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IDENTITY, SYMBOLISM AND PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON: THE CASE OF F.C. JUÁREZ

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Abstract: The research represents the importance of a professional soccer team in Ciudad Juárez, taking as a reference the Social Identity Theory (TIS) and how it manages to influence the being and feeling of the population in which cognitive, personal and social skills of one person, directly affect the social interactions of others and vice versa. The objective was “to know the symbolic efficacy generated by the” F.C. Juárez”, in the border community”. The methodological strategy was of a qualitative nature with an ethnographic approach of 5 phases (diagnosis, immersion in the field, collection of specific data, data analysis and preparation of the final report). The technique for data collection was observation and semi-structured interview, in order to know the social behavior in a fan context of “F.C. Juárez”. The results that were achieved were, to a great extent, the representation of the feeling of the community as part of an identity process under construction of Ciudad Juárez based on the sense of belonging to a significant group, becoming a social and cultural phenomenon of the border community. In addition, it was possible to identify the associated values from the description and interpretation of the symbolic and identity dynamics, as well as the practices and representations of being from Juárez.

Keywords: symbolic construction, identity, professional football, symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

Ciudad Juárez is recognized as one of the cities with the greatest structural violence in northern Mexico. According to the Social Identity Theory (TIS), it maintains that people tend to maximize their self-esteem and enhance their abilities by identifying and identifying with specific social groups, in this case, the social group of F.C. Juárez. The methodology was of a qualitative

cohort and of an ethnographic nature with 5 phases (diagnosis, immersion in the field, data collection, data analysis and report preparation). For the qualitative analysis, the ATLAS Ti software was used as a support tool. The results are shown from three aspects. The first since the semi-structured online interview with a sample of 390 people over 18 years of age, triggering analysis categories such as (pride, identity and fans). The second, based on a semi-structured interview with the leader and active members of the bar called “EL KARTEL” where categories are described such as (El KARTEL, a fragment of being from Juárez; La sur, the southern head of the stadium; El Soccer as a device for social regeneration, Classes and stereotypes Finally, the study is complemented with observation records before, during and after the official matches of F.C. Juárez, where a synergy with the team was observed, creating a connection where families are involved. transferring this culture from generation to generation, building identity for future generations. The conclusions show that the inhabitants of Ciudad Juárez adopt F.C. Juárez as their representative in the sports field, where there is an association between identity, pride and fans with the team “ F.C. Juárez” which generates a construction of the identity of being from Juárez.

APPROACH

Ciudad Juárez is a multicultural, complex and diverse city that is located in the north of the state of Chihuahua in Mexico, which borders the city of El Paso in the state of Texas, in the United States. It has a population of 1,512,450 inhabitants, which makes it the largest city in the state of Chihuahua and one of the largest in Mexico. The male-female ratio is 50% with a median age of 28 years. It must be noted that from 2015 to 2021, 12% (125,990 people) of the population arrived from other

federal entities or another country (Veracruz, Durango and the United States respectively) (INEGI, 2020).

Ciudad Juárez has been one of the border municipalities hardest hit in recent years by social and criminal violence. It has been stigmatized in the recent past, but it is also a city full of opportunities and challenges, for which it is necessary to experience it to understand it.

It is always interesting how a city is formed, how it acquires its own anatomy, a character, its men and women who make the city live or survive as a social group, former residents and migrants from other states of the country, have built and rebuilt the city, facing a globalized world and profound political, economic, social and cultural changes that threatened the viability of Juárez as a developing city, but which has always been despite multiple adversities (violence, femicides, drug trafficking and corruption). It has been able to achieve, and even sustain, stability in its growth and development.

The arrival of the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juárez more than 45 years ago has brought a significant economic benefit to the region, but also other major problems: the arrival of South American migrations and various impoverished places in the country itself; whose population remains stationary, unable to cross into the United States or return to their places of origin. (Díaz, Sánchez and Valdivia, 2015).

Social programs provided by governments (municipal, state, and federal) have not generated a verifiable social impact (Cruz-Sierra, 2014). This lack of strategies, especially in childhood and youth, widens the gap between school opportunities, personal projects and the lack of basic needs.

Many of these children and young people live on the streets for long periods of time, or spend most of their time alone or with

their peers; factors that have led to the social confusion in which the Juárez community has lived in recent years (Juárez, 2012).

In 2014, Ciudad Juárez was considered one of the 100 resilient cities in the world due to its great capacity for survival, adaptation, and growth of the people, communities, institutions, and systems that are found within the context of the border city (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2016). Various economic, political, social, cultural and sports events have placed the border city on the international and national level in the city's recent history. It is on the latter that we will focus our point of interest.

Sport is actually a fairly faithful mirror of our society. Ciudad Juárez has witnessed great sporting events since the fifties, sports such as baseball, wrestling and bullfighting were the emblems of the city in the golden age. In the sixties, baseball continued, basketball and boxing appeared with considerable force, mainly among the young people of the time. Bowling and car races in the PRONAF circuit were highly accepted by the Juárez community. In this decade of the sixties, football was already appearing and its projection was uncertain. Juárez sport has undergone important changes in its structure and operation, some sports have been maintained until the early eighties and others have become extinct over time (Juárez and Lara, 2016).

The opposite happened with soccer, it grew until it became the most popular sport in Juárez and in the world. Its power of influence has crossed economic, political, social and cultural barriers in all latitudes worldwide, it can become a means or an end in itself, depending on its treatment.

On the other hand, the low sense of belonging and roots of the "Juarene population" for decades, due to multiple factors: its border condition, the constant

migration from other states of the country and foreigners seeking to cross into the United States, the various violence, poverty, among others. To love Ciudad Juárez, you first have to know it and live it, only this way, could we understand from the inside what it is like to be from Juárez.

GOALS

GENERAL ISSUES

To know the symbolic efficacy generated by the “F.C.Juárez” in the border community.

SPECIFIC GOALS

- Describe and interpret the symbolic and identity dynamics of the fans of the professional soccer team F.C. Juárez that take place in the Benito Juárez Olympic Stadium.
- To describe and interpret the practices and social representations of fans of F.C. Juárez.
- To determine the association between the professional soccer team F.C. Juárez and the values associated with Juárez identity

RESEARCH QUESTION

What does the soccer team “F.C. Juárez” and what are the associated values identified?

BACKGROUND

Sport is increasingly considered in social policy as a way to lead to social change, it is usually an effective alternative to respond to different types of social problems (Ekholm, 2016).

Studies on soccer and on fans have essentially focused on two large regions of the world: Western Europe, especially England, and the southern cone of South America, mainly Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia

(Magazine, 2008).

In the north of Mexico, at “universidad autonoma de ciudad Juárez” through the Academic Body 112: Physical Culture, Education and Society, this type of work and social interventions are carried out, as is the case of the present investigation.

Body and emotional expression:

Corporeality is manifested through gestures, postures, body expressions and its different motor actions, related to the emotions and feelings that each person experiences. It is a permanent construction that people make of themselves; a unit that merges the physical and functional part of the body with the cognitive, social, personal and cultural aspect. That is, the expression and manifestation of life skills (SEP, 2017). Favoring this component is equivalent to amalgamating experiences, as well as associating self-knowledge with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for life (Juárez, Lara and Medrano, 2020).

The field and the game as common spaces for fans: Space becomes a fundamental element of corporal, physical, mental, personal and social expression, which flourishes before, during and after each match. The synergies that are generated around the game of soccer allow us to experience team sensations, belonging, love, passion, joy, and many other feelings experienced in the game and soccer space, which seeks a transfer to society as a whole. (Magazine, Martinez and Varela, 2012).

From the Social Identity Theory, in which the cognitive, personal and social abilities of a person directly affect the social interactions of others and vice versa. That is, the sense of belonging and the self-concept of a person is formed through the knowledge of belonging to a significant group, in this case the “F.C. Juárez” The fans or sympathizers simplify the world from the space of coexistence in the Benito Juárez Stadium under identity elements that can be transferred to other social contexts

such as schools, neighborhoods, priority attention areas, which allow greater social cohesion and favorably infer in the Juarez community.

Social identity gives rise to the idea that however rich or complex the image that individuals have of themselves in relation to the physical and social world around them, some aspects of that idea are contributed by belonging to certain groups or social categories (Taifel, 1981).

Moscovici (1979) considers that social representation is an organized corpus of knowledge and one of the cognitive activities by which human beings make physical and social reality intelligible, integrate into a group or in a daily relationship of exchanges, such as that are lived on the outskirts of the Benito Juárez Olympic Stadium before, during and after an F.C. Juarez. Soccer has become the most important sociocultural phenomenon of the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

As a methodological strategy, the ethnographic one was used, since it allowed the direct study of people or groups during a certain period of time, using the observation technique and the interview to know the social behavior in a certain context. Ethnographic designs aim to describe and analyze ideas, beliefs, meanings, knowledge, and practices of groups, cultures, and communities (Patton 2002; Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista, 2008).

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DESIGN WAS DIVIDED INTO FIVE PHASES:

Phase 1: Diagnosis

- Bibliographic-hemerographic research
- Venue selection: “F.C. Juárez” and its context.
- Detection of participants: men and

women over 18 years of age, who were fans or sympathizers of F.C. Juarez. A sample of 390 people was taken, of which 226 were men, 161 women and 3 people did not identify with any sex.

- The reliability of the instrument for the determination of the sample was established by the statistical formula based on the level of confidence:
- The population (N) was made up of 387,000 active Facebook followers of F.C. Juarez. A statistically significant sample of 384 subjects was chosen, with a variability of 0.5, considering positive values (P) and negative values (Q), with a margin of error of 0.5 and a confidence level of 1.96.
- Application of the online research question to the border community: What does the soccer team “F.C. Juarez”?
- Analysis of data

Phase 2: Immersion in the field

- Selection of key informants: the referral chain method was used.
- Compilation of open information: the leader of the bar “El Kartel” was interviewed, as well as 3 of its active members.
- Formulation and identification of categories.

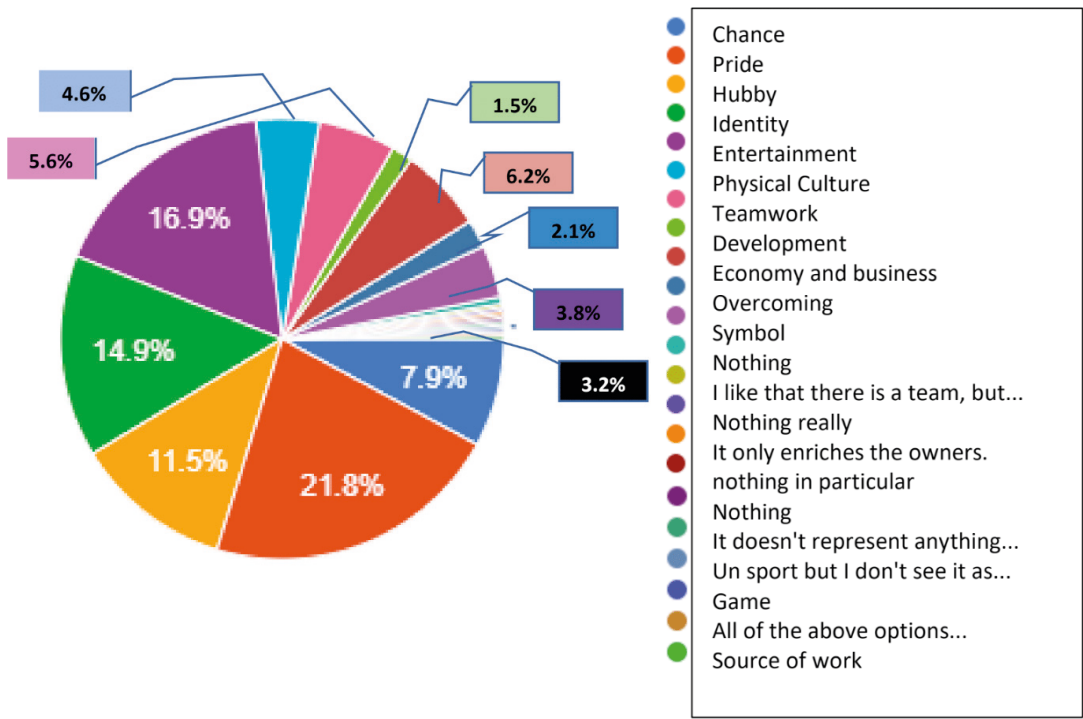
Phase 3: Collection of specific data

- Direct observation
- Participant observation in the official matches of F.C. Juarez

Phase 4: Data analysis

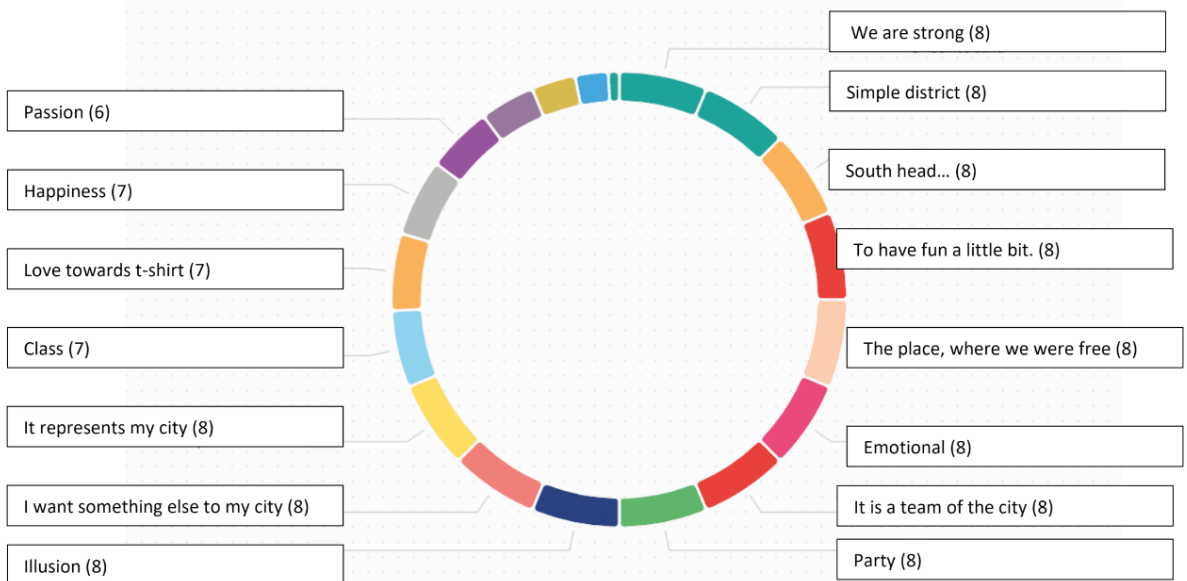
- Description of categories: it was possible to identify 4 categories of analysis (pride, identity, culture and sense of belonging).

| Population | Variability | | Mistake | Trustness level (95%) |
|------------|-------------|-----|---------|-----------------------|
| N | p | q | ME | NC |
| 387000 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.05 | 1.96 |



Graph 1. Results of the online interview

Graph 1. Graphic and symbolic representation of Juárez on the team: F.C. Juárez.



Graph 2. Graphic representation of codes in interviews at Barra el Kartel.

Source: Own elaboration with data from ATLAS Ti.

- Description and contrast with the theory of Social Identity

Phase 5: Final report preparation

- Descriptions and final interpretations of categories.
- Classification of categories (pride, identity, culture, sense of belonging)
- Interpretation of the symbolic efficacy generated by the “F.C. Juarez”

ETHICAL APPROACH IN DATA COLLECTION

Informed consent was used in the interviews (face-to-face and virtual), who, at the time of answering the online interview, read the informed consent and authorized their participation in the research at the time of answering and sending the interview.

Before conducting field work, a favorable opinion was received from the research ethics committee of the ICB/UACJ: (CEI-2022-2-663).

RESULTS

The results are shown from three aspects. The first, from the semi-structured online interview to a sample of 390 people over 18 years of age. The second, based on a semi-structured interview with the leader and three active members of the bar group called “EL KARTEL”. Finally, the study is complemented with observation records before, during and after the official matches of F.C. Juarez at the Olympic Stadium.

RESULTS FIRST PART: DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis allowed obtaining information from the population about their tastes, hobbies, identities, places of origin, ages in order to analyze and know the identity process of being from Juarez.

In addition, the present investigation

was geographically delimited in the Benito Juárez Olympic Stadium, places of origin and neighborhoods or areas of the city, looking for associations of social classes, interests and characteristics of the groups that are fans of soccer and the F.C. Juarez.

Four categories of analysis were identified, being pride, identity, culture and sense of belonging the ones that most identify Juarez with the club.

RESULTS SECOND PART: EL KARTEL

A series of semi-structured interviews was carried out with the leader of the “El Kartel” bar, as well as 3 active members. These were the results according to the statistical package for the Social Sciences ATLAS ti, used as a tool for data processing.

The graphical representation of the codes processed by ATLAS ti allows us to locate the different segments and group them into categories. We find in the first category called El Kartel, a fragment of being from Juárez, the following codes: it represents my city, it is the city’s team, I love my city more, I love Juárez more. The second category identified was La Sur: identity from the south end of the stadium: we are strong, south end, love for the jersey, happiness, passion. The third category was called Soccer as a device for social regeneration: getting a little distracted, the place where we are going, partying, illusion, it’s completely me, emotion, means of exit. Category 4 refers to class and stereotypes: humble neighborhood and class.

In short, they are part of a common feeling, an identity that unites them, that goes beyond gender and class stereotypes, which can be an important factor that can be extrapolated to other conflictive areas of the city, generating a sense of belonging and initiating a process of identity of being from Juarez.

| The Kartel: a fragment of Being Juarese | La Sur: Identity from the South head of the Stadium | Football as a device for social regeneration | Class and stereotypes |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------|
| - It represents my city -It's the city team. -I love my city more. -I love Juárez more | - we are bar - South Head -Love to T-shirt -Happiness -Passion | - get a little distracted -The place where we go -Party -Delusion -It's completely me -Emotion -Means of output | -Humble neighborhood -Class |

Table 1. Categories and codes of the interview with the leader and members of the Barra el Kartel.

Source: Own elaboration with data from ATLAS ti.

| Before | During | After |
|--|---|---|
| - dynamics of coexistence (roast meat) --preparation of forecasts -talks about players | -Entrance of cheers with songs -Applaud at the entrance of players (raises enthusiasm) -frustration and anger if the result goes against -the team feeds singing, shouting. -players celebrate with the bar when they score a goal. family atmosphere, tradition, happy moments. | -Mood depends on the end result. -The bar and some fans celebrate if the score is favourable. -festivals at the exit (family atmosphere) -If the team loses, the fans leave in silence. When you win, the fans say they feel proud. |

Table 2. Observation record before, during and after official home matches.

Source: Own elaboration according to observation records at the Benito Juárez Olympic Stadium.

THIRD PART RESULTS: OBSERVATION AND CONTEXT

The method of participant observation was carried out, before, during and after the matches of the F.C. Juarez. The duration was 360 minutes of observation during 4 home games during the 2022 opening tournament.

People begin to arrive at the stadium up to two or three hours in advance, a ritual is recreated with grilled meats, drinks and music outside the stadium, all within an atmosphere of family and friends.

CONCLUSIONS

- The summoning power of F.C. Juárez generates identity synergies in the Juárez community and promotes a sense of belonging, which can help rebuild the

social fabric based on the identity of Juárez.

- The representation of the feeling of the community as part of an identity process under construction of Ciudad Juárez from the professional soccer team “F.C. Juarez”
- Four categories and 19 subcategories were identified that describe the practices and representations of the fans and their association with F.C. Juarez.
- It was possible to identify the associated values from the description and interpretation of the symbolic and identity dynamics, as well as the practices and representations of being from Juarez.

LINKAGE WITH THE THEORY OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

- In which one person's cognitive, personal and social skills directly affect the social interactions of others and vice versa (Tajfel, 1981).
- The sense of belonging and the self-concept of a person, is formed through the knowledge of belonging to a significant group, in this case the "F.C. Juarez.
- Identity elements can be transferred to other social contexts: schools,

neighborhoods, priority attention areas, which allow for greater social cohesion and favorably infer in the Juárez community.

The transforming power of sport can be a factor of change where coexistence, respect, responsibility, honesty prevail and an ideal setting for the development of cognitive, personal, social and physical-motor skills for girls, boys and young people. which can favor the construction of identity and the transformation of society.

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