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Architectures, Technologies, and Stadiums Atmospheres

Abstract. The aims of this work are to understand some changes in the behavior of football spectators and fans in the stadium. For that, the analysis considers the architecture of new stadiums in one hand, the evolution of elite football in Europe in another hand, and the links with fans by a sociological approach. The information is coming from academics researches and journalists commentaries. The results show that the necessity to struggle against hooliganism and violence of the ultras, the football spectacle commodification, the building of new sport facilities, and the ticket price policy to make them profitable, induced the gentrification of the public. As a former French professional footballer said, "In the past, the fans encouraged, today, they sing."

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, new stadiums have been built, radically different from the previous ones, with a dual purpose: comfort on the one hand, and commercial on the other. But, what are the consequences for the fans and the atmosphere during matches? With the Covid-19 pandemic, many human activities were affected (professional, commercial, artistic, sports, etc.). Among them, elite football has been interrupted on almost the entire planet and if, during June 2020, certain competitions have resumed, it is behind closed doors that is to say without audience: spectators, supporters, fans, to use the categorization of J.-M. Roux (2014). This question of behind closed doors is controversial, especially among fans (ultras) for whom it is anti-football. In May 2020, more than three hundred European groups of ultras co-signed a press release to express their opposition to the resumption of the championships under these conditions: "We are firmly convinced that returning to the stadium would exclusively serve economic interests [...]. However, we strongly call on the competent bodies to continue to suspend football competitions until going to the stadium has become a habit without risk to public health" (Appadoo, 2020). Therefore, behind closed doors distorts the atmosphere of matches.

This position of the ultras refers to the status the football match occupies in their lives, the importance of participating almost weekly in this festive ritual of communion with the team of which they are fans, in the animation of the stadium and in the atmosphere they help to create which constitutes a good part of the show. Football match is not played only on the pitch, but also in the stands, and more particularly in the club supporters' stands.

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But this position is also linked to the economy that elite football has developed. In particular the dependence on television rights and the fact that the clubs have no financial reserve, like Manchester United, one of the richest in Europe, which asked his supporters to waive the refund of their subscription (Guillou, 2020); or Olympique Lyonnais, which obtained a pre-agreement for a State-guaranteed loan of € 92.6 million (L'Equipe, June 23, 2020). If supporters are aware of the financial risks that clubs face, they dream more of the game than profit (Hernandez, 2020), and today “they are no longer the only ones to say that this [economic] model is not sustainable” (Guillou, 2020).

Transformation of Architectures

However, since the early 2000s, within the framework of projects to organize major international sporting events (continental championships, world cup, multidisciplinary sports games), or in order to have more modern, large and profitable infrastructure, many football stadiums have been built, leading to a change of location for resident teams. In England, we can cite Arsenal, Tottenham, West Ham in London, Manchester City; in Germany, Bayern Munich; in France, Lille OSC, Girondins de Bordeaux, Olympique Lyonnais, OGC Nice; in Portugal, Benfica and Sporting in Lisbon, FC Porto; in Spain, Atlético Madrid, etc. These stadiums are, for the most part, radically different from those existing previously, even if sometimes they are reconstructed on the same site or near the old one (Benfica, Tottenham...).

In the past, two types of stadiums have been built:

1. The stadiums on the British model, properties of the clubs, which have developed a very particular architecture, specific to the exclusivity of the game of football: the stands are parallel and close to the pitch, spectators are close to the players. Enclosed in their neighborhood of origin, surrounded by houses, as for the old stadium of Leicester City FC, Filbert Street, which wall of its south stand was adjoining houses, so no extension was possible. These stadiums, over time, have undergone multiple successive redevelopments and modernizations (Inglis, 1983), producing a very heterogeneous architecture from the different stands, but at the same time charged with the history of the stadium and the club. In France, the stadiums of Lens (Bollaert-Delelis) and Saint-Etienne (Geoffroy-Guichard) are the best examples of this type of architecture.



Illustrations 1 and 2. RC Lens stadium in the 1960s and during Euro 2016 (photos: rights reserved).

2. The other model is the multi-sports stadium, built with public funds, and which can accommodate different sports (football, rugby, athletics, cycling). Its location was generally far from the city center. Separated from the field by a running track and a cycling ring, spectators were far from the spectacle

of the match. Today, the new stadiums, whether they remain inserted in their original urban environment (Arsenal, Tottenham) or moved to the periphery, respond to an architectural model that broadly refers to the ellipse made of two levels of stands, built around a pitch exclusively reserved for football. Designed by specialized and renowned architectural and engineering firms like Populous (formerly HOK Sport), Buro Happold, Arup, etc., these new stadiums are free, internally, of any sign linked to the history of the club. Their name even responds most of the time to the mercantile concerns of naming: Emirates Stadium (Arsenal), Etihad Stadium (Manchester City), Groupama Stadium (Lyon), Orange Vélodrome (Marseille), Matmut Atlantique (Bordeaux); the Allianz company multiplying: Allianz Arena (Munich), Allianz Riviera (Nice), Allianz Parque (Palmeiras Sao Paulo).

Effects of Architectures and Marketing

In a seminal article, Tim Edensor specifies the dialectical conditions for the production of the atmosphere in stadiums:

“The stadium possesses architectonic qualities that promote and contain levels of noise, and organize the distance between fans, and the closeness of fans to the pitch and players. These spatial contexts contribute to atmospheres of varying intensity that continually emerge during a match [...]. Atmosphere is moreover, a co-production that involves players, match organizers and fans. In exploring the importance of atmosphere in the match-day experience, I will subsequently focus on the changing conditions under which contemporary football atmospheres are produced, considering the tensions that emerge when clubs attempt to stage atmosphere, further alienating fans whose are already uncomfortable about stadium relocation, intensified commercialization and growing regulation” (Edensor, 2013, 1).

Thus, the architectural characteristics of the new stadiums, the materials used in their construction produce acoustics which contributes as an important part of the atmosphere of a stadium. In ancient times, theaters were designed to amplify sound. In contemporary architecture, the verticality, the inclination or the height of the stands are important parameters. While the Parc des Princes (Paris) or the Signal Iduna Park (Dortmund) are incredible sound boxes, the Santiago Bernabeu stadium (Real Madrid) or the Camp Nou (FC Barcelona), on the other hand, are too high or curved, and do not offer the possibilities of creating the same atmosphere. As for the Velodrome stadium (Marseille), renovated for the 1998 World Cup, it was a real fiasco, the architect having wanted to make it “a flower open to Provence” (Marchand, 2020), without taking into account the reality of the matches and the ambiance aspirations of supporters.

For Jean-Michel Roux (2014), the reputation of stadiums is based on the representations we have of their atmosphere. Thus, in France, the stadiums of Lens, Saint-Etienne, the Parc des Princes in Paris or the Velodrome in Marseille (especially since its expansion and coverage for Euro 2016) are perceived as exceptional. Because the atmosphere refers to three complementary challenges:

1. The economic issue relating to the sale of an event (the match), the profitability of the equipment itself, the development of the sports show business that is the club;
2. The social challenge which consists in creating and maintaining a collective identity (of the city, of the region), but also of the public as in Lens;

3. The political stake which consists in signifying the advent of a territory, of a nation. However, for Jean-Paul Callède (2016), the “new sports cathedrals” are of unprecedented architectural and monumental audacity, and constitute technological prowess, æsthetic virtuosités, innovation in the way of approaching the sporting spectacle. Christophe Bonnotte (2016) stresses that their vocation is to express a form of power, of authority, that of the private investors in whose name they are made, and whose names they sometimes bear (naming). It is obvious that these stadiums exalt a form of economic power, that of the clubs which built them. However, as indicated above, the economic model is fragile (Martel, 2020; Pedro, 2020).

Jean-Michel Roux (2014) identified that the public is made up of three categories:

1. The spectators, who come to see a show, they want to get their money’s worth;
2. The supporters, who attend a match by supporting one of the two teams, they are stakeholders, they come to encourage their own;
3. The fans (or ultras, socios, torcedores ...), who are committed and militant supporters, who want to weigh collectively on the outcome of the match, to win their team.
4. These last two categories are the atmosphere during the match (but especially the fans), and spectators come to the match for this total spectacle, that of the lawn and the stands.

However, under the effects of the development of hooliganism and the violence of ultras during the decades 1980, 1990 and again 2000, the sports authorities on one hand, political on the other hand. They took drastic measures leading to prohibitions of stadiums for some supporters, the suspension of grandstands, matches behind closed doors, and the prohibition of movement of the supporters to follow their team away. At the same time as this form of ‘sanitation’ was implemented, football changed its economic dimension in particular to the substantial increase in television rights, but also by the substantial increase in the price of subscriptions (+ 1000% between 1991-92 and 2011-12). The result is the gentrification and the aging of the public (average age of 35 years in 1995 to 41 years in 2015) (Auclair, 2020). These new stadiums are built for the television show on one hand (pay channels), and to increase revenues related to hospitality (VIP boxes). Security measures have led to the removal of terraces (standing places) and video surveillance. Moreover, today, in UK, several clubs have reintroduced the terraces because it is a demand from the fans and this allows to create an atmosphere more favorable to the total show. In France, they also led to a ban on the introduction of smoke bombs and their use before the match (and even more during ...). All this of course weighs on the expression of the fans, especially since the clubs organize their own matches in the mode of the spectacle (deafening music, giant screens...), some American-style staging and actions appearing to contradict tradition and being hated by fans like Edensor (2013) give an example in Manchester City.

Thus, a very recent information report made to the National Assembly of the French Republic (Buffet and Sacha, 2020) highlights that a certain number of these measures are liberticidal, and do not respect the law of defense, the perpetrators of the incident not even being heard in the context of an adversarial debate! In addition, the IAS (Interdiction Administrative de Stade / Administrative Stadium Ban), originally designed to combat violence, “is widely used to punish supporters for other acts, mainly the possession or use of smoke bombs” (Pécout, 2020).

Conclusion

Regarding the stadium, Pierre Sansot noted that “it is the noise that gives life and mobility to this heavy material. The clamor, the whistles, the songs, the applause or even the unanimous breathing of the multitude awakens the concrete” (Sansot, 1986, 86). Nowadays, as J.-M. Roux (2014) remarks, stadiums are built by renowned architects, have great technological sophistication, “but their» authenticity “is now manufactured.” Thus, with these new architectures, but also to want to make profitable each component of the club, one smothers the flame of the supporters and the fans. The Premier League show has become a happening for wealthy people.

The sociology of the stands has changed a lot, but so have the stadiums: West Ham (London) lost emotion when leaving Upton Park for the Olympic stadium, Arsenal by choosing the Emirates, Atlético Madrid by leaving Vicente Calderon for the Wanda Metropolitano (Sowden, 2020). Taking up the neologism of tradium forged by John Bale (trade + stadium) (Roux, 2014), it appears that the “intense emotionality” (Sansot, 1986, 74) that spectators, supporters and fans seek through the “experience” has diminished. As former AS Saint-Etienne player Patrick Revelli points out, “the supporters I have known at Geoffroy-Guichard and those of today have nothing to do with it. Before, they were encouraging, now they sing” (quoted in Marchand, 2020).

Few stadiums like Dortmund have the incredible “yellow wall” (gelbe wand), the world’s tallest standing stand (24,454 fans). As Saïd Ennjimi (former French international referee) reports: “In Dortmund, facing the yellow wall, you have to look up. But it also depends on the architecture of the stadium” (Marchand, 2020).

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