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Hunter Shobe

Portland State University, hshobe@pdx.edu

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Place, Sport and Globalization: Making sense of la marca Barça

Hunter Shobe

Department of Geography

Portland State University

hshobe@pdx.edu

Abstract

The case of Football Club (FC) Barcelona provides a compelling case for examining the impact of globalization on the place/identity role of football clubs. FC Barcelona has deep historical connections to Barcelona and Catalonia. These connections were de-emphasized by the club's leadership under Josep Lluís Núñez (1978-2000) and Joan Gaspart (2000-2003) and promoted again by Joan Laporta and his directors (elected in 2003). At the same time, under Laporta, FC Barcelona has developed into a successful global brand. How are we to understand this renewed focus on the local and national discourses of place while the team is simultaneously promoted as a global brand? Although the local and global discourses seem to be at odds, the club leadership seamlessly promotes *la marca Barça* (the Barça Brand) while repoliticizing the club with an explicitly *catalanista* discourse. The global and local discourses are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the local is drawn upon in constructing the global discourse and the global is implicated in the reproduction of the local (Massey, 1994, p.120).

“We are more than a club in Catalonia, Spain and the world because we are identified with democracy and the defense of human rights. We want to maintain these associations.”

Joan Laporta, President of FC Barcelona, 2006 (González 2006).

The important role of Futbol Club Barcelona (FC Barcelona), and its stadium the *Camp Nou* in providing a venue for the expression of Catalan identity under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship is recognized in academic and popular literature (Foer, 2004; Ball, 2001; Ainaud de Lasarte, et al. 1999; Barnils, et. al. 1999; Espadaler, 1998; Burns, 1998; Colomé, 1997; MacClancy, 1996; Kuper, 1994; Sobrequés, 1991 and 1993; Shaw, 1985 and 1987; Subartés, 1982). Implicit in this literature is the idea that FC Barcelona is deeply connected to Catalonia and Barcelona as places. Less clear is the identity/place related role of FC Barcelona today, in a democratic Spain a time when Catalonia has the political, social and cultural institutions denied it during the dictatorship. This relationship is further complicated by the intense globalization of, among other things, football.

Examining the rhetoric of the club’s leadership throughout the past thirty years provides some perspective on this situation. Laporta’s comments above reveal two things about how his administration projects the club’s place/identity role. First, there is an overt and conscious effort to position the club in various spatial contexts – Barcelona, Catalonia, Europe and the world. Second, Laporta positions the club as synonymous with “democracy and the defense of human rights” – the club/team of the oppressed – the righteous underdog. These self-ascribed attributes are assumed and essentialized by Laporta not only for the club, but for Catalonia as well. In this way FC Barcelona’s administration is currently engaged in a nationalist discourse, actively promoting itself in *Catalanist* tropes.

This rhetoric represents a sharp contrast with that of Laporta’s predecessors Josep Lluís Núñez (president 1978-2000) and Joan Gaspart (2000-2003). Corresponding with the first twenty-five years of the new Spanish Constitution (1978), Núñez de-politicized FC Barcelona and distanced the club from nationalist associations. His discourse, compared to that of Laporta, represents a very different view of Barcelona and Catalonia as places. Underlying this dynamic are a complex set of local politics.

Elsewhere, I have explored the roles FC Barcelona plays in the social construction of place and place identity in Barcelona and Catalonia and how changes in FC Barcelona itself has implications for the ways in which the connection between club and place plays out. Here, I examine how the changing nature of sport in an era of intense globalization has influenced FC Barcelona and consider the implications of those changes for the club’s place-based role – a discussion of globalization, sport and place. Some have

suggested that the current intensity of globalization has disrupted the ways in which local identity is structured in place (Appadurai, 1996; Philo and Kearns, 1993; Zukin, 1992; Castels, 1989; Emberley, 1989). Critiques suggest that globalization has diminished the importance of place and encourages placelessness. Similarly, scholars of sport have suggested that the intensification of globalization challenges the relationship between football clubs and local communities and places (Brookes, 2002; Bairner, 2001; Maguire, 1999; Duke and Crolley, 1996). Globalization is sometimes seen to *displace* sport. It is suggested that the competitive pressure to turn a profit forces team presidents and boards to increasingly think in terms of attracting customers rather than attracting supporters. The profit-driven logic is said to explain the need for clubs to make themselves increasingly popular and successful beyond their areas of traditional support. Many clubs, particularly those in elite football, have sought to do this through the process of branding. Indeed, it is the branding of football clubs that lead some to suggest that football no longer serves the same local place-related function that it has in the past.

The first part of this article discusses how the current discourse of FC Barcelona's elected administration attempts to reconcile the global and the local. It addresses the question, how does the club support to continue being the team of Catalonia and Barcelona while it attempts to become a team popular throughout the world with people who have no social connection to either Catalonia or Barcelona? Then the focus turns to themes related to global commercialization, place and sport. This is done by exploring the relationship between FC Barcelona and Nike. This discussion juxtaposes the co-development of FC Barcelona and Nike as brands with the idea that the club should represent Catalonia above any corporate brand. By bringing Nike into the discussion, one is provided with views into how places, seemingly unconnected, are linked through global flows of culture and capital. Here I examine place as, "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 1994,p.153).

Branding FC Barcelona along Spatial Lines: Global Club, Local Club, Club of a Nation

The 2003 election of Joan Laporta to the presidency of FC Barcelona brought many changes to the club. Laporta re-adopted an active social role for the club. Laporta also brought significant economic and marketing changes. FC Barcelona had generally been economically strong throughout the Núñez administration, however the club fell into debt under Joan Gaspart. Laporta's financial team has pulled the club out of spiraling debt and seeks to deliver it back to the elite of global football. Aggressive marketing is a pervasive element of Laporta's strategies. Specifically, a new effort is being made to improve and promote *la marca Barça*. A primary goal

of branding is to get consumers to identify with the brand and its associated products. In transforming a brand, there is an effort to change and/or intensify the way that people identify with that brand. In this case it is accompanied by an effort to target a wider audience for the brand, an audience beyond Catalonia.

More than promote individual commodities, brands present themselves as concepts, as experience, as lifestyle (Klein, 2000, p. 21). If the brand purports to mediate how we experience the world, than what are the implications for place and place identity? How can FC Barcelona promote itself as a global brand while simultaneously maintaining meaningful connections to Barcelona and Catalonia? Doesn't an increasingly global supporter and *socio* base erode the place-identity related role and character of the club? In what ways does this restructure the ways that Catalonia and Barcelona are socially constructed as places? I maintain that Laporta's approach and discourse does not choose between the global and the local but rather embraces them both. This has been accomplished by branding the club at different spatial scales – the city, the nation and the globe. The discourse of urban identity is nested in the discourse of national identity. The discourse of Catalanism that Laporta employs is a cosmopolitan and outward-looking one, corresponding with the narrative of FC Barcelona as a global club. This suggests that to better understand how globalization impacts the way that places are constructed it is useful to consider how the global and local come together in place. Rather than consider the placelessness of globalization, it is more useful to consider the fluidity of place in the context of globalization.

Recrafting, marketing and merchandising the FC Barcelona brand has been the hallmark of the Laporta presidency. His election was widely interpreted as an endorsement of change – a change widely characterized as a 'modernization' of the club. Laporta presents the FC Barcelona brand in three primary tropes, each element of the brand image relating to a spatial scale – city, nation and globe. A different discourse of club and place is used to promote the brand at each scale, although the discourses overlap. The FC Barcelona brand, as constructed by the Laporta junta, is rooted in notions of Catalanism, embraces the cosmopolitanism of Barcelona and projects a bold and modern face – aspiring to be associated not only with the European football elite but with the vanguard of global football and global business more generally. The branding of the club at various scales, which to some may seem antithetical, is presented by the Laporta administration as intrinsically Catalan – modern outward-looking approaches built on longstanding traditions of negotiation and industriousness. Thus innovations and traditions alike are fit into narratives of FC Barcelona as *the* team of Barcelona, *the* team of Catalonia and *the* premier global club in the world.

Not surprisingly, FC Barcelona continues to be closely associated with the city from which it takes its name. Historically, like most sport clubs and teams throughout the world, the supporters of FC Barcelona, particularly

those that attend home games regularly, have been predominantly local. Most support has been from Barcelona and the immediate surrounding areas (La distribución del voto blaugrana, 2003). According to data published in 2003, 54% of the club's *socios* lived in the city of Barcelona, with 92% living in the province of Barcelona (La Distribución del voto blaugrana). Since that data was published however, over 50,000 *socios* have joined the club, most of those joining since Laporta's election. Although FC Barcelona is seeking and seems to be successfully developing a global fan base, it remains strongly connected to Barcelona. Furthermore, Laporta and his administration have a good working relationship with the *Ajuntament* and *Generalitat*, which was not the case for twenty-five years of Núñez/Gaspard. Although most commonly referred to as Barça, the club is sometimes simply referred to as Barcelona – thereby conflating city and club and linking the fortunes and failures of the club to the city itself.

Even under Núñez, the club retained strong associations with Barcelona. A club or team is, in certain contexts, charged with representing the host city (Nielsen, 1995). In a way, a football club becomes a brand of its host city, particularly if the two share the same name. Clubs and teams also hold a role in local identification – supporting a local club or team makes many people feel connected or rooted to place, or connected to home (Bale, 2001; Hague and Mercer, 1998). Support for the club becomes part of the collective geographical memory (Hague and Mercer, 1998). Club and city are fused together in those memories. Identification with FC Barcelona, for some, is tied more closely to identification with the city of Barcelona than identification with Catalonia. For immigrants looking to attach themselves to their new urban setting, the context of FC Barcelona as club of Catalonia may be unimportant. Here, support for the club is a way of feeling connected to and rooted in the city of Barcelona. For some people, however, Barcelona's role as capital of Catalonia is extremely significant.

The Barcelona sporting media, particularly *Sport*, suggest that not only has FC Barcelona promoted its own brand, it has promoted Catalonia as well. On the club website, Laporta indicates that his “desire is that Barça remains the tool it has always been for this country to project our values and the knowledge of Catalonia into the world at large” (www.fcbarcelona.com). Efforts to promote Catalonia have also take a global dimension as was evident during the team's 2005 summer tour of Asia. During the tour, the club placed an advertisement on the sleeves of the team jerseys, promoting the Tourism Board of the Generalitat (El Barça promocionará...). The tourism board has used the club to promote Tourism in Catalonia, particularly in cities that host Barcelona's potential champions league rivals such as London, Milan and Glasgow (El Barça promocionará...). Here Barça seems to be marketing Catalonia as brand. *Sport* even referred to the arrangement as a way to promote “la marca Catalunya” [the Catalonia Brand]. Here, it is apparent that the media is also implicated in the promotion of Catalonia as a

brand. In this way, the club becomes part of how people from outside of Spain understand Catalonia.

La Marca Barça: Global Brand

In promoting the club, not only has Laporta employed a discourse of 'FC Barcelona as the pride of Catalonia' but of FC Barcelona as an elite club in Europe and the world. At a July 2005 press conference, Laporta declared, "Barça is more than a club not only on the level of Catalonia but also in the rest of the world" (Martínez Olivar, 2005). When visiting Morocco Laporta explained that, "The *Barcelonista* feeling is global...We will continue to develop and project *el barcelonismo* in the whole world and this will allow us to be a Catalan football club with universal influence" (Laporta: "El sentimiento barcelonista es global).

The branding of FC Barcelona is now an overt enterprise. The press commonly uses the phrase '*la marca Barça*' – the Barça brand. Through merchandising, exposure and on-field success, the Barça brand grows. Lluís Mascaró, columnist for the Barcelona daily sport magazine *Sport*, wrote "Exporting *la marca Barça* has been easier since Laporta became president. In the dark years of Gaspart, the club had lost part of its prestige because of disastrous sporting, economic, social and institutional management...Little by little [Laporta's management team] has regained lost ground and the club is returning to its position among the greats" (Mascaró, 2005). The column goes on to explain that FC Barcelona is following a strategic plan to develop the image of the club on five continents and has already made inroads into Japan, China and the United States. For some, like Mascaró, the aggressive worldwide marketing of the club is in itself evidence of success – an affirmation of the club's 'position among the greats.' Laporta, explains what developing the global brand means for management, "To be successful you have to manage the club like a multinational, for that reason we have to organise and manage our club like a multinational with offices in lots of countries" ('Global view the key to Barça's success).

When the author asked Josep Maria Artells, managing editor of *El Mundo Deportivo*, to discuss FC Barcelona as a brand, he evoked both the global and the local in his response,

They [Laporta and the board of directors] want it to be a brand. They are already taking in terms of a brand. Barça has always been a club with a strong European vocation, with a universal vocation but very deep-rooted, very family oriented. Families have always gone to see Barça. But times also change. They have to be in the Champions League, to be strong economically, and Barça will be a brand such as Madrid perhaps already is now, like Manchester, like Milan. Barça needs to be able to compete with these teams.

(Artells, 2004)

Artells argues that the locally based, family-oriented aspects of the club are not undone by the need to compete with the richest and most prestigious clubs in the world. Furthermore, he suggests that many *socios* and supporters understand the importance of the club's global stature, "the people understand that Barça needs to be global and needs to be in all the world and needs to be powerful, need to have a very grand dimension. This I think is compatible with going to the *Camp Nou* on Sundays with friends or families" (Artells, 2004). Artells' comments echo Laporta's discourse embracing both the local and the global.

Although during the presidency of Gaspart the club fell into debt, the club has long taken pride in fiscal responsibility. This emphasis on business acumen was also at times drawn upon to stereotypically represent Catalonia as an economically successful region and the Catalans as shrewd business people. Laporta's team features Catalan businessmen Ferran Soriano (vice President of Finance), Marc Ingla (vice president of marketing and media), Jaume Ferrer (treasurer). All are under the age of 45 and replaced men many years their senior. The Laporta management team is credited with turning around the debt into a 15 million euro surplus at the close of the 2004-2005 season (Frieros, 2005). The turnaround was due to a combination of factors, many of which surround the success of the team on the field and the presence of several global stars, particularly Ronaldinho, who has emerged as the premier international marketing star for FC Barcelona, the Brazilian national team and Nike. With these developments, pay per view and satellite television revenues have increased dramatically, as has the arrangement with Nike.

The club also generates significant revenue from summer tours outside of Europe. During their 2005 tour of Korea, China and Japan, the club made a million euros per game (Frieros 2005). These are the markets in which the club must compete to be competitive and the key to the brand being competitive in Asia is tapping into the already established fan bases of superstars. David Beckham has been the greatest example of this (although Ronaldinho's marketing image may now have eclipsed Beckham's). In October of 2005, Real Madrid's president, Florentino Pérez, claimed that Beckham made the club more in merchandising than he cost them in salary (Beckham bankrolling Real Madrid's galacticos wages). Real Madrid was also able to renegotiate their sponsorship agreement with Adidas. Adidas now pays Real Madrid 40 million Euros per year, 9 million Euros more annually than the previous contract, an increase attributed by the Pérez to Beckham (Beckham bankrolling Real Madrid's galacticos wages). Laporta's plan revolves around those business imperatives. Ronaldinho is the key to the plan. Artells explains, "The Laporta project, he calls it the virtuous circle, which is to start with a team that functions, bring in some media stars, that sell throughout the world, that television will broadcast many minutes of Barça, and to bring in titles. This will bring money, jerseys, put Barça at the top of the line media-wise" (Artells 2004).

Part of being a successful brand is being perceived as a successful business; image is created and socially constructed but grounded with certain tangible measurements of success. In the world of football, branding status is in some ways measured by Deloitte and Touche's yearly report of football's richest 20 teams. For many involved with FC Barcelona, like for many associated with other clubs, having a high spot on this list is a measure of success and provides an assessment of what the club as a brand might be worth. The ranking itself is a vehicle for the further projection of football clubs as brand. When FC Barcelona dropped into the bottom five of the top twenty, it was taken by many as a sign of the club's demise. As Sobrequés told the author, "With Núñez it would have never been like that" (Sobrequés, 2004).

In 2005, it was announced that FC Barcelona had climbed to the seventh place on the list for the year of the 2003-2004 season, after placing 13th the previous year (Richest teams list). Invariably, discussions about branding in the football world, if not the world of team sports more generally, turn to Manchester United, top of Deloitte and Touch's list for several years running (until it was displaced by Real Madrid in 2006, coinciding with Beckham leaving Manchester and going to Madrid). Manchester United's global marketing network is more developed and has been active for longer than any other football club in the world (Masnou and Giménez, 2005). Something often regarded to be the most successful aspect of Manchester United's brand development is the degree to which the team has become known throughout Asia. Some of that strategy involves attaching the brand of the club to products that have nothing to do with football, as Manchester United has done in parts of Australia and Asia (Masnou and Giménez, 2005).

Summer tours in other continents is one way that the world's largest clubs facilitate global exposure and brand development. In August of 2003, just months after Laporta was elected president of FC Barcelona, the club played three exhibition games in the United States. FC Barcelona's opponents were some of the biggest names in European football – AC Milan, Juventus (of Turin, Italy), and Manchester United. Although other big European football teams had undertaken such tours, particularly in Asia, this was a first for FC Barcelona. This broke the club's long tradition of holding a pre-season training camp in Holland followed by a short low-profile tour elsewhere in Europe and marked another change in how the football team is run in order to promote the brand.

In 2005, FC Barcelona's summer tour took it to both Japan and China, where Nike's new 'electric yellow' second kits for the 2005-2006 were first used, illustrating a synergy of marketing approaches. Here a modernized image in the form of the new uniform coincided with a tour designed to further the spatial reach of the brand. During the tour, stars made appearances on television shows to further promote the tour and the club. The stars in most demand were Ronaldinho and Carles Puyol – the global and Catalan faces of FC Barcelona (Masnou and Giménez, 2005).

Branded: FC Barcelona and Nike

An examination of Nike and FC Barcelona illustrates some of the ways in which the club leadership is attempting to promote *la marca Barça* while also promoting local discourses of place. In 1998, Nike signed a ten-year contract with FC Barcelona to be the club's official outfitter and pay 12 million Euros per year for that right (*El Barcelona exige a Nike más del doble*).¹ Beginning in the late 1990's, Nike embarked on a massive campaign to become the dominant brand in football. Central to this effort was Nike's agreement to become the exclusive outfitter of the Brazilian national team. Nike is sometimes mistakenly referred to as an athletic shoe and clothing manufacturer when in fact Nike owns no manufacturing facilities at all. Nike subcontracts construction of all of its products (Sage, 2004 p.40).

Nike is in the business of branding. It seeks to increase the exposure of the brand by associating it with other brands in the sports world – in this case both national teams such as Brazil and professional club teams including FC Barcelona (Rosell 2004). Rosell explains that, “Nike is always thinking how to make the association between Barça and Nike better known” (Rosell 2004). This is also the case with some university teams, particularly in American football and basketball, in the United States, including the University of Oregon. FC Barcelona, the Brazilian national team, and the University of Oregon football team each have strong place-related roles. FC Barcelona is strongly implicated in how Barcelona and Catalonia are constructed as places. In similar ways, the Brazilian national team is drawn upon in social constructions of Brazil. To a lesser degree perhaps, the University of Oregon football team is also implicated in how some people understand Eugene and Oregon as places. Interestingly, all three teams are outfitted by Nike. What is significant from a place-identity perspective is that Nike is using some of the same ideas and strategies for promoting each team as brand. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the intricacies of this tripartite situation, it can be observed that Nike is in some way implicated in the place-identity roles of each team. And in some way, Nike links these places together. Nike, a transnational corporations and one of the world's superbrands, provides some strands of the web that link Eugene/Oregon, Barcelona/Catalonia and Brazil. Through Nike, places, seemingly unconnected, are linked through global cultural and economic flows.

Although FC Barcelona's relationship with Nike predates Laporta, relations became stronger when he was elected and former Nike executive, Sandro Rosell, became the Vice-President of Football Operations (2003-2005). Rosell embodies the twin discourses of the global and the local seam-

¹ In October 2006, FC Barcelona extended its agreement with Nike five more years in a deal worth an estimated \$189 million (Nike extends FC Barcelona sponsorship...)

lessly advanced by the Laporta administration. On the one hand, Rosell is stridently *catalanista* in his discourse and strong linked with the *catalanist* and club traditions of his father Jaume, who served as a high-ranking club official in the final years of the dictatorship. On the other hand, Rosell has a strongly global profile – he was a Nike executive for eight years. For most of that time his responsibility was marketing in South America. In this capacity, Rosell was closely involved with the Brazilian national team and developed contacts with some of the biggest clubs and national teams in world football.

The assets to FC Barcelona of someone with his connections in the world of football are clear. The very signing of Ronaldinho, the cornerstone of the entire Laporta project, is largely attributed to Rosell's relationship with the Brazilian player developed during his tenure as a Nike executive. During the election campaign, Laporta promised to bring Beckham to Barcelona. Days after Laporta was elected, Beckham signed for Real Madrid, and Laporta needed someone else to be his superstar/media star. After over a month of back and forth, Ronaldinho chose to sign for FC Barcelona over Manchester United. Rosell was widely considered the main influence although it was also suggested that a factor in the player's decision was his preference for living in Barcelona over Manchester. Ronaldinho led the club to second place finish, in his first year. More importantly, his presence made the club an attractive destination for other stars. In the summer of 2004, FC Barcelona signed Brazilian-born Portuguese national team midfielder Deco, Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o, French winger Ludovic Giuly, Swedish striker Henrik Larsson, and two Brazilians with European passports, Juliano Belletti and José Edmilson. With these additions to their squad that also featured several Catalan players in the starting line-up, FC Barcelona won the league championship, the team's first championship of any kind in six years. The following year, 2005-2006, FC Barcelona successfully defended the league championship and won the highly coveted European championship. The Rosell/Nike/Brazilian National Team/Ronaldinho connection is very much the story of how, in a highly globalized world, people and places become linked together in the world of football.

FC Barcelona has developed its own brand in conjunction with Nike. Indeed the club's new marketing approach has been very much informed by Nike's view of branding (Rosell 2004). When the author spoke with Rosell, he explained how his experience with the company has influenced his work with the club. He immediately turned to a discussion of brands, quickly setting it within a context of local club loyalties,

In Nike, you learn to love a brand and you learn to love a group of people, an institution and you learn to love sport. In spite of the fact that here in Barça the brand is not the most important but the club or the group of people that are the 120,000 socios, who carry the club in their blood, that

have since they were little...It [experience with Nike] has served me well, it has served me with techniques to apply to the sport-business issues of the club management.

(Rosell 2004)

Until 2006, FC Barcelona did not have a jersey sponsor unlike most other professional teams in Europe.² This left the Nike swoosh as the only corporate logo attached to the team uniform. As official outfitter, Nike is responsible for designing and coordinating the manufacture of the team uniforms. The sale of replica jerseys is a significant element of the club's marketing and branding effort. At once it generates revenue and disseminates the brand image – hundreds of thousands of people around the world wearing the brand. Together, FC Barcelona and Nike forge a marketing policy that promotes two brands – FC Barcelona and Nike. The leadership of each organization promotes a carefully constructed view of each brand. Nike promotes itself as synonymous with sport and the competitive spirit itself. This can also be seen in the above comments from Rosell who cites the love of sport that is associated with the Nike corporate culture.

This corporate culture, where the Nike brand is constructed as the essence of sport, has come under significant criticism. For Klein,

A company that swallows cultural space in giant gulps, Nike is the definitive story of the transcendent nineties superbrand, and more than any other single company, its actions demonstrate how branding seeks to erase all boundaries between the sponsor and the sponsored. This is a shoe company that is determined to unseat pro sports, the Olympics and even star athletes, to become the very definition of sports itself.

(2000 p. 51).

Nike has come in for a great deal of criticism in part because it is the industry leader. Nike's critics have condemned Nike for promoting "the hedonism associated with consumer culture", epitomized by their slogan 'Just do it' (Maguire, 1999 p.135). The labor and production policies of Nike and its competitors in southeast Asia has also received academic attention (for examples see Sage, 2004; Rothernberg-Alami, 2002; Kahle, *et al* 2000). These companies spend far more on building the brand – through "marketing, advertising, and product endorsement" – then paying the people who

² One of the other few clubs that does not feature a corporate logo sponsor on the team uniforms is Athletic Bilbao. In the case of Athletic Bilbao, the team is outfitted by an independent Basque sporting goods manufacturer, further allowing the club to proclaim its independence from influences outside of the Basque region.

manufacture the products onto which the brand is affixed (Maguire 1999 p.133). From this perspective of this critique, Nike's reputation seems to be at odds with Laporta's view of FC Barcelona as defender of human rights.

Nike and *El New Look*

In the past eight years, Nike has redesigned the FC Barcelona home strip eight times (always some variation of red and blue vertical stripes) and designed seven second strip (away) uniforms ("El 'new look'" 2005). The training wear has also changed every year. Thus every year, there is at least one, sometimes two, 'new' replica jerseys to 'release' along with a new set of training and warm-up garments. The most dramatic changes in strip design under Nike were made for the 2005-2006 season. A discussion of these changes provides another illustration of how the club promotes the Barça brand globally while maintaining an active local discourse of place.

For the 2005-2006 season, three major changes to the team uniform occurred. The first involved adding the Catalan flag to the back collar of the jerseys and to the pant leg. This is a fairly obvious way of highlighting a connection to Catalonia, yet one which had never been employed before. The second uniform change was the adoption of red shorts in place of the traditional blue shorts, which have been worn since 1920. According to initial press reports of the 2005-2006 uniform modifications, the switch to red shorts seems to have struck the most negative chord with supporters as well as players, a change largely interpreted as tradition giving way to a marketing strategy (Herrero, 2005; El 'new look').

The third change deals with the team's 'second' strip. In football, teams generally opt to wear their 'first strip' or 'home' jerseys whenever possible, even on the road. If the visiting team's strip are too similar to the home side's jerseys (generally based on color and/or pattern) than the visitors use their 'second' or 'third' strips. Nike and Barça promote these strips side by side with the home kit at the official FC Barcelona Botigues and on-line. Traditionally, FC Barcelona's second strip has been some variation of blue, although there have been exceptions. Because they vary more widely than the home kit, the secondary and tertiary strips provide athletic outfitters a safe (from the perspective of not upsetting traditional supporters) way to experiment with different ways of promoting the team as brand. For the 2005-2006 season, the Nike designed a bright yellow second strip, something alternatively called – 'amarillo fosfórico', 'amarillo eléctrico' or 'amarillo pistacho'. This created some discussion in the press because the club employed yellow kits in the past, only to abandon them after unfavorable results that corresponded with their use. The color was proposed by Nike after extensive market research and agreed upon by the Laporta junta. The market research suggested that the color would be well received 'on the street' (Herrerros,

2005). Laporta declares that the new uniforms are 'bold and modern' while 'not breaking the tradition of the club (Los pantalones y la segunda...).

The Barcelona sport media highlighted the shirts in stories about fan and player reaction to the strip changes, stories on the increased sales of the away kit since the color change and references to the color in headlines and story-lines. Nine days after the release of the yellow jerseys for sale, the club's official store reported that eight of every ten jerseys sold were yellow, the color being most popular among the young and tourists (Herrero 2005). The electric yellow was also the top internet seller (Herrero 2005).

Front page pictures of players wearing the new yellow gear at the airport or at training sessions appeared frequently after the design's release. FC Barcelona players first wore the yellow shirts during their summer tour of Asia, beating the champion of the Chinese league in Macao 9-0. *El Mundo Deportivo's* headlines the next day referenced 'Pistacho Mecánico' – or Clockwork Pistacho, an allusion to 'Clockwork Orange' the nickname given to the highly successful Dutch national team of the early 1970's (Villarrubia, 2005). Here the press is highlighting the color of the team's new shirts and evoking that color in the team's image as being successful. In this way, the brand is becoming intricately wrapped up in team's image. Yet, are the Nike shirts seem to be more keenly associated with the Nike brand than the Barça brand?

It is revealing that FC Barcelona and Nike met during the preseason to discuss which kits will be worn on which days, sometimes opting to feature the 'electric yellow' jersey at away matches when the 'home' jersey would have not clashed with the opponents home jersey and thus would have traditionally been employed. Brand interests are increasingly considered over traditional interests.

Nike, located in Beaverton, Oregon, is also the outfitter for several US colleges and universities including the University of Oregon, the alma mater of Nike founder and former-CEO Phil Knight (and alma matter of the author). Knight and Nike maintain a close relationship with the University of Oregon. One of the manifestations of this is Nike's use of University of Oregon athletic teams for the testing of Nike products – both in terms of functional research and marketing schemes. In 2003, Nike designed three uniforms for the football team – green (the traditional home color), white (the traditional away color) and an experimental color – 'lightning yellow'. The 'lightning jersey generated attention in the local press and garnered significant national exposure when discussed in the context of a *Sports Illustrated* cover story about the 'new image' of the UO football. The color was then adopted in the design uniforms for the other University of Oregon teams and is promoted in 'Oregon Ducks' paraphernalia of many sorts at the University bookstore and retail shops throughout the Eugene area, where the University of Oregon is located, and in Portland, the biggest city in Oregon.

Sport clubs and teams are often socially constructed to be representatives

of places and uniforms are important elements of that representation. The influence of Nike in that representation in different places provides evidence that clubs and teams are increasingly associated with a sport apparel outfitter (e.g. Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma) and perhaps thus less associated with a place. The uniform is a powerful element in how a team is imagined and remembered.

The bold 'lightning yellow' that was employed to bring a modern and flashy look to the University of Oregon just as the 'electric yellow' was used at FC Barcelona. In a similar way, a rhetoric of how the color reflects the 'bold and modern' profile of the club and the places it represents is advanced. In this way, the University of Oregon athletics/Eugene/Oregon and FC Barcelona/Barcelona/Catalonia are linked through the marketing strategies of Nike. So not only is that distinctive color designed to evoke a connection to University of Oregon athletics and FC Barcelona and the places in which they are situated, it is meant to elicit a connection to Nike. In this way, University of Oregon athletics and FC Barcelona are sub-brands of Nike – which in some way links Eugene and Barcelona. This connection found subtle expression at a Oregon ducks (American) football game on September 24, 2005. Among the thousands of fans wearing Nike branded electric yellow Oregon ducks shirts, baseball caps and replica jerseys, was an individual in the Oregon supporter section wearing a Nike branded 2005-2006 electric yellow FC Barcelona jersey. Similarly, several people blended in with the yellow Oregon shirts by wearing Brazilian national team jerseys, also bright yellow (traditionally so in the case of Brazil), also branded by Nike. That each jersey seemed equally appropriate for supporting FC Barcelona, the University of Oregon Ducks and the Brazilian national team makes one wonder if the symbolic power of the jersey to represent place has been altered, perhaps diminished, by a displaced connection to an aesthetic or style marketed by a transnational corporate brand.

To Brand or Not to Brand: A Jersey Sponsor?

The global/local question comes to a head in the debate over whether FC Barcelona should adopt an official jersey sponsor. An official jersey buys the right to advertise via team jerseys, worn by players and fans. Jersey's become billboards to promote a product that is often not explicitly related to sport nor to the place where the team is located. In 1995, the two largest jersey sponsor contracts were held by Manchester United and Real Madrid with Vodafone and Siemens Mobile respectively.³ Both clubs earned a reported 14 million Euros per year from the arrangement (Gillis 2005). Both clubs, like most clubs besides FC Barcelona, has their corporate sponsor printed across the center of the jersey.

In some cases the arrangements see congruous from a place-based per-

spective. Newcastle United, for example, for a time had Newcastle Brown Ale as their jersey sponsor. In other cases, the sponsor-team relations seems more disjointed from a club/place perspective. During the 2000-2001 season, Fulham featured the Pizza Hut logo on their jerseys – observers wondered what a West London football club had to do with an American fast food chain. Here globalization is seen to facilitate a disconnect between club and place.

That FC Barcelona does not have a corporate sponsor on their uniforms has long been a source of pride for the club and its supporters. The discourse long used by the club holds that the Barça shirt is too pure to be tainted by such a crass degree of commercialism – and illustrative to the club's value of independence. It is often suggested that Barça cannot rightfully wear a sponsor's logo because the team represents Catalonia. Considering nearly every other top-league professional team worldwide has corporate sponsorship on their jerseys, this does make the FC Barcelona situation somewhat distinctive.

As proud as supporters of FC Barcelona have been to have no corporate jersey brand (other than the Nike insignia of course) on the jersey, it is also clear that a significant amount of money could be raised by negotiating such an agreement. That club has so famously never featured a sponsor and have the 2005 FIFA world player of the year in Ronaldinho were cited as reasons why FC Barcelona could be able to land a record-breaking endorsement deal. One report suggested that a sponsorship deal could be worth as much as \$25 million a year (Barça close to first shirt sponsor deal). That money could finance the purchase of a high-profile player or two, which could lead to further on-field success and further marketing appeal. This idea was quite likely in the mind of Laporta, who made a campaign promise to further develop the marketing and branding potential of the club, in part by suggesting he would be the one to sign a corporate jersey sponsor for the first time.

Three years of Laporta's presidency passed with no contract signed and no sponsor on the shirts. Speculation was that Laporta was waiting for the moment when the best possible deal may be negotiated. Press reports suggested that FC Barcelona had been close to an agreement with Chinese authorities to advertise the 2008 Olympics in Beijing (*El Barça podria llevar...2005*). The details of negotiations however, have been shrouded in secrecy. Qatar airlines, Toyota and Hitachi were also mentioned as possible sponsors (*El Barça podria llevar...2005*). When it was suggested that an internet betting company, Betandwin, might land the contract, columnists wrote out in protest, "The Barça brand should associate itself with a prestigious brand...Barça should never be related to betting" (Prats, 2005a). *Sport* opines that the shirt advertisement is 'inevitable and necessary' (Casanovas, 2005). However, in doing so, the editor, Josep Maria Casanovas, writes about

³ In 2006, Manchester United signed a jersey sponsorship agreement with American insurance company AIG.

the end of romanticism, suggesting that perhaps some connection to or representation of Barcelona and Catalonia is being sacrificed in featuring a corporate sponsor on the team uniforms.

Ultimately, in 2006 after the season had already begun, FC Barcelona adopted a different kind of jersey ‘sponsor’ – UNICEF. Instead of selling the rights of the jersey to a corporate sponsor, it is FC Barcelona who has agreed to donate two million dollars a year to the humanitarian organization for the rights to display the UNICEF logo on the shirts and use in their marketing materials. Laporta explained the club’s reasoning for signing this agreement, “If you look at our history, this is a club that has always represented the values of citizenship, sport and democracy in the Catalan capital. We are a club that appreciates talent and tolerance. Through 107 years we have represented those values, and in that time our shirt has never been sold.” (Bell 2006). Indeed, this agreement further demonstrates the Laporta administration’s efforts to market FC Barcelona as the team of Barcelona, Catalonia and the globe.

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