

The Role of Football Rituals in Fostering Cultural Identity Among Fans

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how football rituals and customs differ in various cultural contexts and looks at the particular significance these behaviors have for supporters in building a feeling of community and group identity. This study explores the unique rituals and match-day customs that characterize football fandom in various locales through a comparative examination of case studies from Torino and Leeuwarden. The study uses qualitative techniques, such as anthropological observations and fan interviews, to show how these rituals both reflect and shape cultural identities and community cohesion. The results show that although football's fundamental qualities as a uniting factor have not changed, fandom's manifestations are firmly anchored in regional traditions, cultural settings, and societal frameworks. This thesis advances knowledge in sports sociology by illuminating the vital role that football rituals play in helping supporters forge a sense of community, negotiate social dynamics, and sustain their shared identities. Furthermore in this project I introduce globalization as the agent that threatens the most rituals and traditions, because it over commodifies the sport. In the end, this study sheds light on the complex function that football plays in modern society and emphasizes the significance of cultural specificity in the investigation of global sports phenomena.

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Research question

"How do football rituals and traditions vary across different cultural contexts, and what specific meanings do they hold for fans in terms of fostering a sense of belonging and group identity within their respective communities?"

Introduction

Football, widely regarded as the most popular sport in the world, is more than just a physical contest; it is a global cultural phenomenon that permeates every aspect of society. Football is more than just the play on the field; it's a complex web of customs and rituals that promote social cohesiveness, group expression, and identity building in a variety of cultural situations. The present capstone thesis project delves into the complex and diverse aspects of football rituals and traditions. It clarifies by bringing examples of different stadium experiences in Torino and Leeuwarden how these practices differ in various cultural contexts and reveals the subtle significance that these customs have for football fans in fostering a strong sense of group identity and belonging in their local communities.

Football rituals and customs, which take many different forms throughout different countries, continents, and even local communities, are evidence of the sport's transcultural appeal. Football has its own set of customs and practices that are specific to each cultural context, ranging from the vibrant pre-match rituals of South American supporters to the complex chants and songs that reverberate through European stadiums. I'm going to identify the underlying cultural values, historical legacies, and social norms that influence football fandom expression around the globe. I believe that looking into this is very relevant because these

customs contribute to giving a sense of belonging and an emotional attachment to people and this is often overlooked and underestimated because football is just considered a game. My final aim with this research is to give justice and meaning to what it means to be a football fan.

The investigation of the meanings that football fans attribute to rituals and customs serves as the main focus of the study. These customs are powerful symbols that, in the context of football fandom, not only honor the game but also help people connect with their communities. Later in this paper I will present concrete examples and specific symbols that testify this importance. Every ritual, from the passionate display of team colors to the intricate pre-match traditions passed down through the years, has a tremendous impact on helping fans feel a sense of community and identification. Fans gain a sense of unity and fraternity from these shared experiences, reaffirming their loyalty to their team and their position within the greater football community.

In order to clarify the intricate interactions between football, culture, and identity, I will compare and contrast football rituals and customs across many cultural contexts in this project. I will do this by utilizing historical analysis, ethnographic research, and fan narratives. As aforementioned, my aim is to deepen understanding of the cultural diversity in different contexts with the specific examples of Leeuwarden and Torino games as a base to illuminate the phenomenon of football fandom and its significant influence on individual and collective identities.

Literature review

The goal of this literature review is to present what previous research has found in terms of understanding football rituals and traditions in different cultural contexts. This will help me in creating a base for stating my real mission with this project, which is to illuminate the different cultural rituals and traditions of football and how this allows fans to have a sense of belonging to a specific community. For these reasons, in this section of the paper I will present different arguments that will testify how football is much more than a simple game. This sport has deep cultural values and it holds symbols and traditions that are transmitted generation after generation. I believe it's of crucial importance to present these facts and to connect them to my results and discussion in order to give further relevance to my project and to demonstrate the importance and the impact that the game of football has on the everyday life of the average football fan.

What is a football fandom?

The term "fan" conjures up images from popular culture and a passionate devotion in which performers, artists, athletes, and teams are adored and frequently endowed with symbolic meanings and imagined interpersonal connections (Tapp, 2004).

Hegemonic European football fan moralities, however, indicate that the majority of supporters would take offense if you likened them to those of, say, Lady Gaga, Johnny Depp, or individual athletes like Roger Federer. Football supporters' claims to identification are frequently accompanied by moral precepts about "true," "life-long," "real," and "genuine" support. Supporters of football prefer to think of themselves as engaged participants in the drama around

world-class performances. Maybe for this reason, football has become a popular symbol of identity and civic pride in our days. (Krøvel & Roksvold, 2012)

Because the game frequently revolves around personal difficulties for a dedicated fan, football passion is based in experience and introspection. In a philosophical sense, fandom can also be viewed as generative of knowledge about something fundamentally human, the passionate adoption of identity (Porat,2010). Belonging to a football team can function as an expression of cultural differentiation. The fan gains understanding of what it means to have enduring loyalty. Football is viewed as a ritual with "cosmological limitations" in contrast to more intellectual or religious practices that can reveal insights about the nature of the universe and humankind's place in it. Football depends on its fervent supporters to survive both as a business and a culture (Dixon, 2012).

Football and sense of belonging

Our natural urge to "form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships" is one of the most potent forces on human affect, behavior, and cognition. This urge, which is sometimes called the "need to belong," is evident in our want to interact socially and have deep conversations with other people. Owing to the social nature of sports and the fact that most fans watch sports with others, it is conceivable that football fanaticism could help some people partially achieve their desire to attach. In line with this reasoning, scientists have discovered that

people utilize their passion for sports to build and sustain relationships with others, which helps them fulfill their urge to fit in (Rowe, 2004).

It seems that team identification and football fandom itself are the two main ways in which football fandom might support our need for belonging. First, meeting others who share your interests in football could lead to connections just by being a fan. People know that most people are football lovers, and that fandom is a ubiquitous pastime. Consequently, people who want to expand their social circle may find that becoming or continuing to be a football fan is one way to achieve this objective. Second, by becoming a fan of a certain team, people can expand their social networks. People can develop a feeling of community with other team supporters by developing a psychological connection to that team. It can be argued that these relationships would have limited utility because most of them would be surface level. Research, however, indicates that healthy relationships and exchanges may not necessarily require close proximity to one another. Therefore, even informally formed friendships resulting from a person's general interest in football or affiliation with a particular team are beneficial and can help fulfill our need for belonging (Wann, 2022).

Furthermore, the pursuit of meaning in life is a personal need that football fandom helps to partially satisfy. "The sense of purpose individuals derive from feeling a part of something larger than themselves is the definition of meaning". Life purpose is a crucial psychological factor since it has a favorable correlation with both physical and mental well-being. Two sources of significance in life that are frequently highlighted when asked to list them are social connections and leisure activities like hobbies and pastimes. It makes sense that football enthusiasm could contribute to the idea that one's life has significance and purpose because it is a very sociable pastime. (Wann, 2022)

In addition, football devotion may be a particularly helpful way to foster thoughts that one's life has purpose since it can minimize uncertainty and bring structure to people's lives. It also shows that routines and life structure predict meaning in life. In line with this reasoning, authors have suggested, and research has supported that a person's quest for meaning might be aided by their passion for football. Considering a qualitative study that looked at how much supporters thought that supporting their teams helped them to maintain and improve their psychological well-being, meaning in life was one often noted beneficial effect. Fans cited special events, player meetings, and trips to the team's stadium or arena as examples of how "supporting the team helped them feel like something larger than themselves." (Netto & Cavalcante, 2021)

Finally, to summarize: the beating heart of football fandom are local supporters' clubs, which offer a vital venue for supporters to come together and celebrate their common love. These organizations plan a range of activities, including watch parties, get-togethers, and neighborhood projects, which foster a lively, neighborhood vibe outside the stadium. Supporters' clubs provide a forum for fans to interact with one another, review team performance, and have lively discussions on players and tactics by organizing frequent get-togethers (Jensen, 2022). By fostering a sense of solidarity and belonging among all participants, this collective engagement turns individual supporters into a coherent community. Through these exchanges, supporters strengthen their bonds with their club and forge enduring friendships in addition to increasing their enjoyment of the game. Furthermore, nearby fans' clubs frequently take part in charitable endeavors, enhancing their links to the larger community and highlighting the beneficial social effects of football. Essentially, these teams play a crucial role in maintaining the social and

cultural fabric of football fans by converting indifferent onlookers into ardent followers (Mynard, 2009).

Creation and meaning of symbols. The example of Zimbabwe

Football clubs have numerous symbols that have meaning for both the players and the supporters, such as flags, home fields, chants or slogans, badges, nicknames, colors, and many more. This can involve specific team rituals that are carried out before and after games in an effort to set the team apart from its rivals (Doidge,2020). This paragraph operates on the presumption that the production, replication, and interpretation of these symbols are disputed endeavors. This will be demonstrated by observing the Zimbabwean supporters of Dynamos Football Club. The chapter emphasizes how many symbols have distinct meanings.

Symbols are a negotiated endeavor, just like anything else, according to symbolic interactionists. Because the fan insignia stand for something significant and let the fans participate in something greater than themselves. In the ordinary and profane lives of fans, the symbols acquire a sacred place. It is amazing, if occasionally unsettling, how a football club may acquire extensive and intricate societal symbolism and meaning that surpasses the straightforward result of an athletic event. Support is linked to symbolic pride, which is why many people turn football into "a matter of honor." Symbols are only meaningful within the context in which they are employed. Symbols by themselves are meaningless; humans give them significance (Chiweshe, 2017).

For instance, the meanings of the color blue, which is the color of Dynamos' outfit, are somewhat varied. Though it has no inherent value, blue has several connotations for Dynamos supporters. The intriguing thing about the process by which a color becomes symbolic is that it

depends on the environment. Without Dynamos, the color blue has little significance for the supporters, but when they add their love for a team that plays in that color, everything takes on a whole new significance (Chiweshe, 2017).

The most crucial point to remember is that there is disagreement and diversity in these interpretations, thus different people will interpret the same color differently. These interpretations are frequently created by the fans themselves. The team's reasoning for selecting those colors is unknown, and if the original players were questioned, there would undoubtedly be a wide range of responses. Both the origin of the term Dynamos and its history are up for debate. Regarding the origin and significance of the name, fans cannot agree. Some argue that the name was inspired by the Russian team Dynamo Kiev, while others assert that it was intended to convey the squad's dynamic personality. The dispute over the origin of the name demonstrates how a group of people can be united by something like football teams even though they cannot agree on many aspects of that activity. Symbolic interactionism makes us aware of these conflicts in the process of constructing social reality. Except from newspaper articles, nothing about Dynamos has been documented, in contrast to well-established teams in Europe whose histories are known (Chiweshe, 2017).

In conclusion, this section presented the example of Zimbabwe as a place where symbols are fundamental to how supporters celebrate their identities, they are a vital component of fandom. Moreover, the paragraph has shown how the development of symbols connected to sports teams is a contentious process. It was contended that these symbols describe the relationship between certain people and the teams they support and are only meaningful in particular settings. Footballing relics, which serve as historical markers of the club's origins and give the club purpose, are linked to football fandom. Symbols are therefore a celebration of

fandom and give supporters a tangible way to communicate more intense emotional attachments that would otherwise be hard to articulate.

Football fandom in the globalized world

Football has become widely popularized worldwide thanks to globalization. supporters may follow teams and leagues well beyond their local boundaries thanks to the widespread availability of television broadcasts, internet streaming, and social media. These supporters come from a variety of geographic and cultural backgrounds. Nowadays, major league teams have a devoted global fan base that includes people from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Because of its widespread appeal, football has become a cultural phenomenon that unites people from different backgrounds and spans divides via a common passion. But this globalization has also resulted in a standardization of fan experiences. Attention and resources are focused on a select few elite clubs as local clubs and leagues frequently find it difficult to compete with the appeal of internationally renowned teams. This could undermine the variety of football's cultural expressions by weakening local football cultures and decreasing support for smaller, regional teams.

Furthermore, another aspect of football culture that has been impacted by globalization is fan rituals. Cross-border exchanges and adoptions of traditional chants, songs, and matchday customs have occurred. One such example is the Icelandic "Viking clap," which gained popularity during Euro 2016 and is now imitated by supporters worldwide. Similarly, tifos and choreographed displays, which were formerly the signature of extreme groups in Europe and South America, are now frequently seen in stadiums all over the world. Local customs may lose their distinctiveness as a result of this cross-pollination, even though it enhances the fan

experience by adding new aspects and creating a sense of global football community. International practices can sometimes replace deeply ingrained customs in a community, undermining the regional distinctiveness that contributes to football's rich and diverse cultural fabric.

In addition, the rise of digital media has been essential in defining contemporary football fandom. Through social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, fans can interact with the sport and one another in real time without being limited by geography. These platforms enable the development of international fan communities where supporters can discuss, exchange, and collectively celebrate their teams with passion. The digital era also encourages new kinds of participation, such as blogs, podcasts, and fan channels that offer different perspectives and insights into the sport. These online platforms democratize football commentary by providing a platform to a range of viewpoints that may not be heard in traditional media. However, there are drawbacks to the digitalization of fandom. Online platforms' accessibility and immediacy can encourage harmful fan behavior like trolling and cyberbullying. The internet's anonymity can occasionally intensify unpleasant encounters between supporters, undermining the sense of unity that has historically defined football fandom.

In conclusion, globalization has brought both benefits and challenges that have irreversibly changed football fandom, rituals, and traditions. In addition to broadening the sport's appeal and promoting cross-cultural interactions, it has also resulted in the commercialization of the activity and the standardization of fan experiences.

Methods

For this project I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with football fans that come from different cultural contexts. This could give me specific insights of what their traditions and symbols are in their respective communities. Among these fans one of them is also a coach for a team of teenagers in the city of Torino and another one has been working in the past for a multimedia company that has as its main product football journalism. I believe these two figures can greatly improve the outcome of my research. One gets the perspectives of future generations; the other has experienced the evolution of traditions in a world that is getting more globalized and in which fans not only support their team from the conventional venues such as the stadium or the local broadcast but also through social media, television and real life interactions.

I also conducted a participant observation where I attended two football games, one in Torino and one in Leeuwarden in order to witness the different traditions and symbols that fans have. I gathered the data by taking notes on my phone whenever I saw the use of symbols and practices of traditions which seemed relevant for this research.

For example, I observed that the mascot of Cambuur was dressed like a deer which is the animal on the club logo. This observation is relevant because it testifies how important it is to embody this specific animal beyond its use in the logo but also in a more spectacular way by being on the field cheering up the players. It is key to grasp the transcendental aspects of symbols. Another salient example during the Torino match was the tradition of lifting scarfs and to wave club flags during specific parts of the Torino anthem. I noticed how rooted and deeply automatic it was to use certain gestures and movements, it was clearly a repeated ritual that has

continued through the years. I also took pictures of these observations and I will discuss and explain them in a section dedicated to my field study.

Participant recruitment

For the recruitment of the participants I used my resources inside my football community, in the sense that I'm a football fan myself. I reached out to friends and acquaintances that I thought would be able to give great contributions to my research. Most of them were enthusiastic about the opportunity of being interviewed for my capstone and agreed immediately. After receiving the positive responses we scheduled a date for the interviews. A potential limitation of my research is my emotional involvement in the topic. Adding on to this, some of the interviewees are people who I consider my friends and therefore there might have been a certain degree of bias or sided perspective. Before starting the actual recording I communicated with them whether they were willing to be recorded and I reminded them that they could have stopped the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable for any reason. I always tried to create the best atmosphere possible by having some small talk before the actual interview in order to create a nice, familiar and warm environment.

Research design

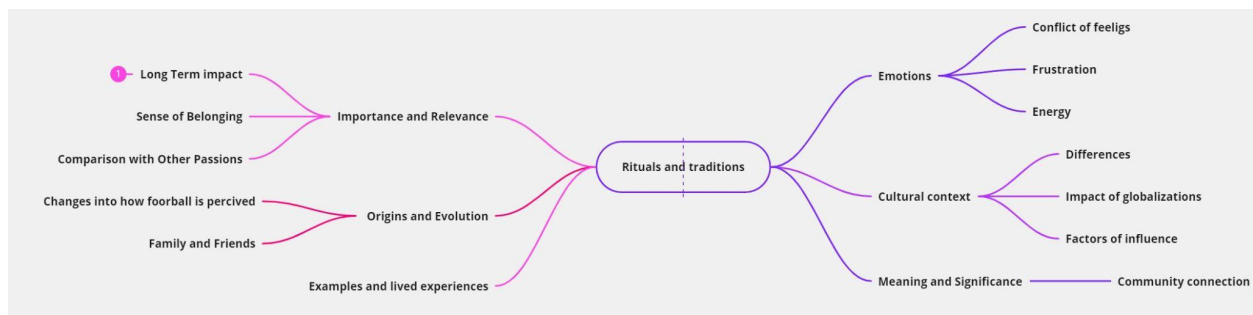
My research consisted of eight semi-structured interviews for which I prepared an interview guide. I often took the liberty to ask follow up questions to the participants that raised important points and insight related to my research question. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes but there were many variations depending on how expansive the interviewee was and from how much they wanted to elaborate on specific details, memories on relevant examples. I decided to let everyone speak freely because it's impossible to take anything for granted or to

assume that certain topics will be erased no matter what. The questions are divided into different categories based on the different topics of my research. The first topic aims at understanding the role of rituals and traditions of football in the life of the participant. In the second section I was trying to figure out if and what are the different traditions and rituals that people have witnessed in different cultural contexts and whether globalization had an impact in homologating football rituals and traditions as many other aspects of our life. In the third section my objective is to find out if these rituals and traditions create a sense of belonging not only towards the football team they support but also towards the community and the people that engage in the same behaviors. Finally, I looked into the long term impact that football has on the life of participants beyond the match day experience by digging deep into what it means to be a football fan in everyday life and how to navigate the emotions correlated to fandom in different environments that don't necessarily conform and adapt to these feelings. Moreover, I asked how football compares to other passions and activities to assess its importance in contrast to other passions an individual might have.

Framework

Figure 1

Theoretical framework



Note. Figure 1 describes my theoretical framework which includes my main themes regarding rituals and traditions

The image above represents a simple mind map that will be my base for collecting the data of the interviews. I started from the main theme of rituals and traditions in football and from there I drew all the ramifications that I think are the most relevant and are also the themes that came out the most from the interviews, although so far, the data analysis is brief and concise. This map helped me out in creating the subcategories that contributed to my results and discussion. To create this mind map I simply followed the questions and tried to resonate on which are the things that I want to extrapolate from them and what connections I can make starting from a specific topic. This process greatly simplified my work while codifying the interviews because it allows me to shed light on the themes and patterns I really need and to exclude the irrelevant bits. Practically, in my transcripts I simply underlined with different colors the phrases and the observations that were including the above displayed themes.

Data analysis

For coding the answers, I looked for common themes and patterns that came up during the interviews. This can be done either deductively or inductively. Deductively is when themes and patterns in the answers align with what is found in the literature and inductively is when new themes are found and topics arise from what the participants shared. I analyzed the transcriptions and once I found something that corresponds with the codes and indicators within my framework I marked it. I therefore developed codes with corresponding colors and underlined sections in the transcript. In the case I found something that was relevant but that I didn't previously consider or expected, I added a new category of themes. This technique is called coding and it allowed me to extrapolate the main ideas and thoughts that I had in the research. These pieces of information are the core of my research and they represent the vast majority of my findings and results.

Ethnographic research

Logos and symbols the examples of Torino and Cambuur

For this project I've also conducted a participant observation inside the stadiums of Torino FC and Cambuur Leeuwarden in order to evaluate the differences in terms of symbols, rituals and traditions that a club in the second division in the Netherlands and a first division and historical team in Italy might have. By doing this I will grasp what it means to be a football fan in these two cultural contexts and what role and what impact does football have in the life of fans. I will be able to understand how rooted are rituals and traditions and this will greatly contribute to giving a meaning and a real purpose to my research. Once I identified the differences I can affirm with conviction how symbols, traditions and rituals might significantly differ because of the cultural context but in the end they hold the same importance and the same meaning, which is to be able to conform to certain standards in order to belong to a specific community of fans. This union can be called a "family", that fosters a sense of belonging across all the different individuals, everyone is welcomed as long as their commitment towards the club. This process of comparison is very important because it gives me the opportunity to create a contrast between two different realities that might approach the football culture in different ways and it allows me to enlight different cultural aspects that are reflected also outside the football context. For example, later I will mention how Italians are more loud in their stadium experience compared to Dutch, and this is something that is very evident outside of the football context as well.

First of all I beforehand conducted research on the most important symbols that both teams have, both are represented on the logo of the teams and very much contributes to the

imaginary of the teams for the two groups of fans. Cambuur in their logo has the deer, in my research and also from what I could understand from the different fans I talked to, this deer has very different meanings depending on which perspective we decide to see it from. From the perspective of an artist, the SC Cambuur logo is an intriguing blend of hues and forms that individually convey a distinct narrative. Any sports team that aspires to succeed and victory needs to possess the attributes of vitality and optimism, which are embodied in the color yellow used in the coat of arms. The color yellow is frequently connected to sunshine, happiness, and the bravery to take chances, elements that are in line with the essence of football.

The red deer, which takes center stage in the emblem, symbolizes strength and grandeur. The deer's position, resting down with its forelimbs outstretched, may suggest a condition of peace and awareness, an essential combination for any football squad that has to be able to both withstand the storms of competition and discern when to strategically back off. This picture offers a potent visual description for the football game's dynamics.

From a health perspective, the SC Cambuur logo provides intriguing information. The red deer symbolizes the fervor and energy required for sports, while the yellow background can be seen as a representation of health and vitality. The red and yellow contrast highlights the significance of harmony and balance in the body, which is crucial for both athletes and non-athletes. The three black combs with teeth in the logo might be interpreted as representations of accuracy and focus, two attributes that are essential in the medical field. Similar to how these combs are arranged with care in the coat of arms, the finest outcomes in medicine necessitate a methodical approach and close attention to detail (De Veelzijdige Symboliek Van Het SC Cambuur Logo - SC Cambuur, n.d.).

Observing the SC Cambuur logo from various perspectives reveals how a straightforward design may have complex and multifaceted meanings. Every viewpoint adds a distinctive interpretation of the colors and symbols, deepening our comprehension of this alluring logo. This ambiguity in the interpretation of the symbols and logos related to the club is strictly connected to the literature and it demonstrates how smaller clubs with less international relevance tend to have more open interpretations of their own symbolisms.

On the other hand, Torino FC has a much more straightforward meaning and sense of belonging towards its city than Cambuur. It's safe to say that the origin and symbolism have a very deeply rooted history and origin and there's no space for interpretation. For this reason I can state that the meaning of the Torino FC logo is deeply rooted in the symbolism of the club's home city, Turin. The Italian word for "Turin" is "Torino," while the city's emblem features a rampant bull. Hence the club's nickname "il Toro," which means "the Bull" in English. It was very intriguing and exciting to learn about such substantial differences, correlated to the team symbols. In my opinion this has to do with the fact that Torino is a more established club in history that has created a strong single narrative in order to create a deep and rooted sense of belonging while Cambuur doesn't have this position and for this reason fans had the chance to give different interpretations and meanings to their symbols. Nevertheless the importance and the sense of belonging that are drawn by these two animals are very strong in both cities and go way beyond the simple football match. For example Torino is well known for its drinking fountains that are designed with a bull leaking water from its mouth. This shows how embedded into everyday life is this symbol that is strictly connected to the city and to the football environment.

Fandom and match atmosphere

Looking back to my experience in watching a football match in both Cambuur Stadium in Leeuwarden and at the “Stadio Olimpico Grande Torino” I could definitely notice a lot of differences in the way the fans approach the game and the fandom more in general. Since I arrived at the stadium in Leeuwarden I immediately noticed a more relaxed and family friendly environment that demonstrates how football is perceived as a passion but not as an obsession. It has to be accessible and livable for everyone from kids that have a match day experience for the first time with their parents to the elders that have been supporters for many years.

On the other hand, when I went to the stadium in Torino I couldn't stop noticing how anxious people were before the game and how the atmosphere was super tense and waiting for the game with an obsession that could only be fulfilled with a win or a positive result. Furthermore, nothing about the game looked like a show or something accessible to everyone, bad language, smoking any kind of drugs was completely fine and none would complain about it. But also this scenario created an environment in which the fans never stopped chanting and screaming to support Torino for the whole game no matter the result or the moment into the game. I definitely noticed a more organized and collaborative fanbase that genuinely believed that with their chants they could help the team win. I didn't see anything like this at the Cambuur stadium. I witnessed fans reacting to what was happening rather than actively participating in the development of the game. Overall, I would say that both experiences were very successful and impactful because they gave me a concrete experience of the clear differences that fans have in approaching the match day experience and more in general the football fandom.

Pictures and Discussion of the field observations

Figure 2, 3

Fans during anthem



Note. Figure 1 shows Torino fans during the team anthem and Figure 2 shows Cambuur fans during the team anthem before the game. As previously mentioned there are clearly differences in the atmosphere and the approach to the game of the two fan bases. In the case of Torino it's clear how in these circumstances symbolism plays an important role. Everyone is standing either holding a scarf of the team or waving a flag that has the same function of showcasing the team symbol while singing the song that embraces and represents what it means to be a Torino fan the most. People are even willing to use smoke bombs in order to create an "hot" atmosphere that can push the player to their limit, even though it's very dangerous and illegal. Figure 2 showcases a completely different reality fans are standing up and singing but the level of engagement and emotional transport I feel in that moment was not comparable, as I said before it was a more family friendly experience that aims at creating an environment where everyone is feeling welcomed without necessity of doing extreme actions in order to show support. The

match day experience is lived as a show that aims at the entertainment of people rather than an opportunity to express an obsession.

Figure 4

Welcoming of Cambuur players on the pitch



Note. I decided to include this picture because it tells us the story that in Cambuur Stadium football is about community involvement, the players from the academy are welcoming the players while waving blue and yellow flags that are the two colors of Cambuur to underline the importance of what is about to happen on the field. This is clearly a tradition that has deep roots and that aims at creating a strong connection between the young members of the club, the fans and the players so that everyone is rowing in towards the same goal which is helping the team win. I found this tradition very fascinating and for sure it personally fostered a stronger sense of belonging to the club because I noticed how powerful and meaningful this moment was for the fan base.

Figure 5

Young generation involvement in fandom



Note. Figure 5 reveals the most pure and naive of sentiments, a young fan showing excitement for football. I believe this image is beautiful because it also shows the involvement of new generations and the transport that adults have into this process. Family plays a big role in introducing kids into football fandom and this is a prime example of a successful experience in which we can clearly see genuine and participative excitement. Finally I chose this picture because it is very relatable to every football fan to have experienced such a thing. I think it creates a sense of nostalgia that makes me remember all the joy and the excitement that I personally had as a kid while going to the stadium for the first time.

Results

In this section of the paper I will illustrate what were the main concepts that were raised from the interviews following an accurate thematic analysis based on the most recurring themes and on tying this information to the already existing theoretical framework. I selected 4 categories that will be presented as evidence here: rituals and traditions, cultural context, sense of

belonging and impact of globalization. These are the topics that better incorporate the main core of my research and give me the possibility to create solid arguments that are going to reinforce what was previously mentioned in the literature review.

Rituals and traditions

Following the interviews the first thing that really stood out when talking about rituals and traditions are the family values and the superstition attached to the whole experience of watching a football game no matter where. At home or at the stadium there is always a sense of superstition that impacts the behavior of fans.

When talking about traditions, family is the first step for introducing young kids in the grand scheme of football fandom: “my family passed to me the passion for football, which is a very big thing in Italy, for some people might be considered as a religion.” This quote is an example of how passing along the traditions and the rituals that football has is a very important process that is taken very seriously by the family, this activity is integrated into the upbringing of kids. “I was born basically inside, inside the football context.” This sentence clearly shows how embedded the culture of football is and how much of an impact football traditions have in shaping the future fandom that kids are going to have “I had no decision on what team I could support when I was little.” The path is already decided for you, the rituals and the tradition embrace you and it’s impossible to “escape” from it, you only have the possibility to embark on this lifelong journey with your family and never look back.

This quote represents what it means to embrace the football traditions within the family context: “Supporting Torino was the wrong decision I would repeat forever.” This expression

creates a sense of attachment that can't be torn apart, the familiar environment is the one that creates the initial connection between the individual and the team.

To conclude, the importance of family in the process of passing along the rituals and the tradition of football fandom was present in every participant no matter the team they supported or the cultural context in which they were raised. For every participant family is the first “tool” that creates a new generation of football fans by inculcating and teaching rituals and traditions that can be never abandoned or left behind.

Moving on to a more practical and tangible understanding of rituals and traditions the main theme was superstitions, even across different cultural contexts and different environments it was very present the idea that the repetition of certain gestures and certain behaviors has the power to bring luck to the team you are supporting. To clarify this I will present some examples that change depending on where the fans are located. If in the stadium a clear superstitious pattern is to constantly repeat certain chants that were used in games in which the final result was positive, to keep the streak going, but chanting doesn't only have the superstitious components it is also a very tangible way in which fans are convinced to really boost and contribute to the team performance. “. I don't believe that it's solely in the hands of the players. You know, it also depends on what the people supporting it are doing.” This quote shows that fans really feel involved and that they have the power to generate more energy that will eventually help the players give their best and achieve an important result.

Moreover, another example of superstitions that comes directly from the stadium is that in certain sectors of the stadium is “prohibited” to record team's penalties and freekicks because it brings bad luck, this practice illustrate how going to the stadium is a cultural and community

experience that has to be lived and not seen through a cell phone, this conviviality is so important that if not taken in consideration it bring “bad luck”. “ Nobody in the sector can record a penalty with a phone, because that's bad luck for us.”

On the other hand, while watching a game at home there are more familiar and intuitive traditions, but they are still linked to superstition . For example, participants often shared the fact of sitting always in the same position on the sofa and wearing the same scarf while watching the game on TV, this is a recurring theme that will never abandon them, even when they are outside of their houses they are trying to find a new “lucky” spot.

In conclusion, what comes out of these interviews is that rituals and traditions are the focal point from where football fandom starts. Usually family introduces young individuals to this passion without really leaving an open choice and after that a journey of commitment and rituals begins. These rituals are constantly kept alive through different generations and different settings, no matter where and in which cultural context football fans will always find a way to keep these traditions alive in order to keep supporting the team they love.

Cultural context

This paragraph of the paper aims at contextualizing the different cultural dimensions and how they impact the football rituals and traditions, based on the interviews I previously conducted.

As mentioned before when talking about rituals and traditions, superstitions are a common practice for football fans . My intention here is to present and create a distinction between these superstitious traditions based on the cultural context from which we are talking

about. The first example that came up in in one interview is regarding the city of Naples, neapolitan people are culturally very superstitious in everything they do, one of their symbols is the red “cornetto” a typical jewelry piece that everyone wears in the city because it’s believed that it has anti evil eyes properties. This general feeling of fighting against bad luck everyday is, without a doubt translated into the football culture, it is so important that when last year Napoli won the league title after a 30 years drought the excitement and the celebrations were outrageous, the city became completely blue for weeks and the party vibe remind intact through the all summer. In this specific context superstitions created an environment that can’t be found anywhere else in the world “ the fact of supporting Napoli and sharing superstitious rituals brings the community together and there is like a sense of belonging and a sense of unity that you don't have anywhere else yeah, something that you can really feel.”

Furthermore, from the interviews I had the chance to get in touch with the African continent and to have an understanding of the rituals and traditions that happen in a part of the world where football doesn't have the international appeal that for example European football has, but nevertheless the meaning and the significance of the rituals and traditions is very important and it has very deep roots that come from the folklore of the region “Zulu tradition, practices mixing with football in a modern kind of way.” Football actively participates in the evolution of rituals and traditions.

In conclusion this paragraph showcases how in different cultural context football rituals are perceived and practiced and even though they might differ significantly there is a constant fils-rouge that is superstitions, these are the very essence of the football rituals and traditions, because winning a game it's something so important that any help is very much appreciated no matter how irrational it might sound or look like.

Sense of belonging

One of the main objectives of this project is to underline how football can create a sense of belonging within a respective community, this section of the paper will present examples that clearly show how this process happens and how it resonates in terms of creating an emotional connection between fans, that might have nothing in common or they might even dislike each other in every context except while discussing about their football team. These interactions provide a concrete scenario in which football contributes to the well-being and to the creation of friendship that overall are benefitting the social life of the participants I interviewed. This sense of belonging was definitely the most recurring theme during the interviews. The participants really approached this subject with interest and devotion and they left very interesting and relevant insights that will also be the base from which I will start my discussion.

To begin with, one of the main points that was raised by the participants while talking about sense of belonging is the fact that thanks to football, fans can deem themselves as proud of being part of a certain community and group “ many people I know pride themselves for, being active taking part in choreography and really proudly wearing the colors of the region and those sorts of things”. This quote testifies how football makes people resonate into being part of something bigger than you, screaming your lungs out during a game to support your team allows you to fit into a certain community giving a strong sense of fulfillment towards the people you are sharing the experience with. “Football without fans is nothing” it’s a very clichè phrase that is commonly misused and decontextualized but in this specific stance it gains a lot of relevance because it shows how people celebrate their fandom as a community activity that loses most of its value if practiced by an individual, if it wasn’t for the community and for the football fans there would be no sense of belonging towards a team or towards the region the team represents.

“I always find it super interesting that I can meet absolute strangers. But as soon as we know, we're both fans of the same club. There's this immediate connection”. Here we can see how powerful football is, as previously mentioned the perception and the feeling of resonating for the same team allows people to immediately bond, because supporting the same football club means that a lot of values and personal identifications are shared, it means so much more than what it appears to be, the team you support considerably dictates your surroundings and the friendships you are going to create.

In addition, football not only creates a sense of belonging towards a community and helps in generating meaningful friendship, it's also an instrument that creates a sense of belonging between different family members. “The most important part of football in my life is how it brings me and my family together. I would say.....between me and my grandpa, for example, we were watching football, and that was our main activity.... It was the only common interest” This lived experience testifies to the fact that football has the power to strengthen relationships across different generations, because emotionally it generates the same energy for everyone no matter the age gap.

In conclusion, this paragraph is showcasing how football goes beyond the match day experience, it is a human phenomenon that positively affects and contributes to the well-being of participants, by creating meaningful friendship or by strengthening family bonds.

Impact of globalization

As a final paragraph for this result section I believe it's very important to introduce the role that globalization is having into the world of football. I will present how the game is becoming more accessible to everyone and what are the different perspectives that participants

had. The results show how the direction in which football is going can have as a consequence the gradual loss of ritual, traditions and local communities involvement. This is why I think it's very relevant to include a section about this.

I want to start this section with a quote that summarizes the football environment in which we live in right now “globalization is the reason why everyone, our fans can watch a match of every country” this expression showcases how globalized and accessible the game of football has become, compared to just 15 years ago there is a very big difference in how accessible it is to watch the games from everywhere TV broadcaster have expanded their horizons and they have given the possibility to for example an Australian fan to closely follow the English Premier League. “Lots of children can play football now, because they have access to it thanks to globalization” the expansion of the game has created more opportunities and the possibility to create a real community of football fans that is connected world wide. Moreover, globalization has created the need to make football a profitable business “globalization has created business needs, we need money in every aspect of our lives, and sports is a part of it for sure”. This quote shows how football is indeed a business and in order to properly function there must be a profit, in essence this is the biggest impact that globalization had on football.

On the other hand, in other interviews the impact of globalization was seen with different eyes, more from a local perspective. “With this globalization, I think we've also had an increasing financialization of the game where it becomes less about local identity and communities and more about revenue”. Here we can see how the participants advocate for the fact that this commodification of the game is posing a risk towards the integrity of football fandom, its traditions and its costumes. And immediately after that it brings up a concrete example of how fans can start to detach from their big passion because of this over

commodification of the sport “you can get alienated from the community, like the football community you're part of, because I have a very good friend of mine who's a fan of Bremen, who's slowly becoming less and less interested in it or as losing his emotional involvement because of the commercial ads during the team hymn at the stadium”. This experience is a clear example of how globalization has a strong impact in shaping the fandom experience in a negative way.

Discussion

In this section of the paper I will evaluate and analyze the results by making statements and creating a connection between my research and the literature presented in the theoretical framework in order to give an academic dimension to my paper and to make my research relevant in a university context.

Rituals and traditions

From what I presented in the results I can make the following statements. First of all I've noticed that rituals and traditions are clearly fostering a sense of belonging that is reflected in the fact that these practices don't change. Taking for example Cambuur the deer mascot will always walk with the players into the pitch before the game, because it brings the symbolism of courage and effort with it and it has the aim of transmitting this energy to the players that are going into the pitch. These superstitious traditions that are present both in the stadium and in the the home environment are the simple materializations of what people are willing to do in order for their team to win, often times there is nothing rational about these behaviors, because once analyzed with a cold mind it's easy to comprehend how filming or not a penalty is not going to influence that outcome of it, or that sitting always in the same “spot” on the sofa can't impact how the

players are going to perform. But this irrationality of rituals and traditions derives from a big sense of belonging and attachment, this unity that fans feel toward their team makes them take very irrational and somewhat delusional decisions.

As mentioned in the literature rituals and traditions allow fans to participate in something they consider bigger than themselves by surpassing the mere athletic result, because no matter how bad the team is going to perform the traditions, the symbols and the rituals are going to remain. In the interviews the result of a game was never mentioned this testifies how if you are a fan of small clubs that doesn't win trophies such as Torino and Cambuur the rituals and the traditions are always more important than anything else, keeping those intact gives a sense of pride that no performance or result can possibly achieve. Rituals and traditions are the consequence of a long lasting attachment towards a club and from the concrete expectation that by doing these things fans will be able to contribute to the success of their team no matter how anachronistic this might sound.

Cultural context

By understanding the cultural context I can draw the conclusion that the rituals and the traditions connected to football are strictly correlated to the environment in which they are located, in the result section I presented how for example Zulu traditions are constantly put into practice in the football context in order to bring luck and to give players the right strength and peace of mind. Grasping this aspect it's fundamental for my research because it testifies on how embedded cultural football traditions are and how this sport actively contributes to the evolution and the maintenance of secular traditions. There is a general and diffused sense of pride

connected to keeping these traditions intact that it's not only reflected on isolated football communities but it extends also to other groups that are not connected with football.

Moreover, football contributes significantly to cultural exchanges, for example Naples and its very superstitious people have exported the tradition of the good luck "cornetto" across the all country and now it's very common to see people all over the country using this specific symbol. This practice exemplifies how football greatly contributes to cultural exchange it allows people from different background and environments to get closer and to develop a sense of unity that goes beyond football itself.

Sense of belonging

By analyzing the results regarding the sense of belonging I can extrapolate that this is clearly the core of my research. Thanks to the participants it was clear that football created a very strong sense of belonging on two main levels.

The first one incorporates the pride and the unity that for example Torino FC represents, supporting this team is a question of pride and a symbolic representation of the city of Torino, by supporting this team you are undeniably connected and attached to the city and to the other supporters, because they don't only share the passion with you, they also share a common identity, that resonates with every individual in terms of values and believes. Basically

supporting Torino means that values such as regional identity, traditions, language and rituals are inevitably shared and lived through the same lenses. Supporting the same club means seeing the world with the same eyes and experiencing similar emotions at the same time. For example after a win fans can resonate with the same sense of joy and excitement that none else outside of that context can understand, this fact of being able to empathize with the other person's feelings, habits and values inevitably creates a sense of belonging and friendship that are very strong. Overall, as I have explored in the literature football contributes to the well-being of individuals because it creates meaningful relationships.

The second level in which football creates a sense of belonging is that it gives a link for people to connect and it could be either a fortifier of a familiar relationship or a means through which people can take their differences apart. Looking at the familiar bonding experience that I presented in the results I can conclude that football has the power to connect different generations, often times it's hard to find common ground between people that have experienced life so differently, this case is prime example of how this gap can be reduced, because no matter the age or the lived life football extrapolate from fans the same emotions and the same sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. As the literature mentions there is a shared sense of purpose that creates a strong bridge that connects people that have very little in common except football fandom. Understanding and proving the connection and the sense of belonging that football can create was the main objective of my research and here I definitely make a strong argument for it.

Impact of globalization

When talking about the impact that globalization has on football fandom from the previously presented results the main observation that is emerging is that globalization is a double edged sword toward football fandom. On the one hand it allows fans to be much more in touch with the players, the team and the football organization because the entire environment is much more accessible compared to 30 years ago. You have the possibility to observe and understand how the personal life of players is outside the football pitch just by opening your smartphone. Or you can easily support Liverpool from Australia because the broadcasting TV are very much interested in the revenue generated by advertisement. As mentioned in the literature all of these opportunities have created a more homogenous and cohesive football environment that allows everyone to be part of it with no exception. I think it's so beautiful that a kid can dream of becoming a football star thanks to the globalization of this sport.

On the other hand though this commodification of the sport is threatening everything I've been advocating so far, the sense of community and identification is losing its strength because of this constant need to associate football with money. In the result section, I presented the example of how the hymn of a club was interrupted early because of a commercial ad and this of course is an example of why people are losing the passion and the sense of belonging that this sport has the power of producing. If the game of football loses its essence and its values that are going beyond the 90 minutes game, then it's simply gonna become another form of entertainment like Netflix, Youtube and social media in general. We can already see how nowadays the young generation are losing interest in this sport because they haven't been properly introduced to the rituals, the traditions and the shared sense of belonging that this sport has to offer

In conclusion, I think it's very important that I include this section about globalization because this movement is what is putting in danger everything I've been stating in this paper and this might be the reason why the relevance of this research might become less and less relevant in the future.

Limitations and further research

The main limitation of this research is the limited amount of time in 4 months it's very hard to collect a relevant amount of data, for this reason my paper is very context specific I could only personally attend two league games in Torino and Leeuwarden and interviewed only 8 people that have different perspectives, backgrounds and traditions but of course they can't represent the all world of football that has billions of people involved. It would have been interesting to interview someone that is really involved in the marketing and advertising projects in the football industry to captivate different perspectives from which the traditions and the rituals are perceived and lived. Furthermore, it would be interesting in the future to conduct similar research in less developed countries where the impact of globalization has been considerably less, because the flow of money is not comparable and see whether traditions and rituals are more rooted and are less threatened because football hasn't been commodified as much.

Conclusion

Examining football rituals and traditions across different cultural contexts shows how important these activities are to supporters' sense of group identity and belonging. My research demonstrates that although the common element of football is a worldwide phenomena, local cultural, historical, and social settings have a significant impact on the particular rituals and

traditions, which in turn let each community feel like it has a distinct identity. The importance of football rituals in creating a sense of community is further highlighted by this capstone project. These customs often offer a place for people from different backgrounds to interact, overcoming social and cultural barriers. Fans' sense of belonging is increased as a result of the common experiences that form an inclusive, representational collective identity within the football community. The different observations and pictures taken in the stadiums in Leeuwarden and Torino have provided a visual on field example of what rituals and practices really signify and how they create a sense of belonging. In conclusion, football rituals and traditions are more than just entertaining shows; they serve as essential platforms for supporters to express their cultural identities and create a feeling of community. These strongly ingrained customs foster community ties, bring people together, and honor cultural history. Comprehending the distinct connotations and importance of these customs provides invaluable perspectives into the global social structure of football communities, highlighting the significant influence of football in cultivating a feeling of cohesion and acceptance among its heterogeneous global supporters. For this reason it's of vital importance to preserve these traditions and to make sure that the football environment prioritizes the conservation and the maintenance of these values rather than treating football as a money making machine.

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Appendix

Interview guide

Understanding Football Rituals and Traditions:

1. **General Perception:** How would you describe the role of rituals and traditions in football within your cultural context?
2. **Examples:** Can you share some examples of football rituals and traditions that are prevalent in your community?
3. **Origins and Evolution:** What do you think are the origins of these rituals and traditions? How have they evolved over time?

4. **Importance:** Why do you believe these rituals and traditions are important for football fans in your community?

Comparison Across Cultural Contexts:

5. **Diverse Cultural Contexts:** Have you observed or experienced football rituals and traditions from other cultural contexts? If so, could you describe some of the differences you noticed?

6. **Factors Influencing Variations:** What factors do you think contribute to the variation of football rituals and traditions across different cultural contexts?

7. **Globalization:** How has globalization impacted football rituals and traditions in your community?

Meanings and Significance:

8. **Group Identity:** How do these rituals and traditions contribute to the formation and maintenance of group identity among football fans?

9. **Emotional Connection:** Can you describe any personal experiences or observations where football rituals or traditions have played a significant role in creating emotional connections among fans?

Sense of Belonging:

10. **Personal Connection:** How do football rituals and traditions personally resonate with you in terms of fostering a sense of belonging within the football community?

11. Community Involvement: Have you observed instances where football rituals and traditions encourage greater community involvement or participation among fans? If so, could you provide some examples?

12. Long-Term Impact: In your opinion, how does the sense of belonging cultivate through football rituals and traditions impact fans beyond the stadium or match-day experience?

13. Comparison with Other Activities: How does the sense of belonging fostered by football rituals and traditions compare to that of other social or cultural activities within your community?

