

# Soccer in the integration and assimilation processes of Amerindian peoples

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## ABSTRACT

Has soccer favoured the integration processes of Amerindian peoples in the different national societies to which they belong, or has it rather permitted their cultural assimilation? Based on this general question, four different scenes are analysed: the ethnic through the Yanomami case; the regional with the populations of the Napo river basin; the national with the Pan-indigenous Games; and the international one with the America's Cup of the Indigenous Peoples. The methodology used for data production combines ethnographic work with documentaries, distributed in different places and periods of time. Among the conclusions, soccer has become one of the symbols of the new ages of the indigenous world, instrumentalized in different ways and used to expand and reinforce social links. By the moment, its practice is not directly denoting the abandonment of the cultural being of these towns.

**Keywords:** Soccer; Colonization; Indigenous; Identity; Cultural development.

### Cite this article as:

Acuña-Delgado, A., & Acuña-Gómez, G. (2022). Soccer in the integration and assimilation processes of Amerindian peoples. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 17(3), 528-539. <https://doi.org/10.14198/jhse.2022.173.05>

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Submitted for publication August 29, 2020.

Accepted for publication October 16, 2020.

Published July 01, 2022 (*in press* November 02, 2020).

JOURNAL OF HUMAN SPORT & EXERCISE ISSN 1988-5202.

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doi:10.14198/jhse.2022.173.05

## INTRODUCTION

Soccer, throughout our most recent history, has evolved to become the most universalized sport of all those practiced on the planet. As Dunning (2009: 13) indicates, either directly or witnessed as a spectator, it is an activity practiced by "*people from all over the world, regardless of their race, sex, creed or colour.*" It is a cooperative-competitive sport with ball, easy to understand, cheap to practice, whose dynamics involve the game of attack and defence, and the combination of strength and endurance with individual-collective technique and tactics. Attractive and popular, in view of the success achieved with its enormous expansion. But beyond its definition as a physical activity, soccer has become a mass phenomenon (Vázquez Montalbán, 2005), whose importance transcends the sporting sphere to influence the social, political and economic structure and dynamics of peoples. The mass media, of course, have played a decisive role in its universal diffusion to make it one of the great exponents of globalization.

Bromberger (2007) said that soccer can be properly considered as a "*total social fact*", since it affects in a greater or lesser degree to all social sectors, and connects with the different levels of culture; as well as the ritual par excellence in today's modern society, in which the community mobilizes and dramatizes its social and symbolic resources. González Ponce de León (2009) defines professional soccer as a recreational ritual framed in free time. Ferreiro (2003: 58) understands it as a complex ritual that includes two sub-processes: the one that occurs within the pitch, and the one that occurs in the stands and among the spectators. Sport in general and soccer in particular, constitutes one of the most widespread socialization mechanisms in the world today. Dávila & Londoño (2003: 127) point out that soccer offers the public the opportunity and ability to share, sympathize, judge or attend to a playful, aesthetic representation; in few terms, a game to identify with. It constitutes a means that involves processes of both: identification and distinction, integration and separation. The fast popularization of soccer, Bromberger (2007: 124) thinks, has largely depended on the ability of this team sport to symbolize, through its competitions, antagonisms and collective, local, regional and national identities. Appears therefore, a substantive new form of confrontation with the symbolic "*enemy*". In the same line, Fábregas (2001) points out that it comes to fulfil the roles that religion or politics previously fulfilled, beyond the explanations that relate it to "*the opium of the people*" or the "*foolishness of the masses*":

*"[...] Soccer leads us a better understanding of the characteristics of contemporary capitalism, of contradictions that make up globality and the validity of the local customs, [...] the consolidation of soccer as a universal phenomenon is due to its ability to generate a system of symbols that support the formation of communities, the passage from identity to identification and the integration of diversity."* (Fabregas, 2006: 158).

Of course, in contrast to the integrative vision of football is the disintegrator. Violence and racism have a presence in the stands and also penetrates their dynamics, as part of the social phenomenon. As a counterweight, plenty values education campaigns and programs are implemented, in order to promote, not only fair play within the game, but also avoid inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of fanatic fans. (Cruz Feliu et al, 2001; Barrero, 2007; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Carriedo, Cecchini & González, 2018, 2019).

With its strengths and weaknesses, its universalization through the media has come to create a common language of symbols, with which to dialogue and show awareness of what is happening in the world, at least in soccer topics. It is common for a taxi driver in Lima or Bangkok to ask the Spanish tourist about Real Madrid or Barça, in order to start a conversation or simply to generate proximity. Phenomenon that reaches the most remote places, and that has been regularly used by different agents as a vehicle of approach and interaction with the interlocutors to achieve their purposes. The Church and the government have used soccer

as an element of rapprochement and relaxation that favours evangelizing or developmental work in the indigenous territories where they operate. With the intention of facilitating the process of integration into the national society, in the different countries of the Amazon, soccer has been introduced among indigenous peoples through missionaries, creoles and the media. Generally, its learning and practice has propitiated a more receptive attitude among the natives with those who come from outside, and, consequently, the colonization of new lands has been facilitated. However, what to say about the people who originally occupied them: has soccer favoured the integration processes of Amerindian peoples in the different national societies to which they belong, or has it rather favoured their cultural assimilation? Answering this question will be the main purpose of this work, with football as the central axis of the object of study, we will break down the subjects into four different areas, from less to more extension, that allow us to cover a wide range of possibilities.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Taking into account that soccer, as far as we know about its history and evolution, constitutes a space for socialization (structure / structuring, Guiddens, 2001) in which the construction of a shared identity around a team is reinforced, as well as what it represents, linked to a territory and its people. With the focus on four specific cases, this work aims to answer in a more concrete way the following research questions: How is it possible to reinterpret the football learned by an Amerindian people in a state of semi-isolation, within their community and intercommunity scope? What role does soccer play as a vehicle for regional communication and interaction in peripheral places of the national territory? To what extent does soccer reinforce or undermine the identity of indigenous peoples and their dialogue with the national state? To what extent is soccer instrumentalized to make the existence of indigenous peoples visible and their intention to integrate into the international sphere?.

Since these questions answer to four different scenarios (ethnic, regional, national and international), the methodology used for the production of data has been in some cases ethnographic and in others documentary. The ethnic scope to which the first question responds will be illustrated through the Yanomami case, an Amerindian people of the Alto Orinoco (Venezuela and Brazil), with whom field work was carried out for six months in three successive stays between 2004 and 2006. For the regional level, we will take into account the indigenous peoples residing in the Lower Napo basin (Ecuador), generically known as "*naporunas*" (Napo people), with a majority Quichua. Ethnographic field work was carried out with them for two months in 2017. We will consider it at the national level through the Pan-Indigenous Games that are regularly celebrated in different Latin American countries, in which a good number of representatives meet. In this case, we observe it through the abundant documentation published by different written and visual media. For the international sphere, we recorded the case of the America's Cup of Indigenous Peoples, performed in 2017 in Santiago de Chile for the first time. This case, like the previous one, we follow and document through the numerous news and reports found especially on the internet.

The ethnographic fieldwork in the first two cases mentioned was carried out with the use of systematic and controlled observation, and intensive and semi-structured interviews, as the main data production techniques. The observation was at times participant and at others non-participant. For its development, a guide with analytical categories was used, in relation to the object of study, and the results were regularly recorded chronologically in a diary for later analysis. Regarding to the interviews, a battery of open questions was used, which allowed dialogue and argumentation, always adjusted to the profile of the person questioned; the conversations were recorded with the authorization of each informant in digital format, to later be

transcribed and analysed. With both resources, relevant and first-hand information was obtained, which allowed us to contrast the behaviours and speeches of the people.

The documentary technique through the internet was applied in the remaining two cases, with satisfactory results. Although the scientific articles found were scarce, the press news, personal statements and journalistic reports were abundant, to form an idea of the organization, development, size of each event, as well as the implications and consequences derived from them, which was ultimately what it was all about.

Methodology, therefore, distributed in space and time, applied in different research works, whose common denominator is the interest in soccer as object of study. We connect the results of each work here to answer the questions exposed, which approach scenarios of different amplitude. All of them together, suggest the panorama of soccer in the Amerindian peoples, and the role it plays in integration processes and assimilation in which they are immersed.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### ***Ethnic area: Yanomamis of the Alto Orinoco***

Learned through contact with Catholic and Evangelical missionaries, mestizo and creole population, and also from television, even with the significant degree of isolation that mark their lives, soccer today is very present among Yanomami, from the community sphere of daily life to the intercommunity (with the organization of championships). To illustrate this double scope, we will take as an example what was observed in January 2006, in the *shapono* (community) of Mabetiteri, located in Alto Ocamo, a tributary of the Orinoco (Amazonas State, Venezuela), and in the Kukurital championship, a riverine community from the Alto Orinoco.

The Yanomami's reinterpretation of football must be understood bearing in mind the role that context plays. In this sense, it is important to appreciate the intensity of social life (Lizot, 1976) and the violent environment in which they develop (Chagnon, 1968). Life in the *shapono* implies a close inter-family relationship, where collaboration is close. In the monotony of a way of life with a high degree of social relationship, soccer as a game or competitive sport is adopted by the Yanomami as a fun form of entertainment, practiced daily and in parallel with *hekuramou* (shamanic ritual); and it is also used as a reason for an intercommunity meeting to try to be together for a few days and compete. So, it is celebrated in a very different way to how it is done in the *reahu* (festive celebration, generally intercommunity), although with certain analogies, which make soccer more interesting. However, intense sociability is combined with actions of extreme violence. The local competition habits, with bloody situations, has been and continues to be very familiar to the Yanomami. Therefore, an environment conducive to the acquisition of a practice came from outside that facilitates collective catharsis, competition between two sides, although this time in a non-violent key. Soccer, among the Yanomami, has not become a substitute for war, as the ethologist Desmond Morris (1983) used to affirm on the world stage, but the social implications and consequences it has for this people are very remarkable. The recreational sports competitions between teams, which characterizes it, fits into the Yanomami alliances and rivalries scheme, which causes continuous processes of fusion and fission among the *shaponos*.

However, football is not only an adopted cultural loan, but also adapted to the Yanomami idiosyncrasy, nativized by them to make it understandable, attractive and culturally useful. A practice acquired from the outside that is attractive and makes sense because it connects with elements of the tradition itself, and specifically with the ritual fight. At the community level in places less exposed to the outside environment, such as Mabetiteri, the applied logic is that everyone wins in the game as far as they score goals, just the same as everyone wins with the ritual practice of fighting. In the fight the important thing is to assume the

challenge of the rival, to give and receive blows in a regular way and show to be *waittheri* (brave). In football, the important thing is to have a fun time, score and concede goals (just as blows are given and received in the other scenario) and finish with the satisfaction of what has been obtained. In Mabetiteri, after the match, no one spoke of a loss when the players of each team talked about the goals they have scored. So, for example, if a match had remained 6 to 4, it was interpreted that some won 6 goals and the other 4 goals, without being losers. In a spontaneous and non-less surprising way, this brave people subtracts the playful and humanistic essence, the one that makes us all win, in a typical global practice surrounded by interests and increasingly installed in the idea of winning, whatever it costs. / It inevitably makes one think which people should be named with the attribute of “*fierce*” (Chagnon, 1968), at least in this area.

Regarding to the championships carried out at the intercommunity level, as happened in Kukurital, the associations and transferences of the traditional *reahu* are of interest to understand the logic of the action. In both cases, the host community that organizes the event sets the date and invites other communities to attend the meeting. In both cases there is also a competition starring by men that generates expectation: verbal and physical in the *reahu*, sportive in soccer. This competition is developed by couples, people in the *reahu* and teams in the soccer, representing communities. The normative application is agreed between the rivals: in the fighting combats the three alternative blows are respected and in football the established rules of the game. There is no place for surrender in any of them, once you start you have to finish, even the series of blows or the match time. In both, they seek to reaffirm themselves in some sense: as a *waittheri* in the fight and as a good team in soccer. Analogies that ultimately favours its acceptance. The scoring system to determine the final winner, on the other side, is also very significant. In the championship observed in Kukurital, of the five registered teams, each one played two matches by lottery, counting as points the number of goals scored by each team and not the matches won. In that way, Kukurital turned out to be the first classified with 7 points (7 goals) and Tumba the last with 3 points (3 goals). But it happened that Ocamo played his first game, and having not paid the registration fee (45,000 Bs., about \$ 15) was disqualified, an incident that provoked Chiwire's protest when they did not count the four goals scored in that game; This circumstance motivated the Committee to accept his claim and agree that the first three classifieds would finally play against each other to decide the winner of the trophy: Kukurital played first with Chiwire. The home team scored more goals, so they then played (without rest) with Lechosa, without considering the overexertion involved in playing two games of 90 minutes in a row. Anyway, Kukurital also scored more goals and ended up winning the trophy. A scoring and pairing system that constitutes a good indicator of the spirit of the rule, by favouring attacking soccer, counting the amount of goals (all added at the end), over even winning or losing punctually.

Once again, the warrior and combative character of this people is reflected in a permanent disposition to always go forward, on the offensive, in their way of understanding soccer. As well as the fact of being always alert and prepared for combat, which is often surprising, we can associate it with the circumstance of not considering it disadvantageous to play several matches in a row, facing rivals who are fresh. Overload effort is not an excuse within a context in which to maintain life, requires being always prepared to confront difficulties and threats at any time, often unexpected.

Fun is an ever-present feature in Yanomami's experience of playing soccer, but in games, whether or not a trophy is at stake, they used to practice with enthusiasm and intensity; they run fast, fight for the ball, work as hard as they can and they do not give up their efforts until get the desired goal. They enjoy the activity, but far from playing it as a joke, they become competitive adversaries who focus all their attention and energy on the role to fulfil a high degree of self-demand.

However, it is striking that, although they always aspire to win, even goals or trophies, as an objective of the competition, achieved or not is assumed normally: without showing exultation and even less arrogance if it is achieved, nor depressed if it has not been possible. The competition of the game has these two possibilities and sometimes you win and sometimes you don't. Simple reasoning used that is summarized in competing and accepting the results with sportsmanship. An attitude that should not be surprising if it weren't because the much-mentioned sportsmanship is very often absent from the society that speaks most about it.

### ***Regional scope: Inhabitants of the Napo River***

In the Napo river basin, that runs between Ecuador and Peru, we can find a series of transboundary continuities and discontinuities<sup>1</sup> in relation to the local development of riverine populations. In relation to continuities, we could include as constants: the waterway as the only route of penetration in the region, outside the air; the generosity and solidarity of the locals; the lack of consideration of national policies and governments by the people of Napo; the subsistence economy of indigenous peoples, and the extractive capitalist model imposed by the developmental policies of national states<sup>2</sup> (Wilson & Bayón, 2017).

From the morphological point of view, the appearance of the towns or communities is adjusted to the orography of the available land, and therefore there are differences in their arrangement. The church (generally Catholic, and lately also Evangelical) and the school<sup>3</sup> are very present, but what we invariably find as constant in all towns, regardless of their size, is the soccer pitch, usually located in a central and visible place. The pitch also adjusted to the orographic conditions and available terrain, with different dimensions, with more or less grass or earth, better or worse delimited, with fixed wooden or metal goals, or sometimes mobile sticks or stones. With different states of conservation, depending if it is given more or less use, but field, in short, that is not lacking in any community in the Napo basin, both Ecuadorian and Peruvian, forming part of the local landscape.

Focusing attention on the Peruvian side, which belongs to the Napo district (Maynas province and Loreto department, a multi-ethnic region<sup>4</sup>, although with a predominance of quichuas and mestizos), the soccer field focuses the practice of a good part of the population, especially children and youth, both male and female, with expectation of all in special meetings. As we had the opportunity to verify in bigger towns such as Mazán, Santa Clotilde, Angoteros or Cabo Pantoja, and minors such as Vencedores, Chingana, Sumac Allpa, Rango Isla and Nueva Libertad, in addition to the games played within the school context, in the course of the morning and until noon, it is throughout the afternoon when the boys and girls organize and divide into teams to organize matches, thus taking advantage of their free time. Activity in which mainly men take part, but to which women have been incorporated in a significant way, some even showing levels of performance that require a lot of practice to achieve it. Daniel Dan, Councillor for Culture and Sports of the Municipality of Santa Clotilde and a teacher by profession, when reporting on his management and the role that sport plays in the town, says:

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the discontinuities in the cross-border comparison starts from the political action or management of the day, as well as the degree of interference from external agents, public (state) and private (churches, companies, NGOs), which intervene in the region.

<sup>2</sup> Around the Napo basin, the hydrocarbon industry predominates in Ecuador and the timber industry in Peru.

<sup>3</sup> In the Peruvian Napo basin, the educational system is decentralized and all the river communities have a primary school; However, in the Ecuadorian Napo basin, the current educational system is centralized in larger educational units located in the most populated communities, with the so-called "Millennium Schools", which eliminate primary schools in small towns.

<sup>4</sup> Among other villages scattered by the Peruvian Napo are: Huitoto, Secoya, Arabela, Orejón, Vacacocha, Murui-muinani and Majuki (INEI, 2017; San Roman, 2015).

*"There are no education projects because there is no budget. There is no library. In terms of culture in the district, every Sunday we meet to play soccer within a league that is the Napo Cup. It is only that what is supported with money. [...] Culture is oriented only to sports, to soccer. Every day the main square of the community is filled with people, women and men, youth, children, and everyone plays, bets and has fun with soccer and volleyball." (10/23/2017).*

Sports activity, and especially football, in addition to promoting physical fitness and serving as a recreational element, plays an essential role as a vehicle for socialization. Soccer is the reason why they meet every afternoon to share and have fun for a while; Informal football matches in which mixed teams of boys and girls are formed, and they compete without losing their good humour, as we appreciate on many occasions from the laughs and humorous comments generated by the dynamics of the game. Neither in these spaces is the result of the match important, since it is all about spending time together and participating in an activity with which they feel good.

Soccer is also the activity that, in festive celebrations (festivities and commemoration of special days) usually generates greater expectations than among those that are organized. Since on these occasions it is common to invite teams from neighbouring communities, the displacements that originate are greater, people from outside arrive and everyone come together to watch the teams compete. / In these cases, separated by gender, with the added incentive to win a prize. These are the scenarios in which a greater expression of rivalry are manifested, but with good mood, without generating conflicts that trigger violent acts, since they constitute one more event of the holiday time, a time that invites to fraternization.

Institutionally, soccer constitutes the main link and means of regional interaction through the so-called "*Napo Cup*", one of the many district leagues that are part of the Peru Cup throughout the nation<sup>5</sup>. The Napo Cup allows almost all the communities in the district to mobilize weekly to fulfil with the league calendar, one week playing host and another as visitor. The teams representing each community travel by canoe, accompanied by more or less followers, and the meetings bring together a large audience that creates an atmosphere of great animation. This weekly event, more than the incipient commerce, is the main vehicle of dialogue and intercommunity communication. However, since this district league is part of a larger system devised by the State, it is worth considering to what extent it is linked to the processes of colonization / decolonization in the towns of the Napo basin. As can be seen from the research of Villena (2016) for Bolivian indigenous football, this constitutes "*a platform for indigenous ties to the nation, but also a stage for opposition to the 'colonial' state*" (Ibid : 28). In the case of Napo, apparently, everything seems to indicate that soccer contributes to consolidating a feeling of Peruvian nationality (or Ecuadorian, in its case) with a strong indigenous content; but at the same time it also generates a meeting space in which to express indigenous dissidence with the process of national change and assimilation (rather than integration). The flags of Peru wave in the boats that transport the teams up the river, a practice that is customary. On the one hand, Soccer is an instrument to reaffirm being Peruvian and at the same time each team is proud to represent and assert the native community to which it belongs<sup>6</sup>. But, on the other hand, sometimes the football scene, due to the expectation it generates and the people it gathers, is used as a protest platform to demand rights, reinforce collective

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<sup>5</sup> The competition system establishes that teams that are district champions and runners-up move to the next provincial stage, in which teams from the same province compete to be provincial champions and runners-up. These then compete with those of the same Department to be the champion or sub-champion of the department; and finally, they pass to the national stage in which they compete teams from all over Peru. The championship champion is promoted to the First Division and the runner-up to the Second Division of Peru.

<sup>6</sup> Indigenous community that has its own identity mark, but that nowadays, in general, gathers members of several ethnic groups with one of them majority.

Indianness (common descent of native peoples, regardless of ethnicity that they belong), and reproach the organisms of the State administration for the precariousness in which they live due to the few services they receive. This latter protest, in which indigenous and mestizo alike participate, represent how they all feel discriminated or neglected as Amazonians, such as *Naporunas* or *Napotinos* (people from Napo). In one way or another, football practiced at district level, due to the formation of teams with players of different ethnic origin (indigenous and mixed race), favours social integration within the common territory they share.

### **National scope: Pan-indigenous Games**

With different denominations, for decades sporting-cultural events have been developed in many parts of Latin American countries that bring together the indigenous peoples, who are invited to participate with their convocation. Thus, in Ecuador the so-called Autochthonous and Popular Games of the indigenous, Montubios and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples are organized; in Venezuela the National Indigenous Sports Games; in Colombia the Sports Olympics of the Indigenous Peoples, or in Brazil the Jogos dos Povos Indígenas (Games of the Indigenous Peoples). Celebrations that in all cases combine traditional indigenous games and modern sports. Together with activities such as: cutting firewood, plucking yucca, rope pulling, tree climbing, archery and arrow shooting, blowgun, spear, relay race with trunk, river swimming, or conotaje with curiara, we also find conventional athletics, volleyball or soccer competitions. Events commonly organized and sponsored by government agencies: Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, Ministry of Sports, Sports Federations, UN Agency for Refugees (ACNUR), etc., with the involvement and collaboration of the indigenous organizations themselves. In this explicit way they aim to promote the participation of peoples, make visible and value their signs of identity, and recognize the multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural character of the country to which they belong, in each case.

Definitely, these games of multi-ethnic encounter, in which you share and compete in a series of activities, reveal the uniqueness of being descendants of the original peoples of the continent. As many of the Brazilians participants express, these are events that are especially oriented towards cultural promotion, unity, dialogue and knowledge (Ruiz Vicente & Hernández Vázquez, 2016). They generate a space for cooperation and fraternization (Magalhães, 2006) in which knowledge is exchanged and diversity is reinforced. But, as Rubio, de Mello & da Silva (2006) manifests, they are also sensitive to non-indigenous sports that, without complexes, they incorporate into their cultural heritage.

The modern sports incorporated into such events, and especially soccer, which is the one that normally generates the greatest expectation, constitute a sample of the bilingualism and biculturalism that indigenous peoples manifest: capable of continuing with their customs and adding those that come from the modern society, to which they also belong. In this case, soccer becomes the universal language to dialogue with and make people understand that they are not isolated and static peoples. The soccer, according to Villena (2016) for the Aymara case in Bolivia, has been installed as an “*appropriated cultural trait*” among indigenous communities and movements, serving for multiple purposes, among those that stand out: strengthening local identities and expressing belonging to the nation. The construction of identity is a process in permanent change, and the football played by indigenous peoples is one more indicator of the transformations that take place over the generations. With the passage of time certain customs can remain almost unchanged; others change partially adapting to new circumstances. However, some disappear completely, and during that process, new practices are adopted, becoming part of the cultural heritage. The Waraos, Pemones, Huaoranis or Aymara are today indigenous peoples who play soccer, without decisively undermining their identity. In pan-indigenous games, however, as indicated by Rubio, de Mello & da Silva (2006), for the Brazilian case, cooperation predominates over competition, which is a distinctive sign to show that in sport the most important thing is not to win but to share and celebrate together. Apart of this, one might also wonder



about the activities that arouse more or less expectation among those attending some Pan-Indigenous Games: are they ancestral practices or modern sports? Is it archery, chopping wood, climbing a tree, or is it soccer games? Answering this question, as well as observing what language certain families belonging to a certain ethnic group speak between them (the mother tongue or Spanish), would give us an idea of the extent to which new ways of facing the present and projecting into the future have penetrated.

### ***International scope: America's Cup of Indigenous Peoples***

In line with the above information, only by broadening the panorama, at the XIII Games of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, celebrated in Cuiabá (2013), it was proposed and approved to convene the celebration of the World Games of Indigenous Peoples (JMPI). Till the current date we have assisted to two editions: the first took place in Palmas, Tocantis, Brazil, from October 23rd to November 3rd (2015), with the participation of 25 countries( mostly Latin American) and 1,513 athletes. The second edition took part in Alberta, Canada, from July 1st to 9th (2017, with the participation of 18 countries and 980 athletes. In imitation of the Olympic Games, they have an opening ceremony and the final closing act with the corresponding staging; as well as the official recognition of some sports (throwing, racing, boating, wrestling, ...) <sup>7</sup> among which soccer <sup>8</sup> is included in a very prominent way. The sporting and cultural activities of this World Games are aimed to expanding the coexistence already established in the National Games, among the different ethnic groups of the participating countries, as their organizers say. Also is a goal to give to the attendees the opportunity to meet, interact and socialize with the customs, habits and cultures of indigenous peoples from all around the world. (Milhomem, 2015).

The outstanding presence of soccer in the JMPI, introduced within a scenario that evokes common traditions in the sports scope, shows the wide extension that this practice has among indigenous peoples throughout the world, and in particular among Amerindian peoples. But even more clearly we can appreciate it with the organization of the America's Cup of Indigenous Peoples, whose first edition from July 16th to 25th (2015) had as organizing headquarter Chile <sup>9</sup>. Eight national teams that represented the indigenous peoples of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru participated in it. The team representing Paraguay was finally the champion, followed by Colombia, Chile and Bolivia. The tournament was divided into three stages: a first group phase, with four teams per group, followed by the semi-finals and the final. The scoring system and the regulations established by the Competition Committee were adjusted to what is usual in international competitions, contemplating all kinds of assumptions to avoid controversies in the fulfilment of sanctions, the pairing system or cases of tie. Welcomed by the Chilean State, the contest was sponsored by the Government of Michelle Bachelet, and organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with representatives of the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Social Development and by the "Gol Iluminado" Corporation. Mentioned in the media as the "other" Copa América, its inauguration was attended by senior national leaders and the paraphernalia that the occasion demanded. (<https://es.globalvoices.org/2015/07/20/pueblos-indigenas-suramericanos-juegan-al-futbol-en-la-otra-copa-america/>).

The testimonies and journalistic reports that can be read in the press about this event repeat the message of establishing a sports organization, aimed at highlighting the culture, values and traditions of the indigenous peoples of America, in addition to fraternizing and strengthening the friendship links through sport practice. Message that was also appreciated in the speeches of the senior officials who took part in its inauguration,

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<sup>7</sup> In the I JMPI 10 official sports were recognized and in the II JMPI were expanded to 15.

<sup>8</sup> In the I JMPI the soccer competition had to start the day before the Games started, due to the high number of registered teams.

<sup>9</sup> The choice of Chile as the venue for the first edition was due to the fact that Chile was also the host country of the Copa América in 2015.

in which two key ideas related to what sports practice implied and specifically the football event that was being held: social inclusion and recognition of ethnic diversity in the different Latin American countries. However, to the many compliments received for the initiative, there are dissenting voices like the Bolivian Katarist Indianist Movement, which criticizes both the "*Indigenous Olympic Games*" (JMPI), mentioned above, and this "*other*" Americans Soccer Cup, as unworthy impostures. They accuse the organization to promote advertising facades for silly Indians that pride themselves on being a form of inclusion, when they only serve to distract attention and cover up the unjust and exclusive system in which indigenous peoples find themselves throughout the continent. (<https://es.globalvoices.org/2015/07/20/pueblos-indigenas-suramericanos-juegan-al-futbol-en-la-otra-copa-america/>).

Soccer, as a struggle element for indigenous peoples, is used at the Indigenous University of Venezuela in the Tauca channel of Bolívar state, as "*rebel soccer*", through the organization of Sunday championships that have as a reward a refreshing and collective bath, to strengthen ties between participants (<http://www.futbolrebelde.org/blog/?p=5659>). It is especially so in the Bolivian case (Villena, 2016), with the proposal of Felipe Quispe, union leader and political figure of "*indigenous football*", as a platform for indigenous links to the nation, while also the stage for an opposition to the "*colonial*" State, which deepens the so-called process of decolonization and Indianization of the nation. (<https://es.globalvoices.org/2015/07/20/pueblos-indigenas-suramericanos-juegan-al-futbol-en-la-otra-copa-america/>).

The America's Cup of Indigenous Peoples, nonetheless, expresses a desire to create an international meeting space, to make visible to the general public the performance levels achieved and the ability to create a show, approaching a high-level closer and closer to the professional soccer. At the same time, it expresses the difficulties that exist to make this possible: Esteban Pogany (Independiente goalkeeper between 1973-1975 and 1976-1980 and FIFA instructor), coach of the Argentine team of indigenous peoples, pointed out the contrast between the enormous illusion of the players participating in the tournament and the little attention paid by the media. Tournament in which Luis Fernando Díaz, an indigenous Wayuu and junior player from Barranquilla, participated and was later selected by Carlos Queiroz to be part of the national soccer team in the Copa América of Brazil 2019. (<https://elequipo-deporte.com/2019/06/22/the-other-cup/>).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the four areas presented in this work, it cannot be said that soccer was forced on the indigenous peoples as part of a systematic colonization program. Rather, it has been a cultural practice that came from outside, learned at first through external agents and later transmitted more or less spontaneously, which has achieved enormous diffusion and facilitated inter-ethnic dialogue and rapprochement with modern societies.

At the local or ethnic level, soccer practice still has a wide margin of reinterpretation by the communities that practice as a novelty, as is the case among the Yanomami, who adapt it to their own idiosyncrasy and reveal in it their most humanistic values. At the regional level, soccer favours community and inter-community interaction, especially in the most depressed areas and far from urban centres, as in the Napo basin; constituting an element to feel linked to a nation, as well as a vehicle of protest and assertion of rights, given the lack of attention from the State to which they belong. At the national level, the outstanding presence of soccer in the Pan-Indian Games shows to what extent tradition is recreated. How the ancestral is combined with the modern to present a renewed indigenous identity, an identity in which bilingualism runs in parallel with the biculturalism demanded by the new times. A circumstance, however, which in many cases continues to cause serious crises due to the lack of clarity on the model to follow. In the international arena, indigenous

peoples generate new scenarios to gain visibility on the world scene, with soccer as the reason for their meeting; its presence in the World Games of Indigenous Peoples and especially in the America's Cup of Indigenous Peoples, demonstrates it. Both scenarios emulate classic events with many years of history, in which indigenous peoples are not represented.

Soccer as a sporting practice and as a social phenomenon can be instrumentalized in different ways, with different implications and with different consequences. In this sense, it can favour, in some cases, indigenous integration processes at different levels: local, regional, national or international. Despite it, also can provoke a cultural assimilation to the lifestyles of the dominant society. The cases shown here illustrate how it is exploited both from inside and outside of the indigenous sphere, a sphere that does not develop apart from the global world. In all the cases, implicitly or explicitly, the intention is derived to reinforce indigeneity with their practice. Yanomami, Quichua, Aymara, Mapuche or Guarani incorporate football into their cultural heritage and also use it to expand their ties with broader spheres of society, without losing their identity as a people. Soccer has thus become one of the symbols of the new times of the indigenous world, to which we should be attentive for the contributions that can make and the changes that it may bring in its evolution. For soccer and for the Indigenous villages. However, for the moment, although it is one of the greatest exponents of globalization, its practice does not directly denote in these peoples the abandonment of their cultural being.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ángel Acuña Delgado: field work, data production, paper writing. Guillermo Acuña Gómez: writing, translation and adaptation of the paper.

## SUPPORTING AGENCIES

No funding agencies were reported by the authors.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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