

The World at Your Feet

The Football Pitch as a Platform for Social and Individual
Development in Medellín, Colombia

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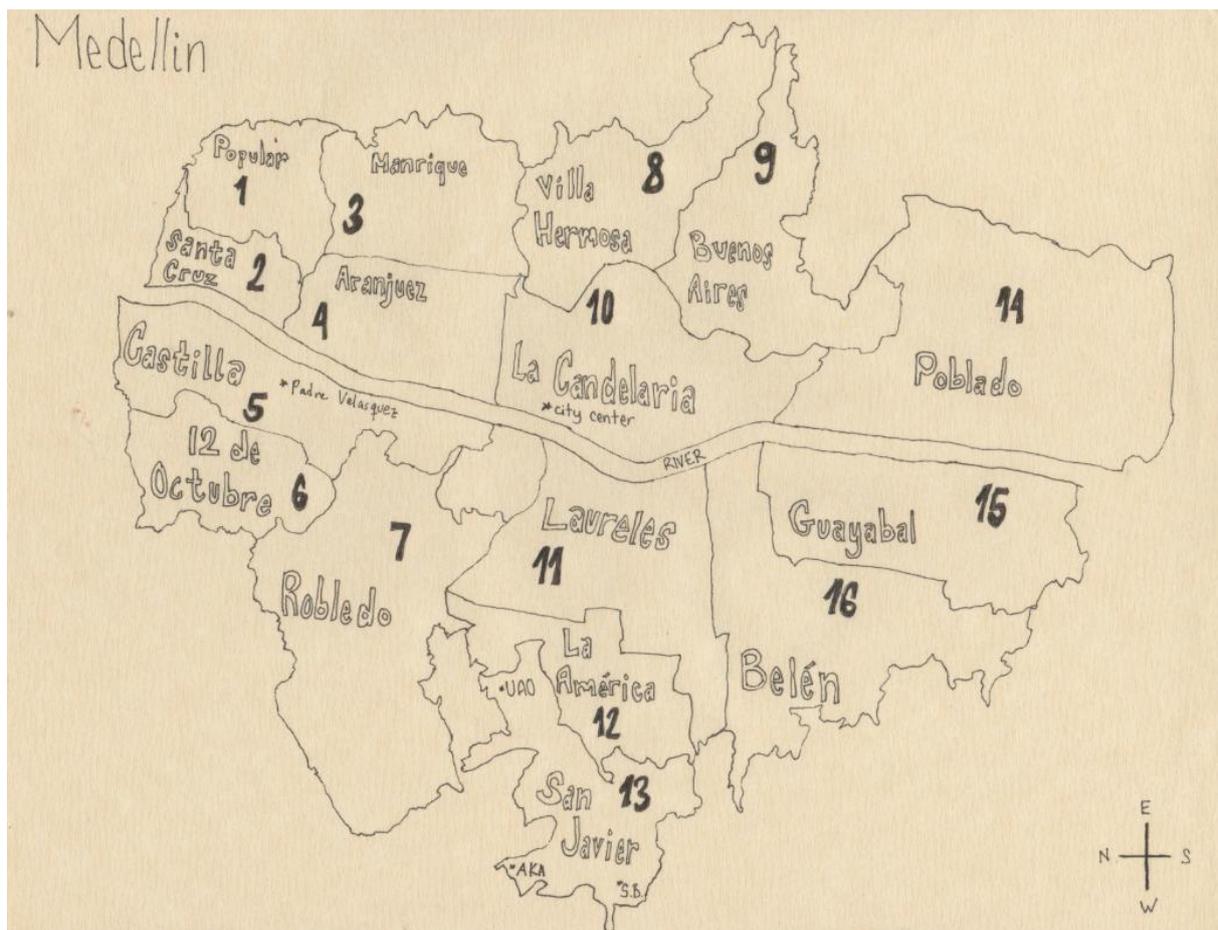
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Abstract

This research provides an analysis of the social significance of football among youths growing up in vulnerable neighbourhoods in Medellín, Colombia. It explores the social significance of football in the context of a city with a long history of conflict and urban violence. Whereas violence is not as widespread as it used to be, continuing social issues provide youths with challenges as they grow up. Through the processes of socialization and identification, these social issues are reproduced and continue to shape communities' social capital. In this social climate, football is understood as a representation of society in its strengths as well as its flaws. Being the most popular sport in Colombia, it cannot be separated from Medellín's context of violence and crime, a context that is manifested through spectator violence and connections between fan groups and criminal gangs. However, football's massive popularity also means that it can be used to address social problems. This thesis provides an analysis of sport engagement on different levels of organization, in which engagement includes playing and watching. Through explicitly using it as an educative tool, it can foster social relations and promote norms and values that apply inside as well as outside the pitch.

Keywords

Social capital, football, socialization, identification, vulnerable neighbourhoods, Medellín



Map of Medellín. The city is divided into 16 *comunas* (communes), all of which consist of various *barrios* (neighbourhoods) (Phillips-Amos 2012).

1. Introduction

“The thing is, football is the king sport in this country. So football, you play it on the pitch, on the street, on the concrete pitch, in the neighbourhoods... football is everywhere.” – Juan Carlos Sánchez, ex-professional football player at Deportivo Independiente Medellín

In Medellín, Colombia, football is an intrinsic part of social life that cannot be reduced to a hobby, a sport, or a gathering with friends. The moment I set foot on the streets, I saw people wearing football jerseys as part of their everyday outfits. I took the bus and inside I found images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus competing with flags and pennants of *Atlético Nacional* or *Independiente Medellín*. When the streets were empty, buildings covered with graffiti of the symbols of these local clubs always reminded me of their significance in the lives of many *Paisas*, as the inhabitants of Medellín are known. And when the national selection played its qualification games for the upcoming World Cup, cafés were filled with people, shouting their Colombia towards victory. For a moment, their futures seemed to depend on the moves of their beloved striker. His name came up in any conversation about football: “Ask a child: who do you want to be? The answer will be Falcao¹.”

For many youths living in the neighbourhoods on the periphery of the city, football is just about everything. Their neighbourhoods are often described as ‘vulnerable’, referring to the presence of gang violence, substance abuse, or poverty and the lack of financial resources to invest in the community. In this context, football is a source of socialization and identification, apart from the negative role models they are usually brought up with, such as drug abusers or gang members. Furthermore, they understand it as a means to *salir adelante* (get ahead). The role that football plays in the lives of these youth, and their perception of it as a means towards vertical social mobility, will be central to my thesis. Furthermore, I will look at how the significance of football on the individual level can be linked to its impact on the community level.

The concepts of socialization and identity are closely related to that of social capital, defined by Bourdieu (1986:246) as the accumulation of actual or potential material or social resources shared by a network of mutually reciprocal relationships. Putnam discusses the concept in terms of quantity, stating that high-social capital states have less violent crime (2000:309). However, McIlwaine and Moser (2004:156) use the term in a qualitative sense when speaking of ‘perverse social capital’, in which the use of force and illegal activities are favoured and reproduced through certain social networks (see also Arias 2006). Unstable living conditions, such as poverty, crime, and unemployment, act as triggers for social problems with which children and youth are socialized, and with which they consequently identify themselves (Kraschl, 2009:4). It is through the process of socialization that perverse social capital is reproduced. However, football can act as an alternative source for socialization and identity in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, broadening the spectrum of activities that youth are exposed to. DaMatta states that football functions as a socializing machine in Brazil (1988:132); its popularity in Colombia suggests that it serves a similar role here. Also, it can be arranged even where financial resources are lacking, making it an accessible medium for disadvantaged communities. Sports events, as Putnam (2000:411) points out, provide good venues for the creation of social capital, because through them we connect with people unlike ourselves. In line with this argument, I will look at how football provides youth with an alternative source of socialization, and how it contributes to the creation of social capital.

Ethnographic studies of the social connotations of football are not new; its relation to society has been studied extensively in Brazil. Janet Lever (1983) wrote about football as a contribution to social cohesionⁱⁱ. Roberto DaMatta, challenging the notion of sports as “an

opium of the people” (1982:101), rather considers football a “social drama” (following Victor Turner) through which Brazilian society manifests itself (1988:126). In societies such as Brazil, marked by structural social inequality, football provides an experience with universal rules, which “makes everybody equal in the field of contest” (DaMatta 1988:131). More recent studies have focused on football as a reconciliatory tool in (post-)conflict societies. Höglund and Sundberg stress that divided groups can only reconcile and reintegrate through contact, for which sports provide a neutral space (2008:811-812). Furthermore, it provides youth with an alternative source for identity and belonging, as supported by Dyck’s research on the role of football in a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program for ex-child soldiers in Sierra Leone (2011:395). However, Nicholson and Hoye (2008:12) rightly point out that sports can facilitate division just as much as it can unite people; in discussions on football and its social impact, fandom, its relation to in- and out-group thinking, and spectator violence are topics that cannot be ignored.

In my contribution to this body of knowledge, I will integrate theories of social capital and socialization to those on football related to social development and identity construction. I will do so by offering a perspective on football as a representation of society in the context of vulnerable neighbourhoods, characterized by urban violence and social exclusion. In doing this, I complement the existing research on the social connotations of football. Furthermore, whereas the existing body of research on football is primarily focused on professional clubs and fandom, I include organized amateur football and street football in my analysis. Based on participant-observation, informal conversations, interviews, and archival documents, I argue that football in Medellín reflects both the cohesive and exclusive aspects of Colombian society; moreover, due to its massive popularity and its centrality in the lives of many young people, it provides a platform for social and individual development.

This thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter, I will provide a theoretical framework, in which I will integrate theories on social capital and socialization with literature on football in relation to society, after which I will present my methodology. I will start my ethnographic analysis with describing the context of Medellín in chapter 3, which includes its history as a homicide capital and its resurrection in spite of continuing social issues. Also, I will look at how professional football and spectator violence are connected to these social issues. In chapter 4, I will describe the social problems in vulnerable neighbourhoods that young people grow up with. The role football plays in youths’ lives in these particular environments, including professional football and fandom, will be explored in chapter 5. I will end the ethnographic section with elaborating on the explicit use of football as an educative tool in Medellín in chapter 6. Finally, I will present my conclusions. The football field represents society in its strengths as well as its flaws. Through its widespread popularity it can also serve as a platform for communality and individual development. As one of the trainers I talked to put it when speaking to his pupils: “Not all of you will reach this dream [of becoming a professional football player], but there are many other goals to reach.”

2. Social capital and football in theory

In 1990, the UNDP published the first Human Development Report. As it was recognized how economic growth did not always result in better living conditions, the concept of human or social development was introduced (McNeill 2007:5-6). Following its adoption by the World Bank in the 1990s, the concept of social capital has been extensively used in relation to economic as well as social development (McNeill 2007:9). In this chapter, I first elaborate on social capital reproduction, after which I discuss the concept of social capital in relation to vulnerable neighbourhoods. Then, I address how sport engagement is related to social capital formation. I conclude with presenting my methodology.

Social capital, socialization, and identity formation

Bourdieu (1986:52) writes how the reproduction of social capital “presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed.” It is in these social interactions that the process of socialization takes place. Putnam (2000:307-308), referring to Jacobs, stresses how such social exchanges influence the public identity of a community, concluding that high levels of social capital lead to safe and productive neighbourhoods. He speaks of ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital. The former is inclusive, connecting people across diverse social cleavages, whereas the latter is rather exclusive and provides benefits only for a certain social group (2000:22).

The neighbourhood in which children grow up is an important source of socialization (Putnam 2000:307). As they spend most of their time in the neighbourhood, it contributes to their social identity. It is the place where people interact and build social networks, creating reciprocal relations that stand at the core of social capital (Forrest and Kearns 2001:2129; McIlwaine and Moser 2004:68). Social capital thus provides a source for socialization and identity formation, which in turn function to reproduce social capital. I will now look at how this works in vulnerable neighbourhoods and in what ways football can intervene in this process.

Building social capital in vulnerable neighbourhoods

The process of socialization, which plays an important role in social capital formation, may lead to the reproduction of social problems in disadvantaged communities (Kraschl, 2009:4), such as urban violence and social exclusion, which are predominant issues in Latin American cities. McIlwaine and Moser (2004:156) stress how violence and fear shape social relations in communities; they undermine existing levels of trust and foster a perceived lack of unity. They distinguish between “productive” and “perverse” social capital (2004:156). Productive social capital constitutes of social relations that generate favourable outcomes, whereas its perverse counterpart fosters the use of force and illegal activities (2004:158). Rubio points to a “reward structure” (1997:805), caused by the altered relationship between education and income, that facilitates young people’s decisions towards perverse activities. Whereas perverse social capital is primarily discussed in the context of urban violence and crime, I use the term more broadly, incorporating structural social problems as substance abuse, poverty, living on the street, and stigmatization. These are social problems that were frequently mentioned by informants as characteristic of vulnerable neighbourhoods. Koonings and Kruijt (2007:1-4) argue that Latin American cities are “fractured”, that is, they are marked by a profound social inequality due to problems of poverty, insecurity, and exclusion. Furthermore, many disadvantaged or peripheral neighbourhoods experience a withdrawal of state presence, especially its public security functions. In this social climate, violent survival strategies become more accepted or are perceived as inevitable; moreover, the presence of violence and exclusion shapes social identities and social order. Fear of potential violence causes people to stay indoors, leading to less social interaction and therefore less social cohesion (McIlwaine and Moser 2004:163). However, social capital can be reconstructed to break the vicious circle and address social problems (McIlwaine and Moser 2004:156). This will be the focus of the next section.

Social capital and sport engagement

Sport is one of the social institutions through which the socialization process takes place. This implies the transmission of norms and values shared by the network of social relations that form a community’s social capital (Snyder and Spreitzer 1978:24). Nicholson and Hoye (2008:2) stress its central role in “facilitating social integration and civic participation”. However, whereas Putnam (2000:114) makes a distinction between playing and watching

sport, Nicholson and Hoye (2008:10-11) choose the term “sport engagement” to include the different ways of sport participation. Since I found football in Medellín to be a social event that has an impact on players as well as spectators, I use the latter, more inclusive term.

To understand how football can be used as a means to construct productive social capital, it is necessary to examine its meaning in Latin America. DaMatta realised that “the presence of the game is so rooted in Latin American societies that some analysts have difficulties seeing its implications” (De Biasi and Lanfranchi 1997:87). Understanding football as an anti-structure, DaMatta (1982) deploys Turner’s concept of “social drama”, defined as a “marked disturbance in the social life of a particular group” (Turner 1957:91). DaMatta states that football in Brazil implies a kind of equality that the Brazilian people do not experience outside the field: whereas people are usually defined by their hierarchical relationships, in the world of football they are judged solely by their performance (1982:131). I follow DaMatta to the point that society, especially in Latin American countries, shows itself through football; however, I do not consider the sport an anti-structure. As Koonings argues, “the ‘[football] universe of equal opportunity has its limits beyond the direct domain of the teams, the matches, and the grandstand crowds” (2003:210). Furthermore, as Robben (1988:136) demonstrates in his study of Camurim, Brazil, football is often subject to political involvement. Also, social status is an important factor in amateur football that can even determine successes and losses through the external manipulation of outcomes (Robben 1988:143-144).

In line with this account, I argue that football cannot be separated from the structures that exist in wider society. Following Lever (1984), I state that the football pitch can provide a space for fostering social cohesion; however, the social problems that these societies are confronted with are manifested on the pitch as well. Feixa (1994:79) argues how football constitutes a terrain for studying boundaries of gender, class, or territory, stating that the sport reflects various identities. In many multicultural societies, it is among the few sources of national identity (1994:79), whereas at the same time it serves as a channel for local rival identities (1994:82). It thus provides an example of bridging as well as bonding social capital (Putnam 2000:22). However, football also produces new identities, as individuals and groups identify with players or clubs (Feixa 1994:87). Moreover, besides these “spectator” identities, playing football oneself can also provide a source of identity. Discussing young fighters in Sierra Leone, Richards (1997:155) argues that football provides a tool for re-socialization, a process that is intimately linked to identity formation.

Football as an explicit tool in social development programs

In 2003, the UN adopted sport as a means to promote education, health, development, and peace. Its characteristics are believed to foster personal development through instilling discipline, confidence, tolerance, and respect in players (Coalter, 2008:40); furthermore, sport participation increases community participation and fosters a social climate of trust and reciprocity (Coalter, 2008:44). It is now an integral part of many social development programs. Being the most popular sport in many countries, football is often the sport of choice. In Israel, it is used to facilitate peaceful social integration in neighbouring Jewish and Arab communities; in Liberia, it is deployed to reintegrate former child soldiers into civil society (Rookwood, 2008:471); and the organization Streetfootballworld unites over 80 social development programs worldwide (Streetfootballworld, 2006:10-11). Besides the social connotations that football has as a mass sport in itself, it is thus deliberately deployed as a tool for social and individual development. In my thesis, I will look at both these implicit and explicit ways.

Understanding football as a representation of society, I consider it a place where social problems are manifested, as much as a platform where these can be addressed. I will use the

concepts of social capital, socialization, and identity formation to explain how football can promote a sense of communality and individual development among youth in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Research setting and methodology

With a population of around three million, Medellín is Colombia's second-largest city. For five months, I conducted fieldwork with two organizations. Fundación Caminos (Roads Foundation) has several male football teams for youth between 12 and 18 years old who live in institutional homes or vulnerable neighbourhoods. They use football to instil an attitude of perseverance in their youths and teach them the skills they need to succeed at school and find employment. Hinchas por la Paz (Fans for Peace) is a project of the *Alcaldía* (municipality) of Medellín meant to promote *la convivencia* (coexistence or living together) through male and female tournaments between secondary schools. Through these projects I visited several neighbourhoods and institutions where participants lived. Furthermore, I got in touch with foundations they co-operated with.

My direct research population consisted of football playing youths, mainly boys, from vulnerable neighbourhoods, some of whom now live in institutional homes. Furthermore, I spoke with trainers, social workers at institutions or related foundations, youth community leaders, *Alcaldía* employees, a professional football player, and a political scientist who conducted research on football and spectator violence. With Fundación Caminos, I did participant-observation at trainings and matches. Being a white woman, it was difficult for me to blend in; however, I noticed my presence becoming more accepted as I participated more frequently, and as I showed not to be afraid of the ball nor the ground. Also, I accompanied the foundation on a week-trip to Bogotá. With the tournaments of Hinchas por la Paz, participating was not allowed. The tournament was a single event for every school, and building rapport proved to be difficult; therefore I decided after several tournaments to continue my fieldwork only with Fundación Caminos. I continuously emphasized that I was conducting research; however, for some of the younger players I was just another *profe* (trainer). I also attended several professional football matches, which gave me interesting insights in expressions of in- and out-group identities.

Besides the methods of participant-observation and informal conversations, I held in-depth interviews with the football playing youths as well as indirect informants. Furthermore, I held several focus groups with the youths involved in the teams of Fundación Caminos. All conversations and interviews were held in Spanish; scheduled interviews were recorded. I complemented my data with written reports, newspaper articles, and fan websites of professional clubs.

3. Drugs, violence, and football: the context of Medellín

“Please be careful with her. She is a very good friend of mine and I want to give her the best impression of our city,” Lola said to the taxi driver as I stepped in the car. He ensured her that he would drive me home safely. We drove off and he asked me the usual: where I was from, how long I was staying in *Medallo* (Medal, as Medellín is called among citizens), and what I thought of the city. He was pleased to hear that I enjoyed it. “This used to be the city of Pablo Escobar. Now we are nominated among the most innovative cities in the worldⁱⁱⁱ. Can you imagine?”

Lola, a 21 year old girl from *Comuna 13*, often expressed to be tired of the negative image that many people still have of Medellín, and of her neighbourhood in particular.

“*Comuna 13* usually is very stigmatized. Because there are many acts of violence here. Including soldiers and... When there are many [foreign] people like you and I am walking in the street with them and there are armed soldiers, to me it is a shame. And I *too* get scared.

And I don't need rude armed soldiers over here. But as there are potentially bad people, there are also the good people. Here you can find artistic and music groups, dance groups, rap, there are many... The people have fun here."

Formerly known as the world's homicide capital, the city has now become an attractive place for tourists, business conventions, and capital investment (Hylton 2008:35-36). It seems that from 2003 onward, Medellín began its 'resurrection'. However, as Lamb (2010:2-3) shows, homicides rates started to rise again in 2007; the 'Medellín miracle' appeared to be over. Nonetheless, I was constantly reminded that compared to the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, "when violence was part of daily life" (Rozema 2007:57), the city is still relatively safe today. In this chapter I describe the context of Medellín and the meaning of football in this particular context. I first look at Medellín's history as the world's most violent city, the period of the 'Medellín Miracle' (Lamb 2010:2), and the current situation, including continuing social issues and social policies that address these issues. I then turn to the social significance of professional football in the city, which cannot be seen apart from the context of violence and crime.

A historical overview

The social issues that continue to play a role in vulnerable neighbourhoods cannot be separated from Colombia's history of violence and conflict in general. In the period between 1948 and 1958, known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), a political conflict emerged between liberals, conservatives, and later also communists. This period was followed, from the 1960s onward, by armed conflict between the government and various leftist guerrilla organisations, which continues to this day (Lamb 2010:37). These conflicts, at least in the beginning, mainly affected the Colombian countryside. However, violent acts by the military as well as these leftist groups caused many people to move to cities such as Medellín (Kirchhof and Ibañez 2001:3). A volunteer at a local foundation in *Comuna 8* explained to me that the neighbourhood they work in primarily consists of *desplazados* (displaced people), who often establish themselves on the periphery of the city. This speeded up the rapid increase in migration that was already taking place as a result of the search for economic opportunities (Rozema 2007:58). In the 1990s, the conflict was marked by an intense degradation: violence was now carried out not for a real or supposed political cause, but for personal gains for either groups or armed individuals (PNUD 2003:81). Human rights violations included massacres, kidnappings, extortions, disappearances, tortures, sexual abuse, and the recruitment of children (PNUD 2003:83).

Whereas Medellín was hardly touched by *La Violencia* (Lamb 2010:36), it became one of the world's most dangerous cities in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Medellín drug cartel led by Pablo Escobar stood at the centre of a climate of drug dealings, kidnappings, and *sicarios* (hired killers). When the cartel was destroyed and Escobar was killed by the government in 1993, the *sicarios* previously connected to Escobar started to form new criminal gangs known as *combos armados*, as hired killings were an opportunity to make money fast. These *combos* in turn caused the emergence of popular militias meant to protect the civil population. Demobilization processes for these groups were implemented starting in 1994; however, this did not result in safer neighbourhoods (Rozema 2007:59). Furthermore, in the late '90s and early 2000s, left-wing guerrilla movements such as FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) and ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) and right-wing paramilitary groups that operated under the national organization AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), started to invade the peripheral neighbourhoods. Daily clashes between these various groups claimed many lives; furthermore, after a while both groups started to use indiscriminate violence against the civil population. Also, they both collected *vacuna* (taxes) from shops and public transport corporations (Rozema 2007:60-61). As unemployment rates were high, many

young people were drawn into such armed groups because of a desire for money and status (Rozema 2007:64). Gonzalo Medina Pérez, a political sciences researcher at the University of Antioquia, told me that a mother in the '80s and '90s raised her children according to the following idea: "Make money correctly, but if you cannot make money correctly, make money anyway."

The 'Medellín miracle' and beyond

Although the city is still struggling with tenacious social issues, the horrors of drugs and violence that gave Medellín its infamous reputation now belong to the past. What Cristian wants to make clear is that the city is not what it used to be in the '80s and '90s. Whereas the state used to be incapable of confronting criminal groups in this period, the army and police forces are now strong enough to challenge them, and absolute homicide numbers have dropped from 6000 in 1991 to 1800 in the past year. The 'Medellín miracle', as it was frequently called, was marked by greater state presence in neighbourhoods that had previously been managed by armed gangs; furthermore, people felt safer in public spaces, and children started to develop more positive aspirations for the future, such as studying instead of becoming a soldier or a gang member (Lamb 2010:267).

Several important events in this period contributed to this security improvement. First, in 2002 Operation Orion was carried out, in which the military successfully ejected the FARC members that were still in the city (Lamb 2010:217-218). Then, the government and the paramilitaries engaged in negotiations that led to a DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) process with the AUC, starting with the Bloque Cacique Nutibara in November 2003. Paramilitaries turned over their arms, returned to their families and took up formal employment. However, new problems arose: youth gang activities increased as neighbourhoods were no longer under control of the paramilitaries. Furthermore, critics argue that the reduction in violence was not so much a result of municipal policies, but of paramilitary decisions: many zones in the city were still in the hands of illegal groups rather than the state (Rozema 2007:68). Nonetheless, violence and crime levels dropped significantly in this period, and Medellín became an attractive place for tourism and foreign investment (Lamb 2010:221).

Another development that brought about changes in security as well as mobility for people living in peripheral neighbourhoods is the Metrocable, built in 2004: an extension of the metro system in the form of cable cars, connecting the city centre with the hillside neighbourhoods of *Comuna 13* and 8 (Blanco and Kobayashi 2009:85). The metro system provides a source of pride to all citizens of Medellín. Juan Carlos Sánchez, the ex-professional football player, explained that whereas there was a lot of violence when he grew up, the neighbourhood is now safer, because all stations of the Metrocable have security guards. Also, public parks, gardens, football fields and playgrounds have been built in neighbourhoods that used to be geographically and socially isolated. These changes were implemented during Sergio Fajardo Valderrama's term as Medellín mayor from 2003 until 2007, and continued under his successor Alonso Salazar Jaramillo who served until 2011 (Samper Escobar 2010:13). Lola experienced a change as well: although *Comuna 13* continues to have problems with violence and illegal activities, she stressed that the area is depicted as more dangerous than it actually is. Walking through her neighbourhood in the evening, I asked her if she ever felt unsafe. She laughed: "This is not Vietnam!"

However, despite the fact that the city today is much safer than it was a few decades ago, homicide rates started to rise again in 2007 (Lamb 2010:2-3). In 2005, the homicide rate reached a historically low number of 35 per 100.000, whereas it rose to 85 again in 2009 (Medellín Cómo Vamos 2012). Many demobilized paramilitaries continued to work as drug traffickers (Lamb 2010:273). As important leaders of criminal networks were killed or

captured, power vacuums caused violence levels to rise again (Lamb 2010:276). This climate has its influence on youths growing up in the peripheral neighbourhoods, many of whom go for “the quick money of organized crime” (Rozema 2007:59). Cristian, who worked at the *Alcaldía* of Medellín, pointed out that many problems that are found in the city’s peripheral neighbourhoods can be traced back to youth searching for money. He told me:

“Let’s say that the *narcotráfico* and everything that we call illegal and illicit activities have generated some economies that turned out to capture the youth in the economically less favourable neighbourhoods. And the boys have had some opportunities to make money. Including money that, well, was a lot easier to obtain in great quantities. So they opt for an option... well, this is basically the principal explanation for the violence that is generated in some *comunas*.”

The problem of armed groups is not as visible and as complex now as it was earlier. In the 1990s and early 2000s, new groups would come in and power relations would change constantly, to the extent that residents often did not know who was in charge, and thus, who they needed to obey (Rozema 2007:69). However, *combos* still control parts of the city today. Lola told me that she hears stories about extortions in her neighbourhood on a daily basis. When we met for the last time, we took the bus back to the metro together, as she would never let me go through *Comuna 13* alone. The bus driver was complaining about the increasing amount of money he had to pay every day to different people; he hardly made any profit anymore. After I left the field, Lola sent me an e-mail, saying that the bus drivers were on strike and the police provided free public transport in some parts of *Comuna 13*. It would be calm for a while, she thought, and then the whole situation would start over.

The context of violence and illegal activities described in the previous section does not exclude the world of professional football. This relationship will be explored in the next section.

Amusement and business: professional football in Medellín

In Medellín, spectator violence ranges from (organized) clashes between groups of fans to killing each other. Moreover, criminal groups are said to intermingle with organized supporters groups known as *barras bravas*. To understand how spectator violence and ties with criminal groups can be placed in the broader context of violence and crime in Medellín, it is necessary to first understand the phenomenon of *barras bravas*.

Whereas confrontations between groups of *hinchas* (fans) have taken place since the ‘30s, institutionalized organized violence between *barras bravas* originated in Argentina in the ‘50s and ‘60s, when fighting started to involve killing the opponents (Duke and Crolley 1996:276). The comparison with European hooliganism is often made; Heuvelink (2010:7), however, argues that they are different phenomena. European hooliganism is mainly associated with masculinity, excitement, and control of territory, for which fighting provides an outlet. Besides these characteristics, Argentinean *barras bravas* are also marked by a highly structured organization, involvement in politics and criminal activities, and influence in the clubs they support.

Madrigal Herrera defines *barras bravas* as “followers of a football team who show violent and aggressive behaviours” (2006:4), although several informants pointed out to me that not all *barras* are violent. The word *barra*, as Gonzalo Medina Pérez explained to me, comes from *barrio*, which means neighbourhood; *brava* means fierce. In the stadium they are recognizable by wearing the colours of their favourite team, standing and singing throughout the game and carrying banners that show the name of the neighbourhood they are from. The identification with the neighbourhood is thus closely related to the identification with either one of Medellín’s two major football teams. Gonzalo Medina Pérez stressed that *barrismo* is indeed strongly related to the neighbourhood, with groups often starting with a few families

living close to each other. Although Colombia as a country is ethnically and culturally diverse, neighbourhoods in Medellín are often strongly unified. This does not mean that fandom is geographically organized: in the stadium, I noticed that both the *Medellín* and *Nacional* supporters groups carried flags referring to the same neighbourhoods. Lola explained that before *barrismo* appeared in Medellín, fans from both teams used to share the tribunes; however, as fandom took a violent turn in the stadium, the *Medellín* supporters moved to the north tribune and the *Nacional* supporters to the south, a division that now shows in the names and songs of the *barras bravas*.

Although it used to be the other way around when it was first introduced in Latin America, football is nowadays a sport of the working class rather than of the elites. Gonzalo Medina Pérez found here the explanation for why in Medellín, or any other football-obsessed place, it is so highly associated with violence. The people that are so passionate about football are often the people that are also most confronted with violence in their daily lives. He spoke of a “heritage of violence”, which causes violent attitudes and behaviours learned in the neighbourhood to also be manifested in and outside the stadium. *Barra* membership and engaging in spectator violence in Colombia is related to the fact that in the violent climate in which many *barristas* grow up, adequate role models are often lacking (Medina Pérez 2010:112).

The relation between neighbourhood life and *barra* membership may account for the intermingling of *barras bravas* and criminal groups. As stated earlier, these two phenomena meeting each other is not something typical of Medellín; in Buenos Aires, members of the largest *barra brava* of Club Atlético Boca Juniors, La Doce, are infamous for their violent attitude and behaviour, their involvement in politics, and their connections to criminal groups (Heuvelink 2010:1). In many Latin American cities that host successful professional football clubs, the social significance of football is thus much broader than being a source of passion to the fans. When I asked Cristian about ties between professional football clubs, their supporters groups and criminal organizations, he reacted assertively: “These are really two different phenomena. Here this does not happen. No. Not in Medellín.” However, I have heard various stories about ties between *combos armados* and Medellín’s *barras bravas*. Although Colombian *barras bravas* are not necessarily involved in politics (Medina Pérez 2010:116), Luis told me that Medellín’s *barras bravas* do have their connections with armed groups:

“In the *combos armados* we have found that the majority of youths has a very strong identification with football. [...] Los Del Sur, it is a group, a *barra* of symbolic support for football. And many of the *combos* that integrate with Los Del Sur are armed. Not all, some.”

Gonzalo Medina Pérez explained to me how criminal groups use their connections with the *barras bravas* to influence the teams and individual players and thus the outcomes of games, as football matches are always betted on. This is not a new phenomenon: when the Medellín cartel lived its high tides, Pablo Escobar used drug money to sponsor *Atlético Nacional*. Defender Andrés Escobar (not related), who scored an own goal with the national Colombian team against the USA in the 1994 FIFA World Cup, was murdered afterwards. This event is widely believed to be connected to the fact that many drug lords suffered gambling losses because of this goal, although an official statement of what happened is lacking.

In this chapter, I have described Medellín’s history of conflict and violence, as well as the current context of social policies and development alongside continuing social issues. In this context, football is not an “anti-structure”, as DaMatta (1982) understands it; rather, it is a representation of Medellín’s complex situation. In the next chapter, I will explore what it means for young people to grow up in this context.

4. Growing up on the periphery

Earlier, I defined vulnerable neighbourhoods as neighbourhoods with the presence of social issues such as poverty, violence, illegal activities, or substance abuse. In Medellín, many of these neighbourhoods are situated on the periphery of the city (Lamb 2010:34). When keeping in mind the social inequality that marks the city, this periphery can also be understood as the periphery of society. Nevertheless, describing a vulnerable neighbourhood in Medellín proves to be difficult. Whereas in some neighbourhoods, people have to stay indoors from time to time because of shootings between youth gangs; in others, poverty is mentioned as the biggest issue; in yet others, the main concern is high levels of substance abuse among young people. The youths that are involved in the teams of Fundación Caminos come from various areas in the city, where they are confronted with different social problems. As became clear in chapter 3, Medellín's history of violence and illegal means to obtain money continues to play a role in many youth's lives. Although my informants are not involved in such matters themselves, this is the climate they grow up in. I will now explore how young people growing up in vulnerable neighbourhoods are socialized with these social issues.

Time, money, and power: socialization and identification with youth gangs

In chapter 3 I state that criminal activities are still a widespread problem in the hillside *comunas*. As Cristian pointed out, violence is always understood as related to illegal economies and making *dinero fácil* (easy money). Gonzalo Medina Pérez, a professor in political sciences at the University of Antioquia, explained to me that Medellín has a strong consumer culture, in which status and possessing things are deemed important. Furthermore, he states that many children live adult lives: they have children at an early age, they have their own house, and as they have to make their own money, they take risks. Another facilitator of youth opting for criminal activities is free time. Luis, a coordinator at Hinchas por la Paz, stressed that many youth in the hillside *comunas* do not study and are unemployed. Not seeing any other option but to hang out on the streets, they are confronted with criminal activities, such as extortions or dealing drugs. Lola recognizes these issues in her own neighbourhood in *Comuna 13*, where drugs are dealt on street corners or on the local football pitch. She told me how young children “roll” into the business simply by spending much time on the street.

“So someone who is on the street doing nothing... they [gang members] go to him and tell him: ‘go and get this money from that bus driver’, ‘take this bag to that man’. But you don’t know what the bag contains, if it contains drugs or other things. Why? Because there is nothing else to do. And obviously he receives some payment for this, they give him certain money for covering it, for doing this. And it is not so bad because they don’t know, or maybe they know but they do it anyway. And they are making money.”

This is what happened to Miguel, who now plays in the sub-15 of Fundación Caminos. He was doing little chores for a gang in his neighbourhood and got more and more involved. His mother decided to send him to an institution, as she did not know how to stop it.

Some children start identifying themselves with young people that are part of armed groups. In the area where Ex-professional football player Sánchez grew up, many children would spend a lot of time home alone as their parents were off to work. The *sicario* of the neighbourhood passed their house every day, carrying his gun and luxurious things. Watching him go to neighbourhood parties with other *sicarios*, drinking liquor and always carrying guns, children would become attracted to this kind of lifestyle. According to Sánchez, this is especially difficult when parents are not around to tell their children that this is wrong. Likewise, Lola and her sister Ana say how some youths want to work for *el dueño* (the owner) of the neighbourhood in order to gain respect. Maria, who meets many children

through her foundation in *Comuna 8*, sees how children in the neighbourhood are often aggressive and play games that are related to violence. Also, they show a lot of respect towards gang members: they are seen as heroes, they protect the neighbourhood, they have guns, and thus they have power.

Poverty also frequently came up as the main concern in some neighbourhoods. Maria's foundation in *Comuna 8* serves a warm lunch every day for as many children as they can feed; as their parents do not make enough money, for most of the children this is the only meal they get. On one of my visits, after lunch Maria led a prayer in which she thanked God for giving her and the other volunteers the strength to keep going. At a certain point she started to cry: "I am so grateful. But sometimes I wonder why we have to send children away sometimes. Why isn't there enough for everyone?" Furthermore, poverty was often mentioned in relation to gangs and illegal activities. Sánchez, who grew up in a poor family himself, explains how children do not grow up as children, but from an early age have to deal with the fact that their parents do not have enough money to buy food. When an opportunity to make *dinero fácil* comes along, many will take it, because they are hungry and the fridge is empty.

However, there are other factors that can withhold someone from getting involved in these matters. Sánchez stressed how the support he received from his family kept him on the right track, despite the lack of financial resources. Lola also points out how her parents taught her the difference between right and wrong, and that she needed to work hard in life to reach her goals. At Maria's foundation, once a month a meeting took place for parents, in which it was continuously stressed how important the home is for children and youth. When I visited one of these meetings, Diego, a volunteer with Maria's foundation, pointed out that when children do not feel at home in the house, they will look for their home outside. This is where they are confronted with drugs, violence, and criminal activities. As I hoped to have more of a discussion with the parents, I asked if I could join another meeting; however, a day before my next visit Maria told me that it was better not to come. There had been another shooting.

Besides the chances of getting involved in these matters, in certain neighbourhoods youths are faced with high levels of violence that influence their way of living and getting around. In many cases, this means staying inside the house (McIlwaine and Moser 2003:163). Jose, who lives in a quiet but poor neighbourhood in *Comuna 8*, said that there had been times when he and his mates could not attend certain matches, because they had to cross a neighbourhood that was too *caliente*. Diego and Eduardo from the sub-15 team, who live in another neighbourhood in the same *comuna*, occasionally cancel trainings or matches because of shootings in their street. Moreover, some children are confronted with domestic violence as well. This is something also reported by McIlwaine and Moser (2003). Demonstrating how political conflict, violence between neighbours and intra-family violence are highly connected matters, they argue that "... violence in itself generate[s] more violence" (2003:72).

Stigmatization and social exclusion

In other neighbourhoods, violence is not so widespread anymore. Pablo Marquez, who works for a foundation in *Comuna 8*, states that whereas the area is now relatively calm, problems of addiction among children and youth are considered a major issue.

"Today, in the neighbourhood, people live here in tranquillity. The problem of drugs and alcohol, we do not yet control, but there was an era in this neighbourhood that violence was total. When there were invisible boundaries. When you could not go from one block to the other because they would kill you. Before. Today, the people can live in tranquillity. [...] There is not so much a problem of violence, but there are a lot of problems with addiction. And children more than anyone, and youths."

Maria states that many young people growing up in poor areas do not know how to deal with their problems, and they start dealing and using drugs because these are widely available.

Apart from these phenomena occurring where they live, many youths feel stigmatized by negative media representations of their neighbourhoods. Lola's friend Milena told me she felt offended by the fact that "on the news, they only show the violence and they don't show the good things". This stigmatization also influences young people's chances when it comes to good education or the job market. Mark, the founder of Fundación Caminos, told me that whether someone is accepted at a good school or not is highly determined by where this person is from and at which school he received primary and secondary education. The children that are involved in his foundation, as many of them come from poor and disadvantaged neighbourhoods or live in institutions, are less likely to be accepted at a college or university or offered a job: unemployment rates are high and many schools and companies prefer youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This idea of social exclusion is supported by Roberts, who states that "... the education that you get marks you for life, determining your occupational possibilities. Social exclusion is thus based on a differentiated inclusion in a social system" (2004:196). Trainer Ernesto depicted the problem as follows:

"A big problem that Medellín has today is that there is hardly any work. There is no work for those who studied, who have a master's degree. So imagine how it is for those who have a bachelor's degree. And imagine how it is for those who just went to college. And how it is for these boys growing up in these neighbourhoods. But we keep the illusion very high that they can do everything they want if they fight. Because when a boy this vulnerable lowers his head, he's already lost."

Youths from vulnerable neighbourhoods should thus work harder to reach their goals; however, as Mark frequently noticed, this is not what children are usually socialized with. Many youths grow up and spend their time the way their peers do: on the pitch playing football, or on the streets doing nothing.

Finally, what frequently happens when spending a lot of time on the street, is that children are not going back to their families. The street is attractive to many children once they are used to it: as there are no rules, they can do whatever they want. Consequently, institutions that accommodate street children have a major problem of desertion, as many children cannot cope with the rules and therefore return to the street. Since he was seven, Ramón alternated between living in institutions and going back to the streets, where he would deal with extortions, take drugs, and get into fights on a daily basis. Finally, he decided that he did not want this life; now he lives in a rehabilitation centre for substance users. In the beginning, Fundación Caminos only worked with boys living in institutions; however, as Ernesto points out, the social problems in the vulnerable neighbourhoods 'produce' street children, which is why the foundation decided to also include at-risk youth from these areas.

In short, violence, the confrontation with criminal activities, addiction, poverty, and stigmatization are factors in youth's lives that provide them with challenges as they grow up. Being socialized with these phenomena, many children start identifying with the gang members who are in charge of their neighbourhood, or youths using drugs and alcohol. This way, social problems are reproduced and become part of the community's social capital, which in turn provides a source for "perverse" socialization (McIlwaine and Moser 2004:156).

However, despite these social issues, most of my informants stressed that they were happy in their neighbourhood. Jose and Camilo described their neighbourhood, although poor, as a calm and nice place where everybody knows each other. When Lola showed me around in her neighbourhood, we passed a group of older women doing aerobics. This class was set up to improve the atmosphere in public places, and it is free of charge. But most importantly, in all these neighbourhoods there is plenty of space to play football. In the next chapter, I will describe the role that football plays for young people that grow up in this social climate.

5. Football madness in Medellín

“I think that because this is like a vulnerable neighbourhood, there is hardly any money, I think that we just play [football] for fun. We don’t have like a goal to reach, but we play, like, for fun.” – Camilo, sub-17 Fundación Caminos

Medellín’s football madness takes many forms: individuals keeping up a ball on the corner of the street; matches between friends where creativity is more important than maintaining the rules; organized competitions on the amateur level; and the stadium spectacles that account for a continuum of feelings, ranging from pride and happiness to sadness and rage. As described in the introduction, people’s identification with professional football is strongly manifested in Medellín’s streetscape. Lola explains that to many *Paisas*, as it is to people from anywhere in the world, football is a source of passion and identification. It is a passion so strong that in some cases they end up killing each other (Taylor 1998:18). The city’s history of violence is often understood as having instilled attitudes of aggression and violence that are also manifested in the world of football and fandom. In this chapter, I first discuss the social meaning of football in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Then I will turn to fandom and spectator violence in the broader context of urban violence.

The social meaning of football in vulnerable neighbourhoods

When asking why they decided to play football, many youths answered that it is simply the most popular sport in Colombia. Children, especially boys, often start playing football, because this is what they are most confronted with. As Lola puts it, “You exist, and there is football.” Many youths I spoke to want to pursue a career in professional football. As Mark pointed out, the players at his Fundación Caminos do not only enjoy it, “they *dream* about football”. Luz, a volunteer in one of the institutions that Mark works with, noticed the same: “They live football, they dream football, they eat football... It’s everything to them.” In this section, I will look at the significance of playing football for youth on the individual as well as the social level.

When talking about what makes football such an attractive sport, Gonzalo Medina Pérez stressed the importance of intelligence. One needs to retain the ball while keeping the opponent at a distance in order to pass him, which implies doing many things at once at high speed. Jose also mentioned passing and transporting the ball when I asked him what he liked so much about football. Creativity is deemed important here, which is manifested through playing styles and movements of the body. This creativity is a specific characteristic of Latin American football: whereas European football is described as focused solely on results, the Latin American game is full of passion, short passing and individual tricks (Mason 1995:vii).

That football occupies such a prominent place in Medellín when it comes to leisure is related to the fact that it is a cheap sport to practice, and in poor neighbourhoods it is among the few options of amusement. Many informants pointed out that one only needs to put four stones, T-shirts, or any other items in place to function as goals, in order to establish a *cancha* (football pitch). It can be played anywhere from the streets to sophisticated pitches, it does not require special equipment, and anyone can do it (Mason 1995:viii). Sánchez remembered how he used to play bare feet when he was young, as football boots were too expensive.

Many children have their first ball contact on the streets. The organization of street football varies: whereas sometimes it is a game among friends that can last for hours, small tournaments are also organized. Players put in a certain amount of money, which is the prize for the winning team. The main difference between street football and ‘organized’ football is that in street football, the rules are less strict when it comes to fouls and determining whether

a ball is in or out. This makes the game often rough, as follows from the description of Ramón:

“Let’s say that street football is without rules. Because one, well, there is no referee. Sometimes we set rules... Here it [the ball] goes out, here it doesn’t, and that’s it. And let’s say, well, in street football there are no fouls. No way, keep going. Once they pushed me really hard and I had to keep going. Because it’s like that, without rules.”

In the hillside neighbourhoods, street football is difficult as the streets are small, crowded with people and traffic, and descending. Fortunately, the city is covered with football pitches made of artificial grass, concrete or sand. For many boys, the local pitch is the place to meet new people. In the ‘80s and ‘90s, when violence was much more widespread, moving around was commonplace in Medellín as people searched for safer living conditions (Lamb 2010:267), and many of the youths I spoke to had already moved twice or three times in their lives.

“The majority of the people that I met, and basically men, I met like this, on a football pitch. Well, I say that when you go to a new neighbourhood, you meet a person who says “hey, let’s play”. This way I was socializing with these people. And one friend after another came, “I want you to meet my friend”, and there you go.”— Fernando, sub-17 Fundación Caminos

Furthermore, football was perceived as something to enjoy with family, friends, and the whole neighbourhood. Lola described the football tournaments where she lives in *Comuna 13* as highly social events. Streets are blocked for traffic and most shops are closed, as everybody is at the *cancha* to enjoy the game. Likewise, the foundation where Pablo Marquez works in *Comuna 8* often organizes football tournaments, as this attracts the highest number of participants plus their families, who cheer for their children, siblings, neighbours and friends on the tribunes. That football indeed is “the king sport”, as ex-professional Sánchez called it, is highly visible here: whereas at a basketball tournament a maximum of 20 children show up, with football tournaments, more than 10 teams of 15 people participate, who often bring their families to the games. Football tournaments are thus events not only for the people who participate, but for the entire community.

In many instances, the *cancha* is the centre of the neighbourhood. It is a place where people unite not only to play football, but also to socialize with friends. However, as trainer Ernesto pointed out, it is also the place where gangs and drug users meet each other and go about their business. Maria told me that this also happens in the neighbourhood in which her foundation is situated: on the football pitch, gangs gather to recruit children, using football as bait. Around 2004, when the Medellín miracle began (Lamb 2010), the *Alcaldía* and its sports department INDER started a campaign to recover Medellín’s football pitches, which significantly reduced this problem. Ernesto remembered it as follows:

“They talked with the groups, about that there wasn’t a problem with their consuming [drugs] or the things they did, but just that they shouldn’t do it in these spaces. They also organized tournaments for them. To show them that these spaces, the *canchas*, were for playing, not for consuming, and that these spaces were here for them too. Sometimes they confronted them with force, with policemen, and sometimes they just talked.”

Angelo Vasquez, a trainer at INDER, gives football trainings that are meant to keep youth in vulnerable neighbourhoods away from drugs and criminal activities; however, he always noticed the presence of other youths at the corner of the *cancha*, smoking marijuana. He told me that providing trainings is not enough to make a change: apart from an educative platform that can help the youths progress in life, the football pitch is also a place where they are confronted with the aforementioned social problems.

Drugs and crime are not the only problems that find their way to the pitch. Exclusion is another issue that is manifested in vulnerable neighbourhoods as well as in amateur football

tournaments. When subscribing for one of these tournaments, founder Mark pointed out to the tournament board that some of his players did not have a proper playing ID. Institutions were often reluctant to provide ID-cards of residents due to strict security rules; furthermore, some of the boys from vulnerable neighbourhoods did not even have the right papers. Sorting this all out thus proved to be a time consuming matter. The tournament board assured to not make a problem out of this, as the tournament was meant to be a social event to promote sport participation among all of Medellín's young people. However, halfway through one of the matches the referee decided to suspend as one of the players did not have a proper ID. The foundation's team was winning, but the tournament was over.

The widespread popularity of football thus makes it a highly social event, which makes it a suitable tool for social capital building. This process will be further discussed in chapter 6. However, through this massiveness it also reflects communities' social issues. This is even more so in professional football, which will be elaborated in the next section.

The joy and drama of football and fandom in Medellín

It was a Thursday evening, the 6th of December. For the third time since my arrival in Medellín its two major teams met each other in the Estadio Atanasio Girardot to play the *clásico* (derby). We sat down on the *Tribuna Norte*, the *Medellín* side of the stadium, as Lola is a true fan. As the stadium filled itself with fans of both teams, I saw red and blue flags rise on our side of the tribune. They all had names of neighbourhoods on them, and in all of them the "s" was replaced by the "x". "This is what *Medellín* fans do," explained Lola, "the *Nacional* fans don't do this. We don't share anything." The biggest flag was marked by the name of the largest *barra* (organized fan-group) of *Medellín*: "*Rexixtenxia Norte*" (Northern Resistance). At the other side of the stadium, an equally big flag rose in white and green, saying "*Los del Sur, siempre presente*" (Those from the South, always present). When the players entered the field, a group of people had gathered next to the field with cylinders with red and blue powder, which was sprayed in the air while the crowd was singing songs towards the *Nacional* fans at the other side of the stadium. The lyrics were sometimes directed towards themselves and their players: "Against fire, we're going against fire. Against fire, real fire. This night it costs what it may cost. This night we have to win!" Others lyrics involved the opponent, and specifically *Nacional*: "I want to win and... kill the *sureños* (southerners)!" Lola pointed to a man who was sitting in front of us, and when I looked closer, I saw that he was holding a card with an image of the Virgin Mary on it, as if he was calling on higher powers to win this match.

When it comes to the *clásico*, football in Medellín presents a spectacle of joy and drama. Luis told me that violence levels in Medellín are significantly higher on match days, especially when a *clásico* is played. Conflicts erupt as groups of fanatics deliberately set up confrontations in different parts of the city. According to Gonzalo Medina Pérez, who did various research projects on the topic, "football is no longer associated with happiness and enjoying oneself, but with drama and violence." In the lives of many young *Paisas*, the identification with their team, and the hate towards the other team, seems to be the only thing that matters. Gonzalo Medina Pérez depicted the problem as follows:

"There is only one option for these youths. It is like a science: $1 + 1 = 2$. *Medellín + Nacional* = a victory for *Medellín*. Or *Nacional* [depending on the fan]. That their team loses is impossible. And the only way to face this problem is looking for the enemy and confront them. With violence."

This hatred goes beyond the *clásico*. At the end of 2012, *Medellín* played a cup final against *Millonarios*, the biggest club in Bogotá. I noticed during my fieldwork period that there exists some sort of competition between citizens of Medellín and Bogotá, both claiming to be living in the most beautiful city in the world. I thus expected all *Paisas* to support *Medellín* in this

final, even if they were *Nacional*, as it is a team from their city; however, some *Nacional* fans favoured *Millonarios* as they could not bear the idea of their enemy winning the cup. Madrigal Herrera (2006:6) speaks of dysfunctional followers, whose fanaticism affects their social behaviour to the extent that their identity is defined by this fandom, and they feel repugnance towards fans of any other club. It can be seen as an example of what Putnam (2000:22) calls “bonding social capital”, in which exclusive identities and homogenous groups are reinforced.

As stated earlier, Gonzalo Medina Pérez believes that many fanatic football fans grow up in the vulnerable neighbourhoods of the city, where they are often confronted with violence in their daily lives. This is supported by Madrigal Herrera (2006:11), stating that Colombian youths imitate behaviours, which are reflections of the violent society they live in. Through this process of socialization, problems of violence are thus reproduced and manifested in different social spheres, among which is the stadium. At the *Alcaldía*, Cristian told me that he too saw a relationship between spectator violence and the violence that takes place in the city’s peripheral neighbourhoods.

“I have heard some approaches about that the problems that exist in the stadium are a reflection too of what happens in our neighbourhoods. And I would say maybe that the attitude and maybe the history of violence have marked us, and maybe that there are youths that have violent attitudes, yes.”

According to Luis, policies aimed at reducing spectator violence are too often focused on the situation in and around the stadium. Whereas many policies are directed towards improving security in the places where eruptions take place, Luis believes that the core of the problem lies in the context of the neighbourhood, the school and the family. This is where the youths who violently confront each other grow up, form their identities and learn their violent behaviours and attitudes. Accordingly, said Luis, these contexts should be included in any policy to reduce spectator violence.

In this chapter I have shown how football in vulnerable neighbourhoods is a community event that is easily organized and brings together many people. This way, it forms an example of the sociability that, according to Bourdieu (1986:52), is required to build productive social capital. However, the sport can also be an arena for social issues as substance abuse, crime, and stigmatization, through which this social capital building can be obstructed. Luis emphasized that without making its social strengths explicit, football can provide many youths with a place to have conflicts and get involved in illicit practices. In the next chapter, I will look into the explicit use of football as a tool to break this cycle and address social issues.

6. *Salir adelante*: the explicit use of football as a tool for social and individual development

Despite football providing a space for issues of hatred, drug abuse and organized crime, its massive popularity is also used to counter these and other problems that young people grow up with in Medellín. As Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001:77) put it, socialization through sports implies learning certain skills and values that can be used outside the realm of sport. The *Alcaldía* has various social policies aimed at youth growing up in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Cristian claimed that “...these youth, for educational programs, or programs for socioeconomic support, have always been priority”. Various foundations and NGOs combine football and social development. I will now describe how football provides a platform for development by looking at the ways in which Fundación Caminos and Hinchas por la Paz deliberately use it as such, as well as the effects their actions have on the participating youths.

La convivencia: improving social relations through football

Earlier, I have demonstrated in what ways the football pitch mirrors wider society and how football is perceived as a social event in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Both organizations I studied continuously emphasized that the football pitch and society at large are connected. At Hinchas por la Paz, football is used to foster *convivencia* (coexistence) in society at their *Golvivencia* tournaments. Before and after the games, trainers always engage in a dialogue with both teams, the central theme of which is *juego limpio* (fair play). Auto-regulation is an important feature of *Golvivencia*: as there are no referees, the players have to regulate fouls, free-kicks, corners, and the like themselves. During the games, teams can earn points for fair play by demonstrating good behaviour such as being honest, solving issues through dialogue, playing without aggression, and apologizing for fouls. These points are more important than the amount of goals scored. Concerning auto-regulation, Luis notes an important difference between rules (externally imposed and specific to the game) and norms (internalized standards of how one should act in general). This is in line with Steenbergen, Buisman and Van Hilvoorde (2001:141), who distinguish between formal and informal fair play. Formal fair play means playing according to the rules; “sport, however, is always embedded in a wider network of common held values and norms, which are (often) not formalized in the written rules” (2001:141). Luis made this clear in one of his dialogues with the teams, in which he pointed out what fair play is about. “Fair play also means representing my attitude outside the game, outside the pitch.”

Lola described how the things one learns through involvement in a sports team can have an influence on others as well, as she often goes to new places to play matches, where she interacts with new people. Returning home, she passes on what she learns when interacting with other people from the neighbourhood. “You talk differently. You don’t use the words you learn in the neighbourhood, but you interact with them the way you already did somewhere else with new people, and you feel like having a good influence.” Wearing a football club’s uniform also adds to this being a good influence, Lola told me. The children in her neighbourhood identify with this and ask her to teach them things. “Apart from being a good influence, it also makes you feel good [about yourself].” Diego and Eduardo felt this way too: when they leave their neighbourhood for training or a match at Fundación Caminos, everybody is watching them and admiring their football kits. They become an alternative to the inadequate role models that children in their neighbourhoods are usually brought up with, such as gang members and substance abusers. At the foundation, leadership is strongly encouraged with the members of the team who are most looked up to. To Ernesto, this entails making changes in other people. He explained: “The idea is that the boys reproduce what they learn on the pitch, in their house with their family, in school, in the institution, in the neighbourhood.” Mark told me that in the future, he hopes to further develop this idea by assigning these young leaders as coaches in different neighbourhoods, so that they improve their leadership skills and can pass on what they learned in new spheres.

Becoming a teamplayer

In the environment where most of my informants grew up in, a child learns that everybody takes care of themselves. Ferney Zapata, a coordinator in the institution where Ramón lives, told me that street children hold social relations with minimal levels of loyalty: “[They say:] ‘We are best friends, we do bad things together, but if I have to kill you, I’ll kill you’”. Ernesto explained that many youths arrive at Fundación Caminos with nothing to lose; however, he noticed that the boys who spend several years with the foundation change because of the dynamics in the group. After a while, they show more respect and trust towards their teammates, which is noticeable in their playing styles. Most youths find it difficult to play the ball to someone else, as they want to be the one who scores the goals. However,

gradually they learn to pass the ball to someone else if this person is in a better position: the players start functioning as a team. Fernando remembered how he learned to be a team player:

“Before, I was like... I didn’t let go of the ball. I like to get it. But once I lost the ball and it was a counter goal. So if you pass the ball to a teammate he can score. So it has its advantages. You have to know to be more collective, more with your teammates. They’re eleven, it’s not just you.” – Fernando, sub 17 Fundación Caminos

Ramón also remembered how he was used to doing everything by himself, including football. At Fundación Caminos he learned to work in a team. “Let’s say that once I was very proud. But that way you cannot get ahead.” Also, organizing the team when it comes to substitutes proved to be a difficult job for the trainers, as players at times got upset when they did not play as much as they wanted. Camilo felt the team could still improve at this point: “As a group we lack the moral. When I get replaced I have to accept it, because it’s better for the team and so it’s better for me as well.”

Furthermore, youths learn that cooperating in a team means that every person has a particular position and a function, which influences not only their cooperating skills, but also their self-esteem. Ferney Zapata pointed out that this is important for youths who have lived in unstable conditions. They often grow up in families in which social roles are not clear: as the father is often absent and the mother is always working, they often have to take care of younger siblings while being children themselves. Ferney Zapata explained that on the football pitch, they are familiarized with stable roles, because “the goalkeeper is the goalkeeper, not the striker”. Every player has his own position in the field with a particular function, and every player is needed.

At Fundación Caminos, team spirit was promoted in several ways. All players receive a training kit (shirt, shorts, socks and boots, all showing the team’s logo) after a certain period of serious involvement, which they are obliged to wear during trainings. Also, a Facebook-page was made, which was used to spread the details about upcoming matches, but also as a platform for players to post football-related messages. Players often posted messages that were evident of team spirit. After a good match in December, for example, Daniel from the sub-15 posted the following message:

“Excellent match boys. Thank you for working as a team in today’s match. I hope that we keep improving as a team and that we can show that we are capable and that we can win this tournament. In the final tournament we did not make it to the quarter finals, because the other team was of a higher level than us. But this is what we train for, to get better every Wednesday and Friday [the training days]. You know what I’m saying.”

Through fostering team spirit, the foundation intended to teach the youths about cooperation and shared responsibility, knowledge that can be applied outside the pitch as well. Also, team spirit served to keep the youths involved and focused, thereby lowering probability of desertion.

Growing as a player and as a person

At Fundación Caminos, trainers Mark and Ernesto repeatedly related the attitude as a football player to that outside the pitch by focussing on the players’ perseverance and focus. Mark often compared trainings with classes at school: “Without the will [to get better] you will not learn anything. It’s the same with mathematics and with football it’s also like that.” Furthermore, the players are expected to demonstrate good behaviour at school, at home, in the institution and in the neighbourhood, otherwise they are not allowed to participate in the trainings and matches. Mark and Ernesto hold good relations with the institutional homes and children’s parents, to make sure that children kept this promise. Ernesto made it clear to them

during the trip to Bogotá at the end of the season: “Lazy people with bad habits we don’t help. Those who fight, we do.”

The reason that this was underscored so often is that in order to become successful, independent citizens, these youths have to work hard. As described in chapter 4, youth who grow up in vulnerable neighbourhoods are stigmatized and consequently have lower schooling and job prospects. Furthermore, they usually grow up with other children spending time on the street and are not socialized with the attitude needed to enter college or university, or find a decent job. At Fundación Caminos, it is believed that playing football can play an important role in fostering vertical social mobility. Trainers Mark and Ernesto recognized that for many youths football provides the stimulus to *salir adelante* (getting ahead). Fernando and Jose understood this as follows:

“When we refer to *salir adelante*, playing football, it’s like... that we since we were little we saw a future in football, our livelihoods as adults. Like playing professionally, or playing in any team [...] that pays you money, like a job that you like.” – Fernando, sub-17 Fundación Caminos

“On the other side, let’s say that [...] if you don’t get to be a professional, there is the whole process of formation, in the trainings, in the school... One learns values. Values that help you to be a better person in the future. For example, it can be the education, the effort, the motivation, the will. These are things that help you. Through football, *salir adelante* as a person. And that you have a future for your family, for yourself.” – Jose, sub-17 Fundación Caminos

The youths all want to become a professional football player; however, they do not all understand what it takes to reach this goal. Ernesto told me that “[the boys] want to achieve everything in one day, [...] so they learn that for many things a long process is required and many things have to be sacrificed.” He explained that although the chances that any of the players will become a professional are small, the foundation uses this dream to teach them to fight for their future, continue with their studies, and become good human beings. Recognizing that getting a university degree or getting and maintaining a job require much effort, Jose felt that playing football and participating in trainings helped him learn the skills he needed to achieve his goals. It is for many youths the only thing they really want to work hard for. He showed this with an example: “Suppose I want to do a good free-kick, but I can’t. So I try, I try, I try... Until I got it.” In this process, he said, he learns the attitude he needs to also succeed as a student or an employee. *Salir adelante* through playing football not only refers to becoming a professional and a provider for their families, but also to learn to work hard and fight for their dreams. This way, football is used to develop skills and attitudes that contribute to vertical social mobility. Fernando and Jose both enjoy living in their neighbourhood; however, later they hope they can live in a safer place, living in their own house with their families, having a nice job that pays sufficiently, and still playing football.

In this final chapter I have shown how football is used as an educational tool to foster social as well as individual development. Playing football, youths are socialized with the mechanisms of fair play, team spirit, and *salir adelante*. Accordingly, they acquire skills and attitudes that can be applied within as well as outside the realm of sport.

7. Conclusion

This research is an analysis of the role of football in the lives of young people that grow up in the vulnerable neighbourhoods of Medellín, Colombia. In spite of major positive developments in the city in the past ten years, including a significant drop in violence levels, youths growing up in vulnerable neighbourhoods are still confronted with social issues such as outbreaks of violence, substance abuse, crime, and poverty. In this context, I looked at the

organizational levels of street football, amateur football and professional football, including playing as well as watching football in my analysis. Furthermore, I discussed the explicit use of football as an educative tool in development organizations. I argue that football represents society in its flaws as well as its strengths, thereby challenging DaMatta's (1982) argument that football is an anti-structure or a social drama. With this thesis, I contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the social significance of football in Latin America. Whereas football is widely researched in Argentina and Brazil, in Colombia the topic remains understudied. Furthermore, my focus on street and amateur football provides an interesting perspective on the social significance of the sport, which in the available literature is often centred on fandom and spectatorship.

In order to analyse how football can contribute to social development, I deployed the concept of social capital as elaborated by Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000), defined as the material and social resources shared by a network of social relations, shapes values and norms, according to which children are socialized. In vulnerable neighbourhoods, criminal activities and violence generate what McIlwaine and Moser (2004:156) refer to as perverse social capital. Youths often grow up with inadequate role models, such as gang members or substance abusers, whose money and gun possession demonstrate a sense of power and status with which many youths identify themselves. I see sport as a social institution that can provide an alternative source of socialization and identification in this social climate. For many children, especially but not only boys, playing football is their passion, and it is what they want to do for a living. My research shows that football is the most popular sport in Medellín, and that it can be easily arranged even when financial resources are lacking. As a social event, it can provide a platform for social capital creation, and thus social development: its widespread popularity makes that it brings together players as well as spectators, youths as well as their parents, siblings, neighbours, and friends.

However, its social significance goes beyond it being a source of amusement that stands apart from the rest of society; rather, the football scene also mirrors Medellín's context of violence and crime. The city's largest *barras bravas* are said to have connections with youth gangs. Furthermore, my findings demonstrate that with the two major clubs *Medellín* and *Nacional* existing in close proximity, love towards the one often means hatred towards the other, leading to violent confrontations between groups of fans.

Finally, I have shown how football can function as an alternative source of socialization by exploring how it is deliberately used as an educational tool at the organizations *Fundación Caminos* and *Hinchas por la Paz*. As the pitch is constantly compared to wider society, these organizations aim to instil in their players certain behaviours and attitudes that not only relate to the specific rules of the game, but also to the general norms that are valued in society at large. What young people learn on the pitch playing football, they are encouraged to use in other realms of life.

Limitations of this thesis include the lack of informants that were involved in *barras bravas*. Concerning this topic, I relied on indirect informants; however, my findings point towards an interesting field of future research. Studying *barra* membership and spectator violence would provide us with a better understanding of how urban violence is manifested in different social spheres and how social capital can have negative effects when only exclusivity and homogeneity are emphasized. Furthermore, I did not include the reproduction of gender roles, as this was beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I noticed that football is increasingly popular among girls. Studying female football can provide us with insights in the reconstruction of gender roles and female empowerment in a predominantly masculine society.

My research adds to the existing literature on the reproduction and transformation of social capital. The role of sports as a source of socialization and identification, processes that

lay the basis for social capital formation, is widely recognized (Nicholson and Hoye 2008). However, my analysis of sport engagement in vulnerable neighbourhoods provides an interesting perspective on the central place that football occupies in many young lives. Furthermore, it adds to the growing body of knowledge on the social significance of football among youths in Latin America. Depicting this significance, I have demonstrated how football relates to perverse as well as productive social capital due to its rootedness in society at large. The link between football and violence is not natural; neither is that between football and development. It is through its explicit use as a transmitter of norms, values and attitudes that the football pitch can serve as a platform to reach this goal.

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Notes

ⁱ Radamel Falcao García Zárate is a football player from Santa Marta, Colombia. He plays for the national team and Atlético Madrid, and was selected for FIFA's 2012 Dream Team. Being the most successful Colombian football player of today, many football playing youth identify with him.

ⁱⁱ Lever's argument is critiqued as being one-sided and too general; see Humphrey and Tomlinson (1986:104).

ⁱⁱⁱ Medellín was nominated for the "Innovative City of the Year" award, a contest run by Citi, the Wall Street Journal Magazine Marketing Services Department, and the Urban Land Institute. On March 1st 2013, Medellín was granted the title, before New York City and Tel Aviv.

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