

## **Global football in the US market. The internationalization of FC Barcelona and its media coverage**

The aim of this paper was to analyse the media coverage, particularly by US media, of the launch of FC Barcelona in New York (6 to 8 September 2016), when their commercial office in the city was opened. Other specific objectives of the paper were to describe the club's internationalization strategy and to understand how the values of FC Barcelona were portrayed in the media. The authors used methodological triangulation, based on an analysis of the discourse in 199 news items published in the media over three days, 10 press releases by the club, and in-depth interviews with journalists and club directors. The authors concluded that the discourse with two points of focus (one economic and one social) that has been established by FC Barcelona contributes to reinforcing its slogan "more than a club in the world". However, this is not achieved by appealing to traditional values, but through the capacity of the organization to alter and adapt these values to modern times: effort, respect, team work, humility and ambition.

Keywords: FC Barcelona, global sport, New York, media sport complex, multinational entertainment corporations, Catalan identity

Subject classification codes: include these here if the journal requires them.

### **Introduction**

On 7 September 2016, *The New York Times*, and almost a hundred other media outlets, ran articles relating to an item reported by the Associated Press (AP), the main news agency in the United States, on the launch of FC Barcelona (known as "Barça") in New York. The sports editor at AP, Ricardo Zuñiga, began the piece with the following association of ideas: "Barcelona's official moto is 'més que un Club', or 'more than a club' in Catalan language. In an effort to take over the US market, the Spanish soccer powerhouse is showing that it's also a global, multimillion dollar business".<sup>1</sup>

These lines are quite significant if we want to find out how the club is positioning itself internationally: FC Barcelona is portrayed as an icon of the global capitalism that has rapidly transformed the practice of sport and the business of entertainment. Some researchers already assume that the organization is a "multinational entertainment corporation" that can compete with the powerful leisure industry in the USA, which has involved franchises of the MLS, NBA, NFL and other professional leagues for many years.<sup>2</sup>

It is surprising that the AP starts by discussing a slogan “more than a club” that in fact has little to do with the implicit, strictly economic meaning that it is associated with in the news item. We could expect the journalist to elaborate in the body of the article on the historical meaning of “more than a club”, which is associated with the tradition of Catalan nationalism that has taken root in Catalonia<sup>3</sup> since the start of the twentieth century, but this is not the case either. “More than a club” is unquestionably associated with the global nature of the brand, and the transformation of a Spanish football club into a true economic power. Consequently, we could question whether the internationalization of the Barça brand has weakened the organization’s more local values of identity, to adopt other much more universal intangibles, such as those derived from the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals or those that can be attributed to its economic and sports success.

On the basis of these premises, the aim of this study was to analyse how the international press covered the opening of the new FC Barcelona office in New York. Two more specific objectives that emerged were: a) to describe the internationalization strategy of this organization in the US market, and b) to understand how the media communicated the values of the FC Barcelona brand.

### **FC Barcelona as an object of study**

The importance of football in contemporary society and, more specifically, within the global entertainment sector, is considerable. In fact, some authors have noted the existence of a global “media sports complex”, in which sports organizations, sponsors, technology companies, the media and fans interact symbiotically.<sup>4</sup> FC Barcelona is an organization that has been studied from many perspectives (anthropology, sociology, history, economy, management and communication) that address this network of interests between stakeholders from a scientific perspective.

Jordi Josep Salvador approaches the phenomenon from the perspective of social and cultural anthropology, to form a holistic picture of the meaning of FC Barcelona. Some of the questions that guide his research are: Why does Barça take up so much social space in Catalonia? In which kind of society do thousands of people devote a large part of their time to following the fortunes of a football club, and get excited about their goals, their victories or defeats? Why are national speeches formulated in the club’s name?<sup>5</sup> From a sociological perspective, Xifra examines its “religious dimension”<sup>6</sup>, that is, the way the club constitutes a civil religion in that it “synthesizes a panoply of meanings that have snowballed in the club’s century-old history and in the history of the imagined community that is Catalonia”<sup>7</sup>.

In fact, Ginesta<sup>8</sup> provides an insight of how the club has changed from a local institution founded in 1899 in the city of Barcelona, to a global entertainment multinational. In this sense, the author explains a crucial point in the history of the institution when founder and President Joan Gamper (1908) decided to link the values of the club with the flowering Catalan cosmopolitan culture: Catalan regionalism, universalism and democracy. This happened in an era where the club was experiencing a deep economical crisis, and Mr. Gamper understood that the only way to survive was to evolve into an institution that could represent the general interests of the local community. Hereafter,

the history of FC Barcelona has been linked to the evolution of Catalan politics and a turbulent relationship with the rest of Spain.

Different researchers have studied this relationship, above all throughout the years when FC Barcelona and its stadiums (Les Corts and Camp Nou) represented a symbol of Catalanism during Franco's dictatorship in Spain. Badia highlights the significance of President Josep Suñol i Garriga, who was also a regionalist MP in the Spanish Parliament, as the person who managed the club when the Spanish Civil War started (1936-39) and was eventually executed by rebel troops in Madrid.<sup>9</sup> Solé i Sabaté and Finestres<sup>10</sup>, as well as professor Santacana<sup>11</sup>, analyse the relationship between the club and Francoist institutions. Santacana explains how President Narcís de Carreras formulated the slogan "More than a club" in 1968, during his first speech as the President of the club. Although the board of directors of the club included different political sensibilities, President de Carreras had two significant advisors: Agustí Montal and Raimon Carrasco. Both members were linked to the future Catalan nationalist leader Jordi Pujol i Soley, who was a young member of the Francoist political dissent at that moment and who, when Franco died, became the Catalan regional President from 1980 to 2003.<sup>12</sup>

The political dimension of FC Barcelona and its relationship with the identity of fans have also been analysed by Barceló, Clinton and Samper-Seró.<sup>13</sup> Their work examines the relationship between national identity, social institutions and political values. The results show how the oldest groups of fans tended to use Barça as an escape valve, intertwined with Catalan nationalism and political freedom. In contrast, the young fans reproduce the old discourse, but leave aside the political values that were formerly attached to the idea of the club.<sup>14</sup> Taking into account the association between FC Barcelona and the political history of Spain, studies by O'Brian<sup>15</sup>, Rodríguez Ortega<sup>16</sup>, as well as López-González, Guerrero-Solé and Haynes<sup>17</sup>, compare the values and corporate identity of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid. In fact, although both clubs currently internationalize their brands, their political positioning inside the national market is totally opposed. As López-González, Guerrero-Solé and Haynes state: "The *clásico* has been frequently framed as a clash between two national identities that goes beyond its sportive dimension".<sup>18</sup> While FC Barcelona has been linked to Catalan nationalism since 1908, Real Madrid assumed a role of Spanish cultural ambassador during the regime of Franco. However, journalistic discourse analysis of the *clásico* in contemporary times shows that "the sport-based resources are enough for controversy generation, considering sport is competition and therefore conflict, and consequently the necessary ingredients to manufacture it are provided".<sup>19</sup>

Barça's strong political identification within Spain could have been diluted from the moment that it decided to globalize its brand, particularly from 2003 onwards. Various authors have studied the transformation of the club into a global sports organization. From a geographical perspective, Hunter Shobe considers that "FC Barcelona provides a compelling case for examining the impact of globalization on the place/identity role of football clubs".<sup>20</sup> In addition, Hamill, Walters and Watson<sup>21</sup>, as well as Gil-Lafuente,<sup>22</sup> Murillo and Murillo<sup>23</sup> and Soriano<sup>24</sup> analyse the globalization of the Barça brand, taking as a starting point the disciplines of management and strategic marketing. Finally, Ginesta has described the internationalization of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, comparing these

two actors within the theoretical media sports complex, and reaching the conclusion that these are new multinational companies in the leisure industry:

“These clubs comprise a new model of multinational companies in the leisure industry because, aside from the football show (which has been exported and is shown in the media worldwide), these organizations offer a range of products that are complementary to this show (as well as communication products) that are launched on an international market and enable fans to show their passion for the club’s colours in all areas of daily life.”<sup>25</sup>

In the same article, the author asks whether the next step will be the creation of theme parks or “cities of members”, similar to the structure of Disney parks. In fact, both clubs have recently presented projects with plans to build theme parks in the future.<sup>26</sup> In 2015, Real Madrid and RAK Investment Authority unsuccessfully proposed a theme park in the Emirates. In 2017, FC Barcelona and the Chinese company Mission Hills Group presented a project to create a new fandom area in Hainan Island that will help to consolidate the positioning of FC Barcelona in the Asian market. However, neither Barcelona nor Madrid are pioneers in the international expansion of football brands.

### **Internationalization of European football: Manchester United, a pioneer**

With the arrival of Florentino Pérez as the President of Real Madrid in 2000, and Joan Laporta as the President of FC Barcelona in 2003, the global reach of both brands began to expand in a way that reflected how this had been achieved at Manchester United (MU) under Peter Kenyon as deputy chief executive from 1997 and subsequently chief executive.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, a book by David L. Andrews published in 2004 and entitled *Manchester United: A Thematic Study* could be an extremely relevant reference to study this case. As Rosaaen and Amis<sup>28</sup> explained, Peter Kenyon directed the club’s international expansion through the subsidiary Manchester United International, using the Internet as a tool to boost B2B and B2C relationships with its audiences. The British club consolidated its expansion with certain actions that would subsequently be implemented by most of the large European clubs<sup>29</sup>. The first was signing sponsorship agreements with global brands. For example, in 2001, MU signed an agreement for 30 million pounds with Vodafone AirTouch for four years, so that the telecommunications company could advertise on the team’s shirt.

Second, collaboration agreements were signed with sports organizations in other markets. In 2001, MU signed an agreement with the New York Yankees (MLB) to collaborate on the global expansion of both sports brands. For example, the British club’s matches could be seen in the United States through YES, a subscription television network that belonged to the franchise.

Third, MU sought new agreements with communication companies and ICT companies to broadcast content. In 2002, MU joined with Terra Lycos to exploit the Club’s content on the Internet for non-British fans. Finally, the developed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects, including an agreement made with Unicef.

The management model's economic success can be illustrated by the evolution of the British club's revenue, in comparison, for example, with that of FC Barcelona in the decade 1993-2003. In financial year 1995-1996, both clubs had similar income (58 million euros for the Catalan club and 62 million for the British club), but at the end of the 2002-2003 season, MU had revenue of 251 million and FC Barcelona just under 150 million (123 m)<sup>30</sup>. With these figures, MU had become a benchmark in the internationalization of the football industry, even for Barça and Real Madrid. In fact, following the British example, Ginesta<sup>31</sup> noted the first attempts of the main Spanish clubs to penetrate the US market during the first decade of this century.

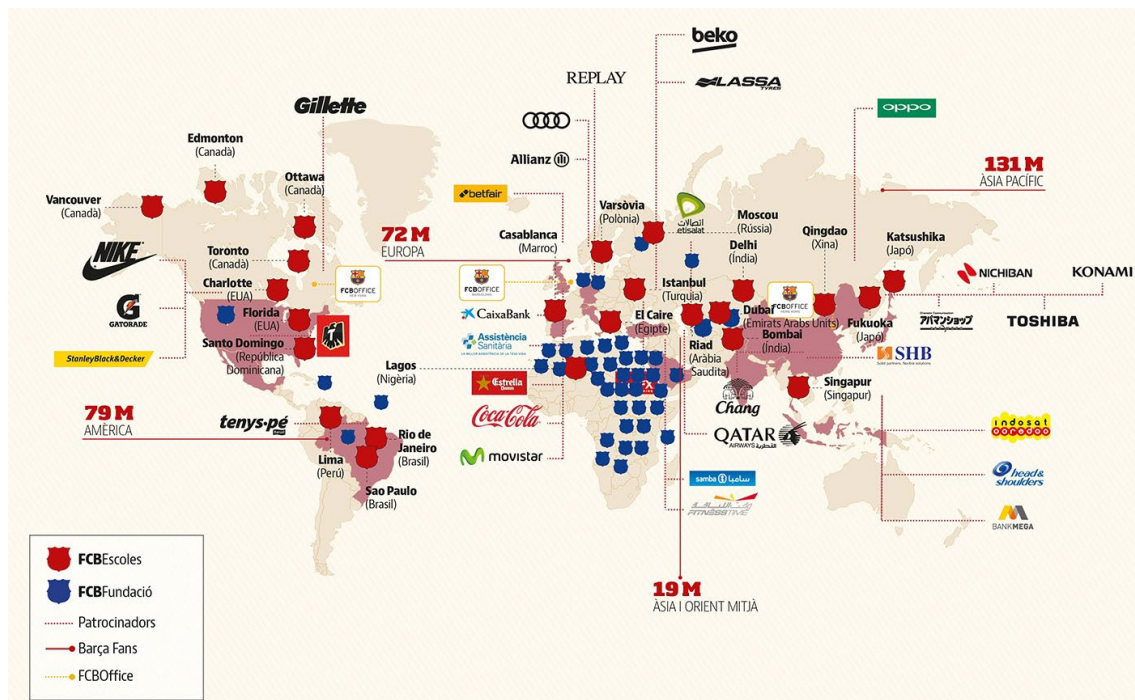
### **FC Barcelona: from the Miami franchise to the strategy of regional partners**

Although FC Barcelona has been present in the US market through its pre-season tours since 2003 (Real Madrid arrived in 2005)<sup>32</sup>, the most significant step that Spanish football took to consolidate its position in the US market, prior to the opening of the FC Barcelona office in New York, was the attempt by FC Barcelona to become the owner of an MLS franchise.

In May 2008, FC Barcelona signed a partnership contract to work strategically with the MLS, according to which the Catalan club would play six matches in the USA between 2009 and 2013, would be among the sponsors of the league, could sign bilateral commercial agreements with US companies, and could opt to purchase a franchise from 2010 onwards. On 15 October 2008, FC Barcelona and an investment group led by the Bolivian Marcelo Claire submitted an offer to become new owners of one of the new franchises, located in Miami. However, the US recession of 2009 and the resulting instability meant that in March 2009 the MLS, FC Barcelona and Claire agreed to "reject the candidacy of Miami as a new franchise in the process of expansion of the MLS"<sup>33</sup>.

The arrival of Sandro Rosell as new president of the club in 2010, and his successor Josep Maria Bartomeu in 2014, led to a redefinition of the entity's commercial strategy to seek new sources of revenue. As Ginesta and San Eugenio explain, the main innovation was negotiation with the first commercial sponsor of the first team's shirt: Qatar Sports Investment (QSI) and Qatar Airways.<sup>34</sup> The relationship with QSI continued until the end of the 2016-2017 season, when the club incorporated the Japanese online sales company Rakuten as global partner and sponsor of the shirt. For five seasons, Rakuten will pay FC Barcelona the fixed sum of 55 million per season.<sup>35</sup> When Sandro Rosell was president, the club also implemented a strategy of regional partners in different geographic areas: these sponsors only advertise in the areas of influence of their brands, to avoid clashing with the official sponsors of the club.<sup>36</sup> Some examples are significant (Graph 1), such as the incorporation of breweries as regional sponsors in Thailand (Chang), which do not compete with Estrella Damm, one of the seven global partners.

Graph 1. Presence of FC Barcelona in the world (football schools, funding projects, sponsors, commercial offices and millions of fans) in 2016<sup>37</sup>



The search for regional sponsors was accompanied by the opening of the first commercial delegation of the club in Hong Kong (2013), to compete directly with the football brand that has the most penetration in the Asian market: MU.<sup>38</sup> The benefits of this commercial action were unexpected, and by the end of a year, FC Barcelona had already recovered its investment through the sponsorship deals that it made, particularly with Suning for 1.3 million euros.<sup>39</sup> In total, in 2014 the club could compensate for the loss of 10 million euros for the cancellation of contracts with Televisión de Catalunya, Turkish Airlines, the insurance company Regal and the chain of sports clothing Intersport, through the signing of other regional sponsorship deals for a value of 19 million euros.<sup>40</sup> The office that opened in the USA was the club's second and joins the office that Bayern Munich has had in New York since summer 2016.<sup>41</sup>

### Football, public diplomacy and sports diplomacy

FC Barcelona has also been analysed from the perspective of public relations, and public diplomacy in particular. Public diplomacy represents the natural evolution of traditional or state diplomacy towards the establishment of a new form of international relations, this being based on co-participation between governments and civil society. Manuel Castells defines public diplomacy in the following terms:

“Public diplomacy is not propaganda; and it is not government diplomacy. We do not need to utilise a new concept to define traditional practices of diplomacy. Public diplomacy is diplomacy of public opinion, that is, the projection of the values and ideas of the public onto the international sphere.”<sup>42</sup>

For Cull, sports diplomacy forms part of “cultural diplomacy”<sup>43</sup>. This lies within the more general framework of public diplomacy, which goes beyond traditional government diplomacy. In this vein, using the case study of the FIFA World Cup held in South Africa

in 2010, Ndlovu<sup>44</sup> offers evidence of football's contribution to a country's international positioning strategy in terms of cultural diplomacy and foreign policy. Chehabi traces the origins of sports diplomacy back to the World Table Tennis Championships held in Japan in 1971, when 'ping pong diplomacy' was deployed with the invitation of the US team to China, in an event that included an official visit by US President Richard Nixon.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Murray summarises sports diplomacy in the following terms:

"It involves representative and diplomatic activities undertaken by sports people on behalf of and in conjunction with their governments. The practice is facilitated by traditional diplomacy and uses sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organizations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government's foreign policy goals."<sup>46</sup>

On the basis of the definitions provided by Castells, Cull and Murray, this concept of sports diplomacy has been used by De San Eugenio, Ginesta and Xifra to study the impact of FC Barcelona as a mediator of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.<sup>47</sup> In the same area, numerous studies have examined Barça's role as an ambassador of Unicef from 2006, or more recently the strategy of country branding associated with the QSI sponsorship.<sup>48</sup>

In a study by Ginesta and De San Eugenio on the internationalization of the Qatar brand through sports, the relationship between the Emirate and the club is considered a key factor in the analysis of Qatar's international placement strategy and in the assessment of how football is used politically to legitimise the interests of a government that has been widely critiqued due to its lack of democratic practices.<sup>49</sup> In addition, FC Barcelona can be seen as a corporate<sup>50</sup> or cultural ambassador of its region (Catalonia, Spain) or its city of reference (Barcelona).

## **Method**

The research presented below used methodological triangulation, based on an analysis of the discourse in news items published in the media between 6 and 8 September 2016, which is when FC Barcelona opened its office in New York; a review of the information sent by the club's press office to the media; and two in-depth interviews with professionals who experienced the event in first person.

Discourse analysis was performed on a sample of 199 news items, taken from the club's archive of clippings. These were divided into 144 press cuttings, 51 pieces broadcast on television and 4 radio pieces. Ten of the items were press releases by the club. Pedro Santander states that "discourse analysts face the challenge of gaining conceptual knowledge in accordance with the research problem that they tackle each time"<sup>51</sup>. However, this technique plays an important, but complementary, role for the researcher: "There is not just one model of analysis that can be used each time. Instead, discourse analysis always varies depending on the interests behind the research, and the hypotheses or objectives that are established"<sup>52</sup>.

Regarding the in-depth interviews, De Miguel clarifies their usefulness for extracting comparable data on the basis of a “list of items or topics that need to be covered, but without using a formal questionnaire to guide the order and content of the questions”.<sup>53</sup> In this study, we interviewed Manel Arroyo, Vice-President of Marketing and Communication at FC Barcelona, and Joan Poquí, who was the correspondent in New York for the newspaper *Mundo Deportivo*, founded in 1906.

## Results

The opening of FC Barcelona’s commercial office in New York on 6 September 2016 was accompanied by other institutional social events that revealed the interest of the club in the US market. On 6 September, the club presented its FutbolNet Project –associated with its foundation – in the Bronx, held a lunch for major US companies in the famous 21 Club restaurant, and finally the Empire State Building was lit up with the blue and deep red colours of the club. On 7 September, the tenth anniversary of the agreement between Barça and Unicef was celebrated at the Headquarters of the United Nations, and a reception was organized in the headquarters of the club’s supporters in New York. These events were what focused the interest of the media addressed in this study. As shown in Table 1, 65.8% of the news items were published by US media outlets.

Table 1. List of countries and type of media that covered the news examined in this study<sup>54</sup>

Country	Television	Radio	Newspaper	Total
Argentina	1	0	0	1
Bangladesh	0	0	2	2
Canada	0	0	2	2
Chile	0	0	2	2
Spain	0	0	20	20
France	0	0	1	1
Germany	0	0	1	1
Greece	0	0	1	1
Hungary	0	0	1	1
India	0	0	4	4
Indonesia	1	0	1	2
Ireland	0	0	1	1
Israel	0	0	1	1
Malaysia	0	0	1	1
Mexico	0	0	4	4
Netherlands	0	0	1	1
Pakistan	0	0	1	1
Peru	0	0	3	3
Portugal	0	0	1	1
Qatar	0	0	2	2
South Africa	0	0	1	1
United Arab Emirates	0	0	1	1
United Kingdom	2	0	12	14
USA	47	4	80	131



<b>Total</b>	51	4	144	<b>199</b>
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The media in up to 24 countries reported this news. The US media were followed by outlets in Spain (10% of the news items) and the United Kingdom (7%). This table also shows that news of FC Barcelona's arrival in New York was only published twice by the media in Qatar. This is surprising given the importance the Qatar government gave during seven years to the relationship between its QSI investment fund and FC Barcelona. As shown by Ginesta and San Eugenio<sup>55</sup>, the Qatar government used the international reputation of the Barça brand – among other factors – to coordinate its *paradiplomatic* strategy and gain geopolitical influence.

To examine the content of the news items, first we identified the focuses of the selected pieces. We determined that there were four main focuses in the 199 pieces. We then used these focuses in an initial assessment of content. Out of the 199 news items, 176 (88.4%) described the opening of the New York office from an economic perspective, that is, they put the action into the context of the club's strategy of regional partners and its need to enter new markets. The main argument in fourteen pieces (7%) was the sporting success of Barça and its capacity to promote football in the USA. Eight pieces (4.02%) centred on an analysis of FC Barcelona's social action in New York. Finally, only one piece could be considered to have a political focus, although it did not relate FC Barcelona with its original political values. This is a piece about the entity's institutional policy and the court proceedings in which it is involved.

Table 2. Focus of the news items published about the opening of the FC Barcelona office in New York<sup>56</sup>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Sports success</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Total</b>
Argentina	0	0	1	0	1
Bangladesh	2	0	0	0	2
Canada	2	0	0	0	2
Chile	1	0	1	0	2
Spain	17	1	2	3	20
France	1	0	0	0	1
Germany	1	0	0	0	1
Greece	1	0	0	0	1
Hungary	1	0	0	0	1
India	4	0	0	0	4
Indonesia	2	0	0	1	2
Ireland	1	0	0	1	1
Israel	1	0	0	0	1
Malaysia	1	0	0	0	1
Mexico	4	0	0	0	4
Netherlands	1	0	0	0	1
Pakistan	1	0	0	0	1
Peru	3	0	0	0	3
Portugal	1	0	0	0	1
Qatar	2	0	0	0	2
South Africa	0	0	1	0	1

United Arab Emirates	1	0	0	0	1
United Kingdom	10	0	4	1	14
USA	128	0	3	2	131
<b>Total</b>	176	1	14	8	199

### A global brand seeking new markets

The popularity of the Barça brand is the aspect that most of the media highlighted: the opening of a New York office illustrates its global nature and its goal of getting closer to future sponsors and fans on the five continents. The club’s global nature has been intrinsically linked to its sports success, particularly since 2006, and the presence of great footballers on its team. This is explained by AP in a report by the news agency that was reproduced in 95 other news outlets:

“Looking to capitalize on its biggest assets –superstars like Lionel Messi and Neymar– and the growing popularity of soccer in the US, Barcelona opened a commercial office in New York that will lead the team’s efforts to expand its business, gain more fans across the Atlantic and help the sport grow in America”.<sup>57</sup>

*Fast Company*, a business magazine, sums up why FC Barcelona is an icon of global football:

“The club is an icon of global football through a combination of its superstar players and rich history, and most recently ranked third on Forbes' annual list of the world’s most valuable sports franchise, as well as the top sports team on social media.”<sup>23</sup>

This publication considered that the opening of the New York office was a vital step in the club’s process of internationalization, particularly taking into account that most of its sponsors are US companies at present: “A significant portion of its revenue comes from U.S.-based brand partnerships with companies like Nike, Gatorade, Black & Decker, and Gillette”.<sup>22</sup> The opportunity provided by the US market to increase the club’s resources is a recurring theme in all of the news coverage. For example, *The Guardian* stated: “Barcelona’s US push is part of a drive to boost income to €1bn (\$1.1bn) by 2021”.<sup>11</sup>

Some media outlets discussed one specific aspect in relation to the club’s new business opportunities: the brand’s penetration into women’s football in the USA, as FC Barcelona has expressed an interest in a franchise in the National Women’s Soccer League. Five of the fourteen news items with a sports focus (CBS Sports, ESPN, *Excelle Sports*, *The Guardian* and Sky Sports) addressed this subject and highlighted the ties between the club and the development of women’s football in the United States. In fact, the FC Barcelona amateur women’s team was created in 1970, and was professionalised by FC Barcelona in 2015.<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, the *clásico* rival, Real Madrid, does not have such a team.

Hence, the US women's football market appears to be a huge opportunity for the Catalan club in order to compete in a market which its most important Spanish rival can not occupy. Football is one of the sports that are practiced most by teenage girls in the USA. A survey of the ESPN among 400,000 sports fans showed that football was the second most followed sport for teenagers between 12 and 17 years old.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, in 2015 almost half a million girls aged between 14 and 18 years old practised this sport regularly, and 1,557 universities have women's football teams.<sup>60</sup> The final of the FIFA Women's Football World Championship in 2015, between the United States and Japan, attracted 28 million television viewers in the US. This match had more television viewers than the last game of the NBA finals of the same season, between Golden State Warriors and Cleveland Cavaliers (23.25 million).<sup>61</sup>

Most of the media outlets used statements by Vice-President Manel Arroyo to explain why the club had decided to open a New York office. Some influential media outlets such as *The Mirror*, *LA Times* or the FOX news channel expressed Barça's interest in the US market through the words of its Vice-President, who was also interviewed by the researchers of this paper. For example, the *LA Times* reported:

“We are here with one focus. That is to be present in the market looking for opportunities for sponsors for our club,” said Manel Arroyo [...] “Just looking for companies that can use our club, our brand to expand and to promote the brands globally.”<sup>18</sup>

The New York commercial office shows that FC Barcelona considers the US market to be of strategic importance. However, as noted by FOX, the global nature of the Barça brand means that it constantly needs to explore new markets:

“New York will not be the last office that we open. We fervently believe that we need a greater presence in China and the Southern Cone of South America. Brazil is one of our strategic targets and we are sure that these new supports will be decisive for sustaining the Club's position among the top three sports clubs in the world,” Arroyo said...<sup>20</sup>

### **An economic discourse tempered by social responsibility**

FC Barcelona as a multinational entertainment corporation – some media outlets such as *Fast Company* classified it as a franchise for good reason<sup>62</sup> – was the main argument in news items published about the events of 6 September. However, the lighting up of the Empire State Building and the Unicef event at the Headquarters of the United Nations meant that some media reported the news from a much more social angle (4.02%). The *Sports Pro* website drew these conclusions:

“Barça has increased its annual contribution [to Unicef] to two million euros, which is a 33.3% increase. On the back of the shirt, the Unicef logo is printed in a

place that could bring in revenue in the order of 17 to 20 million euros if a deal was made with another organization.”<sup>25</sup>

Zee News television channel (India) also highlighted FC Barcelona’s commitment to Unicef in its coverage of the lighting up of the Empire State Building:

“The tribute at sundown marks the Spanish champions’ arrival in the Big Apple, where they opened an office on Park Avenue on Tuesday and are commemorating a 10-year charity partnership with UNICEF”.<sup>28</sup>

The media that reported the opening of the New York office in economic terms mainly quoted the words of Manel Arroyo. In contrast, media outlets that highlighted FC Barcelona’s social responsibility projects used the words of the club’s president, Josep Maria Bartomeu, to talk about these. His voice is much more institutional, and always associated the global nature of Barça with the adoption of universal values, which are also shared by Unicef. This was how *Fast Company* reported the news on 7 September:

“Club president Josep Maria Bartomeu says that now was the right time, given the club's academy commitments, brand business relationships, and its work with UNICEF and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.”<sup>26</sup>

Although some media outlets highlighted the social values that are intrinsically associated with the Barça brand, the economic argument was predominant in most of the news items (88.4%). When Arroyo was interviewed for this research, he adopted this main angle:

“Football grows in such a way that you always need more income. The public demand that you win, but to win you need to be competitive, and to be competitive you need to win. It’s the old dilemma between the founding principles of the club and its real needs. It’s true that Barça’s objective is not to earn money, but to keep the machinery moving you need a lot of it. I repeat: the objective [in New York] is totally commercial” (M. Arroyo, personal interview, 07/01/2017).

This aspect contrasts with the balance between the commercial and social vocation of FC Barcelona that is presented in the ten press releases the club issued at the time of the New York opening. All of them refer to social responsibility projects developed by the club through its foundation. This can be illustrated by two very interesting press releases. In a press release summing up the meeting with businessmen and executives at the 21 Club, the first quote, attributed to Arroyo, states: “Barça’s goal is to solidify its status as a leader in world football while continuing to succeed on the field and on the balance sheet with a sustainable project, while also maintaining its social commitment to helping the world’s children”.<sup>63</sup> On the same day, the club issued a second press release before the broadcasting of an interview with Arroyo on the club’s official television channel. The title was: “The main objective is commercial, but we must also transmit our values”.<sup>64</sup>

## **A more multinational Barça than just an ambassador for the city**

FC Barcelona was received in New York as an ambassador of the universal values promoted by Unicef. In fact, the evolution of its traditional slogan “more than a club” to “more than a club in the world”<sup>65</sup>, which was introduced by President Joan Laporta in 2006 when the Unicef agreement was signed, recognises this redefinition of traditional values proposed by President Gamper in 1908 (pro-Catalan, democracy, multi-sports and universality)<sup>66</sup> in a globalized, multicultural environment. The *Mundo Deportivo* journalist, Joan Poquí, also assumed that, along with Laporta, Unicef was essential to the club’s positioning strategy:

“What Barça does with Unicef is make a pledge to social commitment. This has been maintained. But now it is not the club’s main commitment. In 2006, Unicef was on the chest [of the shirts] as an emblem [of the organization]; not any more, now everything is about marketing.” (J. Poquí, personal interview, 29/12/2016).

In the current context, Ricardo Zúñiga’s (AP) interpretation of the club’s slogan is interesting. In his news agency press release, “more than a club” is intrinsically linked with the description of FC Barcelona as a “global multimillion dollar business”.<sup>67</sup> It is surprising to see how this slogan, first adopted by President Narcís de Carreras in 1968 and transformed into “more than just a club in the world” by Joan Laporta’s board of directors, was associated by 95 international media outlets strictly with economic values when FC Barcelona opened its permanent office in the USA.

Significantly, none of the news items published at the time of the opening had a clearly political angle, that is, linking the club to its historical commitment as an ambassador of Catalanism and Catalan culture according to its founding values. The media that were analysed (Table 2) did not take into account this perspective when they analysed the global nature and social complexity of FC Barcelona. Although many used the word “Catalan” to describe the geographic origin of the club (CNN, *Récord*, *Goal.com*, *Soccer Laduma*, etc.), they did not go into its historical and cultural roots in greater depth.

In fact, the historical rivalry with Real Madrid, based on a “clash between two national identities” –as López-González, Guerrero-Solé and Haynes<sup>68</sup> state– disappears in the global market. Both clubs have adapted their historical values to a new context of globalisation. On the one hand, the current corporate values of FC Barcelona are effort, respect, teamwork, humility and ambition<sup>69</sup>. On the other hand, Real Madrid does not differ much to FC Barcelona. Real Madrid’s corporate values are respect, teamwork, transparency, solidarity, commitment, equality and motivation.<sup>70</sup>

As mentioned above, only one news item (published by Eurosport) referred to the institutional life of FC Barcelona and its governance, focusing on ongoing legal proceedings relating to discrepancies in the club’s accounting and involving the board of directors under Joan Laporta and Sandro Rosell.<sup>71</sup> The particular idiosyncrasy of the club –the fact that it is not a public limited sports company, but an association that belongs to its members and has strong roots in social and political life in its region of origin– was the aspect that was stressed least in the ten press releases issued by the club. Instead, the club presented its social vocation from the perspective of the universality of its social

values (particularly the fight against poverty) and the characteristics of the FutbolNet project that has been implemented in 46 countries already, adopting the current corporate values of the club as the bases of the project.

The idea that FC Barcelona has been the best ambassador of its city in recent years, particularly when new generations of fans do not remember the success of the 1992 Olympics<sup>72</sup>, was not expressed in the reports by the media outlets that covered these events. Not one of the news items analysed used the angle of Barcelona as the place of origin of the club. This approach contrasts with the club's press releases. In fact, in a press release describing the new offices in New York, the club explains that "there are constant mentions of Barcelona" in the office, and states that the entrance to the office is presided over by an "aerial view of the city".<sup>73</sup> In this respect, the club was not capable in its first impact on the US media of showing its *paradiplomatic* role for its city and region of origin, if it is what Cull or Ndlovu consider an agent of "cultural diplomacy"<sup>74</sup>.

### **Conclusions and research perspectives**

The idea that, in its process of internationalization, FC Barcelona is an ambassador for its city (Barcelona) and region of origin (Catalonia) can be qualified by its entry into the United States on 6 to 8 September 2016. Of the 199 news items analysed, 176 framed the news from a strictly economic perspective, which contributes to the club's definition as a "multinational entertainment corporation"<sup>75</sup> that some authors have already adopted. In that sense, the international expansion of the FC Barcelona brand, as well as those of Real Madrid, Bayern Munich or Manchester United, can be exemplified using the concept of *disneyisation*.<sup>76</sup> Football clubs, conceived as entertainment multinationals, wish to offer fans a broad portfolio of experiences and not just a sole live performance on a pitch. Hence commercial offices abroad are essential for finding new regional partners: not only new sponsors but also other companies with whom to develop new business opportunities in common.

The news coverage of the events that were organized portrays a "Catalan giant"<sup>77</sup> seeking new markets to boost its revenue. However, the economic discourse is tempered by the club's corporate social responsibility projects, revealed when FC Barcelona associates its values with those of Unicef. Clearly, this charity agreement is important for the club. Although it needs to increase revenue to maintain its competitive level, as explained by Vice-President Arroyo, and this has forced the club to sign commercial sponsorship deals for the first team's shirt (with Qatar Airways or Rakuten), it has kept the agreement with Unicef, and even increased the amount it donates to the organization to 2 million euros. This action means that it continues to stand out from the rest of its competitors.

However, the club's press releases give little importance to FC Barcelona's exceptional legal status (a not-for-profit association) in the great market of the sports industry. This does not help the club to be perceived as an organization other than a franchise that has social responsibility projects. The definition of the club as a "franchise" by the prestigious *Fast Company* is a clear sign that, at international level, FC Barcelona is not necessarily perceived as an organization that differs from participants in the major US leagues (NFL, MLB, NHL, NBA and MLS).

The club's discourse at its New York events had two angles (the more economic voice of Manel Arroyo, Vice-President and the more social voice of Josep M. Bartomeu, President). This contributes to reinforcing the idea that Barça is "more than a club in the world", not because of its traditional values, but due to the boards of directors' capacity since 2006 to adjust the club's values to fit contemporary society. These new values are effort, respect, teamwork, humility and ambition.

Two years after the opening of the New York office, some facts can be taken into consideration when evaluating the FC Barcelona brand implementation in the US.<sup>78</sup> On the one hand, the club is still looking for a city to host its WNSL franchise (basically in California and in a place where there are other MLS franchises), regional partners have not increased and brand recognition stands at only 36%, according to Kantar Millwardbrown consultancy. On the other hand, the brand has embarked on new projects with two new academies for young players (Arizona and Long Island) and an agreement with an entertainment company, Parques Reunidos, in order to develop five theme parks worldwide. This gives rise to new research opportunities in monitoring FC Barcelona brand management, fan consumption, and business internationalization within a context of football *disneysation*.

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<sup>3</sup> The autonomous community of Catalonia is conceived of within the Spanish Constitution as a historical nationality. In the Public Opinion Barometer 38, Second Wave, which the autonomous

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government published in 2016, a total of 67.2% of Catalans considered that Catalonia “did not have a sufficient level of autonomy” compared to the rest of Spain. More significantly, a total of 47.7% of those surveyed “want Catalonia to be an independent state”. See Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió, *Baròmetre d’Opinió Pública*, 53-56.

<sup>4</sup> See Rowe, ‘Sport and the Reproduction of the Global’, 281-294; Rowe, ‘The Stuff of Dreams, or the Dream Stuffed? Rugby League, Media Empires, Sex Scandals and Global Plays’; Moragas, Kennett and Ginesta, ‘Football and media in Europe: a new sports paradigm for the global era’.

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<sup>6</sup> Xifra, ‘Soccer, civil religion, and public relations’, 192-198.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 194

<sup>8</sup> See Ginesta, ‘Corporate values for a global market. How FC Barcelona went from a local club to an entertainment multinational’.

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<sup>15</sup> See O’Brien, ‘El Clasico and the demise of tradition in Spanish club football: perspectives on shifting patterns of cultural identity’, 315-330; Rodríguez Ortega, ‘Soccer, nationalism and the media in contemporary Spanish society: La Roja, Real Madrid & FC Barcelona’, 628-643.

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<sup>17</sup> See López-González, Guerrero-Solé and Haynes. ‘Manufacturing conflict narratives in Real Madrid versus Barcelona football matches’, 688-706.

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<sup>20</sup> Shobe, ‘Place, identity and football: Catalonia, Catalanisme and Football Club Barcelona, 1899–1975’, 329.

<sup>21</sup> See Hamil, Walters and Watson, ‘The model of governance at FC Barcelona: Balancing member democracy, commercial strategy, corporate social responsibility and sporting performance’, 475-504.

<sup>22</sup> See Gil-Lafuente, ‘Marketing management in a socially complex club: Barcelona FC’.

<sup>23</sup> See Murillo and Murillo, *El nou Barça*.

<sup>24</sup> See Soriano, *La pilota no entra per atzar*.

<sup>25</sup> Ginesta, ‘Football and the Global Entertainment Business. Clubs as Entertainment Multinational Corporations’, 163.

<sup>26</sup> Ginesta, *El futbol a la societat líquida. Consideracions sobre la seva globalització*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Rosaaen and Amis, ‘From the Busby Babes to the Theatre of Dreams: image, reputation and the rise of Manchester United’, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Rosaaen and Amis, ‘From the Busby Babes to the Theatre of Dreams: image, reputation and the rise of Manchester United’, 50-52.

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