item model COMMERCE	(4) Ordered Logit factor model COMMERCE
_CONS	.082*** ± .007	.171*** ± .006		
1			.253*** ± .007	.253*** ± .007
2			.324*** ± .008	.324*** ± .008
3			.252*** ± .007	.252*** ± .007
4			.107*** ± .005	.107*** ± .005
5			.065*** ± .004	.065*** ± .004
<i>N</i>	2,849	2,849	2,849	2,849
<i>McFadden's R²</i>	0.332	0.321	0.253	0.247

CUSTOMERs and that their opinions have no influence on the club's actions (NOINFLUENCE).

Regarding the sociodemographic results, there is at least weak evidence that younger and less educated respondents tend to be more critical.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article presents the first in-depth online survey of Russian fans on their attitudes toward the commercialization of the RPL.

Main Findings and Insights

The main findings are as follows. (1) The acceptance of commercial developments among Russian fans who (regularly) attend matches is substantially higher than among European fans and rather comparable to the results on Chinese fans. These results suggest that in post-socialist countries, attitudes toward sports commercialization are more positive than in Western countries. (2) Controversial issues of commercialization, such as show elements, media coverage, and sponsor presence, are overall seen as less problematic by Russian supporters than by European fans; consequently, it would not lead to a (negative) change in their football consumption behavior. (3) Customer sovereignty is, however, important for Russian fans, but they do not wish to participate in governance and decision-making.

The latter finding is contrary to a liberal Eurocentric perspective but conclusive for the Russian context. The Russian sport system is hierarchical and closely linked to the state, like other systems of the society. The fans like inhabitants are not used to participating actively in decision-making. They rather accept the (sport) political decisions, hoping that state and sport authorities manage in the best interests of its fans. However, a certain distrust in sport governing bodies exists, which is also expressed in the rejection of the fan-ID card, providing ample information on fans to state authorities. But standing up for something and taking responsibility is something they are not used to and could be dangerous in the given political system. The fact that the fan organization (All-Russian Supporters' Association), until it was given up in 2016, expressed a closeness to the political system emphasizes this finding. No nationwide organization representing fans' interests exists to date.

Sovereign customers do not need such an organization, as their interests are considered by market mechanisms. In a commercial system, fans' interests are more likely to be considered than in a state-driven sport governance, in which

customers are hardly important. From the perspective of Russian and similar Chinese fans, commercialization did not harm the fans. Instead, it improved their importance in the governance system. Additionally, Russian fans emphasize the relevance of tradition but do not perceive the commercialization, including phenomena like show elements or selling stadium names, as undermining those traditions. They perceive them as part of the authentic football experience, in line with the concept argued by Brandt and Kurscheidt (2022).

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

First, the results on Russian football are highly relevant for sport economists' debates on sport spectators. They show the relevance of national or regional peculiarities for consumer attitudes and behavior. Assumptions made on Western spectators cannot simply be transferred to other countries, as Watanabe (2012) has already shown and argued. Concerning football's commercialization, the Russian/Chinese type of fan must be differentiated from the European one. The similarities of Russian and Chinese fans indicate a different perception in an authoritarian political and sport governance system. The character of sport in post-socialist countries provides one explanation for that. However, fans in some other post-socialist countries, like Poland or Ukraine (Choluj et al., 2020; Brandt et al., 2024), show different behaviors. Thus, it is worthwhile to go deeper into the data and understanding of consumer cultures in sports of not only different countries but also between regions in these countries. Generally, comparative empirical approaches in sports economics research may be more intensely pursued as cultures and institutions matter and are often not considered enough in sports economic modeling.

Second, the Russian case emphasizes the relevance of the political system or, at least, the governance system in which a sport is based, including its historical traditions. Hence, such institutional environments of the sports industry and the market mechanism may be further developed as a relevant determinant in the theoretical demand models of sports economics. One direction to pursue could be merging theories and constructs of political economy and institutional economics with the pertinent neoclassical demand models.

Third, following the latest military conflict in the Ukraine, many countries and international sport organizations declared sanctions on the Russian economy and sport system, hoping the effected population would call for changes. Concerning football fans, our study could not indicate such effects on the football system to a relevant extent. Instead, the majority of Russian football fans seems to be relatively satisfied (or reluctant), although a certain distrust in national sport governing bodies exists. Fans do not strive to transform the governance of Russian football; for the time being, they may have other worries.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the survey was limited in scope, using two digital social platforms to announce the study. There is also the possibility that an online survey may inadvertently exclude a segment of fans because this method may not reach all potential respondents, such as older people who are less active in the digital space. Secondly, the study was conducted in a markedly difficult political period for the nation, as evidenced by the fact that some administrators of large telegram channels refused to publish news related to the study for political reasons. However, most of the rejections resulted from the fact that administrators were only willing to publish for a fee. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, fans from 81 regions across the country actively participated in the survey, representing a significant 95% of the total number of regions in Russia.

Another potential limitation lies in the fact that only a small number of football hooligans participated in the survey. Moreover, one of the biggest digital communities of this group refused to publish news about the study due to skepticism and mistrust of academic research. The results show striking and ambivalent attitudes of fans' trust in sports governing bodies. Here, further research is needed to investigate the relationship between fans as customers and sport organizations as suppliers.

Endnote

¹ The information on gender was voluntary, so many respondents ($n = 1,090$) did not answer the question. Therefore, the distribution on gender is based on $n = 3,000$. (The term "non-binary" is not common, even forbidden, in the Russian community).

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Appendix

Table 5. Geographical distribution of the sample compared to the Russian population

	Population Count	Population Percentage	Sample Count	Sample Percentage
Russian Federation	146,447,424	100	3000	100
The Central Federal District	40,240,256	27.48	1757	58.41
Belgorod Region	1,514,527	1.03	11	0.37
Bryansk Region	1,152,505	0.79	15	0.50
Vladimir Region	1,325,510	0.91	39	1.30
Voronezh Region	2,285,282	1.56	54	1.80
Ivanovo Region	914,725	0.62	14	0.47
Kaluga Region	1,070,853	0.73	31	1.03
Kostroma Region	571,900	0.39	1	0.03
Kursk Region	1,067,034	0.73	7	0.23
Lipetsk Region	1,126,263	0.77	11	0.37
Moscow Region	8,591,736	5.87	733	24.53
Orel Region	700,276	0.48	14	0.47
Ryazan Region	1,088,918	0.74	33	1.10
Smolensk Region	873,041	0.60	16	0.53
Tambov Region	966,250	0.66	7	0.23
Tver Region	1,211,183	0.83	25	0.83
Tula Region	1,481,471	1.01	29	0.96
Yaroslavl Region	1,194,605	0.82	13	0.43
Moscow	13,104,177	8.95	697	23.24
Northwestern Federal District	13,867,347	9.47	407	13.53
Republic of Karelia	527,880	0.36	8	0.27
Komi Republic	726,434	0.50	8	0.27
Arkhangelsk Region	1,005,687	0.69	11	0.37
Nenets Autonomous Area	41,383	0.03	1	0.03
Vologda Region	1,128,782	0.77	17	0.57
Kaliningrad Region	1,032,343	0.70	18	0.60

More Market and Less Regulation? Fan Attitudes Toward the Governance of the Russian Premier League

Leningrad Region	2,023,767	1.38	58	1.93
Murmansk Region	658,698	0.45	15	0.50
Novgorod Region	575,926	0.39	11	0.37
Pskov Region	587,786	0.40	10	0.33
City of St Petersburg	5,600,044	3.82	250	8.31
Southern Federal District	16,642,052	11.36	239	7.95
Republic of Adygea	497,985	0.34	7	0.23
Republic of Kalmykia	264,483	0.18	3	0.10
Republic of Crimea	1,916,805	1.31	4	0.13
Krasnodar Territory	5,819,345	3.97	122	4.06
Astrakhan Region	950,557	0.65	8	0.27
Volgograd Region	2,470,057	1.69	24	0.80
Rostov Region	4,164,547	2.84	70	2.33
City of Sevastopol	558,273	0.38	1	0.03
North Caucasian Federal District	10,205,730	6.97	36	1.20
Republic of Dagestan	3,209,781	2.19	7	0.23
Republic of Ingushetia	519,078	0.35	1	0.03
Kabardino-Balkarian Republic	903,266	0.62	2	0.07
Karachayevo-Circassian Republic	468,444	0.32	1	0.03
Republic of North Ossetia-Alania	680,748	0.46	7	0.23
Chechen Republic	1,533,209	1.05	2	0.07
Stavropol Territory	2,891,204	1.97	16	0.53
Volga Federal District	28,683,247	19.59	316	10.51
Republic of Bashkortostan	4,077,600	2.78	27	0.90
Republic of Mari El	672,321	0.46	9	0.30
Republic of Mordovia	771,373	0.53	14	0.47
Republic of Tatarstan	4,001,625	2.73	46	1.53
Republic of Udmurtia	1,442,251	0.98	15	0.50
Chuvash Republic	1,173,177	0.80	11	0.37
Perm Territory	2,508,352	1.71	15	0.50
Kirov Region	1,138,112	0.78	16	0.53
Nizhny Novgorod Region	3,081,817	2.10	53	1.76
Orenburg Region	1,841,377	1.26	11	0.37
Penza Region	1,246,609	0.85	12	0.40
Samara Region	3,142,683	2.15	50	1.66
Saratov Region	2,404,944	1.64	29	0.96
Ulyanovsk Region	1,181,006	0.81	8	0.27
Ural Federal District	12,259,126	8.37	113	3.76
Kurgan Region	761,586	0.52	6	0.20

Continued on page 226

Table 5. Geographical distribution of the sample compared to the Russian population (*continued from page 225*)

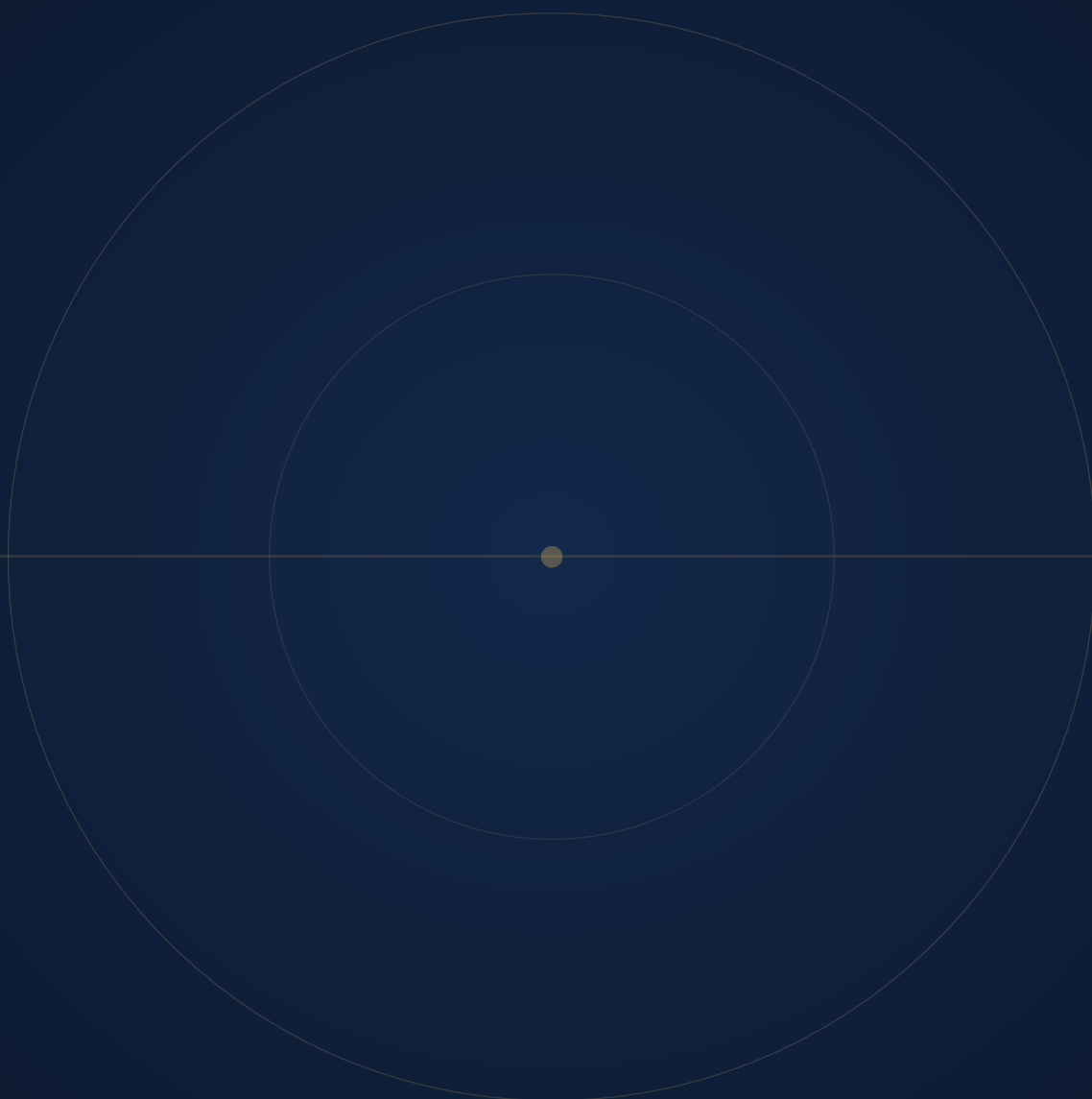
Sverdlovsk Region	4,239,161	2.89	59	1.99
Tyumen Region	3,851,234	2.63	12	0.40
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra	1,730,353	1.18	11	0.37
Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area	512,387	0.35	1	0.03
Chelyabinsk Region	3,407,145	2.33	23	0.76
Siberian Federal District	16,645,802	11.37	92	3.06
Altai Territory	210,769	0.14	1	0.03
Republic of Tyva	337,271	0.23	-	0.00
Republic of Khakassia	530,233	0.36	1	0.03
Republic of Altai	2,130,950	1.46	8	0.27
Krasnoyarsk Territory	2,845,545	1.94	12	0.40
Irkutsk Region	2,344,360	1.60	14	0.47
Kemerovo Region	2,568,238	1.75	11	0.37
Novosibirsk Region	2,794,266	1.91	28	0.93
Omsk Region	1,832,064	1.25	10	0.33
Tomsk Region	1,052,106	0.72	7	0.23
Far Eastern Federal District	7,903,864	5.40	48	1.60
Republic of Buryatia	974,628	0.67	5	0.17
Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)	997,565	0.68	5	0.17
Trans-Baikal Territory	992,429	0.68	7	0.23
Kamchatka Territory	288,730	0.20	-	0.00
Primorye Territory	1,820,076	1.24	15	0.50
Khabarovsk Territory	1,284,090	0.88	4	0.13
Amur Region	756,198	0.52	5	0.17
Magadan Region	134,315	0.09	2	0.07
Sakhalin Region	460,535	0.31	5	0.17
Jewish Autonomous Region	147,458	0.10	-	0.00
Chukotka Autonomous Area	47,840	0.03	-	0.00

Note: The population data for Russia was obtained from the official website of the Russian Federal Statistics Service: <https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru>

Study 3

This chapter provides the link to the following open-access article, published in *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* and available for free download:

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GOVERNANCE OF THE RUSSIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Studies on Management and Fan Perspectives

ILIA SANNIKOV



UNIVERSITÄT
BAYREUTH

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