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DOCTORAL THESIS

Ultra subculture in the romanian football galleries.

**Romanian Ultra - tipology, organization, actions inside and outside
the stadiums**

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Abstract

The status and social impact of the sport king has changed considerably in Europe over the last two decades. Modern football is a profitable industry. The emphasis on media in general and TV in particular has led to the increase of economic interests and investment. The price paid for players, or the income from advertising and sales of products with the club's insignia, has led to a management policy based on the same principles as those of big companies being implemented in football clubs. Sociologists' studies, especially Italians and British, show that economic interests and large sums of money have turned football from a mass sport into a consumerist one, where the ideal fan is a football consumer and not a fanatic supporter of the club. The big clubs are mostly fond of the need for a fan to come to the stadium, to buy the club's products and participate in the match as a show, where relaxation during free time is the primary goal. Thus, the football show takes precedence over passion, community spirit and even rivalries.

Membership of a community of supporters is made by purchasing products, with the symbols of the club, of various other franchises or cards with the most diverse services offered by the club. These products offer, in fact, to the consumer, the belief of belonging to a Community, which supports a strong club with a regional, continental or global influence. This typology of modern supporters is a big market for clubs, which, in order not to lose these ones, invest a lot in the development of brands and bring the star players to perpetuate and even increase the consumer spirit. A team's syncope makes this consumer market of fans lose, becoming either passive or heading to other brands and implicitly to other outlets. Consumer money is supporting and identifying with a strong team, not interested in a weak club in crisis. This new type of support tends to replace the classic non-ultras fan interested in the team, coaches, game, players, tactics, training etc. practically the football changed along with society, at the pace imposed by post-modernism. In this context, fans in subcultures associated with football are a conservative element, often perceived as a brake on modern football, a symbol of a consumerist society, by excellence. The nostalgia of romantic and powerful Community football, inextricably linked to aggressiveness on the streets and stadiums, makes them undesirable for rich consumer clubs, while they are not limited, in the case of such people, exclusively to the manifestation of the carnival spirit in the lawn.

The violent potential of ultras is an element, which consumer football seems to be trying to get rid of. Providing a mass of supporters of the consumer typology mentioned is the key to financial success and also to make sure that they belong to the category of national, regional or global teams. Clubs are therefore tending to go beyond the team status of a Community, city or even a region, and the modern recipe for economic care does not seem to include old-style ultras. A new ultra, a consumerist, limited exclusively to the manifestation of the carnival in the lawn would be welcomed, as it would contribute significantly to the show. The fanatic, deep-feeling of the community, capable of great sacrifices for the team, violent and uncontrollable, unpredictable and penalizing, is a category of fans who oppose global and consumerist football. Organized supporters, who are a force capable of influencing club decision-making, are not agreed by football corporations. The ultras, in turn, are trying to defend their system of values under slogans such as *No al calcio Moderno* or *Against modern football* of English hooligans. But the protesting spirit of the ultras people also makes them evolve in this context, which is unfavorable to subculture. The ultras are a force in the European football, despite legislative measures that are detrimental to subculture.

The trend toward the construction of the consumer fan in Romania has other dimensions, too. Romanians are soccer consumers, but not in the sense of participating in matches. The average number of spectators in the first two leagues over the last two decades has been small even in the case of teams backed by a powerful ultra movement. Consumer football does not have a fan base, such as Western teams, nor ordinary fans attached to the team or willing to simply witness football matches. Consumption in the king sport has degenerated into a large mass of fans of global teams. Although football has been and will remain one of the great passions for Romanians, the new generations do not support local teams or teams, which once had a national dimension, such as Steaua or Dinamo, but are declared fans of Liverpool, Barcelona, Real, Juventus, Bayern, etc. In this context, the ultras have shown that they are useful to the Romanian soccer. The study showed with the ultra groups a former decisive factor in the revival or survival of the Romanian traditional teams. Without the ultrafast they would have been sentenced to extinction. The lawn did not let the spirit of the club die, perpetuating it through direct intervention and support. The ultra-Romanian scene has proved that the ultras are capable of much more than violence with rivals or the order forces. In fact, the aim of the study was to make the most complex, good and bad radiography of the subculture and the manifestations of the ultras people. In the research, interviews with its exponents played a fundamental role. The latter were contacted, starting with the direct getting to know of some people, and after that we resorted to their

knowledge network inside the Romanian football galleries. The network of relations of individuals inside the subculture was extremely useful to the study, as they could be contacted by the very ultrafast in various Romanian galleries. As anticipated in the introduction of the study, the ultras people avoided the sensitive topics for them, namely the incidents in which they were defeated by their rivals, the way in which they were stripped of the fence flags or the scandals that affected the lawn. Representatives of a culture of shame, specific to small and closed communities, have also proved during interviews that image matters very much in the subculture. Sub-cultural specificity requires that within the ultra group as an urban tribe the individual does and say what he expects of him, so as not to lose his respect to others. Collective conscience, which oversees individuals in subculture, has made the mechanism of a culture of shame function as an effective means of censorship for interviewees. As such, these interviews focused on the characteristics of Romanian subculture and less on the events or scandals in which the ultras was involved. The last persons interviewed mostly preferred to remain anonymous. This is not the case for those who have opted for the nickname, who enjoy the notorious subculture.

The events, which involved Romanian pelts, were analyzed from interdisciplinary perspective, in order to give a complete picture of the ultra movement, starting from the pioneering period to the present, watching the adaptation of the rules to the legislative context and implicitly the maturity and antagonisms specific to Romanian subculture. The evolution of the ultra autochthonous movement means the tendency to move closer to the classical principles of subculture and the refusal of important groups and lawns to integrate subculture into contemporary consumer society, in modern football. The study demonstrated that global subculture is made up of independent subcultures marked by national fingerprints, with the nation-specific stylistic matrix influencing the nuances of the ultra-European movements. On the other hand, they do not develop independently, but on the basis of those standards mentioned in the research, which will still be a milestone in the European ultra-culture in the future. In addition to the general rules, a dynamic factor in the evolution of subculture is that they interact and influence each other. A strong subculture attitude or manifestation in Europe affects others to a lesser or greater extent.

Romanian subculture does not therefore evolve in itself, independently of the other subcultures, but continuously relates to the ultra-European movements which are a model for Romanian ultra. Thus, the above - mentioned Romanian politicians took over the slogan against modern football by showing their opposition and constantly displaying messages with the above - mentioned slogan, translated into practice, by opposition to FRF, the professional

League and the leading board of the supported clubs. The exponents of Romanian subculture have practically fought against modern football or against what they consider to be that modern football, a product of decay. As such, they take a prophylactic role in Romanian football or at least I think they are an obstacle against the consumable modernization of the king sport. Research has indicated that their opinion is often a counterbalance when imposing unilateral decisions on the governing bodies of the federation or clubs. The influence of Western subcultures on Romanians was also achieved by the adoption of a casual garment, the influence taken over from the hooligans' subculture, by the European ultras. Practically the contemporary tendency at the semiotic level of clothing is to exclude club colors from the garment and to identify itself by black clothes. The same dependence on sub-cultural expressions has led the ultras romanians to give up their brigade for several years, once symbols of the individual's membership of a certain ultra-group. There are many examples of how dependence on the overall sub-cultural context can be emphasized. The Romanian lawn is part of a phenomenon characterized by mutual influences and the imitation of powerful subcultures by the other less developed ones, as far as the development direction is concerned.

The study also emphasized the analysis of the mentality of the romanian ultras, of the way in which they manifest themselves on the lawn and of their philosophy of life. Understanding specific principles and rules we believe is the key to understanding the subculture in its complexity. The operating dynamics of ultra groups presuppose compliance with the rules. The behavior of ultra groups is an effect of the rules and code within the movement. The principles imprint incomprehensible attitudes and reactions for the citizens, towards the leading forums of Romanian football, club players or law enforcement. That is why the analysis of the mentality of the ultras is an important part of the paper. The ultras live on the lawn like in a community. The relations between the members of the urban tribes are deep and are not limited only to meetings on the day of the match, but to close friends and support in daily life. The paper highlighted that for the ultras the group is perceived as a family. Close interpersonal relationships also determine the cohesion of the group.

Regarding the way in which an individual becomes ultras, several ways have been identified, based on the interviews. According to the ultras interviewed, they generally arrived in groups, after attending the matches of the favorite team, as citizens. The evolution from simple supporter to ultras was made, either through the acquaintances from the lawn, who introduced him to the gallery, or encouraged the team in the gallery on their own, getting acquainted with the lawn and ultras of apprenticeship, became members of a group. Ultras,

usually know a priori the environment of the lawns and are familiar with their rigid organization. In addition to these somewhat classic ways of joining the subculture, cases were also evoked, in which the ultras confessed that, before reaching the lawn, they were completely disinterested in football. Basically, they were taken to the gallery by ultras friends, becoming supporters of the team and connoisseurs of the football phenomenon gradually. For the ultras, the cohesion of the group and the support of the team prevail, to the detriment of its sports performances. The ultras are not a classic football consumer. On the lawn, the interest of the ultras is to support the team in the most spectacular way and possibly to defeat and even humiliate their opponents during the match. From the gallery, according to the interviewees and from one's own experience, you can see a little of the match. The conclusion, which is necessary, is that the ultras are interested in the community as an urban tribe, the team representing for them the object of community support, in any conditions. That is why among the ultras there are many cases in which before reaching the lawn they were disinterested in the football phenomenon or after the ultras had arrived the team's sports performances took a back seat. The community, neo-tribal character of the subculture prevails. The fact that the Romanian subculture is less than two decades old makes the transmission of the quality of ultras from father to son to represent isolated cases. However, we believe that this phenomenon will manifest itself in the future on a large scale in lawns, given that there is a historical tradition in the hereditary transmission of love for Romanian traditional teams, as well as a paternal continuity of the quality of ultras in lawns in the west.

By means of identifying the ultras, an important place is occupied by the citizen, often as a result of otherness or at least as a lower supporter of the exponents of the subculture. The construction of the good image of oneself, of the exponents of the subculture, has in the center of the construction the ordinary fan. The citizen is absolutely necessary seen as a mirror in which the ultras see the image of otherness, indispensable in the process of self-definition of the ultras as a superior supporter. The citizen, in general, is interested in the club, the tactics, the coaches, the results, the other teams, sporadically participating in the ultras show. The big flaw of the citizens, from the perspective of the ultras, is that they do not unconditionally support their club and give up participating in matches, in the case of poor results. The ultras, on the other hand, motivate their sub-cultural existence through their attachment to the club, colors and history, supporting the team, away, for better or for worse, with the same devotion. However, the number of lawn ultrasounds is also dependent on the results. The big lawns in Romanian football prove a surprising numerical oscillation in the conditions of a crisis of the favorite team. We also found that the loss of enthusiasm is also a

long-term problem for lawns and not just the exchange of generations. Analyzing the numerical oscillations from one season to another, in some lawns such as Poli Timișoara, University of Cluj, Dinamo or Petrolul, it is found that the poor performance of the team increases the risk of decreasing the number of fans. What is certain is that a core of ultras remain constantly around the team, the core around which the lawn is reborn. A strong lawn means a federation of ultra groups with their own mentalities, objectives, norms or way of organizing. The more cohesive and numerous they are, the stronger the lawn. A lawn with an ultra group or two is not the ultra ideal for any Romanian lawn. More groups give more strength and energy to the lawn. However, the risk of these energies degenerating into rivalries and power struggles is a reality of the Romanian subculture. The management of divergent energies in the lawn is one of the challenges of the big galleries in Romania, the leaders of the groups having a decisive role in maintaining the cohesion of the lawn, of the unity in diversity.

Ultra groups are formed around converging characteristics of the members. The elements that coagulate them are diverse, which can be the city, the neighborhood, the ethnicity, the socio-economic status, the age, the seniority of the team's supporter quality, common occupations, etc. Obviously, a number of common elements, as consistent as possible, give uniqueness to the group. The elements, on which the ultra group is based, also depend on the fact that we are dealing with a team that is a symbol of the city or with a city with two or more teams. In the conditions of intra-urban rivalries, the neighborhoods also play an important role in the coagulation of groups, where the idea of community is stronger. The rivalries and friendships between the lawns are born around these differentiations and the way of identification, consolidating in time. The history of the Romanian subculture shows that, despite the fact that great rivalries have been perpetuated over time, friendships and enmities can appear and be extinguished.

The evolution of lawns is related, with predilection, to the need to have enemies, on which the ultras to show their public hatred. Incidents between ultras and their conflicts with law enforcement are, to a large extent, a modern transposition of wars. Their skill in waging real guerrilla warfare is a consequence of their enemies. The enemy is therefore fundamental in the process of self-definition. Violence is thus a natural consequence of enmity and is not only a demonstration of the strength, courage or loyalty of the ultras to the group, but also an existential motivation of the ultra groups. Beyond antagonisms, in the social space outside the subculture, rival ultras cohabit peacefully and may even be friends. The status of exponent of the subculture is a common element in everyday life, which makes the differences in terms of

different options in supporting teams insignificant. Common principles and ideals take precedence over antagonisms, not just outside the subculture. The coagulation of ultras in demonstrations for mutual support or for the support of sub-cultural expression, as well as their actions to support national causes or to support rivals in mourning conditions, shows that belonging to the subculture is more important in certain contexts than rivalries. These situations are, however, in the minority, in relation to the aggressive expression of ultras. The general condition of the ultras presupposes a conflicting attitude towards rivals and enemies. The violent expression of the lawns presupposes a ritual violence that the study in question tried to capture in its various forms. Research has established that symbolic conflict essentially involves humiliating the opponent. Without a hostile attitude and expression, the collective instinct of territoriality, as a basic element in the dynamism of the subculture, would no longer make sense. Territoriality generates ritual and symbolic violence, the territory being simultaneously defended through these forms of violence. The ultras perceive football, in this case, as a representation of a conflict in which the protagonists are not, first of all, the players, but themselves. Consequently, the tendency is to outdo themselves, at least in matches with rivals or high stakes, both in street conflicts and as an ultra performance on the lawn. Brotherhoods and rivalries are also an expression of the fact that ultra groups are characterized by a military-type organization. The system of alliances and enemies imprints dynamism on the subculture. The network of existing relations between the Romanian lawns diversifies and accentuates the enmities. Alliances intensify rivalries in the face of the fact that rivals' friends are perceived as enemies. The result was an increase in the number of high-risk matches. The last three decades prove that friendships and rivalries are an open system. They are born and extinguished, requiring their maintenance. Efforts in this regard are more complex in friendships and fraternities. Enmities are more easily perpetuated. What is certain is that friendships and rivalries between lawns weld their time and actions. They are transmitted from generation to generation. The ultras youngsters take over the alliance system from the older generation and carry it on. As such, there must be continuity between generations.

One of the conclusions of the study is that the subculture usually includes young people, who are looking for their identity, and that means a group to identify with. Aspirants to join an ultra group face new forms of relationship and manifestation of authority. Lawns promote specific values and goals, the rules of belonging promoting concepts and characteristics such as loyalty, spirit of sacrifice, commitment, courage, hierarchy. The aspirant accepted in the group adheres to the norms, manifestations and identification method specific to the

subculture. Behavioral convergence is, moreover, the result of sharing a common sub-cultural identity, defined by ultras as an "ultra mentality". It sets out the attitudes to be taken in different situations towards rival ultras or law enforcement. Violence was addressed in the study through the "ultra mentality". The manifestations and reactions of the ultras towards rivals or law enforcement on the streets invariably reflect the behavioral normative coming from the mentality. Incidents between ultras and their conflicts with law enforcement is largely a modern transposition of wars. Guerrilla fighting is a defining feature of ultra groups as urban tribes. Explaining the violent behavior of ultras is useful to those who aim to prevent and fight the violence associated with football. Because this way of expressing the social dissent of the ultras causes damage and disorder. Their control is an important goal of law enforcement.

The ultra subculture is in a state of permanent opposition to the gendarmes. Law enforcement considers the ultras a social danger, a form of subversive expression and not a way of chaotic hooliganism, a subversive subculture, which should be repressed. For the ultras, law enforcement and especially the gendarmerie is the armed arm of the corrupt system and it is the defender of its interests. The ultras make a common front in the fight against what they consider to be the "repression" of the system against them. They argue altogether against the use of bans, as a means of mass intimidation of subcultures and against brutal interventions, as coercive means, on the streets and in stadiums. Beyond the fact that, through violence, it causes destruction, tumult, etc. the fact that they have won numerous lawsuits against the gendarmes proves that the clamor for brutal law enforcement interventions is anchored in reality.

The study captured the power for protest of ultra groups. Not only did they constantly participate in anti-government demonstrations, but they often coordinated them. The presence of ultras in street protests is a consequence not only of the revolutionary spirit, but also of the civic spirit. The ultras are interested in the national, economic, political or social problems of the Romanian society and implicitly in the support and organization of actions specific to the civil society. Lawns have proven, by their presence on the street, that they are a very important mechanism in civil society. The joint participation of rival ultras in the street protests shows that the complexity of the relations between the lawns is not limited to violence. Common goals of sub-cultural or national interest make the exponents of the subculture overcome rivalries and enemies. The fact that many ultras are marginal on weekends and ordinary representatives of the dominant culture, which he blames with so much pathos, accentuates their potential protest. As shown in the paper, many members of

ultra groups have received a good education, are college graduates and have management positions, in national and multinational companies or in state institutions. As such, the ultras are an individual informed and interested in the problems of Romania and the contemporary world, which he largely discusses on the occasion of their travels, their various meetings or even on the lawn at matches without tension. The discussions between the ultras are by no means limited to football, but cover a wide range of fields. This dual character of the ultras, determined by their simultaneous belonging to the subculture and the mainstream, is the most important factor in accentuating their protesting force. The ultras are aware of their protesting force and are proud of it, considering that the repression they claim is due to the fact that they are uncomfortable and even undesirable for the system.

Within the Romanian subculture it is noticed a diversity of attitudes towards politics and political doctrines, from apolitical to ultranationalist groups, but within the nationalist discourse and nationalist actions, common landmarks are noticed. The union of Basarabia with Romania and the slogan *territory of Basarabia-Romania!*, is the most famous banner, under which the ultras acted in unity. In nationalist discourse, the ultras believe that political forces and the system in general pursue an anti-national policy, based on obscure interests. As such, the nationalism of the ultras manifests itself on national holidays or during street protests. The attitude towards the political area is a contemptuous one, despite the fact that various ultra groups have collaborated with political parties, based on material or other interests. The ultras consider that these ultra groups are a minority in the subculture and that the nationalism manifested by them is pure, bohemian and disinterested. In this spirit of approaching nationalism, the ultras supported the fight to save Roșia Montană, were with the villagers of Pungești, honored the memory of the victims of the tragedy in Colectiv in 2015, helped the victims in 2012 and vulnerable people during the pandemic. The ultras do not want to prove anything with these actions, nor do they intend to gain sympathy from public opinion. This type of action, as well as participation and involvement in patriotic manifestations and actions, is a way of sub-cultural expression, an expression of the complexity of the ultra phenomenon.

Antagonistic to the proven civic spirit and humanity are the xenophobic and racist manifestations of the Romanian ultras. These are a traditional problem of Romanian football. Racism and xenophobia are a constant in Romanian football despite the fact that the lawns are not seen as ideology. From this point of view a comparison with Italian lawns for example would be ridiculous. However, the demonstrations against Roma, Hungarians and players of color are consistent, and Romania is in the sights of FIFA and UEFA. The fight

against racism and xenophobia is a priority for state institutions and for the leading forums of Romanian football. Rough legislation and sanctions have failed to eliminate these phenomena from Romanian stadiums. In national or club team matches, players of color, Hungarians and Roma are the favorite targets of verbal attacks by ultras. The state of affairs is an effect of traditional disinterest and tolerance of racism and xenophobia, of their trivialization. In the analysis of racism against the Roma and xenophobia against the Hungarians, it must be borne in mind that there are many Roma and Hungarians in the lawns and in the ultra groups of the teams with important lawns. The paradox proves that racism and xenophobia are not the result of any ideology, but of the desire to humiliate the other, through degrading ethnic or racial attacks. The ultras are trying to disqualify the landmarks, around which they believe that rivals have individualized. Manifestations against the defining elements for the identity of rivals, elements considered inferior, are an attempt to make the enemies feel inferior and implicitly a small symbolic victory. Degradation of opponents is a practice that takes various forms in the ultra subculture. Galleries are also manifested against identity belonging to a region or a certain city. From the area of the desire to humiliate the opponents are also the chants against the "peasants" from the opponent's lawn. However, these manifestations are legally accepted and of course do not have the impact of racist and xenophobic manifestations on individuals. As such, the fight against racism and xenophobia is a problem, which the institutions and forums for leading Romanian football must solve in the future.

As for violence, the ultras consider that they do not promote it and that this is not their main concern. The incidents are from their perspective collateral characteristics, the emphasis being on carnival and choreography. Romanian ultras have often tried to bring to the public's attention the fact that the ultra scene should not be confused with the "hooligans" subculture, in which beatings are fundamental. The Romanian lawns displayed messages such as "We are not hooligans" or "Ultras, not hooligans", but without success in changing something in the perception of public opinion or the media. Any act of violence committed is commented on by journalists as being committed by hooligans. The term is not used by the press, as one of sub-cultural identification, but it has the meaning of rogue, scandalous, but it is enough to provoke, from the perspective of the ultras, confusion regarding the sub-cultural affiliation. On the other hand, the violence caused by ultras and the incidents in which they are involved determine their association with street fights. Regardless of the humanitarian, civic, social or cultural actions in which they are involved, ultras will be associated primarily with violence. The exceptional carnival performances on the lawn or the brilliant choreography do not produce, by far, the media impact that the incidents produce. No matter how good their

performance on the lawns, a street fight, even isolated, remains much more in the public attention and consciousness. Hooligan actions blur their commendable actions. Consequently, the ultras will continue to be perceived as fanatical, dangerous and violent individuals and groups of individuals.

The study shows that their importance for Romanian football is, despite the negative aspects have presented, a consistent one. The ultras not only counterbalanced the authority of club owners and pushed players from behind during matches, but also saved important clubs from extinction. A club supported by a strong lawn cannot die, despite the problems it faces. Turbulent, irascible and unpredictable, the ultras have often proved useful to their clubs. Their voice is one that, with or without their will, is taken into account in Romanian football. The history of the subculture has shown that football people, coaches, players or leaders face problems when they have ultras against them and not the great mass of citizens. In conclusion, it can be said that often their opinion and vision is not necessarily shared by the rest of the fans. But unlike citizens, the exponents of the subculture are vocal and organized. Therefore, their opinion is followed by the rest of the fans, whether it suits them or not.

The analysis of the complexity of the subculture cannot be exhausted by a study, no matter how complex, in turn. The results of the research are limited, first and foremost, by the fact that ultras do not want to talk about sensitive events in which lawn groups have been involved. As mentioned in the introduction, secrecy is the result of being very attentive to the image of the group and the lawn, which such a study could put in an awkward situation, which would affect their prestige as a group. The limits of the study are also drawn by the fact that it analyzes the ultra subculture in a general context. Thus the historical, anthropological or sociological peculiarities cannot be captured in their complexity. Future research directions of the subculture can focus on different lawns, in an analysis, not only historical, but multidisciplinary, and will certainly amplify the analysis and knowledge of the ultra-local subculture.