Socialization, “glocal” identity and sport.  
Football between local and global

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Abstract: Identities are built in cultural stills that distill contradictory socialization in a “glocalized” world (between global and local). They do not only participate in a universal sport (global), but also at a local level involving emotional and affective dimensions of their actors. Cultural consumption of football unifies and generates social activities. Additionally, the tensions generated in the process of construction of identity also are the basis of renovation. Masculine socialization elements share a space with feminine ones. Models of post-figurative culture (adults) prevail in the construction of identity. But the models of pre-figurative culture (youth) are important, too. This renovation is characterized by the tension between cultural diversity and homogenization.

Keywords: Socialization, intercultural relations, identity, culture, football, “glocalization”.

1 Introduction
This article is the result of a sociological research about the fans of a football club of the Spanish Professional League. The research is a quantitative and qualitative investigation that seeks to develop a more general analysis of identities and cultural constructions that frame the sport of the masses.¹

Cultural consumption of football is a habitus, understood as a principle that unifies and generates practices. Lifestyles and perceptions consolidate masculine socialization elements (construction of masculinity) shared with feminine socialization aspects. By representing other styles, young people (fans and players) insert a pre-figurative culture in social situations characterized of post-figurative adult culture and appear as juvenile models of new cultural identities. The adult culture is represented by the coaches, staff and presidents of clubs. In addition to the tensions generated in the process of cultural identity construction, we find intercultural tension between “global” and “local”.

2 Methodology
The methodology has followed a quantitative and qualitative design. Through the survey, through the study of the data base of this club, and through some qualitative methods (such as participant observation, interviews, discussion, focus group and

¹ This research has benefitted from the infrastructure and economic help of the Social Council of the Football Club Lleida of the Spanish Professional League. This article is based on Molina (2002), but it is renovated and actualized with new data and contributions.
triangular group), we have studied the supporters’ feelings and perceptions. Discussion, debate and observation allow to identify elements of perception, feelings and symbolism that facilitate a sociological interpretation of reality. According to Weber (1968), sociology is the construction of explanatory outlines that are derived of the reality of human interactions. The interpretive sociology focuses the attention on analysing daily life.

The survey has been the fundamental method of this research. Spectators (fans, supporters) who attend football matches in the stadium form the population. We carried out a probabilistic sampling, namely a systematic random sampling as a variant of the simple random sampling. In our case, the randomness was time, asking people who entered the stadium through the lathe entrance in that moment, some minutes before the match began. We interviewed 950 people. This sample was needed to assure an error margin of only 3% maximum, with a confidence level of 95.5%. This work was done during a second league match was played in the stadium, in order to avoid that the classification (better or worse) of the team would influence the results of the survey. The questionnaire was elaborated starting from the information and derivative comments of the documented interviews with the manager of the club, the social chairman of the board and a member of the staff council.

Other complementary techniques of research were the content analysis of the club’s database, interviews with important members of the club and discussion (focus) groups. As far as qualitative methods are concerned, it is necessary to highlight their analytic and understanding function which enables the researcher to make inferences from the speech itself concerning the participants’ perceptions and feelings. This way is necessary to understand the group as such, the personal strategies and the symbols and perceptions of social reality. It is also necessary to carry out a parallel interpretation that allows objectivity in these situations, moving away from a single person’s own perceptions of the social actors.

The first interviews with people important for the club were very important to get to know the study object. We interviewed the manager of the club, the social chairman of the board and a member of the staff council. The purpose was to capture the study object, to outline doubts and interesting questions, to profile the questionnaire and to keep in mind the important topics and the guidelines of the research. All these data were ascertained with the aim to analyse group situations and daily experiences with regard to football.

3 Football: just followed by men and people with low educational backgrounds?

Traditionally, people think that football is followed by men with a low level of education. However, nowadays it is hardly possible to adhere to this cliché.

The perception of gender attributes, conceived of as social construction, is closely connected to the socialization process that has been predominant until very recently in the Western contexts. Feminine behaviour is associated with fragility, dependence, etc., whereas masculine behaviour is associated with force, resistance, aggressiveness,
etc. There is an incongruity of sexual situation and gender attribution. Attributes such as virile and masculine appear to be bound to the world of football, as much in terms of actually practising it as in terms of being interested in it. Construction of masculinity is a process that starts in the family context; it is reinforced at school, among the peer group, and by the mass media. Myths, prejudices, social and cultural pressures that have halted women’s participation in football prevail. The study shows that the staff council members perceive a considerable preponderance of masculine culture among the supporters.

In general, the majority of football supporters are men. In our research, men represent 82% of the fans. Football continues being a masculine sport, changing only little by little, as women’s participation is still low. The results of the survey as well as the membership cards show that the percentages decrease with the age and go in an inversely progression proportional to the increment of the biological age. Among the up to 18-year-old, 75% are male and 25% female. From the age of 19 to 30 years, 81% are men, 19% are women. From the age of 31 to 50 years, even 91% are men, and only 9% women. Among the supporters aged 66 and older, the share of men is 94%.

The explanatory factors can be several, but certainly they can be expected to be bound to changes of mentalities and cultural models, besides socioeconomic factors. Mature women usually define their situation by means of the “companionship” with the husband or of the boyfriend. Young women rather see themselves as members of a group or a community of friends that participate in the same leisure activities.

As far as the level of education is concerned, almost half of the supporters in the study have studies of secondary level (42%); there are university students (28%), and also people with studies of primary level (27%). Spectators without school-leaving qualifications represent less than 2.5%. These results refute the claim that following football is related with a low level of education.

4 Identity and community emotion

The reflection about the emotions in groups allows us to outline the collective identity of the “us” that accompanies an “affective common atmosphere”. According to Heine-mann (1998), three types of emotions exist in a club as part of its culture: emotional adhesion, in-group emotion and emotional climate. Emotional adhesion can be adhesion to the organization or to the location. Adhesion to the organization refers to the emotional bonds of union between the members. Space adhesion is tied to the specific locations of the club. Emotional climate in an organization is an important factor when thinking about the “emotional image” of the club. Clubs also have feelings, as organizations, and they are perceived in the daily life in terms of their atmosphere.

4.1 Emotional adhesion

Emotional adhesion to the club is important considering desires and attitudes, but it is not necessarily visible in practice. In this sense, we must remember that attitudes do not assure a certain behaviour. This way, 77% of the members adhere to the club for
reasons of liking the club or of tradition. 41% of the members would not cancel their membership for any reason. 59% of the members would not continue their membership if the team was relegated, if it did not play well any more or if there was not a good show in the stadium.

Space emotional adhesion refers to the symbolism of the football stadium. Its architecture stands out from other buildings of the city and, thus, fosters the identification with the club. The fact that the football stadium is located right in the city is regarded as an element of quality in the daily life. The quality of the citizens’ life has diverse indicators, but one of them is the distance among the various locations that are important for the individual. In this case, it is the fact of being able to walk to the stadium without having the perception of “losing” a lot of time that contributes to the quality of life.

4.2 In-group emotion

Football is a shared cultural consumption. Cultural consumption appears to be doubly represented in the world of sport, as it is understood as physical practice or spectacle. In the last case, it is an element of leisure consumption that has commonly been connected to the low social class and to a low level of education, especially compared to other cultural consumptions such as theatre, music, etc. Nevertheless, empirical results indicate that a high cultural capital is not a hindrance for the cultural consumption of football as a spectacle. In the social world, lifestyles are products of the habitus, being not only the same practices but also the same patterns of perception. The cultural consumption of football as a sport event is reinforced by the attendance of outstanding personalities in the fields of politics, culture and society. This makes, especially when reported in the mass media, the practice of being followers a practice of prestige.

4.3 Emotional climate

The emotional climate of the club (image of club) has a highly positive influence as regards community identification, as long as it contributes to the in-group emotions. However, this identification with the community is opposed by the competitive desire to win. On the one hand, practically half of those interviewed (49.5%) say that the players of the professional team should be recruited from the club’s own young players; but on the other hand, 33% think that “the important thing is the spectacle”. The only thing that counts is to compete well, even if that means that the players are not from the city and have not been raised in the youth teams of the club.

In this sense, we must highlight that the fans are divided in half. 50% prefer the team to be constituted by local players, while the other 50% prefer to have a good game (show, spectacle) and good results, regardless of the fact that the players come from other cities. It is evident that the care for and the consolidation of grassroots football (children’s and young people’s football, football at local level) does not exclude the possibility that there is a well-entertaining spectacle, but it seems that the spectacle and good results lead to the acceptance of foreign players.
5 From local to global

Identities are built in cultural stills that distill contradictory socialization in a “glocalized” world: the individual participates in a universal phenomenon such as sport (globalization), but at the same time it remains bound to the local level, which generates a lot more emotional and affective attachment.2

In this sense, between the symbolic and emotional universe of the followers we must highlight the importance of sport as an important element in the complex construction of identity. The fans are a group that shares a number of identification elements that are connected to a football club. A football club represents, symbolically (socially, culturally, politically), a certain community. This community can be a town, a neighborhood, a city and even a nation.

There is a symbolic perception of the space and of the personal and social trajectories of the individual. In this way, there is a symbolic perception of the citizenship intensively bound to the football club. The stadium is integrated in the urban setting and attracts curious walkers on Sunday afternoons. It is so integrated and so near that for the great majority of fans it takes less than 15 minutes (64%), or between 15 and 30 minutes (29%) to arrive there. Little more than 4.5% need between 30 minutes and one hour, and less than 2% need more than one hour. It is a privileged advantage to have a football stadium practically in the urban nucleus of a modern city.

The fact of being able to walk (39%) to the leisure places and to arrive within a short period of time (less than 15 minutes, or between 15 and 30 minutes) is also recognized as an indicator of quality of life. The ones who use the car (56.5%) answer in some cases that they want to share the match with other friends and that they want to enjoy passivity associated with the Sunday rest. They prefer the autonomy and the comfort that is connected to the use of one’s own car or motorcycle to the use of public transportation (5%), which is rather used to go shopping or to get to work on labour days).

Citizens are interested in the result of the match and in anecdotes about what has happened. The football afternoon forms a great part of their leisure time activities. In fact, the football club is the first ambassador of the city in the rest of Spain, even serving as an advertizing agency to present the city and its environment, and particularly their attractiveness for tourists.

In a situation of growing globalization, almost as a reaction, the football club recovers the most local identification, perceived as the closest and the most affective. According to Walzer (1994), facing the thin identities of the states, we meet with the thick identities of the cultural, community identities. Football allows a primary affective identification, including group recognition on the common basis of “our” team, accompanied by the delimitation of the others. Barth (1969) denominates this as the

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2 According to Foer (2004), Football could explain the world (in our globalization). Sociologists have used football as the key to understand everything from Thatcherite England to Dutch design sense to the sweeps of globalization.
limits or the cultural frontiers of identification. To feel “our colours” agglutinates us around this shared identity.

The emotional localization (see Bale, 1993) achieved through the football stadium is also a community nexus. In this case, the stadium can be an object of recognition, tying space and symbolic meaning for the fan and the citizens in general. The stadium is the temple of celebration where many fans have the best afternoons of their lives witnessing victories of their team in the football league. Because of this significance, the stadium is also used, and should be used, as a location for other important celebrations and as a meeting point.

6 Conclusions

Football keeps being a masculine environment, which has been confirmed by the presented survey. It has also shown that among women, it is rather young women who attend football matches in the stadium. We can interpret this as an indicator of a change of cultural models and the increasing autonomy of girls and women. It may also indicate that the leisure time interests of the male and female youth are not so different.¹ One might speculate whether these new tendencies are able to dissolve the assumed relationship between the three elements football, masculinity, violence (although, evidently, they are not connected by a cause-effect relationship, neither are they necessarily interdependent). This can be a perspective for new research that aims at throwing light on this burning problem.

Furthermore, the study has revealed a relatively high level of education of the questioned supporters. Therefore, we challenge the general assumption that the pleasure of attending football matches is connected with a low level of education, and we even oppose it by showing that people belonging to the elite of society and possessing high cultural capital take part in the consumption of football.

The little use of public transport to get to football matches – even though there are two direct lines going to the stadium – may indicate that a change of mentality in this city proceeds only very slowly. One the one hand, a high percentage (less than half, however) of spectators walk to the stadium – which is enabled by its good location –, on the other hand the use of the car and the motorcycle continues to be unnecessarily high. For most of the fans it usually takes less than 15 minutes to get to the stadium. This vicinity is perceived as a high-priority element in our urbanized society of technology and communication.

Community (local identity) is reinforced in the trinomial individual – city – club. The club represents the city and even the individual. The identification with the club is emotionally strong. Image and marketing of the club magnify this triple identification. The image is reinforced with the colours of the club and the city. This way, it is the

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¹ Despite these tendencies pointed out here, we must not forget that the world of football keeps being a world of predominantly masculine character, with values traditionally associated with the masculine gender.
sentimental symbolism that can move the fans and the citizens deeply; additionally, it is the results that influence the perception of the image of the club.

The football club (and the individual player) can be perceived as social, cultural and moral constructions. Furthermore, an “image of life” can be derived from those images and from the sport identity. Occasionally, big victories (victories against outstanding clubs at the international level) of the club are images of life for many people, as well as for the city.

The organization and the administration of grassroots football (particularly children teams) and its community-emotional connection, its relationship with the local, with the close and with the beloved, is another line of research that we have opened up.

In this sense, grassroots football is a phenomenon located in between the field of symbolic meaning and reality, between fandom and the institutional nucleus. This became obvious not only in the survey but also during the discussion groups and interviews. Grassroots football is seen as an important source of continuity and replacement of generations, for it provides a pool of players that can be recruited for the professional team in the future.

The competitive pride seems to come second, behind identity and community emotion, but, nevertheless, good results and an interesting spectacle are highly appreciated.

From this point of view, we must also remember that usually the identification with a club (and its colours) is based on liking the club or on tradition. However, we know that attitudes and values do not assure a certain behaviour, which is confirmed by the fact that less than half of those interviewed affirm that they would not cancel their membership for any reason. More than half of the questioned would leave the club for diverse reasons: poor performance of the team, other leisure activities and sport, family commitments, etc.

In any way, it has been demonstrated convincingly that the sport results and the performance of the team, that is to say football as a spectacle, is also decisive. The community feeling, the pride, the emotions, the feeling of identity are based on the opinion that the show is a part of reality. In fact, entrance fees for football matches are, in some cases, more expensive than other leisure activities. But if the show element (the spectacle) triumphs in football, the collective expressions, the group and the individual statement change. They still represent the colour and the community, but in a more standardized way. This consolidates the transfer from the game to the sport of the masses – from the local to the global.

References


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