

Football is not only about football!

Başak Alpan and Alexandra Schwell are two of co-editors of *The European Football Championship – Mega-Event and Vanity Fair*, released by Palgrave Macmillan in November 2015.



As Simon Kuper has pointed out, the European Football Championship is an event of major importance that 'has been strangely ignored in studies of football'. In what respect would you consider your book innovative?



Başak Alpan

ALEXANDRA SCHWELL: It is the unexpected angles, from which this book looks at football that make it quite innovative. Departing from the notion of Europeanness, it challenges traditional approaches insofar as it includes fresh perspectives not only on the pitch and on the stands, but also beyond the context of stadiums, fans and players. Football is not only about football, and the book provides evidence for this statement. To understand a social event such as football, we need to broaden our view to include more and seemingly unrelated perspectives to get a clearer view of the phenomenon as a whole.

BAŞAK ALPAN: I also think that the interdisciplinary and comparative nature of the volume allows us to say something new and different about the European Championship. The book not only brought together researchers from 'the Centre' of Europe and from the 'Periphery' – two concepts with which we engage critically, of course. But it also moulds media analysis

into anthropological fieldwork, and it draws a bridge between Euro2008 and 2012.

What are the main lessons to be learnt from Euro2012 for football fans around the continent?

ALEXANDRA SCHWELL: First, many West-European football fans learned that Europe does not end at the former Iron Curtain. Euro2012 opened up many people's 'mental curtain' to a hitherto unknown part of the continent and gave them a reason to visit Central-Eastern Europe and engage in mutual exchange via football. Second, Eastern European football fans not only took the opportunity to be seen and heard as equals on the stage of European football and present themselves as excellent hosts, but many local initiatives also voiced their concerns over the downsides of such international mega-events that often take place at the expense of the less powerful members of society.

All of them had the opportunity to experience a kind of unity that transcends the immediate event: a shared knowledge about globalisation, about commercialisation in sports and the forces of capitalism, but also the love of the game and the joy of celebrating that may play out differently across Europe but nevertheless creates a common experience. In the light of the ongoing war in Ukraine that could not be foreseen in 2012, it remains an open question whether such shared knowledge and mutual understanding is short-lived or whether it does in fact foster a feeling of togetherness and empathy.



Alexandra Schwell

Basak, you are based at Middle East Technical University in Ankara. How is Turkey situated in the Europe of football?

What is the added value that the Turkish perspective brings to the book?

BAŞAK ALPAN: Critically exploring the notion of 'identity' includes by definition the notion of 'alterity'. An event like this creates 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and even a third group who is 'at the brink' – neither inside nor outside. In this respect, Turkey is an excellent case to understand these ambiguities and negotiations of 'Europeanness'.

Alexandra, you are not even a die-hard football fan. Why was Euro2012 such a stimulating object of study for you?

ALEXANDRA SCHWELL: Euro2012 included people who are captivated by the festive ambience, but would not normally care for league football during the rest of the year. Others are repelled by the event. Football mega-events raise strong emotions of any kind, positive or negative. You do not need to share the fascination for football to be intrigued by the display of emotions, the performativity of the event, the various factors and forces that shape it, but also its oppositional and subversive potential.



In France 2016 the event will be even bigger, with 24 teams qualified. What are your expectations in comparison to 2012?

ALEXANDRA SCHWELL: Security and safety will be a big issue. Unfortunately, Euro2016 in France will probably be overshadowed by the events of 13 November. The terrorist threat will lead to heightened security measures both inside and outside the stadiums. Fans need to be prepared for increased screening and airport-style security while the French migrant population in particular will be put under scrutiny. Football research will increasingly become a field also for security experts.

BAŞAK ALPAN: I am looking forward to Euro2016 – not only because Turkey is qualified again, but also because the event promises to be another excellent research laboratory on how the notion of Europeanness evolves.