

# The Role of Fan Clubs in the Promotion of Cultural Values in Cameroon during University Games

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of the fan clubs in the promotion of Cameroons cultural values during University Games. The University Games in Cameroon is an event which is held once every year and it creates an arena which brings together University students from diverse background. Based on primary and secondary sources, this study argues that the festive atmosphere during University Games was the work of group of supporters commonly called fan clubs, whom with the use of their instruments, songs and cultural manifestations promoted Cameroon cultural values. The study adopts the qualitative approach to assess the place of the fan clubs in the promotion of Cameroon cultural values. Our findings reveal that, with the introduction of the fan clubs in the University Games, their activities and cultural manifestations during the games remains valuable in the promotion of Cameroon cultural values.

**Keywords:** Culture; Fan Clubs; University; Games; Manifestation; Impact

## 1. Introduction

The University Games in Cameroon was a sporting competition whose activities impressed the population with the festive atmosphere which reigned during the events. This competition appears to be involved at a crossroad where a sporting atmosphere and socio-cultural components are mixed. The University Games generally occur on the campus of a state university, previously designated and satisfies the routine University Games law. During this competitions, the atmosphere truly reflects that of a popular festival where groups of supporters (Fan clubs), athletes and spectators mingle. The festive atmosphere during the University Games is the work of groups of supporters from the different institutions of higher learning commonly called Fan clubs. With the help of their instruments, their songs, and cultural display, the fan clubs really contributed in the promotion of Cameroon cultural values and building of the University games into a festive event. In their various performances, the fan clubs for a week on campus celebrate culture in a carnival atmosphere but these real promoters of the show during university games face a difficult lodging condition which affects their performances drastically and they have been experiencing a reduction in their number as well. This fact is underpinned by financial reasons brandished by university authorities. Despite these difficulties faced by the various fan clubs, they constitute an undeniable part in the production of the show and the promotion of Cameroon cultural values.

## 2. Conceptual clarification

The definition of culture in this study is very important due to the influence of the cultural manifestations by the various fan clubs during University Games. To Ebenezer Njoh Mouelle, "culture is the set of solutions that a human community adopts in order to solve the problems that the universe imposes on it".[1] From this definition, Mouelle assigns to culture the virtue of being able to solve everyday problems. Even more, it is a solution box for the human community to adapt

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to an environment that can be changing. This system to which he referred to is far from being fixed because it has to be in perpetual mutation, so culture must not be overtaken by time but must follow its evolution by adapting. One might think that the human community would better solve its problems by referring to its culture

According to Herman Hesse, “culture is a dynamic system of values, postulates, beliefs and rules which allow members of a group to establish relationships with each other and with the world, to communicate and develop the creative capacities that potentially exist in them”. [2] In culture, Hesse sees the support of the integration of man with his fellows and especially in his space. But this integration will be done thanks to the ingenuity of man. In addition, he sees culture as the basis for the expression of human creativity. From the above definitions, we see that there is a reason to focus on the concept of culture as it is very important to the study.

### 3. The Fan Clubs and the Promotion of Cameroon Cultural values

During the University Games, any free space was used by the Fan clubs to express themselves. The play grounds, the gymnasiums, the dormitories and the main paths constituted these spaces of expression. Thus finding a space to promote their shows during the University Games constituted a space of social identity. The performances of the different fan clubs during the University Games were all distinct from each other. To achieve this, they were inspired by the culture of the regions where they came from. This originality was expressed through the clothing, music and choreography. Thus, it would suffice to observe the dance steps, the hairstyles and the costumes of the various fan clubs to know which university and by extension which region they came from. So the fan clubs were the cultural ambassadors of each region. They travelled with their own identity and each fan club cling to this culture to stand out from the others. Even the different mascots were not spared from this idea of social identity. The pig was the mascot of the West region while other regions also came up with theirs representing the dominant feature or animal in the region. [3]



Source: Author's collection 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015

**Figure 1** The University of Dschang Fans Club with the pig as their mascot during the 2015 edition of the U-Games in Yaoundé I

Figure 1 above showed the University of Dschang Fan's Club during the 2015 edition of the University Games in Yaoundé I. The pig represented the mascot of the West. The University of Dschang fan's club always moved along with the pig during each edition of the University Games which represented part of their cultural values. During the Games they usually perform what was termed “the pig ritual”, [4] within which the pig was killed, prepared and shared amongst the other fan clubs as a sign of unity, togetherness and desire for peace.

Despite the unifying spirit of the University Games, this competition represented the place where each social group in Cameroon identified itself, through traits that were unique to it. This social identity created a real communion among populations who shared the same origin as some universities. Any national of the region felt involved in the performance

of the fan clubs of the university where he came from: a *Ngemba* (social group from the South-West region) felt concerned and involved when he saw the Buea fan's club performing the *Njang* (traditional Ngemba dance). This reflects the degree of filiation that fan clubs could produce on populations, thus arousing popular interest. The Buea Fan's Club was represented by an elephant as their totem and mascot. The word *Njoku* means Elephant in Bakweri which entails superiority. An elephant symbolised the tradition of the Bakweri native of the town of Buea. The University of Buea Fan's Club usually performed a traditional dance during University Games called "the Maleh traditional dance" in other words; it was called the elephant dance. Whenever this traditional dance was performed, athletes and members of the Buea fan club ate raw plantains and cocoyams to portray the culture and tradition of the Bakweri people.[5]

The fan club of the University of Bamenda had as their mascot a "town crier" who represented the North West tradition. During their performances, the town crier went in front to announce to the entire public that something important and serious was about to happen while the mascots for the day followed slightly behind. For a fan club to be declared the winner for the general animation between the other fan clubs, it depended on how well they pulled and attracted the crowd towards them, which was why during the games fan clubs went extra miles to fabricate what we called "Fatales" or spectacles portraying their culture in other to attract the crowd.[6]

The space occupied by the University Games for being a place where the social identity of the different social groups of Cameroon was perceptible, the University Games constituted a platform where the cultural claim was notable. In a multicultural country like Cameroon where some cultures seemed to be less valorised than others, opportunities for assertions such as those of the University Games were far from being negligible. Thus the University Games constituted a place where social groups asserted themselves in relation to others and culturally claimed their legitimacy. Clear sartorial differentiation was a sign of this claim. Each fan club refused the awkwardness of being like another; each culture is used by a dance group and thus propelled to the fore.[7]

Culture therefore became the symbol of differentiation and originality. This cultural claim was like a socio-cultural issue, just like bodily expression and social identity at the University Games. It showed the extent to which these university competitions went beyond the sporting aspect to assert itself. Thus it created an opening to have another look at the University Games and to research on its sociological component.



Source: Author's collection April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017

**Figure 2** Cultural manifestation from the University of Bamenda Fan Club during the 2017 edition of the University Games

Figure 2 above depicts an example of a cultural manifestation from the University of Bamenda Fan Club during the 2017 University Games in Bamenda. It was an interesting event and it attracted the attention of the masses. The Town Crier could be seen holding a "ngong" announcing and drawing the attention of the public alerting them of the coming of the Masquerades slightly behind.[8]

During the opening ceremony of University Games, the fan clubs appeared through their different mascots and people disguised as "clowns". Disguises during the games consist of coarse clothing causing ridiculous and even humorous



appeal. The opening parade was a tradition in the University Games activity where fan clubs expressed themselves and show off their different mascots which could also be animals such as pigs (Dschang), horses (Maroua), sheep (Ngaoundere) referred to a given region. Instead of following the logic of wearing tracksuits like sportsmen, fan clubs wore traditional outfits or more attractive costumes to capture the minds of the jury as well as put their counterparts in a state of psychological defeat. The iconographic document below will allow us to better understand this phenomenon.



Source: Author's Collection May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015

**Figure 3** Mascot from the UBa Fan Club during the opening parade of the 2015 University Games in Yaoundé I

Figure 3 above depicts an image of a *Timakoh*, which is a Masquerade in the North West region of Cameroon". This was a masquerade which performed only during important death celebrations, festivals and other important events.[9]

The fan clubs, far from dressing in sports outfits in the colours of their university, rather highlighted their culture with traditional outfits. Through this one could be ecstatic in front of the beauty of the rich clothing both by the composition in natural and simple material adorned in the subtle colours of the institution to which they belonged.[10] The use of bird feathers in the form of a headdress, a traditional *tutu* made from tree bark, dotted lines made on the skin, showed us the evidence of the enhancement of the culture of the Centre Region.[11] Such well-designed, original outfits worn by pretty dancers made the shows very interesting. They were so attractive that they did not leave the undermined public indifferent in the gallery. The following photograph illustrates this element.



Source: Serge Stephan, The place of culture in the production of the show, CAPEPS II, INJS 2012.

**Figure 4** The University of Yaoundé I Fan Club during the 2009 edition of the University Games

Figure 4 above depicts the different show outfits, which were a real showcase of Cameroonian culture and a source of curiosity inducing the show. Fan Clubs aroused the interest of the spectator, captivated them when they performed their shows. During the period of the competition, the Fan Clubs multiplied clothing combinations which helped them to maintain originality. It should be noted that only Fan Clubs who benefited from the favors of their university authorities could have a plethora of clothing. The look at the clothing revealed that these different costumes and the cultural displays showcase the cultural riches of Cameroon. This form of clothing took clothing away from its primary function, which is that of removing the body from nudity to create a carnival setting where clothing constitutes the cornerstone of the show.[12] It was a unit of measure for the degree of ingenuity and creativity of Fan Clubs.

During the course of sporting events, the Fan Clubs were illustrated by their impressive presence. This effective presence was reflected in the performance of motivational songs and choreography aimed at pushing their teams to the limit. These were a succession of countless rhythmic gestures that were well arranged to the sound of the music. This beauty of the body in full motion found all its meaning and importance in the frequency of movements and the speed of execution, not to mention the degree of coordination they imposed. The success of choreography also involved memorizing the dance steps and their complexity. In the instant of a half-time, the Fan Clubs stormed the play grounds to perform different dances and cultural manifestations.[13]



Source: Author's Collection May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

**Figure 5** Performance of University of Bamenda Fan Club during a half-time in the 2015 edition of the University Games in Yaoundé I

Figure 5 illustrates the permanence of the traditional dances produced by Fan Clubs during sporting events and, precisely during the halves observed by the latter.

On the University Games site, the omnipresence of Fan Clubs was one of the most striking feature. They seemed to occupy the entire site reserved for this university competition, but in their daily life we find these different Fan Clubs in unusual places.[14] This was in the example of refectories and dormitories. As much as the sportsmen, the Fan Clubs benefited from the same treatment in regards to the other University athletes (which was not the case as before). To do this, they took meals at the place where the distribution was made. Before taking their meals and precisely before consumption, the various Fan Clubs did not fail to put on a show. The moments reserved for restoration were almost diverted for spectacular cultural manifestations.[15]

There were cultural competitions organized among fan clubs by FENASU supported by official sponsors of the university games which promoted Cameroon cultural values. [16] These competitions showed how the existence of Fan Clubs did not leave university authorities and the advertising world indifferent to the success of this event. [17] For the running of these competitions, special measures were taken to assess all the Fan Clubs present during the edition. The seriousness of this organization was manifested by the existence of a commission responsible for designating the best Fan club by respecting well defined criteria which were: originality of clothing or show outfits; presence around the stadiums; originality and creativity; effective presence in play grounds; group dynamics, morality and fair play. Beyond the usual way of behaving through songs, sounds and choreography, Fan Clubs created new forms of expression which were representations of scenes from life.

In the Cameroonian context where the promotion of culture and the conservation of heritage were weak, the University Games therefore appeared as a beacon of hope. Knowing that the main engines of promotion, which were museums and

cultural centres, were obsolete and did not fulfil their roles to their full extent, university games appeared as substitute museums for Cameroonian culture. Instead of being silent as in museums, Cameroonian cultures were expressed, in a lively and dynamic form. Through the different cultural manifestation from the various fan clubs, Cameroonian culture found an ally to promote itself.[18]

Through University Games, the cultural spectacle offers Cameroonian culture a means of expression, a place where it can be magnified. [19] Here (university games) the legibility of culture was striking and allowed us to measure the richness of a country's culture. [20] This cultural richness can be measured by the number of songs performed which were proofs of the plurality of our African languages. The sounds that were produced were also the expression of this cultural richness. These were examples of dances like *Ben sikin* (West Region), *Bikutsi* (Centre Region), *Garaya* (Far North), *Njang* (Northwest region), *Ambasibe* (Litoral), which were performed by the different Fan Clubs. At this one could admire the traditional outfits which were the mirror of the different regions of Cameroon. [21] Thus, the representation of culture only took on its full meaning.

The fan clubs unraveled the spirit of creativity in the students through their display. Fan Club was not all about dancing and clapping, their task was always very demanding and required a lot of creativity. They had to economize their energy and ingenuity to make them recognized by their songs of encouragement, dexterity and exorbitant footsteps which was highly cultural with a well-designed chorography thereby improving on their creativity. [22] The different displays exhibited by the fan clubs spurred the athletes thereby increasing the self-confidence of athletes. [23] Records have shown that athletes were restless and anxious competing in the absence of their fan clubs where as that of the opponent was present. Fan Clubs encouraged and motivated athletes to put in their possible best in the competition. Thus the fan club had a functional role in the good performance of athletes. [24]

It has also revealed that the fan clubs have helped to promote the Cameroonian cultural values from the different part of the territory through their cultural manifestations. The cultural aspect of these games could be seen through the cultural displays of different fan clubs from the different universities. During the 2002 University Games in the University of Douala, the University of Dschang first exhibited a piglet which was grunting reflecting the culture of the people of the Western Region of Cameroon. The second exhibition presented by the University of Ngaoundere was a sheep that was dressed like a Lamido surrounded by his immediate traditional council. This exhibition portrayed the culture of the people of the northern part of Cameroon. [25]

To encourage *camaraderie* and healthy competition a prize award to the best animation club was put in place by MINESUP to encourage them to present all that was beautiful on the Cameroon culture and a spirit of national unity. FENASU often organized cultural competitions among Fans clubs which was based on portraying and promoting Cameroon Cultural values. [26] The first edition of the Open-Challenge cultural dance competition between fan clubs started in the University Campus of Yaoundé I during the 2015 University Games. [27] In this competition, the University of Bamenda fan club won the Gold medal in the open challenge and another gold medal in the culture competition. [28] They were awarded the sum of 1.5 million francs CFA for both medals (Plate 1 below Will better illustrate the event). Thus the University Games was a cultural festival which gave an opportunity to the students to display the rich Cameroonian cultural heritage. [29]



Source: Author's collection 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015

**Figure 6** UBa Fan club emerged victorious in 2015 cultural competitions

Figure 6 above shows the University of Bamenda Fan's Club celebrating their trophies after emerging victorious in the cultural competition.

#### 4. Conclusion

The capacity for the mobilization of people during University Games allowed for cultural outreach, unlike museums which were little known and very poorly attended. The spectators coming from diverse backgrounds to witness the University Games discovered the cultures of other people and better still theirs through the various cultural manifestations from fan clubs. They found themselves in front of a mirror where they could see the reflection of their cultural heritage. The promotion of different cultures during University Games by fan clubs was accompanied by the showcasing of the cultural identity of each region of Cameroon.

In this affirmation of regional identity, the mascots that accompanied the various Fan Clubs also played an important role. Just like the horse which was the mascot of the University of Maroua, symbol of the Islamic conquest, the sheep mascot of the University of Ngaoundéré was the sign of breeding in this region of great pastures. The identity of each region were also a set of qualities that these latter possess on the cultural level. This was what could best represent a region in terms of attitudes, practice and belief. The various Fan Clubs during university games in their cultural displays represented the trademarks of each region.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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