

THE PARADOX OF FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The generalizing tendency is to associate supporter language with a minimal one, using few words, even very little gesture, so that verbal language as well as non verbal end up being disregard by those non involved in the area or who don't look beyond appearances. Paradoxically, team supporters communicate a lot among them as well as with other galleries and even with the mass media, executive football forums, players etc. Banners, panels, choreography, which are meticulously prepared, send a clear message but are also the living proof of the fact that these individuals are creative and have a high communication capacity. Supporter communication is not limited to stadium manifestations; it is also the indicative result of every message sent through and by supporters' actions.*

Key words: *supporter, communication, identities, actions.*

1. Introduction

One can consider that sport is a promoter of national identities as it offers the arena where national symbols such as flags and hymns are worshipped. Sport is the new humanity religion. If the European/Romanian society is built on and through Christianity, the new society can be built through sport, in other words, sport will be a possible vehicle leading towards a new European identity. [21]

Supporters' actions, be they colored or invisible, are of great diversity, manifested almost permanently, and deployment plans can be found both within the stadium and outside it. Colorful Colored manifestations are those visible and known actions, and the invisible ones (bets, game organizing and preparation, collecting certain objects

specific to the favourite club) are the actual manifestations of supporters, which, most of the time, remain in anonymity for the wide public.

2. The Paradox of Football Supporters' Communication

Fans, kings and fetishism – three terms apparently not connected that appear to come from different ages, have in fact a common denominator, which is sport, offering them rationality. For the present case, the notion of fan represents a globalizing concept for types of watchers and/ or spectators of a sportsman, coaches, football team etc and kings have a double functionality: on the one side they represent the beginnings of clothes fetishism (crimson- clothes made of dark

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red pricy toweled cloth, worn in the past solely by kings, emperors or rulers-according to the dictionary), and on the other hand they represent the current idol-kings of many fans, who create veritable bazaars crammed with fetishes dedicated to idols. Fetishes are objects gifted (by people) with supernatural powers. For example, a horse shoe (which is believed by everyone to bring good luck) belonging to the talisman and amulets class, represents a sub group of magical items that we can call fetishes and that are generally good luck charms [2]. Apart from the good luck function, fetishes have appropriate functions (territorial protection), fear conquering, connection and direct contact (keeping a live and permanent image of the favourite team), protection function, functions that supporters endorse to certain objects or collections of objects (generally having to club's symbol) that they have and from which they never part, especially during matches, these being clear forms of manifesting their love for the team.

There is a negative perspective to fetishes that represent collections of objects that can be connected to everything that is irrational, superstitious or perverted: „Fetishism is a belief that destroys the subject's freedom, making him an objects' slave” [2, p.91]. In the contemporary age, we are surrounded by more and more objects, some indispensable, and we end up not just using them, but they become „our masters”. It is not only people who use objects, but the objects in turn get to manipulate people. Fetishism represents in fact a relationship, one of the individual with something/somebody through the objects in question. [2]

The interesting part of fetishes is that they embody symbols, powers, energies, forces, spirits etc. different from what the object itself represents as matter [2]. One can observe that fan groups, like any other

group, is recognized by and through symbols (not necessarily with magic functions) care integrate the individuals and which, at the same time, differentiate them from members of other groups. They use signs that can designate rebellion, revolt, force, stubbornness, resistance. The specific symbols for each group can be found in their names, in songs, on their clothing, can be tattoos, written on banners, in all their publications, graffiti. Graffiti is a relatively new youth activity and represents both a marking of their own territory, as well as a challenge for the other groups, when they are done on their territory.

Supporters' life is not just during championship meetings and does not remain in the daily anonymity. Supporters become themselves part of the show, namely being main actors of different shows, columns or books more or less in the field. They take up many pages of sports newspapers, are subjects for specialty studies (for example in the area of sports (psycho-sociology), represent the heroes of certain books or biographies, like for example „Hoolifan. 30 Years of Hurt” by Martin King and Martin Knight (2003) and, last but not least, they have dedicated documentaries that follow the hidden side of fan activity as well, and radio TV shows presenting and commenting on their behavior.

They sometimes get to be both the actors and creators of their own creations. The best sports publications are dedicated to football and written by supporters. No other sport or supporter group has ever been mediatized to such degree and integrated in various publications. [17]

Supporters, especially the ultras, are renown for decorating tribunes, maintaining stadium atmosphere and vocal-instrumental support of their team.

Many times ultras were imputed with the fact that their own scenographies are more

important to them than supporting the favourite team. Behind these choreographies lie weeks or even months of work, as the images that appear in the tribunes require an organized, creative and painstaking work. For example, on each seat in the tribunes there is a card representing a small part of the image resulted from the simultaneous lift of the cards by the public. Tasks related to design, graphics, calculus etc. are taken by individuals or groups coming from the gallery in question. Each such group tries to show their superiority and skills by displaying an authentic, funny, passionate, original and fide behavior. [27] Ultras invest not only time, creativity and organizational spirit to reaching their purposes, but also material resources, which sometimes imply great sacrifices.

Despite possible dangers that might emerge as a consequence of using firecrackers, Bengali shootouts etc, ultras adapt and become part of the media show, trying to impose themselves and to make their presence known by colorful, ironic, creative, stimulative and sometimes risky performances. Ultras perceive the stadium as a double function stage, once hosting the show offered by the sportive actors on the field and second the show in the tribunes offered by the viewers. [27]

The stage on which the public of the football show is manifested gets bigger and bigger, and the supporters' act plan is not limited to the stadium stairs. They dedicate a lot of time to internet activities, either by consulting materials, existing web sites, either by communicating with other supporters, other by posting or creating themselves websites dedicated to sport in general, football and/or the supporter activity. We can recall movies and pictures posted on YouTube or resembling sites, blogs created and dedicated to supporter activity and, not least, discussion groups on certain forums and/or social networks.

Fans activities are not limited just to tribune choreographies; they divide in many directions and include more dimensions. Many times, the time intervals before and after the games represent the possibility to organize certain meetings, that can take the form of parties with negative and violent valences. These parties take place regardless of the game result, the favourite team's rank in the championship and/or its success, because true fans will support the favourite team irrespective of the scandals it is involved in or its (unwanted) route.

No matter how we perceive supporters, we have to admit that the entire show offered by fans most of the time represents well calculated collective actions. Thus, individual actions become collective actions, voluntary or involuntary, depending on the situation. The well known „waves” became part of the standard repertoire for sport events viewers and not only. Even if initially they appeared sporadically in different events, the waves become successful internationally after 1986. They became well known during the Mexico World Football Championship, in 1986, thus their name „Mexican waves”. Even if certain federations, like the Australian cricket federation forbid such manifestations under more or less plausible pretexts, like protecting viewers against spilling different beverages, sauces or dishes consumed during the game on them or their neighbours, waves continue to be loved manifestations, that sum up individual behaviors, because each person on the stadium is raised with their hands up, creating a general show appearing as waves flooding stadium stairs. [11]

Other classical and universal forms of fan manifestation are songs [Note 1], whistles and applause, manifested many times before entering the stadium, during

the game and especially at the end of the sports show.

Lyrics from songs sung by supporters are either the equivalent of ode lyrics, either representing hymns (specific for a team or a sport club), either war declarations against the other fans or strictly against fans of certain galleries. These songs are not just creations of some authors/composers lost in the mist of time and in the supporter masses, but they are many times the work of some well known renowned artists from the area and the country. If songs are hymn lyrics are reproduced by every fan after they have been individually assimilated, we could ask ourselves how can they get temporal and rhythmic synchronization of applause that create very intense unique sensations.

This is explained by the fact that the individual imitates, learns and complies to the behavior of the supporter group, accepting the external stimulus to sing, whistle or applaud. Applauses are concrete ways of manifestation for any public, no matter if we speak of theatre, concert of sport manifestations' viewers. According to the situation, this behavior reveals human actions that are a direct consequence of good breeding, of some appreciations or even some ironies (in the case of football matches, the referee is many times applauded by the public ironically when we makes visible wrong decision and/ or illegal).

They either adopt a common behavior through conviction, either through habit of conformity, either he is conscious of the final outcome (of the applause) of the amounted behaviors, the supporter (as for other actions) learns along the way the collective behavior of the group he is part of. [11]

Another attraction and concern of supporters (that we have already mentioned) is represented by producing waves. Waves generally start off from a

small group, and the its success of getting the entire stadium will depend on the will of the other viewers, by their degree of involvement, their focus on the game, the level of availability to be influenced by colleagues, stadium neighbours, and last but not least by their passivity and boredom. [9] The spectacular accomplishment of waves depends not only of the individuals' will, but also previous experiences, because, as every rehearsed thing, it will become better and highly performant. The way and degree of occupation of stadiums will directly influence the viewers' success in creating Mexican waves [Note 2].

Another type of supporter behavior is the one directed towards idolising certain sportsmen who become the team, club or event nation's heroes. Sport stars acquire names such as king, inter galactic prince, alien etc, meant to strengthen and maybe even raise their celebrity status. Nicknames, titles of sports stars are taken by the entire press, instating them as new names, un-officially regulated.

Sport heroes represent a sort of prototype of group unitary materialization or, in other words, they become the group's ideal image. [26]

Identifying with sports actors will entail the individuals' integration in the supporter group. Idolising the sportsman will lead to the individual's change both in the behavioral plan (he tries to copy the star's way of dressing, hair cut, star attitude) and emotionally (he will admire him, offer him almost magical valences, will suffer for him) [7], all of them shaping the supporter's behavior in the community in question, but in the same time his deviant behavior (sometimes pathologically deviant, fans who terrorize their idols through different forms of harassment) in the rational plan of contemporary society.

It is hard to establish though if supporters raise sportsmen to stars or if

media management productions offer them the positions envied by everybody.[26]

Visible and many times tragic actions in the human and material plans of supporters are cataloged as having a violent character. Derbies especially attract increased violence between supporters of adverse teams. Without detailing or exemplifying in an accurate manner these actions, we can make a short incursion and observe that, especially during football championships, sport news offer information about the damage and destruction caused by certain viewers. Unfortunately, these incidents take place frequently, and worse, they are not limited to the closed restrained space of stadiums, but they extend outside it, causing collateral damage, which have no chance of escaping the fury, sometimes mixed with alcohol or drugs, or the raged crowd. We have no intention of extrapolating or cataloging the behavior of all sport supporters as delinquent, but we wish to draw attention to the fact that, sometimes, the violent burst of one supporter will trigger a similar behavior from the group he belongs to or just from some persons sympathizers of the same team, under the pretext of wanting to protect and defend the friend in an assumed danger. In this case also one can talk of a collective behavior that has its explanations either in the imitation, learning, frustration therapies or in those regarding instinctual self defense and survival.

Sometimes this criminality is confused with sports hooliganism, whose members deliberately declare their availability for delinquent acts [22].

Stopping such unwanted acts is tried by implementing laws dedicated to the progress of sport events, through the intervention of police, gendarmerie and other state institutions and private law enforcement, contracted by the event's organizers. As every other field, in sport

also involvement and state and civic society partnership regarding solving some issues leads to a quicker and more legitimate solving than in the case of unilateral intervention of one of the two instances.

Potential sanctions or their way of applying are negotiated, generally by supporter leaders with club management or with other representatives of authorized organisations, charged with implementing or applying regulatory laws. These acts of alleged negotiations are not limited just to the legislative framework. Many times leaders, supported by the galleries of different teams, try to manipulate the decisions of club financiers in order to bring, demise or compromise the careers of some sportsmen and/or coaches. Even if these actions are not visible or known by the public, they exist and unfortunately tilt the balance of sport fairness to a dark side, incorrect and hidden to all sport dimensions.

A non-transparent face to supporter manifestations is represented by sports bets, which can easily lead to addiction that has destroyed the most stable families [Note 3].

Supporter actions represent not just the dark sides of human behavior, they can create benefits or, in the popular language, „can open doors”, and from a scientific perspective, we can associate them to a positive discrimination. In a given situation, people who do not know each other, but who learn are supporters of the same team will offer more credit or information to the discussion partner. Affiliation to a certain club doesn't automatically offer the certainty or winnings as a consequence of professional discussions with partners, fans of the same team, but one can talk about a wider opening to dialog of both partners by the simple fact that they share a common passion.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is not necessarily sport or the supporter activity that creates a certain tolerated, open behavior, but the actions or similar preferences of those individuals found in an alleged situation of negotiation.

These preferences or, on the contrary, adversity towards certain persons or groups, are manifested clearly and virulent on the stadium (and not only), also gaining intolerable forms morally and not only like: racism, right extremism ideologies or hatred towards immigrants and foreigners. These actions are not just related to members of other galleries, but to sportsmen and the technical staff of the club in question.

International sport fors, European or national punish such behaviors according to the gravity of the deeds, but also according to the context and their magnitude. Negative sanctions punishing such behaviors lead to an improvement, a settlement of these acts that continue to exist even if are sometimes hidden by subliminal messages.

We will review some ways of communication of football team supporters in order to underline their complexity and ingenuity in transmitting messages despite the discriminatory and unreal cataloging from the public opinion, according to which both supporter behavior and their way of expressing are in a peripheral area of social value expectancy. Supporters succeed through applause, „waves”, singing, whistles, drawings, slogans, through wearing emblematic equipment with the club's colors, by using different musical instruments, wireworks, fire crackers, flags, choreographies, to impress, impulse but also intimidate.

Unfortunately this intimidation is sometimes extrapolated into a dark area of violence, where fists take the place of

words. Apart from these clear and visible ways of communication, we have to mention that there is a less visible side to football team supporters' manifestations. Manifesting love for the club has no limits, and collecting specific objects from the loved team, magazines published by different galleries, posting movies on various web pages, composing lyrics and songs, weekly or daily meetings with other supporters for preparation of the show in the tribunes or the following away game, are just a few of the most well known forms through which fans express they support and love for the club.

Notes

1. From the point of view of supporters' songs there were studies by Kopiez, Reinhard și Brink, Guido in 1998.
2. Authors like Helbing Dirk; Farcas Illes and Vicsek Tamas (2000) conferred great attention to Mexican waves created by the sport public, analysing video recordings of such manifestations on stadiums hosting over 50,000 viewers.
3. Sport can attract, from this point of view, real dramas, it can become, through sports bets, a vice and a life destructive addiction. In Germany, right after the Lottery winnings, the second place is occupied by sports bets. 6% of Germans (approximately 4 000 000 people) take part in sport bets. 96% of bets goon football. Annually, approximately 1 billion Euros is cashed in from sport bets. During the 2006 Football World Championship 800 billion Euros were spent on sport bets. A positive side is represented by the fact that approximately 400 million Euros from these bets are annually invested in promoting sport in Germany. (Plessner, Henning și Raab, Markus. 2012, în Straus, Bernd).

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