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Abstract

Purpose/Rationale: Due to the increasing commercialisation of football, the rise of “Against Modern Football” (AMF) movements has been investigated in several European countries. Using Legia Warsaw football club as an example, this study examines the consequences of football modernisation and commercialisation in this country and how it impacts relationships between a football club and its ultra-fandom.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Interviews with Legia Warsaw’s Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) and ultra-fans (n=5) were performed and thematically analysed.

Findings: Key themes were identified in relation to the sociological portrait of Legia Warsaw ultra fans, the interdependence between a football club and its ultra-fandom, the role of the SLO, the role of commercialisation in the AMF’s movement in Poland and finally, the impact of stadium’s new security measures on ultra-fandom.

Research Contribution: The research provides findings that contribute to better understand the interdependence between a football club and its ultra-fandom in relation to the modernisation and commercialisation of football.

Practical Implications: The paper underlines that the relationship between a football club and its ultra-fandom can be seen as strictly co-dependent but also interdependent, as each side ultimately determines the existence of the other. It also adds to understanding of the role of the SLO in Poland.

Originality/Value: While most of the existing literature has investigated ultra-fandom in Western European countries, the case study of Warsaw Legia Football Club (Poland) expands the understanding of this issue in this particular country.

Keywords: Football, Modern football, Ultra-fandom, Legia Warsaw, Poland

Introduction

This article examines the relationship between the Polish professional football club Legia Warsaw and fans who self-identify as “Ultras” of the club. The article utilises wide-ranging interviews with “Ultras”, focused primarily upon their own conceptions of fan culture and fan identities at the club examined. The article also contains the insights of the Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) at Legia Warsaw. As per Stott et al (2018: 6), the role of the SLO is subtly different according to national context but often it is to ‘help clubs’ understanding of its supporters and the supporters to understand the rationale behind club decisions’. In Sweden, SLOs play an active role in making decisions about supporter safety. In the United Kingdom, SLOs are often subsumed into the marketing and ticketing departments of clubs and their role is somewhat limited to these commercial activities. Stott et al (2018) also suggest that in Italy, the role is largely cosmetic rather than having any active impact on club management and governance. This article allows for some insight into the role that SLOs in Poland play in terms of the relationship between fans and professional football clubs.

In part, the role of the SLO has been introduced to improve communications between football clubs and their fans. As Stott et al (2018: 1) discuss, a dominant theme in academic literature is the argument that ‘as football becomes progressively commercialised, it also becomes increasingly disconnected from its fan base’. In terms of the management and governance of football, the SLO role can be intended to ensure that the views of fans are considered within the management processes that clubs follow. This has become a necessary element of football’s management and governance because the sport is being gradually commercialised, and rules of demand and supply are becoming dominant forces (Williams, 2006). As this article will discuss, many fans have not welcomed this process. The progressive commercialisation of football

began in the 1960s but it was not until the late 1990s that it became a global economic phenomenon (Gońda, 2013; King, 2004; Millward, 2011; Sandvoss, 2003) and a subject of various academic studies (Armstrong, 2003; Giulianotti, 1991; Gońda, 2013; Kennedy, 2013; Numerato, 2015). The process of commercialisation manifests itself in many ways and in various spheres. Existing research examines football commodification aspects identified with stadium modernisation (Giulianotti, 2011; Hognestad, 2012; King, 2002; Nash, 2000), expensive match-day tickets (Williams, 2007), kick offs scheduled at non-traditional times (Numerato, 2014), and the neglect of the football club and local communities' traditions (Brown, 2007; 2008; Giulianotti, 2005; Millward, 2011).

A dominant opinion in the literature indicates that football is a business, and one of the ways that the relationship between a football club and its fans can be conceptualised is that of a producer and consumer relation (Crolley & Hand, 2002; Hudson, 2001; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2017; Nash, 2000). Kennedy and Kennedy (2013) argue that fandom is being subsumed into a new, football consumer role, within which the club and fan relationship is limited to seller-buyer transactions. Furthermore, Antonowicz, Szlendak and Kossakowski (2012) suggest that fan engagement and loyalty are measured by the amount of money that fans spend on season tickets, pay-per-view broadcasting or merchandise, rather than by their emotional support during live games. As a result of increased commercialisation in sport, football clubs have arguably been detached from the local community and they have ceased to fulfil social cohesion functions (Webber, 2015). In lieu of so-called 'industrial supporters', commercialised and globalised football creates 'customers of sports effects' (Antonowicz et al., 2012, p. 8).

Scholars have focused on the conflicting dynamics between supporters and football clubs' management in relation to 'modern' football. Differences among active and passive supporters

(Redhead, 1993; Cleland, 2010) and fans' opposition to neo-liberalism (Dubal, 2010) have notably been investigated. Although the commercialisation of football is widespread and is an identifiable process, there are groups of supporters who resist it. There is an identifiable 'love football, hate business' attitude among football fans across Europe whose main purpose is to fight against the effects of commercialisation (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2016). This specific supporters' manifestation is often discussed as the 'Against Modern Football' (AMF) movement. Rowe and Scherer (2015) have analysed the AMF movement from an economic perspective as football has recently become a significant part of the entertainment industry with an unprecedented inflow of money.

The continually growing influence of various forms of media, and the growth of sponsorships and commercial partnerships have led to a growing perception amongst some football fans that the clubs they support have been converted into 'brands' (Millward, 2011), and the supporters themselves turned into 'consumers of football merchandise' (Perasović & Mustapić, 2017). Moreover, the battle against 'modern' football is also related to the legal context, as the movement is also in opposition to the implementation of restrictive law concerning supporters' stadium activities and tools moderating supporters' actions and behaviours during matches and surrounding areas (Hill, Canniford & Millward, 2018; Webber, 2015). The article offers insights into how Ultras at Legia Warsaw view their own identities and activities in relation to the AMF movement. In presenting the findings, the aim is to present supporters as they view themselves, discussing fan culture as it was expressed in the interviews carried out.

A number of case studies have explored supporters' resistance to 'modern' football culture across Europe. However, most of these examine fan culture in a Western European context. For example, Doidge (2013) and Numerato (2014) focus on the Italian aspect of the AMF

phenomenon which is mainly concerned with protesting against stadium activity as supporters' rights to express themselves on match days have been significantly restricted. With regard to English football one of the main issues involves stadium relocation and football clubs' purchases by owners that put the sustainability of those clubs into jeopardy (Numerato, 2014; May, 2018). In Greece, fans have protested against the restriction of their capacity to travel and support a team during away matches (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012). The Against Modern Football (AMF) trend is often manifested in demonstrations, banners, slogans, boycotts or petitions (Perasović & Mustapić, 2017) and active resistance to commercialisation in football is identifiable as a key element of the movement. This article adds to knowledge by being one of relatively few studies of "ultra" fan culture in Eastern Europe, building upon previous research on Polish Football Ultra fandom such as Kossakowski (2017), Kossakowski & Besta (2018) and Antonowicz & Grodecki (2016) among others.

In literature on AMF, supporters involved in the movement are often characterised as "ultras". Distinguishing types of fandom is significant as the subject of the research concerns the most engaged "ultra" supporters who are said to have a profound, personal attachment and solidarity characterised by a strong and conscious devotion to the football club they support. As described by Spaaj (2007: 414), ultras' basic function is "to provide expressive and colourful support to their team" using choreographed performances including banners, flags, chants and fireworks. The support to their team can also be expressed through aggressiveness and violence towards rivals fans (Doidge, 2013; Testa & Armstrong, 2008). These groups of fans usually demonstrate a high degree of formalisation, including official membership card and recruitment campaigns. The club and ultra-supporters share a cultural interdependence, which can be perceived as 'a live experience, rooted in a grounded identity' (Washington & Karen, 2015). This identifiable

interdependence between a club and its fans is a core theme within this article, and various facets of it will be examined within its findings.

Nash (2000) argues that ultra-fans have a crucial role to play by not only protesting against the ‘modern’ football phenomenon, but also by maintaining the game’s traditional cultural values. As reported by Antonowicz and Wrzesiński (2009), a football club, with an identity composed of colours, emblem, history, and folklore, can constitute a kind of divinity for ultra-fans and guarantees a sense of belonging in the ‘community of the invisible religion’ (Gońda, 2013). Along similar lines, Gómez-Bantel (2015) describes football clubs as a carrier of regional identity and compares their role to a cultural representative of a community, which also gives fans a deeper meaning for their support. Arguably, football is not just a commodity, it fulfils social functions. It is argued here that football must be considered in terms of its social context and cannot simply be considered in terms of the laws of the market (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013; Gońda, 2013).

Despite commercialisation being a worldwide process, the consequences of this phenomenon should be analysed at the local level. Arguably, differences exist between Western Europe and Poland. Therefore, the case study in this article examines the consequences of football modernisation and commercialisation in Poland using the specific example of Legia Warsaw Football Club. The amount of material that discusses football in Poland is scant compared to the amount of material available that examines Western countries such as England, Germany, and France (Kossakowski et al., 2013; Stempień, 2018). Case studies that examine football in Poland can expand knowledge of supporter culture and the commercialisation of the sport in this particular nation. For this article, interviews with representatives from both the football club and the ultras who support Legia Warsaw have been carried out in order to gain insight

into the relationship between the club and its fans. The research examines the mutual dependency between a club and its ultrafans, looking beyond commercial transactions at the level of a seller-buyer relationship. It also examines the attitude of the club towards the activities of ultra fans, and analyses the ways that ultras perceive the club that they support and feel they belong to.

Legia Warsaw has been chosen as case study of Polish football as the club is the current league champion and the most successful team throughout the Polish League competition history (HPPN, 2018). Legia Warsaw is also the 13-time title holder of Polish top division championship with only two clubs that outperformed it - Ruch Chorzów and Górnik Zabrze with 14 championship titles each (Piłka Nożna, 2019). Since the 1990s, Legia has occupied the top spot at the all-time Polish football League table (HPPN, 2018), also being at the same time one of the most successful Polish football clubs at the international stage (qualified for Champions League quarter-finals in 1995/1996 season) (UEFA, n.d; Legia, n.d.). Moreover Legia Warsaw seemed especially suited for the study of commercialisation process as since the beginning of the democratic transition in 1989, the club had been passed from hands to hands into many private owners, corporations or companies (Sport.pl, 2014) aiming at transforming sport entities into business models, what caused a clash between traditional supporting and modern football.

The following section of the study focuses more specifically on Polish football environment and the polish fans cultures, the unique nature of modern football phenomenon in Poland as well as the country's economic and historical features.

“Ultra” fan culture and modern football in Poland

Gońda (2013) and Burski (2013) provide an insight into Central and Eastern Europe ultra-fans’ resistance towards the ‘modern’ football phenomenon, which is essential in terms of the current research. However, many academics deal with the Against Modern Football attitude from the perspective of well-developed, European countries such as England, Germany, Italy or the Netherlands. Polish football has not been affected by the process of commercialisation at the levels experienced in these nations, because compared to Western European countries, its market has not been as attractive to investors. It must also be considered that Poland has a different history to many European nations, having been governed under Communist principles during the Cold War. Examining football in Poland can add to existing research into ‘modern’ football and the Against Modern Football trend.

As the Polish Top Division, called ‘Ekstraklasa’, continuously struggles with sporting performance enhancement, as well as with budgetary crises in the lack of financial resources, protests against football modernisation in Poland may appear to be less relevant or necessary than in other nations. However, the tendency of implementing a corporate market model into the governance of football clubs can be identified in Poland. Antonowicz et al. (2015) evidenced this process, highlighting that Polish football is increasingly covered by commercial TV channels and that stadiums are progressively transformed from ‘sport spaces’ to ‘commercial spaces’ (p. 114-127). Moreover, Polish fans’ opposition is inspired by the increased influence of sponsors and media (Gońda, 2013). As Antonowicz and Grodecki (2016) observe, one of the main reasons for the ongoing processes of football modernisation was UEFA entrusting Poland (together with Ukraine) with the organisation of the UEFA European Championships in 2012. Thanks to the Championships, building and renovating stadiums

initiated future developments in the country. At the same time, new safety policies were introduced at the venues and the use of pyrotechnics, but also presenting the clubs values and traditions became endangered (Antonowicz et al., 2015; Antonowicz and Grodecki, 2016).

The Polish supporters' scene is unique because 'modern' football is identified mostly with strict security regulations on 'active' supporting rather than with commercialisation processes, which differs from England and other Western European nations (Brown, 2007, 2008; Doidge, 2013; Dubal, 2010; Millward, 2011). As implied by Einstadt and Moore (1984, 1987 as cited in Antonowicz & Grodecki, 2016), modernisation of Polish football needs to be perceived as a part of a much broader socio-cultural process that began in 1989 with the economic and political transformation, instead of a change in the norms of the country's institutions that lie on the three pillars of liberal democracy, free market economy and open society. According to Antonowicz et al. (2015), Antonowicz et al. (2012), and Antonowicz and Grodecki (2016), Polish fans' experience of the 'modern' football phenomenon concerns mostly limitations of fans' expressions (e.g. banners, tifos, criticising the authorities, and making political statements) and increased control of their behaviours during matches. In relation to the latter, significant conflict between 'modern' football and ultra-supporters concerns the prohibition of using pyrotechnic materials on sporting objects. The 1997 Act on Mass Events lists various sanctions for both clubs and fans, such as stadium bans or matches behind closed doors, when flares are used in the stadium (Antonowicz et al., 2012; Gońda, 2013). Moreover, many Polish football clubs' managers validate personalised membership cards which facilitates the identification of potentially rowdy supporters. Enhanced surveillance is also related to the increase of recognising faces on CCTV camera systems installed outside as well as inside the stadium (Antonowicz et al., 2012). Overall, Antonowicz and colleagues (2012) claim that the most essential aim of these regulations is to redefine and transform ultra-fandom in new

consumers' roles so that their performance would be predictable, less spontaneous and relatively easy to supervise. As a resistance to these changes 'Football for the fans' or 'Stadium is not a theatre' slogans have been chanted at football competitions in Poland (Gońda, 2013).

In Poland, similarly to other European countries, despite 'modern' football mechanism effects, ultra-supporters do not disappear from the stands. The coexistence of the "new" and "old" type of fans, where the latest become a significant part of spectacle enjoyed by the first ones can also be observed (Stempień, 2018). However, the 'modern' football phenomenon in Poland did not cause radical changes of Polish ultra-fandoms because it did not eliminate supporters from the lowest social strata (Kossakowski & Besta, 2018). When it comes to the sociological portrait of Polish ultra-groups, as noticed by many scholars, one of the major differences is that unlike many Ultras from Western Europe, Polish ultra-fans sometimes manifest right-wing or far right-wing attitudes (Gońda 2013; Kossakowski & Besta, 2018). Going further, many authors agree that it is impossible to present a distinct nature of Polish fandom without referring to Polish history. In the opinion of Kossakowski, Szlendak and Antonomicz (2017) a resistance to numerous political system transformations throughout the last few decades in Poland could only be expressed by patriotic, Roman Catholic symbolism, which has contributed to the occurrence of socio-cultural and aesthetic effects to be found nowhere else in Europe.

The main aspects of Polish history are referred to the fights of independence, prevention of domestic identity and the state of the frontiers. In 1795, attacked by Russia, Austria and Prussia, Poland disappeared from the political map for 123 years, while during the Second World War, Polish Underground State went through a heroic and tragic struggle against Soviet and German occupation. Polish Ultras' specific nature is also affected by the communist form of the government from 1952 to 1989 (Antonowicz et al., 2015; Antonowicz & Grodecki 2016;

Kossakowski et al., 2011; Kossakowski et al., 2017; Kossakowski & Besta, 2018; Kossakowski, 2017). The Polish ultra-fandom community can sometimes represent a patriotic, historical and anti-Communist nature with elements of Catholicism. Moreover, it is sometimes characterised by sharing ultra-conservative values with the core pillars of brotherhood, honour and pride (Kossakowski and Besta, 2018; Kossakowski et al. 2017).

Besides, it is crucial for this article to emphasise two aspects. First of all, hooliganism should not be confused with ultra-fandom activities in general, as according to existing scholarship in the area, hooligan supporters constitute a small group of fans. Therefore, these two terms should not be used interchangeably. Secondly, confusing hooligans and ultras ‘served as a pretext for the government to begin a massive media campaign, propaganda against so-called “stadium bandits”’ (Antonowicz & Grodecki 2016). Brick (2000) also draws attention to the phenomenon of demonisation of hooliganism and the use of the hooligan football concept as a discursive mechanism for demonising ultra-fans by various football clubs’ stakeholders. Ultras are therefore a significant element of fan culture in Poland, albeit an element that is often misunderstood.

As one key aim of this article is to examine the fan culture expressed by those interviewed, right-wing elements of fan culture form a limited part of the discussion. In examining fan culture (or indeed any manifestation of culture), it is vital for researchers to discuss what is actually present in the data they collect. It is perhaps more common for research to address fan culture which is committed to left-wing ideas. A range of articles are available on the culture of Germany’s St Pauli club, including Daniel and Kassimeris (2013), McDougall (2013), and Totten (2016). Doidge (2013) has also written about Livorno in Italy. Contributing to a critical

understanding of the attitudes that ultra fans and the SLO have towards the political views that some of them espouse is one of the aims of the article.

Methodology

This article is concerned with a case study of fandom at Legia Warsaw football club, focusing in particular on the relationship between the club's Supporters Liaison Officer and the ultra-fans. A case study aims to understand the dynamics of the phenomenon being studied within its context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In terms of the authors' research, 'understanding the dynamics of the topic' refers to the interactions between Legia Warsaw and its various subordinate contexts such as ultra-fandom. This article examines a peculiar phenomenon which can only be truly understood by questioning the entities involved, thus an open structure of interviews was a significant aspect of data collection.

The first author of this article conducted a semi-structured, face-to-face interview with the Legia Warsaw Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) and further semi-structured, internet-mediated interviews with Legia Warsaw ultras (n=5) (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted in Polish (native language for both the interviewer and its interlocutors) and then translated in English by the first author. With regard to the Ultra-fans, interviewees were selected based on their official and active involvement in the supporters' movement (i.e. attending Legia home Games in stadium's sections devoted to ultra fans, being active on Legia online discussion forums etc.). As the selection of targeted population is not random and concerns specific entities, a nonprobability sampling technique was used. Ultras can be a difficult population to reach, therefore snowball sampling was also adapted as individuals interviewed were asked to recommend other participants coming from the same environment for further interviews. The

aim of interviewing the SLO and members of the ultra group at Legia Warsaw was to provide two differing perspectives on fandom at the club. Notably given the discussion of the varied role of the SLO in different contexts in Stott et al (2018), the SLO largely provided an insight into the club's perspective, while interviews with ultras provided perspectives from within that particular fan group. This would not always be the case in other contexts, where the SLO's role can be more limited to specific functions within club management (Stott et al 2018).

++++ INSERT TABLE 1 HERE +++++

In order for the results to be more reliable, the researcher used the same medium of data collection - internet-mediated interviews - for all Legia Warsaw fans interviewed for this article. These electronic interviews 'allowed participants to remain in their own familiar locations' (Hanna, 2012). Thematic analysis was used in the study, requiring more involvement and interpretation from the researchers as it puts emphasis on "identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes" (Guest et al., 2012). The analytical process was made of three main steps. First, interviews were recorded and the tapes were played multiples times to become familiar with the data. Second and as a result of the familiarisation process, each author individually identified key ideas and themes in the data. Third, themes were discussed and interpreted by all the authors in keeping closely with the literature on football ultra-fandom. These themes not only appeared because of recurring ideas and meanings in the data but also by structural relations between them that have been identified in the field of study such as power, political beliefs, globalisation and commercialisation that all informed research on ultra-fandom.

Based on the primary research data collected in this study, key themes were identified in relation to the sociological portrait of Legia Warsaw ultra fandom, the interdependence between a

football club and its ultra-fandom, the role of commercialisation in the AMF's movement in Poland and finally, the impact of stadium's new security measures on ultra-fandom.

Findings

According to the Club's SLO, the "Legia Warsaw ultra-fandom consists of people from various social strata, who are connected by a deep feeling towards Legia, while for some of them, supporting the Club is one of the most, or even the most important thing in life". The SLO mentioned that Ultras are a conscious subculture with a vision of Legia as a strong team playing at the European level, but also an open football club, available to different societies. Moreover, the SLO referred to the term by which supporters are widely called - 'Fanatics' - and criticised the pejorative meaning of the term. In his opinion, the word describes an individual whose devotion to the idea is of a higher standard explaining that "of course, there are safer and more dangerous visions of the supporters' movement, nevertheless, following a club, cheering players and creating a unique ambiance is one beautiful love".

In the data collected through semi-structured interviews, all ultra-fans interviewed emphasised features of Legia ultra-fandom which demonstrate how specific and heterogeneous this group is. The first participant (P1) focused on the Ultras' extremely ambitious attitude with regard to the on-field success of Legia Warsaw. Members of so-called "Razor" fandom ("Razor" - the name of the stand characteristic for Legia Ultras) are connected by a sense of pride, where "the second place in the League table is a failure". P2 and P4 defined ultra-fandom as a hermetic group with strong values and its own specific mentality. For them, the Club and the supporters' movement is something more than a cultivated tradition, it is a guiding ideology. In this sense, they could be seen as "fanatics", despite the view of the SLO that this word is not correct.

P1, P3 and P4 focused on the Ultras' patriotic and nationalistic values, which are reflected in the "tifos" that some Legia fans produce. When asked about the expression of political views and commenting on current national affairs in the stands, the SLO referred to the display prepared by Ultras for the 73rd Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising against the Nazi regime in Poland. The scenery presented a German soldier holding a gun to a child's head with an inscription underneath: "During the Warsaw Uprising Germans killed 160,000 people, thousands of them were children". The SLO said that: "It was shocking, it was beautiful, however UEFA perceived this as a political manifestation and punished us with a 35,000 EUR fine' he reported. As the SLO further explained – 'People inside the Club were aware that the fans did well, that it was a noble cause. The unity between us helped a lot'".

The display discussed by the SLO could be considered nationalistic and/or anti-German. However, for the SLO, the display was "beautiful". It is beyond the scope of this particular article to assess whether, as the SLO contends, the wider view of the management of Legia Warsaw was that their fans "did well". One further possibility presented by this research is to examine the relationship between fans and clubs by discussing this directly with club management, in light of the "unity" discussed by the SLO. It is, however, clear that for some Legia fans, the expression of nationalistic ideas is a central part of the club's ideology and iconography.

A second theme identified in the data questions the interdependence between a football club and its ultra-fans. All the Legia Ultras and the SLO stated that the relationship between them has a double-sided nature. Every interview contained a variant of the opinion that "football clubs would not exist without their supporters, while supporters would not exist without the

club”. According to P4, although the Ultras do not always agree with the club’s policy, their devotion, engagement and loyalty remain at the same level. As claimed by the Legia SLO, both sides are engaged in working on the relationship between the club and its Ultras and there is goodwill from each party involved. Furthermore, he remarked that “supporters are a kind of wheel of the football club as all is being done for them, by them, in accordance to their guidelines and ideas”.

The SLO raised a significant issue of perceiving supporters and Ultras as football clubs’ customers – “from the managerial perspective, we want Legia to grow, to satisfy our ‘clients’. I have to admit that I am not using this word on a daily basis (i.e. client) and anyone who limits marketing ideas to the assumption that a fan is a customer, will stumble on it”. The SLO also said “clearly, Legia operates as a business unit, however unlike other enterprises, there is a strong human element involved, which has a great influence on the management of the Football Club”. In this sense, Legia are presented by the SLO as paying particular attention to the views and ideas of the club’s supporters. The view that these people are “clients” of a business, however, is not one that the SLO is happy to support. With relation to this, another key theme highlights the role of commercialisation in the AMF movement in Poland. According to the Legia Warsaw SLO, in comparison to the top European football leagues, in Poland the process of commercialisation continues to progress very slowly. He said “the Polish top division – “Ekstraklasa” - is still many years behind La Liga, Serie A, Bundesliga or Premier League, and naturally, Polish football clubs aim to achieve a sense of the Western football spirit”.

The SLO said that in Poland, the so-called ‘Against Modern Football’ movement does not mainly concern the financial aspects of football. He emphasised that “there is no revolt against match-day ticket prices, contrary to, for example, Liverpool fans, who were opposed towards

paying around 80 GBP for the cheapest match tickets. In the United Kingdom, the process of football commercialisation had begun at its earliest time in Europe and it evolved rapidly”. To further explain, he also added that “the process had its origins when the British Prime Minister - Margaret Thatcher - started to fight against hooliganism by reinforcing football clubs which aimed to adopt a free market economy system at that time. This resulted in audience exchange, as suddenly, only mid and high-class fans could afford to watch live football”.

Considering ultra-fans reaction towards a hypothetical accelerated process of commercialisation in Legia, the SLO reported that “there would not be any conflict if it was implemented in a right, wise way”. However, it is interesting to note that the SLO doubted that the extreme commercialisation of sport in Poland would ever occur. He reported that marketing through sport is not as popular in Poland as it is in Western Europe. With regard to this, in general each participant stated that the Club’s financial status could be ameliorated. P1, P4 drew attention to the need of improving the Club’s financial situation by focusing on training young players – “Polish clubs tend to sell the best players and the clubs’ youth can become the largest source of income’. All the interviewees shared a common vision of Legia as “a strong European club with modern facilities, and a wisely disposed budget”. Nevertheless, ultras upheld that money should not rule or control the sport. In Legia’s case, ultras mostly disagreed with the elevated salaries of particular players and expensive transfer prices.

A final theme evokes the impacts of new security measures, in and around stadiums, on ultras. The implementation of new regulations such as the prohibition of using pyrotechnics; increased controls before entering the stadium; various bans or fines imposed on the Club for extremist slogans in the stands – Even if all these changes arose from external laws and not from the commercialisation of the club in itself, all those actions can provide a background of Legia

Warsaw's surroundings in relation to 'modern' football (Antonowicz & Grodecki, 2016; Antonowicz et al., 2015; Antonowicz et al., 2012). In terms of the interviewed Ultras, all of them are not in favour of the above-mentioned activities, however they are aware that the actions are to ensure greater security during the matches. Additionally, P1 and P2 stated that all the above-mentioned measures "kill the football spirit". Three interviewees from Legia ultra-fandom (P2, P3 and P4) argued that "despite strict regulations and controls, supporters will always succeed to carry out their plan" such as stadium choreography with flares.

According to the SLO, "Ultras are not a real threat for the society, however terrorists are, therefore the regulations and controls must take place, but the key point is how they are carried out, how the Club implements them". Concerning using flares, the SLO admitted that clubs must follow the rules and try to exclude them from the stadium. On the other hand, "the Club understands how much the pyrotechnics can add to the show and Legia Management Board knows that the only way to prevent the Ultras from using flares, would be to carry extremely strict controls outside the stadium". The SLO claimed that "this would change the atmosphere and the nature of a football game into a prison environment and the Club definitely does not aspire for this to happen".

As reported by P2, "The club knows that the Ultras make a unique atmosphere. Legia authorities are usually informed in advance about the presence of the pyrotechnics in the stands, besides, the club has a budget for these types of punishments. All things considered, it is undeniable that Legia must follow the trend of football modernisation in order to meet the European standards and be able to compete in the European tournaments". Similarly, the Legia SLO emphasised that the Club and Ultras do not have divergent interests. He explained that "obviously, there are different centres of gravity, tensions, ways to reach consensus, but both Legia as the Club's

Management Board and the Ultras care the most about Legia's wellbeing". The SLO pointed out that "the process of communication is not based on enforcing, stating or even negotiating". It can be concluded that a win-win situation is achieved through dialogue, uninterrupted contact and exchange of ideas. As reported by the Legia SLO – "If we are going to carry out a business marketing plan, which is supposed to directly concern the fans, I urge the Board to firstly present the concept to the supporters, as if we find out what they think about it, what are their opinions about the idea, together we can come up with something even better".

Discussion

The process of football modernisation, so-called 'modern' football, is perceived by many scholars (King, 2003; Millward, 2011; Sandvoss, 2003; Gońda, 2013) as a worldwide phenomenon, which had commenced in Europe in 1990s as the result of the open market economy era. However, the Legia Warsaw SLO argued that football modernisation is not an homogeneous phenomenon because considering the Polish example, a genuine commercialisation, in which football is controlled primary by money is not likely to ever occur in Poland to the same extent than in the United Kingdom for example. This feature can be explained by the fact that in Poland, marketing through sport is not as developed and profitable as in Western European countries. Besides potentially having many opportunities of cooperation with various sponsors to further develop the market, Polish football market seems to be less attractive to international partners. This may result from various factors including quality of football performance, lack of big names playing in the league, the absence of Polish teams in the major international competitions, and therefore there is low brand exposure for the sponsors' brands.

Considering the Polish case, it can be said that effects of ‘modern’ football, which are mainly associated with the football commercialisation, cannot always be generalised or applied to a number of countries at the same level. Football modernisation is a dynamic and fast progressive process, which occurs in different parts of the world asynchronously and takes various forms. The observation can be supported by Castells (1996) who mentions that football modernisation process, although it exists globally, is mostly embodied in the local community. Since there is one main transfer window in football, the accelerating process of commercialisation affects the players and their transfer prices equally throughout the globe. Therefore Legia Warsaw, has to adjust to the European financial standards to buy a good player as the expenses are incomparably higher considering the differences with other, significantly bigger and better-developed European football clubs.

When it comes to the commercialisation in general, there is a large disproportion between football clubs in Europe. In the primary data collected for this research, Legia ultra-fandom members also paid attention to the issue stating that nowadays, players’ prices and salaries in Polish league are inflated. It can be reported that contrary to Western European countries, the Polish supporters are not affected by the ‘modern’ football phenomenon financial effects (in a sense of e.g. increased match ticket prices), but the Polish football league is under its direct influence because clubs cannot afford to sign the most expensive, top level players.

Taking into account the sociological portrait of the supporters’ community, contrary to Western European countries, ultra-fandom in Poland represents a right or far-right wing ideology (Gońda, 2013; Kossakowski et al., 2017). Moreover, many researchers admit that the specific nature of ultra-fandom in Poland cannot be presented without a reference to Polish history (Antonowicz and Grodecki, 2016; Antonowicz et al., 2015; Kossakowski and Besta, 2018;

Kossakowski et al., 2017) when numerous political system transformations and decades under foreign partition developed nationalism, patriotic and Roman Catholic symbolism (Kossakowski, 2017) which has a strong influence on ultra-fandoms' nature in Poland.

It can be observed that despite the changes in Polish football which are rarely beneficial for the supporters' movement, Legia Ultras realise that the process of football modernisation is unstoppable, and their protests could only aggravate the issue. It is significant that football modernisation in Poland is mainly related to the new safety policies and the lower tolerance regarding fans' behaviour in stadiums (Antonowicz and Grodecki, 2016; Antonowicz et al., 2015; Antonowicz et al., 2012). Legia Ultras agreed with improving safety level at the stadiums. The Ultras interviewed are aware that in order to compete in the European tournaments, Legia must follow the trend of football modernisation and observe the instructions of International Federations. In terms of the literature review, Antonowicz and colleagues (2012, p. 20) explain that "adaptation to the imposed rules is not a duty, but a condition to be part of the international competitions". Legia Ultras are against those activities and do not entirely subordinate to them. According to the Ultras "Despite strict regulations and controls before the game, we will always bring to the stadium what we want". As reported by the Club's SLO modern football transformations will not be accepted by ultras unless the new regulations are introduced gradually and wisely.

When ultras bring to the stadium something prohibited by the rules, they are aware of breaking the law. The supporter might be checked in a way that nothing will be detected, however in case of discovering the offence, a fan might face more or less serious repercussions depending on a type of the offence committed. As mentioned by the Legia SLO, the stadium security staff have a right to react within the framework of the Safety Act (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2018) on the

basis of which stadium regulations are created. However, it is in the football club's authorities' power to set the way of dealing with the 'modern' football requirements and their decision to prepare, implement and employ these regulations in a specific manner.

Ultra-fans' core activities are being progressively restrained in favour of the market rules (Dixon, 2016; King, 1997; Richardson, 2004; Sandvoss, 2003; Webber, 2015; Weed, 2007). Considering this fact, a number of academic studies raise an issue of the football club – supporters relationship transformation into a producer – consumer or seller – buyer transaction (Crolley & Hand, 2002; Nash, 2000; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013). There are many case studies about European clubs influenced by this process to a large degree in a form of adapting the Club's tradition, culture and fans' devotion to the open market economy (Brown, 2008; Doidge, 2013; Kossakowski et al., 2011).

However, it can be said that this trend does not fully apply for Legia Warsaw. As reported by the Legia SLO – “Undoubtedly, a football club functions as a trade unit, which has to meet some financial requirements and at the end, make a profit. Nevertheless, a football club driven by business mechanisms is no longer genuine and authentic”. Analysing the primary data, it can be observed that in the decision-making process of the organisation, Legia Warsaw's authorities do consider the human element involved in the business and they are fully aware that fans, besides being the clients, are the club's reason for existence (Gońda, 2013; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013).

Another answer given by the analysis concerns the fact that even though it is not likely for a supporter to change its preferences and become a fan of different team, a football club should not take its supporters for granted. Considering Legia Warsaw, it can be observed that the Club

cares about the supporters' satisfaction and fulfilment obtained through Legia's success on the pitch, the stadium infrastructure and the whole match-day experience in general. In terms of the salient subject of the research – ultra-fandom – the research can conclude that the Club supports the Ultras' movement as for instance there is a dedicated budget to the fines related to their activities. Moreover, it can be observed that in the case of any scandal or a controversy with the participation of the ultra-fans, the Club does not stand against the fans. In contrary, it shows unity and provides protection to their fanbase.

It might seem that such dynamic, powerful process as football modernisation can provoke lots of misunderstandings between two mutually linked entities as they can be both altered by its influence. The relationship between a football club (in a sense of the Club authorities) and its fans can be at risk when each actor has different interests or visions. As claimed by the Legia SLO "the Club and the Ultras do not have divergent interests. Obviously, there have different centres of gravity, tensions, ways to reach consensus, but both Legia as the Club's Management Board and the Ultras care the most about Legia's well-being and success". As reported by Legia's SLO, "the process of communication is not based on enforcing, stating or even negotiating. The agreement is achieved through dialogue, uninterrupted contact and exchange of ideas". Therefore, it can be observed that effective communication is a key point in order to reach an agreement between both parties.

Conclusions

There are few similar case studies about the influence of the modern football phenomenon on a specific football club from Eastern Europe. This article therefore adds to knowledge of fandom outside the more commonly researched context of Western Europe. In terms of

practical implications, findings underline the importance of a constant and pro-active dialogue between the club and the supporters. It also highlights the crucial role of the Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO) who may have to deal with contradictory demands from external stakeholders (i.e sport governing bodies, national government), the Club authorities and the fan base. The research carried out is exploratory in nature and one of the main limitations of it concerns the small size of the sample used for primary data collection. A wider study could be carried out in future with a greater number of participants. A greater number of club representatives could also be interviewed for a wider range of views. Rich data was obtained from the interviews but carrying out a greater number would be a key feature of future research in the area.

In terms of the differences between modern football in Poland and in Europe, it can be said the process of football modernisation in Poland progresses at its own tempo. Contrary to other Western European countries, there is still room for pyrotechnics or for the expression of extreme ideologies through banners in stadiums, even though these are theoretically regulated. Regarding the fact that the club's traditions and values have some roots in ultra-fandom, it can be said that there is a certain cultural interdependence. The view of the SLO is that "ultra-supporters are a kind of wheel of the football club as all is being done for them, by them, in accordance to their guidelines and ideas". It can be inferred that there is a mutual, strong dependence between both sides. All interviewees agreed about the importance of maintaining the Ultras movement. They have similar attitudes towards modernisation and commercialisation processes and they share a common vision of the future image of the Club. Agreement between two entities can be achieved through effective and persistent communication.

All interviewees that participated in the research recognized a few types of the interrelations between the Club and the ultra-fandom:

- a) Among fans, Legia Warsaw is much more than just a football club, it is a vision, a way of life;
- b) Legia Warsaw is an institution and is built by ultra-fandom;
- c) Legia Warsaw is dependent on its fandom, especially ultra-fandom, and conversely; there is a cultural interdependence;
- d) Fans are much more than the Club's customers.

In line with the literature review, it can be noticed that there is a kind of exchange between fans and football clubs. In general, a football club fulfils fans' need of social affiliation. It gives them a sense of belonging in 'the community of the invisible religion' (Antonowicz and Wrzesiński 2009; Gońda 2013). Also, it provides a unique, unpredictable outcome of the experience, it excites. On the other hand, supporters can be perceived as the creators of a unique ambiance in the stadium, the Club's cultural values and tradition 'holders', but more significantly, they are the football club's 'raison d'être' – the major reason for the club to exist (Nash 2000; Webber 2015). An idea repeated throughout the interviews undertaken for this article is that:

'Football clubs would not exist without its supporters, while supporters would not exist without the club'.

Following the results obtained for this article, the relationship between a football club and its ultra-fandom can be seen as strictly co-dependent, and at the same time interdependent, as each side ultimately determines the existence of the other.

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Table 1 Key demographics of the participants

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	25	35	25	25	45
Education	Master of Arts	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	Technical college	Secondary Education
Occupation	Employee in private sector	Employee in private sector	Independent	Employee in public sector	Independent
Location	Warsaw	Random	Warsaw	Warsaw	Warsaw