

The South Lawn: Sociological aspects of the local identity

Radu Gabor¹, Elena Irimia², Simona Ionescu³

Abstract

The ultras phenomenon is represented by the gallery of the “Politehnica Timisoara” football team and identifies itself with the name “Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud”. This phenomenon is not at all new and its analysis represents a radiography of the white-violet ultras group. The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the timisoarean ultras model and specific means of encouraging the football team, the type of messages sent, characteristics and peculiarities of the group. The inquiry, observation and questionnaire method represented the means through which the research data has been acquired. It has been found that encouraging this phenomenon has strong influences upon the group, for the most majority this kind of manifestation representing a way of living, with consequences on the individual's personality.

Key words: *ultras phenomenon, way of living, non-verbal communication.*

Rezumat

Fenomenul ultras în Timișoara este reprezentat de galeria echipei de fotbal Politehnica Timișoara și se identifică cu numele de „Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud”. Acest fenomen nu este nicidecum unul nou, iar analizarea acestuia reprezintă o radiografie a grupului ultrașilor alb-violeți. Scopul lucrării de față îl reprezintă atât cercetarea modelului ultras timișorean, cât și modalitățile specifice de încurajare a echipei, tipurile de mesaje transmise, caracteristicile și particularitățile grupului. Metoda anchetei, observației și a chestionarului au constituit mijloacele prin care s-au obținut datele cercetării. S-a constatat că încurajarea fenomenului are influențe puternice asupra grupului, pentru majoritatea, acest mod de manifestare reprezentând un mod de viață cu efecte asupra personalității individului.

Cuvinte cheie: fenomen ultras, grup, mod de viață, comunicare non-verbală.

¹ Student, Physical Education and Sport Faculty, West University of Timișoara, e-mail: radu_gool@yahoo.com

² Student, Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, West University of Timișoara

³ Lecturer, PhD, Physical Education and Sport Faculty, West University of Timișoara

Introduction

The Politehnica Timișoara football team has never won a national football championship in Romania, this reflecting in the results which do not highlight it in a distinctive manner (1); in its 88 years of existence has never won a European trophy and has not played permanently in the First Romanian Football League (2). But this fact did not entail the loss of supporters who turned from plain supporters in 1921 to the ultras fanatics nowadays (3).

The ultras phenomenon is represented in Timișoara by the gallery of the Politehnica Timișoara football team called "Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud" (CVUCS), where Curva is the Italian term for lawn and Viola represents the name by which the white-violet fans are known in the world (3). In the ultras landscape from Romania and most recently Europe, CVUCS truly represents a group of fabulous spectators (4). This fact is proven by their presence in large numbers at the games of their favourite team on own field and in motion, the unconditional support irrespective of the result of the game, the fair-play shown by the fans and the awesome spectacle given by the ultras spirit of the South Lawn (5). This special manner of manifesting the ultras spirit, was appreciated by the whole country and by the Professional Football League who in 2003 awarded CVUCS with the trophy for "the best football supporters in Romania"(3). Even though its percentage is significantly reduced compared to other groups in the country, violence cannot be denied. Recent incidents at the Romanian Cup final played in Târgu-Jiu between Poli and CFR Cluj when the white-violet ultras, felt offended by the hostile treatment the Romanian Football Federation has had during the entire championship regarding their favourite team all culminating with the all biased arbitration from the final, entered the playing field

during the game, this leading to a confrontation with the police, which in return abused their position.

Since 2002, supporters grouped themselves into brigades, which lead to a better organization and involvement. Each brigade from CVUCS has a specific name and markings. These are represented on a banner which is anchored on the fence that separates the lawn from the field, on scarfs, mufflers, flags, clothes (6). The identification with their territory is obvious, each group has a certain place in the lawn, this being the same every game, every tournament and every year (7).

From 2002 till now, on the south lawn's fence (Figure 1) appeared the flags of the following brigades: Masseria, Drojdierii, Batalion Giroc, Veterans, Violet Monsters, Fazione Estrema, Hell Unit, Ladies & Gentlemen, Federazione Viola, Brigade Viola, Ultrabanat, Anonym, Gruppo Select, Urban Guerilla, Ultranativ, V.I.P. Group, Banatica, MCMXXI, G.A.V. (8). It is worth pointing out that the "Banatica" group is made up exclusively of girls and women and has for as a marking a violet flower. On August 29, 2008 the MCMXXI group decided to leave the South Lawn due to a conflict regarding their position compared to the rest of the lawn across, also concerning the weak playing and the team's attitude during the championship. Currently, they continue their activity in The North Lawn. And so the team is supported from the two opposite sides of the stadium.

The most famous example of football supporters is the one of Paris Saint Germain team who has two distinct groups placed on the two lawns of the "Parc des Princes" stadium: The Boulogne Lawn, which is populated in an overwhelming proportion by radical nationalists of extreme right and on the other side a part of the multi-ethnic population from the Paris region called "Ile-de France" (7).



Figure 1. The fence banners of the “Batalion Giroc”, “Drojdierii” and “Urban Guerilla” groups (www.tiempo-poli.ro)

Currently the following ultras groups are active in CVUCS: Urban Guerilla, Gruppo Soarelui, Gruppo Autonomo Viola, Batalion Giroc. Although on “Dan Păltinișanu” there are other supporter groups, they cannot be considered ultras groups because of the following reasons:

- Once founded, a ultras group must declare its identity
- To hold a particular sector of the stadium and identify with it.
- To sustain the team regardless of the result, both home and away, irrespective of the distance.
- To wear around their neck the muffler with the insignia and colours of their favourite team (4).

Research tasks were:

- Implementing a questionnaire to the supporters who attended the games in the South Lawn Sector, with the purpose of gathering information about the peculiarities of the ultras group, structure and organization of the gallery into brigades.
- Observation and analysis of CVUCS encouraging methods during the game.

- Identifying the positive and negative influences on the personality of the ultras supporter and society.

Working hypothesis

The South Lawn represents a way of living for the ultras. The ultras group membership has positive influences upon their way of living. The messages shown by the gallery promote aspects regarding local and national identity but also reflects the competition with other groups of supporters from other teams.

Material & Method

205 questionnaires were handed out and 198 were returned (a proportion of 96,6%) during the return of the 2008/2009 national championship. The questionnaires were handed out in different locations: The South Lawn of the “Dan Păltinișanu” stadium in Timișoara, the bus route Timișoara- Cluj on the occasion of the football match from the quarterfinals of the Romanian Football Cup, held between FC Timișoara and Gloria Bistrița (April 15, 2009) and on the occasion of the weekly meeting of the ultras groups “MCMXXI” and “Hell Unit”.

Results

a. The categories of supporters of the F.C. Timișoara football club

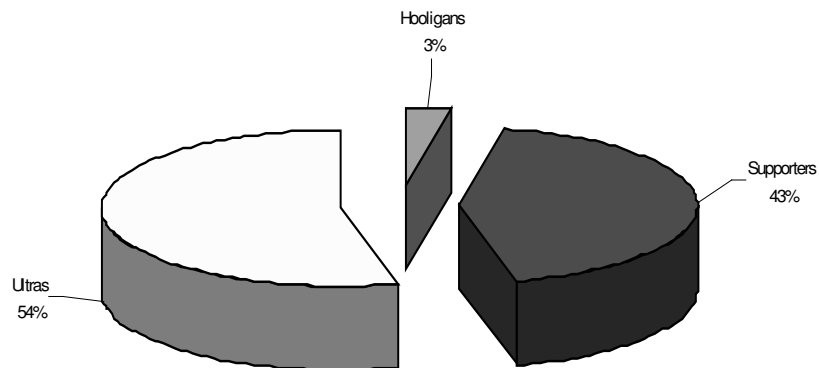


Figure 2. The categories of supporters of F.C. Timișoara

Out of all the people surveyed, it appears that the supporters group of FC Politehnica Timișoara from the South Lawn is divided into 3 subgroups out of which the most representative is the Ultras (at a ratio of 54%) , followed by supporters (43%) and in a

very small proportion by the self-proclaimed hooligans (3%). The respondents identified themselves as being either a ultras, supporter or a hooligan (figure 1).

b. Representation of the team for the ultras

What does the team signify?

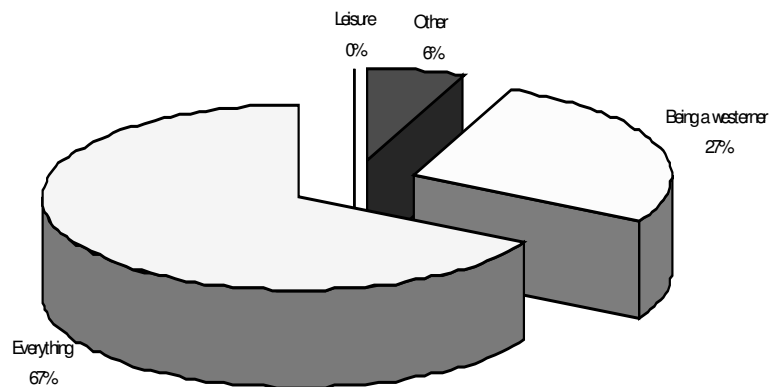


Figure 3. The signification of team for ultras

Figure 3 shows that for 67% of the ultras, supporting the team means “everything”, this meaning that it is a point of reference in their existence, a way of

living. Local identity is also well represented, 27% identifying with the status of being a westerner. For 6% the team represents other things, and for none

of the ultras the football team doesn't just represent leisure, and those 67% for whom the team represents everything goes to show the intensity of their feelings. The Chart above proves the fact that

the most majority of the ultras are hailed from Timisoara, hence the feeling of local identity towards the timisorean football club is the most representative (table 1).

Originating from Timișoara	ULTRAS
Yes	80 %
No	20 %
Total	100 %

Table 1. The origine of ultras

c. Reasons for choosing The South Lawn

Why did you choose the South Lawn?

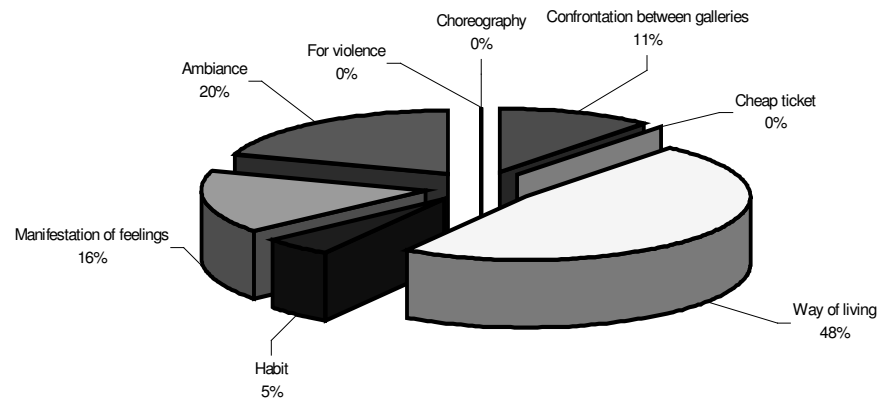


Figure 4. The motivations for choosing South Lawn

Figure 4 shows that for the ultras, The South Lawn is a way of living, a representative space for them from the entire architecture of the stadium, the place where group membership is obvious, where they can express their devotion towards the team and colours, where they can express their living (16% possibility of feeling exteriorization) and feelings through songs, choreography, banners, flags and messages which often go beyond the sporting frame and enter the social domain around the football phenomenon and even more beyond. Also, 20 %

choose The South Lawn because of the ambiance created, 11% for the confrontation between galleries without any reference to violence, the presence of no ultras due to no need of violent manifestation (0%), the same percentage (0%) chose the lawn because the ticket is cheaper. Choreography as a consequence of the means of expression, the message that The Lawn is sending through each choreography being addressed to the spectators on the stadium and outside it, to the players or to the opposite gallery.

d. The positive influences of CVUCS on the individuals personality

Positive influences

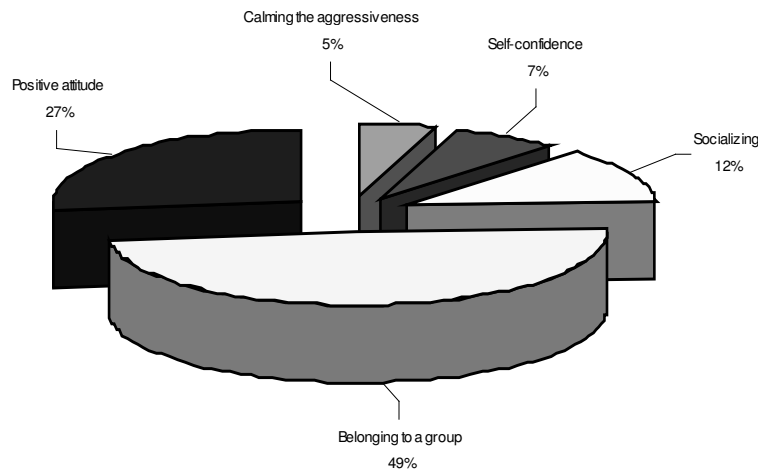


Figure 5. Influences of CVUCS on the individuals personality

Declared in 2003 “The best football supporters in Romania” due to the fair-play spirit (9), the timisorean gallery has a positive attitude on 27% of the ultras individuals present in The South Lawn, through positive attitude understanding participation in choreography, exteriorization, supporting the team. For 7% supporting the team from the middle of the gallery gives them self-confidence, 5% calming the agresiveness and 12% socializing. The simple belonging to the white-violet ultras group gives a positive attitude and represents the main reason of participation for 49% of them (figure 5).

e. Messages sent by CVUCS

During matches on own field but also played away, CVUCS sends different messages through using its own means which often exceed the football area and can be recounted in the social one. These messages can be divided into two categories: Auditory and Visual (10). Auditory messages are transmitted through songs, cheerings, hand clapping, booing, whistles. The songs and cheering can be of encouragement and can refer to the local identity of Banat (“From Banat to Rome/ Ultra Viola Unica”) or

that of timisorean (“In all the world and all the country/ There is nowhere like in Timisoara), to the club’s colours and the team (“We all are white violet/ And fanatics after our boys”), historical performances of the club. The second category of songs are those of adversity aimed at their rivals such as UTA Arad, Dinamo, Steaua (“Jump and scream all out loud/So the dogs from Stefan the Great drop dead”) (8). The adversarial songs do not only aim at the rival team but also to the persons that the ultras consider to be their enemies, due to the relations they have or had with the club (11). The most eloquent example is that of the former team club boss Claudio Zambon or the president of the Romanian Football Federation, Mircea Sandu. The greatest impact, due to its complexity and the susceptible message, is held by choreographies (6). In time, The South Lawn has put together one of the most beautiful choreographies in the country and Europe (5). In the 1995/1996 season CVUCS becomes the first group in the country that puts together a choreography involving all the lawn members, and at the finals cup in 2007 the entire lawn and all two platforms (10).



Figure 6. CVUCS choreography, The 2007 Romanian Finals Cup Poli Timișoara –Rapid București (www.tempo-poli.ro)

Each choreography made on “Dan Păltinișanu” has a special meaning, it sends a strong message both to the whole stadium and to the players. Generally they refer to the Finals Cup of the 2007 season, the greatest performance in the last 16 years (figure 6). The Ultras came up with a choreography that embodied the South Lawn and both tribunes. This was attained in the club’s colours and on top of the lawn was written “Tempo Poli”, the cheering of the polist supporters in the first years of the club’s existence (1). With obvious reference to history there were the choreographies from the matches against Partizan Belgrad and UTA Arad of the 2006/2007

season, the moment chosen for putting together these choreographies is obvious, UTA being the eternal rival and the match with Partizan Belgrad meaning the first European participation of the last 16 years. In both games mentioned above, the lawn there was written “1921”, the year the club was founded and the first insignia of the club in those years (9).

The most eloquent examples are the recent choreographies made up by the lawn on the occasion of the two qualifying matches in the UEFA Champions League disputed against Shaktior Donetsk (Ukraine) and VFB Stuttgart (Germany) (figure 7).



Figure 7. Poli- Shaktior Donetsk choreography, UEFA Champions League Preliminary Tour (www.tempo-poli.ro)

The message sent through choreography was a very obvious one, that of local identity represented through the monuments located in the center of Timișoara with reference to places where the Revolution began and took place in 1989: The

Opera, The Cathedral, The Romulus & Remus statue and the “Traian Vuia” Polytechnic Institute, accompanied by a written message: The faith we have in Poli is eternal (figure 7).

The fact that the border of football domain has been exceeded numerous times is represented by the other category of messages, the written ones. These

are generally displayed after break or during the game and can be of encouragement or adversity (6).



Figure 8. Anti-FRF Messages (www.tempo-poli.ro)



Figure 9. Ironical message against the rival UTA Arad (www.tempo-poli.ro)



Figure 10. Anti written-sports press messages (www.tempo-poli.ro)

In addition to local identity, there is also manifested the clear distinction between ultras and hooligans. The derby from the west part of the country between Timișoara and Arad is manifested by displaying

and the hooligan acts, their membership to the team's colors being shown in a non-violent manner messages between galleries, which sometimes result in violent confrontations (5). In the images

shown below the messages that the ultras address the arad people are obvious (Figure 9).

Also, the ultras manifest the dissatisfaction with the level of the written sports press in Romania, represented by the two major quotidiens "Gazeta Sporturilor" and "ProSport" which are considered to be in favour of the teams from the capital, Steaua and Dinamo (figure 10).

Conclusions

The study reveals the fact that for the majority of the ultras (80% originating from Timișoara) supporting the team from The South Lawn represents a way of living. Correlated with the fact that for 67% of the ultras the team represents everything there can be said that sport leaves a mark on the individuals' life who is present game after game and stage after stage in Commando Viola.

The white-violet ultras's way of expressing can take many forms from verbal messages to non-verbal ones. As a non-verbal way of conveying messages we encounter references to history, represented through outstanding monuments of the city the written messages refer directly to various issues regarding the supporters but especially the eternal rivals such as UTA Arad where its failure is reason for mocking and even joy for the ultras of CVUCS.

The message "Faith in Poli is eternal" strengthens the fact that for CVUCS love and devotion towards the team and colors represents "**EVERYTHING**".

References

1. Dudaș I. (1971) *Timișoara - leagănul fotbalului românesc*, Editura Consiliului Județean pentru Educație Fizică și Sport, Timișoara, 137-151;
2. Popa G. (2006) *Gloria zilelor de ieri*, Editura Mirton, Timișoara, .63-87, 193-200;
3. www.cvucs.ro, accessed in 1 october 2009;
4. Beiu A. (2004) *Modelul ultras*, Dilema Veche, nr.54;
5. www.romanian-ultras.net, accessed in 2 october 2009;
6. Russo R., King M. (2007) *Ultras*, Editura Sport Communication, Verona;
7. Bromberger C. (1989), *Le stade de football- une carte de la ville en reduction*, Bayard Edition, 4-5;
8. www.tempo-poli.ro, accessed in 1 october 2009;
9. www.poli.tm.ro, accessed in 2 october 2009;
10. Bromberger C. (1995) *Le match de football- ethnologie d'une passion partisane a Marseille, Naples et Turin*, Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 9-12;.
11. Dunning E., Murphy P., Williams J. (1988), *The roots of football hooliganism - An Historical and Sociological Study*, Editura Routledge and Kegan Paul, Londra, 105-109.