



FOOTBALL RESEARCH IN AN ENLARGED EUROPE

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Hooligans, Ultras, Activists

Polish Football Fandom
in Sociological Perspective

Radosław Kossakowski

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Series Editors

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Introduction

Football as a global social phenomenon involves a number of actors, such as sports institutions, the state and local administration, the media, corporate sponsors, NGOs and supporters¹ (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009). It seems that the key objective of the majority of football associations in Europe 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 and Reicher 1998) demonstrates that fan aggression often stems from aggressive and provocative attitudes towards them. Providing football fans with opportunities for positive interaction and

¹ The present study uses two English terms referring to people interested in/devoted to football (club, etc.): 'fan' and a 'supporter'. In Polish, there is only one equivalent, which denotes both of these: *kibic*. Another Polish word, *kibol*, is used with reference to 'hardcore' fans (also known as *pseudokibice* and *chuligani*, 'pseudo-fans' and 'hooligans'). This explanation is important as in English studies 'fan' and 'supporter' are used in different contexts (see Giulianotti's taxonomy 2002). In this book, the words 'fan' and 'supporter' are used interchangeably when referring to *kibic*.

cooperation in the creation of good practice can significantly reduce their tendency towards vandalism and hooliganism.

A large number of articles devoted to the study of football fans, particularly in Britain (King 1997), have focused on the phenomenon of 'football hooliganism'. Interpretations of the sources of this social phenomenon include, for example, works published by representatives of the Leicester School (Dunning et al. 1988), whose figurational approach associating football hooliganism with certain segments of the working class has aroused considerable criticism (Giulianotti 1994). Apart from studies using other theoretical models (Taylor 1971; Marsh et al. 1978), research in this field includes the application of ethnographic methods (Armstrong 1998; Pearson 2012). Football hooliganism has also been the subject of comparative studies discussing the phenomenon in relation to different countries (Spaij 2006; Tsoukala 2009).

However, it must be remembered that hooliganism is only one aspect of fandom. Although acts of vandalism can still be encountered in the stadiums, they have certainly been marginalized as a result of changes in modern football. As demonstrated in a number of studies going beyond the hooligan dimension, the culture of football supporters is more nuanced and should be approached in a number of different contexts, such as the presence of female fans (Pope 2017; Toffoletti 2017; Antonowicz et al. 2020), identity issues (Giulianotti 2002), commercialization (Kennedy and Kennedy 2016), securitization (Giulianotti 2011), socialization (Dixon 2012) and global networks (Millward 2011). Other aspects which have come under academic scrutiny include social and political involvement of fans and their multidimensional activism (Doidge 2015; Cleland et al. 2018), with their behaviour analysed in the context of reflexive modernization (Numerato 2015), or local politics (Hodges 2019). In recent years, there have been many papers and books published, dedicated to local, European fan environments. Except English football fandom case which is well evaluated and described, it is possible to gain knowledge, for example, on Italian ultras scene (Doidge 2015), German fandom (Gabler 2010), sophisticated and complicated Balkan ethnic and national mosaic (Hodges 2019), Danish (Pfister et al. 2013), Spanish (Llopis-Goig 2015), Czech (Numerato 2018), Romanian (Guțu 2017), Turkish (Nuhurat 2018) and many more. These works clearly

demonstrate that every regional and national case is different, and that the hooligans' 'optics' is definitely too limited to describe the richness of fandom cultures across Europe. Polish fandom culture—analysed in this book—is also a multidimensional phenomenon and certainly cannot be limited to hooliganism or characterized by simplistic dichotomies, such as the one between traditional and consumer ('new') fans (Antonowicz et al. 2015).

Fan culture in Poland has been based on grass-roots, spontaneous movement excluding any cooperation with local authorities and sports organizations over long periods. The activity of supporters' groups has regularly failed to follow the principles of the official bodies by breaching the moral and legal standards. However, as history shows, the tone of fandom culture has to be investigated in a multidimensional way. In the 1990s unprecedented violence dominated in Polish stadiums, but in the twenty-first century, the hooligan dimension has slowly started to be complemented by other forms of activity (hooliganism has taken on a more 'professional' form, practised by well-trained 'fighters', with the focus on arranged fights outside the stadia): ultras groups flourished in many small and big cities (performative dimension), supporters' associations have been established (institutional dimension), fans have started to engage intensively in social and charity actions (activism dimension), and strong tendencies to establish group as well as ideological identity have appeared (ideological and group dimension). To these aspects one should add some fundamental value for all supporters—their passion for football and feelings for the beloved club constitute an important part of fan identity (the identity dimension). In recent years, with institutional support (Polish Football Association and Ministry of Sport and Tourism), a portion of fans can take responsibility for creating a positive image of fandom, building social capital around the clubs, and gaining the trust of local communities within the framework of the 'Supporter United' programme (*Kibice Razem* in Polish). In other words, institutions provide the material and organizational support, and the fans are social capital networks focused around the clubs. In terms of historical development these should be considered unprecedented achievements. All these dimensions, reinforced by a system of strong values and structural cohesion, make fan culture fascinating from a research point of view.

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 is essential that Polish clubs, the Polish Football Association, Polish public opinion, European organizations and UEFA authorities evaluate positive activity leading to the 'civilizing' of football culture, revising the image of football and attracting new supporters from other social circles. On the other hand, positive changes in fandom culture cannot camouflage the many existing pathologies: violence, involvement in criminal activities (in the hooligan domain), offensive language, and barriers against inclusiveness. Polish fans employ their social and cultural capital both for laudable reasons and—in some cases—illegal or 'immoral' ones. It is therefore not feasible to measure such a multidimensional sphere using one criterion.

The main aim of this study is to present a multifaceted world of Polish football fans. This book is the result of many years of research and study, consisting of content analysis of fan magazines and websites, several interviews (both individual and focus interviews) and fieldwork in many locations and circumstances—wherever fans were active and it was possible to engage with them. Thus, this book is a specific ethnographic case study portraying—in a multi-threaded way—a social-cultural world which has not yet been presented in such a complex way. It is important to underline, however, that not all categories of fans have been investigated. In Poland, there is an important difference between fans of league clubs and supporters of the national team. The latter are engaged in a different way in their passion for the sport. They support the national team, which is naturally not as demanding as supporting a local club. Supporting the national team is not connected in the Polish case—although it sounds paradoxical—to a strong ideological and identity sphere. It is true that people attending matches of national teams are patriots, and very often wear white and red clothes, hats and scarves, but they are not the 'die-hard' category of fans. They usually 'do not have a problem' with rivals, and can chat and drink a beer with fans from other countries (this was clearly demonstrated by Euro 2012 co-hosted by Poland). In the case of club fans, the situation is different: mostly, they express a highly antagonistic attitude towards rivals from other clubs.

Generally speaking, this book is devoted only to supporters of Polish football clubs. Many examples described in the following chapters concern both fans from the ultras stands and people sitting in ‘normal’ tribunes. However, all of them feel, to varying degrees, a sense of identification with their clubs.

The study has a regional/national character, but it could be interesting for anyone involved in research on football and fandom culture. To the best of the author’s knowledge, this is the first attempt to introduce this subject in book form. So far, the topic of Polish fandom has been investigated in articles available only in English and only concerning selected aspects (see: Kossakowski 2017a, b, c; 2019; Kossakowski et al. 2018; Kossakowski and Besta 2018; Antonowicz and Grodecki 2018). Some themes investigated in this book have been undertaken in the author’s previous papers but here they are presented in a deeper, more developed way.

The study is organized as follows. The last paragraphs of this introduction are dedicated to methodological issues. The book is not based on one leading theoretical approach—various interpretations are implemented. The chapters are devoted to the different dimensions of Polish fandom. Chapter 1 offers a discussion of the historical roots of Polish fandom. The conceptual framework of Norbert Elias’s figurational sociology helps to grasp the particularity of the subject under consideration. In this perspective, the history of Polish fandom is approached as a social process characterized by ‘functional differentiation’ in the structure of fandom. The chapter provides the background for the other parts of the study and presents an evaluation of the various dimensions of fandom, such as ultras culture, hooligan (and criminal) activity, social and charity activities, individual as well as group identity, and the principles and structures existing in the fan environment. These are evaluated separately. Following this historical chapter, the structural issues are approached: the hierarchical order prevailing in fan groups, the role of cohesion, trust, and the system of informal rules. This chapter demonstrates some basic structural conditions that are foundations for all spheres investigated in the next chapters. It concerns not only relations between fans in local groups but also the complicated system of ‘friendships’ and ‘enemies’ within the groups themselves.

The third chapter describes a closely knit sphere of hooligans. It shows that the contemporary hooliganism in Poland has evolved from spontaneous brawls to ‘professional’ groups consisting of specialized and well-trained fans. Due to legal restrictions and police surveillance, hooligans are active outside the stadiums, battling mostly in arranged fights. Some of them are incorporated into criminal activities. Due to the specificity of this dimension, the chapter includes quotations from anonymous respondents. Chapter 4 considers some external factors influencing both the behaviours and identity of fans. In the 2010s, Polish authorities implemented restrictive laws which greatly transformed fan culture. This was related to the organization of Euro 2012 and the pursuit of ‘modernization’ of the whole country. In response, fans established a ‘resistance identity’, and this has had a substantial effect on the search for social and political identity. As a result, the fan environment turned ‘right’ in terms of ideological engagement.

Individual trajectories, emotions and attitudes are investigated in Chap. 5. It includes an analysis of the socialization process, with the fundamental meaning of the club as a symbolic universe. In many ways, fans manifest their sense of identification and belonging through the club. This part is also dedicated to female fans. Their role is still marginalized and they are not perceived seriously by many male counterparts, but this does not mean that women are less engaged in the role of fan. The following chapter presents the development and structure of the performative dimension: ultras. Polish ultras are well-known due to their choreographies that constitute the ways of communication. Polish ultras demonstrate various ideas thanks to powerful and sometimes controversial aesthetic form. The last chapter is dedicated to bring more information on the institutional and activism dimension. The development of supporters’ associations is analysed, as well as various kinds of actions undertaken by fans. In this part of the book, the ‘Supporters United’ programme is evaluated as well—an unprecedented phenomenon in the fandom evolution. The following chapters are devoted to the analysis of empirical data and identify the main categories both in the world of fans and in the institutional and social spheres. Together, the chapters create a cohesive image of Polish fandom but they can also be read separately.

Research on Football Fandom: Methodological Challenges

In the fan research, the final conclusions depend, to a large extent, on the research questions as well as the research methods used. While analysing the content of fanzines, websites, and so on is not complicated as it does not require, for example, significant emotional investment, the situation looks different in the case of ethnographic fieldwork. Researchers who have decided on the strategy of ‘entering’ the fan environment need to face many often very difficult challenges, demanding not only knowledge but also physical strength, resistance to stress, and the ability to confront different cultural and social phenomena and extreme emotions (such as fear or anxiety). Studies presented by Richard Giulianotti (1995) and Gary Armstrong (1998) show how many ‘tests’ a researcher has to go through to be accepted in the research area. The situation becomes even more complicated when the question of gender is involved. Emma Poulton (2014) and Ilaria Pitti (2019) show the ‘traps’ that await women who decide to study a highly masculine fan community. On the other hand, Geoff Pearson (2012) in his ethnography of English fans points to the importance of a strong and healthy body, in connection with the need to experience such elements of fandom culture as alcohol, long trips and the often carnival-like nature of fandom.

The research on Polish fans, particularly the most ‘hardcore’ ones, yields many similar challenges. Standing on ultras terraces and travelling on away matches do not pose particularly difficult problems, as long as some norms are met. To accommodate these norms, the researcher has to familiarize himself/herself with all rules and regulations in advance. These are available in wide circulation on the websites of supporters’ groups and associations, and are also shared by experienced fans. Many of them can be gleaned through direct experience. This knowledge applies to appropriate ‘dress code’: everyone should wear a club shirt, or clothes in club colours (or in the colours of friendly clubs). On the ultras stand it is required to stand at all times and take part in cheering and singing. However, in the case of away matches the behaviour must also be oriented towards additional ‘attractions’: strong police presence and

(increasingly rare in recent times) the possibility of rival fan attacks. Acting in accordance with the expectations and rules guarantees that the researcher will not experience any critical comments or threats.

The fieldwork was conducted mostly among supporters of Lechia Gdańsk (club from Polish Extraleague) and was related to availability and living in Gdańsk (single observations were conducted on the ultras stands of Legia Warsaw, Motor Lublin, Śląsk Wrocław and Wisła Płock). Moreover, Lechia fans belong to the 'elite' in the Polish landscape, both in quantitative terms (a few thousand engaged supporters regularly attending ultras stands) and environmental terms (they are held in high regard and esteem, even in the eyes of their rivals). In the case of fieldwork in Gdańsk, research was conducted in the period 2013–2018 (visits to the stadium at Lechia continued after concluding the book). In terms of away matches, ethnographic records and travel notes have been included (travelling on a bus with Lechia fans). It is worth emphasizing that anonymous travel in an organized group of fans is not possible in the Polish context. The regulations of companies managing the Polish league system (*Ekstraklasa SA*) state that supporters' associations have to submit the list of fans with personal data of all travellers. As a consequence, to travel with fans, it was always necessary to meet and know people from supporters' associations (called 'The Lions of the North' in the case of Lechia Gdańsk). Therefore, from the first match, some people were aware that there was a researcher among them. This, however, did not result in any form of leniency: rules functioning in fan environments concern all travellers with no exceptions. Observations from matches/trips are presented in the following chapters.

In addition to participating in matches, the research also included fieldwork from other 'no-match' activities important to Polish fans, such as the Independence March (nationwide parade on 11 November), Fans' National Pilgrimage to Bright Mountain (*Jasna Góra*) monastery (annual meeting of supporters in a monastery that is a holy place for Roman Catholics), fan tournaments, social and charity campaigns, and conferences organized by fans. Data from fieldwork were supplemented by content analysis of press releases, websites, social media and online forums.

Extensive empirical data have been collected as a result of individual in-depth interviews with representatives: supporters of local clubs, supporters'

associations, municipal councils, local media/newspapers, Supporters United local centres, the Polish Football Association, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, beneficiaries of fan activism, and police ('spotters'). Quotations from interviews are marked as follows: Polish Football Association: [PZPN]; Ministry of Sport and Tourism: [MST]; representatives of Supporters United centres: [city_Supporters United]; representatives of supporters' association: [club_SA]; supporters: [club_supporter]; local officials: [city_City Council]; journalists: [city_journalist]; beneficiaries of fan activism: [city_beneficiary]; and police: [city_spotter]. In several cases, for example when hooligan and illegal issues were evaluated, quotations have been marked 'anonymous respondent'. In total, in the period 2013–2018, eighty-eight interviews were conducted: with 11 female fans and 77 male supporters. Generally, the gender of respondents is not marked after quotations, and the only exceptions are related to the 'gender' issue (when the situation of female fans is investigated). Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 3 hours. Table 1 contains the names of the clubs (with brief descriptions) of the supporters-respondents.

Table 1 The names of the clubs from which supporters-respondents come from

Club	City	Division (2019/2020 season)
Arka	Gdynia	Extraleague
Chrobry	Głogów	I League
Cracovia	Cracow	Extraleague
GKS	Bełchatów	I League
GKS	Katowice	II League
GKS	Tychy	I League
Górnik	Zabrze	Extraleague
Hutnik	Kraków	III League
Korona	Kielce	Extraleague
Lech	Poznań	Extraleague
Lechia	Gdańsk	Extraleague
Legia	Warsaw	Extraleague
ŁKS	Łódź	Extraleague
Miedź	Legnica	I League
Motor	Lublin	III League
Polonia	Warszawa	III League
Ruch	Chorzów	III League
Śląsk	Wrocław	Extraleague
Widzew	Łódź	II League
Wisła	Płock	Extraleague

Recruitment for interviews often required many attempts, diverse communication strategies and sometimes official documents (as in the case of consent to an interview with police officers). The most challenging aspect was gaining permission from the fans involved in the hooligans' fight. Undoubtedly, this dimension requires further research, because only a few hooligans agreed to answer questions. Groups of hooligans are subject to strong surveillance by the police, so they must be vigilant regarding any person outside their group. In each of these cases, the conversation took place after several months of 'negotiations' and only thanks to recommendations received from other supporters. This is a matter of fundamental importance as, generally, most of the interviews with the engaged supporters (not only hooligans) would not have taken place without these recommendations, 'asking for contact' and so on. The term 'snowball sampling' (see Naderifar et al. 2017) acquires a distinctive meaning in this case.

It is worth mentioning the risk that is associated with a research process. Recommendations from other supporters allow the respondents to recognize the researcher as trustworthy. The fans do not allow unknown and untrusted people into their circle, as they operate in a highly contained environment. Gained trust was therefore a sign of acceptance, but it also meant that the respondents could expect something in return—first and foremost, that the researcher would describe them in a better light. They could perceive the researcher instrumentally. On the other hand, a researcher who gains such a level of trust (and evidence of sympathy as well) can feel the pressure to return the favour, for example with a less critical look at pathological phenomena. These doubts caused by people from other backgrounds (police, officials, journalists) have been included in the study. Their view allows the researcher to evaluate fans from different perspectives, and it makes the process of data analysis more critical.

It is worth noting that the respondents might idealize issues relating to hooligan activity, which is difficult to verify since the author has no access to this domain. One should be particularly sensitive to the discourse of 'honour' that involves respecting the rules (the only opportunity to verify this discourse was to present it to the 'opponents' and follow their

discussions on Internet forums, which, in some cases, made it possible to prepare a more objective evaluation). The hooligan world in Poland is characterized by a continuous struggle for ‘authenticity’ and monopolization of high esteem. It resembles the construction of reputation described in ethnographic research from different countries. Therefore, during the collection of data and their analysis, a reflexive and critical approach was essential, and this made the entire research process more ‘objective’.

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History of Polish Fandom: Communism, Post-Transformation Violence and the Division of Functions

To understand the specific nature of Polish fandom it is crucial to analyse its history. Some particular phenomena and social processes of the past decades have had an impact on the formation of the fan movement, both in terms of the internal dimensions (bottom-up mechanisms) and external imperatives (legal regulations, the state apparatus of violence, media influence, etc.). This is why it is very important to look at the historical development of football fandom in Poland and to adopt a multidimensional perspective.

Fandom in Communist Poland

As can be seen from its history, the fan movement in Poland is subject to transformation and cultural modernization and is far from 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) started to organize support for their teams. At the time, Polish stadiums were visited by clubs taking part in the European Cup games (such as Feyenoord Rotterdam and *Saint-Étienne*) and the behaviour of

their supporters provided inspiration for Polish fans. Legia fans, for example, were greatly impressed by the Dutch supporters who arrived in Warsaw:

For football supporters in Warsaw the greatest sensation was the Feyenoord fans who followed their team in their thousands. The guests presented something that was completely new in Poland, something that could be seen here for the first time. Almost all of them wore white-and-red club t-shirts and scarves, they had trumpets and flags, different sorts of pipes and rattles, and (...) they wore huge top hats with “Feyenoord” written on them. The sight was really impressive and the atmosphere they created during the game was something incredible, something that was bound to be remembered for years to come.¹

This influence, however, was only superficial. Indeed, restricted access to information (subject to control by the authorities) and a lack of elementary knowledge about fandom culture in other countries made it impossible to develop a relationship of ‘interdependence’. Although Polish fans tried to imitate Western examples, it was local animosities that were to function as the main factor behind the formation of ‘firms’ supporting Polish football clubs. They were first organized to protect their ‘own area’ against ‘strangers’, that is, 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 (Milicja Obywatelska, MO, the communist police). The editor of a fan magazine explains:

I think that Poles have something like that in their blood. We are different than Slovaks, Czechs, even than Hungarians, who have their hooligan crews. It’s in the blood, this street aggression, things like beating up a guy at a disco because he’s a stranger, he frowns on us, he picks up our girls. (...) Back in the 70s there was also an important division between ‘git-people’ and hippies. ‘Git-people’ arrived at the stadiums and they brought a lot of this prison element. [Personal interview]

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/StrefaKibolii/photos/a.1729198494022697/1966495420293002/?type=1&theater> (accessed 3 June 2020).

‘Git-people’ (*Gitowcy*) were people with a criminal background who were familiar with prison culture—they knew its jargon and code of rules. The culture of ‘git-people’ reached its heyday in the first half of the 1970s and was the strongest in large urban areas, where the first and most important fan crews appeared. Although the importance of this subculture began to decline at the end of the decade, its patterns of behaviour evolved in the fan movement. They included hostility to ‘strangers’ and uniformed services, and a strong sense of loyalty to the group and its principles, which was crucial in the case of dangerous trips to other cities. A Lechia fan recalls: ‘In those days, everyone knew each other, you recognized everyone’s face. There were no casual people. There were small groups; you could count on everyone because otherwise there was no chance. It cemented us together’. Another key element was tough character, required in physical combat. These rules are of great importance also in contemporary hooligan groups—they do not tolerate any form of cooperation with the police.

Communist authorities tried to channel the movement by setting up 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. ‘Planning’ was 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 2009: 18).

Sport was one of the most important elements of propaganda discourse, as it served as ‘proof’ of the superiority of the ideals of communism over capitalism. Fans and their ‘rebellious’ behaviour tried to break down this discourse. 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 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 its 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 development of civic attitudes (except for the underground structures of anti-communist opposition), or a sense of community which would not be imposed by coercion. Indeed, communism stimulated the development of the 'homo Sovieticus' mentality (Tischner 1992) based on a conformist attitude, lack of individual initiative and dependence on the system. Although in the 1970s the fan movement began to take on an organizational form, it was not a coherent cultural formation. Hence, it is difficult to talk about a committed 'social identity' of the fan.

Many respondents recalling that period, despite their awareness of living under an unfavourable system, emphasized that the MO, the communist police, was much less prepared to deal with fan incidents than modern services. In cases that required intervention, the Militia arranged everything in the simplest ways, and benefited from the fact that militia-men commanded great respect: 'These were different times; after all, only fifteen policemen were enough to appease everyone because of respect they had' [Arka Gdynia_supporter]. Also the media, controlled by communist authorities, noticed only positive aspects of supporting. Although one reason for this was the ideology of 'law and social order', the fact was

that except for some occasional incidents fans were not a 'problem' in the 1970s, and they could be seen as a significant part of the whole propaganda project related to social 'massification' of sport. Moreover, the level of sensitivity to violence was different, and what today is assessed as unacceptable could be regarded as 'normal' at the time.

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, for example overgrown bureaucracy, bribery, cronyism, poor organization of work, and excessive influence of the communist party on the economy (Koralewicz and Ziółkowski 1990). The inefficiency of the system (empty shelves in shops and food rationing were a part of daily life 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 economic collapse and 'unplanned' system transformation. Jacek Tarkowski aptly describes the final years of communism in Poland: 'instead of talking about 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; Kossakowski 2011). 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 responded reactively, and there was no special law regulating football matches. The most common 'strategy' of

the Citizens' Militia 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 the fan movement. The fatalistic mood of the end of an era was dominated by violence between fans, and between the police and fans.

The 'Decivilizing Spurts' of the 1990s

The fall of the socio-political system resulted in a phenomenon described by sociologists as a 'social vacuum' (Nowak 1981). The term refers to a situation in which there is a gaping hole—no civic communities, associations or grass-roots 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 were not formed. 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, while ideological censorship blocked the possibility of manifestation of alternative ways of thinking in order to 'integrate' people in the communist spirit.

The first period of political transformation (1989) saw the new democratically elected authorities, without stable structures, having to face the necessity of suppressing enormous inflation and high unemployment and supporting the collapsing economy, which was not able to compete in a free market environment. In 1990, the unemployment rate was at 6.6%, and reached 14.9% in 1995; in 1991, the gross domestic product fell to 80% of that recorded in 1989, and returned to this level only in 1996 (GUS 2019). The most dramatic situation was in the cities where previously strong, state-owned industrial companies were not able to meet the demands of free-market reality. The collapse of such companies often meant a degeneration of urban centres, whose residents had to look for jobs in other parts of the country (or, after 2004, abroad). Political turbulence (between 1989 and 1997 Poland had eight prime ministers) did not help to resolve the economic problems.