

## **ANALYSIS OF THE SPATIAL DIFFUSION PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN CHILE**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The football has been studied like an element that structures the societies and the territories. Under this logic, it is possible to combine the concepts of football and spatial diffusion, this associated to the adoption of this sport in the cities, its relationship with the urban hierarchy and the socio-economic processes involved in the birth of the activity.

Thus, the spatial distribution of professional football does not escape to the concentration of population that lives in urban centers and the capacity of these for sustains the activity (RAVENEL, 1998). In effect, the importance of the teams would be associated to their capacity to have a human capital for their administration, spectators and economic volume of all elements that may be implied in a sport activity (MEYSSONNIER Y MINCHENEAU, 2013). This fact causes that football teams are an excellent indicator of the hierarchy that have the cities in the urban system, due to the correlation between that hierarchy and the importance of the teams.

Therefore, there will be different processes and factors involved directly in the rise of the activity in different cities and where their spatial diffusion becomes relevant, indentifying and understanding how a phenomenon spreads in the environment, involving space and time variables (PICKENHAYN, 2001).

### **2. METHOD**

The methodology of this research was developed in three stages. First, a delimitation of the professional football clubs in Chile. Second, an analysis of the phases of spatial diffusion process with the support of two graphics. The first established the years (range 10) and the cumulative frequency (%) of football teams and the Chilean cities that had adopted the professional football in its 81 years of existence. A second figure was made to understand the variable time and the distance (in kilometers, from the emitting source of this innovation). Third, about the hierarchical diffusion, was elaborated a chart that expresses the relationship between the size of population in cities and the year that the professional football was adopted in each of them.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Among the results it was found that from 1933 to 1953 six cities adopted professional football, which corresponds to 16.2% of the total, so these are considered "early adopters", at the start of the process of spatial diffusion. The first town that joined the professionalism, besides the Great Santiago (emission source) was the Great Valparaiso (at 115.95 km from diffuser center) and where the activity arrived with English people in 1937. Subsequently the industrialization process, fostered by the government since 1939, generated a growth that manifested itself in the modernization and increase of transportation, which is considered a key element in order to expand the professional football from Santiago and to cover almost the entire national territory (SANTA CRUZ, 1991).

Since 1953, the consolidation of the Second Division (established in 1952) will allow an important incorporation of teams from the cities of Rancagua, Talca, Curico, Los Andes and other clubs located in the capital city. In 1956, Deportes La Serena located in the city of the same name, will be one of the first clubs farthest from the emission source (470 km approx.) to join professional football.

Another aspect to highlight corresponds to how the most distant cities from the emitting source have joined the football activity much later, which may be explained mainly by the geographical distance from the emission source. However, although the distance played a fundamental role in the distribution pattern of this sport, another factor also was the lack of "fans" and social support necessary for sustain the activity. This is observed in the fact that around 1970 the professional football was displayed between the cities of La Serena and Chillan. But it is during this period that it was observed a "relocation" of football clubs located in Santiago to the provinces, like it was the case of Green Cross to the city of Temuco and Iberia to Los Angeles (1969).

A parallel aspect to this process it was the role of industrial corporations. Indeed, Huachipato (Concepcion) had the patronage and financial support of the *Compañía de Acero del Pacífico* (CAP). Also the *Corporación Nacional del Cobre de Chile* (CODELCO) had a significant role in promoting the foundation of the Club Cobreloa in 1977 (Calama) and Cobresal in 1979 (Salvador). Other industries that supported the creation of teams are *Bata* (Deportes Melipilla), *Super Pollo* (Super Lo Miranda), and the *Empresa Portuaria de Chile* (EMPORCHI), encouraging the birth of Deportes Arica and Deportes Antofagasta.

Another interesting aspect was the regionalization process lived in the country by 1974, which will set the interest of certain regions for having professional football as well as a strategy to incorporate the national football to the south of Chile, which at that time was absent. Thus, the cities of Puerto Montt, Valdivia and Osorno, provincial capitals of Los Lagos region, were "invited" by the Central Football Association (CFA) to professional football, due to the "request" by the military dictatorship, through of the *Dirección General de Deportes y Recreación* (DIGEDER) (SANTA CRUZ, 1991; PUMARINO, 2015).

Another noteworthy aspect was that not necessarily the cities with the largest populations and administrative and functional importance in the urban system caught first the activity. This feature is important, because at the beginning the proximity seems to have played a key role in the spatial diffusion of professional football because at first arrived to Santiago, Valparaiso, Los Andes, Rancagua and Quillota. But in terms of consolidation and persistence, the population size was determinant. Also, because of the late consolidation of the Chilean urban system<sup>1</sup>, the cities when captured the activity not necessarily had an important population (with the exception of Santiago, Valparaiso, Concepción and Valdivia, who exceeded the 100,000 hab.).

By comparing the cities that were initially rejected to being part of professional football and the cities that the CFA prompted to join the professionalism, it appears that the main argument for the refusal was the geographical remoteness from Santiago (where come most of participants). This is contrary to the case of the southern cities, whose invitation had like objective to expand the geographical limit of professional football in Chile. This shows that over the years, the CFA gave less importance to the distance factor and began considering the infrastructure component, among others.

This underlines two key aspects of how the diffusion process was developed. On the one hand there were institutional barriers that prevented the spread, associated with discretionary logic. In fact, the football activity, unlike others innovations, tended to be confronted to transmission channels with strong barriers, where particular interests overcame the functional aspects of urban centers. This situation did occur until 1981, when it began the promotion mechanism from amateur football to professionalism, so this institution lost its power since that for "sport merit" a team may enter to the professionalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Only in 1914 a train between Santiago and Puerto Montt was articulated. The region of La Araucanía was "annexed" to the national territory by 1880.

On the other hand, in contrast to the first aspect, a second element is determinant: the geographical distance. This, in some way, meets the law that the greater is that distance from the emission source, the lower will be the catchment capacity. This situation tended to be attenuated with transportation improvements, reduced costs, accessibility and communication, in addition to the disappearance of the institutional barriers. However, the adoption curve was quite established and growing in time, the above expressed mainly by the proximity in that occurred the catchment in a first stage, for later the farthest places be incorporated, which would rule out the hierarchy as an important element in the adoption of the innovation.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Professional football in Chile has been diffused following a pattern of distance and proximity to the emitting source, showed in the institutional power of the CFA, the body that decided which teams (cities) entered professional football until the early eighties.

It is noteworthy that the influence of population size on the spatial diffusion of professional football in Chile is ruled out, since not necessarily the most populated cities and with higher administrative role in the urban system adopted first the activity. The CFA did not considered the functional aspects of the urban centers that postulated to professionalism. However, it is undeniable the role played by the factor population of the cities at the time of capture and make lasting the activity, since this results in a greater number of fans and increased social support that sustain the arrival of professional football to a particular city.