

- 5th Small Worlds of Football Workshop -

Defining, Interpreting and Comparing Small Worlds of Football: Identities, Events, Styles

Call for Papers

4th September 2025, 28 Black Arena, Sportpark Klagenfurt, Austria

Though traditional practices have played a part, sports like football, which have diffused globally, have often proved most effective in constructing and asserting communal, local, regional and national identities. This helps to explain why they feature more prominently than others in any discussion of sport's relationship with identity. Team sports rather than individual pursuits also tend to predominate, possibly because they facilitate the imaginative leap necessary to make the connection between the private and the public, the singular and the collective. In sporting competition, the players in a team have the potential to become a visible embodiment of a particular nation, region, locality or community. It is important to remember, however, that the link between sport and identity is highly dependent on contingency and context and requires an understanding of football's 'small worlds'.

Characteristically, *events* create and display the attractiveness of a social world and can be understood as highly symbolic, extraordinary activities that call for intensified subjective engagement. Therefore, they are pivotal in the process of the creation of meaning and the analysis of the symbolic stock of knowledge of the social world they are located in. Originally, the idea of an event was not an academic concept. It first appeared as 'the extraordinary' in the media and was related to a new fun-loving society and 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. In the realm of grass-roots soccer, however, clubs characteristically attempt to use events to strengthen the traditional club communities with their symptomatic claims for commitment to link traditional and post-traditional ideas.

It could be claimed that small worlds of football constitute ambivalent spaces of meaning and *stylization*, as a process of selection, expression and presentation. The 'football world' in this sense is a particularly interesting example as the representation or

embodiment of a general social tendency: the dialectic between efficiency, optimization and pressure ('progress'; 'keeping pace with'; 'imitation') on the one hand, and having 'fun' or 'representing one's own culture' or 'style' (under controlled conditions) on the other. The social world of non-elite football, for instance, is recognizable not only by its characteristic forms of institutionalization and bureaucratization (clubs and associations) but also via the social world of club football and the emotional community surrounding it. In fact, it is constantly recreated and redefined by social actors through their actions, thereby creating and re-creating a vast range of different 'styles'.

How did *identities* and *styles* in organized football at the grassroots emerge and develop in different national, regional or local (e.g. minority) settings? How do social actors adapt in order to achieve them? What kind of identities/styles do they develop in the process? What role do *events* play in this context and how do they impact on football at the grassroots, even if they take place at the professional level? What similarities and differences are evident in different national/regional/local contexts, also in direct comparison to other sports?

These are some of the questions the workshop seeks to tackle.

To apply to present please send a 150-200word proposal to Kristian.Naglo@serbski-institut.de by 30th April. We will ensure confirmation is as soon as possible.

The workshop is planned to take place on the **4 September 2025** at the *28 Black Arena* in Klagenfurt, Austria. Should you have any questions or would like to discuss your participation, please feel free to email Kristian.Naglo@serbski-institut.de.

Organizers: Dr. Kristian Naglo (Sorbian Institute Bautzen, Germany), in cooperation with the Slovenian Sports Federation/Slovenska Športna Zveza.

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