

06 de mayo de 2013

**CULTURE AND SPORTS****And at the end it was not only football**

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Two CONICET investigators analyse how some social imaginaries relate to the most popular sport in Argentina and how they are involved in the formation of local identities.

The downhill team has skilful players: they pass the ball quickly; they dribble nutmeg, back-heel and so on. The members of the uphill team play a more rustic game, the players are not talented but they are strong and play really hard. These conceptions respond to old social constructions that become more significant in the department of Valle Grande, province of Jujuy, in Argentina, during the 90 minutes the match lasts.

For Federico Fernández, a CONICET postdoctoral fellow at the University of Social Sciences and Humanity of the National University of Jujuy in the northeast of Argentina, the annual football championship works as a kind of ritualised space. This event lasts for three days, where different groups of the population define themselves from a historical account with special socio-cultural or even physical characteristics. These features vary in these teams according to the area where they inhabit, the Northern –uphill - or the Southern part –downhill of Valle Grande.

This department is located in the eastern part of the province of Jujuy. It has a population of about two thousand people, it is isolated by the surrounding hills and it is an area difficult to reach. To the North, the landscape of this department is a high elevation montane grassland, or Puna, whereas to the South jungles or Yungas prevail. Sugar mills concentrated in this region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and employed local native communities.

“Local foreman and sugar mill workers’ stories about northern inhabitants express that they had more endurance and physical strength for work. Thus, they were characterized as quieter, more submissive and to be paid less. This narrative on their physical characteristics and strength translates to their football games. Their game is rough, tough and they way they play is rustic: their passes are long and not precise”; Fernández comments.

In contrast, players from the southern – jungle - region are described as *chaguanco*s, a term associated not only to wilderness but also to physical characteristics related to ability and physical skills. They boast they play better and more impressive football with short and effective passes.

The investigator filmed each championship match and counted the number of passes of both teams considering whether they belong to the uphill or the downhill team. Contrary to expectations, the data revealed that the inhabitants of jungle regions made less passes among them and they failed their target when compared to the Puna team.

Every day, during ordinary activities, these two sectors are connected by livestock farming and in several cases are bound by family bonds. However, during the championship, they are separated. “The story is stronger than the game. The uphill players play with a “mountainous”

style game and whether it is true or not, it is undeniable because that is part of the construction of their identity”, the investigator explains.

In Fernández' view, this way of conceiving sport is the antithesis of football as a show. There are no tickets, no fence and no transmission. “Here, the game is an excuse to meet.. It is a kind of carnival where once a year relatives gather and the game is a catalyst. During those three days, there are tensions, conflicts among families, romance and stories of identity” He analyses.

### **Mar del Plata: to be or not to be**

Gaston Gil, CONICET associate investigator at the National University of Mar del Plata, studies in another city the same phenomenon: How is a population's identity constructed around football?

In 1967, with the creation of national football championships, smaller teams had the chance to face and compete with the so called “big teams”. In Mar del Plata, five teams have participated in this kind of national competitions: Aldosivi, Alvarado, Kimberley, San Lorenzo and Circulo Deportivo. From these teams, only two of them managed to “experience a reinforcement of their identity, which allowed them to polarize their city's passion for football” Gil explains.

Aldosivi and Alvarado started to construct their identity and afterwards their rivalry. This is related to the different historical-social moments that Mar del Plata went through. By early '90s Aldosivi and Alvarado became so popular on the football scene of Mar del Plata that the rivalry was well accepted by supporters of the two teams.

The investigator explains: “At the beginning of this decade they managed to express some urban imaginaries in which one the clubs defined itself as marginal from a geographic point of view – Aldosivi- while the other team – Alvarado – defined itself as marginal from a social perspective, compared to the rest of the city. While Aldosivi became the metaphor of a zone that historically ceased to be associated with the imaginary of ‘Traditional Mar del Plata’, Alvarado consolidated its position of class marginalization”.

Aldosivi club is located near the port, in the south of the city. “Mar del Plata is a city built on the basis of a tourist imaginary. The industrial and fishing processes projects failed and were relegated to the seaside resort project. Little by little port workers, associated to European immigrants of late 19<sup>th</sup> century, were progressively expelled from the city centre. That is how Aldosivi's first rival was the city itself”, the investigator comments.

Conversely, for Alvarado fans, the sense of belonging is not related to its location. Instead, it has to do with a social and economic construction. “Football rivalries in the city or out of it tend to present a significant class component. In other words, in the imaginary, clubs are associated to determined social classes that represent the clashes and opposition between rich and poor”, he concludes.

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