

*Dariusz Zifonun / Kristian Naglo*

# Core Activity, Event and Crisis: Making the Small Worlds of Amateur Football<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we use a glocalisation theory framework to argue that the management of paradoxes, contradictions and ambivalences—which are distinctive of amateur football—is the driving force of re/constructing the field of amateur football and re/writing the boundaries to professional football. We develop a micro-sociological approach for the study of amateur football by distinguishing between three different types of activities—core activities, crisis, and events—that are being performed in the small worlds of grassroots football. To this end, three different case studies in the context of German amateur football will be analysed within the scope of our theoretical and methodological framework: First of all, the idea of a specific footballing style developed by a local Turkish ethnic club; secondly, the endeavour of a local club to install a new artificial grass pitch; and finally, an international under-17 youth tournament. These case studies show that it is precisely the contact to professionalism that shapes the identity of the amateur world, and that the unique ways of dealing with global forces allow for constructing locality. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the German amateur football world, we suggest to take seriously the first-order ‘messiness’ of the distinctions between amateurs and professionals in football which has so far been widely ignored or not reflected when researchers approach the amateur football world by using clear-cut second-order concepts of amateurism and professionalism.

Keywords: *crisis; event; core activity; social worlds; small worlds; football; amateur; professional; glocalisation; ethnography*

1 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and comments. Moreover, we express our appreciation to Vivian Strotmann for her kind and professional editorial support.

## The Glocal World of German Amateur Football

The main premise of the following case study is the idea that the social world of German amateur football is a mixture and mutual interrelation of both the local and the global and of amateurism and professionalism. While sensitive to the specific cultural and historical contexts in which the game has developed in different countries, and the form in which they have shaped the way it is now experienced, it is clear that we are engaging with a phenomenon whose dimensions are national and international rather than local and isolated considering the all-encompassing influence of the electronic media.<sup>2</sup> The grassroots football experience, on account of its sheer complexity and the fact that it is so often embedded in a sense of local identity, challenges the idea of globalisation as a one-dimensional process characterised by standardisation. However, at the same time, specific local practices and self-perceptions persist and continue to shape the way in which club life operates below the elite professional level, including values, traditions and myths, sometimes facilitating, sometimes moderating the impulse to modernise or re-organise. This argument stresses the idea that the global is a realm of the imagination which has to be analysed at the local level.

Glocalisation according to Roland Robertson comprises the endeavour to re-contextualise global phenomena locally.<sup>3</sup> This assumes mutual influences of the universal and the particular and ambivalent spaces, and that cultural globalisation finds expressions as homogenisation and heterogenisation at the same time.<sup>4</sup> The idea of glocalisation can thus be illustrated convincingly drawing on examples from professional football, as the mutual dependency of the global and the local, in which local, i. e. national, practice finds its representation in the mass media, is well observable.<sup>5</sup> One can see, for instance, in men's football how different players both on and off the pitch, together with fashionable clothes, hair-cuts or tattoos have come to represent different patterns of behaviour amongst players of the game in recent years. Professional footballers today are not only athletes but also celebrities indicating "the commodification of sports charisma through merchandise endorsement" by which "sport moves away

- 2 Steve Redhead: *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues: The Transformation of Soccer Culture*, London 1997; Tobias Werron: *World Sport and its Public: On Historical Relations of Modern Sport and the Media*, in: Ulrik Wagner/Rasmus K. Storm/John Milton Hoberman (eds.): *Observing Sport: Modern System Theoretical Approaches*, Schorndorf 2010, pp. 33–60.
- 3 Roland Robertson: *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London 1992.
- 4 Richard Giulianotti: *Glocalization and Global Sport*, in: Roland Robertson/Didem Buhari-Gulmez (eds.): *Global Culture: Consciousness and Connectivity*, Farnham 2016, pp. 128–131.
- 5 Richard Giulianotti/Roland Robertson (eds.): *Globalization and Sport*, Oxford 2007; Richard Giulianotti/Roland Robertson: *Globalization & Football*, London 2009.

from the impersonality of athletic strengths [...], and towards the commodified personalization of sporting performance”.<sup>6</sup> Examples of these different patterns include the increasingly ecstatic individualistic celebration of a goal, the progressive professionalisation in the ‘marketing’ of players or the admission of crises in the player’s private life. These developments and specific examples point to the global aspects of a (post-) modern game strongly moulded by the media. This way, the mass media help to imagine a great number of others out there who are engaged in carrying out the same kind of practices with the same aims.

In this account, modernity in its multiple forms is based on different versions of the imaginary, which allows for perceived connections to be drawn among strangers, with the aid of mass mediation. According to this approach, “readers of narratives disseminated translocally through print identify with both the audience addressed by the narrator and the narrated-about characters, and become aware of the existence of like-minded readers who share similar identifications. The ‘We’ of nationalism is the tropic embodiment of these two identifications”.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Benedict Anderson<sup>8</sup> focusses on print capitalism as the major trigger in the creation of imagined communities in his famous study, today it is certainly what we could call ‘media capitalism’ which helps to create new perceptions of imagined worlds. This includes “the appropriation of agonistic bodily skills that can then further lend passion and purpose to the community so imagined”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, everyday football routines, (media) discourses on those routines and corresponding narratives, form the basis for what we believe to be the cultural-linguistic spaces of football that help to define national or local imaginary borders. Football at the non-elite level respectively is very much part of the globalised world in which social actors interpret global processes and phenomena according to their particular beliefs and local needs.

Symbolic circulations as it is understood here accordingly do not only represent the distribution of material and immaterial goods. Rather, they generate the perception amongst recipients that they are part of a bigger and abstract context/correlation. These processes have the potential of generating (collective) identifications based on imaginaries.<sup>10</sup> By increasingly taking part in cultural circulations of professional

- 6 Richard Giulianotti: *Sport: A Critical Sociology of the Global Game*, London 2005, p.118.
- 7 Benjamin Lee/Edward Li Puma: *Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity*, in: *Public Culture* 14 (2002), pp. 195–196.
- 8 Benedict Anderson: *Die Erfindung der Nation: Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts*, extended edition, Frankfurt a. M. 1991.
- 9 Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996.
- 10 Andreas Langenohl: *Imaginäre Grenzen: Zur Entstehung impliziter Kollektivcodierungen in EU-Europa*, in: *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 1 (2010), pp. 45–63; Andreas Langenohl: *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe*, Basingstoke 2015.

football, local clubs may be supported in their endeavours to re-define the identity/boundaries of their own club. However, for the clubs to gain in locality—understood as a concentration of significant relations in a specific space<sup>11</sup>—through the referentialities that national and global football enables, is a paradox process that needs to be worked through analytically in ways and to a degree that have so far been neglected. If glocalisation is understood as penetrating really deeply into structures of the social, it makes sense to quite literally go to ground level and observe what is happening there, as for instance manifested in amateur football and its initiatives.

In order to complement and reconsider the macro-frame of globalisation theory we will, firstly, suggest a micro-sociological framework for the study of amateur football by distinguishing between three different types of activities—core activities, crisis, and events—that are being performed in the small worlds of grassroots football. Secondly, we will argue that the management of paradoxes, contradictions and ambivalences—which are distinctive of (German) amateur football—is the driving force of re/constructing the field of amateur football and re/writing the boundaries to professional football. I.e., we suggest to take seriously the first-order ‘messiness’ of the distinctions between amateurs and professionals in football which has so far been widely ignored or not adequately reflected where researchers approached the amateur football world by using clear-cut second-order concepts of amateurism and professionalism. With regard to methodology, we developed both the conceptual framework as well as our empirical argument by combining ethnographic fieldwork with hermeneutic data analysis.<sup>12</sup> This methodology is based on an iterative research process that switches between data coding on the level of single cases, theoretical contextualisation and comparative case analysis, resulting in thick descriptions as provided in this article that relate action to social and cultural structures. This approach rests on the assumption established in the sociology of everyday life that institutionalised social relations, practises and cultural patterns can be interpreted as standardised solutions to problems that actors regularly encounter in their daily routines.<sup>13</sup>

11 Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*; Andreas Langenohl: *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe*.

12 Robert M. Emerson/Rachel I. Fretz/Linda L. Shaw: *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago/London 1995; Barney G. Glaser/Anselm L. Strauss: *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago 1967; Dirk vom Lehn/Ronald Hitzler: *Phenomenology-based Ethnography: Introduction to the Special Issue*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44:5 (2015), pp. 539–543; Hans-Georg Soeffner: “Trajectory” as Intended Fragment: The Critique of Empirical Reason According to Anselm Strauss, in: David R. Maines (ed.): *Social Organization and Social Process: Essays in Honor of Anselm Strauss*, New York 1991, pp. 359–371.

## Core Activity: Playing Ball and Shaping a Local Ethnic Amateur Milieu

The idea of focussing on “core activities” can be derived from Anselm Strauss’ micro-sociological approach to analysing the social world. Indeed, Strauss suggested that, instead of talking about “the social world” we should think of the everyday life of modern societies as being segmented into numerous “social worlds”.<sup>14</sup>

According to Strauss, social worlds (like, for example, the football world) segment into subworlds (like rugby and association football or, on a different plane, into different teams or into the subworlds of players and fans), they intersect with different social worlds (like the local town or business worlds) and they legitimise *vis-à-vis* their members and their environment (for example when players justify their spending enormous amounts of time in participating in the football world by its positive impact on their health, or when football associations explain the enormous amount of tax money they gain by reference to the positive effects football has on social integration).<sup>15</sup> Strauss argues that social worlds come into existence and are maintained through these three processes. Most importantly, however, he points out that social worlds are centred around “at least one primary activity (along with related clusters of activity)”<sup>16</sup> and that the performance of this core activity is the very purpose of the social world.

Taking this analytical perspective, ethnographic work focuses on the meticulous analysis of core activities and tries to decipher its meaning by reconstructing the symbolic contexts in which it is embedded. With regard to football the core activity of the football world is, obviously, the playing of football on the pitch.

13 Alfred Schütz/Thomas Luckmann: *The Structures of the Life-World*, Evanston 1973; Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York 1966; Hans-Georg Soeffner: *The Order of Rituals: The Interpretation of Everyday Life*, New Brunswick 1997.

14 Anselm Strauss: *A Social World Perspective*, in: *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 1 (1978), pp. 119–128; Hans-Georg Soeffner/Dariuš Zifonun: *Integration: An Outline from the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge*, in: *Qualitative Sociology Review* 4:2 (2008), pp. 3–23.

15 Anselm Strauss: *Continual Permutations of Action*, New York 1993, pp. 215ff.

16 Anselm Strauss: *A Social World Perspective*, p. 122.

## FC Hochstätt Türkspor and Football Style

In the following, we will analyse a move by FC Hochstätt Türkspor<sup>17</sup> and argue that (1) the football practice in question (short passing, triangle play) derives from professional football, that (2) the very idea of a team having a style is borrowed from international football and appropriated by the Hochstätt team to delineate its amateur identity and that (3) the Hochstätt club links its claim for a style to features of Turkish national culture. The play has as its starting point a free kick in Hochstätt Türkspor's half of the field; it is the attacking team (Figure).

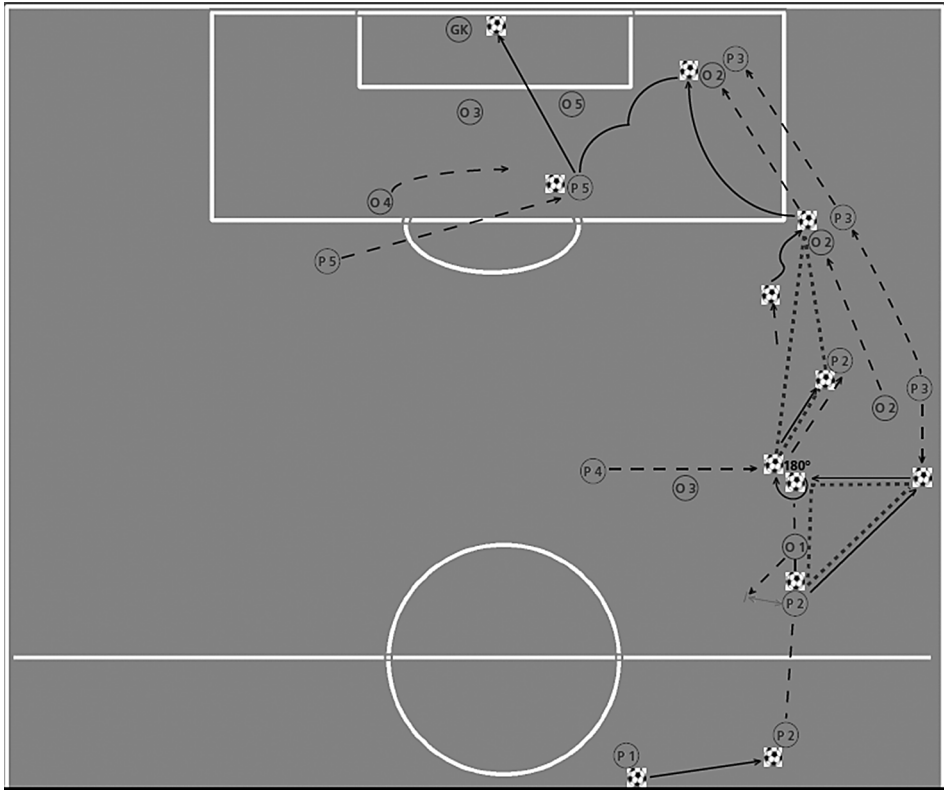


Figure: A play by FC Hochstätt Türkspor © Dariusz Zifonun

17 For a more extensive and partly different analysis, see Dariusz Zifonun: Pasttraditional Migrants: A Modern Type of Community, in: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44:5 (2015), pp. 617–635.

Player 1 passes the ball from the right edge of the centre circle forward and to the right over a distance of six meters to player 2. In five steps, the latter takes the ball across the halfway line. An opponent blocks his path, whereupon player 2 fakes a pass to the left with his right foot. The opponent reacts to this feint with a defensive move toward the centre of the playing field. This creates space for player 2 on the outer right side of the field. He takes advantage of this open space by playing a pass over nine meters toward the right sideline. The pass is received by player 3, who moves back along the sideline to do so. Player 3 receives the ball with his left foot and passes the ball with his right foot over four meters past an opponent toward the centre of the field into the feet of player 4, who is running toward him. Player 4 strokes the ball with his left foot and, in the process, turns his body toward the opponents' goal; once the 180-degree turn is completed, he is in a position to pass the ball past the opposing player to the centre with his left foot. In the meantime, player 2 has moved from the halfway line straight ahead to the centre of the field and receives the ball with his right foot after a seven-meter pass from player 4. He slows down, stops after six short steps, and then plays the ball on a bounce, forward over six meters, past the defender, toward the right corner of the penalty area. Here, player 3, who had run forward on the right side, is waiting. Being pursued by an opponent, he fails to cleanly control the ball as he receives it. The ball takes a bounce over a distance of five meters toward the right goal post, describing an arch of 2.5 meters in height. Player 3 and his counterpart run after the ball; under pressure from player 3, the opponent lobs the ball into the centre of the penalty area. The ball bounces twice before player 5, coming from the left, runs away from his opponent and, with the outside of his left foot, shoots the ball past two opponents and the goal keeper into the centre of the goal just below the crossbar.

The first aspect that is noteworthy when we look at this play is the fact that the team needed only 27 seconds to move the ball from behind the halfway line into the opponents' goal. This is accomplished without resort to the long ball. To the contrary, the five players of the attacking team involved in this play use five short passes. Player 2 is the only one to dribble the ball a few steps. Otherwise, the one-touch passing game is the dominant mode of moving the ball. The key to this play is that it requires a huge effort in terms of running from the players. Only by running to get into an adequate position are players 2 and 3 able to again receive the ball; only relentlessly pursuing the opponent allows player 4 to force his counterpart to make an inaccurate pass to the inside, and only thanks to reacting and running quickly is player 5 able to gain possession of the ball and score. Long passes are just as absent from this play as dribbling is. The players do not attempt to gain ground individually. No one tries to dribble past his opponent. Rather, the play is based on a moving triangle involving the players 2, 3, and 4.

The play resembles what Christoph Biermann and Ulrich Fuchs have characterised as the "modern style." In their view, a football team's style of play is its interpretation of a more general system of play and the set of tactical options that the system typ-

ically offers.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, style must be viewed as a mode of expression and presentation. However, only the performative and discursive enactment of a style makes it 'my' or 'our' style, thus rendering it an identity marker. Only the conscious consideration of one's own actions and their meaning forges a diffuse conglomeration of patterns of action and interpretation into a focused, clearly discernible style, not least by setting it apart from other ones. The authors stress that all the options known to football were developed by the time of the World Cup in 1958.<sup>19</sup> They trace how rigid systems of play eroded and, in consequence, style gained significance. The greater the range of potential plays and possible combinations to choose from, the more crucial become interpretation and the way plays are forged into a style and executed on the field. They describe the modern style as a style that has developed since the 1970s, which is characterised by "players in constant motion, collective action at high speed, and a high level of individual skill, which comes to bear in team play only".<sup>20</sup> The key stylistic device of a modern offense is the short pass. "On the field, it takes the shape of combination play within very limited space, where the participants have only brief possession of the ball".<sup>21</sup>

Biermann and Fuchs further emphasise that a style is not simply a physical technique but an expression of a certain "idea of football": "Is it passionate or calm and cool, destructive or creative, flexible or more static, combative or playful, elegant or wooden".<sup>22</sup> And as Kelly observes:

One cultural idiom for expressing relations of affinity and opposition is that of sporting 'style', generally taken to be a distinctive, albeit elusive configuration of coaching philosophy, game strategy, player attitudes, and team social relations. Individual players and coaches have styles; teams have style, but the notion is used broadly (and most problematically) as a national style of sports. [...] Sports styling is, in effect, a core grammatical construction of sports glocalization.<sup>23</sup>

18 Christoph Biermann/Ulrich Fuchs: *Der Ball ist rund, damit das Spiel die Richtung ändern kann*, Köln 2004, p. 39.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 114. Translated by the authors.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 139. Translated by the authors.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 44. Translated by the authors.

23 William W. Kelly: *Is Baseball a Global Sport? America's 'National Pastime' as Global Field and International Sport*, in: Richard Giulianotti/Roland Robertson (eds.): *Globalization and Sport*, Oxford 2007, p. 85.



## Ironies and Their Resolution

Returning to our case, we can identify two ironies. The first one is that this is a style that is by no means original to FC Hochstätt Türkspor. It is globally available and has been established on the level of professional football. Furthermore, the whole idea that teams (need to) have a style that makes them identifiable goes back to (the media discourse about) world cups and originally served as a vehicle of claim to national identity.<sup>24</sup>

To get a clear understanding of the second irony involved in the FC Hochstätt's play, we have to take a brief look at the way in which the club itself makes sense of the modern style it adopted. This pattern of action, which is played all over the world, shows high affinity to the interpretation pattern of *arkadaşlık*, friendship, which occupies a prominent spot in the social world of Hochstätt Türkspor. Werner Schiffauer has underlined the prominent status of *arkadaşlık* in Turkey's traditional rural culture.<sup>25</sup> The latter is marked by a strict division between the internal and external sphere. The family represents the internal world of economic reproduction. This internal world faces an external one that includes the village community and extends to the neighbouring villages, the district administration, and so on. This external world is considered to be hostile and a threat to maintaining the family and securing its survival. Social relationships are ordered hierarchically, depend on family status, gender, and age and are based on obligations toward the family and the village. Outside relationships are almost exclusively maintained by the male head of the family. In this social formation, *arkadaşlık* and especially the friendship between two young men forms an alternative world. It enables young men to entertain close relationships outside of the family. In contrast to the relationships within the family, those external relationships are characterised by their voluntary nature, by equality of status, and reciprocity. In these friendships, hierarchy, leadership, and the assertion of individual interests are tolerated only for a limited time and require that all of the friends forming the group recognise and accept them.

These principles governing the relationships among friends are mirrored in the play discussed above. The system of play is neither dominated by a playmaker nor is there a clear-cut division of roles. Rather, the players display a great degree of flexibility and leave their positions to create a numbers advantage in the vicinity of the ball. The triangle in motion constitutes a horizontal web of relations devoid of a control centre or any other type of central command. The main principle

24 Christiane Eisenberg et al.: FIFA 1904–2004: 100 Years of Football: The FIFA Centennial Book, London 2004.

25 Werner Schiffauer: Die Gewalt der Ehre: Erklärungen zu einem deutsch-türkischen Sexualkonflikt, Frankfurt a.M. 1983, pp. 108–124.

of organisation is not based on (the 'star') individually possessing the ball but on quickly relaying the ball to one's fellow player, who follows the same principle. The high importance of *arkadaşlık* in the repertoire of interpretations encountered in this social world supports this understanding. 'Arkadaş' is a term frequently used when the manager addresses his players. The players often refer to friendship, as well. When asked for reasons why they play for this particular club, players from outside the district mention the friendship among Turkish teams while players from the Hochstätt district state that they have been friends since childhood. Finally, the club leadership points out that the Hochstätt Türkspor players receive significantly lower expense allowances than the players of other clubs, claiming that the players accept this because of the friendships and the relationships among the generations that the club cultivates.

The second irony then is that, empirically, this is not the way the team plays most of the time. If we look at the team's offensive game, we observe that it often deviates from the pattern identified in the play discussed above. This is especially so regarding the game in midfield where offensive plays are regularly organised centrally: at the team meeting before the match, the coach designates one of the two players capable of playing the traditional playmaker position to assume that role. He is the pivot for the transition from defence to offense; he is the one who initiates most plays. Assuming a central position, he limits the flexibility and freedom of his teammates. If the opponent succeeds in neutralising him (one-on-one coverage, double coverage), a flexible triangle offense can hardly be established. This kind of centralism of an offense organised around a key player is again encountered on defence. The team frequently plays with a sweeper. He plays flexibly behind the defence and acts as a security guard. His flexibility and freedom owe to the central defenders holding their position fairly rigidly. He thus limits the defence's flexibility and renders lateral shifts of the defence impossible. Midfield and offensive players neglecting defensive work also stands in stark contrast to the modern style. Offensive pressing, which is the key to quickly recovering the ball and maintaining a large share of possession, takes place only rarely. The forwards mainly perceive themselves as 'strikers' and the attacking midfield players view their role as that of 'creative playmakers', both of whom are largely relieved of defensive tasks.

We may hold that FC Hochstätt Türkspor, for the most part, subscribes to a fairly conventional style of play, as is widespread among the teams of the lower German amateur leagues. I. e., far from acting as a non-hierarchical network of friends, the team would act under the authority of two leaders, a defensive and an offensive one, who were assigned power by an external authority—rather than self-coordinate according to the necessities on the pitch. However, the key aspect is that the actors, in their own perception, tend to strongly overrate and aggrandise the elements also present in their play that stand for a 'modern style'. Although these elements play only a limited role in the way the team plays, they are nonetheless interpreted as the true nature of their

play; whenever they surface, they are highlighted and described in terms of representing the team's 'actual style' and a collectively distinguishing feature.<sup>26</sup>

## Crisis:

### The Horizon of Professional Football and its Promises

While core activities are the routine encounters that constitute the basis and rationale for people to engage in social worlds, they are surrounded, as has been argued before, by "related clusters of activity" that have to be taken seriously from a perspective of analysis. One other type of activity are *crises*. Crises are ruptures in routine activities that question the legitimacy of social worlds and raise existential questions. We will now elaborate on how clubs engage in legitimacy discourses for maintaining their boundaries and their own structures of relevance in the context of crisis.<sup>27</sup> Quite often, the idea of installing a new artificial pitch in order to modernise the club's facilities while actively devising a new economic and sporting strategy for the years ahead is at the heart of this.

Apart from the clubs' athletic accomplishments, the members of German non-elite football clubs view the acquisition and regular use of the clubhouse as a success.<sup>28</sup> Clubs usually possess their own clubhouse and have their own pitch, though sometimes the facilities are owned by the local government. In certain parts of Germany—especially where football has been played on dirt/cinder pitches—it is a relatively recent development that lower level clubs aim to install their own *artificial* playing surface. These projects become, as a rule, the centre of the clubs' activities for a considerable period of time, in a sense therefore epitomising both a rekindling of the

26 We argue that *arkadaşlık* plays a key role in the club's self-understanding. *Arkadaşlık* is an important element in the club's philosophy and it informs the club's preference for a certain football style that is exemplified in the play we analysed. The starting point for this argument was the ethnographic observation that 'arkadaş' is frequently used when players, coaches, managers and staff of the club address each other. We related this everyday life use of the concept to statements the actors made in informal conversations and in interviews and to observations we made during training and matches. We also showed video footage of matches and single plays to the actors and asked them for their interpretation of the data. Additionally, we made use of the anthropological and sociological literature on friendship and on Turkey, as well as of the familiarity of the members of the research team with both football culture and Turkish everyday life culture. We found the following piece of ethnographic evidence particularly striking: We provided the club with video footage of matches we produced as part of our ethnography to be used on the club's website. In selecting scenes, the host of the website who was also a player for the team and a referee, showed a remarkable preference for plays that were made in an 'arkadaşlık-manner' and those who commented on the videos also frequently expressed their liking of these excerpts.

27 Dariuš Zifonun: *Posttraditional Migrants: A Modern Type of Community*, p. 3.

28 Ibid.

club and of football as a whole within the village, town or region in question. In some cases, pitches are officially consecrated at the end of the construction phase: The reverent blessing the artificial surface with holy water in this context can be interpreted as a symbol for the meaning of the new pitch, representing the rebirth of the club. Here, artificial pitches are often viewed as a manifestation of modernisation tendencies that in turn are seen as a way of securing a club's future. The installation of new pitches is typically interpreted as a *signature project* by the club members. The decision to install such pitches is portrayed as being without any kind of alternative and as a potential achievement of which the club and its members will be proud, and as having profound professionalising effects.

A further reason why these new pitches and the premises are regarded as extremely important by the clubs is that the old playing surface is perceived as embodying an existential *crisis* for the club. Hence, the projects to build new pitches can be interpreted as a reaction to these crises: they activate processes of legitimisation through professionalisation, rationalisation and homogenisation of everyday spaces. The members of clubs involved in the process of re-construction consequently feel that they are part of a bigger context, whilst their main motivation is to legitimise their position in the social world of amateur football in Germany by providing a playing surface and other facilities that match professional standards.<sup>29</sup> This practice of identity building supports the idea that implicit understandings of the local, the national and the global are symbolically circulating in German amateur football. These are never expressed directly and explicitly by the participants involved but are nonetheless clearly visible because the practices that carry them are public.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of German non-elite football, tendencies to professionalise, modernise or re-organise local clubs are rarely mentioned as such, but are quite often linked to the idea of crisis—i. e. calling for self-perpetuating action—, an idea that is somehow ubiquitous in local football discourses. However, the inflationary usage of crisis rather hints to a vague rhetoric than to a specific interpretation of a situation. The narrative of crisis indicates insecurity, but also suffering and ordeal, and points to an unknown future.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, it is often an essential stimulus and incentive to action.

29 For a comprehensive definition of crisis communication as an ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, and the idea to primarily understand crisis as an element to force action, see Timothy L. Sellnow/Matthew W. Seeger: *Theorizing Crisis Communication*, West Sussex 2013.

30 Andreas Langenohl: *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe*, p. 172.

31 Reinhart Koselleck: *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, p. 203.

The investigation of a case study we would like to draw on below initially took the form of participating in the committee that was coordinating and supervising the construction of the artificial ground at a local football club. While the initial idea was to focus on the process of the construction of new club structures (premises, ground, pitch) and a new club identity, it became clear that the impact of such processes on the meaning of ‘crisis’ in non-professional football in Germany is the real focus.

## The Project of Local Club BSV Bielstein to Construct a New Astro Turf

The BSV Bielstein—Ball sportverein (BSV) translates as Ball Sports Club—which is located in a small town of roughly 6,000 inhabitants not far from Cologne—was founded in 1920 and has about 505 members, around 30 of which are refugees, divided into the categories ‘active’ and ‘passive’. ‘Passive’ refers to non-playing members and those not actively involved in running a team, but paying a membership fee and thereby supporting the club. The club has 50 volunteers, 35 coaches, four senior teams and 13 youth teams. Whilst the club also comprises a gymnastics section, football is by far the most important constituent and the only one visible on the club’s website. The website is considered very important for the public image of the club and serves as a communication platform, including a link to the club’s Facebook presence. The club’s first team has been playing in the second lowest division (*Kreisliga C*) of the respective regional association since 2008.

This case selection was largely prompted by the ideas of the board—supported by some motivated members—to restructure and effectively reinvent their club on account of a perceived crisis threatening its very existence. At the centre of this process was the project to install a new high quality artificial pitch, the construction of which started in 2014 and was eventually finished in 2015, replacing the allegedly inferior cinder pitch surface. This went hand in hand with a partial rebuilding and a complete renovation of the clubhouse (*Vereinsheim*). The starting point of these initiatives was an all-encompassing discourse/narrative of crisis, determined by the club’s leadership, in which the survival of the club served as a strategy to legitimise the restructuring. As soon as the process of building the new surface and renovating the premises was finished, the club organised a series of events aimed at improving its visibility in the local region and beyond.<sup>32</sup>

32 One example was the so-called *Ehrenrunde* (Lap of Honour), which was organised by the club in the summer of 2015. The idea behind this event was that through its introduction the German Football Association (*Deutscher Fußball Bund – DFB*) was offering 63 selected amateur clubs the opportunity to present the ‘2014 FIFA World Cup Winners Trophy’ for one day on their premises.

At the beginning, the fieldwork was informed by a couple of hypotheses regarding the club's restructuring initiatives. We assumed that the club expected and wanted to strengthen the loyalty of its members, which would result in drawing new—mainly exclusive—social borders.

## The Club and the New Ground: Strategies of Legitimation

After some of the older playing surfaces in the region had already been replaced by artificial grass pitches, the club's board decided to lay down their own astro-turf, replacing the old open-access playing area with a new enclosed and fenced-in arena. In informal discussions, the members reasoned that the old cinder pitch embodied the club's crisis in various ways. For example, the core activity of playing football ("One simply can't play decent football on this pitch"); safety and health issues ("The old surface is uneven and therefore too dangerous, leads to injuries"); competition beyond the core activity and imitation ("Every club around has a better pitch and is therefore able to attract more and better young players as well as senior players"). It was even argued that the very existence of the club was in jeopardy if the club were unable to get its own artificial surface. The latter assertion can be seen as part of an integrative narrative claiming universal validity and significance, independent of specific practices, discourses and value orientations.

At club meetings, in a specially-produced leaflet and on the club's website, the board argued a) that building the new pitch would help to increase the number of members in the long run and that it would make the signing of talented youth and senior players possible; b) that the local school could use it as a playing field, thus helping to integrate the club with the local neighbourhood; c) that there would be an enhancement of the visual attractiveness ("from red cinder to the most beautiful green", as it says in the leaflet); d) that new approaches in terms of more proficient training could be implemented with a focus on tactics, speed and skill, and e) that the pitch was playable 365 days a year, cleaner and easier and less expensive to maintain, so that fewer games would have to be cancelled. This explicit and incontestable discourse made it possible for the club to link adjacent social worlds and subworlds of football (such as the subworld of professional football or the social worlds of refugees) to this project without explicitly referring to them.

Another important aim stressed by the club's board was to strengthen the local community via collective practices in the context of the project, which coincided with the necessity of finding sponsors. As the club needed to raise a substantial sum of money to finance the new surface—though most of the money actually came from local government—, players in the youth teams were sent round town with collecting boxes, and traditional events (Halloween, Carnival) were used to raise funds. The fundraising was overseen and organised by a team specifically put together for this purpose, with

the explicit task of approaching potential sponsors. The principal fundraisers expected unconditional loyalty from its members in the context of this project. This strengthened sociability amongst club members on the one hand, as hard work on behalf of the project generated a new kind of togetherness and was rewarded on an emotional level. On the other hand, a tendency to exclude those who did not participate actively ('enough') and who did not contribute extra money also became obvious. In this context, 'merely' paying one's membership fee was no longer sufficient in the eyes of those running the project as raising money from outside the club almost became an obsession. The declared aim of the club's officials was to start this 'new era' unindebted.

## From Crisis to Action: Working for the New Ground

The provision of these new facilities comprised a complete rebranding and revitalising of the club with the major aim of becoming the most successful local football club 'in the whole' of the region Oberberg—despite the fact that other astro-turfs had been laid no more than three miles away. In this context, amongst other developments, one has to mention the new clubhouse, a newly-designed website, new music before and after first-team fixtures as well as a return to the old club anthem. Also, a person responsible for the integration of refugees was appointed. All of this happened over the past three years. Recently, the club won an award endowed by the professional football club Bayer Leverkusen for its social work. This shows a more professional attitude and alignment within the club regarding areas in which they were involved in competition with other clubs locally and regionally. However, it is important to note that all these modernising initiatives required the support of a majority of the members who had to be convinced that it represented the most appropriate strategy considering the circumstances.

More generally, the ambitious idea of becoming the leading club 'for all' in the region is based on a set of values recently listed by the club in an official publication,<sup>33</sup> comprising concepts such as solidarity, fun, fairness, tolerance, success, responsibility, hospitality, personality and advancement. While this list, though commendably aspirational, is rather vague, the club's president argued in an ethnographic interview that it would also need growth, self-confidence as well as the application of economic and organisational intelligence in order to be successful in the long run, and that those running the club had to think more like directors of an actual company. He also stressed how there should not be stagnation, and that progress was now at the very heart of the club's thinking. At the same time, he defined social integration as the most

33 See <https://www.bsv-bielstein.de/fileadmin/html/media/vereinszeitschrift/2017> (accessed on 5 November 2018).

important feature of the club's identity, and he generally wanted to create a welcoming climate for children, adolescents and refugees.<sup>34</sup>

These views reveal the ambiguous character of the club's current strategy, which is quite typical of the social world of non-elite football in Germany. In this context, the unfolding of a strategic vision for the coming years by the club's board, stressing that the club has now turned from a mere village club (*Dorfverein*) into a small business (*Kleinunternehmen*), is important here. The president further outlined how the club would, for instance, lose a considerable amount of money because of presumably lacking endorsement deals if the first team were not promoted in the coming seasons, and he threatened his own resignation should the team not move up the 'football pyramid' quickly. In this respect, the crisis continues. There is no radical change of perspective from the inside to the outside world, but rather a continuation with a relative shift of focus, in which the existential struggle continues. Crisis seems to be of systemic value for the social world of local football in Germany. However, the club's metamorphosis from a village club to a small business supported by the appropriate parlance is obvious.<sup>35</sup>

To sum up: the astro-turf is interpreted as a symbolically prestigious object within the locality, which, on the one hand, allows for connections to the professional world of football to be established and for a further modernisation of club structures. On the other hand, the integration of non-elite local clubs into a wider football culture shaped largely by their elite professional counterparts impels them to reconfirm their distinctive local amateur identities and to tell them apart from the professional level by creating something completely novel.

Last season (2017/18) the club hired a new manager for the first team and several new players. The team won the league without losing a single game. Consequently, they were promoted to the next level. In this sense, the promise of progress in the context of the club's realignment seems to have been fulfilled, at least until the next crisis arrives.

34 Participant observation, 2012–2014, notes in possession of the author.

35 In a comparative perspective, it is striking that similar processes seem to take place in an international context. See the example of the English non-league club Malvern Town, at: <https://www.malverntown.co.uk/clubinfo/project-2020> (accessed on 12 October 2018).



## Event: The Westerwälder Keramik-Cup

Finally, a third type of activity that can be distinguished analytically are events. Events are highly symbolic, extraordinary activities that call for intensified subjective engagement. Events, whether of global, national or local character—and often combinations of them—, help to produce images and styles. They create and display the attractiveness of a social world. Therefore, they are pivotal in the process of creating meaning and in the analysis of the symbolic stock of knowledge of the social world in which they are located.

Originally, ‘event’ is not an academic concept. It first appeared as ‘the extraordinary’ in the media and was related to a new fun-loving society, as well as to the concept of the ‘post-traditional’. Thus, it can be defined as a specific variation of a festival or celebration which carries a sense of community and belonging. According to Ronald Hitzler, the concept describes a new kind of community, where participants almost paradoxically try to create collectivity by maximising individual self-fulfilment and assuming a minimum of obligations.<sup>36</sup> Such events are always staged/orchestrated and organised by someone with the aim to entertain. In the realm of grass-roots football, in addition, clubs characteristically attempt to use events to strengthen the traditional club communities with their symptomatic claims to commitment in order to link traditional and post-traditional ideas. This again correlates with the focal idea of crisis. In German amateur football, it is argued here, an ‘event’ can be conceptualised via community, because it is intimately connected to the concept of *project*, i. e. as a rule it is processual and comprises a specific timeline. Furthermore, events in this context can be described as *hybrid* as they usually comprise combinations of areas (e. g. action and comedy; science and sport; fun and sobriety), thus forming a new kind of phenomenon, delimiting itself relatively clearly from the single events they are composed of.<sup>37</sup>

We will now elaborate on the case of the *Westerwälder Keramik*<sup>38</sup>-Cup (WKC hereafter) as an example for a hybrid event that can be useful in the context of our analytical framework. As a youth tournament, and especially with the participation of teams from professional clubs, it represents an *arena* where elements of professionalism and amateurism strongly overlap. Secondly, in the 2016 edition of the competition, the organiser came to the conclusion that the tournament could be upgraded by using an

36 Ronald Hitzler: Posttraditionale Vergemeinschaftung: Über neue Formen der Sozialbindung, in: Berliner Debatte Initial, 9:1 (1998), pp. 81–89.

37 Gregor J. Betz et al. (eds.): Hybride Events: Zur Diskussion zeitgeistiger Veranstaltungen, Wiesbaden 2017, p. 1.

38 The region Westerwald is well-known for the production of clay and its ceramic-industry. Hence the reference in the title.

artificial grass pitch to play on. Thus, they decided to lay down a rented surface just before kick-off, which led to a redefinition of the tournament by the people involved and the local press thereafter.

## The Westerwälder Keramik-Cup as Event

The WKC is a two-day international indoor youth tournament for under-17 players. The tournament takes place in a small town called Montabaur in the geographic region Westerwald, situated in South-West Germany between Frankfurt and Cologne. The competition has been organised since the early 1980s, taking place in two different towns (Wirges, Siershahn) within the same local area at that time.

The defining feature of the tournament is a starting field consisting of youth teams from German professional clubs (e.g. in 2018 VfB Stuttgart, Borussia Mönchengladbach, Schalke 04) and internationally renowned clubs (e.g. in 2018 Brøndby IF, Austria Vienna, Wolverhampton Wanderers), as well as other and, in the realm of football, more 'exotic' teams, such as South Carolina United FC and Team Teikyo Nagaoka High School. Two participants from the region usually complete the starting field: While the team EGC Wirges represent the hosts, TUS Koblenz are always invited as the allegedly strongest and biggest club of the region.

What makes this tournament special from an organisational point of view is the fact that it is at the same time registered as a non-profit club (*Verein*), with the explicit aim to support and promote young sportspeople in general. The focus of this support is, according to the competition's website, on the integration of immigrants (*Ausländer*) and ethnic German immigrants (*Aussiedler*), general improvement for the socially excluded, reducing aggression and violence in school and recreational contexts, as well as measures to prevent addictions.<sup>39</sup> As its strategic aim, the club mentions the idea of bridging the gap between sports and the local sponsors on the website—which of course seems to be the focus from the point of view of the organisers. In fact, while attending the tournament, it becomes obvious that the event is predominantly designed as an exclusive sporting event and—at the same time—as a platform for the local businesses.

39 See Westerwälder Keramik-Cup: Wir stellen uns vor, at: <https://www.westerwaelder-keramik-cup.de/der-verein/> (accessed on 19 September 2018). Although the club has a relatively short catalogue of activities regarding its social activities on display, the rather ambitious programme sketched above does not seem to be a priority as the social activities are rarely mentioned.

## Aesthetical Frames of the Keramik-Cup

In regard to the WKC, three different and interrelated frames of reference, namely professionalism, cosmopolitanism and localisation, provide the tournament with meaning. The first one, professionalism, refers to the image of the competition as outstanding tournament with a reputation for presenting very talented players to the audience, many of whom will become professionals eventually. The exclusivity of the competition is stressed by the local and regional press and television as well as by all the people involved (participants, organisers, volunteers). On its website, for instance, the WKC honours players who used to take part in the tournament and who became professionals later on in a 'legends'-section (prominent examples are Julian Draxler, Leroy Sané, and Marc-André Ter-Stegen<sup>40</sup>). Also, former, relatively famous players attend the tournament on a regular basis or star at the draw for the coming event.<sup>41</sup>

During the time of the tournament, so-called VIPs get the chance to retreat into a specific room, a redecorated equipment room within the sports hall. A VIP in this context can be a former professional player, a local politician or a local businessman who bought a VIP-ticket. At the end of the first day of the tournament, a *VIP-night* is organised, exclusively attended by team representatives, organising staff and the local business and political elite. On this occasion, a social programme is organised with dance groups appearing on stage, and in an official part of the evening, team representatives get the chance to thank the organiser with a short speech. Whenever possible, the benefit of the tournament for the region is underscored as designated trademark. The *VIP-night* can thus be interpreted as an *event within the event* designed mainly for promotional purposes, as well as to support networking.

The professional and exclusive aspect of the tournament is further stressed by videos commissioned and produced by the organisers. They mainly consist of iconic images of the players as well as of interviews with players and managers in which the professional character of the tournament and, again, the benefit for the local businesses is highlighted.

The exclusive aspect intersects with the second theme that becomes apparent during the tournament, which is in fact its cosmopolitan flair. Whereas the exclusivity is ubiquitous and the construction and circulation of cultural capital obvious, the accentuated internationality provides the tournament with a potential for symbolic inclusion. Thus, the main headings on the website, for instance, are translated into

40 Julian Draxler is a former Bundesliga player (Schalke 04 and VFL Wolfsburg) who is now playing for Paris Saint-Germain. Leroy Sané (former Schalke 04) is now playing for Premier League Club Manchester City, and Marc-André Ter-Stegen, who used to play for Borussia Mönchengladbach in the German *Bundesliga*, is now the goalkeeper for FC Barcelona.

41 See Westerwälder Keramik-Cup: Gruppenauslosung 2018, at: <https://www.westerwaelder-keramik-cup.de/gruppenauslosung-2/> (accessed on 20 September 2018).

English alongside the logical German. Moreover, there are participating teams from the USA, Great Britain, Austria and Japan. Especially the players from Japan show all kinds of symbolic trappings eagerly while interacting with the audience, with capes, flags and hats with the typical crimson-red disc at its centre. On top, they usually perform practices which are supposedly linked to their 'culture'.<sup>42</sup> This cosmopolitan aura is inserted into the local sociality and provides the tournament with social significance and meaning. In this context, a re-articulation of cultural differences as aesthetic differences takes place. The self-proclaimed aim is to overcome differences and facilitate understanding,<sup>43</sup> similar for instance to interpretations during the *FIFA World Cup*, especially during opening and final ceremonies.

Although the event is linked to a certain region, its towns and its business elite alike ('a trademark of the region'), it differentiates itself from mere locality. On the one hand, it claims to be part of the professional elite football even on an international scale. On the other hand, its cosmopolitan aura is no ordinary practice of international circulation (such as tourism). It rather stresses an inclusive symbolic potential that interprets differences as a matter of taste. Therefore, as a local event the WKC is delimited from outside by a certain professional and cosmopolitan aesthetics, generating a specific kind of trans-locality.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, as an event in German amateur football, the WKC focuses on the idea of community building, including elements such as commitment and hard work. At the same time, it is project-related, following a specific time-line and aiming at generating a public image. It combines fun (the *ludic* element of football), professionalism (elite football) and more serious elements of everyday life (business, non-profit club).

## Astro-Turfing

In 2016, the organisers of the tournament decided to use an artificial grass surface to play on instead of the generally used synthetic flooring. This idea was initiated by a former professional player who informed them about the possibility to rent artificial grass pitches for the duration of the tournament.

The introduction of the new surface was received well by the public and the press. Everyone involved praised the new pitch ('a different kind of tournament now'), which allegedly raised the perceived footballing quality of the event. The local press

42 See Westerwälder Keramik-Cup: Videos 2018, at: <https://www.westerwaelder-keramik-cup.de/videos-2018/> (accessed on 27 September 2018).

43 Andreas Langenohl: *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe*, pp. 200ff.

44 *Ibid.*

titled for instance “The Artificial Grass is the Star”.<sup>45</sup> As in the example of local club BSV Bielstein, the idea is expressed that the artificial grass surface creates a better and more authentic football experience (‘they play with real football shoes now, you see’). In this respect, the astro-turf symbolises both the imitation of the ordinary *and* the exceptional. We might even argue that it resembles a new kind of plastic<sup>46</sup>: Artificial grass pitches offer an ideal environment for an advanced academisation and modernisation of the game at all levels of competitive football. This leads to one of the hypotheses being put forward here. Namely, that by increasingly imitating what they perceive as professional and by taking part in the cultural circulations of professional football, local clubs in organised German non-elite football and their main actors may be helped with re-defining their own club identity and boundaries, in order to transform into a new kind of entity. These new entities are not only mere imitations or adaptations of the professional ones, but represent something completely novel.

## Conclusions: The Ambivalent World of Amateur Football

We started by arguing that paradoxes, contradiction and ambivalences are an inherent property of the social world of amateur football and that their management is the driving force in re/constructing the field of amateur football and re/writing the boundaries to professional football. According to Robertson,<sup>47</sup> glocalisation comprises the endeavour to re-contextualise global phenomena locally, assuming mutual influences of the universal *and* the particular. Cultural globalisation therefore finds expression as homogenisation *and* heterogenisation and, consequently, constitutes ambivalent spaces of meaning. Therefore, we concluded that non-elite football represents a glocalised world, one in which social actors interpret global phenomena according to their particular beliefs and local needs at a given time. In our cases, these are associated with understandings of core activities (a footballing style in the context of a local ethnic club), crises (the symbolic meaning of an artificial grass pitch) and events (an international under 17-tournament in the German provinces), which we analysed using ethnographic data from three different case studies to elaborate on and support our argument.

45 Andreas Hundhammer: Keramik-Cup 2016: Der Kunstrasen ist der Star, in: Rhein-Zeitung, 14 January 2016, at: [https://www.rhein-zeitung.de/sport/rz-regionalsport/regionalsport-fussball-hallenfussball-alle-meldungen/regionalsport-fussball-hallenfussball-f\\_h\\_artikel,-keramik-cup-2016-der-kunstrasen-ist-der-star-arid,1426547.html](https://www.rhein-zeitung.de/sport/rz-regionalsport/regionalsport-fussball-hallenfussball-alle-meldungen/regionalsport-fussball-hallenfussball-f_h_artikel,-keramik-cup-2016-der-kunstrasen-ist-der-star-arid,1426547.html) (accessed on 27 September 2018). Translated by the authors.

46 Roland Barthes: *Mythen des Alltags*, Frankfurt a. M. 1964, pp. 233ff.

47 Roland Robertson: *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*.

It became evident that the world of amateur football is marked by representations of the non-professional game *and* an orientation towards the professional, by stressing community, equality and social values *as well as* strong hierarchies and a focus on competition. From a methodological point of view, the process-oriented, micro-sociological approach to football challenges the dominant romanticising and exoticising view on organised lower league football in Germany. Rather, this chapter has shown processes of legitimisation through tendencies towards professionalisation, rationalisation and homogenisation in the social world of German amateur football. Finally, we adhere to the idea that global and professional discourses, practices and norms are far from being *the Other* of the local amateur world. On the contrary, it is our firm belief that we can only understand the nature of the small worlds of amateur football by focussing on the processes through which they engage with the global world of professional football.<sup>48</sup>

**Dariusz Zifonun** is Professor of Sociology at Philipps-Universität Marburg. He was Visiting Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2006) and Hitotsubashi University Tokyo (2005). His research interests include: Sociology of everyday life, migration and integration, courtroom interaction and virtual worlds. His most recent publication is the edited volume *Ritual Change and Social Transformation in Migrant Societies*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016 (with Hans-Georg Soeffner).

**Kristian Naglo** is lecturer in Sociology at Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany. He has taught in Sociology, German Studies and Intercultural Communication. His research interests include: themes in the field of Sociology of Sport and Culture, Migration and Integration, Education and Language/Multilingualism. In 2015, he initiated the international research group 'Small Worlds: Football at the Grass Roots in a Comparative European and Global Perspective' together with Dilwyn Porter (De Montfort University, Leicester, UK).

48 Kristian Naglo: Soccer's Small Worlds, in: *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 34:5-6 (2017), pp. 414–419.