

Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, *Globalization and Football*. London: Sage, 2009, 216 pp.

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Globalization is a term that has prospered as much in the academic sphere as in the journalistic. Whereas *football* as a global event has become omnipresent in the mass media, however, it has not had anything like the same effect in academia. Roland Robertson is a theorist of globalization, while Richard Giulianotti is an expert in the sociology of sport, particularly football. In this book they join forces to achieve two objectives. The first, “to place the analysis of football (...) within the academic mainstream.” The second, “to advance understanding of globalization processes through close investigation of the global game.”

The book comprises five chapters in which the authors unpick the relationship between globalization and football. One chapter each is dedicated to the historical, cultural, economic, political and social aspects of the game. The concept of glocalization (a concept present throughout Robertson’s previous work) gives coherence to the book, and is the thread that links the chapters together. The thesis of the authors derives from how they conceive globalization; they argue that it cannot be understood as an irreconcilable dualism between “local” and “global.” Rather they contend that the opposite is the case, where the global and local spheres fuse to the point where they produce glocalization. The local sphere adapts, moulds and redefines the sense of any global phenomena, with the aim of satisfying its needs, beliefs and particular customs.

In this context, the authors review the factors that have driven the globalization of football, at the same time as they highlight how these forces have been transformed by the local sphere. At the cultural level, they argue that the globalization of football is characterized by a continuous diversity between cultures. The mix of universalism, homogenization, and cosmopolitanism of this global sport-spectacle, produces particular forms that locally relativize its global aspects. For example, the majority of countries have similar league systems, or even compete in common championships, but each region interprets the game in a distinct way, with its particular idiosyncrasies readily apparent to everybody in the global arena.

At the economic level, global impulses convert the biggest clubs into transnational businesses who work closely with multinational businesses of sports clothing, like Adidas or Nike, and communication businesses, such as BSkyB or Canal+. The clubs transcend national barriers, but at the same time maintain very close links with their places of origin, and conserve strong symbolic links with them. The names of the clubs – almost always linked to the city, – its stadium, its local fans and the captains of the teams – who are very frequently nationals – are further examples of this tendency. Similarly, despite the transnationality (a feature intimately related with globalization) of the biggest clubs, there are notable differences in the model of management depending on the country of origin. Many English clubs have entered into the stock market, for example, or been purchased by foreign magnates; while in Spain it is not uncommon for many of the biggest clubs to have a model of management linked to the members, who elect the directors by direct vote.

At the social level, the diffusion of football across the length and breadth of all five continents has led to transnational identities and to common points of contact between fans of different countries. Football is globalized. But at the same time, there are distinct particularities among the fans of each region, who differentiate themselves in their way of supporting their team (for example: the hooligans (in England), the ultras (in Spain), the tifosi (in Italy), and the barras bravas (in Argentina) each have their distinct origins and development that is inextricably tied to their particular country.

Beyond this link of global and local phenomenon in cultural, economic, political and social spheres, the authors develop other interesting ideas linked with other aspects of globalization. In the history chapter, they divide up the history of football into various phases, in parallel with the five sections in which Robertson characterizes globalization. In the chapter dedicated to politics, they strongly argue for a democratization of the international organizations that manage the biggest competitions. In the economic chapter, they analyze the increasing inequality between the biggest and the smallest clubs, on the one hand, and between the regions (Europe and South America), on the other. Finally, at the social level, they reflect on the potential of football to develop a global civil society and collaborate with NGOs in promoting peace, anti-racism and human rights. All this is based on an impressive quantity of information, fruit of an impressive collection and analysis of data.

Do the authors fulfil the declared objectives of the book? The reader is left with the feeling that what is really guiding the analysis is the theoretical framework of globalization that Robertson has put forward in other publications, and that to this structure has been added copious information related to football. More than advance the understanding about the evolution of globalization, the use of football in the book sometimes seems to be an exercise in how to apply a very specific phenomenon to Robertson's concepts. In this sense, on some occasions, the adaption of football to Robertson's theoretical framework seems forced. On other occasions, the reader has the feeling that, in reality, there is simply not so much to football. At times, far from making football more understandable, it becomes more complex. Throughout the book global tendencies are described alongside local peculiarities, in a juxtaposition that at times is very entertaining and at other times difficult to digest. These criticisms should not in any way devalue a work that offers a very original perspective and that, undoubtedly, is set to become a key reference book for any study on the sociology of sport.

Juan-Ignacio Martínez-Pastor

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid