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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Pyta, W. (2015). Football memory in a European perspective: the missing link in the European integration process. *Historical Social Research*, *40*(4), 255-269. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.40.2015.4.255-269

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Football Memory in a European Perspective. The Missing Link in the European Integration Process

Wolfram Pyta [*]

Abstract: *»Fußball-Erinnerungskultur aus Europäischer Perspektive. Der Missing Link im europäischen Integrationsprozess«.* The missing link in the process of European integration seems to be a sense of a European collective identity. The article therefore analyzes how European football might add some cultural substance to the European institutional frame. Indeed, football appears to be very suitable to fill the gap as it receives wide media coverage and succeeds in touching many people around Europe emotionally. The central question is, if there are already some *lieux de mémoire* which have been established by European football and which have turned into pan-European narratives. In the light of recent research on European football, several cultural phenomena are examined if they could work as realms of a shared European memory: historic matches on the European scene have to be taken into account as well as stadiums themselves as sites of memory or even a disaster like the catastrophe of Heysel in 1985.

Keywords: Europeanisation, European integration, collective memory, lieux de mémoire, European football.

1. Introduction

The historiography of European integration has traditionally mainly dealt with the *forces profondes* in politics, economy and the world of ideas that have led to the formation of the European Union in its present shape (Bitsch and Loth 2007; Loth 2008). Historians specialised in political ideas and political philosophy, as well as sociologists from the social constructivist school of thought, have scrutinised the roots and fundaments of the integration process. Therefore, the discursive origins of the European institutional arrangement belong to the favourite issues of researchers who take a close look at the history of contemporary Europe (Risse 2004; Hörber 2006). With the advent of the European single market and the introduction of a common currency, increased emphasis has been laid on the study of the economic factors of European integration

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(Thiemeyer 2010). And since the 1990s, the discipline of European Studies has known a significant 'Europeanisation turn' with a strong focus on the analysis of the processes through which European political dynamics are interiorised in policy-making or preference formation on the national level (Ladrech 1994; Börzel 1999; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Ladrech 2010).

One conclusion that the increasingly diverse research strands on all aspects of top-down and bottom-up dynamics of European integration and their rich publication output seem to agree upon is that the 'missing link' in an overall remarkably successful integration process is collective identity. Cultural sociology has shown that successful community building must produce practice-relevant patterns of meaning (Giesen 1999; Giesen and Eder 2001), and there is no doubt that the European project does not seem to have produced such patterns of meaning. Statements on the lack of a 'European demos,' the insufficiency of 'European narratives' or of the absence of a genuine European 'public sphere' for want of genuinely European political parties or pan-European media have even entered the mainstream of political discourse and become conventional wisdom in speeches and editorials.

What research on European integration has mostly neglected or underestimated, however, are the often unintended social and cultural practices that have contributed and are contributing to give the European project the dimension of a cultural community project. It is perfectly possible, especially given the present severe crisis of the European Union, that it is precisely such practices, experienced and internalised in everyday life outside the realms of politics and economy, that may lend genuine stability to the European project beyond institutional action.

The research on the collective memory of European football not only adopts a change of perspective but also applies a conceptual refinement. It concentrates on 'Europeanisation' in the sense of those soft forces which provide cultural substance to the integration process (Risse 2004, 166-71; Demossier 2007, 58-62). Methodologically, this means that such 'soft' Europeanisation processes are described with a historical and systematic approach which has proven its effectiveness in the humanities and social sciences. This approach is used by qualitative-oriented cultural sociologists, by political scientists who are aware of historical developments and, quite naturally, by cultural historians. Historians, political scientists and sociologists can build up productive cooperation, particularly in analysing Europeanisation processes. In this respect, the "Football Research in an Enlarged Europe" (FREE) project recently has broken new ground: Funded by the European Union, the interdisciplinary project with a total of nine project locations explored the multiple socio-cultural, historical and political dimensions of European football.[1]

[1] <http://www.free-project.eu>.

2. Competing Identity Layers

European community building has always had to compete with two other cultural codes: the concept of nation and the concept of 'The West' or a Western hemisphere.

The concept of nation is by no means an outdated model of community creation which reached its peak in the 19th century. Even since 1945, it has continuously proved its strong capacity to forge collective identity. In all European states the nation continues to be the primary framework of allegiance and a major instance of socialisation. As a result it both overlaps and partly blocks the construction of a European identity (Dell'Olio 2005).

The relation between the construction of a European identity and the recourse to a universalistic code is not free of tension either. The reason is that universalistic values as they were put down, for example, in the Declaration of Human Rights, are clearly based on assumptions, norms and beliefs that are rooted in Western, or transatlantic, culture or 'civilisation.' They are transatlantic in the sense that they have their foundations both in the cultural heritage of Europe and in norms and traditions that became sustainably effective in the United States of America and were, due to the cultural hegemony of the USA after 1945, successfully exported to all parts of the world, including of course Europe. It is therefore difficult to claim that there are European core values which, from a normative point of view, would be substantially different from Western values (Grillo 2007, 72-3); for a master narrative on German history cf. Winkler, 2006).

Consequently, the construction of a genuine European identity is a very ambitious project which is made even more difficult by other factors. The European Union as the organisational core of the European project has not succeeded in providing its institutions with a symbolic added value. Like all democratically legitimised institutions, they would have a significant symbolic potential if they were able to condensate political and cultural guiding principles that underpinned their creation (Melville 2001), or to corroborate their legitimacy by efficient staging or self-projection of their actions (Pyta 2011). Moreover, the construction of specific temporality will always be successful if institutions manage to create a founding myth about their own origins. But unfortunately, Europe is miles away from the ability to create such a founding myth which would be the historical fundament or pillar of Europeanisation (Mayer and Palmowski 2004, 580).

As a result, European institutions seem to be both unwilling and incapable of providing any appealing offers pertaining to the affective dimension of citizenship. They do not touch European citizens emotionally and therefore fail to induce the crucial patterns of identification that are summed up in the Aristotelian notion of *philia* and that are considered essential for the sustainable functioning of the polity. One of the reasons for this lack of visibility and symbolic

power of the European institutions is the complicated multilevel system of the European Union where a large number of players compete for decision-making power and public attention. Another one is the strong focus of the European institutions on economic and financial issues since the construction of the European Single Market and the introduction of the common currency. As a result, the institutions of the European Union have been unable to challenge the 'emotional monopoly held by the nation-state' (Sonntag 2011). As Ernest Renan famously said in 1882, 'a *Zollverein* is not a fatherland' (Renan 1996).

3. Football in European Memorial Culture

Collective myths and narratives need to be rooted in a shared memory. Given the incapacity of the European Union to produce a binding common narrative, it is not astonishing that a genuine European memory culture does not exist.

For a long time it was assumed that an increasingly converging, mutually acceptable interpretation of National Socialism and the Holocaust could become the most important historical-political element on which a European post-war narrative or identity could be founded. This assumption, or hope, was however very much a Western European one. The experience made after the collapse of the communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe shows to what extent memory cultures in Europe are still framed nationally. For the states of the former Eastern bloc, the historical-political debate on the experience under communist rule clearly had a higher priority than remembering the National Socialist crimes (Bauerkämper 2012). Furthermore, the question must be asked whether a 'negative memory' drawn from the experiences with dictatorships of different sorts can actually be an appropriate and suitable base for a cultural European identity of Europe (Bauerkämper 2012, 393). Historical-political discourse that is overloaded with normative moral exhortations has at best limited social impact and at worst contributes to turning Europe into a continent of a plurality of 'painful pasts' (Mink 2007). It is therefore advisable to explore less normative cultural practices with regard to their potential of producing pan-European narratives.

Football is one of these practices that fit well into the recent research agenda of 'Europeanisation of life worlds' (Niemann, Garcia and Grant 2012, 5). The reason for the growing research interest in football is the fact that it is a cultural phenomenon which gives expression to configurations of meaning in a very practical way (Pyta 2006, 2). Among all kinds of sport, football has by far the biggest power for community building because this game is solidly anchored as a classical spectator's sport and as a form of popular culture that has become premium media content. As a result, when we are looking for cultural practices that are a very important part of daily life for a vast majority of Europeans,

football imposes itself as a revealing object of study (Mayer and Palmowski 2004, 581-2).

In other words: football is trans-European cultural practice that was not artificially conceived by marketing strategists with the aim of promoting the European project on the cultural level. But does football's community building potential actually target Europe as a level of identification? Is it not much more powerful in providing space and opportunity for the consolidation or celebration of national and regional communities? Is football not, in a rationalised world of closely linked states and economies, one of the last remaining 'playgrounds' on which individuals can release and display patriotic emotions in the public space? These questions show that it is far from certain whether football, whenever it serves as a projection screen for identity construction, actually also contributes to European identity.

In order to explore this question more thoroughly, it is necessary to identify criteria against which football's contribution to European identity construction can be assessed. One of the most promising conceptual approaches in this respect is the theory of collective memory, which is now well established in the cultural sciences (J. Assmann 1992; Ricoeur 2000; Giesen 2004; A. Assmann 2006). Since communities are founded on the construction of collective images of history, the fundamental question is whether there is, or not, a shared football memory on a distinctly European level.

It was the French historian Pierre Nora who first pointed out that shared memory requires communicative focal points. Particularly in times of mass media and communication overload, such points of reference are necessary memory landmarks that attract attribution of meaning by their symbolic and communicative capacity (Bauerkämper 2012, 41-52). Pierre Nora named these memorial reference points *Lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), and he included in this concept not only geographical place, but also persons, events, monuments or even pieces of art that have the potential to become bearers or supports of collective memory (Nora 2001).

Hence, the main research question is: Are there *lieux de mémoire* which have been established by European football and which have become the object of attributions of meaning with a genuinely European dimension? Spontaneously, one might be tempted to give a negative answer, as the overwhelming majority of potential candidates seem to be firmly owned by national discourses of memory.

Take, for instance, the former Wankdorf-Stadion in Bern, where the German national team won its first World Cup in 1954, which seems to be a purely national site of memory. The same applies to 17 October 1973, when the Polish national team qualified for the 1974 World Cup against the 'mother country of football' in Wembley (Blecking 2012). Or to the Andalusian city of Sevilla, which hosted to the legendary World Cup semi-final between France and Ger-

many in 1982 and whose name has become a meaningful *lieu de mémoire* in French national memory.

European sites of football memory do not impose themselves. They are not marked in red on the map. And they suffer from the tendency of traditional historiography to favour so-called 'high culture' over popular culture. Even the editors of the commendable book on 'European sites of memory' (*Europäische Erinnerungsorte*), an ambitious initiative of one thousand pages in three volumes with over 120 entries by authors from over 15 countries, could not – or did not want to – identify any football sites of memory that would have been so unambiguously European as to be included in their collection (de Boer et al. 2012).

In other words: the identification of genuinely European sites of memory from the international history of football is a demanding endeavour: just as the simple addition or juxtaposition of national memories does not lead to the formation of a European commonality, transnationality is not the same as Europeanness (König 2008, 22).

4. The Transformation of Football through the Media

There is a consensus in academic research that collective memory is always the result of a successful communication process. If football events are to be attributed a genuinely European meaning they must necessarily have been made the objects of a Europe-wide communication process. They need to have become transnational media events (Dayan and Katz 1992; Couldry, Hepp and Krotz 2010).

As mentioned above, it is difficult to claim that there is today a European public sphere. And even if one accepts the hypothesis that a European public sphere 'is still in the stage of emergence' (Kaelble 2010, 37), one would have to admit that this emerging sphere is an unstructured and uninstitutionalised one. What then could be an indicator that would enable us to maintain the thesis that there is a common communicative space across Europe that is capable of producing truly European media events?

If we consider the public sphere as an observatory sphere, in which the public is the anonymous observer that functions as a monitoring instance (Trenz 2005, 46-51), we have to acknowledge that football is a particularly privileged field of pan-European discourse. Hardly any other object in everyday life is characterised by the same dynamics of observation: since the European cup competitions have put 'Europe' on the football agenda in the 1950s, mass media in all European countries report on European football with increasing intensity and sense of detail. Although empirically documented studies are still awaited, there are clear signs that suggest that media coverage about football contains increasing references on Europe since the mid-1950s (which corre-

sponds to the findings of empirical studies on the Europeanisation of national media coverage on EU policies (Peters 2007, 298-321).

It was particularly club teams from countries whose national teams had not won major titles over decades that succeeded in attracting large interest and media coverage across Europe, eventually becoming distinctly 'European football institutions,' such as the top teams of the Spanish *primera division*, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. These clubs were trendsetters for professional football and celebrated on the European scene. Similarly, in the 1970s, the Dutch top clubs Feyenoord Rotterdam and Ajax Amsterdam represented top-quality football underpinned by a new, exciting football philosophy, which the European competitions spread across European media, while the domestic Dutch *Eredivisie* had only little interest abroad, even for the sport-interested audience in neighbouring Western Germany.

Like all sports, football possesses a two-dimensional character: it pertains both to a culture of presence and a culture of meaning (Gumbrecht 2004). This means that football events build communities for a limited period of time during a performative act: A stadium is the space in which spectators on the terraces and players on the pitch come together for an intensive and dynamic interaction (Alkemeyer 2008). But a football match is not limited to such performative acts. Once it becomes the object of large media coverage, being transformed into texts, images and sounds, it goes beyond immediate performance and enables an unlimited audience to take part in the event without having been at the same time in the same space. The match thus opens up to hermeneutic processes of attribution of meaning: its media actors, in their capacity as television commentators, radio reporters or print journalists circulate interpretations and explanations of football events.

At the same time the viewers of these television programmes, the audience of these radio broadcasts, and the readers of the print articles are by no means passive recipients, but perfectly able to give their own responses to propositions of interpretations provided by the media. The dynamic interaction between producers and recipients of football media coverage possesses a proper aesthetic dimension. It is the task of literature or media studies to scrutinise the implications and consequences of such aesthetic transformations. It is clear that there is a huge difference between acquiring meaning in a purely discursive manner by reading a text and being exposed to the expressive power of a live broadcast on the radio or the real-time images on television (Axter et al. 2009).

5. The Role of Football Reporting

Up to the present day, there is no systematic research on the question if and how sports journalists steer and influence the attribution of meaning to football events.

Journalists participate in the circulation of interpretations of major football events in various formats. They do so in writing explanatory texts for print media, in producing live reports during radio broadcasts about a match that remains invisible to the audience, in commenting live from the stadium television images that all viewers can see themselves and in providing additional information by detaching their own regard from the cameras and casting an autonomous look on the pitch.

Writing and speaking about football is in most cases a dynamic interaction of texts, sounds and images. The radio reporters of the 1950s had often been trained in classical sports journalism, which required competences in both writing and speaking. In German sports journalism, for instance, reporters traditionally had the tendency to use a language that as pure text already was able to inspire the imagination of the recipients (Eggers 2004, 85-107).

Even on television, still a very young medium in the 1950s, reporters had often had training in radio reporting. They also tried themselves as writing journalists sometimes. Due to this polyvalence and their sensitivity for the differences between the media they often limited themselves to commenting the match events on the pitch in an explicitly sober manner and putting their expertise, rather than their emotions, to the forefront. The BBC in particular was known to be committed to this reporting style, and its perfect embodiment was Kenneth Wolstenholme, the authoritative voice for football in Britain for over thirty years.

Jean-Christophe Meyer compared how Geoff Hurst's legendary 'Wembley Goal' from the 1966 World Cup final was commented in France and England. He thus highlights how two different reporting traditions collide. The French commentator Thierry Roland, who also was to become the national voice of football for four decades in his country, albeit still at the beginning of his career in the 1960s, did not hold back with critical comments directly addressed to the referee team. Moreover, he seized the occasion of the final to denounce once again that the English team had allegedly been favoured all throughout the tournament. Wolstenholme's comment, in comparison, was characterised by subtle restraint. But it is precisely for this reason that the matches commented by this gentleman reporter have been deeply engraved in English football memory. The manner in which he commented the last moments of the match, just before the fourth goal scored, again, by Geoff Hurst, when the first celebrating spectators had started to invade the pitch – 'Some people are on the pitch. They think it's all over,' immediately followed by Hurst's goal which cleared the last doubts about who was the winner, and his elegant conclusion 'It is now. It's four' may justifiably be considered a brilliant example of 'powerful communicative poetics' (Boyle and Haynes 2009, 76).

Within German memorial culture the four consecutive screams of radio reporter Herbert Zimmermann – 'Tor! Tor! Tor! Tor!' – when Helmut Rahn scored the winning goal in the 1954 World Cup final against Hungary are of

primary importance. This landmark in the history of radio broadcasting made the event accessible even for those Germans who had little interest and knowledge about football. This sequence of the broadcast has since unfolded such an imaginative power that the national museum of the history of the Federal Republic (*Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) found it worthy of having a prominent display in its permanent collection (Eggers 2004; Pyta 2006, 11).

As these examples suggest there is evidence that football discourse in both written and oral form has made its entry into collective memory – if only on the national level so far. As long as the European media landscape is still structured on a national basis a European Kenneth Wolstenholme is not likely to emerge. There is no *lingua franca* in which a European football event could be communicated in a uniform manner. On the other hand, this diversity of media coverage of football across Europe also has an interesting advantage: If research was able to show that football journalists actually do attribute meaning to European football events in a similar manner, this kind of convergence or homogeneity of reporting would provide evidence for the existence of a truly European discourse.

6. The Europeanisation of Football Competitions and Football Fandom

The constitution of European sites of football memory requires a specific form of competition on the European level. There is no European League similar to national leagues, which would be composed by the best European clubs. The organisation of the European cups has always been structurally different from the 'series principle' used across the national leagues, according to which the same number of points is awarded for each match and the champion is the team having won the highest number of points at the end of the season. On the European level the tournament format, similar to national cup competitions, is applied: Apart from a relatively recently introduced group stage, European cup matches have always been played according to the 'knock-out' principle in home and away games, leading to a final which alone decides on the winner (Werron 2013, 52-7).

As Tobias Werron has shown, this tournament system has had two crucial advantages for the Europeanisation of football. Firstly, it gives teams from politically and economically peripheral regions in Europe access to European football's centre stage. A European League would inevitably have resulted, after a few years, in a de facto closed league of the richest clubs, making it impossible for weaker national leagues to make their representatives participate. This in turn would have considerably diminished the distinctively European appeal of the European cups, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s for the

countries under Soviet influence for whom the European club competitions represented a unique opportunity to participate without restriction in a major pan-European event (Sonntag 2008, 250). Secondly, the knock-out tournament format creates media highlights. It makes sure that the significance of the matches is differentiated and that media interest is focused on the last, decisive matches. The finales become privileged highlights and ideal objects of media coverage. It is therefore not surprising that they managed to emerge as transnational media events.

Studies on fan behaviour also indicate that the Europeanisation of football competitions has had an impact on the European awareness of hard core supporters. First empirical studies on Manchester United supporters (King 2000) provide evidence for the fact that such fans nowadays consider the European scene the real test for the quality of their team. Rather than the Premier League and the matches against teams such as Fulham or Norwich, their yardstick is the matches on eye level against Real Madrid or Bayern Munich. Moreover, the impact factor of football tourism ought not to be underestimated: Nowadays, it is taken for granted that thousands of fans travel with their team through Europe and become familiar with major European cities.

From their beginnings the European club competitions formed a close alliance with mass media. Launched by the leading French sports daily *L'Equipe*, they quickly became premium content for television. Since its inception in 1955 the European Champions Clubs Cup became an essential element of television programs in many European countries. This was facilitated by the fact that with Eurovision a European format had been made available, which made it possible to simultaneously transmit television images to all associated broadcasting institutions. The response to the Champions Clubs' Cup was overwhelming, especially to the final, which became a kind of performance show of European football, presenting the new standards set by the best teams. Spectators flocked to see the final and television reported live. For a long time these European Cup finals were the only matches that were transmitted live on a large scale, and due to this positioning as exceptional, almost monopolistic events the finals of the 1950s and 1960s became engraved in the collective memory of the football community across the continent.

Geoff Hare provided a revealing case study of the final breakthrough of Europe-wide television coverage that occurred with the European Cup final in Glasgow on 18 May 1960. By means of a dense media analysis Hare demonstrates to what extent this match was attributed European meaning by the spectators of the host nation. The simple fact that among the 127,000 spectators more than 90 per cent were Scottish, showing a keen curiosity for continental football as represented by the incumbent champions Real Madrid and their challengers Eintracht Frankfurt, provides evidence for the European dimension of the game (Hare 2015). The Glasgow final became the first full-fledged European football media event, and it reveals the existence of a hidden discourse

on genuinely European meanings and values: the victory of Real Madrid is not only explained by the outstanding quality of their players. Rather, 'Europe' stands for professionalisation of training, for technical progress that goes beyond the sports realm. The Glasgow final has engraved itself so deeply in the memory of its contemporaries and the following generations that it can claim the status of a *lieu de mémoire*.

7. Football Stadia as *lieux de mémoire*

This applies even more to an event which at first sight does not seem to be appropriate for European community building: the outburst of violence before the European Champions Clubs' Cup final between Liverpool FC and Juventus Turin at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels on 29 May 1985. Thirty-nine spectators, mostly Italians, died after Liverpool hooligans invaded their section of the stadium. This catastrophe, today often simply referred to as 'The Heysel disaster,' stirred a Europe-wide debate which was remarkable insofar as the large majority of comments across the media spectrum, from television to print media, took the same tone. Hooliganism was not identified as a specifically English problem but as a sign of increasing brutalisation that was understood as a kind of rupture in civilisation.

Clemens Kech has elaborated that the discursive processing of the Heysel disaster was based on a European discourse, namely the idea that 'barbarians' prone to violence were waging war against the values of European civilisation. It is true that this interpretation was linked with a problematic regard on football fans in general, who were put under general suspicion of vandalism. But the understanding that gained acceptance at this moment of the mid-1980s was essentially the idea that the Heysel disaster violated a civilisatory code which was regarded as a cultural core of what 'Europe' stood for. It was believed that this civilisatory heritage of Europe was being threatened by criminals who abused football to satisfy their archaic impulses for raw violence (Kech 2015).

There is reason to believe that this interpretation was made possible by the fact that in the mid-1980s the Cold War ensured that there were no armed conflicts in Europe. The continent was thus no longer used to experience violence and only the civil wars in former Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s recalled that in Europe, too, genocidal practices were not a thing of the past. This renewed experience of raw violence may have contributed to a discursive re-coding of the Heysel disaster in collective memory around the turn of the century. 'Heysel' now epitomises the failure of security arrangements at big football events.

This example shows that such a *lieu de mémoire* grounded in football history remains open to interpretative changes over time. Its symbolic significance is

reflected in the fact that Belgium seized the occasion of Euro 2000 for changing the tainted name of the stadium: Heysel became *Le Stade du Roi Baudoin*.

In the search for European sites of football memory, stadia are the most obvious candidates for several reasons. Firstly, in a performative perspective, the stadium is the stage where the physical interaction between spectators and players happens. The stadium is not an interchangeable place – like the theatre a stadium is a distinctive location which creates through its architectural design the conditions for experiencing a match in unity of space. The irreductible spatiality of a stadium experience contributes essentially to the creation of a unique atmosphere in which a spark emanates from the crowd to the players on the pitch thus producing an overwhelming experience of community (Dinçkal 2013).Therefore, stadia need to be designed according to principles of architectural and urban planning that transforms them into temples of experience (Jessen and Pyta 2012).

Secondly, for the media it is also important that a stadium provides an appropriate space for a football event capable of creating the impressive atmospheric backdrop that is necessary for emotional television images. The most excited reporting cannot camouflage the dreary scenery of an empty stadium. Only a stadium that is designed according to the needs of the spectators is an ideal stadium for television.

Are there then football stadia in Europe that have become the scene of magic moments of European football history and thus possess the potential of being European sites of memory? Spontaneously the London Wembley Stadium comes to mind, host to several unforgettable international matches, such as the first home defeat of the English team against the famous Hungarian squad in 1953, the World Cup final of 1966 with the legendary 'Wembley Goal,' or the semi-final of Euro1996 with the dramatic penalty shoot-out. But these matches, even if remembered across various countries, have not provided Wembley with any specifically European meaning. Wembley is a place that is an anchor point for national football memories. As Jean-Christophe Meyer has demonstrated, the famous 'Wembley Goal' and the ensuing discussion whether or not the ball had crossed the goal line, did not raise much interest even in France, the neighbouring country of both finalists. Wembley has thus remained an essentially national site of memory: for English football, of course, as privileged venue for international games and 'sanctuary' of the yearly Cup finals – but also for German football, with regard to mythical matches against the motherland of football that took place in this stadium in 1966, 1972 and 1996.

It might be more promising to explore the European dimension of stadia in which specifically European football history was written. Stadia that were marked on the map of European football as hosts of unforgettable events in European club competitions. Research on this topic is not very advanced, but there is evidence to justify the assumption that the stadium of Real Madrid meets the requirements of a European site of memory. This stadium, named

after the club president and patron Santiago Bernabéu, was the first to be especially designed for European competitions, since only the appearance of the European top teams could fill the then biggest stadium of the continent with a capacity of approximately 120,000. From this point of view, the Bernabéu Stadium was indeed a genuine European stadium. It contributed significantly to the dominance of its home club which won the first five consecutive European Champions Clubs' Cups. Its intimidating monumentality paralysed the visiting teams and facilitated the rise to the European Football Olympus of Real Madrid, which previously had a relatively mediocre historical record in the Spanish league (Garcia-Garcia, Llopis-Goig and Martin 2015).

There is still no definitive answer to the question whether the Europeanisation of football has led to a collective memory that has a distinct European dimension. Yet the methods and findings of the FREE project have highlighted some promising paths that further research on this fascinating topic will have to follow.

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