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# What Role Does Soccer Play In The Globalization Of The Argentine Economy?



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## Abstract

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Soccer is one of the most widespread sports on our planet. For many people, however, it's about more than just sport. This inevitably leads to the fact that the influence of soccer extends beyond the borders of the game. In one of the countries most influenced by soccer, Argentina, one can even go so far as to say that soccer has a major impact on the globalization of the country, and thus also on the economic and political spheres. Through ethnographic studies of interviews and soccer games, the influence of soccer in Argentina on the globalization of the country and its economy will be assessed and explained with concrete examples.

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## 1. Introduction

Soccer is more than just a sport for many people, including in most cases also South America. There, it is culture, politics or even economics (Ridge, 2022), especially in Argentina (Noguera, 1986). One of the most famous countries where soccer is still alive and more than a simple sport. With two world championship titles, three vice world championship titles and 15 wins of the Copa América (South American continental tournament), Argentina is one of the most successful soccer nations in the world (Stroud, 2021). With that, the country has came up world stars such as Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi, who have made Argentina an attractive country far beyond soccer.

But these players as Diego Armando Maradona became absolute world stars not only because of their skills, but also because of their history. Because of what soccer means to them and how they grew up with it. Because, in principle, soccer can be played anywhere, no matter of how poor or rich, all it takes is two goals and a ball. Both Messi and Maradona come from very poor backgrounds and have managed to achieve great wealth despite this.

Messi e.g. grew up in a poor village and started his soccer carrier in the age of 5 at the very small Argentinian soccer club Grandoli FC (Ilango, 2009). Diego Maradona played for Argentinos Juniors until his adulthood before moving to Argentina's most iconic club, Boca Juniors (Britannica I, 2022), alongside River Plate (Britannica II, 2022).

These are the two most famous clubs of the Argentinian capital Buenos Aires (Martin, 2018), which have now also become real tourist attractions and provide a large part of the local population with a revenue queue. (MyGuide Argentina, 2022)

As a result of their importance, the two footballers have become icons of the sport and have embodied for an entire country the rise from Argentina's poor neighborhoods to the globalized world (Smith, 2020). This also led to a boom and a higher level of recognition on the Argentine side. With the players, the country itself also became known and thus, an

increasingly sought-after travel destination, a sought-after political partner, or even an increasingly valued business partner (Alabarces, 2007), (Bensinger 2018).

Thus, soccer has greatly contributed to Argentina's perception as a country at the international level and to a much higher level of globalization. It is not for nothing that soccer is considered one of the current most prominent ways to implement soft power strategies (Connell, 2017).

If you take a look at the streets of Buenos Aires, you will quickly realize that soccer is the dominant theme there. Entire neighborhoods are decorated in the colors of the clubs, countless people go to work in jerseys, and an industry has built up around soccer whose influence now extends far beyond the country's borders (Olga Tribe, 2021).

## 2. Main Part

### 2.1 Boca Juniors & River Plate

Probably the most famous soccer clubs in Argentina and one of the main factors in the globalization of Argentine soccer are Boca Juniors and River Plate. In the case of the two clubs, they are ice-cold rivals whose mutual hatred extends even beyond the borders of soccer.

The story began when both clubs were founded in La Boca, a poor port district of Buenos Aires. A few years later, Boca Juniors moved to the posh district of Palermo, and the clash between the two clubs led to a class struggle between rich and poor that continues to this day (Thomson, 2018), fueled by the ongoing economic crisis in Argentina (COPA90 Stories, 2018).

The climax of this clash is the so-called Superclasico, the clash between the two teams, where no opposing fans are allowed for security reasons, and which has become famous all around the world (COPA90 Stories, 2018). Normally, the two teams already meet 1-2 times a year in their own league, but in 2018, the two teams met in the final of the Copa Libertadores, which led to a whole new level of rioting, action and also attention. Aside from the game being postponed several times, the clashes at this match even resulted in deaths (Winterburn, 2018). Soccer fans from all over the world tuned in for this spectacle (Brookes, 2020). This game can be used to assess the world of soccer in Argentina.

#### 2.1.1 Ethnographic Insight

If you look back at the game, or more precisely the first and second match which were held on the 11.11.2018 and on the 09.12.2018, and analyze the behavior and interaction of the fans, players and visitors, you quickly realize that this game was something very special and that it was more than just soccer. (COPA90 Stories, 2018), (Jwasc92Futbol, 2021, Source 1 & 2).

Even before the two games, the whole stadium were already completely out of control and were already throwing paint bombs and firework around, which led to a lot of stoppages during the game. At times, visibility was simply too poor due to all the smoke and they had to wait for it to dissipate. From the first to the last minute, the two games were overshadowed by a deafening screaming of the fans, which shows the intensity of the game.

Every time a person was fouled, a loud murmur went through the stadium and heated up the atmosphere more and more. And the players also took it much more personally than other games. One can notice how they slowly heated up and fouled each other more and more violently and quickly. In the course of the first and second match, there were a total of 13 yellow cards and one yellow/red cards. The players seemed to really stand up for their team, and thus also for their district and their fans.

Also in the case of the 8 goals scored in the course of the 2 games, one can see how much both the players and the fans were happy about the goals. They were completely out of their minds, even more than in normal cases. The fans even went so far as to jump on the fences set up in the stadiums, which are quite high, when their teams scored. Tears flew with every goal, the players on the bench jumped onto the field and celebrated together with the active players.

It's easy to see the deep bond between fans and players in Argentina. The fans respect the players, and vice versa. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that during the game the players often communicate with the fans, which is not necessarily common in soccer. In addition, the stadium of Boca Juniors, which is located directly in a poor neighborhood, is built not in width but height, which allows fans to be located only a few meters away from the players (SportMob, 2022).

In spite of this, before and during the games, when fans rioted against each other, there were serious injuries, which also led to deaths. And even after the game was over, these clashes and riots continued. According to locals, it is not safe during such a game day in a relatively dangerous city. Especially not if you wear the team's jersey after or before the game (Kicker, 2022). However, sadly, these are often the games that achieve international notoriety.

### 2.1.2 International Scope

Because this drama led to the game gaining international notoriety and probably going down in history as one of the most critical soccer games of all time. However, this international fame also ensures that people around the world pay to stream the game, buy jerseys of the players, or even just become aware of Argentina that way, which may well lead to a trip or the like later on.

Also quite exciting is what happens to the whole city of Buenos Aires in such a situation. On match day, almost all the people in the streets wear jerseys. Weddings and birthdays are postponed, and the whole city is focused on the upcoming game (DW, 2022). This shows the scale and reach that Argentine soccer has, at least within the country's own borders.

But the two clubs are now known worldwide because of their rivalry and also greats like Maradona, who played for Boca Juniors at the beginning and end of his career. This leads to the fact that the two clubs have become a tourist attraction. Guided tours are offered, every tourist trip stops once at the stadiums, and not to mention all the jersey sales and also admissions to the stadium. (WelcomeArgentina, 2022)

This leads to the fact that a large part of the population living in Buenos Aires is directly or indirectly involved in the business of the clubs. For many people, it's the only possibility to make a living. Only because international tourists travel to Argentina, also because of the soccer, the players, and what is behind it, and spend their money.

Moreover, soccer clubs could be called businesses these days anyway. In the case of the two clubs, this means not only that they can demand more transfer fees for their players with an ever-increasing reach and international recognition. After all, this also leads to benefits for the entire neighborhood and the population, e.g. also in form of tax money. Furthermore it also means that these companies are one of the main employers in Buenos Aires, whether directly or indirectly.

## 2.2 Maradona

As already mentioned, Maradona is probably one of the most famous representatives of Argentine soccer and certainly a celebrated national hero in his own country, if not more (Lopez-Menchero, 2021).

There are not many interviews from the soccer legend, also due to the time and Maradona's character. But in one of the few interviews of him, he explained his connection around soccer, the city, and the importance for the population.

### 2.2.1 Etnrographic Insight

In the documentary "The life of Argentine footballer Diego Armando Maradona" (MLS, 2022), Maradona describes the poverty conditions that prevailed in Argentina and in his family (0:30-0:50), which of course also led to him doing a lot of nonsense in his youth (3:50-4:10).

Like probably many other children from his background, he wished to become a doctor, to pursue a seasoned profession (8:30-8:40). It quickly becomes clear how famous Maradona

was in his playing days in Argentina and also the world. Many revered him like a god (9:00-9:50).

When he moved to Napoli in Italy during his time, he was welcomed and celebrated by virtually the entire city in the stadium, which also radiates his international recognition (10:0-10:35). He also talks about his connection to his fans and the jersey he wore, as this really meant being a part of the city and its people for him (12:10-12:20).

Many scenes also show his love for his homeland and especially the poor neighborhood of La Boca, but also for Argentina itself (13:45-15:00). This shows the close ties that Maradona and presumably other Argentines have with their country and their nation in the course of soccer. In his last speech on his playing time, he revealed and showed once again the close connection he has with soccer, but at the same time also with the local people and from his homeland, which he also describes as his family (15:00-17:20).

This shows once again that Argentine soccer and Argentine culture can hardly be separated from each other, with Maradona as maybe the most famous face of Argentine soccer.

## 2.2.2 International Scope

But with the rise of Maradona, the international eye naturally turned not only to the great footballer, but also to the country he came from. The best example of this is the 1986 World Cup, in which Maradona scored the most famous goal of history with his hand and thus shot Argentina to victory, who ultimately went on to win the World Cup. He denied this until 2005 (Stern, 2005), which shows the international interest for the Argentinian soccer.

Something like winning a World Cup, which in this case can definitely be attributed to Maradona, brings great international prestige. Both for Maradona and Argentina. Worldwide jersey sales, guest appearances, live shows, documentaries, etc. The world wanted to know more about the famous soccer star from the poor areas of Argentina and about his home country.

Thus, Maradona and his successes have probably also led to a not inconsiderable number of tourist trips and excursions. There are numerous tourist attractions that are based on it, and even today fill entire stadiums (WelcomeArgentina, 2022). Accordingly, Maradona has been instrumental in making Argentina known around the world, and probably in linking it up.

Despite all the wrongdoings and the very controversial last years of his life, he was an icon for the Argentine people and everyone loved him (Heath & Raszewski). But this was not only true for Argentina. Because on the date of the death of Diego Amando Maradona, the 25/11/2020, the whole world was grieving (Longman, 2020). This shows once again the international reach that Maradona, on the one hand, and soccer in general, on the other hand, bring with them (Mineo, 2020).

## 2.3 Commercialization and its global impact

So what exactly do soccer greats like Maradona, the rivalry between River Plate and Boca Juniors, or even Argentine soccer in general mean for the globalization of the country and its economy? Not to mention the local influence of soccer on the entire city life, the local economy, and also on the culture.

Soccer clubs like these, or even players like Maradona, inevitably lead to a degree of globalization due to the strong worldwide commercialization of soccer. Just the fact that games are now broadcasted worldwide and teams are made up of completely international players. Things like this provide a kind of advertising space for the country these players come from or represent. How that space is ultimately used is up to the country itself.

Qatar, for example, uses soccer as soft power because of its international influence and high degree of globalization (Brannagan & Guilianotti, 2008). Soft power is described as an exercise of power based on cultural attractiveness, ideologies, and also by means of international institutions, (Hüttmann, 2022) like for example in the case of soccer, the FIFA. Qatar pays a rather high monetary price for this degree of recognition and tries to establish many new economic relations, political relations and also military relations through this (Brannagan & Guilianotti, 2015). It can be assumed that the same thing happened in the case of the Argentine government, as it was also in a politically difficult point at the time of Maradona's playing days, which naturally offered a rapprochement with other countries in the course of soccer (Edwards, 2019).

This has led in some small way to an improvement in the standard of living of the people, at least in the regions directly affected by soccer, as well as to an ultimate source of income, both domestically and internationally. Be it through ticket and jersey sales, broadcasting rights, or even relationships that have arisen only over or through the success and intensity of Argentine soccer.

Argentine soccer is therefore strongly anchored in the culture of Argentina, and also South America. This is not only due to the country's success on the international stage in this sport, but also due to the extent of soccer in Argentina, which can hardly be found in any other place in the world.



### 3. Conclusion

So it's fair to say, that the Argentine economy and the Argentine soccer are strongly linked. On the one hand, soccer forms one of the largest direct and indirect sources of revenue for the country. On the other hand, however, by far the largest and most important industry in Argentina is massively promoted by soccer, the tourism. People from all over the world travel to the country just because of names like Maradona or Messi. This indirect influence on tourism and global awareness cannot be overlooked under any circumstances.

Soccer, as the international examples of Qatar show, also brings promising results, be it in political, economic, or cultural spheres. In the case of Argentina and its long-lasting economic crisis, it is especially important to have secure money from abroad that is not linked to the rather unstable domestic currency (BBC, 2019). This is the only way to carry out long-term projects with international partnerships.

Soccer in Argentina is therefore more than just a sport. It is linked to the dreams and aspirations of the population and symbolizes the possibility of becoming anything, no matter from what background, with what means, or under what conditions.

Accordingly, due to the factors mentioned in this work, soccer has undeniably had a great influence on the globalization of Argentina. The only problem with a further globalization might be, that soccer in Argentina is the way it is because, compared to other places in the world, it is perhaps not yet too commercialized and is really still part of the culture and their people. But that's exactly what carries Argentine soccer to the world and carries away soccer fans all over the world.

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