



MISLEADING EQUATION: CITY BRANDING, STADIUMS, CONCERTS AND NEIGHBOURS?

The case of the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium

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ABSTRACT

The need for cities to enhance their positioning has found in football clubs, financially pressured, highly appealing allies. The use of football infrastructures for purposes other than sporting events, such as hosting concerts, aligns with a strategy that benefits both the enhancement of City Branding and the increase in revenues for the clubs. As a result, the relationship between cities, football clubs, and their facilities has been studied, focusing on how they contribute to City Branding. However, the problems caused by the redevelopment of the Santiago Bernabéu stadium and the continuous scheduling of concerts have severely impacted the liveability of the neighbourhood. In the case of Madrid, the proposed equation has not only failed to deliver but seems to be undermining the quality of life for those affected, as the intended economic development collides with the neighbourhood's habitability.

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1. Cities, Events and Sport: Infrastructures and Community Identity

Since the establishment of the modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, countries, and especially cities, have identified sporting events as a means to showcase their existence, their specificity, and their way of life on a global scale.

These sporting events have superseded the prominent international fairs and exhibitions of the 19th century, which constituted the optimal opportunities for prominent cities to engage with the global community by showcasing remarkable engineering and artistic creations designed specifically for these events. Notable examples include the Crystal Palace in London, constructed for the Universal Exhibition of 1851, and the Eiffel Tower, erected for the International Exhibition of 1899. The generation of these monumental structures functioned as a platform for cities to showcase their capabilities to the global audience during the celebrations. However, as the 20th century progressed, these great exhibitions declined in favour of other spectacles that had also been created in the preceding century. The advent of the modern Olympic Games, as pioneered by Baron de Coubertin in 1896, and the Football World Cup since 1930, superseded these great events.

However, it should be noted that this dynamic infrastructure has not only positive aspects, such as large exhibitions and sporting events. Sports facilities, particularly those constructed for major events, encounter significant challenges in generating sufficient revenue to cover their operational expenses once the event has concluded. Consequently, these facilities frequently remain underutilised, and the associated maintenance costs become a significant challenge.

It is therefore unrealistic to confine this relationship between sport-city only to major sporting events. Indeed, such occurrences are frequently exceptional. In Europe, the relationship is characterised by more profound and pervasive connections, such as the presence of football teams that serve as emblems of the cities or their respective neighbourhoods. These teams foster a "glocal" spirit, as posited by Edensor and Millington (2008), engendering a profound sense of identification between the fan and the community. This phenomenon, as posited by Edensor and Millington (2008), functions as a significant catalyst for the development of associative cultural practices. This phenomenon, which will be revisited subsequently, entails the establishment of a distinct territory by the football club, encompassing not only sporting but also social, cultural, and even class dimensions. According to Bromberger et al. (1987), an analogy can be drawn between attending a football match and participating in a religious ritual.

Established football teams exhibit a strong duality in their identity, as they are closely linked to the cities in which they are located, while city managers often associate themselves with the local team as well. However, in cities with multiple clubs, the city administration faces divided pressures and loyalties towards each club. Furthermore, in numerous instances, clubs are more closely associated with specific neighbourhoods than with the city as a whole (Agostino et al., 2018).

Moreover, the economic contribution of football clubs within local communities is a subject that merits attention. According to Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002), a football team exerts a considerable direct economic influence by generating employment opportunities, enhancing local marketing through continuous media exposure, and augmenting tourism. Additionally, the team's economic impact is indirect, stemming from its role in supporting local councils through the collection of taxes from these economic activities. Consequently, it can be deduced that sporting success has the potential to contribute to economic prosperity for the city, though the extent of this relationship may vary.

A further element that strengthens the bond between the community and the economy is the stadium, in the broadest sense, which encompasses the surrounding streets and public spaces, and takes up the legacy of large infrastructures. According to Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002), the perpetual need to generate increased revenue has resulted in the commodification of all adjacent spaces, which are now under the jurisdiction of sponsorship, advertising and business. These changes in the way cities and neighbourhoods are designed and developed in various large-scale regeneration projects make the business approach an essential component of local urban development strategies.

The rationale for this assertion is twofold: firstly, the process of economic regeneration is analogous to that of social regeneration; secondly, the image of the city is enhanced. However, it should be noted that this viewpoint is not universally held, as there are divergent opinions on the matter. Indeed, it has been contended that certain groups are given preferential treatment over others, and that these favoured groups are predominantly comprised of individuals belonging to large consortiums that do not

require public assistance. Furthermore, since the commencement of the sports infrastructure construction boom, the hypothesis that economic development is synonymous with social development appears to be unproven (Siegfried and Zimbalist, 2000).

Nevertheless, these issues do not negate Paramio's (2004) assertion that stadiums, as a consequence of their design, already function as public spaces that engender a sense of community. Furthermore, the assumption that there is a geographical equivalent of trickle-down economics, whereby the income generated by one area of sports exploitation will spread to the whole city, is a common one (Lauerermann, 2022).

In this sense, as previously stated, the necessity for cities to secure additional direct and indirect funding sources compels them to employ urban marketing strategies, particularly the promotion of the City Brand, as a means of enhancing their visibility. However, it should be noted that both marketing and branding, in the sense employed in this study, extend beyond the scope of mere economic performance.

Urban marketing, in its most fundamental sense, can be understood as the set of actions aimed at aligning the functions and services of a city with the needs and expectations of its residents, businesses, tourists and other visitors (Van den Berg et al., 1990). Urban marketing can thus be conceptualised as a management strategy that employs a range of tools, techniques and expertise to enhance the city's responsiveness to the demands of its inhabitants. However, Seisdedos (2007) contends that it can also be regarded as an urban development strategy, one which has led to policies focusing primarily on positioning cities as economic and cultural hubs. Nevertheless, this can result in the relegation of citizen needs and aspects to a secondary place (Murua, 2013).

Therefore, according to Van Heck (2011), urban marketing navigates between the search for a middle ground between short and long term strategies, i.e. economic and commercial interests, on the one hand, and social objectives, where tensions arise between public and private organisations and the local population, on the other. Furthermore, according to Van Heck (2011), geopolitical changes and the process of European unification have led to a phenomenon of imitation between cities, which has reduced the differences between European cities over time. It would therefore be a dynamic and infinite process of change, innovation and attraction to create an attractive and changing image of a city identity that tends to change very slowly and with great difficulty. According to Zhang and Zhao (2009), one of the main challenges is to identify the essence and key values of a city so that they can be accepted by the community, easily marketed and visibly and accessibly integrated into people's daily lives (Morocho-Bermuda et al., 2022).

Thus, for Zhang and Zhao (2009) there are a number of standards or variables from which a City Brand can be built:

- The capacity for internationalisation based on the city's economy, politics, population and infrastructure, i.e. its socio-economic capacity to become a globally recognised city.
- The cultural importance of the city: monuments, local artists, real estate, local culture and lifestyle.
- The livability of the city: environmental aspects, provision of public facilities, standard of living and governance.
- The importance of sporting and/or cultural events in the city: Promoting the local economy, creating local identity and a sense of belonging, and enhancing the attractiveness of the city.

This final point pertains specifically to one-off, exceptional events such as the Olympic Games; however, it does not preclude the possibility of extrapolation to smaller, ongoing events, which are the most prevalent in urban settings.

It is within these variables that the conflict between the imperative for transformation and the need to uphold identity will be played out, and where the necessity to harmonise urban planning with these two imperatives will also be linked, with all of this centred on the citizens who inhabit and animate the city (Bonakdar and Audirac, 2020). If the community does not feel at ease in its environment and does not align with the values espoused by the City Brand, then there is an inherent flaw in the brand's design that will, in due course, become evident.

Building on the work of Zhang and Zhao (2009), albeit not exhaustively, this paper aims to demonstrate how this sport-city-economy-brand-city equation, which in theory is a sure-fire formula for success, can become problematic if citizen participation is not taken into account.

To this end, the following objectives will be set, following the established steps:

- Examine how sport can create community identity and quality of life, helping to build the City Brand.
- Investigate whether the creation of infrastructure is an economic asset for the city and the community and how it can be made profitable.
- Analyse how continuous events are usually required to make sports facilities profitable.
- Examine the case of the Santiago Bernabéu stadium to see what steps have led to the suspension of the events necessary to make the redevelopment work profitable, which in theory would serve not only economic growth and development, but also better exposure for the city and its brand.

2. Football and the City Brand: Economic and Social Development

An analysis of the internationalisation capacity of the city due to its socio-economic strength reveals that most of the prominent football clubs are based in the primary cities of each country, particularly in the two or three most significant ones, especially if they have a strong economic development. In Spain, Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia; in Portugal, Lisbon and Porto; Rome, Milan, Turin and Naples in Italy; London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool in England and Paris, Lyon and Marseille in France. Germany, however, appears to be an exception, as the capital, Berlin, lacks prominent football teams due to the Cold War division of the city.

In this context, it is noteworthy that even one of the European trophies contested, the UEFA Europa League, traces its lineage to the original International Fair Cities Cup, which was played under this name from 1956 to 1971, and subsequently renamed the UEFA Cup until 2009. This suggests that the concept of cities competing against each other is not a recent development, and it is therefore unsurprising that the most economically significant cities have amassed the most trophies.

With regard to the significance of local cultural elements, while football reliably responds to its status as a popular cultural artefact, it circumvents the conventional boundaries of high culture. However, within the domain of local popular culture, as previously mentioned, football clubs can be regarded as agents of community building and identity creation, wielding a substantial and immediate influence (Murua, 2013). In a broader context, the cultural milieu of football is recognised as a significant domain for the exploration of contemporary identity formations, notions of place, and the reproduction of the “glocal”. In this regard, football's capacity to engender narratives, legends, visions and goals can be conceptualised as a manifestation of the city itself, a transformation of identity.

It is also important to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of the relationship, as football clubs function as independent brands, engaging in competition not only on the field of play but also within the broader entertainment industry, striving to attract as many supporters as possible (Moya-López and Oliveira, 2022). This rivalry between football teams has evolved into a competition between cities, where stadiums, fan zones, and other associated infrastructure become the focal point, and the City Brand becomes an integral part of the spectacle, as evidenced by matches between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, or Paris Saint-Germain and Olympique de Marseille. It is evident that regional city or regional rivalries are evolving into brand conflicts between cities, supported not only by the identity of each city or region, but also by its own identifying brand.

The following variables are proposed for the development of the City Brand and, consequently, the maximisation of associated benefits. These variables include the creation of liveable urban design, ensuring the comfort of all stakeholders, environmental respect, and effective governance.

This urban design will include sports stadia as places of leisure and recreation that influence the shaping of the local landscape itself (Gaffney, 2008); making it the centre of the map if it has to be built from scratch or trying to integrate it into the new map if the venue has already been built. The undertaking of this task is likely to be colossal if the stakeholders, the dimensions of the site, the adjacent green spaces, or the balance between the sporting, the economic-commercial and the residential within the identity itself are taken into consideration.

This concept exerts a considerable influence on the planning of public urban structures, including transport stations, leisure areas, and parks. It may also imply indirect participation of local authorities in the economic operations of private entities, in the absence of direct investment with public funds, a phenomenon that is perhaps more prevalent than is generally recognised. In the United States, for

instance, since the 1990s, a significant proportion of sports infrastructure has been financed by public funds, in addition to private funds (Friedman and Beissel, 2021). Local governments have facilitated these constructions through the implementation of flexible policies, including tax reductions and zoning amendments, due to the theoretical advantages associated with the existence of such facilities. However, according to Coates and Humphreys (2003), these advantages are often overstated, and the associated social costs, such as community displacement and gentrification, are frequently disregarded or overlooked. It is also politically expedient for city leaders (Kellison and Mills, 2021).

Nevertheless, the generous design and planning of the surrounding areas of stadiums can result in problematic issues. Primarily, as Zirin (2015) asserts, the development of a planned neighbourhood is oriented towards spectators rather than the local residents. Moreover, this approach results in an isolation of the stadium from the broader urban fabric, both economically and socially. Consequently, the phenomenon of “touristification” of the neighbourhood becomes evident, as opposed to the intended regeneration.

Secondly, the potential benefits of the development may not be sufficient to address the prevailing issues in the area (Zirin, 2015). It has been asserted that the economic growth equation does not always hold true or is less strong than believed (Bradbury, 2022).

Consequently, the construction or upgrading of a building of such magnitude and symbolic significance cannot be entrusted exclusively to the clubs but must also be a collective responsibility of local and regional governments, environmental and/or neighbourhood groups, and tourists visiting the site itself. Friedman and Beissel (2021) caution against an exclusive focus on financial aspects, emphasising the need to consider broader issues, such as maximising public benefit for the community at large and its implementation within local governance frameworks.

Another issue that exerts a significant influence on the question of habitability is the design of the stadium itself. In the case of a pre-existing stadium, there is typically an effort, albeit not a universal practice, to renovate it in a manner that respects the aesthetic integrity of the surrounding neighbourhood. However, this renovation often involves an update that meets the expectations of all relevant stakeholders.

The primary challenges stem from the endeavour to retain the stadium's original location and bestow upon it a monumental appearance that it lacked previously. This approach frequently compromises or alters the concept of community (King, 2003). The necessity to increase ticket sales, coupled with the desire to project an image of authority, becomes a compelling imperative for clubs (Wergeland and Hognestad, 2021). A public-interest approach to stadium development is argued to engender superior political outcomes for the numerous actors involved in the city's governance network when compared with a purely mercantilist utilisation of space, which is posited to engender numerous conflicts (Zukin, 2010). This focus on public purpose necessitates an evaluation of the underlying assumptions of subsidy. The involvement of citizens as more than mere spectators in the construction of stadiums, but as watchdogs and defenders of the identity of the community and the locality, is crucial in the concept of City Branding alluded to earlier in Zhang and Zhao (2009).

However, an investment of this magnitude only for more or less regular sporting events, such as a league championship, does not make the economic effort of restoring the old stadium or building a new one worthwhile. In general, this effort is linked to the organisation of major events such as the Olympic Games, international exhibitions or similar. According to Naranjo Escudero (2011), these celebrations served to promote and regenerate the city at the time they were held and to showcase its image to the outside world, but not so much to generate a sustained economic return.

In other words, neither a regular sports championship nor a major event of a few concentrated days is enough to justify all the costs involved. Therefore, the question of making these venues more useful is conducive to holding the regular championship plus a series of events with a more stable and controlled periodicity than exhibitions or finals, see Carretero (2024). The question is what such controlled events might be.

An analysis of the relevant data indicates that the most expeditious solution is music concerts. According to Kronenburg (2012), the performance of the Beatles at Shea Stadium in New York, attended by 55,000 people, precipitated a paradigm shift within the music industry, with sports stadiums becoming a pivotal venue for the entertainment industry to engage with its vast and growing audience. For instance, in 2019, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the live music sector

generated revenue exceeding USD 28 billion, with projections indicating that by 2028, this figure would reach more than USD 37 billion (Orús, 2024). Moreover, due to phenomena such as piracy and economic crises, the music industry's business model is undergoing a transformation, with a shift towards individual tours by artists and groups rather than the predominant logic of festivals (Mir, 2024).

The neoliberal logic suggests that the constant repetition of these events creates an equation that is difficult to disprove and from which all parties benefit (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2016). According to this equation, a City Brand is established, the community's identity and civic personality are strengthened through the introduction of governance elements, public spaces for leisure and sport are regenerated and built around the stadium as the physical and spiritual centre of the neighbourhood. The generation of sufficient economic benefit from the commercial exploitation of neighbouring businesses on competition days and mega-events, which are continuous and controlled by the organisers, is also a key component of this equation.

3. The City of Madrid and the City Brand. The Case of the Bernabéu Stadium

The next step in this research will be to introduce the city of Madrid within the theoretical guidelines of the City Brand and observe how it takes advantage of the sporting and reputational strength of the capital's two main clubs, Atlético de Madrid and, in particular, Real Madrid. Both clubs have had to make changes to their sporting facilities: Atlético de Madrid has relocated to a peripheral area of the city, as its original stadium, the Vicente Calderón, was situated in an area undergoing redevelopment by the Madrid city council. A mutually beneficial agreement was reached between the two institutions for the club to move to a new field (Díaz-Orueta, 2015). Conversely, Real Madrid has opted for an upgrade of the Santiago Bernabéu, as the land on which the field sits is owned by the club, not the city council, on the condition that sporting activities are carried out there. Therefore, in the event of a transfer to another location, Real Madrid would not receive any compensation. For this reason, a complete change of the site was chosen.

With regard to the socio-economic conditions of the city of Madrid, one of the focal points of the selected model, it is evident that the Autonomous Community of Madrid (CAM) has achieved notable success in 2024. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2023), the Autonomous Community of Madrid experienced a 7.2% growth in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, placing it third among all regions in Spain in terms of economic expansion. In terms of absolute GDP numbers, Madrid has a GDP worth 261,713 M€, which places it as the first economy in Spain (Diario Expansión, 2024). Although the figures refer to the entire regional community, the capital is the primary driver of growth in the community, suggesting the presence of the necessary economic infrastructure that Zhang and Zhao require for the construction of the brand.

According to a study by KPMG (2023), Spanish professional football clubs generated €18,350 million (directly and indirectly), representing 1.44% of the national GDP in 2022 and contributing to the creation of 194,381 jobs. However, no such updated data is available for Madrid clubs. According to Eurosport (2019), the professional football industry in the Community of Madrid generates an annual turnover of 4,635 million euros, representing 2.15% of the regional GDP, and creates 53,024 jobs. This places Madrid at the vanguard of the Spanish autonomous communities in terms of the economic impact of football at the regional level.

From a sociological and tourististic perspective, Madrid is a leading example among European cities. However, the city has faced challenges in establishing its position among the major European cities and capitals, a situation compounded by the international rejection stemming from the Franco regime. Since the early years of the 21st century, Madrid has experienced significant economic growth, alongside notable advancements in the social and tourist sectors. The cultural offer of Madrid is considered to be among the most significant in the world, notably due to its hosting of the Museo Nacional del Prado, the foremost art gallery in the world, which received 3.3 million visitors in 2023, as reported by the newspaper *La Razón* (2024). The city's cultural offer is further bolstered by institutions such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, which received 2.5 million visitors in 2023, and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, which attracted over one million visitors in the same year. However, it should be noted that these are not merely museums; the Royal Palace of Madrid, the National Library, Puerta del Sol, Círculo de Bellas Artes, the Madrid of the Austrias, Retiro Park, Almudena Cathedral, the Temple of Debod, Madrid Río and the Theatres of Madrid collectively comprise such a significant

attraction that the Community of Madrid is expected to receive a total of 7.84 million international tourists in 2023 (Martínez, 2024).

3.1. Problems with Events at the Santiago Bernabéu

The issue under discussion is the problem that has arisen with the remodelling of the Santiago Bernabéu, a stadium owned by Real Madrid and built in 1947. In this paper, we have sought to demonstrate how football clubs across Europe represent one of the most effective tools for cities to enhance their brand, contributing to the recognition of the city to a greater or lesser extent. In the case of Real Madrid, this performance is particularly noteworthy. The numerous sporting achievements of the club, coupled with its robust financial health, particularly as evidenced by its financial reports, stand in stark contrast to the financial struggles experienced by the majority of European teams. In this context, Real Madrid emerges as a prominent and highly recognisable symbol of the city, arguably surpassing even the cultural institution of the Prado Museum in terms of renown. This phenomenon underscores the notion that the Real Madrid brand has attained a level of renown that eclipses even that of the city, thereby reinforcing the bond between the two entities.

In terms of the points of the City Brand and its relationship with the football teams, Real Madrid has also, up to now, been at the forefront in terms of its links with the city. The inauguration of the Santiago Bernabéu stadium in 1947 coincided with a period of significant urban development in the 1960s in the northern part of the capital. To this day, the stadium remains a prominent landmark in Madrid, contributing to the city's identity not solely in architectural terms but also in emotional terms, thereby giving life to an entire neighbourhood around it.

In terms of revenue generation for the city, the importance of Real Madrid is enormous. Citing previous consultancy reports on the importance of football to national GDP and Madrid's GDP, the merengue team is at the top of the list. In terms of awareness, Real Madrid is featured in most of the world's sports and non-sports news programmes and newspapers, ensuring tangible brand recognition. It is difficult to specify how much economic growth and development it can generate for the city, but we could talk about hotel stays, hospitality, merchandising sales. In addition, the Real Madrid Museum itself receives more than one million visitors per year (Diario Marca, 2019). In this sense, if we consider that a football team generates income for a city, Real Madrid is the best example.

The problem arises from the aforementioned issue of the need to improve the income of clubs through the non-sporting use of their facilities. The Santiago Bernabéu stadium has undergone several renovations to increase its capacity since 1954, just seven years after it was built. It is important to note that the various extensions and improvements have involved the expropriation of land around the stadium for sporting purposes. In the event of non-sporting use, the expropriated areas would revert to their former owners (Ruiz, 2009). This peculiarity makes it almost impossible to sell the Bernabéu site as it is today.

All of the stadium's expansions have been more or less successful, and in 1983 Real Madrid began to use the stadium for non-sporting events, with a concert by Julio Iglesias, a former player of the club who became a world star of song (García, 1983). Since then, hundreds of events have followed. In this sense, it supports another of Zhang and Zhao's (2009) points, promoting the cultural life of the area and its way of life, generating cultural events of greater or lesser importance.

In this way and following Zhang and Zhao's (2009) guidelines for contributing to the City Brand, it can be seen that Real Madrid more than satisfies them. Even in 2001, the sale of the former Real Madrid sports complex, located on land adjacent to the stadium that had been controversially rezoned by Madrid City Council (Prieto, 2021), did not meet with much opposition from the community. Real Madrid rezoned the land and built four towers for sale, two and a half of which were retained by the club, the other half by the Community of Madrid and the fourth by the Madrid City Council, generating large profits for all three parties, so it could be argued that Real Madrid was beneficial to the city.

The conflict originates from the most recent transformation of the stadium, which was approved by the Madrid City Council in 2017 following several unsuccessful prior attempts. The project, which was awarded to FCC, commenced with an initial budget of 475 million euros (Ugalde and Raffin, 2019), a figure that has since increased significantly, resulting in the team incurring substantial debt. By 2024, Real Madrid will have invested almost 1.17 billion in the refurbishment of the Bernabéu (Carretero, 2024), with its main debtors being the companies Sixth Street and Legends, an investment fund and a

stadium management company respectively (Diario Cinco Días, 2022), which have gradually lent the team money in exchange for a percentage in the operation of the stadium itself, reaching 30% (2Playbook, 2022). In order to comply with the aforementioned agreement, it is imperative that Real Madrid generates a minimum of 100 million euros per annum from the operation of the stadium (Marín, 2024).

In 2024, the objective was to exceed this figure and attain 400 million euros in profits from the stadium's operation through the organisation of various concerts featuring artists such as Taylor Swift, Aitana and Karol G (Carretero, 2024). However, two problems have arisen. Firstly, two neighbourhood associations in the vicinity have lodged a formal objection, as reported by El Diario.es (2022), citing concerns regarding the construction and operation of two municipal car parks that were awarded to Real Madrid in a tender. The agreement would enable the club to manage the two car parks, which have almost 2,000 spaces, for the next 45 years. Local residents have expressed concerns that this arrangement constitutes preferential treatment by the Community of Madrid, particularly the City Council (Casado, 2024), and that it will generate substantial revenue for Real Madrid, estimated to be between 470 and 500 million euros over a 40-year period (Casado, 2023). Furthermore, the construction work and associated paraphernalia have resulted in prolonged periods of street parking bans, which, in conjunction with the incessant movement of lorries through the vicinity, has significantly diminished, if not wholly eliminated, vehicular mobility.

The 30th Administrative Court of Madrid has annulled the public tender by which the City Council had awarded Real Madrid the concession to construct and operate the car parks for the subsequent 40 years (Ugalde, 2024a). The grounds for the annulment pertained to the questionable public service nature of the car parks' establishment. Despite the City Council's appeal and ongoing efforts to complete the project, the controversy has led to a noticeable deterioration in the reputation of both the City Council and the current president of Real Madrid, Florentino Pérez, who is widely regarded as the primary responsible for the situation (Farnós, 2022). This persistent refusal to halt work on the car parks has led to a complaint being lodged against the City Council at the European Commission's office in Madrid for granting public aid to Real Madrid (Ugalde, 2023).

The second part of the disagreement is the conflict generated by the sound of the concerts that are constantly being programmed at the Santiago Bernabéu, which have become an unstoppable chain of events and almost daily complaints from the neighbours against Real Madrid. The generation of the stadium's resources, essential for the team's growth, was based on the constant holding of concerts at the Bernabéu, one every six days (Casado, 2023), which also served as an economic boost for the whole area due to the influx of spectators, as mentioned in this theoretically perfect equation of success.

However, the constant holding of concerts brought with it an unexpected problem: if the work on the car parks and the increased influx of traffic were already causing enormous noise, the incredible lack of soundproofing at the Bernabéu (Leal, 2024) meant that during the Telefónica 100 Live concert on 18 May, a noise level of 84.9 decibels was reached in an apartment next to the stadium, whereas the maximum allowed by law is 68 until 11 p.m. and 58 thereafter (Hormigo, 2024a).

Now it was the stadium itself, which had been at the heart of the neighbourhood, that was undermining its quality of life, a state of affairs that was seriously damaging to the neighbours, but also to the combination of elements necessary for the construction of the City Brand from the events.

In July of this year, after the concerts of Taylor Swift, Aitana and Karol G, in which the noise and disorder around the stadium reached its peak, with a brawl that left one person dead, the mayor of Madrid, José Luis Martínez-Almeida, who, according to Blasco (2024), is accused of having the interests of Florentino Pérez at heart, limited the duration of the concerts to 11 p.m., shortened the rehearsal periods, increased the cleaning brigades and tried to find a temporary compromise solution.

Real Madrid had already tried to find a compromise with the neighbourhood associations by sending one of its most friendly and charismatic faces, Emilio Butragueño, now a director and former star player of the team. At the end of June 2024, a meeting was held between Butragueño, the neighbourhood associations, the City Council and the Community of Madrid, which failed to resolve the neighbours' complaints (noise, unregulated tourism, dirt, vandalism and restrictions on mobility), except to limit the number of concerts per year (Peinado, 2024).

The next step in widening the gap between the parties was the admission of an environmental crime complaint against Real Madrid by a neighbourhood association (Ugalde, 2024b).

On 13 September 2024, Real Madrid issued an official communiqué cancelling all concerts from that date until at least March 2025 (Real Madrid, 2024) in an attempt to soundproof the stadium. This communiqué has caused an uproar, with mixed reactions from the neighbours, who celebrate it as a momentary victory with the appearance of permanence, and the local authorities, the mayor José Luis Martínez - Almeida and the president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who praise the decision of President Florentino Pérez to temporarily suspend the concerts (Marín, 2024).

Pérez's stance makes it difficult to pay the investors Sixth Street and Legends, since only a third of the macro-concerts promised (Marín, 2024) will take place, with the consequent loss of income on the one hand, and the need to improve the newly completed stadium's soundproofing on the other.

However, and in the context of this work, it can be seen that Real Madrid, one of the champions in building the brand image of a city with important but scarce international references, and which for more than a century has made its activity and its stadium key elements of Madrid's identity and economic development, is currently experiencing a crisis in its relationship with the community itself, if not so much with the authorities. The economic issue, which is crucial for both the city and the team, has collided head-on with the quality of life in the area, leading to an erosion unprecedented in Madrid's history. It should be borne in mind that the neighbourhood in question is an upper-middle-class area, a constituency of the Partido Popular (Hormigo, 2024b), which holds local and regional power, and a decidedly Madridista area (Farnós, 2002), so that it is impossible to understand any previous animosity.

This conflict does not seem to be breaking the football link between the team and its neighbours, but it is causing considerable external damage, deteriorating the club's international image and causing more than significant economic damage, as well as profoundly altering the conditions of habitability.

4. Conclusions

As can be seen, there is a fairly general consensus in the literature that the construction of the City Brand can be, and is, sustained and supported by sports clubs and all the activities they generate around them. Zhang and Zhao's (2009) research, which encompasses the organisation of macro-events, facilitates an analysis of Real Madrid's contributions to the Madrid brand.

The establishment of a shared identity within the community serves to reinforce its representation, as posited by Edensor and Millington (2008). The team's shared emotional ideal, symbolised by colours, images and a worldview in the field of sport, fosters a sense of unity and identification among its members. In this sense, the team's worldview becomes intertwined with the city's self-perception, thereby contributing to the formation of a distinct brand identity. In this regard, Real Madrid serves as a prime example of this phenomenon, particularly when examining the case study. When one enters the term "Madrid" into a Google search engine, images of the city and the football team appear simultaneously, thus indicating a symbiotic relationship between the two entities, despite the presence of other teams in the Spanish capital.

The next step is the stadium: the physical place where the neighbours are grouped around this common ideal and which could be compared to a temple where the faithful communicate, as Bromberger et al. (1987) put it. Around this common place, and more, the stadium is built before the rest of the neighbourhood, and the other buildings that make up the neighbourhood are grouped together. In this sense, the stadium will become the nerve centre of the district, like the public buildings in city centres. All this urban design can be carried out with greater or lesser success, depending on the different mentalities for urban growth. This, of course, contributes to the City Brand.

According to this logic, the team and the stadium become a source of income and recognition for the city. It provides elements for the City Brand and, as a local business, it attracts tourists to sporting events, with the consequent indirect spillover on other businesses: hospitality, transport, merchandising, accommodation. From its museum to its merchandising, the team is a money-making machine that also generates revenue for the local authorities and the city, either in the form of taxes that provide hundreds of direct jobs and thousands of indirect jobs, as is the case with all major football clubs. The point is that the expenditure that the clubs need to maintain these infrastructures and, as we have seen, their own sporting activities, is not easy to come by, so non-sporting activities have to be generated to maintain this level of expenditure.

The most common activity is music concerts, and the Santiago Bernabéu had a well-established tradition in this area, and with the agreements reached with Legends and Sixth Street, the equation

seemed to guarantee success for all the partners, i.e. the authorities, the restaurants, the neighbours and the football team.

However, the formula has backfired because one of the variables, the community, the neighbours, does not perceive that there are benefits. This perception is based on one of Zhang and Zhao's points: everyday livability. It has been said that the Santiago Bernabéu is the nerve centre of the area, even the original one, since the rest of the neighbourhood was born from its construction, but this does not mean that the interests of the team and the municipality take precedence over those of the citizens, or that they are the same.

The residents' associations have noted, and it seems more than obvious, that the transformations required to build the car parks and the constant holding of festivals and events are reducing the quality of life in the area, since firstly the car park works are a source of disruption to mobility and life in the area around the stadium, where there is already a large influx of cars, schools, shops, etc. But if the first point is serious, the second seems even more so: the indiscriminate holding of musical events has multiplied the arrival of visitors from Madrid and other places in the neighbourhood, and this does not seem to be very pleasant for the neighbours, as there are allusions to dirt, vandalism, disruption of daily life and public order.

Here, the idea of neighbourhood touristification as an unintended consequence, as described by Sequera and Nofre (2018), is evolving into a form of small-scale "tourismphobia." This arises because the present conflicts overshadow any perceived future benefits of spectators' arrivals. To this, we must add the issue of noise generated by concerts and attendees, often lasting late into the night and significantly exceeding permissible noise levels. In this context, Zhang and Zhao's (2009) concept of liveability collapses, as the quality of life and the environment are disrupted.

This second point is more serious, because if the work on the car parks is finished sooner or later, the events will continue over time. And the fact that there are already football matches almost every week does not help. If there is a lot of excitement and even celebration on days when there are sporting events, it is because of this affinity or communion with the merengue club, and because they are considered an integral part of the community's existence and an important part of it. There is no criticism of the football team, because the love of Real Madrid is not in question. It is the leaders who are directly attacked, in particular the club's business vision, which takes precedence over sporting matters and the community's world view. And the criticism reaches the local authorities, both the president, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, and the mayor, José Luis Martínez Almeida, especially the latter. The reason for this criticism is that the city's governance has been folded in favour of the interests of the equation, which turn out to be exclusively economic, without taking into account issues that have more to do with the quality of life, as Bradbury (2022) asserts.

This episode has thus engendered a crisis in terms of the contribution of Marca Ciudad by Real Madrid and the political authorities. A primary problem of habitability exists, the resolution of which would require a reduction in the distance between positions, though even this measure is predicted to incur economic costs far in excess of those initially anticipated by Florentino Pérez, the president of Real Madrid. This is predicated on the assumption that a definitive court ruling does not ultimately bring the construction work on the car park to a halt. Secondly, the episode has engendered a crisis of governance for the mayor in a neighbourhood that has voted massively for him and his political party.

In addition, it is necessary to examine other areas of the city of Madrid that have experienced similar problems, such as the areas surrounding the Caja Mágica, where numerous events are also held, but which appear to have less repercussions as they are more popular neighbourhoods (Trilles, 2024). This is another frequent criticism of the mayor's office, which also poses a significant threat to the development of the Madrid City Brand. The suspicion of unequal treatment between neighbourhoods can erode the sense of belonging and identification within the local community to a greater or lesser extent.

In conclusion, the idea of creating roundtables for dialogue between the parties is the right one, although it comes rather late and almost desperately. There are many tools for citizen participation and consultation, see Lavín et al. (2014), that can be used and, in fact, are used quite often in Madrid. Although late, this could be a good starting point to try to find a solution, which will have to be joint and quite radical, as the most visible parties (Florentino Pérez and José Luis Martínez Almeida) will have to

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make significant concessions. Looking at the whole equation, it seems that focusing only on the economic part and ignoring the opinion of the neighbourhood is not satisfactory.

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