

Rodrigo Daskal. *Los clubes en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1932-1945): Revista La Cancha: Sociabilidad, política y Estado.* Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2013. 176 pp. \$28.00, paper, ISBN 978-987-1867-73-8.



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Rodrigo Daskal's *Los clubes en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1932-1945)* explains the role that soccer clubs played in shaping urban sociability and the physical fabric of Argentina's capital city. *Los clubes* joins a growing literature that examines the social significance of *fútbol*, particularly in its urban context.[1] In Latin America, the game's rapid spread at the end of the nineteenth century helped position it to become a dominant form of mass culture in the continent's urbanized centers at the start of the twentieth century. The practice and consumption of soccer cuts across class divisions as a ubiquitous male pastime and its study sheds light on many topics, including urban subjectivity, national identity, and the relationship between the state and civil society. As Brazilians protest the public investment and urban transformations wrought by FIFA's lucrative World Cup, *Los clubes* is a timely read for those interested in the history of Latin American soccer's urban roots.

Daskal received a special grant from Argentina's National Library to produce this book on the

sports magazine *La Cancha*, a source that covered the internal life and politics of clubs, their efforts to construct stadiums with public support, and the impact of clubs' social and physical infrastructure on surrounding neighborhoods. The book contains ten chapters focusing on a variety of themes covered in the magazine's thirteen-year run. Urban scholars will find Daskal's work on demonstrating the links between stadiums and neighborhood life particularly useful in understanding the relationship between sports and urban life. *Los clubes* also details how clubs received support from the state and municipality to build stadiums and facilities, projects that public officials saw as serving the public good.

The first four chapters of *Los clubes* explain that Buenos Aires expanded in the 1930s, creating a wider urban area with new poles of social and cultural life. The book pays close attention to how the growing popularity of soccer clubs overlapped with changes in the wider cultural landscape, including tango and sports magazines. Soccer, Daskal notes, grew in popularity and the clubs in

membership, becoming centers of associative life and cultural production that would shape neighborhood life and identity. Clubs sought to acquire stadiums with larger capacities to accommodate soccer-hungry *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires), yet in the 1930s, there was still the question of who would own these spaces and who would pay for them. Some legislators proposed national and municipal stadiums shared by clubs, while club directors lobbied for their own space. Daskal tells how the construction of stadiums by the clubs Huracán, Boca Juniors, and Vélez Sarsfield demonstrates the “diverse questions the clubs faced in obtaining space, such as the expansion of the city, private interests, construction costs, and the quality of their club directors” (p. 41).

The magazine *La Cancha* largely supported the efforts of clubs to obtain their own stadiums, yet the debates they covered reveal the tensions between clubs serving their own interests, primarily professional soccer, or the public good. For example, one article in the magazine justified public subsidies for stadium construction by arguing that clubs also provided kids play areas and swimming pools, and loaned their facilities for public events for free. Yet another article lambasted clubs as “commercial enterprises [that] falsify their financial reports and argue a ‘public good’ [that] doesn’t exist” (p. 61). Daskal demonstrates that debates over the justification of public funds for private sports clubs have a long history, debates that echo with public investment into infrastructure for mega-events, such as the World Cup and Olympics.

Chapters 6 and 7 contain rich analysis of the internal social and cultural life of clubs in Buenos Aires. *La Cancha* devoted space to club politics and elections, dances and social events, and the impact of club facilities on neighborhood growth. Clubs of all sizes organized important Carnival dances, concerts, and a variety of other cultural activities. Smaller *clubes de barrio* (neighborhood

clubs) saw themselves predominantly as centers of social life, arguing that they merited public support as “bastions of the values of ‘love of the game’ and the common good” whose dedication to grassroots sport fed the larger, professional clubs (p. 110). One of Buenos Aires’s largest and most popular clubs, River Plate, demonstrates that clubs with a strong social infrastructure, wide memberships, and successful professional soccer teams could anchor the urban development of an entire neighborhood: Daskal shows that the urbanization of Nuñez grew significantly from the stadium and surrounding infrastructure of River Plate’s stadium.

The book’s focus on *La Cancha* is both its strength and weakness. Daskal does incorporate a rich and growing literature on soccer and urban life in Argentina, largely produced by a group of academics that include Daskal at the Centro de Estudios del Deporte (CED), hosted at the Universidad de San Martín in Buenos Aires. Working groups like CED are completing a wider panorama of the complex social relations, urban transformations, consumption patterns, and notions of citizenship that soccer clubs shaped and were shaped by. These contributions inform my own work examining how stadium and social-athletic facilities constructed in the second half of the twentieth century illuminate how *porteños* sought to shape modern spaces of consumption and social life that would herald the city’s arrival into modernity.[2]

The project’s scope results in a short book that centers on what is contained in the pages of the magazine, yet the richness of the content and analysis is exciting for the future of the field. The book’s sustained examination of *La Cancha* yields fascinating debates and coverage of a moment where professional soccer deeply affected the city’s landscape and everyday life and will prove an invaluable addition to a growing body of work. Urban scholars interested in associative life,

sports, and professional soccer will find great value in the book.

Notes

[1]. Other recent studies include Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Joshua H. Nadel, *Fútbol! Why Soccer Matters in Latin America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); and David Goldblatt, *Futebol Nation: A Footballing History of Brazil* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

[2]. Alex Galarza, “Dreaming of Sports City: Urban Transformation, Politics, Consumption, and Soccer Clubs in Postwar Buenos Aires” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, forthcoming).

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