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ABSTRACT

No matter whether rich or poor, young or old - football is firmly anchored in society. However, the interest in certain football clubs is not due to the fact that they are competitors in sports. Their role as economic units also plays no role in the social anchoring. The anchoring in the society is due to the fact that football clubs are carriers of identities to which the fans feel a strong relationship. Accordingly, football clubs have a potential for communitization – thus they also have a social aspect. These identities may, for example, be associated with a geographical region or a social milieu. This means, in addition to the missions of sporting success and economic success, a football club has a third mission: to cultivate its organically grown identity in order to preserve or further develop the social component. For this purpose, corresponding communication goals must be defined and target oriented public relations must be conducted by a team of professionals. The advantages that result for a football club are:

- Fulfilling of a social mission to give the football club a deeper meaning
- Faithful supporters who are passionate without being dependent on sporting success
- Excellent communication basis to address the supporters of the club
- Very good marketing potential (which helps to have economic success)
- Examples for identities of football clubs are 'Schalke 04' (Germany) for assignment to a milieu (working class milieu) and 'FC Barcelona' for assignment to a region (Catalunya).

Keywords: social anchoring of football/ football clubs as carriers of identities/ social aspect of football/social mission of football/football clubs as representatives

Introduction

Scarcely any other sport has as many fans throughout the world as football. Even a glance at the football stadiums, football bars and the blanket coverage in the media is sufficient to demonstrate the enormous attraction that this sport exerts over people.

Corresponding to the importance they have for many people, top class football clubs are professionally managed. The managements of the individual clubs pursue a variety of different projects in their work, which will be referred to in what follows as their 'missions'. These missions represent a kind of *raison d'être* of the club and explain what it wants to achieve as its main goals.

The Missions of Football Clubs

One of the most obvious **missions** of professional sports clubs is **sporting success**. This is not in need of further discussion. However, the competitiveness of the club at the sporting level depends on securing top players and this involves high expenses. In addition, the infrastructure of the club, such as its training facilities, club buildings, pitch maintenance, stadium rent, youth academy, etc., are important in creating the conditions for sporting success.

With the progressive commercialisation of football, the dependence of sporting success on the available financial resources has become ever greater. Accordingly, a further component has been added to the objectives of club management, namely, the view that economic success is a means to facilitating sporting success. Financial income is generated from broadcast revenue, revenue from spectators, transfer surpluses and advertising agreements, among other things. The greater the sporting success, the higher is the corresponding income, and vice versa. The interconnection between sporting and economic success becomes apparent.

At the same time, as economic and sporting success become increasingly interdependent, it is no longer ascertainable from a business perspective whether the original intention of achieving economic success for the sake of sporting success remains valid. For sporting success could just as well serve the purpose of economic success – for example, if the club management regards the club as a marketing instrument for a certain product, company or group. In any case, however, it can be stated that a further mission of a professional football club is to achieve **economic success**.

However, one of the two missions cannot be said to be clearly more important than the other. And even if the majority of the management and supervisory board consist of individuals from the business community, the club is owned by a private person or is a marketing construct of a commercial enterprise – the economic success of the club is contingent on its sporting success and vice versa. Thus, although a hierarchisation of the missions is possible, achieving the corresponding goal means that both missions must be pursued equally because they are interdependent.

With this we have uncovered the two most obvious missions of football clubs: **sporting success** and **economic success**. But what induces people to feel that they belong to a certain club and what is it that makes football such a popular sport? Economic success is obviously not what inspires masses of people to feel a sense of belonging to certain football clubs; after all, it is only a means of achieving sporting success. And sporting success as such does not induce large masses of people to follow a certain club either. Otherwise, every year the football spectators would follow the respective winner of a competition. It is at most smaller groups that attend matches because of sporting success; but particularly enthusiastic, not to mention fanatical behaviour is not to be expected from such groups.

Hypothesis: Identity is a Decisive Popularity Factor and Requires the Management of Clubs to have a Social Mission

Its relatively straightforward rules and regulations and the modest requirements as regards equipment are undoubtedly factors that make football so popular. However, this is much more a matter of its popularity among those who practice this sport. As far as its popularity among spectators is concerned, other factors must be decisive, for otherwise they would watch the games merely as neutral observers. Instead, the spectators align themselves with specific teams and selectively support them.

The reason for the actual popularity of football clubs can be found in their most original mission, namely the formation of social communities and as a result being the bearer of an identity. After all, a shared identity is the basis of every community and the link uniting its individual members. Modern football clubs, which have long played in commercialised football leagues, also offer the spectators the possibility of identifying with them.

In the case of the national teams which compete in friendly matches or in international competitions, it is quite easy to fathom the reason for their popularity among supporters. The national teams are the sporting representatives of certain countries. The supporters of the teams generally identify with their ethnic origin, their original home country and (or) the country to which they feel they belong. Therefore they unite behind the national team by which they feel represented in virtue of a common identity.

It is very similar in the case of football clubs, because they also offer a major potential for identification that makes them very popular among certain groups of people. Firstly, a football club is always a representative of a particular region, city or urban district. If a club is the sole representative of a region in a certain division, for example, it assumes a representative role for that region. If the region is home to several clubs, then they compete for regional supremacy as representatives of their home towns. When clubs from the same city meet, then it is the districts that compete with each other for sporting dominance at

local level.¹ A prerequisite for the struggle for urban dominance is, of course, the club's identificatory alignment with an urban district, so that it becomes the representative of that district. But apart from regional identity, the social milieu of the club is also decisive for its identity. Thus for historical reasons many clubs align themselves, for example, with the working-class milieu – and often this identity as a workers' club is also cultivated. But the social milieu also includes the political spectrum to which the club and (or) its supporters feel they belong.

It is the supporters who make their clubs into the representatives of certain social milieus or regions. And at the same time the clubs have an impact on their supporters through their historically determined identity. As regards the existing identity of clubs, there is therefore a constant interaction between the clubs themselves and their supporters. The supporters and members of the club have always been the decisive part of the club's identity and legitimately always help to shape it.

Whether the key element of the popularity of football clubs is in fact their identities will be examined later. First we must determine whether the clubs are indeed bearers of certain identities, because that would be the precondition for them being able to exercise communalising effects. At the same time, we must examine whether and how the individual stakeholders in the clubs adopt these identities (assuming they exist) or lend them expression themselves. The findings of the study will then determine whether the cultivation of the club identities (assuming they exist) should represent a further mission of the management of the clubs, how the missions are related to each other and whether a possible forging of an identity even has advantages for a football club.

State of Research and Methodology to be employed

Football is commanding increasing attention among researchers. Although the question concerning the identity of football clubs has been raised several times, often the treatment did not go beyond observations and indications that such an identity existed, but without offering an explanation of this conjecture. Studies were often confined to a single scientific discipline. Thus sociologists point out that football clubs are cultural representatives of different kinds of communities and that the supporters also need the club to play this role in order to be able to relate to it.² It has also been pointed out often enough that club supporters feel that the club represents their regional identity.³ As examples can be cited the procession of the club supporters to the stadium, the flags and banners, songs and chants, and noisemakers and fireworks displayed in the stadiums, which should be understood as means of expression of affiliation and

¹Oswald, Rudolf (2008). *Fußball-Volksgemeinschaft. Ideologie, Politik und Fanatismus im deutschen Fußball 1919-1964*. Page 212.

²Väth, Heinrich (1994). *Profifußball. Zur Soziologie der Bundesliga*. S. 108.

³Schütz, Volker (2007). *Ausländische Spieler in der Fußball-Bundesliga. Die Auswirkungen des Bosman-Urteils auf die Identifikation mit den Vereinen*. Page 77.

demarcation and should be seen against the background of regional or cultural identification.⁴ According to Seweryn Dmowski, a football club can play a crucial role in expressing the identity of a community that wants to demarcate itself from others. He also explains the rivalry that can arise between clubs in these terms.⁵ That football matches can be a means of expressing regional rivalries is also recognised by Victoria Schwenzer, who traces the rivalries between the supporters of different clubs back to social controversies.⁶

Then the fact that football matches can have such effects naturally presupposes that the clubs possess a communalising identity. Concrete, in-depth studies of the identities of single clubs are quite rare, however, so that no generic conclusions can be drawn concerning regional or social identities. An exception is the work of Mick Totten, who studied the Hamburg club FC St. Pauli and established the existence of identity relating to a political-cultural milieu of the club's supporters. Totten ascribes this club identity to the influence of the supporters.⁷

Thus it can be said that although research has begun to recognise football as an identity-forging factor, it has not yet studied individual clubs in sufficient depth by adducing evidence apart from the identity established on historical grounds, such as the different stakeholders (first and foremost club members and officials), examining them and comparing them with each other and with the historically established identity. A solid analysis of the identity of a club is possible only on the basis of a prior holistic study.

Unfortunately, researchers also all too often forget to draw conclusions from the findings of the investigations of club identities concerning their cultural and social significance. They also forget to derive recommendations for action for the management of the clubs, such as a social mission, which is the objective of the present elaboration. However, only by drawing conclusions and making deductions does it become possible to derive a practical benefit from the investigations.

The aim of the present study will therefore be to examine by way of example two clubs as regards their regional and milieu-specific identities. In doing so it will proceed in a holistic manner. This means that it will not only adduce the history of the club in order to establish the club-specific identities. In addition, the statutes of the club will be examined, the communication of the club towards the outside will be an object of investigation and the behaviour of members and supporters will also be studied. These investigations are representative of possible future studies of clubs through which the club

⁴Lindner, Rolf (1986). *Die Sportbegeisterung*, in: Utz Jeggle/Gottfried Korff/Martin Scharfe/Bernd Jürgen Warneken (Hrsg.): *Volkskultur in der Moderne. Probleme und Perspektiven empirischer Kulturforschung*. Page 254.

⁵Dmowski, Seweryn (May 2013). *Geographical Typology of European Football Rivalries*, in: *Soccer & Society* 14, no. 3. Pages 331-343.

⁶Schwenzer, Victoria (2002). *Fußball als kulturelles Ereignis. Eine ethnologische Untersuchung am Beispiel des 1.FC Union Berlin*, in: Zentrum für Europa- und Nordamerika-Studien (Hrsg.): *Fußballwelten. Zum Verhältnis von Sport, Politik, Ökonomie und Gesellschaft*. Pages 89 and 100.

⁷Totten, Mick (November 2015). *Football and community empowerment: how FC Sankt Pauli fans organize to influence*, in: *Soccer & Society* 17, no. 5. Pages 703-720.

identities can be established. Once the identities have been established as a decisive factor in the popularity of football clubs, there follows the discussion of whether the management of the clubs should regard the cultivation of the social components of the club's identity as an essential part of its field of activity.

Examples of Club Identities

In what follows, football clubs from different countries will be examined in an attempt to demonstrate that they are bearers specific identities and that these identities may be accepted and propagated by the different stakeholders, preferably supporters, members and club officials. The clearer the findings are and the more extensive the reception and propagation by the stakeholders themselves, the more important this identity should be judged to be for them. Ultimately, this is an expression of the communalising potential of the club's identity. The identity constituted via the social milieu or the regional identity can be consciously used by the club; but an unconscious communication of one of these identities is also conceivable, for example if the club has not yet reflected sufficiently on its own identity. Of course, an identity is nevertheless still present.

Schalke 04 (Germany) – Representative of a Social Milieu

An example of a club that defines itself through a social milieu is Schalke 04. The club is based in the Ruhr area, a region in North Rhine-Westphalia known for its mining industry. However, the club bears the identity of a workers' club not only because its home is in a region shaped by workers, but also as a result of a range of other factors.

A glance at the history of the club reveals that the first clue to its identity as a workers' club is that it was founded by miners, factory workers and students, all of whom belonged to the working-class milieu. Further proof of the historical connection of region and football club to the working-class milieu is provided by the name of Schalke 04's first home ground. From 1928 to 1973, the club played its home games in the Glückauf-Kampfbahn [Glückauf Arena]. The salute '*Glückauf*' is known to be the German miner's greeting. And in the entrance area to the stadium visitors were greeted by the image of a crossed hammer and pick, the international symbol for mining. Thus the historical home stadium, and hence also the club itself, must be seen in the context of mining and the working-class milieu.

According to its statutes, the main goal of the club is the physical, mental and character formation of its members, in which football occupies a pre-eminent position. In addition, the club declares in its statutes that its activities are altruistic and that its primary purpose is not the pursuit of its own economic goals. The club's assets serve the club's objective as described above; moreover,

collecting and using funds for other purposes is not permitted.⁸ Thus the economic mission is accorded a subordinate hierarchical status to the sporting mission in the statutes of the club. However, the statutes make no reference to the club's identity as a workers' club. Schalke 04's mission statement, by contrast, states that the club 'began as a colliers' and grafters' club' and that 'resting on our tradition as a miners' club, we acknowledge our social responsibility' and that it wants to 'enable its supporters from all social backgrounds to participate in the life of the club and attend matches'.⁹ This is clear evidence of its understanding of its identity as a workers' club.

But in addition to the evidence from the history of the club and its mission statement just cited by way of example, its identity as a workers' club is also shown by other factors, such as its external communication. For example, the club communicated its tradition as a workers' club with close historical links to mining in the region by modelling the players' tunnel on a mine gallery. And on the website of the club one repeatedly encounters the hammer and pick mining symbol as well as images of coal. In the 2014 image campaign '1000 Freunde – unzählige Kumpel' [1000 Friends – Countless Mates]¹⁰, the club also alluded to the working-class milieu. In addition to other media, the image in question was published on posters with themes from mining.

Following games against RB Leipzig (for example on August 19, 2017), the team took the opportunity to display a banner to the fans in the fan curve with the message: 'Founded by Colliers and Grafters'. In doing so, the team was reassuring its supporters of the identity of FC Schalke 04 as a traditional workers' club while also setting itself apart from RB Leipzig, which is regarded by a large number of football fans as an artificial commercial product.

As regards the supporters and members of the club, they are referred to by the club and in the media as 'Knappen'. This is the German term for someone who has successfully completed an apprenticeship as a miner. In addition, the clubs' supporters, like the players previously, invoke their traditional identity as a workers' club by displaying banners with the lettering 'Founded by Colliers and Grafters' in the stands at matches against RB Leipzig.

FC Schalke 04 openly presents its rootedness in the mining and working-class milieu. The club draws its identity from its history and cultivates it through targeted communication of this identity in image campaigns, which are decided by the club management. Since Schalke 04 is a registered association, the approximately 150,000 club members at the general meeting constitute the supreme decision-making body of the club. Thus they exercise influence over the identity of the club not only through their communication from the stands but also through their decisions in votes, for the members are the personification of the club. If the members are bearers of a determinate identity, then this also applies in a corresponding sense for the club, and vice versa.

⁸Statutes of FC Gelsenkirchen-Schalke 04 e.V. § 2 Purpose and task of the club.

⁹Mission statement of FC Gelsenkirchen-Schalke 04 e.V. <https://schalke04.de/en/club/fc-schalke-04/mission-statement/> (visited April 14, 2018)

¹⁰The German slogan involves a play on words, since 'Kumpel' is not only a colloquial term for 'friend' or 'mate', but also means 'miner' or 'collier'.

FC Barcelona (Spain/Catalonia) – bearer of a Regional Identity

An unambiguous bearer of a regional identity, namely the Catalan, is the football club FC Barcelona. The club's coat of arms includes as one element red and yellow bars – the colours of the Catalonian coat of arms. This is the most apparent symbol of the traditional attachment that the club cultivates to its home region. But apart from this visual symbolism, the club also declares in very concrete ways that regional identity has a special meaning for it. For, according to the club, there are four attributes that define FC Barcelona. In addition to 'Universality', 'Social Commitment' and 'Democracy', the club cites the attribute 'Catalanism'. The club declares regarding the last-named attribute that since its foundation it has been connected in an essential way with Catalonia. It states that the commitment to this connection has its origins in society and is understood by Barça supporters throughout Spain and worldwide. By its own testimony, the club supports Catalonia wherever possible throughout the world, but at the same time supports a cosmopolitan Catalonia.¹¹

Figure 1. *The Red and Yellow Bars are the Colours of the Catalonian Coat of Arms*



Source: FC Barcelona (printing approved by FC Barcelona)

The club's statutes also state that, in addition to promoting different sports, it aims to promote participation in various activities, including social and cultural ones. It is claimed that this is relevant and necessary for preserving the representative character that the club has, among other things, in virtue of its traditional loyalty to Catalonia.¹² Furthermore, Article 5 of the statutes states that the club participates in local, national, state and international competitions while maintaining its Catalan identity.¹³ The following Article 6 points out that Catalan is the 'language of preferred use' in all of the club's activities.¹⁴ Thus, there can be no question that the club emphasises and cultivates its regional identity and sets itself apart from the central state of Spain.

¹¹<https://www.fcbarcelona.com/club/identity/card/more-than-a-club-> (visited April 4, 2018)

¹²Statutes of FC Barcelona, as of October 5, 2013. Article 4 Functional area. Pages 5 and 6.

¹³Statutes of FC Barcelona, as of October 5, 2013. Article 5 Territorial area. Page 6.

¹⁴Statutes of FC Barcelona, as of October 5, 2013. Article 6 Language. Page 6.

The club is organized as a non-profit organization and is owned by its 144,000 members, some 133,000 of whom live in Catalonia.¹⁵ This supports the previous statement that the regional identity has its origin in society; after all, it is obvious that a large proportion of the inhabitants of a region also feel connected to this region.

But also the composition of the squad and of the most important officials is an expression of the club's Catalan regional-cultural identity. The current president of the club, Josep Maria Bartomeu Floreta, is himself a Catalan, as also were many of the previous presidents of the club. One of the main reasons for this is presumably the democratic structure of the club, since the members are the owners of the club and they determine themselves through their votes who leads the club. Since most members, as already noted, are Catalans, it is obvious that they tend to vote for people who in virtue of their identity feel beholden to the region – as they do themselves.

But expressions of identification with the region come not only from the side of the club. The supporters of the club also repeatedly exhibit its role as a cultural body for people with a shared identity. Prime examples of this are the especially explosive matches against Real Madrid. The club from the Spanish capital, whose players are also known as 'The Royals', is considered to be a symbol of the central state. Thus the matches are simultaneously a symbolic trial of strength between Catalonia and the intrusive central state. At the match on October 6, 2012, 17 minutes and 14 seconds after the kick-off the supporters of FC Barcelona chanted the slogan 'Independencia! Independencia!'¹⁶ With this they commemorated the Siege of Barcelona in which the victory for the Spanish Royal Army in 1714 resulted in the loss of autonomy. This is a clear indication that, for its supporters, FC Barcelona serves as a projection screen for their cultural identity and that football matches have a deeper meaning than a mere trial of sporting strength. But the fans also repeatedly express their Catalan identity at other matches, among other things through the many Catalan flags that are waved in the stadium.

In summary, therefore, FC Barcelona by its own declaration is the bearer of a regional-cultural identity. This is stated in the statutes of the club, to which the club officials are bound. Moreover, the club's understanding of itself as a bearer of Catalan identity is part of its historical heritage, because it is among the values which were defined by the founder of the club, Hans Gamper, in its early years.¹⁷ And the followers also see their club as a means for expressing their identity. It is also the supporters who lend the club its distinctive identity and influence it; after all, the club belongs to its members. In this case, the club and the members must be understood as a unit, since the club is made up of its members and, in addition, the identity communicated by the management and the members of the club is identical and apparently incontrovertible.

¹⁵<https://www.fcbarcelona.com/club/identity/card/club-in-figures> (visited April 4, 2018)

¹⁶"Independencia! Independencia!"

¹⁷<https://www.fcbarcelona.com/club/history/card/1899-1909-foundation-and-survival> (visited April 4, 2018)

Identity as a Social Mission

The different kinds of club identities established in the case of the football clubs studied are extremely important for the supporters of the clubs in question. For the identification with the club is based on these identities, so that they are a decisive factor in determining the club to which people feel they belong. Accordingly, they represent the communalising potential of a club. The club identity is a cultural factor whose importance must be acknowledged by those in positions of responsibility among the management of the club, if this is not yet the case.

In addition to sporting and economic success, therefore, the club management should become aware of the club's social mission and cultivate and promote its cultural identity, as is already the case with the clubs examined (as noted). In order to achieve this, the club must first make the effort to research its identity and to identify it as the core of the organisation as a whole. There are several ways of achieving this. In particular, reviewing and reappraising the club's history and studying the self-image of its supporters, but also the external image that supporters of other clubs have of the club, can be informative. It is interesting in this context whether the club management and players identify with the club which employs them in a similar way to the supporters and whether the findings of studies of these groups of people resemble the historical manifestation.

If the club understands its identity and its corresponding communalising potential as a key feature of the organization, the hierarchical ordering of the missions or task fields becomes clear. The **social mission** as the core of the club should stand at the top of the hierarchy. Without its identity, a club would be a mere artificial construct – it would lack charisma and the club would not have any importance to speak of for its supporters. In order to possess sufficient aura to be able to represent a social milieu or region, a club must command a correspondingly high level of attention, which is generally only available in the higher divisions. The **sporting mission**, hence sporting success, is the objective of the association and at the time the factor that ensures that a large group of people is addressed by the club. The higher the level at which the club plays and the more success it enjoys, the more media attention and acceptance it receives among the groups of people who feel they belong to it in virtue of its identity. The communalising potential of the club increases accordingly. At the same time, sport and the attendant social component is the cornerstone on which most club foundations are based. The **economic mission** serves as an aid to the club in achieving sporting success. Therefore, the club has the task of generating sufficient funds to engage players and a coaching staff capable of achieving the desired sporting success. The venues and training facilities, as well as the rest of the environment around the club, are also capital goods which are supposed to serve sporting success. An operating environment marked by economic success, assuming that funds are used sensibly, serves as a catalyst for sporting success.

However, even though there is a hierarchy among the missions, it does not follow that one mission can be accorded clear priority over the others. Rather, a balance must be struck in the pursuit of the objectives, since ultimately success in achieving one of the missions depends on success in achieving the others. Although the economic mission is essential for sporting success and hence for the aura of the club – thus, it has equal priority to the other missions – it has the lowest rank in the hierarchy of objectives. For at the core of the charisma possessed by a football club is always its identity as this developed organically over time. If a club loses its identity, it also loses its personal importance for a large number of supporters.

Total Commercialisation – An Alternative Hierarchy

But there are also football clubs that were founded by companies and clearly serve the purpose of marketing products. One such is the football club RasenBallSport Leipzig founded in 2009, which consciously adopted the slightly modified logo of the soft drink whose manufacturer¹⁸ was behind the founding of the club. The club has just 17 members.¹⁹ Its supporters are not offered any opportunity to become members. The *raison d'être* of the club is manifestly to ensure increased media attention for the superordinate brand or for a product. That supporters should influence the club is not envisaged, because otherwise the club would open itself up to them and accept them as members who could influence the club in the context of a general meeting. But this is precisely not the case. Accordingly, a social and cultural *raison d'être* is not discernible in this case.

In the case of a club of this kind, the supposition is that for it the **economic mission** has taken over the top position in the hierarchy of the club goals.²⁰ The attention that the beverage manufacturer desires for its product is supposed to be secured through sporting success. The **sporting mission** would accordingly occupy the second place in the hierarchy, whereas there is no discernible **social mission**. Numerous football fans are also critical of such a weighting of club objectives in favour of profit maximisation.²¹

¹⁸This is a reference to Red Bull GmbH, which markets the energy drink Red Bull through the club RasenBallSport Leipzig. The drink's logo depicts two red bulls, who appear to be running toward each other, with a yellow circle in the background.

¹⁹Leipziger Volkszeitung. RB Leipzig bestätigt Pläne für Stadion-Neubau bei Bundesliga-Aufstieg. (visited April 9, 2018): <http://www.lvz.de/Sportbuzzer/RB-Leipzig/News/RB-Leipzig-bestaetigt-Plaene-fuer-Stadion-Neubau-bei-Bundesliga-Aufstieg>

²⁰ Spox.com. *Ein Erdbeben für den deutschen Fußball; Interview mit Tobias Kollmann*. (visited April 10, 2011): <http://www.spox.com/de/sport/fussball/0906/Artikel/tobias-kollmann-red-bull-rasen-ball-sport-leipzig-dieter-mateschitz.html>.

²¹Sommerey, Markus (2010). *Die Jugendkultur der Ultras. Zur Entstehung einer neuen Generation von Fußballfans*. Page 62 ff.

Conclusion

The investigations outlined above have shown that there are football clubs which are bearers of regional identities or represent a social milieu. This is expressed by various stakeholders and exercises a communalising effect. Furthermore, it has emerged from the discussion that the identity is one of the key elements of many clubs. Therefore, the clubs need to cultivate and communicate their identity and to acknowledge this task as their social mission. Here the management of the clubs has an obligation to regard the identity not only from the perspective of marketing, but also to develop an understanding for the fact that the social mission of the club is a major priority. And, of course, this has advantages for the football clubs, provided that they do not use their identity merely as a tool to generate more merchandising or spectator revenue, but instead credibly engage in cultivating the identity.

On the one hand, a club that ascribes itself a social mission in order to lend football a deeper, socio-cultural meaning exerts a very positive radiance on football fans. The supporters of a club which identifies its identity as something worth communicating are also more passionate and their loyalty to the club is less dependent on sporting success than, for example, the supporters of a club which defines itself exclusively through sporting success. A management that is aware of the club's identity, where this understanding is congruent with the supporters' understanding of the club identity, also possesses an excellent means of communication when it comes to addressing the supporters. And, of course, clubs with a clearly defined identity also have a good marketing potential, which tends to promote economic success – even if this is not supposed to be the justification for the search for a distinctive identity.

Every Answer gives Rise to New Questions – Prospects of additional Topics for Research

In addition to the clubs examined here, an investigation of the club identity is of major interest for virtually all football clubs worldwide and is potentially highly productive for their self-understanding. Studies of recently founded clubs, in which the development of an identity is not yet so far advanced, may be especially interesting in this regard. Also clubs owned by investors or private individuals, or even obvious marketing objects for certain products, such as FC Red Bull Salzburg, would be interesting objects of research. Clubs from Major League Soccer in the United States are likewise interesting because many of the clubs in this league are owned by private individuals or companies in different sectors, are still very young and are founded specifically for business reasons. Specifically in these cases it can be assumed that a specific, sustainable identity is not very well developed. And if an identity is artificially designed, presumably it will encounter major difficulties in being adopted by the club (consisting of all stakeholders), since the authenticity of an identity that has developed over time in an organic way from the original ideal of clubs and associations is likely to be lacking. This could be the focus of further studies.

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