

FWF Project Tackles Football Wanderers

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Agency: **PR&D - Public Relations for Research and Development**

The creation of the first comprehensive database on foreign players in Austrian professional football has opened the way for academic study of the relationship between migration and football. The project concerned, which is being supported by the Austrian Science Fund FWF, not only takes a systematic look at 50 years of Austrian football history but is also addressing current debates.

The history of immigration and football in Austria has been a little researched field until now, though it goes back a long way. Football migration was accelerated by the 1995 Bosman verdict of the European Court of Justice which led to the liberalisation of the transfer market, but it began long before. A project being conducted by the Vienna Institute for Development and Cooperation entitled "Migration in Austrian Football after 1945" is investigating the changes in Austrian professional football caused by player mobility.

The research team has compiled a complete set of data on foreign first division players and coaches at work in Austria during the period. This information has laid the groundwork for further project stages. These will involve biographical accounts of selected players' migration and career paths, a survey among current professional players, and an analysis of media discourse on representation and identity in Austrian football. Some general trends are already apparent.

Long Tradition

The data compiled shows that player mobility has partly reflected broader waves of migration. In the words of project member Georg Spitaler: "At the start of the nineties increased numbers of migrants began arriving from Eastern Europe, but this was soon followed by immigration from an ever wider spectrum of countries. These two trends also left their mark on football. On top of them came the Bosman verdict which led to the deregulation and Europeanisation of the football labour market. The net result is that players from every continent of the globe now figure on Austrian team sheets."

Yet even before the nineties, Austrian teams almost always included migrants. The project data, which goes back to the fifties, provides preliminary indications of the foreign players' origins. For instance after 1956 some players came from Hungary to Austria corresponding to the refugees that fled to Austria, later on many players originated from Yugoslavia.

Integration and Discrimination

As the number of foreign players in Austria grew they often became the focus of heated debates, as the media research reveals. Commenting on this, Georg Spitaler's colleague Barbara Liegl said: "Particularly at the start of the sixties, there were bitter complaints in the sporting press of an alleged foreign invasion. In the eighties, when many Austrian footballers went to major European clubs, the foreign players evidently got a more friendly reception." These shifting media responses to foreign players will now be more closely investigated using the database and conducting a media analysis.

The number of foreign players has risen by about 40 percent since the nineties, and there are once again frequent discussions of fans' inability to identify with "foreign dominated" teams. A consequence of this controversy was the "gentlemen's agreement" reached by first division clubs during the 2001/2002 season, under which a quota of home-grown players had to be met in every game.

The biographical work that forms part of the project also aims to revive memories of forgotten foreign players. For instance, few remember Saleh Selim - the first African footballer in Austria after 1945 - though he was one of the best known sportsmen in his home country, Egypt. The FWF project is keeping its eye on the ball, and the team will deliver final results in good time for the 2008 European Championship, due to be staged in Austria.

Image and text will be available online from Monday, 19th June 2006, 09.00 a.m. MEZ onwards:
www.fwf.ac.at/en/public_relations/press/pv200606-en.html

Important information: As of 16th of August 2006 the FWF will be at your service in our new office in 1090 Vienna, Sensengasse 1. The telephone number remains the same.

Vienna, 19th June 2006

The Austrian Science Fund (FWF) is Austria's central body for the promotion of basic research. It is equally committed to all branches of science and in all its activities is guided solely by the standards of the international scientific community.

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