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Diversifying the fan experience and securitising crowd management: a longitudinal analysis of fan park facilities at 15 football mega events between 2002 and 2019

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ABSTRACT

Rationale: This article explores the development, use and impact of fan parks in host cities of men's football mega events, constructed as temporary commercial sites where fans congregate to watch matches on large screens and partake in other forms of entertainment.

Approach: This study draws on ethnographic, observational, interview and focus group data, exploring perspectives of fans, volunteers, organisers, journalists, police and security personnel, totalling 212 respondents at five FIFA World Cup finals and ten other confederation tournaments.

Findings: This paper reveals that fans have increasingly engaged with such provision where available, relative to the degree of cultural resonance, accessibility, affordability, security and the suitability of facilities. However, these fan parks remain conspicuously absent in confederation events beyond Europe.

Practical implications: The research shows that fan parks can help diversify the fan experience, allowing users to interact with supporters from across the world in defined spaces. They also contribute to crowd management, enabling authorities to contain fans, confine their movement, monitor alcohol consumption and control behaviour.

Research contribution: This longitudinal study examines the emergence and development of fan parks at 15 events in five continents, analysing their impact on the fan experience and the securitisation of crowd management.

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Introduction

Large-scale events have become a dominant part of the cultural, economic and political landscape of countries across the world. In particular, the staging, participation and consumption of sports mega events (SMEs) and football mega events (FMEs) have become increasingly significant. For Roche (2003), the specific status of mega events is determined by their significant

scale, dramatic character, periodicity and widespread importance. The extensive global interest in contemporary FMEs such as the FIFA World Cup (FWC) and UEFA European Championships (UEC) are often evidenced by viewer ratings, attendance figures and lucrative commercial and broadcasting contracts, fuelled by mass media exposure and social media engagements (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). Staging

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FMEs and SMEs can incur considerable costs for host nations, particularly where necessary architecture is lacking – often driving investment in sports stadia, training facilities, hotels and transport infrastructure (Rookwood & Adeosun, 2021). Despite the global economic austerity of the twenty-first century, SMEs have retained a “transformatory mystique”, with evident competition between states bidding for the right to host major events (McGillivray & Frew, 2015, p. 2649). This interest and investment demonstrate interconnections between political, economic and socio-cultural realms. Political support for the expenditure of extensive public resources is often shaped by popular perceptions of sport and engagement in major events, shaped by mass media representation (Golubchikov & Wolfe, 2020).

SMEs are usually presented as drivers of positive contributions for host countries, allowing national heritage and potential to be showcased, promoting trade and investment, whilst influencing international perceptions of culture and capabilities (Rookwood, 2019). Resultant increases in opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity and improve national elite sport performance levels are emphasised, whilst the legacy claims typically extend to sustained usage of purpose-built facilities and infrastructural investments. Quantitatively projected economic benefits of SMEs are often stressed, which can underestimate the extent of investment and overstate the potential advantages (Golubchikov & Wolfe, 2020). Segments of some national populations have criticised their governments for hosting SMEs. More than a million Brazilians were mobilised in civic protests against the 2014 FWC and 2016 Olympic Games, whilst Tokyo’s delayed 2020 (21) Olympic Games saw protestations on health grounds in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (MacAloon, 2021). Qatar’s forthcoming 2022 FWC has also been widely criticised in relation to bribery, corruption, discrimination and human rights abuses (Khalifa, 2020).

During SMEs, organisers hope for impressive and memorable athletic performances and positive coverage from national and international broadcasters and commentators. For those who attend, particularly international visitors, their projected experiences can shape perceptions of host cities and/or nations. Some FMEs can be differentiated from SMEs in respect to the behaviour and management of crowds, particularly regarding interactions between visiting supporters, which has proven problematic in some contexts, prior to but also within the timeframe of this analysis. The 1990 FWC in Italy, the 1996 UEC in England, the 1998 FWC in France, and the 2000 UEC co-hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands, all featured examples of fan violence and ineffective crowd control (Rookwood, 2009). Many twenty-first century FMEs have been less affected by such disorder, however, both Euro 2016 in France and Euro 2020 in England demonstrated the enduring potential of football disorder under certain conditions. For those seeking to control media narratives and maximise the commercial impact of tournaments, preventing disorder and promoting the positivity of the fan experience have become central to how events are managed and marketed.

The expansion of FMEs has incurred different responses to the challenge of hosting large numbers of supporters, especially those without match tickets. This has been shaped by the requirement to provide facilities for fans to watch broadcasted games projected on vast public screens, whilst also offering entertainment before and after matches. Some tournaments have seen organisers erect fan parks in large public spaces where supporters can congregate irrespective of allegiances, watch matches on huge screens and engage in other forms of entertainment. These areas have otherwise been labelled as “fan zones”, “fan fests”, “live sites”, “celebration zones” and “public viewing areas” across various SMEs (Eick, 2010). Although some terms are used

interchangeably here, the dominant reference employed by stakeholders – and therefore within this article – is to “fan parks”.

SMEs have received widespread analysis, however, relatively few studies have examined how fan parks have (or have not) been developed and utilised at FMEs, and their perceived impact on supporter behaviour and the fan experience. This is surprising given that fan park users outnumber stadium attendees at some FMEs (Hautbois et al., 2020). This paper examines the impact and experience of fan parks at 15 men’s FMEs between 2002 and 2019, involving visits to five FWCs (Japan 2002, Germany 2006, South Africa 2010, Brazil 2014 and Russia 2018), four UECs (Portugal 2004, Switzerland and Austria 2008, Poland 2012 and France 2016), two CAN Africa Cup of Nations (Ghana 2008 and Gabon 2017), one AFC Asian Cup (Qatar 2011) one CONCACAF Gold Cup (USA 2011), one CONMEBOL Copa América (Chile 2015), and one FIFA Club World Cup (FCWC) (Qatar 2019). These are all multi-match competitions and can be differentiated accordingly from single match club contests (such as UEFA Champions League finals). They are also inter-country rather than club-based competitions, with the exception being the seven-team 2019 FCWC, which was included here to diversify the context. This article proceeds with a review of key literature on the fan experience and crowd management, followed by theories relating to social identity, spatial contexts, football disorder and crowd management. The methods and approach are then outlined, followed by three findings sections detailing the introduction and evolution of fan parks, the diversification of the fan experience, and the securitisation of crowd management.

Key literature: the fan experience and crowd management

Some management and marketing research on the fan experience examines SME stakeholders,

including efforts to retain supporters at events for longer periods to encourage additional interactions, monetised as expenditure and projected through social media engagements. Typical approaches have included the provision of pre- and post-match entertainment. “Fan experience” analysis also includes interactions and activities at the stadium and the entire “journey” around event attendance. Some scholars have examined “smart stadium” initiatives to enrich attendee experiences through improved convenience, safety and engagement. Such work explores crowd behaviour analytics within stadium settings to improve safety and security, and smart solutions to address sustainability, energy optimisation and event traffic and parking (Panchanathan et al., 2016). Research has also explored stakeholder expressions. SME “consumers” commonly use social media to communicate “electronic-word-of-mouth” impressions. This includes Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat and TikTok, currently the world’s most popular networks. Recent studies have explored emerging forms of ephemeral social media, namely that which auto-deletes content after a prescribed time, allowing fans to have greater control over their messages (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018). Finally, Rogers et al. (2017) explored augmented-reality technology to enhance fan experiences, examining the intersection between spectatorship, information seeking and entertainment theory, exploring how different gratifications predict enjoyment of SMEs.

Some interdisciplinary crowd management studies have examined FME contexts, including organisational management, policing and legislative analysis (Stott & Pearson, 2006). Sporting and international contexts can be differentiated regarding fan demographics, engagement and crowd control. With FMEs staged across different continents, diverse dynamics and approaches have impacted crowd behaviour and “disorder” – which some employ as an umbrella term to encompass violence (“football

hooliganism”) and other non-violent but “indecent”, antisocial and/or prohibited behaviours (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2018). Some legislative responses have been criticised for their disproportionality, social marginalisation and cultural prioritisation. The criminalisation of “indecent” has been framed as attempting to “sanitise the match day experience for the edification of a new breed of consumer” (McArdle, 2000, p. 82). Under British law football fans have been treated differently from those of other sports, particularly since the first legislative act specifically targeting football fans was passed: the 1985 Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol) Act. This is a problematic position lacking a rigorous evidence base – and some hooligans avoid intoxication because it hampers their ability to fight (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2018). Nevertheless, some FME organisers prohibited the consumption of alcohol due to the perceived risk of violence and the assumed causal link to hooliganism, shaping cultures of distrust. In a club context, some football fans became more heavily policed, with away supporters met at stadiums by riot vans, police dogs and mounted police, and escorted to and from grounds by lines of officers, and segregated within stadiums (Rookwood, 2017).

Particularly from the 1970s to early 2000s, media representations of violent altercations in international tournaments helped reinforce the view of football fans as a threat to be controlled, rather than an income stream to be capitalised upon. Violence between opposing supporters (and sometimes security personnel) at FMEs became a source of embarrassment, notably for British politicians, with some legislative acts passed following major international events. The increasingly legalistic approach to social policy and the rising criminalisation of fans led to the Football (Disorder) Act in 2000, following disorder at Euro 2000 and previous events. British authorities were subsequently afforded greater powers to arrest and prosecute football fans. Stricter laws on ticket touts, racist and indecent chanting and more

extensive “football banning orders” (FBOs) were introduced, prohibiting known hooligans from attending matches and travelling to FMEs (Hopkins, 2014). Other countries adopted their own legal and policing practices, such as in Sweden (Stott et al., 2019). Subjecting fans to unfamiliar policing has proven problematic at some FMEs. Host nations, police and security personnel assume responsibility for controlling behaviour and preventing disorder in and around stadiums and other locations. This research examines the use and impact of fan parks, which were partly developed in a climate where football disorder was considered a potential threat to public safety.

Social identity, shared space and crowd management theories

Numerous researchers have examined social identity as a construct and theory to frame and analyse interpersonal relations. One’s social identity can refer to aspects of their self-concept connected to memberships to social groups, which can inform understandings of inter- and intra-group dynamics, relations, attitudes and behaviours (Jenkins, 2014). The theory can be used to analyse such components relative to shared and distinct characteristics and their perceived legitimacy and stability (Rookwood, 2009). Symbols, colours, communities, stereotypes, languages and cultures can all contribute towards shared and contested notions of identity (Jenkins, 2014). Some examine social identity through sport, including allegiances to a particular club and national football teams, shaped by negotiations of similarity and difference (García, 2012). Within stadiums at FMEs the segregation and spatial demarcation of supporters may not be as rigidly enforced as in club football, potentially reducing the intensity of hostilities. However, the lack of physical separation and the relative freedom of movement can instead see violent encounters, as was the case at some fixtures at Euro 2016 in France. Despite the heavily mediated narratives of such

examples, however, violence within stadiums at FMEs is rare (Rookwood, 2017).

Driven by data presented in this research, I propose a theory of “shared space” here, whereby there is a demarcation of space but no segregation within it. This is facilitated in FME contexts by less rigid segregations in stadiums and particularly by the complete absence of spatial demarcations within fan parks. Perimeters are imposed on both environments, distinguishing these from “open” spaces. However, supporters of different and often opposing teams congregate in these monitored vicinities, enacting and expressing social and sporting identities, but with greater freedom for intergroup interaction. This approach is influenced by the premise that physical confrontations can be reduced if the dynamics for the inception and escalation of violence are discouraged, which can include deterritorialising space, as argued and contextually substantiated in this research. Previous scholars have conceptualised territorialisation as both a physical and social and symbolic process and the longstanding and complex phenomenon of football hooliganism partly emerged in territorialised spatial contexts. Some theorists have rationalised the social construction and motivation for involvement in relation to social identity (Rookwood, 2009). FMEs often feature expressions of multiple and perhaps conflicting identities and allegiances, complicating crowd management and threatening social order. Fan parks can however dilute or disperse such antagonisms. Events featuring multiple participating teams and groups of fans may be a pertinent contextual environment to test the theory. Depending on the demographics and identities present, effective crowd control can help mitigate social disorder, promote peaceful interactions and improve the fan experience.

Crowd management theories have been informed by sociological, psychological and organisational perspectives. Sociological theorising recognises crowd behaviour as an often

dynamic, complex and unpredictable process. Crowd psychology emerged in the European social sciences in the late nineteenth century, concerned with problematisations of collective irrationality, whereby crowd behaviours were perceived as veritable incarnations of ignorance, destabilising existing social order, producing different practical strategies for governing collectivities (Borch, 2013). Subsequent theorising suggested that by discarding conceptions of irrational crowds, negative spirals of escalating violence can be prevented. Although determining the objectives of crowds can prove difficult, some consider social identity approaches as the most powerful and explanatory model of the psychology of contemporary crowd action (Stott, Drury & Reicher, 2017). Enacted identities can fluctuate shaped by situational influences, and social order can change with the dynamic intergroup interactions within a crowd.

The approach of police towards crowd participants can have a profound impact, notably in FMEs. Some suggest that effective contemporary crowd management includes mechanisms that appeal to emotional receptiveness, namely “dialogue, under-enforcement and negotiation” (Gorringer et al., 2012, p. 3). By adopting policing tactics that take account of modern theory on crowd dynamics, security personnel can foster environments conducive to positive behaviour. Football crowds are not always homogenous groups and composite identities, behaviours, lived experiences and interpretations can differ. However, Procedural Justice Theory suggests that public compliance with the law is best achieved through officers demonstrating that their actions are legitimate, treating football fans (in this case) in ways interpreted as fair and equitable (O’Brien & Tyler, 2019). In FME policing, persistent concerns have been identified regarding legal issues, human rights and the use of force (Stott et al., 2017). The policing and securitisation of FME fan parks represent a contained experiential context, whereby users pass through security

checks before proceeding into an open and “shared” space. Movement is shaped by the availability of space and the volume of attendees and otherwise restricted only by perimeter barriers. Unless crowd control issues emerge in these parks, “policing” is often restricted to monitoring and processing admittance and withdrawal. Located at a theoretical and conceptual intersection, this research draws on diverse and experienced perspectives, examining how the enacted social identities of football supporters within the shared spaces of fan parks are manifest, and how users are managed by those responsible for crowd control.

Methods and approaches

A qualitative, mixed-methods approach was adopted here, utilising ethnography, participation observation, structured interviews and focus groups. This triangulation of methods evolved over two decades, yielding rich data and depth of insight, giving voice to key stakeholders across 15 men’s FMEs. The study began in a journalistic capacity, with interviews of fans at the 2002 FWC in Japan as research for a regular column published on the Japanese international football website *Soccerphile*, with articles focusing on fan culture and engagement. I then embarked on a related Ph.D. with subsequent FMEs forming extensive fieldwork components, notably Portugal’s 2004 UEC and Germany’s 2006 FWC. Fan parks emerged as a central theme, particularly from 2006. The remaining events were included in what became a longitudinal study of fan parks.

Multiple matches were attended at each competition, totalling 70 fixtures. Where they existed, fan parks were frequented in each host city visited. Partly comprising the ethnographic and participant observation components of the research, 146 h were spent in 39 fan parks in 11 countries (see [Table 1](#)). The majority of fieldwork was conducted in the early stages of the respective tournaments

when all competing teams remained involved and the number of supporters was usually at its peak, as therefore were the organisational challenges facing host nations. Participant observation was undertaken with written field notes categorised around fan engagement, the fan experience, security, policing and crowd management. The following section contains a conceptual timeline of FMEs regarding the introduction and evolution of fan parks. Additional findings are then analysed detailing the fan experience and crowd management.

I visited each fan park with various groups of experienced supporters, which facilitated conversations and the building of rapport with other fans, leading to requests for interviews. Where groups were present, and as the situation allowed, this took the form of informal focus groups in some cases. Respondents are referred to here by gender, nationality and/or event, as deemed relevant. Seven police officers and security personnel were interviewed across six FMEs. 19 volunteers were interviewed, with at least one from each event, along with three event organisers and four football journalists. Three categories of fans participated in interviews and focus groups, namely “local” (those from the host city), “national” (those from the host nation but not the host city) and “international” (those who had travelled from other countries specifically for the event). 25 focus groups were conducted at 12 FMEs comprising 108 respondents, with 104 interviews conducted across every event. The gender split of the 212 respondents was 175 males and 37 females. Data was collected at fan parks, stadiums and other locations in host cities.

The introduction and evolution of fan parks

Given the range of events included in this multi-layered research, this conceptual analysis clarifies when fan parks were first introduced at FMEs, identifies where and how they were

Table 1. Details of the FMEs featured in this study relating to host cities, fan parks and data collection.

Year – federation – event – host nation(s) visited	Host cities	Fan parks	Host cities visited	Matches attended	Fan parks visited	Hours spent in fan parks	Interviews conducted	Focus groups facilitated
2002 FIFA World Cup: Japan*	5	0	4	3	N/A	0	4	0
2004 UEFA European Championships: Portugal	8	1	8	8	1	3	11	3
2006 FIFA World Cup: Germany	12	12	12	6	8	23	12	4
2008 CAN Cup of African Nations: Ghana	4	1*	3	7	1	3	5	1
2008 UEFA European Championships: Austria and Switzerland	8	8	4	2	4	17	6	2
2010 FIFA World Cup: South Africa	9	9	6	6	6	19	10	3
2011 AFC Asian Cup: Qatar	2	0	2	8	N/A	0	6	1
2011 CONCACAF Gold Cup: USA	13	1*	1	2	N/A	4	3	0
2012 European Championships: Poland*	4	4	2	2	2	7	4	1
2014 FIFA World Cup: Brazil	12	12	4	4	4	24	11	4
2015 CONMEBOL Copa América: Chile	8	0	3	3	N/A	0	3	0
2016 UEFA European Championships: France	9	9	9	9	9	23	10	2
2017 CAN Cup of African Nations: Gabon	4	0	1	3	N/A	0	4	1
2018 FIFA World Cup: Russia	11	11	3	4	3	12	8	1
2019 FIFA Club World Cup: Qatar	1	1	1	3	1	11	7	2
Total	100	69	60	70	39	146	104	25

*Does not include co-host nation.

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subsequently used and highlights any alternative practices to crowd management.

Requirement and emergence: Japan 2002 and Portugal 2004

Preparations for the 2002 FWC were impacted by the apparent threat of football hooliganism. International news programmes featured footage of Japanese security forces training to manage fan violence. Previous FMEs (notably the 1998 FWC and Euro 2000) saw disorder and instances of what many saw as disproportionate policing. Prior to Japan 2002, over 1000 FBOs were issued in the UK. Only 13 of the estimated 8000 fans who did travel were arrested, with only one for a public order offence (Rookwood, 2009). Some fans also considered the event prohibitively expensive, with costs influencing attendee demographics and

interactional dynamics. An Irish fan interviewed in Tokyo, who was attending his third World Cup, said that there was a “noticeably different type of fan” present “... perhaps because Japan’s so expensive, and the crack-down on hooligans.” Another fan interviewed in Saitama argued there was “little do to between matches – nothing specifically for fans.” It was my first FME, so I lacked frames of reference regarding provisions for the fan experience, but reflecting on tournaments since this notion resonates in retrospect.

Japanese authorities associated enthusiastic fan behaviour with social deviance, limiting public viewings to restricted sites which were not widely advertised (Horky, 2013). This approach contrasted with that of South Korea, where the unique public viewing and street cheering culture was encouraged by the

installation of “public viewing areas” (PVAs). However, as one football journalist commented in Osaka: “They [PVAs] mostly seem to cater for South Koreans.” At Portugal’s 2004 UEC, I travelled to every host city, encountering limited facilities for visiting fans beyond stadiums. Tickets were readily available and relatively affordable, meaning fewer supporters congregated in alternative spaces during matches where policing mechanisms may not have been in place. This helped occupy fans therefore and reduce disorder. There were 261 arrests including 87 for football-related disorder (Schreiber & Adang, 2010). Significantly, a single fan park was constructed in Lisbon, which one fan interviewed in the city described as “a game changer ... They should do this in every city. Put fences up, a big screen showing matches, serve food and drink.” Some declare Lisbon and Euro 2004 pioneers of this approach, although fan zones featured in Sweden’s UEC in 1992. However, these were located on the periphery of host cities, with entrance fees charged. Accordingly, attendances were low (Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010). Such facilities rarely featured in FMEs in the decade that followed.

Revolution and demand: Germany 2006 and Austria and Switzerland 2008

Temporary fan parks were constructed in all 12 host cities at the 2006 FWC, attracting 21 million visitors; and in all eight host cities at Euro 2008, where five million attended (Rookwood, 2009). The former event received generally positive media coverage. However, there were 9000 arrests, “numbers that were hardly communicated in the media” (Schreiber & Adang, 2010, p. 238). Nevertheless, many who attended reflected positively on the use of fan parks at the event during interviews. One fan in Nuremberg heralded it as “a revolution ... and a lesson in how to manage a football tournament ... Fan parks changed everything.” Reflecting the perceived genesis and impact, a football journalist interviewed in Leipzig

stated: “The Germans took the fan parks from Lisbon, tweaked it, and rolled it out in every [host] city. Germany got the credit, but it was a Portuguese innovation.” A Euro 2008 volunteer in Geneva stated: “There are so many fans without tickets. The stadiums are not so big. Switzerland is central in Europe so many fans can travel. It’s good we have the fan fests.” Apart from Vienna and Basel, the other six tournament venues averaged 31,285 capacity, and yet over 10 million fans attended (Klauser, 2011). Including corporate facilities, there were 1,134,906 tickets for the 31 matches, and with many attending multiple games, it is conceivable that less than 10% of attending fans secured match tickets. Face value tickets ranged from €45 to €550, but with demand vastly outstripping supply, the cheapest ticket I saw exchanged on the black market was €300, for a group game between Romania and Italy. The well-advertised fan parks were very well attended, providing vital safe spaces for ticketless fans, whilst significantly augmenting income for host cities.

Mixed perceptions and limited use: South Africa 2010 and Chile 2015

All nine host cities at South Africa’s FWC had fan fests, frequented by a total of 18 million users. However, a Cape Town resident was critical of the facilities: “It’s so expensive for us. Free [entry] but the Cokes and the beers, so expensive. Not many South Africans come to fan parks ... We don’t really have them in Africa.” Fans at Chile’s CONMEBOL Copa América also referenced the lack of cultural resonance in a South American context. A fan in Santiago, for instance, stated: “I was in Brazil for the World Cup and the fan zones there were really cool, but it’s more a European thing. For the Copa [América] we don’t really have them. They’re more for sponsors and tourists.” There were some small facilities for fans in Concepción, but one fan suggested these were a “token effort ... Only room for a few fans. Same at the stadiums, not much there.”

***Non-existence and alternative practice:
Qatar 2011, Gabon 2017 and USA 2011***

The AFC Asian Cup was staged in Qatar a month after the country had been awarded the rights to host the 2022 FWC. All five host stadiums in 2011 were located within an 8-mile radius and, with multiple matches on the same day, limited fans and cheap and accessible tickets, I saw all sixteen teams play in six days. There were no fan parks, although as an Australian fan in Doha said: “You don’t have fan parks if the stadiums don’t sell out.” The average attendance for Qatar’s four matches was 28,935, whilst 37,174 were at the final. However, the average audience of the remaining 27 games was 9324, with the lowest being 2022 at Saudi Arabia’s game against eventual winners Japan. Gabon’s 2017 CAF Cup of African Nations also drew small attendances, particularly international visitors – not aided by the price and complications of obtaining visas. At the Tunisia v Zimbabwe match those present in an official capacity outnumbered fans. At Libreville’s stadium, a hand-painted sign directed supporters to a “fan zone”, although no such facility existed. The 2011 CONCACAF Gold Cup also lacked fan parks, but the alternative practice of “tailgating” was evident. Tailgate parties are non-commercial social events held on and around the open tailgate of vehicles stationed in stadium car parks, where alcohol and grilled food are consumed. These are common in the USA and Canada including at the Gold Cup and in Latin football communities (Coche & Guerra, 2017). Fans gathered in stadium car parks several hours before matches, as explained by a Honduran supporter and resident of New Jersey in East Rutherford: “This is what we do. Get here early. Barbeque, beer, then go to the stadium together and watch Honduras win!”

Unofficial sites: Ghana 2008

The 2008 CAF Cup of African Nations was staged in four cities but only one had a

dedicated fan area, outside Accra’s stadium. This was seemingly “sponsored” by Guinness, but as one supporter present said: “It’s just one guy who’s paid to have something more exclusive for richer fans. He sets fences up and pays some money and has security.” When I inquired whether this was a fan zone he said: “Maybe it’s the opposite. More like VIP treatment, where most fans aren’t let in. It’s not for famous people, but it’s exclusive. We don’t have like official fan areas.”

***Fan safety and variable engagement:
Poland 2012, Brazil 2014, France 2016 and
Russia 2018***

Many of the non-European tournaments examined here did not feature fan parks, particularly non-FIFA events. Some tournaments that included such facilities saw variable engagement between locations. Seven million supporters attended eight fan zones in Ukraine and Poland at Euro 2012. As one fan interviewed in Warsaw stated: “There’s been trouble here, especially Russian fans, and Polish police can be harsh. You’re safer in the fan parks. Never any trouble.” Rio’s Copacabana fan park at the 2014 FWC in Brazil was the best attended, best situated, and most memorable fan facility I have encountered at any FME. As an American fan commented in a focus group at the site: “Can you imagine a better place than this? On the beach, perfect weather. Endless beer and football on the big screen, the iconic Maracanã stadium up the road.” Another respondent added: “I prefer fan parks to the stadium. We went to Russia versus Belgium. Boring as hell, man. We just came back to party at the fan park. Way more fun.” Emphasising the perceived variability, however, some fan parks were not considered well situated or organised. A Belgian fan in São Paulo stated: “The fan park here is a nightmare. Middle of nowhere. A bit angry too. We stayed for one beer and left ... Fan parks depend on the city.” In total only five million attended Brazil’s fan parks.

Considered within the context of twenty-first century FMEs, Euro 2016 saw unexpected levels of violence, most notably in Marseille, where fighting involving Russian hooligans, French ultras and English supporters led to injuries and arrests (Wong & Chadwick, 2017). Fan parks were considered relatively safe spaces in such cities, as one English interviewee in Marseille claimed: “If you’re in a bar here anything can happen. Fan parks can be the safest places to be.” Despite such claims only four million people visited these fan parks. After the violence involving Russian hooligans at Euro 2016, some suggested that the 2018 FWC in Russia could be unsafe for visiting fans (see Wong & Chadwick, 2017). However, fan violence was largely absent from the tournament, as an Icelandic interviewee in Moscow stated: “The whole Russian security system’s on show. I’m not surprised there’s been no problems with violence ... There are police and military-types at stadiums and fan parks. A pretty clear deterrent. It’s worked.” Russia’s 11 fan parks had a combined capacity of 203,000 and a total of 7.7 million attendees. However, whilst those in more populated cities such as Moscow and St Petersburg drew large crowds, venues in smaller cities were less popular. Kaliningrad proved a notable example, as Russia’s most western and yet least accessible exclave. Before attending the Serbia v Switzerland game there, I watched Brazil v Costa Rica screened at the city’s fan park. I counted 122 fans at the 15,000-capacity site. A supporter present said: “Great when they’re full but boring when they’re dead. You’d rather be in a bar than an empty fan park.”

Cultural expression and concession: Qatar 2019

Qatar’s forthcoming 2022 FWC has been widely criticised in relation to: bribery, corruption, discrimination and human rights abuses (Khalifa, 2020); the sustainability of the infrastructural investment (in which a country with 313,000 citizens and a 2.9 million mostly expatriate

population will have eight stadiums in a fifty-mile radius totalling 390,090 capacity); access for female supporters and the treatment of LGBTQIA+ communities; and a range of concerns relating to alcohol consumption. Qatar’s 2019 FCWC featured a fan zone, where a key issue concerned the sanctioning of alcohol consumption, prohibited in many Gulf states under Islamic law. I interviewed a Doha resident who described expatriate culture whereby “Western tourists and expats drink – but only in hotels, especially Friday brunches, which are basically all-day drinking sessions.”

Liverpool FC won the 2019 FCWC, where the fan zone was managed by the German PR and marketing company Fischer Appelt, with Liverpool-based music events company BOSS providing the cultural programme. Liverpool reached the 2018 and 2019 UEFA Champions League finals, with BOSS helping organise pre-match fan parks hosting over 100,000 supporters. An organiser of the 2018 event stated: “There was a real desire from people at the club to make it authentic and fan led. The fan park ... turned into its own legend.” The widespread engagement, momentum and professional networks propelled the 2019 event, collaboratively organised by Liverpool FC’s tourism, fan activation, stadium safety, press and broadcasting teams, featuring BOSS performances and partnering with the local organising council. When Qatar was announced as the 2019 FCWC venue, plans for a fan park developed. One of the organisers interviewed stated: “The planning and ultimate delivery of the fan park was put out to tender. BOSS programmed five days of musical output and offered general consultancy on how the fan park could be best set up.” Significantly, alcohol was sold at this open-air fan park – a first for the Gulf state. Qatar’s Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy Hassan al-Thawadi declared: “Alcohol is not part of our culture, but hospitality is” (France 24, 2021). Whether this experimental and controversial cultural concession

will shape fan parks at the 2022 FWC remains to be seen. However, Doha's fan park saw no reported alcohol-related incidents or arrests and it emphasised the importance of professional and cultural networks and partnerships. As an organiser interviewed in Doha stated: "If we [Liverpool] hadn't qualified for this [FCWC], this fan park might not have happened like this. It might make Qatar think about organising them like this at the World Cup – and serving alcohol."

Diversifying the fan experience

Politicians, economists, police, organisers and broadcasters can adopt distinct and overlapping agendas concerning contemporary SMEs. Priorities may include: hosting safe, orderly, profitable, innovative, popular and memorable events; generating sustainable legacies facilitated by infrastructural investments which inspire and enable subsequent generations to participate in sport and strive for higher performance levels; driving modernisation and stimulating subsequent events, tourism and commercial and broadcasting revenue growth; and encouraging profitable partnerships and cultural influence, producing acquisitions of soft power through broadly effective nation-branding and public diplomacy initiatives. The quality and excitement of widely broadcasted and creatively marketed sports contests may shape levels of consumption and commercialisation, in the form of global audiences generated through lucrative broadcasting contacts and profitable sponsorships. Public opinion will also be influenced by mediated narratives and social media engagements. Tourism revenue is another key feature, with organisers aiming to maximise capacities and profitability. This necessitates creative solutions, positive interactions and a diversification of the fan experience, encouraging visitors beyond those able to secure match tickets.

Prior to the 1998 FWC, the English Football Association embarked on a domestic campaign

with the motto "If you don't have a ticket, stay at home" (Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010, p. 740). This reflected the perceived threat of disorder. When I began a Ph.D. in football hooliganism in 2003, the Council of Europe had just published recommendations on avoiding violence at sporting events, which did not mention fan zones (Rookwood, 2009). Ticketless supporters were still generally discouraged from travelling amidst a climate of fear and suspicion regarding football fans. Lauss and Szigetvari (2010) interviewed Alan Ridley, UEFA's Head of Sponsorship and Event Promotion in 2008, who said: "People have a better time if they have things to do. They are happier, and then they behave probably in a better way" (p. 741). These scholars also quote an Austrian football police expert as saying: "A good atmosphere and good communication are natural methods to prevent violence" (p. 742). The evolving practice of FME fan parks in the intervening period altered the organisational, experiential and regulatory mindset. A Euro 2008 volunteer interviewed in Bern stated: "We're open from 11 in the morning until midnight, 2am at weekends. There are cultural programmes and every match is shown on the big screens." Fan park capacities at Euro 2008 totalled 320,000, ranging from 15,000 in Innsbruck to 70,000 in Vienna, shaping the varied dynamics and atmosphere for visitors. Fan parks at the 2012 edition in Poland and Ukraine featured 650 concerts and shows. At Euro 2016 in France, fan embassies located near fan parks served 19 of the 24 teams, welcoming, advising, informing and supporting visiting fans.

Of the 212 interview and focus group participants in my research over the course of two decades, most who had experienced fan parks articulated positive perspectives. Even criticism was usually balanced. A fan interviewed in Zurich at Euro 2008 stated: "The fan parks are a bit commercial, and you're limited to basic food and drink, like in a stadium, but someone has to pay for it ... It's a good atmosphere, safe, you meet people from all over the

world.” Another interviewee at the same location noted: “Being at tournaments used to mean missing games. You could never see a screen in a packed bar. But with the big screens you get to experience the culture, soak up the atmosphere and watch games in the fan park, then try and get tickets.”

The widespread establishment of fan parks at the 2006 FWC was perceived as a distinct feature and divergence from previous events. An English interviewee in Nuremberg stated: “A big change with the fan parks is they serve beer. It’s weak as piss, but it’s ale. Not letting you drink was a way of saying you can’t be trusted. Selling [alcohol] does the opposite, makes you feel welcome, trusted.” Another interviewee in Hamburg stated: “Why d’you come to tournaments? Not just to see your team, it’s for the experience, the atmosphere, meet different people. Fan fests are great for that. Plus, there’s entertainment, music and stuff between matches... Sponsors do free games for kids, and adults!” At the Copacabana fan park in Rio at the 2014 FWC musical entertainment took place before and after games and during half time breaks. One Belgian fan described it as “like a mini rave.” On one occasion, when the match resumed, and music was replaced by football on the big screen, the crowd started booing. An English fan interviewed afterwards stated: “Everyone got really into the music. Amazing atmosphere that. It was funny when everyone was booing the footy. Best fan park ever.”

Various participants commented on the popularity and accessibility of fan parks. A Portuguese supporter in Durban at South Africa’s 2010 FWC stated: “Hard to think of a World Cup without fan zones. Everyone goes, especially if you’re in a big group... Easy to meet people at meeting points.” Internationally recognisable symbols have become common features of FME signage, directing visitors, from airports and on roads to and within host cities towards stadiums, public transport and fan parks. This demonstrates that the latter

facilities have become a key component of FMEs: As a journalist interviewed in Kaliningrad stated: “Poland were really good at that. That’s the first time I saw fan park signs. You can follow them no matter what language you speak. They paint lines on the road here, so you can’t get lost.” Various respondents commented on their accessibility. A female volunteer at the Paris fan park at Euro 2016 contended: “Football used to be quite male-dominated. It still is, but you get a lot more women now, especially at fan zones. Football is for everyone.” A female fan at the Bordeaux fan park in same event argued: “As a Muslim sometimes you feel people look at you in a certain way at football matches. But in the fan parks you get different races, religions, genders, young and old, people from every country.”

In their recent FME study, Hautbois et al. (2020) called for researchers to explore how experiences of fan parks combined with other spaces, such as pubs. Some respondents made a similar point here. In a focus group at St Etienne’s fan park at Euro 2016 disagreements were expressed. One respondent commented on the convenience of fan parks, another suggested they lacked authenticity, but both agreed that the respective spaces were valued components of the shared FME experience: “I don’t like fan parks, they’re a bit commercial, and limited for food and drink, but we’re mates so we mix it up between fan parks and bars.” Contextualising what Hautbois et al. refer to as the “eventization of host cities” (2020, p. 574), a resident in Zurich offered insight into local perspectives at Euro 2008, arguing: “Not everyone likes fan zones. They dominate a city centre... Those who complain tend to not like having events. Usually older people.” For the majority of respondents, well-planned, secure fan parks constructed in large open spaces within or close to the centre of host cities, featuring varied and sufficient facilities, services and screens, which avoid organisational and technical problems, were

welcomed, and even *expected*, as a core component of the modern FME experience.

Such facilities did not feature in the confederation events included here outside Europe, namely COMNEBOL's Copa América, CONCACAF's Gold Cup, CAF's Africa Cup of Nations and the AFC Asian Cup. The fan cultures associated with some of these FMEs were not considered by respondents in this research to be receptive to the commercial spaces and interactional dynamics that fan parks typically facilitate (see Coche & Guerra, 2017). These event contexts were also perceived to lack a combination of financial resources, commercial support, international visitors, organisational capacity, security personnel, physical space and/or popular demand. Fan parks are unlikely to become common features of such events in the future, despite their popularity in FWCs and European FMEs. Even in countries and continents where FWCs have been held, subsequent continental tournaments have not embraced fan parks, with host cities typically attracting and catering only for fans with match tickets. This can reduce the costs of staging FMEs, whilst restricting their economic viability.

Securitising crowd management

The build-up to numerous FMEs has included media narratives proclaiming the risks of attending events (Hagemann, 2010). Preparations for UEFA Euro 2016 were connected to the threat of terrorism, particularly following the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris (including at the Stade de France) in which 130 victims died. Following violence at Euro 2016, notably involving Russian hooligans, international media coverage of preparations for the 2018 FWC in Russia cited potential dangers for visiting fans (Ludvigsen, 2021). However, a focus group participant at the latter event in Moscow argued: "Before you get here, the press talk about the danger. Once you're here you see how safe it is. It's

really well policed... The fan parks are the safest place to be." Another respondent in the same focus group added: "Outside the fan parks and the grounds you see all the security and police. You wouldn't mess with them. You know that's waiting if you cause trouble. The only way out is through them." Such statements reflect how some football fans welcome or at least accept the increased securitisation and policing at FMEs. For instance, a Swedish supporter at Euro 2016 in Paris stated: "There's lots of police here, but at least you know if there's fighting or even a terrorist attack that the police are there."

In 146 h of fieldwork in 39 fan parks, I only witnessed one violent incident and two other occasions where police intervened to eject drunken supporters. Fan parks are often popular with police, providing secure environments where fans are contained, facilitating crowd control and monitoring crime or alcohol-related issues. As one police officer at the 2006 FWC in Frankfurt stated: "It's much easier in this environment than in large squares with bars. Here you have fences and secure entrances and exits." He also argued that the environment can redirect carnival-esque behaviours (see Turner, 2013) and that policing approaches can help diffuse deviance: "Sometimes fans can be a bit crazy but because they know we are there and there's no escape, they calm down quickly. But we don't overreact either. Sometimes we give a warning. Talk to them and not threaten them."

Many fans interviewed suggested they forgot about the security processes soon after entering the parks. One fan in Johannesburg at the 2010 FWC in South Africa provided this analogy: "Fan parks are like airports. You go through security control, have your bags checked. It's a pain to queue but you know everyone goes through it. So, you relax once you're in, you trust it's safe and don't think about it." Several respondents also commented on what I frame as the absence of internal spatial demarcations within fan parks. For

example, an English supporter in Moscow at the 2018 FWC said: “A big thing is that they don’t split fans up. You can watch your team score a late winner next to a fan of the other team. You can stand anywhere and celebrate, just don’t go too far... You know the police are there. Segregation would probably cause problems.” The lack of separation between fans who identify as supporters of different national teams and who may enact “rival” social identities was well received. Seen through the lens of the aforementioned Shared Space Theory, the effective deterritorialisation of the designated space enables interaction between groups, a reminder of the open, welcoming neutrality of those spaces, where fans are free to support their team but not to behave violently.

Over time, technology has become increasingly important to FME management, including fan park operations, influencing experiential dynamics and securitisation, as the two central themes of this research. An event organiser interviewed at the 2018 FWC in Moscow stated: “Free Wi-Fi is provided in all of our fan fests. We want fans to share their experiences with the world.” Russian operators invested \$20 million in mobile network infrastructure in Moscow alone; and there were 7.5 billion interactions with official FIFA digital platforms in the city during the event (Boylan, 2018). A nationwide “Fan ID” identification system was required for stadium access, also serving as a visa waiver for ticketed fans (Ludvigsen, 2018). Moscow authorities deployed sophisticated CCTV systems, with 4288 cameras installed at FIFA facilities, whilst three video analytics zones were piloted with facial recognition systems. About 98 people were prohibited from entering FIFA facilities as their photos matched with the database provided by city authorities (Boylan, 2018). There are therefore both explicit and concealed layers of surveillance shaping the securitisation of contemporary FME crowd management, including at fan parks.

This approach can be differentiated from the manifest model of governance adopted at previous FMEs, notably Euro 2008. Lauss and Szigetvari (2010) frame its motto “Expect Emotions” as a directive for governance, rather than a mere marketing slogan, connecting crowd management to the fan experience. These scholars invoke Michael Foucault’s notion of “governing by fun” for regimes seeking to apply frameworks of liberal governmentality; where “fun” as pleasurable leisure “in which desires, understood as the pursuit of individual interest, become translated into particular (social) action”, can be differentiated from entertainment as the passive expenditure of time (p. 738). In addition, Klauser’s (2012) research on this event connects the notions of security and commodification in terms of how security policies implemented in fan zones also provide a monopoly for event sponsors, partners and consumption. This is relevant especially in the sense that event owners and organisers often push for harmonised, “fun” and safe spaces that are packed with official consumption opportunities. As a divergence from this approach, the more overt securitisation of fan parks and other event facilities in Russia, policed by large numbers of imposing personnel was perceived by some visitors to reflect Russian governance and ideology. As the most popular sport in the world, football may be seen as a “soft” and neutral context that a host nation can exploit to influence international perspectives, but it also offers opportunities to demonstrate hard power resources. The “smart” combination of hard and soft power resources in this respect may be a key objective of host nations (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016).

Conclusion

Bale’s (1998) research on virtual fandoms and the “futurescapes” of football described public viewing areas as a third spectator environment, between the stadium and the homes of

television viewers. At the time, such facilities were unfamiliar and irregular features of FMEs, events where fan conduct and policing could prove problematic. When British cities, including Liverpool, London and Manchester, staged PVAs to broadcast England matches at the 2006 FWC, organising councils intended the events to be family-friendly and alcohol-free. However, showings of England's first match against Paraguay attracted unexpectedly large crowds and these events were affected by alcohol-related disorder. With legal lines blurred as to whether the environment constituted a football context, disproportionate crowd control tactics were employed by some police who were as unaccustomed to the event dynamics as the fans who attended (Rookwood, 2009). These spaces lacked perimeter fences and entrance and exit points at which attendees could be processed, searched and separated from shoppers – some of whom were inadvertently inconvenienced and even injured. The screening of the first match was abandoned in Liverpool, as “fans clashed with police armed with batons and wielding riot shields” (Morris & Gibson, 2006).

Such scenarios (and fan parks in general) can be perceived to reflect a growing trend towards the temporary use of urban spaces for specific events, temporarily transforming public areas into sites of consumption and entertainment (Smith, 2015). For critics, the above example confirmed the causal relationship between alcohol and football violence and the enduring threat of hooliganism. Millward analysed similar problems as Manchester hosted the 2008 UEFA Cup final between Glasgow Rangers and St Petersburg, depicting the “degeneration of a fan party into a hooligan riot” (2009, p. 381). I watched England's second 2006 FWC game in a fan park in Nuremberg, widely attended by England fans drinking alcohol. There was no disorder and there were no arrests. The key differences between these environments were the organisational conditions and policing of supporters. Fan parks have proven generally

safe and peaceful FME environments conducive to positive fan experiences.

Fan parks typically remain conspicuously absent from intra-continental tournaments beyond Europe, where the appropriate degree of cultural resonance, popular demand, financial resources, commercial support, international visitors, organisational capacity, security personnel and/or physical space may be lacking. However, at FWCs and European FMEs hosted within the timeframe of this longitudinal research, fan parks have become key components of the FME fan experience. Such facilities can manufacture and accentuate intense and memorable experiences, but ultimately offer parallel not comparable, experiences to match attendance. They are more accessible and affordable for those without match tickets, notably in contexts where the demand for tickets outstrips supply. As evidence of the popularity of fan parks, visitor numbers now surpass stadium spectators at many events. A Spanish fan interviewed in Gdansk at Euro 2012 stated: “Many fans come without tickets, happy to stay in fan parks most of the day.” This also reveals a problem, as the concentration of expenditure in fan parks can limit prospects for local businesses. However, the same respondent added: “You need to leave parks for good food, and to sleep in hotels. Overall, the parks must be good for the city, and business.”

Fan parks can enable host cities and those with commercial objectives to attract, cater for, and capitalise on increasing numbers of visitors, enhancing the economic viability of events. They have enabled more football tourists to experience and develop informed perspectives on event destinations, whilst shaping attitudes towards football supporters in host cities. An enduring prevalence of disorder remains apparent in some football subcultures. This is manifest in occasional violent incidents at FMEs, notably where rival supporters interact (sometimes influenced by alcohol). Conditions can be cultivated by

organisational mismanagement and ineffective and disproportionate policing. The Euro 2020 final in July 2021 between England and Italy in London provided various examples. Footage widely circulated on social media showed many home fans storming gates and forcibly gaining entrance to Wembley, and Lawson (2021) stated: "It was also the worst organised and managed operation at a football ground I've ever seen." Reflecting on twenty-first FMEs in general, however, and fan parks in particular, the increasingly varied visitor demographics and decreasing ratios of public disorder arrests demonstrate that fan parks are of cultural, diplomatic and commercial value. In many contexts attitudes to football fans are changing, and they are increasingly viewed as a demographic to be welcomed. This partly follows the marginalisation of "less desirable" fans, replaced with "a new breed of consumer" (McArdle, 2000, p. 82).

As research into fan parks has identified, key issues include the provision for and diversification of the fan experience, as well as effective crowd management, security, and the reorganisation of public spaces (Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010). Temporarily-erected fan parks require a fraction of the cost compared with permanent infrastructural investments, whilst event destinations need no longer be restricted by stadium capacities and ticket availabilities. Fan parks can provide opportunities for commercial partners to interact and influence potential customers, although further research is required on the economic impact of these sites. Social media engagements facilitate the expression of positive word-of-mouth towards host nations (Hautbois et al. 2020), providing opportunities to capture, analyse and capitalise accordingly. Critical expressions via social media can also inform event organisers how to improve subsequent provision.

Many of the planned fan parks for the delayed multi-site Euro 2020 were cancelled or reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This event context was discounted from this

research as a consequence. Clearly, however, the future provision of large, open spaces designated as FME fan parks attracting international visitors relies upon open borders and freedom of movement. This necessitates a thus far elusive internationally-coordinated containment and vaccination programme to accelerate the advent of a post-pandemic era. Depending on the degree of progress made by December 2022, Qatar's FWC may see some restrictions on visitors, which could shape the approach to and engagement within fan parks. Looking beyond that, with Euro 2024 serving as Europe's next men's FME, there may be a reliance on Germany's organisational capacity once again.

The four FWCs and three UECs between 2006 and 2018 saw 66.7 million supporters visit 69 host city fan parks. Despite their popularity, these sites have been subject to limited research. This article offers an important contribution, notably to the fields of event management, security studies and various sport-related disciplines, pertaining to the diversification of the fan experience and the securitisation of crowd management at fan parks. Although the conception may counter the global trend of COVID-19 social distancing, a shared space theory was proposed, emphasising the importance of fan parks as deterritorialised environments conducive to peaceful interactions. Future work could consider the application of this theoretical construct to other contexts, such as Olympic live sites and Premier League fan zones. Giving voice to 212 participants across 15 FMEs represents a significant engagement in the research process, but also serves as a snapshot of each event, and a reliance on a limited number of perspectives. As is common in such approaches, the generalisability of findings could therefore be questioned. Further limitations of this work need to be acknowledged and could serve as a starting point for future research. Addressing COVID-19-era fan parks and post-pandemic solutions is an investigative priority. Future work could

also analyse how sponsors engage with customers in these sites, how economic impacts might be measured, and also how these spaces and those that manage and use them might serve to co-create both tangible and intangible value (see Horbel et al., 2016). Subsequent studies could also analyse how police monitor behaviour and coordinate with security personnel in light of emerging surveillance technologies, how fans share their experiences on evolving social media sites, and the associated lessons event organisers and commercial partners can learn.

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