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Global and local interactions in football: The changing field of professional football stadiums in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s

Abstract

This article aims to increase understanding of the global-local contexts in football by exploring the changing field of professional football stadiums in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s. More specifically, the cases of two clubs, HJK (Finland) and Ferencvárosi TC (Hungary) are studied. We employ concepts of sport and globalization. The research data consist of semi-structured expert interviews with Finnish and Hungarian football practitioners, media and club documents, and data from observation.

The results suggest that interactions of global and local forces are reflected in the development and operation of stadiums. On one hand, international and national governing bodies have strengthened their control over the different aspects of stadiums, indicating increasing standardization. On the other hand, due to distinct local histories and conditions, the development and management of stadiums have shown dissimilar trajectories, as demonstrated in the Finnish and Hungarian contexts, therefore highlighting both homogenization and heterogenization processes.

Keywords: football, stadium, globalization, Finland, Hungary

Introduction

The marketization of football has resulted in ‘a new generation of facilities which are more than football stadiums’ (Bale 2000, 93). These facilities represent the era of

postmodern stadiums emerging since the 1990s, characterized by increased safety regulations and growing commercial opportunities, which have expanded beyond the match-day (Paramio, Buraimo, and Campos 2008, 521). Accordingly, requirements concerning stadiums have increasingly included commercial elements (Alm 2016, 468). At the same time, the growing integration of television and other media in sports have influenced stadium aesthetics and architecture: the technology available in stadiums has become more relevant and the stadiums are seen on TV screens, therefore they need to be visually attractive (Cairns 2015, 736). Likewise, today's more high-profile cup matches require stadiums that do more than provide on-field entertainment for the spectators in the stands (Kentrotis 2016, 8). Furthermore, new or refurbished football stadiums are mainly built without an athletic track, and dedicated primarily for football (Feddersen and Maennig 2009, 180).

These changes have taken place within a global regulative framework, which reaches beyond the border of countries. As a result, stadiums have begun to look similar from a number of perspectives in professional football (UEFA 2011). The regulative framework includes national and international football authorities, the legal system, the code of corporate governance, and the participation of stakeholders (Hoye 2015, 313). The football authorities consist of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and the national football federations. Requirements concerning the infrastructure in football are included in the UEFA club licence, which was introduced in 2004 (UEFA 2015).

Despite these previously outlined processes that indicate standardization, the field of professional football stadiums has been shaped by complex processes and trajectories in different contexts. This is to say that the local responses to global forces on developing and operating stadiums reveal differences.

Scarce research on less developed football countries

Although football has become increasingly relevant as a terrain for sociological inquiry (Giulianotti and Robertson 2012b, 218), it has been observed that there is a lack of deeper analysis of the different aspects of football in less developed football countries, such as Finland and Hungary. Research on football and globalization so far mainly centred on core football countries (Szabados 2008, 60; Szerovay, Itkonen, and Vehmas 2015, 2) such as England, Germany, Spain, and Italy. In addition, until recent years stadium management within the study of the development of contemporary stadiums has received scant attention from scholars (Paramio, Buraimo, and Campos 2008, 518). It seems, therefore, that there is a lack of basic sociological studies about the context of developing and operating football stadiums in Finland and Hungary. Consequently, this paper attempts to address this hitherto ignored perspective of football and globalization.

The aim of this article is to increase the understanding of football's global and local contexts by discussing and comparing the increasingly complex field in which professional football stadiums have been developed and operated in Finland and Hungary from 2000 to the present. The research questions addressed are the following: In what way has the context of stadium development and management changed in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s? In what way have the practices in managing football stadiums developed in these countries?

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we provide background information about the Finnish and Hungarian football environments and justify why we chose the given countries and clubs. Second, we review the related literature about globalization and football and point out the main perspectives that we apply. Third, we describe the research process. Fourth, in the results and discussion session, we present our analysis of the processes in stadium development and

management in professional football in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s, with a focus on the top clubs of each country, HJK (Helsingin Jalkapalloklubi, from Helsinki) and Ferencvárosi TC (from Budapest), respectively.¹ Finally, we advance our concluding thoughts.

Case studies in the Finnish and Hungarian football contexts

The main scope of this text encompasses men's top-division football in Finland and Hungary. The roots and trajectories of Finnish and Hungarian football can be viewed as considerable different. Organizing sport has been traditionally based on the strong civil sector in Finland, a Nordic country with a population of 5.5 million. Football took off from amateur roots, impeding this way the development of market-oriented activities, and has not been the major spectator sport (Itkonen and Nevala 2007, 13-4). Ice hockey is the main spectator sport in Finland and the only one with a fully professional national league. In contrast, Hungary is a former state-socialist country located in Central Europe with a population of 9.9 million. Football has been the most popular and most practiced sport, and accordingly, has played an essential role in socio-historical processes and the development of social identity (Molnar 2007, 313).

However, these countries' recent performance in men's football and the level of their highest division is rather similar, which makes the comparison of these two contexts in a global framework reasonable. In the international rankings, as reported by the UEFA, the country coefficient ranking for the 2015/16 season is 36th for Finland and 33rd for Hungary out of the 55 member countries (UEFA 2016). These rankings are formed according to the performance of each association's clubs in the past five UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League² seasons. The average position of these countries in the men's World Ranking has been 57th and 52nd for men, as well as 19th and 35th for women, respectively (FIFA 2017).

Most popular football clubs chosen for the case studies

We selected HJK and Ferencvárosi TC because of their exceptional opportunities compared to the average Finnish and Hungarian football clubs due to their role in the national football history and culture, the quality and location of their stadiums, and their relatively large number of fans. In addition, among Finnish and Hungarian clubs, they may have the best possibilities to comply with the requirements of the global football system. The majority of the examples presented in this text deal with these clubs' stadiums. Nevertheless, some comments refer to the professional football environments in general in Finland and Hungary. Our time frame is the 2000s to the present. This period was selected because HJK's home ground Sonera Stadium³ opened in 2000 (HJK n.d.), which initiated a new era of running football stadiums in the Finnish context. The stadium has a capacity of 10,770 (Tuohimaa 2000).

HJK, based in the Finnish capital Helsinki, was founded in 1907 and has won 27 Finnish championships. To date, it is the first and only Finnish club to reach the UEFA Champions League group stage (in 1998) and the UEFA Europa League group stage (in 2014; HJK n.d.). HJK has operated as a private limited company since 2000 and its turnover in 2015 was 5.7 million euros, by far the largest among clubs in the Finnish Veikkausliiga⁴ (Kauppalehti 2016).

Ferencvárosi TC, located in Budapest, was founded in 1899. With 29 championships, it has been the most successful and popular football club to date in Hungary. The club won the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup⁵ in the 1964–65 season and, in 1995, was the first Hungarian club to reach the group phase of the UEFA Champions League. The football section operated as a limited liability company from 1998⁶ to 2002, and as a private company limited by shares since 2002 (Margay 2009). After a number of crises in the 2000s, including exclusion to the second league between 2006 and 2009

due to financial problems, the football section returned to the parent club in 2011. Since then, the football club has gradually strengthened its economic foundation and, in 2014, the club moved to its new stadium, Groupama Aréna, with a capacity of 22,000 (Groupama Aréna 2016). Its turnover amounted to 13 million euros in 2015 (Amadeus 2016), the highest in the OTP Bank Liga.⁷

Globalization of sport as a theoretical framework

This article draws upon concepts related to sport and globalization with the main focus on the interaction of global and local processes. It seems that the relationship between sport and global processes is currently taken as self-evident (Maguire 2015, 519). Sport is perceived as one of the most globalized fields of culture, and thus in itself contributing to globalization (Dóczy 2012, 166). We understand globalization as a multifaceted historical process characterized by fluctuating interdependencies between the local and the global (Giulianotti 2015; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007a; 2009; Itkonen and Nevala 2007; Maguire 2001). Giulianotti and Robertson (2009, 30) emphasize ‘the historical complexity and transnational unevenness of global processes within football.’ Globalization has often been conceptualized by applying the term glocalization, highlighting the global and local interactions and the simultaneous production of both cultural homogenization and heterogenization (Robertson 1995; Giulianotti and Robertson 2009, 46). It is also suggested that local and global power relations related to the production of sport stadiums should be further examined (Horne 2011, 222). The changes brought about by globalization of football have shown varieties in distinct localities, which provide a rich field to study.

We drew on two main theoretical approaches in this article. First, figurational sociology, pioneered by Elias, Dunning, and Maguire, was employed. As a second theoretical lens, glocalization, more specifically, the concept of ‘duality of locality’

coined by Giulianotti and Robertson (2007a; 2009; 2012), was used. In the third sub-chapter of this section, we specify the main elements of these approaches that we applied in this article.

Global processes in football from a figurational sociological standpoint

Figurational sociology may be applied to address the evolution of professional sports, globalization processes in sport, and the development of the global sport formation (Maguire 2001, 5; Murphy, Sheard, and Waddington 2000, 95). In the consideration of football's development and restructuring, globalization and Europeanization processes should form the frame of inquiry (Dunning 1999, 125). Maguire also suggests that, in figurational sociology, a global viewpoint is needed as a frame of reference because it is not sufficient to examine social change as merely an internal development of societies (Maguire 2001, 38). Elias (1986, 156) points out that the developmental paths of different sports can only be explored through detailed empirical studies.

Figurational sociology suggests that 'individuals and institutions are engaged in processes' (Dunning 2010, 16). The figuration may be understood as a web in which people function while interdependently connected, enabled and constrained (Bourke 2003, 175; Dunning 1999). Añorve Añorve (2016, 4) adds that the figuration indicates interdependent people and spaces that form networks. These people and spaces are connected on diverse levels and in many ways. Maguire (2001, 89) points out that global sport figurations are 'shaped and contoured by a range of global flows, particularly of people, technology, capital, mediated images and ideologies'. The increasing player migration and transnational ownerships of football clubs are illustrative examples of the global flows. In the context of this research, the figuration refers to the interconnected actors involved in the development and operation of football stadiums, such as football practitioners of football clubs, employees of stadium

management companies and governing bodies, and as officials of municipalities and governments.

International governing bodies such as the UEFA and the FIFA, together with the media, have gained great financial power within the football figuration. Moreover, club owners have sufficient power to make key decisions (Malcolm 2000, 102). The fans may be seen as the least powerful in the figuration (Dunning 1999, 127). The power ratios across these actors shifted considerably in recent years (Malcolm 2000, 102) and keep changing constantly. At the same time professional football clubs started to operate as companies and the number of stakeholders involved in their operation has grown. Simultaneously, polarization has taken place, for example, through the increasing differences in turnover and uneven access to international tournaments, between the top clubs and the rest in European football.

Glocalization and football

The concept of glocalization reaches beyond the binary oppositions and ‘registers the societal co-presence of sameness and difference, and the intensified interpenetration of the local and the global’ (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b, 168). This is to say ‘the local’ is not merely considered as a pre-given opposition of the global, but can be better captured as a transitional outcome of globalization (Robertson 1995, 40). Within a global framework, local may be seen as necessarily included within the global, consequently, globalization suggests the connecting of localities (Robertson 1995, 34). The local refers to the context in which stadiums operate, including the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. The local is not necessarily homogenous, as within one country the locality of different football clubs and stadiums can be highly distinctive.

Giulianotti and Robertson (2007b, 169) conceptualized glocalization and coined the ‘duality of glocality’, which serves as a useful tool for identifying global and local interactions in football and thus applied a second theoretical lens in this article. According to this concept, homogenization and heterogenization processes appear simultaneously in football (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009, 47). Consequently, ‘commonly diverse’ cultures are created, developing simultaneously, instead of substituting each other (Cowen 2002, 16). In the homogenization-heterogenization debate, homogenization suggests increasing transnational cultural convergence. For example, homogenization processes imply that football is played by the same rules all over the world under the governance of international umbrella organizations. On the other hand, heterogenization arguments posit that global processes support cultural divergence. Heterogenization processes refer to the playing styles, competition formats, and media interpretation that vary across countries (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009, 38). There is a broad range of additional themes that enable the examination of the duality of glocality in football, including fan cultures, referee styles, management practices, professionalization processes of players, and youth football systems (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009, 49; Szerovay and Itkonen 2015).

The ‘unevenness and complexity of global processes’ (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b, 168) should be noted as well. The unevenness may be better grasped through the concept of ‘connectivity’, a term that discloses the social ‘electricity’ of global processes (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009, 135). Connectivity captures, for example, the expansion of transnational contacts between football teams and football officials’ increasing ‘elite socio-political transnationalism’ in governing bodies (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b, 171). Although football clubs have, in general, been increasingly linked on a local and global level (Giulianotti 1999, 24), the connectivity is highly

uneven and may therefore mark sociocultural differences and lead to disconnectivity. For instance, unemployment and poverty impede people's access to sport facilities in developing countries (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b, 171). In professional football, disconnectivity may be exemplified by the limited access of clubs from non-core football countries to participate in UEFA tournaments.

Exploring the changing field of football stadiums in a global-local perspective

Both the concept of duality and glocality and the figurational approach discuss global–local interactions not as binary structures but as multifaceted, dynamic social processes (Giulianotti and Robertson 2012a, 448; Maguire 2001, 39). However, figurational sociology places greater focus on power balances and the unintended consequences resulting from these processes (Maguire 2001, 39). The key perspectives of the figurational approach that we applied in this research comprise the complex and multifaceted development paths in football. This can be exemplified, for example, by studying the changing power balances and interdependencies between the increasing number of actors involved in the field of football stadiums.

Utilizing the concept of the duality of glocality appears to be particularly fruitful in this study, because it enabled the identification of homogenization and heterogenization processes. This is to say the standardized and increasingly detailed regulations reflect homogenization processes as well as intensifying specialization in the operation of stadiums. At the same time, heterogenization processes may be identified. For instance, since the 2014 World Cup, goal-line technology has been used in selected competitions and stadiums (although it had been tested for several years previously) in, for example, the Premier League and the Bundesliga, and the video assistant referee (VAR) has also been tested recently in some series. Both of these uses indicate differentiation between the various levels of football.

Research data and methodology

The key research data used in this study are semi-structured expert interviews carried out for the first author's doctoral dissertation. Altogether 36 interviews were conducted with Finnish and Hungarian football practitioners between February 2014 and July 2016. The fields of expertise of the informants are displayed in Table 1. Purposeful criterion sampling was applied, which aims at the selection of competent informants and suitable cases for in-depth research (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 245). We also employed snowball sampling, which uses participants to find other informants (Sparkes and Smith 2014, 71).

We carried out all the interviews in the mother tongue of the interviewees either in Finnish or in Hungarian. The analysis and writing took place in English, and all the translations were made by the first author, who is fluent in both Finnish and Hungarian. In addition, he played as a semi-professional and professional football player in both countries in the 2000s, which facilitated the access to the interviewees. The quotations presented in the results and discussion section are direct translations from Finnish or Hungarian to English. We completed six interviews via phone, two through Skype, and the remaining 28 in face-to-face sessions. The length of the interviews varied from 30 to 120 minutes, and on average took 70 minutes.

Table 1 Occupation fields of the informants

Domain of football	Type of position	Number of informants	
		Finland	Hungary
National governing body	President or general secretary	3	1
	Employee	2	2
Professional club (board)	Board member and/or owner	4	1
Professional club (executive)	Managing director	3	2
Professional club	Employee (marketing, events)	2	3

Professional club (first team)	Coach	1	1
	Player	4	4
Elite youth club	General manager or manager	2	3
Player union	Managing director	1	1
Football expert	Sport economist	1	3
	Sport sociologist		1
Player agent			1
Media	Journalist	1	1

Note: there are interviewees that are marked to various sections due to multiple roles.

Out of the 36 interviews, four semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in Hungary and three in Finland, conducted in 2016 with football practitioners who have considerable experience in the field of football stadiums, were exceptionally beneficial for this article. We fully transcribed six out of these seven interviews. The informants consisted of the representatives from the football associations (the event manager from Finland, and the chief financial officer and licensing manager from Hungary), the event manager of HJK Ltd, a board member of SJK Ltd (a Veikkausliiga team from Seinäjoki), one current and one former managing directors of the company operating Ferencvárosi TC's stadium (Groupama Aréna),⁸ and the former CEO of the Hungarian Football League.⁹

Furthermore, we utilized a considerable amount of on-line material and documents received from the interviewees about Finnish, Hungarian, and international football. These documents included strategies of the Finnish and Hungarian football associations, websites of the studied football clubs and their stadiums, materials and reports related to the use of stadiums, and regulations and guidelines issued by FIFA and UEFA. During the final stages of the analysis in autumn 2016, two football experts and one of the interviewees were consulted for additional information and clarifications via phone calls lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. Notes were taken during these calls.

In order to deepen the analysis and broaden our perspectives on the research topic, the first author visited three matches on-site and performed observation in 2016. Observation may be used as an additional method of data collection used with other methods (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008, 37), interviews in this case. The three matches comprised HJK–VPS at Sonera Stadium in Helsinki (8 April 2016), SJK–FC Lahti at OmaSp Stadium in Seinäjoki, Finland (23 July 2016), and Ferencvárosi TC–Újpest FC in Groupama Aréna in Budapest, Hungary (23 April 2016). The first author was guided by a host and had the opportunity to access almost all of the spaces in these stadiums, including the dressing rooms, the pitches, and the VIP lounges. Notes were taken during the observations.

We performed a thorough thematic analysis on the interview data. The interview transcripts were imported to Atlas.ti software, which we used as a tool for coding. A coding frame was formed to structure the data as a combination of theory- and data-driven coding (Braun and Clarke 2006). This facilitated continuous two-way traffic between the theory and data. For the main theme of the coding frame, we chose the increasingly detailed regulatory framework that controls and enables the changing field of football stadiums. The research questions of this article were derived from this theme.

Results and discussion

The results section is divided into three parts. First, we explore and compare the themes found in our data related to the changing glocal contexts in which football stadiums have been developed and managed in Finland and Hungary. Second, we identify the themes with regards to the changes and differences in the practical operation of recently built stadiums by providing examples of Sonera Stadium and Groupama Aréna. Finally, we discuss how these changes mirror the broader contexts of Finnish and Hungarian

societies.

The changing context of stadium development and management

Table 2 summarizes the context of developing and operating stadiums in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s in terms of the nature of facility development, stadium ownership, forms of stadium management, and types of potential revenue streams available for the clubs. These revenues may enable the operation of the stadiums and likewise, new stadiums can contribute to earn additional revenues. The left-hand column presents the main themes we identified in our data that reflect global and local interactions. The second column describes the attributes of changes in these countries in general related to the given theme. The third and fourth columns provide specific examples from both countries. Following the table, we elaborate on the specificities and give further examples of the processes in the Finnish and Hungarian settings.

Table 2 Changing glocal context of football stadium development and management in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s

Theme	Common features	Finland	Hungary
Facility development	Complying with UEFA standards	Various actors involved in stadium development	State-driven facility development
Stadium ownership	Football stadiums as state / municipality infrastructure	Shift towards mixed models in the future	State-owned
Stadium management	Commercial actors appearing	Owner, operator, and tenant of the stadium as separate actors	
Broadcasting revenues	Competition with football core countries for viewers	TV broadcast revenues almost absent	Broadcasting rights held by public TV
Commercial revenues	Often lacking market logic	Largest proportion of annual revenues from partners	Central revenue streams from the Football Federation as most relevant

Lack of significant sport business	More market-oriented operation needed	Structure of club budgets unhealthy	Distorted football market
New stadium enables additional revenue streams	Creating new services for consumers both on match-days and non-match-days		
International flow of money	UEFA money relevant for less developed football countries	Lack of success: UEFA coefficient ranking 36th	Lack of success: UEFA coefficient ranking 33rd

The changing landscape of football stadiums in Finland and Hungary

There have been numerous football stadium building and renovation projects in both countries in recent years. In Hungary, these projects have proceeded as part of the framework of the National Stadium Development Programme regulated by a government decree in 2013 (Hungarian Journal 2016), which has heavily financed the construction of new facilities for football. Since the change in the Hungarian political environment after the parliamentary elections of 2010, sport has clearly risen to be a strategic area, which is reflected in the increasing power of the state within the football figuration. In contrast, the figuration of stadium development has developed in a distinct way in Finland: construction projects have been mainly carried out on the municipal level with complementary funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture and UEFA's HatTrick programme. The ministry allocates a maximum of 750,000 euros per project (Haglund 2014). At the same time, the private sector has become increasingly involved, as in the case of OmaSP Stadium in Seinäjoki, home of SJK in the Finnish Veikkausliiga. The infrastructure manager of the Football Association of Finland (FAF) predicts that financing models with an increasing number of stakeholders from different sectors are likely to become common in the near future (T. Auvinen, personal communication). In response to the demands for a longer football season, the environment for year-round training opportunities has developed in both countries

(Football Association of Finland 2016; Hungarian Journal 2016).

Facilities for professional football have to comply with the regulations of the governing bodies. The event manager of the Football Association of Finland pointed out, that 'UEFA's set of rules are certainly clear, but very broad. Probably no other sport has an equally strong umbrella organization that instructs and requires what a match event has to look like' (V. Nylund, interview). Regulations by the UEFA license, introduced in 2004, have covered, for instance, standards for stadium attributes and playing surfaces, requirements for commercial activities, and services for different types of fans. In the beginning, a UEFA licence was necessary to be eligible for the participation in UEFA tournaments, but nowadays 51 out of 54 member associations use a licensing system or regulatory control for their domestic competitions as well (UEFA 2015). The licensing criteria comprise five dimensions: sporting, infrastructure, personnel and administrative, legal, and financial (UEFA 2015, 11).

As for the ownership of the stadiums, they have typically been state or municipality owned in both countries. There are two exceptions in Finland: the OmaSP stadium in Seinäjoki, home of SJK, which was opened in June 2016, and FC Haka's stadium in the city of Valkeakoski, which was owned by the forest industry company UPM until 2014, when it was sold to FC Haka and private individuals (UPM 2014).

The management of the stadiums has seen considerable changes as it has shifted towards a more commercial approach, according to the demands of international competition in football. As a result, in both Groupama Aréna and Sonera Stadium there are separate companies taking care of the management and maintenance of the facilities. Football clubs have come to understand that they need special skills to be able to successfully run these multifunctional facilities. The owners, tenants, and operators of the stadiums have clearly been separated from each other, thus producing lengthening

interdependencies. In their old stadiums (Helsinki Olympic Stadium for HJK, opened in 1938; Flórián Albert Stadium for Ferencvárosi TC, opened in 1974), figurations consisted of different actors and functions. Municipalities typically ran the stadiums and clubs rented them, while the state owned the facilities.

Distinct revenue streams in Finnish and Hungarian football

The revenue streams of professional football clubs are often divided up into broadcasting, commercial, and match-day revenues (Deloitte 2016). There are a number of relevant points to be highlighted related to the revenues of Finnish and Hungarian clubs. In Finland, the income from selling broadcasting rights is practically non-existent (UEFA 2015). In contrast, the Hungarian public broadcasting company MTVA and a partner company bought the broadcasting rights jointly for 12.2 million euros per year (3.54 billion HUF) in 2012 for the period of 2012–2016 (MTVA 2012). The chief financial officer of the Hungarian Football Federation (HFF) confirms that ‘in the case of an average first league club, more than 50 per cent of the revenues come from the HFF in the form of so-called central revenues’ (T. Gudra, interview). Central revenue streams include income from the broadcasting rights, the name sponsorship rights, and the rights of intangible assets in betting. Revenues from merchandise and player transfers are low in both countries, a level which indicates the position of these countries in the player market (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson 2015) and the lack of significant sport business (Poli, Besson, and Ravenel 2013). A former Hungarian national team player, who works as a player agent nowadays commented on the differences of revenue structures across countries: ‘...compared to clubs abroad, [in Hungary] merchandising income hardly exists, and really difficult to count on the ticket sales as well...’ (J. Hrutka, interview). The situation is fairly similar in Finland as well.

Accordingly there is a need for clubs to be more market-oriented in order to achieve long-term viability. The need for more market-oriented operations is reflected in overpriced broadcasting rights and sponsorships that lack real market logic in Hungary. These phenomena have caused a certain distortion in the Hungarian football market, as commented by a sport economist: ‘Today, we can say that the expenditures of our first league clubs consist of one-third real business income, one-third state-related revenue, and one-third loss. Obviously, these proportions cannot be kept up in the long term’ (M. Muszbek, interview, 2014). In Finland, up to 80 per cent of the revenues come from commercial partners, indicating a risky business model. In both countries some clubs have wealthy owners who often pay off the debt.

Nevertheless, potential services in HJK’s and Ferencvárosi TC’s stadiums enable previously missing revenue streams to be acquired. Maximizing both match-day and non-match-day stadium related revenues is essential for professional sports teams to be financially viable (Parrish, Lee, and Kim 2014, 20). For example, according to the former managing director of operator of Groupama Aréna ‘the revenues from the VIP tickets in one season exceed 50 per cent of all ticket sales. I am only talking about the VIP, the skyboxes are separate items on top of that...’ (T. Szekeres, interview, 2016). In addition, offering hospitality to partners in their previous stadium (Flórián Albert Stadium) with no proper premises and personnel was a cost item for the club, whereas Groupama Aréna, with its high-quality VIP spaces and skyboxes, has provided a relevant revenue stream. As for Sonera Stadium, it offers fitness testing, conference venues, and wellbeing services for its clients. A Hungarian sport economist confirms these trends: ‘There is a new pillar brought by international football, the facility has to also attract people other than match-days and generate revenues. In addition, there is a clear shift of focus from individual consumers towards business consumers’ (K. András,

interview). On the basis of these activities, we can conclude that the number of actors and types of connections in the figuration surrounding football games has clearly grown.

The experts interviewed for this study raised potential risks and concerns about the financial viability of the stadiums. The former managing director of the Hungarian Football League, Mihály Muszbek, commented that it is worth asking if the new stadiums respond to actual demand or will they squeeze out already existing, similar services that provide, for example, venues for conferences and other events, commented (interview, 2016). Regarding HJK, Sonera Stadium is expected to be refurbished in the near future with the involvement of the City of Helsinki, HJK, the Football Association of Finland, and private investors. In addition, HJK would like to own the stadium in the future (A. Väinölä, personal communication).

International prize money from UEFA can be a relevant source of income for the top clubs of less developed countries. However, results in recent years have been modest. HJK made it, for example, to the Europa League groups phase in the 2014–15 season. In UEFA's association rankings, the Hungarian and Finnish leagues placed, as of 2016, 33rd and 36th out of 54, respectively. Association ranking is a coefficient calculated from the results of UEFA member association clubs in the last five UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League seasons (UEFA 2016). In addition to prize money, UEFA HatTrick projects for facility development have contributed to the possibility to play football throughout the year (UEFA 2014).

Changing practices in managing football stadiums

Simultaneously with the changing context for stadium development and management, the practices required for the operation of stadiums have been shaped as well. These processes, reflecting a glocal perspective, are presented in Table 3. The left-hand

column of the table displays the main themes we identified in our data. The second column describes the changing processes in these countries in general. The third and fourth columns provide specific examples from Finland and Hungary.

Table 3 Changing practices in football stadium management in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s

Theme	Common features	Finland / Sonera Stadium	Hungary / Groupama Aréna
New stadiums as multifunctional spaces	From multisport stadiums to multifunctional arenas for football and other commercial events		
Stadium maintenance requires knowledge	Specialists appear, in e.g., pitch management, security	Increasingly common football turf	Pitch maintenance becoming sophisticated
New functions that require knowledge	Emerging football match related & other practices	Wellbeing manager hired	Networking for business consumers
Acquiring knowledge	Specialization	Stadium management by local actors (club/municipality) Importing knowledge	Global player entered in stadium management
Learning processes	Adapting imported knowledge to local conditions	Adapting ideas from ice hockey	Selling previously unknown services is challenging
Stadium as a resource for (re)positioning football	Increasing connectedness internationally / globally	Good enough for Europe League games	The first stadium positioned as a conference and event centre

Towards multifunctional arenas

Recently built stadiums represent multifunctional spaces. Apart from being venues for football games, these facilities enable various business activities for a number of stakeholders, which marks a shift in the function of football games as well as in the types of actors involved. For instance, Groupama Aréna has two levels for VIPs and two additional floors with 32 skyboxes. A wide range of events can be organized here,

including conferences, weddings, and cultural events (T. Szekeres, interview, 2016).

These results corroborate the ideas of Bale (1993, 123) who suggests that stadiums have become segmented and specialized spaces in which forms of control are increasingly evident.

Findings from our data analysis also highlight the contrast between old and new stadiums. Considering an ideal venue for football matches, there has been a shift from a multisport stadium towards a multifunctional ‘pure soccer stadium’, which provides spaces for only one sport, football, along with other business activities. The rise in attendance and revenues in these pure soccer stadiums versus multisport facilities has been observed in an empirical study on the economics of sport in German Bundesliga stadiums between 1963 and 2006 (Feddersen and Maennig 2009, 188). The stadiums discussed in our article represent pure soccer stadiums. Good examples of the multisport stadiums are the Helsinki Olympic Stadium and Ferenc Puskás Stadium (opened in 1953) in Budapest. At the time of writing, Ferenc Puskás Stadium is being rebuilt to become a primarily football stadium and to comply with UEFA’s requirements to host four games at the EURO 2020. The match venue manager of the Football Association of Finland reflected on the differences between Helsinki Olympic Stadium, and a stadium built specifically for football in the 2000s: ‘There is no problem with the capacity there [at Helsinki Olympic Stadium], but the services the customers receive are on a different level, [in a football stadium] they have covered and comfortable seats, there is no running track in between, there are no pillars in front of the spectators...’ (V. Nylund, interview).

Emerging practices in stadium management

The maintenance and the increasingly complex regulative framework for football stadiums require learning and know-how, for example in the case of the increasingly

sophisticated pitch management. Here is the license manager of the Hungarian Football Federation commenting on the construction of the pitch in Groupama Aréna: ‘They brought experts from England to work out what different layers of soil have to be laid down and how to place the grass on that’ (G. Reményi, interview). On the other hand, Finnish stadiums have been constructed with football turf, also known as artificial turf, in recent years, which is more suitable for the climate and can be utilized more efficiently.¹⁰ Concerning the regulations on the playing surface, FIFA introduced quality control for football turf in 2001, and since 2004 both natural grass and football turf have been allowed for certain international matches (FIFA 2016).

The evolution of security measures in stadiums is another key theme we identified, especially in the Hungarian context. This area has been characterized by technological development and security concerns and has been increasingly addressed in the literature as well (Paramio, Buraimo, and Campos 2008, 520). Biometric vein scanners have been used in Groupama Aréna, which is one of the strictest existing access control systems. This method analyses the patterns of blood vessels from the surface of the palm. It seems probable that these biometric identifications will spread in the future (T. Szekeres, interview). In addition, compulsory registration of fans was introduced for buying tickets in 2014 by HFF, which resulted in an adverse response from a group of fans, who have since then protested and stayed away from the matches of Ferencvárosi TC. The HFF terminated the measure in 2015, but Ferencvárosi TC has continued to require it (Fekő 2016).

The changing nature of stadiums has resulted in the emergence of new functions. The running of stadiums has become far more complicated, with a number of new actors entering the network, while the practices related to stadium management have consisted of similar tasks across football clubs. These functions are partly linked to the

match event itself, but there are also activities that are not related to football. In order to perform these functions properly, there is a need to develop and learn new practices. For example, recently built stadiums provide services for a range of consumer groups, including business consumers, and this range requires differentiated service design and implementation. The match venue manager of Sonera Stadium pointed out: ‘We have fitness testing equipment and a well-being manager...we don’t need to do this only with perimeter advertising, but we can negotiate versatile contracts with our partners’ (A. Väinölä, interview). The former managing director of the operator company of Groupama Aréna highlighted that, in this new stadium, ‘coming to the match is not only about the football, or a football experience, but it is perfectly suitable for networking and building business relationships’ (T. Szekeres, interview, 2016).

A variety of ways for acquiring knowledge in stadium management

HJK and Ferencvárosi TC have intended to acquire knowledge in a variety of ways in order to be competitive in the national and global football platforms. Both have hired companies that are specialized in running and maintaining stadiums, a move which highlights the homogenization processes. Whereas Ferencvárosi TC made a contract with an experienced multinational company, Lagardère Sports and Entertainment, HJK itself owns Helsinki Stadion Management Ltd (HSM Ltd), which runs Sonera Stadium. The managing director of the operator of Groupama Aréna commented, that ‘Ferencvárosi TC wanted to have a partner, an agency...who has international experience in sport marketing and sport facility management, as the parent company has been active for 20 years in this field’ (C. Siklósi, interview). In addition, international relations have become an increasingly relevant form for networking and acquiring knowledge. A new stadium may boost international relationships because it can be an attractive destination to visit. To illustrate this, the assistant of the operative managing

director of Ferencvárosi TC pointed out that ‘at the previous game we had guests from Rapid Wien [Austria], a German delegation from the parent company [Lagardère Sports and Entertainment] who were interested in the operation of the different sections, and an event management company, who is already our partner, from Hungary...’ (B. Máté, interview).

HJK has exchanged knowledge in connection with its UEFA Champions League and Europa League qualifier and group phase games, for example with the Danish FC Copenhagen (A. Väinölä, interview). Memberships in international organizations and the increasing number of both friendly and official international games clearly demonstrate increasing connectivity to the global flows of football. In addition, football stadiums may be perceived as spaces, which may facilitate the connectedness of football clubs to the global football system. However, when talking about connectivity, we cannot disregard the notion of relative disconnectivity, which is evident when considering the modest achievements of Finnish and Hungarian teams in UEFA’s tournaments at both the club and national-team levels. A further way of acquiring knowledge for clubs has been hiring specialist companies to take care of certain tasks by outsourcing. Typical examples include catering and security management. In Groupama Aréna, the fan shop is outsourced to a subcontractor as well (G. Reményi, interview). The quality of the stadium appears to influence the degree of connectivity in manifold ways.

However, knowledge and know-how cannot be directly copied from other countries, but they have to be adapted to local conditions. Selling services in Groupama Aréna illustrates this aspect well: ‘While, for example, in Germany you can explain your offer via a cold call in a few sentences...in Hungary these services had been unknown...we had to invite the potential clients to a stadium tour and explain and show

everything in detail...’ (C. Siklósi, interview). When building Sonera Stadium in 2000, ideas were adapted from professional ice hockey operations (Aalto et al. 2007, 235).

Stadiums may be used as tools for repositioning the club, or football in general, in a certain country and internationally. The position of these clubs also refers to their relative power within the global football figuration. To illustrate this, the management of Groupama Aréna seems to be aware of their leading position within Hungary: ‘Our goal is to take a kind of pioneering role to show the way [to the other clubs] and, how to put it, deliver a strong European standard’ (C. Siklósi, interview). In the case of Sonera Stadium, ‘the facility may be positioned as suitable for UEFA Europa League games, but for Champions League games it is a bit tight...’ (A. Väinölä, interview). A high quality stadium may, therefore, provide further added value. Nevertheless, the perspectives of these two clubs are, according to the interviewed representatives, fairly discrepant. There is a camera system for analysing games in Groupama Aréna. In addition, according to the CEO of Ferencvárosi TC, the stadium may contribute to the recruitment of new players as well (P. Orosz, interview). In contrast, at HJK Sonera Stadium is seen as part of a larger infrastructure because HSM Ltd also runs other pitches, including facilities for youth teams, throughout the year (A. Väinölä, interview).

Stadium management reflects changes in society

The results of this study revealed that the interaction of the global and local forces is reflected in the development and operation of the stadiums. On the one hand, stadium development and management have taken place in increasingly similar ways within a standardized regulative framework. Stadium operations have been characterized by expanding web of interdependencies and increasing number of actors with diverging interests. Changes have been driven by the relative power relations of actors within the

football figuration, such as clubs, governing bodies, fans, commercial actors, the media, and the state.

On the other hand, local responses on how to develop and manage stadiums vary due to the distinct background of the countries and clubs, as can be seen in the examples of Groupama Aréna and Sonera Stadium. The Finnish football environment has been characterized by a strong civil sector in which volunteers have played a crucial role along with a tradition of amateur football. The Finnish first league, called Veikkausliiga since 1990, has slowly shifted from an amateur to a semi-professional league, in which teams have mainly relied on sponsorship revenues as the main source of income (Szerovay and Itkonen 2015). The size of the stadiums and the playing surfaces has been adjusted to the Finnish football market and climate. In comparison to the situation in Hungary, the role of the media and the state, in providing support in the form of buying broadcasting rights and building facilities, has been much smaller. The fact that football is not the primary spectator sport in the country has influenced the dynamics of stadiums management in manifold ways. This can be illustrated by modest revenue streams as well as by practices copied from the number one spectator sport, ice hockey.

Meanwhile, from 1949 to 1989, Hungary was influenced by the state-driven socialist way of organizing sport, during which state-owned corporations heavily financed elite sport. Since then the system has moved towards operating according to the logic of the market economy. This is underscored by increasing commercial and broadcasting revenues, however, there are also indications of strengthening state involvement in recent years through sponsorships by state-owned companies and broadcasting rights held by public television. In the Hungarian figuration, the state has, since 2010, become anew one of the key actors as sport has gained more significance as a strategic area under the new political leadership, providing both direct and indirect

forms of support to football. The channels through which resources have been granted include facility development, sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and tax schemes.

Conclusions

This article, applying a glocal perspective, has explored the changing nature of football stadium management in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s through case studies of the countries' most prominent football clubs, HJK and Ferencvárosi TC.

We set out to answer two research questions. First, the changes in the context of stadium development and management in Finland and Hungary in the 2000s were discussed. In recent decades international governing bodies such as UEFA and FIFA as well as national football associations have strengthened their control over the various aspects of football stadiums. Increasing control has attempted to ensure the quality of the sport product in different venues. These changes have led to the standardization of stadiums, which can be taken as evidence of homogenization processes in football.

Nevertheless, the themes we identified in our data reflect the interaction of global and local forces and mark the co-presence of both homogenization and heterogenization processes. For example, football stadiums have been built and updated both in Finland and Hungary in recent years, however, the type of actors involved and the way of financing has been considerably different. Commercial actors, such as stadium management companies and other businesses, have gained increasingly active roles in both countries. These actors include the enterprises undertaking the construction of stadiums and companies providing services in the stadium on match-days as well as on other occasions. The revenue structures have differed noticeably in the two contexts. In addition, new stadiums may enable to generate additional revenue streams.

The second research question in this study sought to explore the changing practices in managing football stadiums in these two countries, focusing on HJK's home

ground Sonera Stadium and Ferencvárosi TC's stadium Groupama Aréna. Recently built stadiums are multifunctional arena suitable for football as well as other activities. As a result, stadium maintenance has become more complex and new functions have appeared that require knowledge. For example, considerable specialization has occurred, as in pitch management and security. International knowledge import via memberships in international organizations and the exchange of know-how with foreign clubs have become increasingly common in both settings and are viewed as being beneficial. Parallel to these homogenization processes related to the practices of the stadium management, we could identify processes that imply heterogenization. Stadium management in Sonera Stadium has been taken care of by a company owned by HJK, whereas at Groupama Aréna a multinational company entered the football figuration to run the facility and act as the marketing agency of Ferencvárosi TC. Learning processes have also shown discrepancies. For instance, in the case of Sonera Stadium, examples have often been taken from ice hockey.

These multifaceted developments have been shaped by the interdependencies and power relations in which football practitioners have been bound up in an increasingly complex web of actors. Due to distinct local histories and conditions, the development of football figurations have shown dissimilar trajectories, as demonstrated in the Finnish and Hungarian localities explored in this article. These development paths have reflected the economic, social, and cultural backgrounds of the studied countries.

This article has provided new insights about different ways of responding to the tightening requirements in the field of professional football stadiums as well as about the development of the network of actors involved in the football domain. For instance, varying forms of stadium management, devising commercial services, and importing knowledge presented in this article may be beneficial for organizations and practitioners

in the field of professional sports and sport facility management in Finland and Hungary as well as in other venues with recently developed stadiums.

Future studies could be conducted on football stadiums with a specific focus on certain aspects, such as changes in architecture and design, the evolution of commercial activities in stadiums, and the shifting roles and role expectations of actors participating in stadium maintenance and management. The design and procedures of this research could also be applied in other non-core football countries as well as to other sports that have become increasingly global. As we have shown, context matters, and therefore there is a need of similar undertakings to understand the production, distribution, and consumption of different sport forms in distinct localities.

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1. As measured by the number of championships won by the clubs.
 2. The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) is the umbrella organization of European Football. UEFA Champions League is the highest ranked annual club competition organized by UEFA. UEFA Europe League is the successor of UEFA Cup. Clubs qualify for this competition according to their performance in their national cup competitions and national leagues.
 3. From April 2017, Sonera Stadium has been called Telia 5G Areena. The change occurred when the sponsoring company, TeliaSonera, dropped “Sonera” from its name and was

combined with its subsidiary Tele Finland to create the new Telia brand (Veikkausliiga, 2017).

4. Veikkausliiga has been the top tier of Finnish football since 1990.
5. The Inter-Cities Fairs Cup was a European football competition between 1955 and 1971. It is considered as the predecessor to the UEFA Cup.
6. According to the decision of the Hungarian Football Federation in 1998, only clubs that are business organizations were allowed to participate in the highest division of football.
7. OTP Bank Liga has been the name of the highest division in Hungarian football since 2011.
8. Lagardère Unlimited Solutions Ltd is the operator of the Groupama Aréna and the official marketing agency of Ferencvárosi TC.
9. The Hungarian Football League (MLL) was a sub-organization of the Hungarian Football Federation from 2000 to 2007. The MLL consisted of the teams of the first and second divisions. The MLL was commissioned to organize and run the competitions of the first two divisions (András 2003, 103).
10. In the 2017 season, six out of twelve Veikkausliiga teams played their home games on football turf.

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