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Media construction of peripheral regional identities: Real Murcia Club de Fútbol as a symbolic space for negotiation and sense-making

La construcción mediática de las identidades regionales periféricas: el Real Murcia Club de Fútbol como espacio simbólico de negociación de sentido

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Abstract

Football is an important symbolic space for representation and the construction of regional identities. However, it is an underdeveloped subject of study within the field of communication in Spain. This paper seeks to analyze the media construction of regional identities within the context of football. The case study selected was the crisis experienced by the emblematic Real Murcia Football Club at the end of 2018, with citizens and followers forming a solidarity movement to resolve it. By means of quantitative content analysis, a total of 152 news items published between October and December 2018 were analyzed. The results show Real Murcia to be perceived as a symbol of local identity created by citizens, their ethical actions and a media discourse promoting values and adherence to the culture of the region of Murcia. Hence, local media are key social institutions when disseminating peripheral regional identities, i.e. identities less well-developed than the historical ones recognized by the Spanish Constitution. Ultimately, football represents a symbolic space for sense-making, including the discourses of collective identities on the fringes of nation states.

Resumen

El fútbol es un importante espacio simbólico de representación y construcción de las identidades regionales. Sin embargo, el estudio de estas identidades en dicho deporte ha sido un objeto de investigación poco explorado dentro del campo de la comunicación en España. Por ello, el presente artículo adopta como caso de estudio la crisis que el Real Murcia, club emblemático de la región homónima, vivió a finales de 2018 y que fue contestada por la afición y la ciudadanía con la creación de un movimiento solidario. Un total de 152 informaciones publicadas en la prensa local entre octubre y diciembre de 2018 han sido investigadas mediante un análisis de contenido cuantitativo. Los resultados muestran que el Real Murcia es construido como un símbolo identitario, protagonizado por la ciudadanía y sus acciones de carácter ético, en un relato periodístico que promueve los valores y apego a lo murciano. Así, los medios locales son instituciones sociales clave en la reproducción de las identidades regionales periféricas, menos desarrolladas que las reconocidas como históricas por la Constitución Española. En última instancia, el fútbol es un espacio simbólico de sentido en el que también se reconocen las colectividades que habitan en los márgenes de los Estados-nación.

Keywords

Identity; media culture; press; discourse; content analysis; territoriality

Palabras clave

Identidad; cultura mediática; prensa; discurso; análisis de contenido; territorialidad

1. Introduction

"Since I left Lebanon in 1976 to settle in France, I have been asked many times, with the best of intentions, whether I feel 'more French' or 'more Lebanese.' And my answer is always the same: 'Both!' And this is not because I want to be fair or equitable, but because I would lie if I said otherwise. What makes me, and no other, is being on the edge of two countries, of two or three languages, of various cultural traditions. That is precisely what defines my identity. Would I be more honest if I amputated a part of who I am? (...) Identity is not made of compartments, it is not divided into halves, nor thirds nor watertight zones. And I don't have several identities: I only have one, the result of all the elements that have configured it through a singular 'dosage' that is never the same in two people."

Amin Maalouf (*Identidades asesinas*, Alianza Editorial, 1999, p. 1)

Informational globalization has placed the reflection and analysis on social identities at the center of social and communicative thinking. Social identities are narrative constructions that provide meaning and allow the individuals to recognize themselves in various contexts (personal, social, political, etc.) based on their different affiliations (ethnic, racial, territorial, gender, social class, language, sexual orientation, religion, age, migrant and consumer / lifestyles) (Block in Rodrigo-Alsina et al., 2016). Thus, the serious financial crisis that broke out in 2008 after the Lehman Brothers collapsed, prompted the redefinition of meanings around social and political issues, as well as, of course, identity. The importance of economic recessions lies not only in the lack and transformation of global and local financial issues, but also, and above all, in the redefinition of the social, cultural and identity aspects that characterize nation-states, which were subject during the last decade to enormous pressure from above by the financial markets and from below by the citizens themselves. The 2008 recession clearly represented the collapse of the project of modernity based on scientific knowledge as the only way to access the truth (Waisbord, 2018). The truths, understood as inter-subjectively agreements made throughout the twentieth century, exploded into a thousand pieces becoming outdated (García-Jiménez, 2019). Advances around AIDS, vaccines, climate change, etc. are criticized and denied (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1870), a scientific denial whose roots are deep in the 1950s (McIntyre, 2018).

The context we are describing has worked as a breeding ground for the revitalization of discourses around territorial identities (national, regional, local, etc.), which are not diluted in the context of globalization (Castelló, 2008, p. 106) but presented as a way of counteracting the sense of loss suffered by part of the population (Martín Barbero, 2012). Thus, we find that references to territoriality (nation, region, locality, etc.) continue despite globalization processes. Therefore, the analysis of identities from a territorial point of view, as explored by the present article, remains a key issue in understanding the contemporary context.

In this scenario, the triangle made up by the media, identity and sport is a privileged symbolic space for the analysis we propose (Hand, 2002). Firstly, because mass media are an important social instrument in the construction and reproduction of identities (Castelló, Dhoest and O'Donnell, 2009; Castelló, 2005 and 2008; Chan, 2012; Martínez Guillem, 2013; Sowinska and Dubrovskaya, 2012; Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998). Secondly, because of the connection between mass sporting events and ethnic and territorial issues (Capistegui, 2012; Plaza-Martin, 2009; Hobsbawm, 1991; Llopis, 2006 and 2013; Quiroga, 2014 and 2018; Russell, 2016).

Amongst sports, soccer [or football] deserves special attention due to its social, economic and media impact (Llopis, 2006; González-Ramallal, 2008; Liga de Fútbol Profesional, 2018). However, empirical analyses of the media construction of territorial identities in Spain in soccer events are very scarce. From a local point of view, the interest has been centered around Spain's historical regions and/or relevant *comunidades autónomas* [each one of the first-level political and administrative units in which Spain is divided] (Coteron and Bello, 2012). At national level, studies have focused mainly on the Spanish national soccer team (González-Ramallal, 2008 and 2014; Puebla, Carrillo and Iñigo, 2012; Plaza-Martin, 2009). Therefore, we find that peripheral regional identities, understood in this article as those less developed than the ones recognized as "historical" by the Spanish Constitution [Title VIII,

article 143, 1978], have not been extensively explored in communication research in Spain, a circumstance that this article will attempt to remedy.

Specifically, this article conceptualizes soccer as a symbolic space for negotiating regional identities. In order to carry out this analysis, we have chosen the case of Real Murcia Club de Fútbol, an institution historically associated with the idiosyncrasy of the Region of Murcia, whose territorial identity is not as strong as those of historical regions such as Catalonia or the Basque Country. The Region of Murcia's identity is also characterized by its duality, that is, its coexistence with the Spanish national identity (Quiroga, 2018, p. 931). For these reasons, this case study could be representative of those other peripheral regional communities that, like Murcia, tend to operate in the political, symbolic, economic and power margins of the Spanish state.

The corpus of this study is 152 news items published in the two local reference newspapers, *La Verdad* and *La Opinión*, between October 10 and December 31, 2018, during which the grassroots movement SOS Real Murcia was created and developed. The aim of SOS Real Murcia was to help the club overcome the serious financial situation it was experiencing. The corpus has been analyzed by means of a quantitative content and discourse analysis.

The objectives of this research are to:

- Present regional identities as narrative constructions that provide meaning based on territorial affiliation.
- Defend the social and scientific importance of the analysis of peripheral territorial identities in the context of globalization.
- Conceptualize sport and, particularly, soccer as a symbolic space for the construction and reproduction of identities.
- Carry out a methodological approach that can be extrapolated to the media analysis of other cultural and social identities.
- Analyze the construction of Murcia's regional identity and its main values through the local press.
- Study Real Murcia and its link with Murcia's regional identity.
- Determine the discourses, perceptions, subjects and actions that characterize the construction of Murcian identity in the press based on Real Murcia Football Club.

Two research questions arise in the framework of this work:

- RQ1. *What are the key theoretical and methodological issues that help explain and analyze the relationship between territorial identities, sport and media?*
- RQ2. *What are the discourses, positions, subjects, actions and sources in the media that build up Murcia's regional identity based on its soccer club of reference?*

To respond to these objectives and research questions, this article has been organized as follows: firstly, the fundamental theoretical questions that underpin this study are presented; secondly, the methodology is explained; this is followed by the results and, finally, by the discussion, conclusions and future lines of research.

1.1. Soccer as a symbolic sense-making space

The analysis of the link between sport and national identities – and, consequently, also regional identities – sets up a debate that takes us to the very emergence of sport as an element and “platform for national confrontation,” as Capistegui indicates (2012, p. 23). The manner in which sport has been used historically – and, more particularly, since the end of the nineteenth century – for political or identity purposes gives us an idea of the influence it has had and still has on societies and public space. The popularity of sport in the first third of the twentieth century would extend throughout the subsequent decades, whereby it would acquire a key role “in the formation of a language, myths and narratives linked to the nations” (Quiroga, 2014). Sport would also become a tool for states to transmit national values (Capistegui, 2012). We can see this instrumentalization by Spain through Act 10/1990 of October 15 of Sport, which states that professional and high-level sport is “of interest to the

State [...] because of its function representing Spain in official sporting events or competitions of an international nature.”

In this context of continuous permeability between sport and societies, the current media are configured as the most influential institutions in the construction of social discourse, often using precisely sport and, particularly, soccer for the construction of the idea of nation (Plaza-Martin, 2009) and other group identities. The importance of soccer compared to other current sports is evident if we take into account, precisely, the space and relevance that is given in the media, as we will see later (González-Ramallal, 2008).

In Western countries, and with greater intensity in Spain, soccer has become a privileged window for social observation and analysis, because it is one of today's main socio-economic activities. The 2017 Economic-Financial Report of Professional Football (Liga de Fútbol Profesional, 2018, p. 66) states that the growing importance of the Spanish soccer league in the Spanish economy can be confirmed 'by the accumulated annual growth of the income generated by LaLiga (+ 10.4%) compared to the Spanish Gross Domestic Product (+ 2.3%) over the last six years.'

In relation to its social impact, Llopis (2006, p. 38) points out that the analysis of soccer carried out by sociological research has been as a socio-economic phenomenon that is mainly developed around its "ethno-territorial dimension." That is, soccer has been linked to the concept of ethnicity, in the sense of "awareness of belonging to a group, the reference to a territory and the attribution of meaning to a specific cultural element such as language, religion or folklore" (Llopis, 2006, p. 38).

This intrinsic link between soccer and group identities became especially evident with the foundation of the FIFA (International Federation of Football Association) in 1904. According to Llopis (2006), FIFA stood, from its inception, at the center of the football nationalization process, making sport a fundamental element of international politics. The consequence of this phenomenon materialized years later, in the interwar period, when, as indicated by Hobsbawm (1991, p.152), "sport as a mass spectacle was transformed into the unending succession of gladiatorial contests between persons and teams symbolizing nation-states." At this stage, sport became "an expression of national struggle," something that became evident with the emergence of the FIFA World Cup (1930) and with the vision of the Olympic Games - as early as 1936 - as "occasions for competitive national self-assertion." The sporting spectacle became a nationalizing element even for those "least political or public individuals" who, through it, could identify with the nation (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 152).

Thus, the birth of FIFA and the subsequent emergence of UEFA (1954) as supranational organizations in the world of soccer helped to consolidate the link between soccer and the construction of group identities. Quiroga (2014) indicates that "no other sport has contributed to the consolidation of national identities and the spread of narratives as much as soccer."

Soccer, already understood as the greatest sporting spectacle, gained special relevance in this process of identity construction: "The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people" (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 153). Anderson (1993, p. 23) develops the concept of "imagined community" in his definition of the nation; he considers it "imagined" because "the members of even the smallest nation (...) will never know most of their fellow-members (...) yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" and, at the same time, "community," while "regardless of inequality, (...) the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1993, p. 25).

1.2. Identity in sports journalism

All the factors indicated in the previous section made possible the emergence of a specialized press at the beginning of the twentieth century, and caused an increase in sports coverage in some forms of media. The media were already configured as key tools whereby "popular ideologies could be both standardized, homogenized, and transformed" (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 151). Now, in addition, their ability to configure identities had been enhanced by the rise of social interest in sport.

The sport chronicles became "an additional way of talking about the nation" and acquired a "nationalizing character by attributing national aspects to athletes and teams [...] that reflected the identity of the country they represent" (Quiroga, 2014). This tendency of the media to use sport as a key piece in their nationalizing discourses has not been lost over time – quite the opposite: "The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed an unprecedented growth of both patriotic narratives

(...) and manifestations of nationalist pride related to soccer" (Quiroga, 2018, p. 929). To such an extent that Billig (1998, p. 37) actually talks about the existence of banal nationalism, "a set of ideological beliefs, practices and routines that reproduce the world of nation-states" and that appear daily in the lives of the citizens through the media and sporting events, among other social elements. "The concept of banal nationalism aims to call attention to the forms of nationalism that can be found closest and that are so familiar that they can be taken for granted" (Billig, 1998, p. 43). To the same extent, the existence of a banal regionalism could be pointed out as an indigenous form of banal nationalism (Flor, 2015, p. 3980).

Crolley and Hand (2013) affirm that, at present, considering the increasing socio-economic importance of European soccer, a newspaper cannot survive economically without an extensive soccer coverage. Not only does specialized journalism become indispensable, but also when European newspapers report on soccer, they do so by going far beyond mere information about their technical aspects and acquire a literary tone; a tone that, according to Crolley and Hand (2013, p. 2), materializes in the conversion of players and clubs into characters that "are pitted against each other in moments of crisis and conflict (soccer matches and competitions)." This conflict can be read, on many occasions, as a "story about how Europeans interact with each other" (Crolley and Hand, 2013, p. 2) and about their group, national and regional identities.

According to Hand (2002), when informing about soccer, nationalities are represented by the media perpetuating stereotypes – explicitly and implicitly – about values traditionally attributed to the nation. These values are expressed both through sports vocabulary, and through the symbols of the different teams. Hand himself (2002) recognizes that information on national and cultural identities is increasingly channeled in the press through sports information and, particularly, through soccer information. For this reason, the media discourse on soccer also becomes an indispensable source for the analysis of these identity transmission processes. In this context, "soccer has been occupying spaces previously occupied by other expressions of culture, investigative journalism or political debate, among other cultural manifestations" (Liga de Fútbol Profesional, 2018, p. 64).

For Quiroga (2014), the process of national stereotyping through soccer media coverage is especially evident in the discourse on Spanish soccer by international media or by Catalan and Basque separatist media – "the 'other' nationals." These discourses are articulated either looking to "understand the 'other' national, or as a counterpoint to reaffirm the country stereotypes locally." This statement introduces us to the analysis below about the different media discourses of the same cultural identity – regional, in our case – made through soccer.

1.3. Territoriality and mass media

As with national identities, the construction of regional identity takes place through a long process through which the region acquires a symbolic character. For Tejera-Gaona (1992, p. 48), one of the reasons it has contributed to the development of regional identities within nations has been "the emergence and recognition of diverse political and cultural expressions, which has given rise to new social and differentiated subjects" – social subjects are not understood here as individuals but as communities. In this sense, regional identities arise from the interaction between these communities and materialize in the establishment of social groups – the regions – united through a series of principles that, in addition, differentiate them from other groups. We are entering the field of the construction of identities and of difference: "Self-recognition and the configuration of the 'others'", the regional identity being something changing over time and throughout history (Tejera-Gaona, 1992, p. 52).

For Bourdieu (as cited in Giménez, 1994, p. 168), the region is "an imaginary and imagined community" but, contrary to what happens with the concept of nation, the geographical plane acquires a special relevance in the construction of the regional meanings. The territory becomes more important and so do the "basic social exchanges," so that regional identity is "less 'anonymous' and less 'imagined' than the nation" and, for this reason, also tends to be less "hypostasized" and sacralized," except in cases where there are separatist/independent aspirations (Giménez, 1994, p. 168).

The use of symbols, frequent in the construction of national identities, passes into the background when we refer to the concept of region; nevertheless, we also find certain symbols within the regional identities. Within regional symbols, Giménez (1994) mentions the ones closely linked to the territory

(mountains, valleys, elevations ...). On the other hand, Turner (cited in Giménez, 1994, p. 169) calls "secondary symbols elements such as music, gastronomy and festivities," that is, elements that contribute to the construction of regional meaning without resorting to the "mass symbols" characterizing national identity.

The regional symbols are also manifested through local journalism; and, precisely through it, there is a close link between regional media and regional identity. In Spain, the geographical areas with a more marked regional identity have a more powerful information structure (Fontcuberta, 1997). However, as Giménez mentions (1994, p. 167), the area of the regions "does not necessarily coincide with the political-administrative delimitations," something that is linked to the concepts of globalization or liquid society, introduced by postmodern social theories, announcing a change in the idea of state and nation, and also in national and regional identities (Castelló, 2008).

Thus, in connection with the role of soccer in identity processes, Quiroga (2018, p. 929) states that, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the announced "disappearance of nationalist components in media discourses" due to globalization did not happen; quite the contrary, through soccer, "an unprecedented growth of patriotic narratives' took place."

Although this analysis refers particularly to the concept of national identity, we can understand that the concept of regionality has not been threatened either by the change in the social dynamics resulting from globalizing processes. In the framework of globalization, the celebration of the regional, far from disappearing, has been further strengthened in an attempt to, according to Gwyn (2015, p. 8), "resisting global homogeneity and national hegemony." In the media discourse about the region there is always an intention of "preserving something important" (Gwyn, 2015, p. 8). Thus, Staples (2016) considers, among other factors, identities and belonging to a territory as fundamental elements in the configuration of movements in which a group of people – a community – works together in the face of a specific problem that affects its own community (grassroots movements). As we will see later, SOS Real Murcia can be studied under the criteria that define these movements according to Staples.

Fontcuberta (1997, p. 49) considers that "the regional not competing with the national or the global, but complementing it (...) responds to two conditions of the human being: that of its universality and that of its roots" and that, in this context, the function of the local or regional press is to "reflect the changes in attitudes or thought that occur in it (the region)." The media ultimately become a privileged actor "in the creation and development of a regional conscience" (Fontcuberta, 1997, p. 50). In the local media, however, there is a hierarchy of sources; something that Davis studied (as cited in Kelly, 1997, p. 310) when he mentions that the media pay more attention to the discourse of institutional sources and other high level voices.

According to Russell (2016), regionalism is configured as a key piece of soccer culture that has been at the center of the process of creating rivalries between teams. However, according to the author, this link between regionalism and soccer does not occur in the same way in all countries:

The English game is also noteworthy for lacking the depth of political hinterland encountered in, for example, Spain, where football has long articulated powerful discourses of regionalism (...) Support for Barcelona has often served as proxy for degrees of Catalonian national aspiration, while Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad (...) have been potent symbols of Basque identity (Russell, 2016, p. 18).

Soccer's ability to create identities at local and regional level is also mentioned by Quiroga (2014), who states that "soccer teams have become a source of collective identification and an expression of identities of municipalities and small local communities." In this sense, Edensor (as cited in Gwyn, p. 2015), states that, "despite the facility of sport to provide an occasion for the parading of national antagonisms, it can also stoke ethnic and regional rivalries."

1.4. Regional identity: the case of Real Murcia Football Club

We will be moving in the framework of regional identity from now on, where the relationship between sport and place –the region– has taken different forms, but the most predominant one is a relationship determined by the confrontation with "a bigger, more nebulous other" (frequently, the nation). In the majority of cases, this discourse is constructed with reference to "similar sentiments" and "evoking a mystical past and 'us against them'"; a symbol that is transnational and common to many regions

(Gwyn, 2015, p. 5). In the case of the Murcia region, however, there is a difference with regard to this premise.

When analyzing the specific case of Murcia's regional identity, we find that it is not particularly well developed compared to others in Spain. The analysis of this identity has always been characterized by the "non-existence or weakness of the Murcia's regional identity when compared to the Catalan or the Basque identities." This is something that, at some historic moments, had been synonymous with "backwardness, dependence or submission" in a national context in which "the possession of differentiated sociocultural features, 'nationalist' in particular, ensured the immediate satisfaction by the central power of their material and self-government demands" (Dueñas, 2008, p. 20).

Along these lines, Torregrosa (2015) mentions the importance in the surge of regional identities of factors such as history, insularity or possession (or lack thereof) of an own language. Regions which fit these requirements – such as Catalonia, the Basque Country or the Canary Islands – tend to have a more developed national identity.

Related to the above, we see that the idea of regional conscience, according to López-Aranguren (1983, p. 52) refers to "the perceptions, sentiments and aspirations shared by a group of people: (...) when the conscience makes us inseparable of the notion of an own land, a country-fatherland, the phenomenon is known as 'group regional conscience'." In the Murcia context, Álvarez-Munárriz (2009, p. 312) states that "in the Region of Murcia there is a conscience and a sentiment of being a Murcian (...) Its inhabitants have a similar way of being, thinking and acting founded on a common symbolic system, that is, common belief and values."

Following Gwyn's approach (2015) whereby regional identities tend to be constructed from the discourse of "us against them," the nation-state being "them" or "the others," we find that Murcia's regional identity does not follow this premise. The Murcian identity – except for a minority with independence aspirations – has been constructed in communion with the Spanish national identity: in coexistence. Quiroga (2018, p. 931) calls this phenomenon "duality of identities," stating that it occurred particularly explicitly in Spain during the victories of the Spanish national team in the period 2008-2012, when "the supporters of the national team boasted a combination of Spanish constitutional flags and emblems of their regions (*comunidades autónomas*), in a demonstration of coexisting loyalties." Although this author thought this was a milestone in the case of communities such as Catalonia – traditionally a territory of nationalist confrontation (Quiroga, 2014) –, the truth is that Murcian identity has historically followed this pattern of double patriotism, which has been constructed since its origin as complementary to and coexisting with the Spanish identity. In Autumn 2018, the report from the Centre of Murcia Studies on Public Opinion (CEMOP) confirms this dual identity in the Region of Murcia and considers that the national Spanish identity prevails over the regional one. In fact, 88.9% of respondents feel "very identified" or "quite identified" with Spain, whereas 81.2% feel "very identified" or "quite identified" with the Murcia region (CEMOP, 2018). Taking this situation as a starting point, we can understand the importance of symbolic factors in the configuration, development and preservation of the Murcian regional identity; factors such as the media, as mentioned above. Comparing it with other cases of Spanish regionalisms with a more marked identity, we see that the use of soccer as an instrument of transmission of national identities is also a frequent approach (Quiroga, 2014).

In this context, Real Murcia is configured as the team of reference for the Region of Murcia. In fact, the supporters of this soccer club are usually defined with an adjective derived from the noun Murcia, "Murcianista" –defined by the Spanish Royal Academy dictionary as "the love of or attachment to Murcia." Since its official inception in 1919 (Garre, 2018), the Club would stand out in Murcian football for its sporting results and for its convening power: it is the soccer club in the region that has obtained the best competitive results at national level, and also the one that has stayed more seasons in the Second Division, the second tier of the Spanish League (Ibarra, 2008; Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). In addition, its social influence compared to other regional soccer clubs is evident: in the 2018/19 season the club had 99 supporters' clubs distributed throughout the region (Fepemur, 2018), compared to ten for FC Cartagena (FC Cartagena SAD, 2018), and four for UCAM CF (UCAM, 2018). Furthermore, it has a higher number of club members (10,775) than the second regional team, FC Cartagena, which has 7,100 (Real Murcia CF SAD, 2018; Moya, 2018).

In recent years, Real Murcia has struggled with financial and sporting problems: after being sanctioned for breaching financial ratios by means of "one tier relegation" and fined for its debts to the Tax Revenue Agency in the summer of 2014, the club was relegated to Second Division B, where it

remains (Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). The administrative relegation of Real Murcia generated, in the summer of 2014, a social movement characterized by the concentrations and mobilizations of supporters and Murcia members of society at large (Abou-Kassem, 2014). This was the beginning of five years of managerial changes and financial uncertainty that mobilized both supporters and Murcian society. One of the greatest examples of this social mobilization is the SOS Real Murcia Movement, carried out massively by the supporters themselves between the months of October and December 2018 to rescue the Club after employees were not being paid and money was being diverted to third-party accounts by the then owners of the Club (Gómez, 2018). The main outcome of this movement was the collection, by the club, of 1,270,000 euros (Gómez, 2018) by means of a capital increase in which more than 20,000 people from 94 countries joined as shareholders of Real Murcia (RMU) (Fernández, 2018).

As part of this movement, on November 5, 2018 the PARMU (Real Murcia Support Platform), created by Real Murcia supporters and Murcian citizens, took control of the Club and the former owner Víctor Gálvez left the Club (La Verdad, 2018; Moreno, 2018).

For all these reasons, we can conclude that: i. Real Murcia has become a clear example of the media discourse about the connection between the Murcia regional identity and regional sport; and ii. that the SOS Real Murcia Movement was an important milestone in the relationship between RMU supporters and Murcian society with the Club, chaired for the first time in its history by a grassroots movement.

2. Methodology

To analyze Murcian identity through the best-selling reference newspapers in the Region of Murcia, *La Verdad* and *La Opinión*, we have used a quantitative content analysis methodology in which qualitative parameters (discursive elements) have also been included, so that the explicit and the implicit content of the texts has been examined and revealed (Eiroa and Barranquero, 2017, p. 110).

In order to do this, we designed a record file (included in this section) to cover each of the units of analysis (news items) and to be able to establish those frequencies that allow us to statistically measure the data collected (Piñuel, 2002). The coding has been carried out by only one of the authors of this article and the data has been statistically analyzed using the Excel program.

We have selected those news items about the SOS Real Murcia Movement launched by Real Murcia supporters and citizens of Murcia to help get the soccer club out of the serious financial crisis in which it was immersed. Thus, the period of analysis is between October 10, 2018, when SOS Real Murcia was launched, and December 31, 2018. By selecting this time period, we sought to collect a corpus that includes both the first moments of the Real Murcia supporters protest movement – “Murcianism takes action” (Otón, 2018) – as the news items published during its peak, the month of November 2018, when the capital increase took place. Similarly, we also sought to collect information after the capital increase had been affected in order to study any potential change in the news discourse so we decided to analyze the news until December 31, 2018.

Only publications devoted to the informative journalistic genre (Moran Torres, as cited in Moreno-Espinosa, 2010, p. 99) were included, and profile and opinion items have been left out due to its low presence in regional media. In this way, we have gathered a corpus of 152 news items of which 85 were published in *La Verdad* and 67 in *La Opinión*.

The parameters that have been evaluated in each of the units of analysis are included in the following table.

Table 0: Analysis Record

<i>Code.</i>
<i>Newspaper.</i>
<i>Date.</i>
<i>Headline.</i>
<i>Author.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Professional author.</i> News items written by journalists or communication professionals. • <i>Agency.</i> News items written by news agencies. • <i>Non identifiable.</i> News items with no known authors.

Journalistic genre. As we have already pointed out, in the configuration of the corpus we have chosen to focus exclusively on the genre of informative news. For this reason, we have considered the following categories:

- News.
- Interview.
- Report.
- Chronicle.

Main discourse of the news item. Discourse is understood in the sense proposed by Van Dijk (2003), that is, as the general idea articulating the informative piece. This is the theme that provides global coherence (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 152), the semantic macrostructure derived from (micro) structures of meaning or particular propositions expressed in the text. The following discourses have been distinguished:

- *Real Murcia understood as an identity symbol for the Region of Murcia.* Rescuing Real Murcia means rescuing an icon of Murcia's regional identity. There is a clear identification between Real Murcia / Murcianism and Murcian identity, with specific references to regional identity ('to murcianize', 'all together', 'we', 'people push', 'roots', 'Murcianism', 'collective assistance', 'historical club', 'centenary club', 'Murcian society', etc.).
- *Real Murcia as a soccer club.* The news items of the corpus do not make a direct connection between Real Murcia and the Murcia regional identity. They consider the Real Murcia crisis merely as a soccer club crisis, and not of a sentiment or identity value. Real Murcia, not the Region of Murcia, is in crisis.

Perception that the newspaper has of Murcianism, of the assistance to the Club or of the social movements that arose around it.

- *Positive.* The newspaper is in favor of the movements to rescue the Club.
- *Negative.* The newspaper is against the movements to rescue the Club.
- *Neutral.* The newspaper does not take any kind of position about the movements to rescue the Club.

Main subject. Individual or group starring in the news item, who is interviewed or whose actions or activities are highlighted in the headlines. In this context, after a first analysis of the sample, we have established the following categories:

- *Real Murcia supporters.* Individuals or groups with a high degree of involvement with the team (supporters' clubs, FEPEMUR (Federation of Supporters Clubs), Association of Minority Shareholders..., as well as PARMU (Real Murcia Support Platform) and its different members.
- *Players, technical staff and employees.* Real Murcia players, technical staff and employees of the Club.
- *Real Murcia, understood as a sports entity.* Real Murcia understood as an entity independent from its administrators, similar to the brand value of Real Murcia, that is, when the subject of the news item is the sports entity brand (Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007).
- *Previous owners.* Real Murcia managerial staff between April and November 2018. When referring to this group we will call them 'directors' even though they ceased to be directors on November 5, 2018. The subsequent group of directors, arising from the PARMU, is part of the supporters' collective.
- *Murcian society.* Murcian groups and individuals.
- *Non-Murcian society.* Non-Murcian groups and individuals.
- *Murcian political authorities.*
- *Not applicable.*

Main action. Following a previous analysis, we have established the following actions:

- *Real Murcia supporters rescue the Club.*
- *Directors (previous owners) rescue the Club.*
- *Murcian society rescues the Club.*
- *Players, technical staff or employees rescue the Club.*
- *Supporters encourage protest and confrontation.*
- *Directors (previous owners) encourage protest and confrontation.*
- *Murcian society encourages protest and confrontation.*
- *Players, technical staff or employees encourage protest and confrontation.*
- *Non-Murcian society helps the Club.*
- *Non-Murcian society encourages protest and confrontation.*
- *Murcian society and/or Real Murcia players, technical staff and employees and/or Real Murcia supporters find solutions jointly and collaboratively.*
- *Murcian society and/or Real Murcia players, technical staff and employees and/or Real Murcia supporters and/or previous owners find solutions jointly and collaboratively.*
- *Not applicable.*

Main sources.

- *Real Murcia supporters.*
- *Real Murcia Previous owners.*
- *Real Murcia.* This refers mainly to data provided officially by the Club (shares trading data, advertising, etc.).
- *Murcian society.*
- *Non-Murcian society.*
- *Real Murcia players, technical staff or employees.*
- *Murcian political authorities*
- *Murcian media.* When the Murcian media become an informative source.
- *Non-Murcian media.* When non-Murcian media acts as an information source.
- *Not applicable.*

Source: authors' own.

3. Results

The following sections show the results, organized as per the analysis record file presented in the previous section.

3.1. General features of the corpus

The corpus is made up of news items published by the Murcia regional newspapers *La Verdad* and *La Opinión* between October 10 and December 31, 2018. In total, we have analyzed 152 news items published about the SOS Real Murcia Movement – 149 are pieces of news and three are interviews. Of the information analyzed, 93.4% were written by professional authors, 4% by information agencies and 2.6% were unsigned.

Within the corpus, we find two very different periods, with November 5, 2018 being the turning point. This is the date when the PARMU (Real Murcia Support Platform) accessed the Club's board of directors and the previous board left the Club. Before that date, 46% of the total corpus is published; after the supporters took control of the Club in early November, the interest of regional media increased significantly (54%). This difference between the two periods becomes especially evident when we analyze the main discourses of information below.

3.2. Main discourses in the news items

Analyzing the main discourse of the news items in the corpus, we notice that the regional press connects the Real Murcia rescue with assisting the region, and considers the soccer team as a bulwark of regional identity. Therefore, assisting Real Murcia is seen as assisting, ultimately, Murcians themselves. This happens in 69.7% of cases, while 30.3% of the news items refer to the Real Murcia crisis as the crisis of a soccer team (disregarding Murcian identity) (see Table 1). Indeed, recalling Hand's comments (2002), we find that the information about the SOS Real Murcia Movement in the regional press functions as a channel for regional identity, as Real Murcia is considered a part of Murcia's heritage and belonging to Murcian people. Furthermore, we also see the concept of a "secondary symbol" proposed by Turner (as cited in Giménez, 1994, p. 169) reflected in this data: Real Murcia, as a sports entity, is configured as a "secondary symbol" of the regional identity, as reflected in the corpus analyzed.

However, despite the fact that a large majority of the news items links the Club to Murcia's regional identity, there is a considerable percentage of news items that does not (30.3%). This leads us to the concept of weaker identity compared to other Spanish regional identities as we pointed out in our theoretical framework. In this regard, as we have seen previously, Russell (2016, p. 18) considers that, in other Spanish regions or *comunidades* such as Catalonia or the Basque Country, soccer continuously articulates "discourses of regionalism" something that does not occur to the same extent in the case of Real Murcia. In this way, it would not be too risky to consider that the Real Murcia crisis would have been used with greater impact to express identities if it had happened in other regions with a greater sense of regional identity. In this case, the lower development of a Murcia regional identity with respect to other regional identities in Spain is significant; something Dueñas comments (2008, p. 20), when highlighting "the weakness of a regional identity in comparison to the Catalan or the Basque."

Table 1: Discourses in the news items corpus

Discourse	<i>La Verdad</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	Total
Real Murcia as an identity symbol in the region of Murcia	56 (66%)	50 (75%)	106 (69.7%)
Real Murcia as a soccer club	29 (34%)	17 (25%)	46 (30.3%)
Total	85 (100%)	67 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

However, we do find that there is a clear differentiation in the corpus between the news published before and after November 5, the date on which, as we have said above, the PARMU (Real Murcia Support Platform) takes over the control of the Club. If we establish a temporary division based on this date, we appreciate that approximately 46% of the news items were published between October 10 and November 4, 2018, with 54% between November 5 and December 31. We see that before

November 5 (see Table 1.1), in 51.4% of the news items analyzed Real Murcia is considered as a symbol for regional identity whereas, but according to the news items after this date, the percentage increases to 85.4%. Based on this data, we understand that, from the moment the PARMU team (as representatives of the supporters and Murcian society) get to managerial positions, the discourse built by regional media tends to connect the Club more intensely to regional identity.

Table 1.1: Discourses in the news items: two phases

Discourse	Published 4/11/2018 up to	Published 4/11/2018 after	Total
Real Murcia as an identity symbol in the region of Murcia	36 (51.4%)	70 (85.4%)	106 (69.7%)
Real Murcia as a soccer club	34 (48.6%)	12 (14.6%)	46 (30.3%)
Total	70 (100%)	82 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

3.3 Local media positioning

If, as we have seen in the previous section, the media builds up the soccer club as a symbol for the entire region, the analysis of their positioning reinforces this issue because it shows that the local press is clearly in favor of "Murcianism," which, as we have indicated, implies "love or attachment to Murcia" and which seems to be associated with Real Murcia. Thus, this "Murcianist" sentiment is identified with helping Real Murcia and appears positively constructed in 89.5% of cases, compared with 10.5% of cases in which the press takes a neutral stance. There are no cases (0%) where there is a negative view (see Table 2). This positioning becomes visible both with the inclusion of the names of companies supporting Real Murcia in the news items headlines – in this sense, we cannot ignore the potential advertising power of the media, as Osuna comments (as cited in Ezquerro and Fernández-Sánchez, 2014). For instance, the media themselves urges companies and individuals to join these initiatives to help: "Although the capital increase process ends tonight, companies and individuals interested in taking part are invited to send their registration form (...) and make the payment later" (Otón, 2018).

Thus, we see the –as already mentioned above– connection between regional media and regional identity when we study the sample in relation to the vision of "Murcianism." As Fontcuberta (1997, p. 50) comments, the ultimate function of the regional press is to "reflect the changes in attitudes and thinking" happening in the regions. In this way, we notice in our analysis that the Murcian press is not positioned against Murcianism nor does it offer a negative view of it in any case, but it tends to reflect, precisely, what the concerns of the Murcian society are perceived to be, by means of a positive vision of the connection to Real Murcia. We can appreciate already here an incipient link between Real Murcia, regional identity and the media.

Table 2: Media positioning about helping Real Murcia

Positioning	<i>La Verdad</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	Total
In favor	76 (89.4%)	60 (89.5%)	136 (89.5%)
Against	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Neutral	9 (10.6%)	7 (10.5%)	16 (10.5%)
Total	85 (100%)	67 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

3.4 Main subject of the news items

When we focus on the main subject of each of the news items (see Table 3), we find that amongst the subjects defined previously the "Real Murcia supporters" prevails, with a frequency of 51.3%. In

contrast, 13% of the news items has “Murcian society” as the main subject and 12.5% has “Previous owners.”

Table 3: Main subject of the news items

Main subject	<i>La Verdad</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	Total
Real Murcia supporters	45 (53%)	33 (49.2%)	78 (51.3%)
Real Murcia players and technical staff	5 (5.9%)	3 (4.5%)	8 (5.2%)
Real Murcia Football Club	1 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)
Real Murcia Previous owners	11 (13%)	8 (12%)	19 (12.5%)
Murcian society	10 (11.7%)	10 (15%)	20 (13%)
Non-Murcian society	10 (11.7%)	7 (10.4%)	17 (11%)
Murcian political authorities	2 (2.3%)	6 (9%)	8 (5.2%)
Not applicable	1 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)
Total	85 (100%)	67 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

In this case, we notice that the 64.3% of news items that have as the main subject either the Real Murcia supporters or Murcian society reflects, precisely, the intention of the regional media to focus on the actions carried out by Murcians, disregarding other actors that could also be considered relevant in the situation such as Real Murcia players, technical staff or Club employees. This intention could be interpreted as a consequence of the role of regional media in being a “reflection” of the social concerns of the regions (Fontcuberta, 1997), but also as an obvious purpose to highlight the social movement and the actions carried out by the Murcian society –of which, according to the press and to our analysis of the discourses (as we have seen in Table 1), Real Murcia is heritage.

3.5 Main actions reflected in the news items

With regard to what we have commented so far, we note that, among the predefined actions, the one that appears most frequently in the news items corpus is “Real Murcia supporters” (22%), followed by “Murcian society and Real Murcia supporters look for solutions together” (21.7%) (see Table 4). As a whole, we see that the predominant actions are those that involve the help of both the supporters and Murcian society, either jointly or separately.

Table 4: Main action from the news items

Main action	<i>La Verdad</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	Total
Supporters rescue Real Murcia	20 (23.5%)	14 (21%)	34 (22%)
Directors rescue Real Murcia	4 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	4 (2.6%)
Murcian society rescue Real Murcia	8 (9.4%)	14 (21%)	22 (14.5%)
Players/employees rescue Real Murcia	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Real Murcia supporters encourage protest	9 (10.6%)	4 (6%)	13 (8.5%)
Real Murcia directors encourage protest	8 (9.4%)	8 (12%)	16 (10.5%)
Murcian society encourages protest	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Real Murcia players/employees protest	5 (5.9%)	2 (3%)	7 (4.6%)

Non-Murcian society rescue Real Murcia	9 (10.6%)	5 (7.5%)	14 (9.2%)
Non-Murcian society encourages protest	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Murcian society and/or Real Murcia supporters and/or players/employees find solutions together	19 (22.3%)	14 (21%)	33 (21.7%)
Murcian society and/or Real Murcia supporters and/or players/employees and/or directors find solutions together	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not applicable	3 (3.5%)	6 (9%)	9 (6%)
Total	85 (100%)	67 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

We could even consider sets 1, 3 and 11 of Table 4 (Supporters help Real Murcia; Murcian society helps Real Murcia; and Murcian society and Real Murcia supporters find solutions together) as a whole unit. Thus, we follow Llopis' approach (2013, p. 242) which considers that "one of the elements that has the greatest influence on identification with a soccer team is the geographical connection" and the reflections already mentioned by Staples (2016) on grassroots movements when we consider the Club's rescue by Murcian society and Real Murcia supporters as a whole. In this way, we would find that in 58.5% of news items, the main action is the assistance of Real Murcia supporters and Murcian society (jointly or separately) to Real Murcia.

Again, recalling the data extracted from the analysis of the main subjects of the information (Table 3), we find that the media once again gives priority to Murcian society (and to Real Murcia supporters, also understood to be Murcian society). Thus, the regional press constructs the SOS Real Murcia Movement as a grassroots movement: a movement of social and community organization that occurs "when people work together on a single issue or project (...) yet no permanent organizational structure would be built" (Staples, 2016, p. 3). According to Staples, this venture may be due, among other causes, to territorial or identity reasons, or shared experiences. In the case of the news items analyzed in the corpus on the movement to rescue Real Murcia, it becomes clear that the power in rescuing the team is assigned, by the media discourse, to society, which is catapulted as a salvation force against a board of directors that is blamed for the Club's problems or, at least, for not avoiding them. In the news items corpus, in contrast to the high rate of news items that refer to the rescue by society, only 2% talk about the assistance provided by the (previous) Real Murcia directors.

Regarding Staples' statement (2016) about the absence of permanent organizational structures in the grassroots movements, we note that, in fact, the only organizational structure emerged as a result of the SOS Real Murcia Movement, the PARMU (Real Murcia Support Platform) announced, in April 2019, its aim to dissolve "after refloating Real Murcia" (Conesa, 2019).

Focusing, on the other hand, on the actions connected to confrontation, we have proceeded to consider together the news items that present the SOS Real Murcia Movement as the main action (sets 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 of Table 4) and the ones that present the rescue as the main action (sets 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11 and 12 of Table 4). This grouping gives us a result of 70.4% of news items about the rescue, compared to 23.7% about the confrontation. With this predominance of the positive vision ("assistance") as opposed to conflict ("protest" or "confrontation"), we appreciate, once again, the aim of the media to build a positive discourse on the social movement rescuing Real Murcia as opposed to a discourse of confrontation.

3.6 Sources used by the media

Taking into account Davis's approach (as cited in Kelly, 1997, p. 310) on the distinction of the value of the sources and the greater relevance of the institutional sources, we see in the analysis of our corpus a clear predominance of Real Murcia supporters used as a source (50.6%). The use of institutional sources (the Club and Murcian political authorities) is much lower (in total, 8.6%) than the sources connected to the Real Murcia supporters or to Murcian society (61% in total), as we can see in Table 5. This fact reinforces the idea of the construction, by the media, of the SOS Real Murcia Movement as an essentially social grassroots movement connected to Murcian identity.

Table 5: Sources used as main source

Source	<i>La Verdad</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	Total
Real Murcia supporters	51 (60%)	26 (39%)	77 (50.6%)

Real Murcia previous owners	6 (7%)	2 (3%)	8 (5.2%)
Club data	0 (0%)	6 (9%)	6 (4%)
Murcian society	5 (5.9%)	11 (16.4%)	16 (10.5%)
Non-Murcian society	7 (8.2%)	5 (7.5%)	12 (7.9%)
Real Murcia players, technical staff, employees	4 (4.7%)	3 (4.5%)	7 (4.6%)
Murcian political authorities	1 (1.2%)	6 (9%)	7 (4.6%)
Murcian media	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.5%)	3 (2%)
Non-Murcian media	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.5%)	3 (2%)
Not applicable	7 (8.2%)	6 (9%)	13 (8.5%)
Total	85 (100%)	67 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: authors' own

Again, we find that the media takes a position in the construction of the SOS Real Murcia Movement and does so using the Murcian society and the Real Murcia supporters as the main source of information in most cases (61%). Furthermore, the non-Murcian society is the third most used source (7.9% of the cases), something that leads us to the construction of the Murcia regional identity not as an “us against them” (Gwyn, 2015, p. 5) in relation to the nation, but as a coexisting and complementary identity. In these cases, the “identity duality” of which Quiroga spoke (2018, p. 932) is especially evident through the media that not only does not exclude non-Murcian society as a source (Table 5), nor as the main subject of its news item (Table 3); but, in addition, it gives it special relevance in headlines: “The Federation of Elche Supporters Club joins the #SOSRealMurcia campaign” (Palomar, 2018); “A great response breaking barriers” (Gómez, 2018).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article has been to carry out a media analysis of the construction of the regional identity from the crisis experienced by Real Murcia at the end of 2018. We have presented soccer as a social phenomenon of huge cultural implications due to its capacity to construct and reproduce identities. In addition, as a mass spectacle and because of the wide media coverage it receives, the media analysis serves as a social laboratory to detect some of the issues that characterize identities in the twenty-first century, in a context of globalization that re-emphasizes territoriality (nation, region, local, etc.).

We have responded to this approach through a quantitative content and discourse analysis of the news items published by the two local reference newspapers in Murcia, *La Verdad* and *La Opinión*, during the action of the grassroots movement created between October and December 2018 to take the Club out of the serious crisis it was experiencing. This methodological approach based on the main discourses, the positioning of the publications, the subjects, the actions and the sources used could be extrapolated and could also serve for the media research of other social and cultural identities.

This article has empirically corroborated the approaches of previous research on the ability of local media to reproduce regional identities in soccer events (Russell, 2016; Quiroga, 2014; Gwyn, 2015), a circumstance that also occurs in the case of those weaker regional identities not recognized as historical by the Spanish Constitution, which have been given little research attention. These are “second-class” regional identities inhabiting the symbolic, political and economic margins of the nation-states, but that should not be made invisible because the scientific invisibility of these identities contributes to reproduce inequality and social injustice. We should also remember that research in our field must solve the communicative problems (Hanitzsch, 2013), such as the processes of dominance in the symbolic interaction (García-Jiménez, 2019, p. 114), to make them stop. Hence, this work fills an important gap in the media analysis of peripheral regional identities in sporting events.

As the results show, Real Murcia is constructed as a regional identity symbol (rather than a mere sports club) and in a positive light based on ethical actions (assistance, collaboration, search for solutions, etc.). In addition, in the confluence of Murcian identity with Real Murcia, the leading actors would be, according to the local press, supporters and ordinary citizens alike, society itself, and would be defined by its grassroots character. A society that appropriates the sports institution and mobilizes in solidarity to save one of its most characteristic symbols. A society that is given a voice in the journalistic discourse, making supporters and citizens at large the main source of information consulted by local media, which clearly supports “Murcianist” values.

For all these reasons and since identity is a narrative construct that allows the individuals to recognize themselves, soccer is a symbolic space of sense, a space that encourages and includes those values and discourses with which the community identifies themselves. And this also happens where, as in the Region of Murcia, local identity is weaker than that in historical communities (e.g. Catalonia and the Basque Country). Ultimately, soccer is a powerful narrative of meaning in contexts close to everyday experiences in which regional identity is weaker, a circumstance that makes this sport a privileged territory for identity configuration, despite, or precisely because of, contemporary globalization processes.

5. Future lines of research and limitations of the study

After studying the news items, it would be necessary to analyze how the public would re-signify and reinterpret them, both at the level of mediatizations (media communication) and at the level of hyper-mediatizations (digital communication). This future line of research also marks the main limitations of this

study, namely to have covered exclusively the media texts without including the subjects participating in the communicative process.

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