THE FOOTBALL TOURISM TREND: IMPLICATIONS OVER MANAGEMENT ISSUES REGARDING LOCAL FOOTBALL HERITAGE

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Introduction and objective(s): The attendance of tourists in stadiums is not a new phenomenon in football history and indeed can be attested each weekend in all tournaments around the world, even at lower divisions. However, particularly in this decade, a considerable flow of tourists has become a permanent part of globally-famous football clubs after visiting the stadiums' tours, museums, or to experience a match-day. For instance, VisitBritain’s 2015 report on football tourism revealed that 800,000 tourism visitors went to a football match in the UK in 2014 and spent around £684 million. On the other hand, the ‘FC Barcelona Museum and Camp Nou Experience’ attracted 1.7m of visitors in 2017, a number higher than registered in the Picasso museum, which gave to the club the title of most visited sports museum in Europe and the most visited museum in the city of Barcelona. Since tourists present higher levels of consumption (merchandise sales, expensive tickets, and hospitality services packages), thus contributing to boosting commercial and broadcasting deals, which is fundamental to secure the best players, trainers, and managers in the race for national and international titles, they have continuously been encouraged through marketing campaigns to visit football clubs. However, in specific stadiums of famous-global clubs (e.g., Manchester United, Liverpool, and F.C. Barcelona), the “hot traditional football culture custodian” (Giulianotti, 2002), characterized based on locality and long-term identification with club’s history and heritage have been criticizing the influx of tourists. According to them, tourists are creating contested traditions considered disruptive to fandom tradition (e.g., half-and-half scarves and extensive use of smartphones) and to the increase in ticket prices. From a heritage and management lenses, this proposed paper seeks to discuss the potential
challenges that football clubs are already facing as a result of this increasing form of cultural consumption through tourism, in particular the impacts on local football heritage. Methods: This research is based on an extensive documental analysis of examined numerous football and tourism-related researches, club-based fanzines, websites and reports, social media vehicles of professional football clubs as well as official tourism websites of many cities and countries. It also counted with field observations by the first author in two official matches played in England during November and December of 2018. The first match attended was between Manchester United and Young Boys for the Champions League (11.28.18), while the second was the 'Merseyside Derby' between Liverpool and Everton (12.01.18). The methods adopted were fundamental to have access to a broader contextualization of the football tourism trend since its genesis and its scales of development hitherto. Results and Discussion: As Evans and Norcliff (2016) concluded in an ethnography study about Liverpool Football Club, there is a new “football space” symbolized by the interaction of the globalized sport, economics of cities and its teams, and the cultural significance of the sport to tourists and residents. Recent studies revealed that the promotion of heritage elements such as stadium atmosphere, fandom traditions, and remarkable players (Sondaal, 2013; VisitBritain 2015) presented and packaged through broadcasted matches influenced tourists to make a pilgrimage or experience a day out in the football grounds of the Premier League. As such, football is now packaged and sold as a tourist attraction forcing clubs, cities, and countries to adapt to face the challenges and opportunities that come along. As a consequence of the concerns and beliefs nurtured by specific group of fans, social exclusion processes were identified at Barcelona and Liverpool stadium after tourists waved half and half scarves; wore half and half t-shirts; adopted a silent behavior; or for even supported the opponent the home fans. Differently than being in a VIP section, where tourists’ satisfaction is under control, at the stands other hosts are in place with a potential to ruin the dreamed experience of these tourists that once attacked can destroy the reputation of the club through social media which by its turn have a significant influence on the decision to attend a match (Peng, Chen, & Kwon, 2016). Based on this scenario, this paper also seeks to push further discussions regarding the possible transformation of football stadiums as multicultural spaces rather than the symbol of local communities. In this token, what are the management measures that clubs must make to preserve what is now being marketized to attract visitors – heritage - and at the same time profiting from visitors and keeping a positive relationship with its local fan base? Conclusions: The presence of tourists in specific football grounds is a reality that will keep promoting debates for solutions to the way the sport is vivid in the 21st century. This global cocktail of tourism and football has the potential to bring critical environmental and socio-cultural changes
in the core of certain clubs that will demand management solutions. The definite integration of tourists in the stadiums, where visitors are far more profitable customers than local fans invites scholars to find answers about how it will be possible to balance profit from tourists while preserving the local culture, traditions, identity, and heritage of the club.

**Keywords:** football; tourism; heritage; management; fandom.

**References**


