

Radosław Kossakowski

University of Gdańsk

An Unprecedented Civilizing Process?

Social Evaluation of the ‘Supporters United’ Programme in Poland¹

Final Report

¹ In September 2015, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism renamed the ‘project’ as ‘programme’. Although it is more adequate to use term ‘programme’, fans and officials often use the term ‘project’.

Contents

1. Introduction – the basic assumptions of the research project
2. Methodology and research questions
3. Theoretical inspirations and the frame of analysis
4. History of Polish fandom as a social process
5. ‘Supporters United’ – a programme of multisector cooperation
6. ‘PZPN is changing...’: The meaning of the programme for the supporters
 - Mutual trust, ‘clearing’ and being ‘normal’
7. Between corporate legitimacy and spontaneous order: The sphere of institutions supporting the programme
 - Benefits and risks
 - Barriers to overcome
 - Towards the indicators of development
8. The meaning of ‘Supporters United’ for beneficiaries and local councils
 - A platform for communication and recognition
 - From trust to benefits
 - New generations, new values, new role models?
 - How to deal with the ‘dark side’
 - Political involvement and local patriotism
 - Changing the terraces
 - Integration of disabled fans
 - How long will it take for things to change?
9. The civilizing process and social change: Critical assessment and recommendations
 - The synergy effect, or on social change
 - Recommendations
10. References
11. Appendix 1

1. Introduction – the basic assumptions of the research project

Football as a global social phenomenon involves a number of actors, such as sports institutions, the state and local administration, the media, corporate sponsors, NGO's, and supporters (Giulianotti, Robertson 2009). It seems that the key objective the majority of football associations in Europe are facing is to strengthen cooperation with local authorities and supporters' associations operating in the local context. As a result, football associations will have a greater impact on the development of local football centres, and – on the other hand – the local administration and supporters will receive assistance in further development, giving them a sense that they are not left alone. Research findings indicate that fans involved in various initiatives are less prone to acts of violence (Pilz et. al. 2006). Furthermore, the 'social identity' approach (Stott, Reicher 1998) demonstrates that aggression of fans often stems from aggressive and provocative attitudes towards them. Providing football fans with opportunities for positive interaction and cooperation in the creation of good practice can significantly reduce their tendency to vandalism and hooliganism.

The programme known as 'Supporters United' (Pol. 'Kibice Razem') provides an example of such cooperation. It operates in nine cities: Gdańsk (Lechia football club), Gdynia (Arka), Legnica (Miedź), Tychy (GKS), Warsaw (Polonia), Wrocław (Śląsk), Poznań (Lech), Zabrze (Górník) and Kielce (Korona). It is assumed that such projects build a network of social relationships and trust between various partners in the field of football, and provide a valuable model to follow and implement in different European countries.

The primary objective of the present research project is to evaluate the social, cultural, and institutional role of 'Supporters United', a project unprecedented in the Polish context, combining the fandom culture with institutional actors: the Polish Football Association (PZPN), Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism (MST), and the local councils which have decided to support it (e.g. by providing municipal office space and financing some of its activity).²

The fact that such different social actors have joined their forces is an unprecedented phenomenon in the field of Polish football. The purpose of the project is to investigate whether the initiative has produced a synergy effect (and, possibly, what type). Fan culture in Poland has long been based on the grassroots, spontaneous movement, excluding any cooperation with local authorities and sports organizations (Kossakowski 2015). The activity

² It is worth noting that the German programme 'Fanprojekte' (established in 1993) provided inspiration for its Polish counterpart.

of supporter groups has regularly failed to meet the principles of the official bodies by breaching the moral and legal standards. Fan projects combining the specific nature of the social world of fans with the strategies of sports institutions and local authorities are the next step in making use of the enormous potential residing in fandom communities. Their passion for football and feelings for the beloved club constitute an important part of fan identity. With institutional support, fans can take responsibility for creating a positive image of fandom, building social capital around the clubs, gaining the trust of local communities, and expanding other dimensions of the movement: educational and charitable activity or anti-discrimination and anti-homophobic actions. In other words, institutions provide the material and organizational support, and the fans – social capital networks focused around the clubs.

The social image of football fans in Poland is generally quite negative. To a certain extent, such opinions are justified (owing to fans' failure to comply with the legal regulations, the use of pyrotechnics, abusive chants, etc.; Polish clubs have been fined for such incidents). It seems to be essential that Polish clubs, the Polish Football Association (PZPN), Polish public opinion and the UEFA authorities should evaluate positive activity leading to the 'civilizing' of football culture, revising the image of football and attracting new supporters from other social circles. Due to the fact that the 'Supporters United' programme is coordinated by the Polish Football Association, it should be expected that the authorities of the organization recognize its potential for creating fandom culture. Because the project has no precedent in Polish football, one cannot confidently assume that 'Supporters United' will 'revolutionize' the culture of fans in the short term. Neither can it be compared to similar types of activity carried out in the past. Therefore, 'Supporters United', both in the organizational and cultural sense, involves 'a jump in at the deep end'. Although the risk of the initiative is difficult to estimate, it is important to notice that inaction would be a worse alternative: the current situation, characterized by mistrust and a lack of common ground for joint actions of the football association and the fans, would continue. It seems that the very fact that fans agreed to cooperate with 'external' organizations is proof of change in their attitude. Declaring their willingness to cooperate, they must be aware of responsibility they take: their partner does not tolerate any illegal actions or acts of discrimination. In all centres under consideration, the full-time staff employed to run the project are recruited from fandom communities and receive the legitimacy from the movement. 'Supporters United' provides a form of access to the closed world of fandom, characterized by considerable mistrust and lack of formal control. The implementation of such projects constitutes an appropriate structure for civilized and educative forms of fandom without imposing formal directives.

The study is designed to answer whether this form of official cooperation with fans offers any prospects for the future and can be treated in terms of an example to follow (also in the context of allocated funds), and whether it is worth expanding. A positive evaluation of the programme can lead to the formulation of a set of recommendations for the national football associations in other European countries, as well as for the UEFA. Good practices and a positive social change would provide arguments to undertake similar activity in different national environments. The UEFA executives could consider the results of the study in the context of allocation of funds to fandom 'grassroots' actions. It would certainly be worthwhile, especially that the relationship between the European football authorities and supporters (in different countries) should be developed.

2. Methodology and research questions

It is assumed that fan projects can function as a space of cooperation between the two spheres of activity which have so far been divided by hostility: the fandom culture and the institutional sphere. It is also recognized that as a result of the involvement of fans in the project their conduct becomes a part of the official sphere, which amounts to ‘the civilizing process’ (Elias 2012), operating mainly by the mechanism of limiting violence and hooliganism, as well as by ‘good practice’, such as supporting people in need (e.g. assistance to foster care institutions), or socializing the youngest fans (e.g. painting activities). One of the most challenging aspects of the research project is to answer the question whether such a ‘civilizing process’ of fandom occurs.

The research includes project centres at a different level of development: from those operating for several years (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Legnica, Tychy, Warsaw, Wrocław) to the cases of Poznań, Zabrze and Kielce, where the project was scheduled to begin in the second quarter of 2015.³ The study thus evaluates the practices of sports fans at the outset of the process and compares them to fan performance after a few years of involvement in the project. The combination enables a cross-estimation of project activities at various stages of their development.

The research project aims to evaluate: firstly, the benefits for fans and the level of fandom transformation resulting from institutional support (the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, Polish Football Association, local councils); secondly, the impact of institutionalization of fan projects on relations of fans with their environment (‘the outside world’); thirdly, the types of benefits which various organizations (PFA and the Ministry) gain from their formal cooperation with the fans (trust? control? implementation of ‘grassroots’ strategy?); fourthly, whether the involvement of local administration in the financing and organization of the project serves to build a better relationship between the local authority and supporters of the local team (and the local community in general)? The most important question to answer could be: is the fans’ engagement in institutional forms of activity one of the symptoms of the ‘civilizing process’?

These objectives can be achieved by examining the following questions relating to:

Institutions and organizations:

³ The application prepared for UEFA Research Grant programme included only one new centre (Poznań). In the course of research, the author decided to include also Zabrze and Kielce centres to answer the research questions in greater depth.

- What is the importance of fan projects for all sport institutions involved? Is it an important tool in building relationships with the world of fans?
- Can the success/failure of the project affect the management strategies in described institutions and the development of similar/future initiatives?
- What kind of risk does cooperation with fans involve for institutional bodies?
- Has involvement in the project increased the level of trust in the activity of fans?
- Are there any visible effects of the project? If so, what are they?
- What other projects dedicated to fandom culture are considered?
- What kind of knowledge was gathered as a result of cooperation with fans?

Fandom culture:

- What opportunities for fans have been established as a result of partnership with institutions and local councils?
- Has involvement in the project increased their trust in the institutions?
- How does ‘Supporters United’ develop fan movement in the local area? Has any ‘added value’ appeared in the fandom movement?
- What kind of barriers (communication, mental, cultural, etc.) occur between the ‘Supporters United’ project and the community of fans (particularly in the case of ‘hardcore’, ‘die-hard’ supporters)?
- What resonance have project activities gained in other – formal and informal – local groups of supporters?
- What is the opinion of the local community about the project?

Local councils:

- Why have local councils become involved in the project? Were there both supporters and opponents? What are the arguments of both sides?
- What goals have the local councils achieved thanks to ‘Supporters United’?
- Does ‘Supporters United’ address any important social issue recognized by local councils?
- What limitations/mistakes in the operation of the projects have been traced? Is there any suggested solution?
- What recommendations does the local council make to fandom activists?

‘Synergy effect’:

- What social changes (in local communities and at a more general level) can be brought as a result of project activities?
- What new ideas about future actions (which were not formulated at the conceptual stage of ‘Supporters United’) emerged during the project?
- To what extent has the project helped to integrate and attract groups which are excluded and discriminated?
- Has ‘Supporters United’ facilitated a change in public opinion about football fandom in Poland?

Due to the time frame of the project (nine months) and a specific nature of the phenomenon, it was proposed that the research process should make use of qualitative methodology. The following methods were implemented in order to achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions:

(a) Individual in-depth interviews with representatives:⁴

- ‘Supporters United’ project from nine centres (coordinators from: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Kielce, Legnica, Poznań, Tychy, Warsaw, Wrocław, Zabrze) – nine interviews;
The interviews were conducted with a couple of coordinators in each city. Interviewing two people made it possible to capture the dynamics of cooperation between the two activists, and to stimulate ‘brain storming’ and mutual complementation.
- Municipal councils (officials responsible for the project) – eight interviews (Warsaw city council was not engaged in the programme during the research fieldwork)
- Polish Football Association (PZPN) (the official responsible for communication with supporters) – one interview

The Ministry of Sport and Tourism (the officials responsible for ‘Supporters United’ programme) – two interviews

- Beneficiaries of the projects in each city (e.g. teachers, parents, pupils, organizations) – nine interviews.
- Supporters’ Associations in each city – six interviews (in the case of Gdynia, Gdańsk

4 Quotations from interviews are marked as follows: Polish Football Association – PZPN; Ministry of Sport and Tourist [MST]; Supporters United – [city_SU]; supporters association – [club_SA]; supporter – [club_supporter]; local officials – [city_City Council]; journalists – [city_journalist], beneficiaries – [city_beneficiary].

and Zabrze, one of the SU coordinators was a member of supporters association)

- Local media/newspapers – eight interviews (in Silesia region – Tychy and Zabrze areas, there was one journalist interviewed)
- Supporters of local clubs (Lechia Gdańsk – 2; Polonia Warsaw – 1; Arka Gdynia 1, Lech Poznań – 2; Korona Kielce – 1; Miedź Legnica - 1) – eight interviews

(b) Content analysis of press releases, websites, social media and online forums.

- Project websites
- Project Facebook profiles
- Various fandom websites
- Newspapers and magazines

(c) Participant observation in the field. Observation addressed selected activities (sports, social, charitable, etc.) from the ‘Supporters United’ centres. In addition, the observation covered one joint cooperative action (e.g. a football tournament for children from all seven centres). Appendix 1 includes a photo gallery of local activities.

3. Theoretical inspirations and the frame of analysis

The principal analytical frame of the report is provided by Norbert Elias's concept of processual ('figurative') sociology. Although the choice of analytical tools is always an arbitrary and disputable matter, framing the empirical reality using an existing (and well-known) theory makes it possible to 'translate' local phenomena into a language understood by a global readership. Polish football fans constitute a local world based on particular values and cultural patterns. Describing these particularities using metaphors known in the world of social sciences will make them more open to inter-subjective analysis.

Considering the key elements of Elias's theory, Robert van Krieken (1998: 5–7) identifies five interrelated principles underlying Eliasian approach to sociology. First, 'although societies are composed of human beings who engage in intentional action, the outcome of the combination of human action is most often unplanned and unintended'. Second, 'human individuals can only be understood in their interdependencies with each other, as part of networks of social relations, or what he often referred to as "figurations". (...) the study of processes of social development and transformation – what Elias called *sociogenesis* – is necessarily linked to the analysis of *psychogenesis* – processes of psychological development and transformation, the changes in personality structures or habitus which accompany and underlie social change'.⁵ Third, 'human social life should be understood in terms of relations rather than states'. Fourth, 'human societies can only be understood as consisting of long-term processes of development and change, rather than as timeless states or conditions'. Fifth, 'sociological thought moves constantly between a position of social and emotional involvement in the topics of study, and one of detachment from them'.

Norbert Elias became famous for the concept of the 'civilizing process' (2012), which relates to individuals, groups, and entire societies. Transformation of individuals (tempering instincts, controlling aggressive behaviour) goes hand in hand with the development of the state as the structure to control violence. With the development of social structures (the state is becoming more and more 'complex' in structural terms) and the evolution of economic life, individuals confront the necessity of dealing with progressive 'functional differentiation' (a more complex environment entails control of behaviour), as well as reflexivity of attitudes and behaviour.

⁵ According to Elias, by using the concept of 'figuration', 'we can eliminate the antithesis (...) immanent today in the use of the words "individual" and "society"' (Elias 1978: 262).

The present study assumes that Polish football fans are currently undergoing such a process and evolving towards a peculiar social movement. Although it is still characterized by some phenomena of its deviant nature, its character keeps changing as a result of its own transformation ('internal factor'), as well as an increasing sensitivity to the wider social context and normative pressure ('external factors'). What used to be the affective 'standard' in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. vandalising trains and stadium infrastructure), today occurs less and less frequently. In the frame of fans' figuration, 'internal' constraints increasingly more often come to the fore and stimulate changes in behaviour. The transformation of society affects fan culture, which certainly becomes subject to reinterpretations (people and groups are not passive 'cogs' with no impact on the surrounding environment). Despite some extreme attitudes, fans increasingly more often rely on widely accepted mechanisms, refer to public rights and relate to other members of society.

Today, the multisector cooperation programme 'Supporters United' is considered the culminating achievement of a civilizing process which would have been difficult to imagine a few years ago. The present study focuses primarily on the analysis of the programme, as the initiative under discussion showcases the evolution of fandom in Poland. However, as the programme does not operate in a vacuum and is the result of long-term social process, it is therefore worth presenting a brief historical outline of how the social process of fandom has evolved over time and from what type of foundation it has grown.

4. History of Polish fandom as a social process

Elias perceived society as ‘the processes and structures of interweaving, the figurations formed by the actions of interdependent people’ (1978: 103). In social duration, individuals and groups are interwoven, and activities are transformed into social processes which are neither intentional nor intended (Elias 1987). These processes are characterized by ‘relative autonomy’ (Elias 2009a: 7): they take place despite the actions of individuals, but – on the other hand – are not independent of people. Although unplanned, the social process is driving with a ‘constancy of direction’ (there). The direction of the process, not designated by any demiurge, is characterized by increasing mutual dependency and functional differentiation. Also, ‘(...) the continuity of a process is mediated by the transmission of society-specific knowledge, acquired by learning, in the form of social symbols’ (Elias 2009a: 8). Norbert Elias observes that ‘the concept of “social process” relates to continuous long-term transformations’ (2009a: 4).

The author identifies the characteristics of long-term, complex social processes: functional differentiation, social integration, state-formation processes and another long-term (also unplanned) trend – the change in standards of social behaviour, i.e. ‘in what is socially permitted, what is commanded and forbidden, and the corresponding change in social personality structures in the direction of an increasing civilization of human feelings and behaviour’ (Elias 2009b: 32). The formation of the state (understood as a monopolist in the management apparatus of violence and taxes) was instrumental in restraining aggressive behaviour of individuals, who – in the course of social differentiation⁶ – had to learn to control their impulses (Elias 2012). Transformation of the state, processes of integration, and a growing social awareness have gone together with the ‘civilizing’ of fans’ figuration, a phenomenon accompanied by an unprecedented ‘functional differentiation’ – a division of fan movement into ‘specializations’.

In fact, as demonstrated by its history, fan movement in Poland is subject to transformation and cultural modernization and is certainly not a one-dimensional phenomenon. It dates back to the early 1970s, when fans of a number of clubs (ŁKS Łódź, Polonia Bytom, Lechia Gdańsk, Legia Warsaw) organized support for their teams. At the time, Polish stadiums were visited by clubs taking part in European Cup games (such as Feyenoord Rotterdam and

6 As Marta Bucholtz writes: ‘The higher the level of social complexity, the greater the need to regulate the behaviour of individuals and the greater the emphasis on internal control, while at the same time the more developed institutions of power, whose characteristic feature is the increasingly effective monopolizing the external pressure’ (2011: 12).

Saint-Étienne) and the behaviour of their supporters provided inspiration for Polish fans. However, it was local animosities that were to function as the main factor behind the formation of 'firms' supporting Polish football clubs. They were first started to protect their 'own area' against the 'strangers', i.e. supporters of clubs from other cities. Animosity was further fuelled by the fact that some clubs were affiliated with official state institutions (e.g. Legia was an army club, and Wisła Cracow was a club of the Citizens' Militia (MO), the communist police).

Communist authorities tried to channel the movement by setting official fan clubs which received state sponsorship for their activity, including organization of social events and trips to away matches. According to the logic of the communist regime, the authorities tried to make fandom a 'planned' process, as was the case of centrally planned economy.⁷ This policy involved the establishment of nationwide 'fan clubs' organizing regular meetings of representatives of their local branches. Their activity was supervised by communist party activists. However, the real fan movement was a grass-roots initiative in opposition to the political system of the day. Towards the end of the 1970s, informal groups of football fans were active in nearly thirty clubs (Goksiński 2014: 389). Figurations of fans were formed by young people (students) and workers (the working class). Although they did not differ from the rest of society, as a group they tried to behave spontaneously, or at least made an effort to resist ideological 'exploitation' pursued by the authorities.

The policy of the communist authorities aimed to create a one-class society dominated by the workers' movement. The structure of the economy, based on heavy industry, mining and agriculture, was to serve the functional uniformity. The communist party monopolized all aspects of life, but the state monopoly was not the result of a natural process of historical tensions and competition as in the civilizing process described by Elias. The mechanism of centralization served the 'concentration of all social resources for the implementation of both the target goals of the system and sub-targets. For these reasons, the system has not only a centralist, but also hierarchical nature. Organizational units located at the lower levels of the organizational structure are subordinated to a higher level' (Tarkowski 1994: 218). The country was 'integrated' by closing the borders and restricting opportunities to discover other cultures and values. At the same time, society was not integrated from the 'inside', as there was no

⁷ 'Planning' is an inherent feature of the communist system: 'In the communist countries, the view of history as a structured change of society in a specific direction remains alive. But with it, there survives at the same time the idea that this change is leading inevitably to the realization of communist ideals' (Elias 2009b: 18). Sport was one of the most important elements of the propaganda discourse, as it served as 'proof' of the superiority of the ideals of communism over capitalism. Fans and their 'rebellious' behaviour were breaking down this discourse.

development of civic attitudes (except for underground structures of anti-communist opposition), or a sense of community which would not be imposed by coercion. Indeed, communism stimulated the development of 'homo Sovieticus' mentality (Tischner 1992) based on conformist attitude, the lack of individual initiative, and dependence on system. Although in the 1970s fan movement started to take an organizational form, it was not a coherent cultural formation. Hence, it is difficult to talk about a committed 'social identity' of a fan.

The 1980s were a period of decline of the communist state. The beginning of the decade saw a social revolution leading to the emergence of the 'Solidarity' movement. At the same time, the results of opinion polls showed that Polish society was aware of the pathological nature of the system, e.g. overgrown bureaucracy, bribery, cronyism, poor organization of work, and excessive influence of the communist party on the economy (Koralewicz, Ziółkowski 1990). The inefficiency of the system (empty shelves in stores and food rationing were a part of daily experience for the majority of people) was manifested in rampant inflation, reaching a level exceeding 70% in 1988. The system which was supposed to bring prosperity in fact led the state to the economic collapse and 'unplanned' system transformation. Jacek Tarkowski aptly describes the final years of communism in Poland: 'instead of talking about the crisis, we should rather talk about a state of permanent backwardness' (1994: 205).

In the 1980s, news of the activity of English 'hooligans' reached Poland and the level of football-related violence increased. Owing to the official 'success propaganda', the scale of the phenomenon was never publically acknowledged. For example, as unofficially reported, in the riots during the 1980 Polish Cup final between Legia Warsaw and Lech Poznań there was at least one dead and several hundred injured. On the other hand, the same period saw the stands become a scene of anti-communist activity. Slogans such as 'Solidarity' (*Solidarność*) and 'Down with the commies' (*Precz z komuną*) were often to be heard in Lechia Gdańsk stadium (Wąsowicz 2006). Rioting against the authorities and fights with the police have remained a distinctive feature of Polish fans ever since. Official 'fan clubs' organized by the authorities perished, and fans organized themselves in their own way, which was usually manifested in mass trips to away matches. Taken on regular trains, the trips were spontaneous and involved binge drinking and fights with opposing fans. Law enforcement officers acted reactively, there was no special law regulating football matches. The most common 'strategy' of the Citizens' Militia (the communist police) was to punish the most hot-headed supporters by beating them and to release them home. The chaos of the fall of the state system was matched by the lack of any serious structures of fan movement. The fatalistic mood of the end of an era was dominated by violence between fans, and between the police and fans.

The fall of the socio-political system resulted in a phenomenon described by sociologists as a ‘social vacuum’ (Nowak 1981). The term refers to the situation in which there is a gaping hole – no civic communities, associations and grassroots initiatives – between the level of abstractly perceived nation, and the level of individuals focused on family life. The elements of social fabric enhancing the development of functional differentiation in the space of community and citizenship did not form. As a result, human activity was confined to the private sphere; in other words, individuals ‘withdrew’ to their small groups. At the level of the system, institutional instruments of terror and coercion – at least theoretically – tamed ‘uncivilized’ behaviour of individuals, and ideological censorship blocked the possibility of manifestation of alternative ways of thinking to ‘integrate’ people in the communist spirit. The first period of political transformation (1989) revealed that the new, democratically elected authorities without stable structures were faced with the necessity of suppressing the enormous inflation, high unemployment and supporting the collapsing economy, which was not able to compete in a free market environment. Political turbulence (in 1989–1997 Poland had eight prime ministers) did not help to resolve the economic problems.

The instability of the situation in the country resonated in the stadiums. Indeed, in the early years of the post-1989 transformation the culture of violence in Polish football stadiums developed on an unprecedented scale. The police data indicated an increasing number of hooligan incidents: 190 cases in 1991, 220 in 1992, 440 in 1993, 584 in 1994, 906 in 1995, 917 in 1996 and 1075 in 1997 (Gorący 2009). A ‘hardcore’ supporter of ŁKS Łódź describes the atmosphere of those times in his two-volume diary (eR 2014, 2015). He recalls traveling across Poland in a most ‘uncivilized’ manner: free-riding on the trains (endless conflicts with the conductors), vandalising public property, heavy drinking (sometimes for several days), ‘hunting’ for supporters of opposing teams, shoplifting, conflicts with the police. A Miedź Legnica supporter recalls:

Each trip meant a brawl, literally, every trip. We travelled with the equipment, wooden planks and stones; we escaped from the police; the police escorted us across Poland. (...) the 1990s, it was like... bricks flying in the stadium, people threw just everything. It was often a miracle that no one was killed every week. When you ripped out all those bricks from the stadium over and over again, the stadiums were already falling apart and there was no stuff left to fight with, just planks, bits of wood, fencing; [there was] no CCTV. (...) Back then, you ran around the city and fought because no one could do anything. How could they? And now you just go out and you’re getting recorded.

This phenomenon exemplifies ‘decivilizing spurts’ related to the fact that ‘rising levels of danger and incalculability in social life quite quickly render people more susceptible to fears

and fantasies' (Mennell 1996: 113).⁸ Elias comments: 'The armour of civilized conduct would crumble very rapidly if, through a change in society, the degree of insecurity that existed earlier were to break in upon us again, and if danger became as incalculable as it once was. Corresponding fears would soon burst the limits set to them today' (2012: 576). The lack of any structure organising the life of supporters in terms of regulations involved very peculiar forms of the search for 'security':

We had some locks, some chains to lock up the train compartment, to lock one end of the carriage, the other... Oh, my God... what a time... Now, you are escorted by the police all the way. It didn't use to be like that back then, what police? [Górnik Zabrze_SA]

The democratic structures of the state did not have any tools to react to hooligan incidents at their disposal. In the first years of the 1990s, football matches had a similar scenario: fights between fans (at railway stations, streets, around the stadiums, in the stands), sometimes leading to invading the pitch (interruption of the sporting event), followed by police intervention and escorting supporters to their sector or train (Miedź Legnica supporter: 'The rules were like this: the police beat us, we beat the police, no one went to court. Now, when the police beat us, you go to court'). It should be emphasized that in most cases confrontation between fans was not planned or arranged. 1997 marked an important turning point: in view of the situation in the stadiums (e.g. a club building was set on fire and thirty-seven police officers were injured in the riots during Polonia Warsaw vs. Legia Warsaw match), the government decided to introduce the *Act on Mass Events Security (Ustawa z dnia 22 sierpnia 1997 roku o bezpieczeństwie imprez masowych)*.⁹

Although the new regulations did not eradicate violence from the stadiums, acts of aggression became considerably less frequent. While 1998 saw as many as 826 incidents, the annual figures for 2000s rarely exceeded two hundred, to fall to a historic minimum of a hundred and five in 2010 (Piotrowski 2012). The end of the 1990s brought a slow change in the character of fan culture and marked the beginning of its 'functional differentiation'. November 1998 saw the first arranged fight planned by both 'teams' (Pol. *ustawka*: 'arranged', 'planned'),

8 Mennell argues that in the case of the 'decivilizing process' one can put two kinds of questions: 'The first group of questions are "structural": in what circumstances do the chains of interdependence in society begin to break, and thus why do levels of complexity, differentiation, and integration start to decline? The second group concerns the outcome of such processes of structural unravelling for people's experience: what are the cultural and psychological consequences and the impact on people's day-to-day conduct?' (1996: 113-114). In this study, it comes to the question: how did structural changes and Polish post-1989 transformation influence fan culture? What was their impact on the daily routine of individual supporters?

9 In 1995, Poland ratified the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches (Strasbourg, 19.08.1985).

held between the supporters of Lechia Gdańsk and Arka Gdynia. At the beginning of the twenty-first century one of the fan magazines wrote: 'Nowadays, hooligans meet for the popular "ustawka", where they show their superiority over the rivals, and where there is no risk that something could happen to outsiders. Someone might say that there is a law against it. This is a fact, but I repeat once more, no outsider suffers and no property is damaged' (Artur 2002: 19).

The rules of relationship between fans began to be regulated by an informal code (e.g. the so-called 'Fan Code').¹⁰ In 2004, the so-called 'Poznań Pact' was signed – fans of several dozen clubs met to discuss the rules considering 'not using "equipment" in fights' and the principle of 'truce' during the Polish national team matches (in 1995, before Poland vs. England match in Chorzów, a fan of Pogoń Szczecin was stabbed by a fan of Cracovia Cracow). With rare exceptions, the 'Poznań Pact' has functioned ever since. Is such 'honourable' aggression against an opponent a proof of the 'civilizing process' of fan culture? If judged from the perspective of a broader context of social conduct – violent acts would be considered 'uncivilized'. On the other hand, the historical social process shows a slow but distinct change of fan attitudes. While in the 'crazy' 1990s such issues as dangerous 'equipment' were not the subject of concern (one of the respondents recalls: 'We used everything, samurai swords, anything that was at hand; you protected yourself, because you never knew what could happen'), they are certainly considered today. Although the perspective of eliminating such extreme affects as aggression (and hate) from fans' figuration is very distant, it is crucial to recognize the changes, influenced also by 'external constraints'. Criminal and civil law developed in the process of state formation to protect the social order becomes an important factor of disciplining the fans.

The turn of the century brought the development of ultras groups. Their separation within fan movement is proof of the 'division of function' (Elias 2009b: 32). The 'Calendar of the decade 2001–2010' published in *To My Kibice!* ('It's Us the Fans!') says: 'In 2002, ultras groups sprang up like mushrooms. (...) A division between ultras and hooligans was becoming more and more visible' (*Kalendarium dziesięciolecia* 2011: 35). The institutionalization of the movement in the form of supporters' associations, a trend which emerged in 2003, contributed

10 The code is available: http://kibicowskiezycie.pl/325,KODEKS_KIBICA (accessed 11.03.2016). The rules include: supporting fans in the fight against the police (even if it concerns hostile fans); ban on the use of dangerous objects in the fights; ban on mistreatment of defeated opponents, including robbery. These principles do not form an ultimate list, and many comments on internet forums indicate that in some cases the rules are not obeyed. However, such a supra-local, nationwide ways of regulating behaviour resemble monopolization, which accompanied e.g. the formation of larger social entities and states. Elias described it as a type of 'formalization' (1996). Not sanctioned by any 'coercive apparatus' (as in the case of the state) the fan code works on the principle of ostracization: 'dishonourable' and unfair behaviour violating the spirit of the rules is stigmatized by means of rumours and symbolic violence.

to the development of ultras' performances¹¹ (*Kalendarium...* 2011). What proved a factor conducive to the development of fan performances was the institutionalization of fan movement, mainly in the form of officially registered associations. The change was important considering that support shows became increasingly more complex and complicated, which required close cooperation with club management in terms of logistics (installation, mounting, storage on club premises). Institutionalization of ultras groups also facilitated raising funds for choreographies, whose costs often exceeded tens of thousands złotys. Indirectly, the ultras introduced formal structure to the community of football supporters. As a result, the fan movement went on to discover different areas of activity outside stadiums and became a part of organized civil society. Since the activity of the ultras required a certain level of organization, logistics and budgeting, they played a major role in the process. Naturally, fan associations included not only the ultras, but also those responsible for charity actions, contacts with the club, etc. At the same time, however, performances organized by the ultras were a means of communication of the most engaged fans with the outside world.

The first decade of the twenty-first century brought a fast and significant evolution of fan movement. It should be remembered that it was the period of Polish accession to the European Union (2004). The opening of borders resulted in a large emigration from Poland (estimated at the level of up to two million people), which affected the world of fans. A Górnik Konin (the Fourth League) supporter says: 'The town is depopulating at a high rate, the wave of emigration is rising. In addition, it has painfully affected our group' (*Działamy na własny rachunek* 2014: 39). However, the most important date marking a change of the football 'figuration' in Poland was 18 April 2007, when Poland was selected (together with Ukraine) as a co-host of Euro 2012. Modernizing stadiums and highways, the Polish government decided to 'modernize' also supporters, mainly by ousting football hooligans from the game. The 2009 amendment of the *Act on Mass Event Security* was to serve the purpose. As a result, the number of those arrested for offenses related to this act increased significantly. Established in 2007, the National Union of Supporters' Associations (Ogólnopolski Związek Stowarzyszeń Kibicowskich) intended to integrate fans in the struggle for their interests (and was an institutional proof of their integration). Importantly, the integration of supporters' associations stemmed from the impact of external processes (changes in legislation, transformation of stadium infrastructure) – deepening structural processes of state-building. Before the inauguration of Euro 2012, fans vigorously protested against the policy of the government by

11 A representative of Śląsk Wrocław supporters' associations mentions: 'Ultras have their business, the sports' crews [hooligans – RK ed.] have their own issues, supporters' associations have their own business'.

presenting choreographies with political contents (pointing towards Prime Minister Donald Tusk), and organizing street happenings.

Lewis Coser observes that ‘conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding social world’ (1964: 38). The experience of the conflict was instrumental in expanding the activity of the fans and, as it turned out, their organizational skills manifested during the protests were to be used in other fields. The energy of collective identity has been used in new dimensions: first of all, in the expanding area of activity of supporters’ associations, which initiated the next stage in the historical process of fandom – involvement in the sphere of social, educational, political and charitable activity. In the 2015/2016 season, fifteen out of the sixteen teams playing in the Polish Ekstraklasa (level 1) have their supporters’ associations (except for the newly promoted Termalica Nieciecza from a village with a population of 750 people). Local groups of fans have a representative in the management structure of the club holding the position of Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO). Implemented through the efforts of the Polish Football Association, SLOs are another evidence of the impact of modernization and civilizing factors. In most clubs, the position is held by a person from the fan community. Clubs can cooperate more easily with the fans when they are represented by an institutional body (association). The activity of associations facilitates a number of issues (e.g. organizing the distribution of tickets) and, above all, enables their expansion in other spheres. It needs to be stressed that the civic and social development of supporters’ associations reflects a broader context, where a number of different organizations create their particular identity policies in contemporary Poland. This would seem to confirm that fan movement (in terms of associations, as well as mobilization and activity) is developing into a figuration capable of reaching particular aims and objectives in a modern and official way. The multidimensional sphere of fan activism reflects the fact that

In the course of the growing differentiation and integration of social functions and increasing democratization and equalization, the people involved have forced themselves and each other to behave with greater consideration; consideration of the feeling and interests of more people, for more of the time. (...) The level of their mutually expected self-restraint has risen. (Wouters 1986:11)

‘The broadening of the figurative field’ of fandom beyond typical ‘cheering’ actions stems from several motivations, and the respondents indicate such factors as: the intention to demonstrate the positive side of fan activity, to break the stereotype of the ‘hooligan’ and ‘thug’, to use the energy and potential of the group, to work for the sake of the Club, to raise the new

generations of fans, to strengthen ties in local communities, to create attitudes and values and, in a broader sense – to serve others (as the coordinator of the SU centre in Tychy mentioned: ‘We just want to help’). The ‘civilized’ aspects of social activity of fan movement include such dimensions as:

(A) Charitable activity

- collecting food supplies and everyday items for foster care institutions, nursing homes, animal shelters, the Polish minority in the former Soviet Union (Legia Warsaw, Lechia Gdańsk, Widzew Łódź, GKS Katowice, Resovia Rzeszów)
- collecting funds for a variety of actions: medical treatment of those in need (children and adults), the purchase of rehabilitation and medical equipment, the rescue of football clubs (the case of Lechia Gdańsk, Stilon Gorzów, Chrobry Głogów)
- donating blood (Wisła Płock, Zagłębie Lubin)

(B) Social and educational activity

- helping in the redecoration of foster care institutions (a nationwide campaign called ‘Kolorujemy’ (‘Colouring’))
- organizing sports tournaments and festivals for children (‘Supporters United’ centers)
- organizing Christmas parties for children from foster care institutions, for the homeless and the elderly (ŁKS Łódź)
- organizing football tournaments for supporters (KKS Kalisz, Ruch Chorzów, Wisłoka Dębica)
- organizing art competitions and educational classes for children (Cracovia Cracow, Arka Gdynia, Polonia Warsaw).
- organizing summer camps for children from foster care institutions and from the Polish minority in the former Soviet Union (Wisła Cracow)
- preparing officially authorized graffiti in urban space (Lechia Gdańsk)

(C) Commemorative and political activity

- commemorating important figures of local sport (Legia Warsaw, Ruch Chorzów)
- commemorating important events in Polish history (e.g. Warsaw Uprising) (Lech Poznań, Legia Warsaw, Pogoń Szczecin)
- renovating and taking care of the graves of people who rendered service to the region and the country (Lech Poznań)
- participating in events celebrating local and national holidays (fans from whole Poland)

(D) Functional differentiation

- division into different sections: ultras, associations, local fan-clubs, hooligans, etc.

(E) Institutionalization

- in terms of official supporters' associations – official status as public benefit organizations

(F) Integration

- integration in terms of an institutional body – the National Union of Supporters' Associations (Ogólnopolski Związek Stowarzyszeń Kibicowskich) (representing the fan movement in official affairs)
- integration as the field of multisector cooperation – 'Supporters United' programme
- integration in terms of social mobilization and grass-roots activity (supporting fans of rival clubs, solidarity between 'enemies')

(G) Fans' political economy

- production, management and making profit from fan culture (fan brands, merchandise, fan shops)

(H) Normativity, regulations and 'fan codes' ('formalization of conduct')

- the 'Poznań Pact' and the 'Fan Code'
- internal regulations of individual groups – rules of conduct during the match, both home and away (e.g. obligation to wear club colours)

(I) Communication and publishing activity

- editing and publication of fan journals
- setting up and administration of websites

Apart from the above activity incorporating fans in a broader – civic – context, what cannot remain overlooked is controversial, often 'uncivilized' and illegal dimensions:

(A) Hooligan activity and vandalism (fights between hooligans, damage to public property)

(B) Political extremism (displaying illegal political symbols, e.g. associated with racism)

(C) Criminal activity (engaging in drug trafficking, robberies, organized crime)

(D) Violation of legal regulations concerning the matches (e.g. pyrotechnics)

While it is certainly necessary to note the coexistence of positive initiatives with the 'dark side' of fandom, it seems that the development of new, legal, and culturally and socially acceptable forms of activity is the symptom of the civilizing nature of fans' 'figuration' (or – a

large part of it). In the days when the figuration was dominated by hooligan incidents, there was no space for such programmes as 'Supporters United'. Again, Elias's metaphors can prove useful in the analysis: the relationship of interdependence between state-formation processes, modernization and Europeanization of Polish football (Euro 2012, modern stadiums, professional league), and the maturity of a part of the fan movement made it possible to implement such a platform of inter-sector cooperation.

5. 'Supporters United' – a programme of multisector cooperation

The evolution of the fan movement coincides with the modernization of Poland as a large, dynamically developing European country. Thanks to economic transformation (the marketization of the post-communist economy) and changes in social awareness, Poland is becoming a major player on the map of democratic Europe and the world. In the field of sport, the organizational success of the UEFA Euro Championships in 2012 was a sign of 'joining' modern Western countries. This was possible nearly twenty-five years after the beginning of the system transformation (1989), which launched a programme of national modernization. Political changes do not take place in a vacuum, but are accompanied by progressive changes in the social, economic, and sports sphere. Therefore the possibility of implementing such a project as 'Supporters United' emerged only when both the fan movement and government agencies were ready to work together. As Dariusz Łapiński, coordinator of the programme in the Polish Football Association (PZPN) recalls, it required time and change:

– We can observe social changes... We had the most serious problems with the fans in the 90s after the political transformation (...). It seems to me that there naturally occurs... a process of civilizing this whole movement. Civilizing, most of all, in the sense of moving away from political radicalism and violence in its pure form as a particular feature of fandom. And this process continues...

Researcher – So, in the 90s it would rather have failed?

– In the 90s it would have been unlikely to succeed, because then... well, generally civil society in Poland was in absolute infancy, and then speaking of civil attitudes among fans would have been difficult.

As fans explained, the past decades had been characterized by a different atmosphere:

Maybe there was no need of such centres then. Everyone met at the matches, and it was the centre, the stadium, wasn't it? [Tychy_SA]

In retrospect, it must be concluded that the organization of the European Championships was a milestone in the implementation of fan projects in Poland. The organization of such a big venture obliged the authorities to turn attention to fan issues. The deputy mayor of Gdańsk observes:

Definitely Euro. Euro was such a moment. (...) We mapped out processes, built projects based on these processes, as defined and shared. (...) Our great ambition was not to have a project for tourists, just a promotional project, but a project that the local communities could take pride in, because we had succeeded, because we showed our best side. Well, here we began to think also about fans. Well, it seemed natural to us that we should build a relationship with the fan community in a reasonable way.

A representative of Wrocław city council also refers to the importance of the tournament in the context of the local SU centre:

This project was sensible and it was a good idea to start it; in addition – before Euro 2012 – it helped to ensure security in the stadiums, to make the best impression in Europe and the world.

Drawing on the German experience (introduced in Poland by Dariusz Łapiński, who had lived in Germany for twelve years), it was decided that fan projects should be implemented in Poland. Łapiński, the present coordinator for fan affairs in the Polish Football Association, began his work in PL.2012 company, which was responsible for the organization of the EURO 2012 in Poland. PL.2012 was a special purpose company of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, which coordinated more than two hundred organizational projects related to the championships. One of them was a pilot project called ‘Supporters United’, implemented in 2009 and launched first in two cities: Gdańsk and Wrocław. Each centre employed people rooted in the fan community (Lechia Gdańsk and Śląsk Wrocław respectively). The next centres were established in Gdynia (Arka football club), Warsaw (Polonia), Tychy (GKS) and Legnica (Miedź). In 2015, three other cities joined the project: Poznań (Lech), Zabrze (Górník) and Kielce (Korona).

The centres in Gdańsk and Wrocław helped to implement the project of Fan Embassies (information points providing practical advice to visiting supporters) operating during the EURO 2012. It was an important and unprecedented step in ‘admitting’ fans to the mainstream, by sharing with them the responsibility for the quality of the event. After the European Championships, the question of how to capitalize on the success of the Embassy remains to be answered. PL.2012 company, responsible for preparing and maintaining embassies and the SU project, was dissolved after the tournament, but Dariusz Łapiński planned to use the positive energy released thanks to fan activities. After the election of the new authorities of the Polish Football Association (when Zbigniew Boniek was elected president), Łapiński managed to obtain guarantees of support for a further development of cooperation with fans, this time in the form of local fan projects. In this way, the relationship with fans took an institutional form:

In 2012 we felt a responsibility towards these fan groups. I kind of pulled the wool over their eyes with the bright perspectives after the Euro, and really the trust that somehow arose would have been hugely disappointed if I wound it all up and broke this deal. [Łapiński]

After the dissolution of PL.2012 company, the project was taken over by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. The ministry could ensure a more stable organizational and financial

structure and established the strategy of its further development (the number of centres, long-term strategy). Several years of functioning of the SU centres had brought enough satisfactory results, and the ministry of Sport and Tourism decided to rename the 'project' as 'programme' (9 September 2015). This is not only a semantic change as it brings serious organizational consequences. The programme for improving the organization and security of sports events in Poland by building structures for dialogue and cooperation with the fans was announced for a longer period. The most important information for local centres is the scheduled structure of financing in the three-year period (the first period: 2016–2018), which ensures a greater stability of its operation. The fact that most of the centres used to work on an annual basis restricted long-term planning, as well as deprived the employees of their salary for the first few months of each new year. The ministry decided to change this. For the period 2016–2018 nearly three million Polish złotys (PLN) was allocated for this purpose.

The 'Supporters United' programme forms an alliance of several different subjects. Apart from the Ministry, the PZPN, supporters' associations, and non-governmental organizations (some of them are the operators in local cases, e.g. 'Wake up Hope' Foundation (Fundacja 'Obudź nadzieję') in Gdańsk), the programme involves the local authorities. Their participation, contrary to appearances, is of great importance. Municipalities provide the premises (often at a preferential rate), and partly finance the salaries of coordinators. Each local centre employs two people; the salary of one is financed by the local authorities, and the other by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. The principles of the project (2010) specify the profile of prospective coordinators (including such features as an ability to work in a group, an easiness of networking, good skills in English). In addition, one of them is supposed to be recommended by the local supporters association. This requirement appears to be crucial – in the hermetic structure of fan groups a 'stranger' would not be able to present the activity of the centre in a wider context. It is worth stressing that most activities are undertaken by local centres. Apart from joint workshops, training sessions and working meetings, an annual football tournament for teams of young players (often children from foster care institutions) representing all centres is held in Warsaw. In 2015, the event was attended by eighty participants.

In general terms, the programme can be approached in the context of the following objectives:

The ministry implements the programme because it wants to cooperate with the fans, because we care about attendance at football matches. We want to make the atmosphere at matches change. (...) We don't like the fact that football fans are seen as hooligans – it deters potential viewers from the sport. It contradicts the idea of sport. We don't want football to be associated with aggression, with excesses in the stadium, we want it to be a family event. (...) It's not about

replacing people in the stands. We would like to cooperate with the ultras fans, we believe that there is a big potential in them. (...) I hope that this is a social group that can be used to promote the sport. We don't want to have matches without choreographies, because it's an element of fan culture, but we would like the fans to expand this activity and use it a little more to promote the sport. [MST]

It is worth having a closer look at the implementation of the objectives of the programme in specific, local circumstances and communities.

Gdańsk (Lechia Gdańsk)

Operated by the 'Wake up Hope' Foundation, the Gdańsk centre was among the first to become active (2010). The city has very strong traditions of fan activism and Lechia fans take pride in their anti-communist activity in the 1980s (Wąsowicz 2006). In 2001, they rescued the club from the ultimate collapse and Lechia made a slow recovery proceeding from the sixth level of competition. In 2008, Lechia returned to the Polish Ekstraklasa (level 1); in 2011 the club played its first match in the new stadium built for Euro 2012. During the championships, the centre coordinated the 'Fans' Embassy', which served over five thousand fans from many countries.

The Gdańsk centre is known for its festivals held around the city, providing a number of attractions (e.g. playgrounds for children) for the local residents. As the events are attended by Lechia players, fans have a chance to get to know them and take pictures (in 2014 there were five festivals; in 2015 – four; the centre plans to organize such events in all thirty-four districts of Gdańsk). Another type of activity involves football tournaments for children, very often those in foster care institutions or from dysfunctional families (participation in the competition aims to create a sense of respect and belonging to a group). Supporting children from foster care institutions is a result of cooperation with the 'Wake up Hope' Foundation, which specializes in activating children through sport. The Gdańsk centre attaches great emphasis to organizing sports competitions for both children and fans. It has recently focused also on activity in the field of education: centre coordinators visit schools with talks about Lechia and cultural ways of supporting the players.

Another fact worth noting is close cooperation between the centre and Lechia Gdańsk Supporters' Association 'The Lions of the North' ('Lwy Północy'), thanks to which it was possible to obtain funding (from the Civic Initiatives Fund, Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich) to organize the conference 'Pyrotechnics is safe' (two editions: 2012 and 2013). In 2010, a group of Lechia Ultras attended graphics and drawing workshops conducted by architecture students from the Gdańsk University of Technology, held at the local SU centre. In 2011, the

association and the SU centre published the first issue of the *A my swoje!* ('Let's do our job!') magazine, including information about the activity of SU Gdańsk (circulation of 500 copies, distribution before the matches). Cooperation with the association is an important step in integrating wider fan circles. It seems, however, that the coordinators of SU Gdańsk should put more emphasis on cooperation with new actors (beyond the world of sport and fandom), which could help them to develop new fields of activity.

Gdynia (Arka Gdynia)

The centre was established in 2011 in a non-host city of Euro 2012, which marked an important step of expanding the project beyond the immediate environment of the tournament. This came as a result of joint efforts of Gdynia Sports and Recreation Centre and the Arka Gdynia Supporters' Association (the project operator). Although the activity of SU Gdynia may look somewhat more modest than other centres, such an assessment would not be fair. The centre struggled with financial problems in 2013, when the financing was not secured until May (coordinators worked as volunteers, but eventually had to look for other employment).¹² The initiative has survived thanks to the commitment of the supporters' association. It should be noted that in spite of these problems, in May 2013 the centre organized a meeting of different generations of fans of the club (about 1,000 people), and held a Children's Day event in June. It seems that the centre has survived without financial resources only because it was important for the fans. Paradoxically, the significance of the SU project was manifested in the situation of its greatest crisis.

In spite of modest financial resources, the activity in Gdynia involves a few well-known initiatives: 'Yellow-Blue starting kit' (school supplies for children); a campaign called 'Yellow-Blue Santa Claus' (presents for children's hospital wards; funds are raised at the 'Yellow-Blue Music' charity concert; yellow and blue are the colours of Arka); coordination of the family sector known as 'Śledziki'¹³ during Arka matches, and meetings of club supporters. The main shortcoming of the activity of SU Gdynia is poor administration of its website, which simply

12 The discontinuity of financing affected also the centre in Gdańsk. From January to February 2013, the centre was maintained from donations of supporters and volunteers. Needless to say, such instability disrupts the planning of activities. The transformation of 'Supporters United' from a 'project' to a 'programme' will help to avoid such situations.

13 'Śledziki', Pol. 'little herrings'. 'Herrings' is the nickname of Arka Gdynia fans; the city is a major Polish seaport.

does not present a number of initiatives. The advantages include the ability to raise money (public collections, concerts), although it does not take the form of applying for grants.

Kielce (Korona Kielce)

Operated by the 'United Korona' ('Zjednoczona Korona') Supporters Association, the centre in Kielce is one of the newest (contract signed in May 2015). In addition to typical football fan activity (preparation of officially authorized graffiti, meetings with players, etc.), it is also focused on issues of the so-called historical policy. The centre participates in a number of projects related to the celebration of historical figures and events (e.g. joined the Independence March in Kielce). Generally, the idea of patriotism, both local and national, cannot be regarded as controversial. However, cooperation with 'The Third Way' (Trzecia Droga) organization, officially defining itself as 'nationalist', may give rise to concern. This is the first such case in the history of the SU programme.

Apart from these controversies, it should be stressed that the centre pursues a broad spectrum of activity. SU Kielce was instrumental in the charity initiative for an ill boy: he was invited to the stadium, where he met the players. The premises of the centre began to function as a community day centre (offering games and workshops for children), a place of integration of children from the neighbourhood which does not have a particularly good reputation. The centre also holds historical lectures and talks (e.g. by war veterans). A representative of the local self-government in Kielce recognizes the importance of the centre for local residents:

I think that what can be treated as a small success – after just a few months that the centre has operated – is probably that – considering that the centre is located in such a place... an estate... which... so to say, not to offend anyone, well... it's famous for things and events, and characters, that are... not exactly interesting... but I know that this issue has been tackled, that these people who hang around and would like to come here... and still, no one is ignored. Quite on the contrary, they [the centre] can make contact with these people so that everything's fine, so the centre wouldn't be seen as a meeting spot for hooligans, but show that a fan is a good person with good character. [Kielce_City Council]

The centre quickly gained trust among the youngest residents of the area. In the course of the study, I had an opportunity to talk with several children, all of whom were delighted with the place, the offer of games and activities, particularly access to a game console. It seems they have no such opportunities in their homes. The centre has become so popular with children that coordinators had to start making sure they do not skip their school classes. To avoid this temptation, the SU considers later opening hours. Plans for the centre involve a further development of its activity in order to attract more people:

I hope that we will complete the redecoration of the centre, including the basement. We plan to open a gym at the lower level, so people could actively spend their time here. We hope that more and more children will start coming. Next year we want to focus on our fan clubs, to visit some schools with football players. We'll see how to arrange it. We'll have to work on this so that people will be happy to come here. Also, to go to schools around Kielce and to arrange and present something nice. [Kielce_SU]

Legnica (Miedź Legnica)

Legnica centre was founded in May 2014 and has already become well-known for its activity. The scope of its initiatives has been recognized by UEFA, which invited the staff and children to the final game of Europe League in Warsaw. An exemplary centre where all the partners support one another,¹⁴ it is operated by the Children's Friends Society (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci, TPD), one of the oldest (established in 1919) and most widely-known organizations in Poland; one of the coordinators of SU Legnica is a board member of the TPD. The centre is highly committed to work for children. During winter holidays, it organized activities for children who had no access to other forms of recreation (action 'Winter in the City'). Other examples include: a Christmas Eve for children, a charity tournament for children with cancer, actions called 'Santa Claus of Miedź', 'A Young Fan in the City' (during summer holidays), 'Zumba Party' (a dance workshop, the revenue was transferred to prepare gifts for children), and daily help with homework and learning. Apart from helping children, the centre supports the Disabled Supporters' Club (Klub Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych, KKN) of Miedź Legnica (e.g. the organization of a charity ball), and is engaged in 'typical' fan projects. The range and number of initiatives undertaken by SU Legnica draw attention because Miedź is a club at the second level of competition and Legnica is the smallest city among all Polish SU centres. In 2014, SU Legnica received (from both the ministry and the local government) the lowest funding among all the centres.

Apart from TPD's experience of working for children (going back to 1919), another great asset of SU Legnica is the 'Only Miedź' ('Tylko Miedź') Supporters' Association established in 2009. The scale of its mobilization for social activity and charity is impressive; the chairman of the association lists:

There's lots of people who help. I do a lot of charity work, I have a group of volunteers, there are about five hundred people. There's a profile on Facebook, a separate group of blood donors, the social committee, now we have an official association of disabled fans. We work

¹⁴ At a conference organized by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism in October 2015, SU Legnica was recognized as a 'model pattern' of cooperation between the SU centre, the club and the city.

with all entrepreneurs. (...) There are people not only from Legnica, but also from Strzegom, Jelenia Góra, Lubin, Chojnów, Chocianów, Polkowice, Miłkowice, Jawor, Wrocław, basically from whole Poland. When I needed some medicine for Angelica [a girl with cancer – ed. RK] which couldn't be got in Poland, there were people writing from France, Spain, Italy, Germany; it's a huge machine; there is potential. Today, I got a letter from a girl who needs a prosthesis. We collected over seventy thousand złotych from all our events.

– Researcher: Who else do you work with?

– All associations in Legnica, all the associations from the local area. With mayors, with foundations, with different football clubs, with the management of the largest shopping centre in Legnica, the Youth Centre of Culture, smaller shopkeepers, schools, school directors, I know every director, they are very happy they can call and ask for help; the Regional Football Association.

Interestingly, owing to considerable formalities involved in application procedures, the association does not benefit from external grants, as it does not employ a person specializing in this area.

Poznań (Lech Poznań)

The Poznań centre was established as one of the last, the agreement with the operator (Lech Poznań Supporters' Association, Stowarzyszenie Kibiców Lecha Poznań, SKLP) was signed in May 2015. However, the premises officially opened only on 30 October. The early days were not without problems, as the municipality had allocated only limited resources to the SU centre in 2015. The situation forced the SKLP to take on some of the financial obligations involved, which confirms the potential and importance of the organization. One of the respondents comments as follows: 'The fans are a movement to be reckoned with in Poland. (...) We are the greatest power, we have potential, we can say, for the scale of the entire Wielkopolska region.'¹⁵ [Lech Poznań_SA]. The regional 'monopoly' of Lech Poznań is confirmed by an official from the Poznań City Council:

The peculiarity of Poznań and Wielkopolska region is that Lech has no competitors. (...) We are not like Silesia, where there are a lot of clubs, or Mazovia. Here, the whole fan environment means Lech.

Likewise, a journalist from Poznań draws attention to the importance of the club for the local community:

Poznań is divided and there are no alternatives. Lech is among the symbols of Poznań, like the town hall, for example. Yes, it's important. It's been particularly stressed recently. The authorities of Lech have recently started to communicate with the supporters in Poznań dialect.

¹⁵ Wielkopolska – geographical region and administrative province in western Poland with the capital in Poznań.

The representatives of Lech supporters complain about the relations with the local self-government: 'The local authorities apparently are afraid to invest in the fans. (...) The self-government believes that it's better and knows everything better'. However, only a few months was enough to mark the presence of the SU centre in the community. A strong emphasis was put on sports competitions, which was connected not only with the profile of the association, but also with the source of financing, as the centre received funds from the programme for prevention of alcohol abuse (physical activity is part of its prevention policy). The SU centre also became the honorary patron of an amateur football league, and – together with various partners (mainly with the Museum of the Wielkopolska Uprising) – organized several tournaments, e.g. commemorating the anniversary of the martial law (13.12.1981), the Lech Cup (U12 international tournament), the 'Little Souls Cup' (a tournament for children born in 2006 and 2004). Theoretically, the Poznań centre has been operating for only three months. However, what cannot be underestimated is the role of the supporters' association in keeping 'Supporters United' alive in the early days of the initiative. The sports profile of the centre contributes to improving the level of physical fitness of both children and adults.

Tychy (GKS Tychy)

The centre in Tychy was founded around the same time as SU Legnica (inauguration in June 2014), and is operated by the 'Tychy Fan' ('Tyski Fan') GKS Tychy Supporters' Association. The profile of the operator has an influence on the profile of the centre – it is strongly fan-oriented (a tournament for fans, legal advice for fans, the *Tyski Fan* newsletter). However, there are also social campaigns and charity initiatives: visiting sick children at the hospital (with hockey players from the club; GKS Tychy has two sections: football and ice hockey), collection of funds for the purchase of infusion pumps for the paediatric ward, a Children's Day tournament for school children (known as the 'tricolour', after GKS Tychy colours: black, green and red). While the Tychy centre does not stand out in any particular way, it systematically builds its identity as an important organization in the sporting life of the city. The decision to set up the centre resulted from the common experience of the city council and the supporters' association in organizing the 'Support with Class' campaign. During the World Junior Ice Hockey Championship, primary schools were invited to support different teams (one school – one team). Following the success of the campaign, the Mayor of Tychy decided to establish the SU centre. Fans were seen as a reliable group:

It turned out that cooperation worked well, that this structure they have is somehow organized, that it's not just a yelling crowd nobody really controls, that there is someone they all listen to. (...) And the fact is that we are no longer afraid to cooperate with them. [Tychy_City Council]

Warsaw (Polonia Warsaw)

It is the only centre which functions without the financial support from the local council. Initially, the municipality co-financed SU Polonia, but in 2014 the fans had to form an alliance of non-governmental organizations ('Zona Muranów', named after Muranów district of the city) to receive funding for their activity. These financial means will run out in June 2016; the talks with the local authorities concerning financial support to the centre are currently under way. The present operator – the 'Great Polonia' ('Wielka Polonia') Supporters' Association – will probably terminate its involvement in the SU project. The next few months will be decisive for the Warsaw centre both in terms of financial and organizational partnership. Although Polonia is an established club with a historical record of success, it does not have as many supporters as Legia Warsaw. This might explain inadequate support from local authorities: 'Simply speaking, there are politicians who know that they will do better when they support Legia' [Warsaw_SU].

Warsaw centre is distinguished by a specific frame of activity involving cooperation with numerous associations beyond the world of football fandom. Such external assistance stemmed also from financial problems; for example, in the first three months of 2013 coordinators worked on a voluntary basis, collecting donations to pay the rent for the premises. Another problem for Polonia fans was the trials and tribulations of the club: in the 2013/14 season Polonia lost its financial liquidity and a license to play in the league. The supporters saved the club from collapse and strove for permission to be allowed in the Fourth Division in the following season. The SU centre provided expert and organizational support in these efforts. Paradoxically, the uncertain fate of the club gives a boost to its supporters to show their initiative:

We even discussed the possibility of closing the centre. I didn't want to agree to this, I think it has a very high added value. The centre is involved in the activity of the club, supports the club. I like it that they organize a female football team; they have some very specific ideas which are very good to activate the local community. Besides, when they already have a budget they can really use it very well; for example, they go to schools with some workshops. [MST]

Although SU Polonia is strongly rooted in the fan environment, a number of its initiatives extend beyond this area mainly because of the source of funding (not allocated to football fans). For example, the financing of the centre in 2013 came from the programme for prevention of alcohol-related problems, which meant that its activity had to be profiled

accordingly. The lack of stability is not conducive to long-term strategies. With hindsight, it is obvious that the 'Great Polonia' association has not coped with the management of the project – there were delays and administrative problems. In addition, the legitimacy of the association among wider fan circles has also been affected. Coordinators of the SU centre agree in their assessment of the operator:

C1: The operator is just a passive operator, that's all I can say.

C2: Passivity is probably the right word.

The association is also 'passive' in terms of communication and promotion: 'It's hard to cooperate with the official website, the official fanpage, which gathers most of the people and information. We don't get along, and they don't really want to promote this. Apparently that's the fanpage of the association which is our operator, so it should promote the project but it was hard to push through' [Warsaw_SU]. Consequently, there is a plan to change the operator in the second half of 2016. The crucial issue will be to secure funds from the municipality.

Despite the problems, the variety of activities undertaken by the SU centre in the framework of 'Zona Muranów' is impressive: the 'Invisible Hand' module to establish cooperation between seniors and youth; 'Black School' action (doing homework in the centre; black is the main colour of Polonia's logo); 'School of Passion' – workshops where children can develop their passions, arts classes; tutoring in many school subjects; sports activities (swimming, football, wrestling); historical and journalism classes (preparing magazine and internet articles); photography workshops; personal development workshops (where children learn to express their emotions). The centre also undertook the organization of a female football team (girls aged 10–11 years), a precedent among all the centres.

Wrocław (Śląsk Wrocław)

The centre opened at the same time as its Gdańsk counterpart (June 2010) and has been operated by Convention Bureau Wrocław (CBW; a municipal company promoting the city) ever since. In comparison with other centres, its cooperation with the local supporters' association – 'Hey Śląsk' ('Hej Śląsk') – appears far less successful. Although initially the two organizations worked together (e.g. restoring old fan flags and preparing WKS Śląsk Wrocław graffiti), in the course of time their relations deteriorated. One of the reasons of the situation was the reluctance of SU Wrocław employees to become involved in a patriotic march attended by the association (November 2011). It should be mentioned that some fans of

Śląsk are recognized for their involvement in patriotic (or even nationalist) movements and demonstrations. On the other hand, as the principles of the 'Supporters United' programme do not include political involvement of the centres, Wrocław coordinators announced that they would not support any such initiatives ('for me, politics is a matter that is the least interesting in football, because the club is the supreme value we all should engage our efforts to' – one of the coordinators). The association has often asked for financial support to its *ad hoc* needs. In one such case, the staff of the centre have been misled: a choreography which was supposed to glorify the club turned out to contain anti-refugee message. Coordinators complain about the lack of mutuality, the unprofessional structure of the association, mental and communication barriers. As a result, 'cooperation is very superficial, there are no joint projects we implement together' [Wrocław_SU]. However, a representative of the association mentions a 'new opening':

We have announced our really close cooperation as of the New Year. We've set out directions. We have some actions already planned. By the end of the year we want to have one such joint action planned for every month. (...) The first thing we're going to do together is to organize a fan pilgrimage to Częstochowa.¹⁶ (...) In general, this centre offers many opportunities we haven't fully used so far.

A remedy for improving relations would be to employ the third SU staff member, a person rooted in the supporters' association. Although this would be the first such case among all local centres, it seems to be necessary in the context of legitimizing the programme among Śląsk fans. The situation confirms once again that the success of the SU programme is impossible (or very difficult) without the acceptance of, and legitimacy among, the local fan movement.

SU Wrocław has developed a number of remarkable initiatives: leading prevention programmes, teaching the Czech language, organizing exchange of fan souvenirs, meetings with former Śląsk Wrocław players. More 'standard' forms of activity include football tournaments or assistance in preparing match choreographies. The activity of the centre has recently focused on close cooperation with the Disabled Supporters Club (Klub Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych, KKN; meetings for disabled fans are held at the centre), the annual photo album showing the club and the supporters (hardback, published in full colour on glossy paper), and the organization of the conference 'Modern Football and the World of Fans', providing fans and academics with an opportunity to exchange ideas. The fifth edition of the

¹⁶ Fans from many Polish clubs travel to Częstochowa every year; the most famous Polish monastery is the place of integration, common prayers and lectures.

conference was held in November 2015; the follow-up of one of the events included the publication of a volume of conference papers. The strength of relations between the centre and disabled fans is described by the chairman of the KKN:

We started to talk together about ourselves. And we've made our contact so strong that today one could say that we're basically one centre and it's inseparable. It very often happens that fans in Wrocław identify the project, this centre, as something addressed only to disabled fans, and vice versa, that we are connected with the project. And the fact is that we really are completely separate.

The strength of the Wrocław centre is its organizational and financial stability. On the other hand, the greatest challenge is to convince a critical group of the most ardent supporters. The task is particularly difficult owing to the poor organization of the supporters' association. The coordinators would also like Śląsk Wrocław club to become more involved. Indeed, there was no sign of any reaction even to a meeting with its former players (the SU centre plans to organize regular meetings with distinguished players). However, the situation in Wrocław does not discourage the SU staff:

(...) Although the fans throw a spanner in the works of our centre, we're still here. And we don't intend to leave the stage.

One of the new ideas created by the SU together with the KKN and waiting for implementation is the programme with the working title 'The Third Sector of Śląsk':

The idea is to establish a network of relations with NGOs, which naturally associate people who are more active than others; it doesn't matter whether they are single mothers raising a child, or horsemen, or lawyers. And thanks to this, information about Śląsk, about the games, about the fact that it's safe in the stadium, could be spread using this network of relations, we could easily reach several hundred or thousand people.

If the idea is successful, Wrocław centre would integrate a considerable number of actors operating, paradoxically, out of the football context.¹⁷ The diversity of activity stems from the need of seeking other partners than those seemingly natural.

Zabrze (Górnik Zabrze)

¹⁷ An employee of Wrocław city council says: 'I think the project has enemies among those supporters who are afraid of positive change, that is, those who are characterized by negative behaviour. (...) On the other hand, anyone who has the benefit of the club at heart and who has good intentions supports this initiative and should not have anything against it.'

The SU centre in Zabrze was launched in May 2015, with the Górnik Zabrze Foundation (focused on training young players in the club) as the operator. A few months of its activity have been marked mainly with projects for children – organization of the summer holiday, the Children’s Day, football tournaments for children (also from Youth Care Centres). The centre also serves as a community day room where children can do their homework. Shaping the cultural patterns of supporting is particularly important in the context of the geographical location of Zabrze. It is one of the cities of the Silesian agglomeration, an area with many different clubs and feuding supporters. In view of frequent incidents involving physical confrontation between them, it is particularly important to develop a new type of fan behaviour.

The centre has a very good relationship with the supporters’ association of Górnik club: ‘we combined these two projects... Thanks to Supporters United we are able to better communicate with the city, because the Supporters United opens the door’ [Zabrze_SU]. While organizational and communication issues are certainly important, another factor at play is competition with local rivals:

We decided that we really must be the first big club – which Górnik Zabrze is – to open the project. Yes, GKS Tychy was before us, but it’s not any rival for us. There are still Piast Gliwice, Ruch Chorzów, GKS Katowice... There’s this guy here, a legend among fans, I have great respect for him. He said that he doesn’t like our project. But when he got the message that Ruch Chorzów is also opening the centre, he said: ‘You know what, you did the right thing, we are first, before them.’ [Zabrze_SU]

The importance of the centre could be expected to grow thanks to modernization of the stadium in Zabrze. The coordinators plan to organize activities for children during the games and encourage fans to come to the matches much earlier before the first whistle.

Next steps

The ‘Supporters United’ programme is developing. At the end of 2015, the Polish Football Association (PZPN) signed the letters of intention with another three SU centres – in Białystok (Jagiellonia), Chorzów (Ruch), and Lublin (Motor), all of which will be launched in 2016. In addition to local centres, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and PZPN decided to support the organizational process among disabled fans. The National Union of Disabled Supporters Clubs (Ogólnopolski Związek Klubów Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych) was established during the annual conference organized by the ministry and devoted to the SU project (October 2015).

The new centres will be able to benefit from the experience and achievement of those already active. Consequently, the question is: what are the benefits and experiences of the entities engaged in the programme?

6. 'PZPN is changing...': The meaning of the programme for the supporters

Fans in Poland organize the activity of their associations in an effective way. As has to be stressed, it is only thanks to supporters' grassroots initiatives that some long-established Polish clubs have avoided a financial and organizational collapse (Lechia Gdańsk, Chrobry Głogów, Stilon Gorzów, Szombierki Bytom, Hutnik Cracow, and recently – Widzew and ŁKS Łódź). So far, all fan undertakings were based on 'internal incorporation', i.e. the involvement of common spirit and human resources among fans. 'The fan circles can get together very easily, can get organized very well' [Wrocław_beneficiary]. All kinds of fan activity require the crucial element of 'collective spirit'. Alain Touraine noted that 'social action is the building of a world of cultural creations through human work; this process can only be collective' (after Pyka 2010: xvii).

In an analysis of social action of the fans, the key element is not the individual members of the group (although charismatic personalities certainly play a role), but mutual relations between them. This makes it necessary to consider the notion of social capital, 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992: 14). The collective aspect of these relationships is even more important in the context of such hermetic groups as football fans, characterized by a limited trust in 'outside' structures: the police, political authorities or the media. It is for this reason that the social capital of fan groups is mainly of the 'bonding' type (Putnam 1993). On the one hand, their collective identity is rooted in a shared awareness and system of values, referred to as cultural capital, with the core element being that of the Club, perceived as an autotelic value. It is easier to mobilize the resources of group members in situations which require, for example, organising a trip of a few hundred or a few thousand supporters to an away match. It would not be possible without the skill of activating such extraordinary social capital. Apart from providing a strong bond, it also has other important functions, such as making it possible to achieve aims which would be unattainable for an individual, even if equipped with technological resources required (Coleman 1994: 302).

Mobilization of human resources in a group of fans can involve many different activities. For example, in the early 2000s, when the club was in an extremely difficult financial situation, fans of Lechia Gdańsk cleaned the stadium and drove players to away matches when the club could not afford to hire a coach. For Korona Kielce fans, the SU centre is a chance for a revival of fan movement, drawing new members to the local supporters'

association (after the organizational changes, the 'United Korona' association has only several dozen members): 'We've had a bit of a standstill. Fewer people get involved' [Korona_SA]. Other cities also experience problems with the level of activism, as is the case of Lechia Gdańsk Supporters' Association:

Really, every year fewer and fewer people are willing to get involved... In general, the flow of people is getting smaller. (...) We've tried different ways to activate the new members, used various tricks, and finally we said: just let's do our job.

When asked about a sense of direction in supporters' associations, the chairman of Miedź Legnica supporters' association surprisingly responded:

... the liquidation of associations.

Researcher: Why?

– Associations are being liquidated, closed, the formula has burnt out, there aren't enough people who would be willing to go on. This means some obligations.

This pessimistic opinion does not change the fact that associations are important for example in the context of relations with the club or the authorities – even in such 'trivial' matters as the distribution of tickets and organizing transport to away matches.

In Wrocław, falling attendance is associated with a very poor level of performance of the team (in 2015/16, Śląsk was fighting for survival in the league), but the problem seems to be wider:

It seems to me that the number of people who are interested in local football ceased to grow. There are many people who are interested in football at the high level of competition. By contrast, in terms of some forms of sacrifice to local clubs, it seems to me that this is almost dying. (...) I don't see this enthusiasm about being a fan as it used to be. When the new stadium was coming, when the club was getting better or started to be successful, it seemed to me that the natural thing would be to go with the flow and there would be new people supporting the groups of fans. Now this starts turning into a bit of a niche, as if fans became the subculture which I know from the 90s. [Wrocław_SU]

In this context, a representative of GKS Tychy supporters mentions the generational change:

The whole generation is mentally different. It's not about the fans, these generations are already a little different than we are. Well, it is harder. (...) It's a generation we must attract. In our times, we didn't have to be attracted, we all went to the game. A lot of people. (...) The computer appeared when we were in our teens, sometimes later. And now it's... In the past the worst punishment was to be forbidden to go out and play football, wasn't it? And now, even if the mum closes the room with the computer in it the kid still doesn't go out.

On the other hand, the SU centre in Warsaw is trying, after all the turbulence, to establish cooperation with other groups of Polonia supporters:

We have a group of patriots who are doing all supporters' stuff. We tell them: let's see that you can take part in more formal initiatives and your work will be perceived differently. It's the same with the ultras. They operate in the stands, they do flags, and so they can also do workshops for kids. Sometimes you need to open their eyes a little. This work they are still doing could be used to create a better image of the fans. To show that the fan isn't someone who always fights, is always against, but can do something good. [Warsaw_SU]

The decision to become involved in the SU programme is not one taken on the spur of the moment, but comes as a result of a conscious choice, thought-out ideas about yourself. This could be a sign of reflexivity, which helps to estimate the 'defects' and 'benefits'. Modern football is becoming multidimensional and requires consideration of many alternatives and constant self-definition (Numerato 2015). It is also a sign of 'civilizing', as opening up to new environments and relationships expands the 'figuration' of fans and promotes taking into account the perspectives of others. And those 'others' are becoming crucial when what is at stake is forming new generations of fans, building ties with the club, and – at the very basic level – increasing match attendance at the modernized stadiums.

The activity of SU centres aims to attract fans and keep them for the next matches. To build identification with the club, local SU centres must educate new generations of fans, so numerous actions are undertaken in schools and at children's festivals. One example was a drawing competition for children from primary schools in Gdańsk. Children painted pictures associated with Lechia club (logo, colors, people, etc.), and the best work was turned into a large choreography, presented at the family sector during one of Lechia matches. Children were supported by representatives of the ultras Lechia group in the preparation of the choreography. For the coordinator of the Gdańsk SU, such activities have a socializing value:

Thanks to our action we have gained supporters who will be loyal to Lechia over the years. Anyway, that was our goal – we want to attract young people to the club and 'infect' them with positive supporting. Not many people have the chance to be familiar with the 'backstage' of ultras work, so I think that in the school hallways they will be talking about our action for a long time.

Definitely, the problem is the lack of 'attractive content', i.e. the level of sports performance, as Polish leagues cannot be compared to their best Western counterparts. In Poland, 'modern football' is practically not an issue, there are no groups of supporters who would protest against the commodification of the game. Polish clubs do not play in the Champions League. What is more, some fans are ready to come to terms with the commercial

spirit of modern football: ‘I have repeated this many times, it’s a very trendy word, this commercialization, it’s a very strong word, very trendy, you’ve got to go in this direction. You can’t do anything without money any more...’ [Górník Zabrze_SA].¹⁸

The Polish league cannot compete with its counterparts in Spain, England or Germany, which is why such programmes as ‘Supporters United’ could become an important asset in building relationships and identification with the club. The programme aims to ‘attract’ new fans:

In this sense, I believe that the centres pursue this objective, which is to attract fans to the game, to stimulate interest, to popularize the sport, to popularize the team. [MST]

It is difficult to estimate the time frame required to achieve this goal (which in fact impossible to measure). However, some effects in terms of attracting new fans have been noticed for example in Legnica.

We always get response when we announce that we collect something for the kids, it’s fluffy animals, or toys, or sweets; fans come and ask if we need help. (...) Certainly since then, since last year, there’s been a greater flow of fans who come and show their interest. Sometimes they call and say ‘I know a friendly gentleman who has a shop and sometimes he asks: “Listen, I’ve got juices, I have water, if you need”’. And he brings it, a hundred litres. And it’s his idea, he can see that... and it’s the same with a lot of people. It’s not that there aren’t any of them at all; there are. And there are more and more of them every year, every event; there are more fans. [Legnica_SU]

One of the priorities of SU Zabrze is to fill the recently modernized stadium (February 2016, capacity of 24,000).

For us, here in Zabrze, to fill the stadium is the priority thing. This is a priority for me to visit all our fan clubs and invite those who used to come here and stopped because there was nothing to come for, because there was no stadium. And this will be huge work. [Zabrze_SU]

The level of attendance in the new stadium in Tychy (opened in July 2015) turned out to be a success. The SU centre was co-responsible for the information and promotion campaign which filled the stadium for a friendly match with FC Köln. A team from the third level of the competition, GKS Tychy boasts the highest attendance in the division, largely thanks to its supporters. Attracting fans to the new venue was particularly difficult because during the construction of the stadium in Tychy the team were playing their matches in another city

18 Similarly to some English fans, Polish fans seem to adopt ‘the language of commerce’ (Kennedy 2012).

(twenty kilometres away), which made the fans feel 'homeless'. In addition, many of them, especially younger ones, could not afford the trips. At that time, the SU centre was to resemble 'home':

It was a place we could meet. The centre was to remind some people that sooner or later we would return to Tychy, that GKS is in the city. [Tychy_SU]

GKS Tychy and its fans have already settled down in the new stadium. The supporters plan to use of one of the rooms for the SU centre (which is now located a few kilometres away). Their activity attracts a number of people, as can be seen from the following example of an elderly lady:

There was this old lady in her late fifties, maybe even more, who came here and said that she'd been at the football match for the first time ever; and she says 'If it hadn't been for you, gentlemen, we would have left after five minutes.' And the first thing they did after the match, they went to buy tickets for the whole round. I suppose that she still doesn't really know what exactly is going on on the pitch. But you know, she looks at the fans, there's this atmosphere; and it is attractive. Well, we are an example that it's still possible. The third league and, you know, it's not like one hundred people in the stands, or two hundred, but... And really, when we talk to someone, some people who aren't, you know, any fanatics, just ordinary people who take their scarf and go to the game. They want to have fun after a week of hard work, you know, have a beer, sit down in the stands with their kid. That's what they like, don't they? This cheering, this turmoil. How many times is it that the whole stadium here sings? That's also exceptional. [Tychy_SU]

Meanwhile, 'Supporters United' enables them to tap a new form of resource: support from the local government and the football association. Deciding on cooperation with official institutions appears as a stage in the natural development of the fan movement.

This movement has evolved, it really was inevitable if we wanted to develop further. Every supporters' association and every fan involved has to realize that in order to go one step higher... to attract more people and encourage... or, let's say, to organize events or actions on a wider scale, it's obvious we need different partners. [Gdynia_SA]

For us it's also a chance to develop. We have some new options we didn't have before. Let's be straight about this, the centre gives us a lot. [Kielce_SU]

A member of Śląsk Wrocław supporters' association indicates that cooperation with external actors can help in the implementation of various undertakings and should not be denied in principle. The limit of acceptance is about the level of independence that fans should keep: 'As soon as someone who gives the means to operate SU centres starts to set some conditions, that you have to do this or that, and some kind of independence will be over, cooperation with the centres will be probably over as well'. The question is: how to define the

‘conditions’? The SU programme is based on the institutional principles of both the Football Association and the ministry, so fans have to – willingly or unwillingly – adjust their actions. Therefore, cooperation with institutions requires a compromise, ‘expanding the figurative field’ and partnerships – essential reflexivity to deal with the ‘conflict of interest’. This makes it possible to strengthen the ‘power for action’.

This ‘power’ gains importance thanks to the institutional support of the ministry or the Polish Football Association, the support which opens a lot of doors for fans. The ‘Supporters United’ programme ensures that fans are associated with a broader context, together with different institutional subjects. The support of the latter constitutes ‘the surplus value’.

The Ministry of Sport, the Polish Football Association, this support network is really an additional value. It has an influence on the perception of our environment, because it’s different when you go to a meeting with a sponsor, and say: Good morning, I’m a representative of the ‘Supporters United’ project, a project of the Polish Football Association and the Ministry of Sport. (...) And it’s different when I’m a hooligan (...) We are no longer treated like ‘oh no, fans again’, but now this has become a serious matter. When we introduce ourselves as representatives of a programme run by this institution... then definitely most doors open for us. [Gdynia_SU]

Could fans establish a successful co-operation with other agents in the case of informal action? The coordinators from Wrocław comment as follows:

C1: I think that it would be even impossible, because in the case of informal groups it’s sometimes hard to keep people who are the sources of contacts and their credibility is lower.
C2: I think that the whole thing is based mainly on responsibility. Someone has to bear the responsibility in case it suddenly doesn’t work out as it should. Well, here it is, this institutionalization, let’s say.

Statements from various respondents cooperating with the fans include such terms as ‘credibility’, ‘trust’ or even ‘surprise’ – especially in the case of people who do not know the fans and do not know what they can expect of them. Gaining credibility is crucial for fan activism (and for the whole movement in general), and it is much easier thanks to a wide partnership.

First of all, as it [SU centre – ed. RK] is supported by these two organizations, the TPD [Children’s Friends Society – ed. RK] and the supporters’ association, it gives us more credibility in the city. It means that we aren’t something that’s going to fall overnight. Thanks to people who are in these institutions, the association, the TPD – we are perceived as an organization that is not another product that’s been created... (...) so it gives us a feeling that we are needed in this city and that what we created here together makes sense. [Legnica_SU]

Local centres cooperate with different organizations. In Legnica, they include the local higher education college (collecting school supplies for children), the Fitness Centre (sports activities

for children), a bowling alley, the Youth Centre of Culture, Sports and Recreation Centre. The situation in other cities is similar: Poznań – the Museum of the Wielkopolska Uprising; Warsaw – the ‘Odra-Niemen’ association (assistance for Poles living in the former eastern borderlands). The Gdańsk centre is supported by various organizations:

There is the municipal sport and recreation centre, which lends us some equipment and is one of the co-organizers, I mean a partner, when we organise local festivals. There is, of course, Lechia Gdańsk club. We also cooperate with such institutions as primary schools. (...) Last year, we started to cooperate with the Gdańsk Centre for Preventing Addiction. [Gdańsk_SU]

The situation is quite similar in Gdynia, where the SU centre cooperates with the Club of Disabled Supporters, and, most importantly, with a large number of primary schools. The Centre organizes a campaign called ‘Yellow-Blue starting kit’ (school supplies for children). In addition, a different campaign called ‘Yellow-Blue Santa Claus’ aims to help children’s hospital wards. Yellow and blue are the colours of the Arka badge and logo, and the gifts for children, both in schools and in hospitals, are designed with club colours. On the one hand, these are charity initiatives, but on the other, they promote the club and the supporters’ centre.

It is important to notice that the ‘expansion of figurative field’ is not only conducive to improving organizational potential (a greater variety of partners makes it possible to expand the range of activity), but also offers an opportunity to attract people who have not been visiting the stadium. Another important factor is that social, charitable and cultural involvement is instrumental in answering the question ‘Who are we?’.

Mutual trust, ‘clearing’ and being ‘normal’

As presented above, going beyond the immediate context of supporting is connected with several factors; first of all, with the development and evolution of the fan movement:

In fact, over the years we have already reached a certain level and we can easily prepare applications for various grants, competitions on any subject, and we manage to do it. So, I think this shows the development not only of the association, but also of the people who work here. [Gdynia_SA]

Going beyond the area of ‘pure’ fandom activity (although this is still an important part of the work of associations and fan projects, for example: manufacturing and sales of fan paraphernalia, organizing trips to away matches) is a sign of development, making the first steps in the area of civic activities, which can also be considered as a manifestation of the ‘civilizing’ process. Fans are aware of bad publicity they get, hence charity actions help to change the image of the environment among the public.

It probably started from clearing our image, really, and showing that a fan is not just a thug or hooligan from the stadiums. I think that after some time people just got to like this effect, the feeling at the final moment of an action, seeing the joy of the people we help, so that now people themselves want to do things, they come to us, they come up with ideas. We have a lot of requests for help, raising money... And I think that it's precisely because of this positive PR [public relations – ed. RK] for fandom and that it has become a part of fandom... In the past it was different. Now it's so cool that we have our power, and we are really able to use it to help better than many other organizations and foundations. [Gdynia_SU]

Owing to their negative image in the media, fans strive to achieve a positive reputation. They face a difficult task, because 'you can perform dozens of good actions and then there is one riot, and the media write about it, and all the work gets ruined. It's like getting up over and over again' [Wrocław_Journalist]. In Kielce, where the situation is difficult due to strained relations between the fans and the police, the establishment of the SU centre is perceived as a valuable initiative:

I think it's a very good initiative. It presents the world of fans from a good side. I was just impressed by the opening of the centre, there were a lot of celebrities, Boniek from the PZPN, not to mention the representatives of all the media, and the councillors. It was a really impressive group and this meant that it was something important. You can see that it works and goes in the right direction. This centre is a boost for the development of fan movement. [Kielce_Journalist]

Long-term efforts and grassroots work result in improving trust and confidence towards the fans. Only in this way can fans become partners in various projects:

Even the fact that the leader of the supporters' association is a respected person in the city. There is cooperation not only at the level of municipal officials, but also at these most important levels... There were many, many initiatives which would have been very hard to accomplish in such a way if the association did not enjoy such trust as it had earned over the years, mainly thanks to such projects. [Gdańsk_SU]

The activities, the quality of which is visible to outsiders, convince others that fans are not people from pathological environments:

You get the best public relations by what you do. Usually we've been criticized for little promotion of project activities, but we just did what we did and... somehow it's already become a rule that whenever the association undertakes something it will always be done right. [Gdańsk_SU]

It seems to me the fans are becoming a fully-fledged partner to talk with the city. It's not like 'the hooligans come and we won't talk with them'. It's fans who come, who have carried out some programme and they made it; it worked out, so maybe we start to cooperate. [Warsaw_SU]

They see that we can talk using compound sentences, commas, periods. [Polonia Warsaw_SA]

Associations have taken on the task of convincing the public, in the media, that there are some people here who are normal; (...) that the fans are really not drunken, upchucking guys, but just normal people with passions, they just like supporting. [Śląsk Wrocław_SA]

To show that they are not bad. That apart from the fact that they got labelled as good-for-nothing, just fighting all the time, or something... just to show they are normal people who can come and help, that you can rely on them and if they have an opportunity, they will get something done.
[Legnica_SU]

Fan narratives resound with an awareness of 'otherness'. Indeed, they are aware that they function outside the mainstream of society and many of them even accept the stigma of an 'outsider'. Norbert Elias wrote about the distinction between the 'established' and the 'outsiders' (1994), presenting how the use of law, customs and symbols sets boundaries between them. Fans tend to be regarded as 'outsiders' who do not fit in the mainstream of society (as a result of their 'uncivilized' ways of conduct). Consequently, it is hardly surprising that their comments include such words as 'normal' or 'normality':

We have to do more to look better. We are not 'normal' people, so we have to try even harder to make people understand that we are normal people. [Warsaw_SU]

The narratives of fans indicate an awareness of their situation, reflexivity, an ability of self-evaluation, and an assessment of the outside world. This also shows the evolution of fandom. A few decades ago, fan movement did not care about the opinion of others and did not consider compromise to be appropriate. Aggression and violence (physical and symbolic) were the only type of relationship with others. On the other hand, today there are not only attempts to pursue joint activity, but also signs of aspiration to be like others – 'normal' (i.e. established, civilized) members of the community. Consequently, it is important to note the context of identity and 'labelling', as mentioned by a journalist from Legnica:

If someone keeps saying that 'you're bad, bad, bad', you will eventually adapt and you'll be 'bad'. And if you're treated seriously by important institutions in the city, by the local government, I think you try even harder.

It is a game between the 'established' (civilized, fully-fledged citizens holding a monopoly on 'proper education') and the 'outsiders' (deviants, the margins of society incompatible with the 'civilized' groups). Adopting such a perspective perpetuates divisions, maintains barriers between people, and thus prevents them from showing their 'good', 'normal' side. Meanwhile, the 'Supporters United' programme enables the 'outsiders' to go beyond stereotypes and convince others.

People want to be with others. They know it's cool. Not everyone has to like it. Nobody is forced to do anything. For me, it's very important that they come here because they want to. They do it because they want to do it and it's fantastic. [Miedź Legnica_SA]

The conflict between the discourses of the ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ means that fans need to work harder to convince others. They have to earn trust, which could be problematic, especially in the case of institutional actors:

The department [at the city hall – ed. RK] which finances our centre has recently changed attitude. This lady never wanted to come over, she always had a problem. But four months ago she started to visit us. Perhaps she realized that we don’t want to make any trouble. So, this attitude has changed. So I think there is some trust. [Legnica_SU]

Polonia Warsaw supporters have to prove much more due to the lack of institutional support. Thanks to the presentation of their achievements at the annual conference of the ‘Supporters United’ programme, they fortunately managed to interest officials: ‘I had a presentation at the conference. As soon as I was off the stage I was approached by two people working at city council and they were interested in cooperation. They said that the project is interesting and that they would be happy to support it’ [Warsaw_SU].

Civil and charitable activities do not so much completely change the image of Polish football fans, as significantly expand its scope. As one journalist mentions, this is the ‘bright’ side of fandom activity. But there is also the ‘dark’ one, hidden as if ‘behind the scenes’.

There are some negotiations, talks, some interactions behind the scenes, with those who will never come into the spotlight, in front of television cameras, never talk to a journalist. And those ‘backstage’ people, I suspect, they have a lot to say behind the scenes in these associations. We can call them, conventionally, militants. It seems to me that they... are a nuisance, because they are just, well, from some crime-related circles, connected with intolerance, and also with drug trafficking or violence. [Gdańsk_Journalist]

In this context, the respondent draws attention to the importance of good practices established by the SU centres:

The more projects like this, the more hope for the increasing isolation of extremist groups, which I have called militants. The more people become involved in this type of initiatives, the fans themselves will feel stronger. (...) I hope that this will naturally lead to the situation in which fans will become more civilized. At least when we talk about Ekstraklasa. And they will push these militants to the lower leagues, where there won’t be such initiatives. [Gdańsk_Journalist]

The Programme lowers the level of antagonism, as antipathy gives way to the will of dialogue and the need for common working meetings. It requires the reflexivity in the approach to others and to own attitudes:

When it comes to Supporters United, when we go somewhere, we look neutrally at the others. Someone might not like Lech Poznań, but we won’t talk about club animosities, but rather about

the organizational matters; we make suggestions where to arrange some action; we don't tend to look at each other with hostility. (...) We know that if we needed any help, to learn something, it wouldn't be a problem to get in touch with someone else. [Kielce_SU]

The following story of a schoolboy and his pencil case shows how strong the inter-club regional antagonisms are:

There was this mother who bought an orange pencil case for her son and the boy didn't want to go to school. The parents didn't know what was going on; his school bag was already packed. You know, if something is pink, people often say it's for girls. But here, this thing was orange and it's Zagłębie club colour. It really comes to such situations. [Legnica_beneficiary]

'Zagłębie' is a club from Lubin, twenty-three kilometres away from Legnica. The two clubs play in different leagues, but they are 'derby' rivals. There is a strong animosity between their fans which – as can be seen – functions also at the level of socialization.

The SU centres, as well as supporters' associations, complement the 'spontaneous' bonding social capital of fans, which – although essential for rapid mobilization of resources – is insufficient to pursue serious projects involving financial support and legal conditions. While the institutionalization of their activity enables further development and new relations, at the same time it preserves the independence and cultural patterns of fan movement.

7. Between corporate legitimacy and spontaneous order: The sphere of institutions supporting the programme

The two sports organizations which are the most involved in the development of the 'Supporters United' programme are the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, which not only secures the financial basis for the programme, but also supports it organizationally and institutionally. The Polish Football Association (PZPN) also provides funding for the programme (although to a lesser extent than the ministry), but above all supports the centres logistically, and, what is no less important for the fan circles, psychologically. This last and less formal aspect is associated with the person of Dariusz Łapiński. Supporters confirm that he has played an important role in mediation between different organizations.

(...) in this case Darek has played a huge role, because he is a person we have known for a long time. Even when he didn't work for the PZPN yet, he was such a 'key-man' opening the way to the world of fans for the Football Association. And I think that thanks to the confidence we have in Darek, that we can always count on him, mainly in fandom issues, that we saw the reaction of the PZPN in some cases (...), so, well, we said that at least there is one person who is trying to help fans. And later it turned out that he is someone who has influence on his bosses, on Zbigniew Boniek and other directors of various departments. Well, actually we found out that it may be worth a try, maybe it's not an evil, so to speak, which must be avoided.
[Gdynia_SU]

This statement is of great importance. International research on football fandom (quantitative research in nine countries, conducted by the FREE Project, see Buchowski, Kowalska 2015) shows that fans in most countries do not trust football organizations (both national and international). In Poland, the relationship between the supporters and the football association (PZPN) has had a difficult history. The Football Association must rebuild public trust which was undermined by such problems as corruption scandals which riddled the Polish game in recent years. The year 2012 was definitely a 'new opening', since, on the wave of organizational success, it was decided that relations with fans must be regulated.

For many observers, the development of the programme is possible thanks to the fact that fans finally began to perceive the football authorities as a partner. This change of attitude is relatively recent:

Maybe three years ago, it was a real shock. For some people, the PZPN was perceived so... but they saw that the PZPN is going in the right direction. Such things as the image of the Polish national team also mean something. Generally, the PZPN is doing a good job in marketing. I witnessed how Zbigniew Boniek heated the atmosphere with the fans. It would have been impossible to imagine in the past. Since Listkiewicz was gone, the image of the PZPN has changed. [Kielce_Journalist]

As there were no structural changes in the Polish Football Association, what proved crucial was the change of the 'human factor':

Before, the Polish Football Association tended to treat football and fans instrumentally, to obtain their trust simply by giving them accommodation, alcohol and tickets. But from the moment that the PZPN got people to talk with fans and also to listen to them, well, it's been easier to build a thread of understanding, a bond that makes cooperation possible. And at this point the Polish Football Association is an organization that has gained the mutual trust in the eyes of fans. [Wrocław_SU]

Also fans in Kielce speak of human factors influencing the relationship with the PZPN:

It seems to me that relations with the entire fan movement have improved. During the presidency of Michał Listkiewicz this institution was very negatively oriented.

Researcher: Why?

– Because of all those arguments. There was this negative attitude to fans in Poland, they were perceived as the greatest evil of this world. Because of all those prohibitions.

Researcher: Has it changed under Zbigniew Boniek?

– Maybe not so much. He is more inclined to talk with fans. He speaks quite differently. It's a different type of person. It seems to me that people are not so very much against the PZPN as they used to. [Korona_SA]

Convincing fans to the project is a process involving long, repeated meetings and negotiations, as well as drawing perspectives. In Tychy, Łapiński first met with the board of the supporters' association, then the information was passed on. 'It took a bit of time. First, there was the board, then they told it to the rest. It was such an exchange that, OK, but the ultras, for example, they didn't want any financing or control from the centre. The pros and cons of this. Do we get in, or not? And finally it turned out that we did. It's such organizational assistance, a little financial boost, a little, but it's something. Who knows what would have happened if we'd been in a different situation?' [Tychy_SU].

A representative of Korona Kielce supporters tells about the initial doubts, mistrust and a feeling that fan culture should be a separate entity, independent from the authorities and institutions: 'At the beginning, I wasn't convinced about the Supporters United project. It seemed artificial and too modern. The fan environment should be separate, with no impact from anyone else. Surely not the PZPN. It's obvious'. Trust emerged with time and the informant emphasizes that commitment to the programme was possible thanks to respecting independence and autonomy by the authorities:

I started to become convinced. In fact, this project gives us great opportunities. We can arrange a lot of actions. We can meet here, talk everything over. In this sense, it is cool. The PZPN and the ministry... I understand that they want to get some effects, but they don't interfere with what we do. They don't impose anything, we set out our plans by ourselves. The actions are repeated so that they can reach possibly the greatest number of people. We

determine how much to spend on each campaign. So really, it all depends on the way we would like it to go. [Kielce_SU]

The SU Warsaw coordinator also talks about preserving fan principles: 'Łapiński is able to talk with fans and... he can understand them. Fans are not forced to do God knows what. He knows they've got their rules and they can work with him'.

Łapiński is also responsible for introducing the Supporters Liaison Officer programme in Poland, which binds clubs with supporters even more closely. In this way, fans have a greater impact on what happens in the clubs; for example, it is better to arrange matters related to travelling to away matches through the SLO. Visiting supporters know that there is a person responsible for arranging certain matters, and that he or she is most often associated with the fan movement, and thus understands certain issues very well. However, it is also clubs that benefit from the SLO activities.

It's easier for clubs to work when they have such trustworthy direct access to the fans, and supporters take part willingly as long as they don't get the impression that they are simply just a fig leaf. [PZPN]

Benefits and risks

The negative image of supporters in the media meant that participation in the programme raised a lot of concern and brought potential risk for both organizations. First of all, there were concerns about allegations that respectable institutions were involved in a cooperation with hooligans and criminal circles:

Definitely there is a risk of brand image. If an institution really decides to be the front-man in the cooperation with fan communities, which are generally perceived as slightly criminal and dangerous, well, this is some risk. If you make the first slip, everyone will suddenly be the smartest, they will say that the Polish Football Association supports bandits or fraternizes with criminals. [PZPN]

The Ministry of Sport and Tourism provides a very similar narration. This institution has even more to lose because it represents the government, allocates public funds and is therefore monitored in a more critical way than the Football Association, which is simply a non-governmental sports organization.

We were afraid of accusations that the ministry is working with hooligans, promotes activities that are against the law, that we support the violent groups of fans which are shown as almost organized criminal groups (...) This is our main concern, that is, in a sense, concern about the image of the ministry. We were also afraid of allegations that the project transfers funds to use them for making illegal pyrotechnic shows. Another concern was that the fans wouldn't want to work with us, because it's quite a hermetic environment. We know that they don't allow any

cooperation with law enforcement agencies. We hoped that they perceive the ministry a little differently and it worked (...). [MST]

The risk is compounded by the fact that the programme is largely funded with public money and therefore any problem with accounting for expenditure and ‘unreasonable’ spending could become a pretext for massive criticism. The programme coordinator from the ministry mentions that care was taken to prevent spending funds on pyrotechnics or controversial choreographies. As it is a pioneering programme, all the institutions involved have to learn what works and what does not as they go. In the course of time, there were such situations as changing the project operator in Gdańsk, or the replacement of coordinators in Warsaw. However, there have been no situations when it was necessary to close any local centre. Another benefit is a considerable increase of trust towards fans from the institutional side. Łapiński argues that regular working meetings, when everything is discussed, including even the most difficult issues, provide space for relieving tensions and build mutual trust. As a result, there are no violent incidents involving feuding fan groups. Thanks to this dialogue, the atmosphere improved to such an extent that the President of the Polish Football Association, Zbigniew Boniek, could travel by train with Korona Kielce fans to their away game (the case was widely discussed in the press), a situation virtually impossible to imagine some time ago.

On a wider scale, the PZPN recognizes many possible benefits in the implementation of fan projects:

Most of all, when it comes to a wider perspective, it really gives a more adequate picture of reality. There is a message that football – in general – is not a sport for troglodytes, it’s not so terribly dangerous, that the stadium isn’t a place where you risk your life and limb, that it’s worth turning up there. That football is, in general, a social phenomenon that generates energy that can be used for positive purposes not only in the sense of sport. These are tangible benefits to the PZPN. And the simplest thing is that today hardly anyone is mauling the PZPN in the stands. [PZPN]

Łapiński lists some achievements as follows:

For me, the most important result is that we started from scratch. (...) At the moment, the biggest success of this project for me is that, in addition to the nine centres, we have at least as many supporters’ associations that would like to run a centre like this in their city. This positive feedback, especially from the fan environment, from the associations, is the greatest satisfaction, the greatest success. (...) And what is also nice is the diversity of the centres. I see from the perspective of several years that every centre has its own specialization, something it is good at. And... and it proves that this instrument can be used to enhance our strengths even more.

A representative of the Ministry also lists positive aspects of the programme, which are apparent in such elements as the scale of supporters’ involvement:

There are people who associate all their free time, even their job with the team, with football. And I'm really surprised that they can really devote all their free time to their supporters' association. I don't know when they sleep. There are a few centre coordinators I can call any time of the day or night to and ask what's going on in the centre, what are your plans, and these people can talk for an hour about what they plan, what they did. I'm delighted with their commitment. [MST]

Many supporters' associations are queuing up to run the next 'Supporters United' centres, which proves that the fan movement in Poland is undergoing significant changes. Fan circles are not 'inbred' tribes any more, fencing themselves off to keep the 'Other' out. They are keen to get the 'fishing rod' (Łapiński's term, i.e. 'getting the fishing rod rather than the fish') thanks to which they will develop new projects and engage in new activities. It is a sign that some part of fandom is becoming embedded in the broader context of civil culture and social self-organization. It can also be seen as evidence of the progressive 'civilising' of the fan movement. Fans are becoming incorporated into a wider social context and are doing so without the legal or institutional pressure, but rather on the basis of the evolution of their own values and accomplishments.

Barriers to overcome

The initial steps of the programme resulted in situations in which rules of public institutions clashed with those of the world of fandom. One of such cases was the official conference in October 2015 organized by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, aiming to present the main objectives of the programme and activities of all local centres. Most of the guests will probably never know that the event might have been called off because just before the opening the fans had decided to boycott it. They did not accept the presence of police officers in the hall. After long negotiations both sides managed to find a compromise.

There was such a situation at the conference that they didn't want to make their presentations, which would have meant – more or less – an organizational disaster... and I also think, the termination of the programme. The management of the ministry would have concluded that this is a group you cannot cooperate with. [MST]

Such strong aversion to the police is difficult to explain to outsiders; the phenomenon is manifested also in everyday activity:

We're in this position that various organizations come forward and ask for help in developing their activity, to work together. It is nice. Even the municipal police come here, but I say, 'Janek [Johnny], I'm sorry, but no.' No, police, municipal police, institutions like these, no. We can know each other, we see each other at various events, but they are in one corner, I'm in the other. And many years will pass before we do something... The girls here made an action with the police; I insisted that it should be low-profile. [Miedź Legnica_SA]

Thanks to the programme fans have an opportunity to appear in the public space, but they still maintain some of their old, well-established strategy of actions. The acceptance of the police as a trustworthy partner would represent another step in the development of the movement.

A representative of the ministry mentions that the state authorities might make concessions. They understand that fans cannot be forced to cooperate with someone with whom they are not on friendly terms. However, it is impossible to continue such a firm attitude indefinitely.

At some level, in the frame of a large ministerial project, you need to realize that this project involves not only the realization of your goals. It means, the ministry also has its goals. [MST]

The conflict at the conference ended up in a compromise, but it showed how much still needs to be discussed. Both sides have to learn about each other's 'otherness', which is an interesting consequence of the implementation of the programme. It is a mutual process: the ministry learns the patterns of activity going beyond corporate rules (unplanned 'spontaneous' action, based on the 'all hands on deck' principle), and fans – the patterns of action that are part of the administrative standards (planning, procedures, implementation, applications, accounting).

The misunderstanding revealed also another aspect, which has been mentioned above: the importance of charismatic representatives of the fans.

If we can get along with the coordinator, we can also get along with the fan circles. [MST]

Indeed, fan groups are characterized by the hierarchical, vertical leadership structure.¹⁹ It could be an advantage if a rapid mobilization or 'relocation of forces' is required, but complicates the matters when there are many (sometimes very different) opinions to consider. The situation involves somewhat of a paradox. On the one hand, if there is an impact on the leaders, the programme has a chance to 'trickle down' to a wider audience, even if it encounters 'non-democratic' management of the social process. On the other, if there is no such initial impact – even the best democratic and encouraging methods are pointless. Such is the case of Wrocław, where there are disagreements between the SU centre and the supporters' association:

19 A municipal official comments: 'If I don't have the leaders, if I don't have people from this environment who want to do it, there's nothing I can do' [Zabrze_City Council].

One would think that if the activity of the centre does not have any impact on the fans, does it pursue the objective of the project? Theoretically, it implements a number of other activities promoting fan culture, some academic circles work on this subject. But maybe you need to change the attitude. There was a moment when we considered changing the coordinator, but there is no person in this environment who would lead the fans. (...) I hope that this will change, because, if it doesn't, I think that in a year or two we will seriously consider some kind of recovery plan in the framework of the operation of this centre. [MST]

As mentioned above, what speaks in favour of the coordinators in Wrocław is the range of their activity, and what would further improve the quality of their operations would be to employ a person trusted in the fan circles as another staff member.

Towards the indicators of development

Both institutions, the PZPN and the ministry, see a lot of positive values generated by the programme. It seems that the idea of 'civilizing' fans, i.e. educating cultural supporters, has brought results at the local level. However, this does not change the fact that there are some aspects which could be improved, such as communication problems, the cases of diverse needs of the partners, a slow process of reaching the core of the 'hardcore' fans, or a modest involvement of the local authorities:

I thought the project would grow faster. Convincing the next municipalities to spend relatively little money goes slowly. Even those which have decided to finance the centres do not increase their funding... We hoped that maybe local governments will relieve us financially a little, will be more convinced about these projects, and we will be able to open the centres. The fact is that the project is still largely based on our funds. [MST]

The local authorities 'do not perceive supporters as a group worth investing in' [MST]. The lack of platform of communication between them and the supporters in the past means that there are practically no social programmes addressed exclusively to this group today. As a result, when municipalities consider cooperation with the fans, they have to fit them in other existing domains, such as youth sport, anti-addiction programmes, etc. Comments from local council employees (quoted in the next chapter) demonstrate that taking the 'risk' has paid off. The problem is then to cross the mental border, and not to perceive fans as unpredictable and unreliable. At this point, one can imagine that the 'Supporters United' programme could – in the long term – translate into a model of programmes addressed to fans at the level of the local councils. This would result in opportunities for the implementation of social projects even without the ministerial programme.

Both institutions coordinating the SU programme should closely monitor the activity of the centres, particularly those established earlier. Their daily activities show the symptoms of a routine and reproduction of established (and therefore less demanding) solutions. The issue which needs to be immediately addressed is the sphere of the PR, particularly cooperation with the media. The coordinators of local centres complain about the lack of media response to their initiatives (a Górnik Zabrze supporter comments: ‘No journalist will turn up at the festivals, where we have hundreds of children, but if there are riots, they are on the spot right away’). It seems, however, that the centres do not make enough publicity (in the media, local authorities and other groups) for their own achievement.

Following consultations with the football association and the fans, the ministry proposed a number of indexes to be used for the periodic evaluation of the programme. Aiming to develop the activity of the centres, they include: establishing three new centres every year (up to the target of eighteen centres); two newspaper articles a month about the programme; gaining external funds (apart from designated subsidies); the number of cooperating non-governmental organizations (two new organizations a year); applications for external grants; employing volunteers; the number of organized sporting events, workshops for the fans, group trips to sports events; the number of ‘likes’ on Facebook profiles of each local centre (one hundred a year).

The set of indexes has a pilot character. Their validity will be tried and tested during the work of the centres, and those which do not pass the test will be eliminated. Their number reflects the expectation that the centres should operate in a multi-dimensional manner. Importantly, some of the indicators (e.g. cooperation with non-governmental organizations) intend to give them a ‘push’ out of their enclaves. Although some of the centres cooperate with different institutions (e.g. Warsaw, Poznań), the scale of such activity is still small.

Not everyone is fond of the idea of ‘quantification’:

We can see it even without indicators, that something goes in the right direction, that you need to change something, because it goes poorly, and things like that. (...) We’d rather go and do something with the kids than do some paperwork. [GKS Tychy_SA]

I worked in different corporations for a few years and it smells like a corporate approach a little, doesn’t? [Tychy_SU]

The informants understand that the ministry is trying to evaluate the activity of the centres in different areas, and the indexes are just an instrument. However, numbers should be approached carefully, as it is not always the case that they can reflect the quality of performance.

8. The meaning of ‘Supporters United’ for beneficiaries and local councils

Thanks to the ‘Supporters United’ programme fans gain legitimacy in the social world. They become partners for cooperation, and – by taking into account other groups – they expand the space of their own group identity, they become more reflexive about who they are, who they were, what is appropriate to do, and what makes a violation of common rules. They learn it by making commitments to the ministry and the football association, for which the programme is about the next generations and development of the sport. However, the programme resonates not only among fans and the institutions concerned. The question is what meaning it provides for other beneficiaries, local councils and local communities. Before describing the benefits of different groups, it is important to mention that the fan movement had to recognize the ‘other’ institutions as natural partners:

For me, working with the local and national institutions, organizations, means raising the rank of this project rather than a loss of fan values, because as long as we have full autonomy in carrying out the tasks, we can represent them here before the local group of fans without any problems. [Wrocław_SU]

Openness to others is possible if both sides respect mutual needs and limitations. Setting institutions as partners does rule out sensitivity to attempts of using the programme for political purposes:

Yeah... politics. It’s something really disgusting. It very often happens that some actions are used for political purposes. In Legnica, it’s been clearly said that there is no way it’s going to be used for politics. Everybody can come to help, to work with us. There’s no such thing that someone can use it – the elections are coming, you are not with us, we will not give you money. This cooperation with the city, good, okay, it can function as long as there is no pressure. Because you can lose all this in a day and building it can take a very long time. [Miedź Legnica_SA]

Although they express particular political ideas, the fans in Poland officially renounce supporting political parties. Just as the police, institutionalized politics stirs antagonistic attitude of the fans. Consequently, the local authorities have to consider fans outside the political context.

A platform for communication and recognition

People working in the local government units recognize the value of the SU programme in different dimensions. In Gdańsk, there is dialogue between the authorities of the city and the fans, based on mutual respect and individual treatment. The authorities

understand the unique nature of fan community, its social cohesion, system of values and patterns of action and solving problems. The strategy of action adopted with regard to the fans was developed on the basis of such understanding (in which dialogue was no doubt very helpful). It was considered necessary to provide space for self-management of certain processes by fans rather than to impose ready-made solutions. This space of trust (which is unprecedented in relations with the fans) has brought returns in the form of increased security in the stadiums, but also an attitude of commitment, as fans feel obliged to keep their own ranks under control. What operates here is a kind of ‘rule of reciprocity’, with the authorities treating fans with respect, and the fans reciprocating with civilized behaviour.²⁰

Thus, in a ‘soft’ way, local governments gain what would have been difficult to implement without the ‘Supporters United’ programme. The employee of Gdynia local government points out that the very fact that ‘there is peace and quiet in the city’ and there are ‘no complaints’ against the fans is a huge success. During the celebrations of Independence Day (11 November) fans march among the participants in parades and behave peacefully, ‘it is quiet, they just walk, there are no problems with them, so this, too, is the achievement of this programme’.

The existence of SU centres is also important for the communication sphere, because it is a specific platform for the exchange of opinions.

The biggest advantage of this project is the thread of contact with fans, (...) fans have a platform of dialogue. [Wrocław_City Council]

It [SU – ed. RK] certainly helps if I want to meet with the fans, talk about different club problems, and other things. It makes it easier for me because, so to speak, I have a partner I can invite for discussion. There’s always someone who is not involved in this project or is not with them, but also wants to talk, so we invite them as well, we meet with the fans from time to time. It’s definitely also a major help that they have a website, they have their forum, they can post some information from us which we really want to get to the fans. And it’s as if we have a coordinator we can work together with. [Gdynia_City Council]

A platform for the exchange of information is particularly important in the areas where there have been practically no contacts between the fans and the local authorities:

To be honest, there was practically no such cooperation (...) There was a better cooperation between the club and the fans. Their life was concentrated there, that’s where they conducted their activity, had a place to meet and prepare actions. And the co-operation with the city was probably less visible. [Kielce_City Council]

20 This confirms that recognizing fans as ‘normal’ people and partners in cooperation ‘makes’ them reliable people fulfilling their promises. In other words: perceived as ‘established’, fans in fact are becoming ‘established’.

The need to establish the SU centre in Kielce is interpreted as a change in fan movement, as evidence of its evolution:

Perhaps at this moment, the boys saw the need to create this place, because this programme had functioned for five years and so there were some moves taken both by the PZPN and the supporters. They started to talk with us and so together we took the initiative as well. [Kielce_City Council]

Partnership developed with fans within the framework of 'Supporters United' enables mutual understanding: 'I think it's more knowledge about what's going on in fan movement, also because in the context of the SU centre contact from the side of our office is more frequent. And we know what's going on, what's being done. I think both sides of this relationship are strengthened' [Kielce_City Council]. The fact of establishing an official platform of communication makes the relations between the fans and the local authorities unprecedented. As pointed out by a number of respondents, such space of communication practically did not exist, and – most importantly – it was as if both sides did not exist for each other either. Consequently, the social change in question is unprecedented.

From trust to benefits

Another reason why the city councils engaged in cooperation with fans is that their development strategies included no references to fans as a social group or projects addressed to them. In this context, the SU programme contributes to filling the niche at the local level. Considering that the programme is unprecedented, there are no trained and experienced social workers or office staff who could lead it. Thus, the local authorities acquire a knowledge of a new educational and social policy tool:

We mean to show how you can spend time, how it can be spent at the stadium. (...) This is a place where they can invite young people, to show them... They operate on a regular basis, they are there every day. And I think that sometimes they know how to influence some people who could go astray. (...) Then this young man will know that he can organize his time, that he doesn't have to wait until he gets invited and someone sets up a group. (...) It's part of our support system, social policy in general. [Zabrze_City Council]

In a broader context, the situation is as follows: the local authorities pursue a number of programmes for the inclusion of excluded groups and lead educational programmes. In social prevention, an observation that fandom can be a form of education, socialization and incorporation of a 'deviant' group into a wider social environment is crucial. Supporters have

to be involved as ‘educators’, because it is only them who have legitimacy in their group; they make the best coaches. Thus, the fans are the ‘medium’ in the scheme: programme – implementation and beneficiaries. The following observation made in Tychy refers to filling a social gap:

It’s exactly this part of sports education that was abandoned. Because schools cannot... schools didn’t do it really; and it was the same with other organizations. So, it’s as if they filled the gap. [Tychu_City Council]

For the municipalities, the ‘Supporters United’ programme is part of a broader strategy of social prevention:

We were aware that this problem is unavoidable, or problems with fans, bandits who sometimes appear at sports events. So it’s better to civilize, focus on good fandom, fanatical support, but within the limits of the law. And such were our determinants; it’s worth doing, because the problem will come to us sooner or later. It could be a problem with our fans, from Legnica, or with those who come over. [Legnica_City Council]

The socialization objectives of supporters (formation of new members) can go together with the educational objectives of the local officials or teachers. While so far the goals of these two groups have been pursued independently, the SU programme implies a common pursuit (convergence) of the objective to educate cultural, responsible generations of fans. Today, such a strategy is based on somewhat idealistic approach:

We say this: look, it’s just fun. Look at that guy in the terrace on the other side of the pitch, he’s from another city, he isn’t your enemy, he is your rival, your fellow, he supports his team. We show them the other side: you will go to an away match pretty soon... So, give your guests the same welcome you’d like to get. [Legnica_City Council]

Good practices implemented within the SU provide a basis for future projects. The operator of the local centre in Legnica, the Children’s Friends Society (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci, TPD), has received another grant (from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration) for the project entitled: ‘Legnica football fans: We are supporters, not vandals’ (*Legnicki kibic dopinguje, stadionów nie demoluje*). It certainly comes as a reward for the success of the SU Legnica, which would not have been possible without the legitimacy of the fans and without their support.

New generations, new values, new role models?

The informants appreciate the value of education and shaping the attitudes of new young fans by organizing family picnics, a family sector in the stadium, or lessons in schools.

It's really important for pupils, because we convince them to positive patterns of supporting; we tell them that we have a right to be in the stadiums, that it's a very good way of spending your time, it's good entertainment. (...) We've been to several schools with our partners from the SU centre, we presented some cheering, a little information about Śląsk; it's always been a success, it was something positive for these people. (...) That's a very good element. You just need the right people, but I think that those who go to schools have a sense of a mission. [Wrocław_beneficiary]

When asked whether fans, as a social group, can be set as an example to follow, the interlocutors answered as follows:

(...) Those fans I think positively about, (...) they mostly can, because being a member of a group is important for everyone. I remember (...) that when there was some work to be done at the stadium, some clean-up work, the fans were the first who we could turn to.²¹ [Wrocław_City Council]

Researcher: What can a fan show to a kid?

– Well, you know, these murals or graffiti, to show the kid who's got an artistic talent that you can demonstrate it; not necessarily in the stadium. The second example is just supporting. This emotion and identification with your team is something worth promoting. The role of the fans is to promote Korona Kielce as a football club. I think this is the role that fans can play, to direct young children to the mainstream of sports fans. [Kielce_Journalist]

A journalist from Wrocław draws attention to the important fact that the 'leaders among fans, but such extreme ones, using hate speech in the context of religion or race, unfortunately can attract the youngest kids'. In Wrocław, there is a strong group of supporters with nationalist views, who perceive the SU centre in terms of a 'rival' in the transmission of football content. The same informant adds: 'whatever they [the SU] would do, they will not attract some fans; if they keep their soft message of tolerance, peace, equality, they have total resistance from the opposite side'. This statement points at the fact that there are two sides of the fan world – the 'good' one, manifested in helping others, and the 'dark' one, which excludes and leads to violence. In a 'tug of war' between them, the SU programme provides an extra pull, although the 'opponent' has a considerable experience and appeal.

The situation is quite unusual: as noted before, the best group to educate fans are fans themselves. Consequently, all those involved in the programme have to trust that SU centres can recruit those who are going on to be on the 'good side' (and resist the pressure of extreme groups). An official from Poznań observes that the local SU centre is a place where fans meet people who are like them:

21 Also other informants mention the potential of fans for mobilization: 'We had a situation: the match had to be cancelled because the pitch was buried in snow. And the fans got mobilized: "And what does it mean there's no match? We'll sort it out" they say; they came to the stadium, they got the shovels' [Legnica_SU].

(...) It's important to reach out to troubled teens who need an example to follow. It's different when parents or teachers talk to them, and it's different when a supporter from Poznań talks to them. (...) For a young boy, a fan is more reliable as authority figure than a teacher who says that you have to learn.

The term 'more reliable' is of great importance, as it points to a 'tribal' transfer of tradition from the 'elders' to the young. Although it may not seem very 'modern', this is how it works in the community of fans. Informants from Kielce and Legnica also consider the fans as model to follow:

– And where do we get these young people from? They have to draw on examples, so let them be able to enjoy the best examples of the older fans who come here. This also means integration with the young generation and the older generation, and the development of a hobby. I think that each of these fans can be a good example for the young. [Kielce_City Council]

Researcher: What can a young kid from this housing estate take from the fan? What can they learn?

– Those supporters who come to us are from different backgrounds. So if you can draw on the best practices of these people, or if you see that a person who comes here is, for example, a doctor and a supporter, this is a sign for a small child that a fan is not a bad person, it's just a normal doctor. [Kielce_City Council]

It's different when one of the ultras tattooed in the colours of Miedź or Śląsk comes over and talks about fan behaviour, how not to say f*** or something like that. It's different then. [Legnica_beneficiary]

Perceiving fans as role models raises their standing and delegates responsibility. Although there is a risk involved, this has also a civilizing and educational value. In this context, the informants mentioned the need of authority figures for children (especially in modern times of 'liquid' authority, see: Bauman 2005):

It's about authority figures; especially boys and girls are looking for strong authority figures these days. Their parents don't have time for them. And fans can be authority figures. (...) They command respect, that's probably the right word. They command respect, they easily draw attention and thanks to this they can transfer the nice values to young people. [Legnica_Journalist]

The argument that fans should teach the 'art of supporting' is well founded for at least two reasons. Firstly, the fans are well-experienced, they know what rules should be followed, how to support your club. Secondly, due to the hermetic nature of the group, a 'stranger' would not be credible. Besides, it is natural to listen to those who talk about their own experiences they have been through rather than share a 'theoretical' perspective. A representative of the local authorities in Zabrze makes an interesting comparison:

Please note that it's similar in the case of addictions. Basically, the best leaders, the most authentic ones are those who are able to move people who have problems; and these people will follow such a leader because he or she was an alcoholic. Such leaders are the best, the most reliable, they have authority. They don't talk literature, they don't push academic content in people's heads, but they are experienced. (...) And it's the same pattern of action here, that they are credible for this group of people. They are neither worse, nor better, they are just normal people who are looking for their place in the world. [Zabrze_City Council]

'I'm addicted – I can talk about addictions'; 'I'm a fan – I can talk about fan behaviour' – what seems to be at the core here is the quality of the 'testimony' – it is important that it should convey love for the club, respect for the opponents (you do not need to 'love' them), pride in victories, acceptance of failures. This builds credibility and openness, as is the case in Kielce, where in spite of its short history, the SU centre has gained trust of the local community. Before it was open, residents of the area protested and voiced their concerns about the 'hooligans with their sticks and fights'. While initially parents were afraid to send their children to the centre, currently the number of young visitors keeps growing, as is adult participation. A meeting with Korona players in November 2015 brought together more than forty people. A very important fact is the awareness of the local context – one of the coordinators comes from the housing estate where the SU centre is located.

How to deal with the 'dark side'

A conclusion that fans can play a dominant role in the formation of the next generation of supporters is as obvious as it is controversial. First of all, certain cultural patterns are still present at the stadiums – vulgar language, symbolic violence and discriminatory discourse. However, fans draw attention to the fact that this is not the question of stadium culture only:

The movement supporting my club does not propagate hate speech. I completely don't understand why people say that children learn it there [at the stadium – ed. RK]. As far as I know, it isn't school or the stadium or kindergarten that are supposed to bring up children; that's the parents' duty. [Lech Poznań_supporter]

Informants point at the specific nature of the stadium, where it is not always possible to control emotions and this is the case with different groups of supporters:

It's hard to fight it. Still, in modern times you need to be aware that some of these stadiums are like that. Poland is no exception. It's the same in England, Spain, where there are radical groups of Barcelona fans. Things like that happen; verbal abuse against another club. You know, this is a rival, and those emotions explode somewhere. [Kielce_journalist]

This is an age-old problem of just about everyone... There's no point fighting with that. [Zabrze_SU]

I'm responsible for relations with business in the club. I often bring some guests who, let's say, are the first time in the stadium. And it's fun until someone starts... Well, this is not pleasant at all, and it's irritating. And this, unfortunately, is often the case with people sitting in VIP sectors, sectors for 'cultural' people... I've noticed it not only in Zabrze. [Zabrze_beneficiary]

An employee of Poznań City Council notices the ambiguity in the behaviour of fans:

Yeah. It is a serious topic. On the one hand, we must set a positive example. (...) On the other, the chants offending the opponents or the police... (...) The fans are not saints, but in some respects they provide positive values.

and an official from Legnica comments:

I can imagine that they are the people who can help a child, they will buy a pram, a doll, get some food, sandwiches, snacks, and next they can go to the stands and do something bad.

For the local authorities which provide financial support to the centres, and feel the burden of responsibility for possible incidents, it is important to change the opinion about the fans: 'this is the key element, to show the good side of fans, not just to show that this evil no longer exists, (...) to make fans visible in charity actions, in helping the non-governmental organizations, people with disabilities' [Wrocław_City Council]. The same is true in Kielce:

It's important for us to change the negative image of the fans a little, because we know what is associated with a 'fan'. So I hope that the work of this centre, the people in this centre, through meetings they organize, it will just change the negative image of the fans. In addition to activities aiming to show support, preparation of flags, the centre keeps cooperating not only with the local government. [Kielce_City Council]

The improvement of the image of the fans is mentioned also in Poznań, where both SU coordinators and officials emphasize the importance of safety at the matches. The latter consider this issue as a priority, while the former take responsibility for maintaining safety. A journalist from Poznań draws attention to the role of social and charitable activity in 'restoring' fans to mainstream society:

(...) they [fans – ed. RK] have never been perceived as a group that was asked for an opinion. That's it, the so-called margins of social life, aggressive attitudes, rebellious. And this hasn't changed. (...) The form of showing that we are not degenerates, and not only interested in brawl. [Poznań_journalist]

The informant is aware of the ambivalent image of the fans, a clash between charity and incidents of aggression which make groups of fans turn more radical: 'This is a matter of determining their freedom. Fans really don't like it when someone tells them what they have

to shout'. They entrench themselves by accepting negative opinion about them. This results also from the policy of the media:

The allegation that the media deal with incidents involving fans rather than with things they do... It's true. It's always been like that. The only way to get something done about it is to eradicate such incidents. [Poznań_journalist]

It seems to follow that, at least theoretically, educating new fans – ones who would not engage in aggression – through 'Supporters United' could – 'automatically' – solve the image problem of football fans in Poland. The key is to put stress on integrative values, 'inviting' different groups of beneficiaries, and thus making discriminatory practices and entrenchment strategy impractical. This is the way leading to social change.

Political involvement and local patriotism

Both UEFA authorities and the Polish Football Association (as well as Ekstraklasa SA, the league organizer) explicitly forbid the promotion of political contents during matches. However, Polish fans very often present choreographies referring to political issues. As early as the 1980s, fans of Lechia Gdańsk engaged in demonstrations against the communist authorities (Wąsowicz 2006). Today, fan performances are related to the current politics and historical events (e.g. Warsaw Uprising in 1944). Polish fans are united in their political views, which are conservative and right-wing. The 'Supporters United' programme does not promote any political idea, and the programme coordinator, Dariusz Łapiński stresses: 'It's our rule that we don't engage structures or resources to promote or fight against any political project'. Considering that the programme has an ambition to shape the fan environment, it is important to see how the informants perceive the presentation of political views in the stadiums and in everyday fan activity. Some of them mention that the fan environment should be politically neutral, or even apolitical:

We don't get involved in political affairs. Who will be up there... we don't care. If they don't interfere with us, we don't... There's surely no way that we do some sort of action and this minister comes over to take pictures to use them in his political campaign. [GKS Tychy_SA]

We have different political views, we try to put politics aside in such places as the SU. Let it be recorded as my personal opinion – this place is completely apolitical, neutral. [Warsaw_SU]

No, I think that the fan environment should be apolitical, in my opinion it must not be mixed up in politics. [Kielce_City Council]

We should be apolitical. We are citizens, we have the right to vote and to express that voice in the elections but we should stay away from politics because people can use it in an offensive way. It's easy to get pigeonholed, and to lose a lot. [Legnica_SA]

Fans explicitly dissociate themselves from supporting any particular political parties ('If it comes to any political party – it's never ever in my life' [Poznań_SU]). This is due to fear of instrumental treatment of the fans by politicians, as well as mistrust and lack of confidence: politicians are treated as an enemy group which is trying to 'change' supporters against their will. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to specify the ideological sympathies of fans:

It seems to me that we are right-wing. The history of the club is very strongly connected with the history of Poland and we are even obliged to be more right-wing. I mean, right-wing... it's such a marked word. It's more a matter of being patriots of flesh and blood, we will always participate in patriotic initiatives. [Warsaw_SU]

'Patriotic initiatives' mean, for example, celebrations of important national anniversaries (Independence March). In this regard, the majority of fans are consistent – fans should take part: 'We have participated and we will participate as fans at the celebration. It's also politics. When we go, we go as a group – fans' [Poznań_SU]. The majority of informants noted the importance of the concept of 'patriotism':

In recent years, fans have started to approach patriotic issues differently. They stress them quite a lot. (...) In Poznań, fans are focused on the pro-national patriotism. [Poznań_journalist]

The centre in Kielce puts a strong stress on historical education, e.g. organizing meetings with war veterans: 'I think we should organize such actions as much as possible. (...) Lectures with historians. We work with such organizations as the patriotic "Third Way". They want to organize history tutorials. We are open to this, of course. This can also mean watching historical films' [Kielce_SU]. As mentioned above, the organization 'The Third Way' (Trzecia Droga) admits to nationalist ideas, which should draw attention of programme coordinators.

In other cities the prevailing view is that the club and the fans play an important role in shaping local patriotism, supporting local communities and local identity, and commemorating important events from the history of the region. Lech Poznań supporters contribute to celebrating the anniversary of the Wielkopolska Uprising: 'Fans have engaged in commemorating the Wielkopolska Uprising for years. Restoring memory and creating a bond of local patriotism is certainly a benefit for the city' [Poznań_City Council].

Fans can express local pride. (...) Poznań citizens are not only attached to the city, they just love it. Fans not only think the same, but they are also able to articulate it publicly. [Poznań_journalist]

Supporting the local team is, by definition, associated with local patriotism:

I think that we should be local patriots. (...) I love Zabrze and I love Silesia. (...) I can't imagine supporting if I'm not a local patriot. Well, you know, let's say I support Poland today, and Mexico tomorrow. It's as if I didn't care, isn't it? [Zabrze_City Council]

Football has never been just sport, just entertainment, or just business. For decades it has served as an expression of group identity and a means of identification with the place and the people 'in the neighbourhood'. Despite its global nature, football is primarily a phenomenon of 'little homelands'. However, the ministry, the football association and the coordinators of the centres must be vigilant about the potential exposure of fan identity to discriminatory and forbidden symbols:

not to put up things like an image of a swastika hanging from the gallows, or the Star of David stuck in the ground, because this symbolism is banned. In general, these xenophobic, or racist or anti-Semitic [symbols] shouldn't be used at all. [Legnica_beneficiary]

It doesn't mean that they can't say that they feel, I don't know, Poles. But there's absolutely no way to accept any manifestations of racism and things like that, vicious things. [Zabrze_beneficiary]

SU centres may become a stronghold of practices rejecting extremism. This is particularly important in the context of the educational role the programme has ambitions to fulfil.

Changing the terraces

Considering all the above concerns, the evaluation of the programme should stress again that social change is a slow process, and that the concept of a fan proposed by 'Supporters United' encounters opposing discourses. In view of these facts, good practices generated by the programme are particularly worth appreciating.

The centre in Legnica, which is highly praised by many commentators, managed to increase the activity of the family sector in the Miedź stadium. Children (accompanied by parents) are invited by fans they work with in the centre, school or kindergarten. The family sector is engaged in the so-called children's support (cultural and without bad language), and the atmosphere is assessed as even better than... in the sector for 'hardcore' fans:

In the family sector... when we talk about the colours and quality, it looks much better than the 'hard-core' sector that's supposedly the image of stadium fandom. Even fans of opposite teams say: (...) 'This sector for children from the centre, or from schools in Legnica, or those disabled guys who've got their ramp, it all looks better and better.' [Legnica_beneficiary]

Childcare during matches is one of the most important priorities for the local centres. A sector for families operates in Gdynia (the so-called 'Śledziki'), and there are similar plans in Zabrze:

We have a plan to open a fan zone for parents with children. The fathers could come to sit down for a beer and the kids could play, all these jumping castles and things. The first whistle is at six o'clock, we'll invite them from three o'clock, let them come, let them sit; it's a bit of fun; that's what it looks like somewhere in the well-known European stadiums, where the game starts at, say, six o'clock but no one comes at six. No, you should come earlier, spend some money on a t-shirt, have a hot dog with your kid, you know, have a beer... That's what it's going to look like. [Zabrze_SU]

In Tychy, childcare is carried out on two fronts – parents can leave their children under the care of animators in a special facility at the football stadium, as well as during hockey matches (the other section of GKS Tychy, the Champion of Poland in 2015), where the family sector is always full.

The centre in Gdańsk goes further in the socialization area, supporting children from foster care institutions. Thanks to the cooperation with the 'Wake up Hope' Foundation, children from orphanages get free tickets to Lechia Gdańsk matches. In the summer of 2015, when Lechia played a friendly match against Juventus, pupils from the Foundation conducted cheering for the players, for which they received thanks from the management of the club. Jan Ptach, who works for the Foundation, has organized children's visits to Lechia games for ten years (even before setting up cooperation with the SU centre); thanks to him, several thousand children have watched football games. After leaving foster care institutions, some of the pupils became committed supporters of Lechia.

There is one girl who came to the orphanage seven years ago. She went with me to see the game for the first time. And I wouldn't want to lie, but after that she has probably missed only one match. She is very much involved, she distributes the club newsletter *Lechista* before matches and Lechia has offered her a free ticket for her work. (...) She is simply 'infected' with Lechia. I talked to her two weeks ago, and she admitted that a long time ago she had not been interested in sport, in football at all. And now even her room is painted in graffiti, in Lechia colours, it's full of scarves, t-shirts, she collects all of that. And she lives for it. [Jan Ptach]

The Foundation not only helps in bringing up new Lechia fans, but, perhaps more importantly, helps them when they begin their adult life after leaving the orphanage. Together with the fans, the foundation redecorated a large apartment where twelve former wards of a foster care institution were able to start their adult life. The redecoration cost two hundred thousand zlotys (about fifty thousand euros) and fans' assistance consisted in grass-roots

initiatives in getting construction materials, and voluntary work on the site.²² Fans also helped to organize a holiday camp for children from orphanages when it turned out that there were not enough funds for it. Thanks to immediate money collection among his friends in fan circles, Jan Ptach was able to organize not one but two camps for his pupils. The joint initiatives of the 'Wake up Hope' Foundation and the Gdańsk SU centre also have a sports dimension: a football team made up of children from Gdańsk foster care institutions, with Ptach as a coach and team supervisor, has competed in national and international tournaments for a number of years now.

I coach children from foster care institutions and I have to admit that I have a lot of success when it comes to sports. The kids compete across Poland, they have taken the first, second and third place in the championships of Poland many times. They have also taken part in international tournaments... I can be proud that one pupil I trained for a few years has now got to a sports school in Warsaw. (...) The boy played in the national team of Polish foster care institutions. So it's a great joy for me. [Jan Ptach]

Working with children is appreciated by a number of respondents:

I like it that the kids spend time in a very much active way. Firstly – vacation and holidays. (...) This is something they wouldn't normally get. Participation in meetings with athletes, promoting sporting, active lifestyle. Secondly, popularizing decent fandom. I really like it, especially that they are children from poorer families. Christmas Eve, Easter, it's really something great. (...) I think they have a refuge, they have a place to go where someone is waiting for them and devotes attention to them, because they often don't have this at home. [Legnica_journalist]

We visit schools, do some actions, and then these kids see us and say 'good morning'. It's a great feeling; they remember. It means that somewhere out there, something works slowly; that it's not only a Messi t-shirt, but they wear a GKS Tychy jersey and come to the game. [Tychy_SU]

Work with young people and children seems to be the most widespread form of activity of the centres.²³ This is associated with the priorities of the ministry (socialization of new waves of fans). Sometimes, initiatives develop thanks to volunteers, as in the case of Kielce, where a participant of a meeting with a war veteran offered to help as a volunteer:

22 The renovation was a part of the nationwide grass-roots project called 'Kolorujemy' ('Colouring'). The campaign was organized by fans all over Poland and its aim was to enable redecoration of the orphanages that could not cope with such work for financial reasons. Until now seven orphanages have been renovated. The campaign fanpage on Facebook got more than 240,000 'likes'.

23 It is difficult to estimate the number of children, or all the beneficiaries of SU centres. For example, the centre in Legnica mentions sixty children a day, Kielce 'a dozen or so'. The Ministry strives to convince the centres to provide such information, so in the near future coordinators will have to 'count' their beneficiaries more precisely.

She [a volunteer – ed. RK] was at the meeting and said that she could get involved as a tutor for kids.²⁴ Of course, I was very interested, especially that we planned to do tutoring in various school subjects. She came to do a maths session, but it turned out that the kids preferred arts. And so they did some Christmas ornaments and snowmen. They liked the class. Generally, she comes over almost every day. There was also a friend who lives here in a tower block; he did some sports activities with kids and they liked it. [Kielce_SU]

Such examples legitimize the fan community, build trust and convince others, and those who have been convinced are more likely to help:

Parents come and say, for example, ‘if you couldn’t go with them, then I’ll be happy to go’. (...) And they see that the kid comes back and is happy. We had a trip to the Śląsk Wrocław vs. Lech Poznań match. We travelled as a group of a hundred people. There were parents who said ‘I can go and help take care of them’. The children say: ‘I’ll go with my mum, dad and we meet on the spot’. It seems to me that more people come to the stadium. They see that they can sit down and the kid doesn’t have to be with them all the time, and that nothing will happen. They sit down and feel safe. I wouldn’t say they suddenly became fanatics but yes, they do come. [Legnica_SU]

The above examples are proof of working through positive values. Similar activities prevail in the activity of all local centres, which probably meets the expectations of institutions supervising the programme.

Integration of disabled fans

Working with children is not the only distinguishing feature of ‘Supporters United’. Another outstanding example of social change is cooperation between the SU centres and the Disabled Supporters’ Clubs (Klub Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych, KKN). The KKN benefits from the premises at the SU centres, where it organizes its events and holds advice meetings for disabled people. SU coordinators of the SU accompany disabled fans during trips to away matches. The activity of disabled fans overcomes many social and psychological barriers and their efforts in the social activation of the disabled have been publicly recognized and appreciated. In 2015, The National Union of Disabled Supporters Clubs (Ogólnopolski Związek Klubów Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych) was established, and its inauguration and presentation of the main objectives were held during the annual ‘Supporters United’ conference. This shows that the ‘Supporters United’ programme has an impact on previously marginalized groups. Michał Fitas, the deputy chairman of the KKN Wrocław, was appointed president of the union.

In Wrocław, the SU centre works together with the KKN so closely that ‘it very often happens that fans of Śląsk identify this project here, this centre, as connected with the SU

²⁴ Tutoring sessions for children are offered also in Legnica and Warsaw.

project. And the fact is that we really are completely separate' [Wrocław_beneficiary]. The SU became a kind of a community centre, a meeting place for people with disabilities. As a result of such good cooperation, the two partners intend to broaden the scope of beneficiaries to include fans at risk of social exclusion. Misunderstandings with the supporters' associations are not an obstacle to their activity:

'Let's focus on what we have; and the fact is that the KKN associates a few hundred people today. Let's focus on institutions we can work with, the provincial governor's office [Urząd Marszałkowski], or the city council, or on organizing a common room here (...). Let's just focus on this direction and let's make it our asset, because it's no dishonour that a group of supporters of Śląsk just don't want to come here.

Disabled fans benefit from cooperation with the local SU centre also in Legnica:

Our premises – yes, they come together, we have meetings and they do some actions or events together.

Researcher: Can you call them your beneficiaries?

– I think so, (...) we did something for them, so it's like... joining forces? It's also going to matches most of all. The KKN in Legnica is quite new, but they've already been in Wrocław at the game; we got tickets for a national team match, so the KKN went. The KKN in Wrocław helps them a lot. When we organized our Christmas Eve, the KKN Wrocław also came over. So this cooperation between them is good. [Legnica_SU]

Before the establishing of the local SU centre in Legnica, fans with disabilities cooperated with the Miedź Legnica supporters association, e.g. organizing a charity tournament. The SU centre is aware of the needs of the disabled: it was important to find premises for 'Supporters United' on the ground floor. Both organizations are involved in the same projects, e.g. the children from the SU centre and the disabled went together to the Paralympics. The idea was to integrate children and the disabled, to know each other, to get close to them, to learn an acceptance of otherness. Two coordinators of the SU centre serve on the board of KKN. Asked what the situation would be like without the help of the SU, one of them comments:

It would be more difficult, for sure. And the premises issue, and the involvement of these persons and their experience, because I have to say that people who work in the SU in Legnica, they know about both working with children, and working with difficult children, and they get closer to disability problems. [Legnica_beneficiary]

There is no doubt that the KKNs in different cities are gaining momentum thanks to the organizational support of the SU centres, even if it 'only' means offering office space and technical assistance. Their institutional body – the National Union of Disabled Supporters Clubs, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism – comes as a result

of perseverance and energy of disabled fans, in which they were largely supported by SU local centres.

How long will it take for things to change?

The above considerations and examples of activism in the ‘Supporters United’ centres have to be regarded as the beginning of an extraordinary phenomenon. It is work at the grass-root level rather than reorganization of the system ‘here and now’. Ambivalent assessment offered by the informants is justified by reality: apart from social action, there are still pathological incidents. The programme should not be interpreted in terms of a great revolution, but rather as a ‘fledgling’, or ‘creeping’ social change. Consequently, comments in reply to the question whether the programme has a significant impact on the fan movement are hardly surprising:

Probably not yet... There are several people, they will be able to get involved in the daily operations of the centre. Them, yes. While others I think probably not, because the centres don’t yet have the firepower, or impact on greater masses, on the larger population of fans. We strive for what is in Germany, there are several dozen or several thousand people who are able to keep safe enough not to pose a threat to themselves and to others when they travel to the matches and so on. There, it took them several years. That’s what we’re aiming at, we keep learning, but we still need a bit of time. [Legnica_City Council]

In case of ‘Supporters United’, the famous saying that ‘patience is a virtue’ could become an important recommendation.

9. The civilizing process and social change: Critical assessment and recommendations

The following statement was included among the objectives of the research project: ‘It is also recognized that as a result of the involvement of fans in the project their conduct becomes a part of the official sphere, which amounts to “the civilizing process” (Elias, Dunning 1986), operating mainly by the mechanism of limiting violence and hooliganism, as well as by “good practice”, such as supporting people in need (e.g. assistance to foster care institutions), or socializing the youngest fans (e.g. painting activities).’ A representative of Gdańsk municipality recalls:

It is thanks to the Supporters United programme that we were able to establish simply sensible dialogue, with the... well, the hardest, most committed part of five, six, maybe seven thousand fans. They have eliminated or keep on eliminating pathology from their own circles. They know that we have a kind of deal and that as long as it's safe and there is no stupidity, then they will have benefits. We will not victimize them, we are even going to work with them and we want this to lead even to legal pyrotechnics at stadiums.

The above words confirm to some extent the initial assumptions concerning violence and hooliganism. In a similar vein, the director of the Gdynia Sports Centre comments:

They [the fans – ed. RK] have their authorities, they are organized. They come together once in a while, take part in various meetings organized by the Polish Football Association and exchange their knowledge. And the best is (...) that they do not exchange know-how to burn a bottle and throw it at the police, but they exchange, for example, their new ideas for the integration of young people, how to get kids interested in coming to the match. They have understood, too, that through their work the club can get more money, because more season tickets are sold. And how to make a better choreography for the kids, how to attract young fans and new fans to cheer.

The civilizing of attitudes is manifested by understanding that a lot of ‘profits’ can be obtained through legal operations and official measures. Contact with a public office or completing formalities does not have to involve a challenge to own values:

I often use such a phrase, that we civilize fans. It goes well in any context. When someone has to go to an office, talk with an official, it's something different than shouting at the stadiums. (...) You can organize a march or a large collection of money, you can go and clean up the cemetery, put candles, commemorate some anniversaries... All this can be done and you don't have to do this sort of hush-hush (...). They understand that many things can be done without being against everyone else. You can really do it in a civilized way and then no one seems to mind. [MST]

Similar observations are expressed by a coordinator of SU Warsaw:

I keep an eye on other SU centres and I see that very often people start to listen to them [fans]. So they know that they can go to the club and talk. This is not like a big protest, no insults, no rows, just to meet and talk. When we have, for example, a meeting with the commission of the

league, they go there and argue sensibly, why they shouldn't get punished for something, why some sort of situation came about. They very reasonably show they are a partner you can talk to, a serious partner. This changes the image; this has potential. It's surely a long process, so you can't say that something has definitely changed, but you can see that something meaningful could happen. [Warsaw_SU]

The ability to be a 'discussion partner' and a commitment to 'dialogue' are the effects of a 'long process' of transformation of supporters. Just as civilizing Western societies described by Norbert Elias took many centuries, so the process of changing the fans does not occur overnight. What is important is that there is no room for aggression and violence, both in the physical and symbolic sense, in the activity of SU centres. Good patterns of conduct, supported by practice, affirm a 'civilizing' trend, although it has a limited range. This limitation is metaphorically described by an employee of Gdańsk SU centre:

Well, I can't imagine that one day I will come between two teams of hooligans, for example, from Lechia and Legia Warsaw, and I'll say, 'hello, I'm from the Supporters United centre, please, do not fight any more'; and they'll say 'okay' and go home.

One must remember that the Polish programme has started only recently, it is unprecedented and ambitious, but no one should expect that hooligan groups will suddenly disappear. Fights between fans in Poland have a long and strong tradition. It is the socialization of new fans, children and youth rather than 're-socialization' of hooligan groups that is the primary objective of the activity of the centres. In the context of attitudes towards the programme, Dariusz Łapiński mentions that there are three groups of supporters. The first is a group of supporters – activists who are willing to engage in these or other initiatives of the programme. The second is a group of supporters who are more neutral, but if encouraged, they could get involved. The third group are 'hawks', convinced that programmes such as SU 'kill the fan's soul'. In all of the nine local centres, however, the last group has no impact on the daily activity.

The fact that hooligan factions stay away from the activity of the SU should be considered as a success of the programme. In this way, the centres may focus on other aspects of their mission, their grassroots work, which is to educate the new generations of fans and shape more civilized patterns of supporting. In this matter, all the centres can boast a number of initiatives.

The synergy effect, or on social change

In a wider perspective, the objective of the present research was also to verify whether the activities of the programme ‘Supporters United’ brought about some kind of social change. It is clear that each social action resonates in the whole environment, so that even the smallest activity causes a change. In the evaluation of the SU project in 2012 (see Rogaczewska, Szymborska 2012) the authors mention the need for a ‘cascade’ concept of social change based on leaders and strong teams, educated how to attract others to the project. This assumption has its justification if we consider that the fan environment in general is based on activities of charismatic leaders. Definitely, some of the SU centres work in this way. For example, in Legnica, Krzysztof Piotrowski²⁵ not only runs the supporters’ association, but also ‘gets through’ to the city and club authorities. On the other hand, there are also centres such as Warsaw, where change is based on a social model of participation, with no distinctive leader.

In the view of Maria Rogaczewska and Maria Szymborska, the principles of the ‘Supporters United’ programme contribute to modernization of the fan movement in two senses (2012: 12). Firstly, it is a ‘change (modernization) of the supporting style and presence of football fans’ towards one that corresponds with the so-called modern football, which is friendly for different groups (women, children, the elderly and the disabled). Secondly, it refers to the ‘modernization and improvement of the functioning of the existing supporters’ associations’, so they would become a reliable partner for public institutions. The term ‘modernization’ at first glance appears less evaluative than ‘civilizing’. The authors do not fully explain its meaning (an evaluation report is not intended as an in-depth theoretical study), but their previous reflections describe the state ‘before modernization’ as socially dangerous, anti-cultural, aggressive. The authors rightly point out that before the implementation of the SU project, there was no platform of communication between supporters and other subjects, and that relations between them were based either on ostracism and infamy, or progressive criminalization. This is an important diagnosis. The deep rift between the ‘modernized’, ‘civilized’ part of society, and the ‘non-civilized’ fan community resulted in the escalation of animosity and conflict. Therefore, the commencement and implementation of an unprecedented space of communication with supporters is the first and probably one of the most important social changes in this area. In this way, ‘Supporters

25 Krzysztof Piotrowski is one of the best-known charity organizers in Legnica. He received numerous awards for his social work. Recently, he won the title of ‘The Personality of the Year’ in Legnica (2014), Piotrowski was also awarded the title of ‘The Philanthropist of the Year’ (Legnica Region) in 2010.

United' is the protagonist of social change. The consequences of the change include fan empowerment (formerly, fans were considered as 'a problem', a 'dysfunction', and thus were regarded as something to be dealt with). The establishment of an official space for fans results in anecdotal situations:

A representative of a local government which has decided to open an SU centre, on watching the presentations of all the centres during our conference, was astonished to find: 'so they do such cool things?'. [MST]

The question did not follow from lack of qualifications or irony, but was a result of the fact that fan initiatives had not existed in the public and institutional sphere before. Despite the media image of fans and the coverage limited only to instances of their hooligan behaviour, the world of football fans was (and largely remains) alien to most people. For this reason, 'Supporters United' is an undertaking aimed at the grass roots, which requires patience in reaching compromise, in anticipation of long-term effects.

In addition to 'cascading' social change, manifesting itself primarily in terms of project management and motivation of others, the 'Supporters United' centres also play an important role in enabling slow and gradual social change. It should be clearly emphasized that the unprecedented nature of the programme makes it necessary to limit too far-reaching or very ambitious requirements for the local centres. What is at stake is not a thorough transformation of fandom in Poland over the next few years, but a patient building of a new culture of supporting, starting from its peripheries. Most likely, a strongly hierarchical culture of fans in Poland will not change radically in the current generation as a result of the activities of 'Supporters United'. To think of an evolution of the 'centre' towards a more civilized, less aggressive model of supporting, it is necessary first to build the periphery of fandom culture. This is done through work with children, who will one day become part of this world and will begin to shape it in their own way, also on the basis of their experience of SU projects.

This is why the development of the family sector 'Śledziki' in Arka Gdynia stadium should be considered in terms of successful social change (even mental change to some extent). It is a success because parents trust the fans that their children can spend time in a safe and civilized way during the match, where someone will take care of them, make it fun, and teach them how to cheer and support a team. The perception of the fans has changed; the fact that adults are ready to trust the fans with their children is a kind of message: 'you have our trust, we believe that what you do makes sense'. This is also an example of a transition to the next level

of evolution: from the need to change the image (the ‘clearing’ mentioned before) to action and particular initiatives that, as such, create a positive image of fans.

In spite of the above doubts, it has been possible to diagnose a number of key issues related to the SU programme. It is already clear that each of the actors involved in the programme benefits from it to a greater or lesser extent. The programme consistently breaks with the stereotypes about football supporters, incorporating them into a broader social context, and earning them the respect of both the authorities and ordinary people. The ‘Supporters United’ centres build ‘good practices’ for football, which benefit a responsible and civic fandom culture. However, all experts, journalists, social scientists, activists, managers, representatives of the government and ordinary fans should bear in mind that the ‘civilizing’ process of the fan movement is in progress as well.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are considered as a proposal to be thoroughly studied and – perhaps – incorporated by centres and programme coordinators:

- Securing a three-year financial support from the organizer (the ministry) to the programme was a very important step. Local centres definitely need stability in a reasonable time perspective (the cases of Warsaw and Gdynia centres indicate the kind of problems resulting from the lack of financial stability). It is recommended that this strategy should be continued.
- Some local centres operating for several years (the most experienced are: Gdańsk, Wrocław, Gdynia and Warsaw) have already reached a certain organizational stability. It seems that in order to ensure further development they should try to look for new initiatives to prevent them from falling into a routine.
- Most of the local centres focus specifically on the relationship with the fan circles (supporters’ association, ultras group), and their initiatives are predominantly those supporting the development of the fan movement in the local area. Although this strategy is consistent with the objectives of the programme, it appears that it is now time to take advantage of organizational skills and experience to expand the scale of project operations to other areas of social life. For example, the Gdańsk centre plans to engage in drug prevention programmes. It is recommended that this strategy is followed, all the more so that it will help to gain the trust and support of more diversified environments. The centre in Legnica, which cooperates with a number of organizations unrelated to the fan movement, is a good example.

- Despite strong orientation towards activities for sports fans, the SU centres do not have a significant impact on the 'core' of the fan environment. Consequently, all actors should consider a strategy of 'moving' from the periphery to the centre.
- One of the most significant weaknesses of the programme (and, most of all, its local branches) is a lack of more extensive cooperation with the media. Fans' distrust of the media can be understood, as in most cases the media have presented a negative image of the fans in recent years, with emphasis on acts of hooliganism. Another problem is that the media focus on controversial and negative issues ('bad news is the good news'). However, local centres, and most of all the main coordinator, should put more emphasis on cooperation with the media. Suffice it to say that the last newspaper articles about the programme posted on the 'Supporters United' website date back to 2013.
- Further expansion of the programme – increasing the number of local centres to the target of eighteen – appears as a good step towards social change in the field of football. A greater scale of the SU programme will make it possible to achieve a significant level of political and social legitimacy. A fair number of centres will also significantly strengthen their position in talks with other partners. As noted by one of the coordinators: 'with more centres, local governments will find it harder to refuse. They will realize how serious the matter is. If it works in so many cities, it will also succeed in our case'. Probably, a large number of centres would require increased coordination efforts, which could be achieved by the creation of a special department in the Polish Football Association, or the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. The next step of the process of institutionalization will endow the whole programme with greater significance.
- All actors involved in the programme, and particularly the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, and the Polish Football Association, should be sensitive to the issue of political contents which appear in the programme. Local centres play a significant role in the local communities, but it is important to be aware of extremist movements which could use the potential of the programme for their own ends.
- At the same time, the local peculiarity of the centres is worth preserving. It is a great advantage of the programme that the centres do not multiply the same ideas, but are looking for niches to better meet the local needs.

- There were no discriminatory practices in the centres under consideration. Cooperation with the disabled and young people from excluded communities indicates that fans are becoming open to marginalized groups. Although women play an important role in the project, the centres tend to be led by men. It is crucial to encourage supporters to overcome barriers in this area and give more responsibility to female fans.
- The centres should strive to secure funding from external sources, such as grant funds; what would increase their potential in this respect is creating organizational coalitions – clusters with other institutions.
- One of the biggest challenges that can be raised is an attempt to ‘manage the antagonisms’. It is understandable that football is based on the identity of ‘difference’ and ‘competition’, but there is still a considerable effort to be made to have competition based on viable principles, without violence and hatred. While this certainly is work for years, it is linked to the quality of football in Poland in the immediate future.

10. References

- Antonowicz, Dominik and Łukasz Wrzesiński. 2009. *Kibice jako wspólnota niewidzialnej religii*. „Studia Socjologiczne” 192(1): 115-150.
- Antonowicz, Dominik i Radosław Kossakowski, Tomasz Szlendak. 2015. *Aborygeni i konsumenci. O kibicowskiej wspólnocie komercjalizacji futbolu i stadionowym apartheidzie*. Warszawa: IFiS PAN.
- Armstrong, Gary. 1998. *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score*. Oxford: Berg.
- Artur. 2002. *Kibic też człowiek*. „To My Kibice” 2: 19.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2005. *Liquid life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bucholc, Marta. 2011. *U źródeł socjologii procesów społecznych. Wstęp do pierwszego pełnego wydania polskiego 'O procesie cywilizacji' Norberta Eliasa*. [in:] N. Elias. *O procesie cywilizacji*. Warszawa: W.A.B., pp. 5-22.
- Buchowski, Michał and Małgorzata Z. Kowalska. 2015. *Globalna gra: Mundial 2014 w oczach Europejczyków*. [in:] R. Kossakowski, J. Kurowski, J. Nowakowski (Ed.). *Modern futbol a świat kibiców. Interdyscyplinarne studia nad kulturą futbolu*. Pszczółki: Orbis Exterior, pp. 35-52.
- Coleman, James S. 1994. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard: University Press.
- Coser, Lewis. 1996. *Functions of Social Conflict*. New York: The Free Press.
- Działamy na własny rachunek*. 2014. „To My Kibice”1: 36-39.
- Elias, Norbert and Eric Dunning. 1986. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *What is sociology?* London: Hutchinson.
- Elias, Norbert. 1987. *Involvement and Detachment*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Elias, Norbert. 1994. *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*. London: SAGE.
- Elias, Norbert. 1996. *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 2009a. *Social Processes*. [in:] N. Elias. *Essays III. On Sociology and the Humanities*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, pp. 4-8.
- Elias, Norbert. 2009b. *Towards a theory of social processes*. [in:] N. Elias. *Essays III. On Sociology and the Humanities*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, pp. 9-39.
- Elias, Norbert. 2012. *On the Process of Civilisation: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- Er, Artur. 2014. *Z pamiętnika Galernika. Magia lat 90-tych*. Łódź: SPRINT STUDIO.
- Er, Artur. 2015. *Z pamiętnika Galernika. Magia lat 90-tych. Cz. 2*. Łódź: SPRINT STUDIO.
- Freedom for the terraces*. 2012. Berlin: Profans.
- Gabriel, Michael et al. 2006. *Welcome Fans. The World Cup 2006 Fan and Visitor Programme*. Frankfurt: Koordinationsstelle Fan-Projekte bei der Deutschen Sportjugend.

Giulianotti, Richard and Roland Robertson. 2009. *Football & Globalization*. London: SAGE.

Giulianotti Richard. 2002. *Supporters, Followers, Fans and Flaneurs: a Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football*. „Journal of Sport and Social Issues” 26(1): 25–46.

Goksiński, Jan. 2014. *Klubowa polska piłka nożna. Lata 70*. Warszawa: PZI Softena.

Gorący, Anna. 2009. *Widowisko sportowe – studium agresji. Uwarunkowania zachowań agresywnych kibiców piłki nożnej*. Pruszków: WSKFiT.

Hognestad, Hans K. 2012. *What is a Football Fan?* [in:] R. Krøvel, T. Roksvold (ed.). *We Love to Hate Each Other: Mediated Football Fan Culture*. Göteborg: Nordicom, pp. 25-44

JasiuP. 2002. *Pogadanka o zasadach: krojenie flag*. „To My Kibice” 3: 19-22.

Kalendarium dziesięciolecia. 2011. „To My Kibice” 2: 32-51.

Kennedy David. 2012. *Football stadium relocation and the commodification of football: the case of Everton supporters and their adoption of the language of commerce*. „Soccer & Society” 13(3): 341-358.

Koralewicz Jadwiga and Marek Ziółkowski. 1990. *Mentalność Polaków : sposoby myślenia o polityce, gospodarce i życiu społecznym w końcu lat osiemdziesiątych*. Poznań: Nakom.

Kossakowski, Radosław 2015. *The end of the hooligan terraces? Dimensions of football fandom in Poland*. Conference paper, PSA Sport and Politics Group 9th Annual Conference „Sport, Politics and Social Policy”, 7-8 January 2015, Durham University, England.

Malkontent. 2002. *Solowki – wyjście idealne?* „To My Kibice” 2: 11.

Mennell, Stephen. 1996. *Civilizing and Decivilizing Process*. [in:] J. Goudsblom, D. M. Jones, S. Mennell. *The Course of Human History. Economic Growth, Social Process and Civilization*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, pp. 101-116.

Miles, Kevin et al. 2005. *Fans' Embassies at international tournaments. Portugal 2004*. Frankfurt: Football Supporters International.

Nowak, Stefan, 1981. *Values and Attitudes of Polish People*. „Scientific American” 245(1): 45-53.

Numerato, Dino. 2015. *Who Says 'No to modern football'? : Italian Supporters, Reflexivity, and Neo-liberalism*. „Journal of Sport & Social Issues” 39(2): 120-138

Pilz, Gunther A. et al. 2006. *Wandlungen des Zuschauerverhaltens im Profifußball*. Berlin: Hofman.

Piotrowski, Przemysław. 2012. *Chuligani a kultura futbolu w Polsce*. Warszawa: PWN.

Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pyka, Robert. 2010. *Teoria działania i samotworzenia się społeczeństwa jako nowatorski wkład Alaina Touraine'a do współczesnej socjologii francuskiej i światowej*. [in:] A. Touraine. *Samotworzenie się społeczeństwa*. Kraków: Nomos, pp. IX–XXVIII.

Rogaczewska, Maria and Maria Szyborska. 2012. *Raport z ewaluacji projektu "Kibice Razem"*. Warszawa: MSiT.

Schneider, Thomas and Daniela Wurbs. 2007. *Handbook on developing and establishing supporters' charters in Europe*. Strasburg: Council of Europe.

Spaaij, Ramón. 2006. *Understanding Football Hooliganism. A Comparison of Six Western European Football Clubs*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press

Stone, Chris. 2009. *The Role of Football In Everyday Life*. [in:] S. Brown (ed.). *Football Fans Around the World. From Supporters to Fanatics*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 7-22.

Stott, Clifford and Steve Reicher. 1998. *How Conflict Escalates: The Inter-Group Dynamics of Collective Football Crowd 'Violence'*. „Sociology” 32(2): 353-377

Szymon. Victoria Jaworzno. 2014. „To My Kibice” 2: 40-45.

Tarkowski, Jacek. 1994. *Władza i społeczeństwo w systemie autorytarnym*. Warszawa: ISP PAN.

Tischner, Józef. 1992. *Etyka solidarności i Homo sovieticus*. Kraków: Znak.

Van Krieken, Robert. 1998. *Norbert Elias*. London: Routledge.

Wąsowicz, Jarosław. 2006. *Biało-zielona „Solidarność”. O fenomenie politycznym kibiców gdańskiej Lechii 1981–1989*. Gdańsk: Finna.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wouters, Cas. 1986. *Formalization and informalization: changing tension balances in civilizing processes*. „Theory Culture and Society” 3(2): 1-18.

„Zgred”. 2002. „Okciem zgreda”. „To My Kibice” 3: 31.

Appendix 1 - Photo gallery of local activities

GDAŃSK



The Youth Football Tournament



The workshop for secondary school

GDYNIA



‘Yellow-Blue starting kit’



‘YellowBlue Santa Claus’

KIELCE



Workshop for children



Commemorating the soldiers' graves

LEGNICA



Easter



Annual football tournament

POZNAŃ



‘Little Souls Cup’



Video games tournament

TYCHY



Blood donating



Charity action in local hospital



Children's Day

WARSAW



Charity for animal shelter

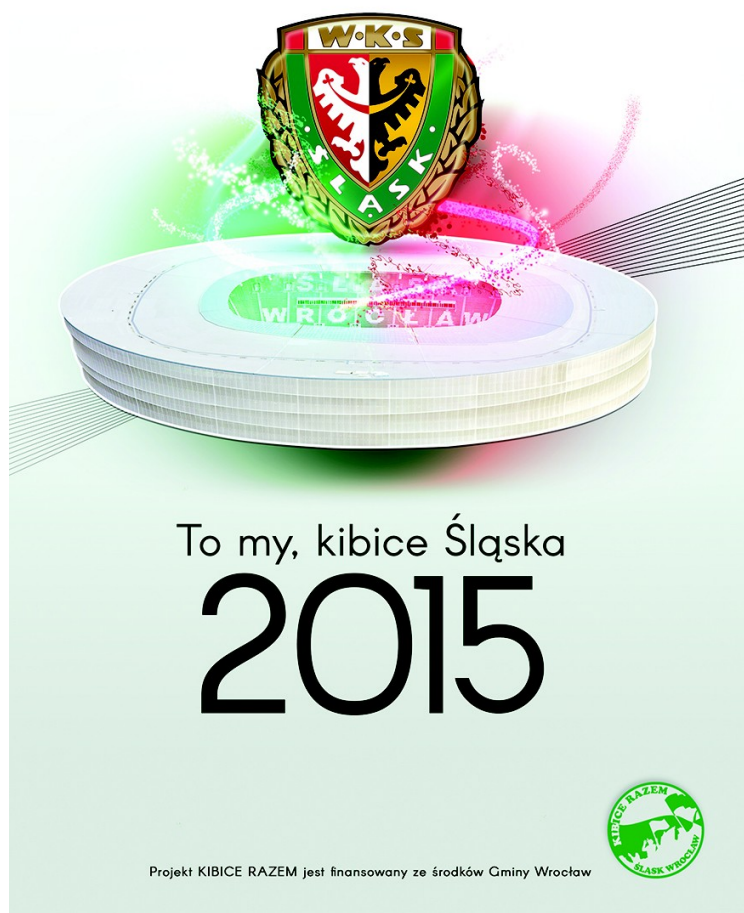


Football for young girls



Workshop for fans

WROCLAW



Fans' photo album



‘Modern Football and the World of Fans’ conference

ZABRZE



Workshop for children



'From school to stadium' action