

No longer sidelined? Football fandom, belonging and the boundaries of Europe

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In times of 'polycrisis', numerous challenges threaten unity and cohesion on the European continent. European identities can play an important part in navigating these challenges and fostering solidarity. One key to understanding European identities is analysing the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, as constructions of belonging form an essential component of individual and collective identities. Football fandom, a popular and highly Europeanised cultural phenomenon, has the potential to shape identities and constructions of belonging to Europe. Given the diverse participation in European football, we posit that the identities of football fans are more inclusive and diverse than those of non-fans. Our analysis indicates that football fans are more likely to count countries outside of what is commonly associated with Europe as European. This points to a distinct effect of cultural integration through football and underscores the role football plays in fostering a sense of unity and shared identity across the continent. The findings highlight the importance of leveraging cultural avenues to strengthen European cohesion and unity in times of uncertainty.

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