

# EURO 2012 IN POLAND – THE SOCIAL FACTOR – “DOPING” IN MOBILIZATION OF POLISH SOCIETY AND CREATION OF A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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## 1. Introduction

Poland and Ukraine started the efforts to become organizers of Euro 2012 long before their bid was chosen by a vote of the UEFA Executive Committee at a meeting in Cardiff (Great Britain) on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007. It can be a truism, but not everybody seems to be aware of how long the “Polish-Ukrainian way to Euro” really was –it lasted almost a decade. First official steps were taken on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2003 in Lviv, when the representatives of Ukrainian Football Federation (UFF) and Polish Football Association (PFA) agreed to cooperate in order to be given the chance to organize Euro 2012 (Szczepański, 2012). We mention these historical facts for two reasons. Firstly, to show that the qualification procedures for hosting such an important sporting event are extremely challenging. Secondly, to contextualize the process as well as the changes that occurred in Polish society while preparing for and hosting this top European football event.

In order to carry out a social analysis of Euro 2012, we need to look at some facts from its organizational process. Let's go back to the period between June 8<sup>th</sup> 2012 (opening match in Warsaw) and July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 (closing match in Kiev), when all Poles were thinking just about one thing: football. Poland and the Ukraine have organized one of the most important sporting events in 2012 –Euro 2012– the European Championships in football. The organization of Euro 2012 was an event of enormous significance –sporting, political, and ideological. Preparation for Euro 2012 was a test of the ability of Polish society for social mobilization, capacity for long-term work, the ability to cooperate with the Ukraine, and fulfilling the expectations of both international sports organizations and ordinary sports fans.

On the one hand, Euro 2012 was treated as a political factor. It was a test and an opportunity for the government to build a positive image of the Polish people, landscapes, cuisine, and hospitality. The government has used the Euro in 2012 to build its image and create a positive atmosphere. It was a political success of PO (Civic Platform), the governing party.

On the other hand, Euro 2012 was a very important social factor. People need to be focused on what is important to them, builds their sense of values, and adds meaning to their actions. Since the days of “Solidarity”, Poland has lacked a positive idea that could raise people’s enthusiasm and pride in their own country. The organization of the European Championships in football has allowed them to understand that they do not only know how to antagonize, have conflicts, fight, protest, and criticize. Suddenly, they discovered that they know how to sympathize, cooperate, work together, and support each other as part of a large project lasting several years. They simply discovered what it means to be a society and community.

We would like to present the positive aspects of the European Championship in football on for the spirit of Polish society.

The championship took place in two countries: Poland and Ukraine. In each country four

match cities were chosen: Warsaw, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Poznań (Poland) and Kiev, Lviv, Donetsk, Kharkiv (Ukraine). During the championship the spectators could watch as many as 31 matches with an astounding number of 76 goals altogether. On average, there were two goals per match. More than 3 million fans coming from 110 countries gathered in the specially prepared fan zones. UEFA's president, Michel Platini, admitted that Euro 2012 was the best football tournament in Euro's history (Wawrzynowski, 2012). Indeed, the tournament proved to be a huge success, partially thanks to many volunteers who helped in its organization. They were present in each host city, in every place that could potentially be visited by foreign football fans. There were as many as 2700 volunteers in Poland; they worked extremely hard before and during the event in order to make the foreign supporters' visit to Poland as pleasant as possible. The preparations for Euro 2012 accompanied people in their everyday lives. Being a host meant being responsible for foreign guests visiting Poland. In many households it had an even more tangible meaning: many people hosted foreigners in their own houses and flats. Poles treated being a host in a very serious way. Let us look at one household's preparations to host a football fan from Europe (this fragment comes from research carried out by the Institute of Public Space Research in 2012 which was commissioned by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as part of a programme called "Cultural Education and Culture Diagnose":<sup>1</sup>

I prepared a room for Luca together with my mum. We took away all things that belong to my brother, we changed the bedsheets and we also took away the laundry. My brother lives in this room only during weekends, so normally we use it just for ironing and keeping laundry. We also cleaned the bathroom on the first floor; it was to be the guest bathroom (and mine). It's because on the level where the room is located we only have a toilet, and I have to admit that our cat uses this toilet, so I thought it would be very awkward to let our guest go there. We swept the floors in all rooms and we tidied up the kitchen. If somebody hadn't known that we were expecting a 22-year-old boy from Austria, they could have thought that we were expecting the Pope! Another thing that illustrates our efforts is the enterprise of washing our house's facade, as if the king were to visit the town. Our house is full of life and you have to get used to it. Two dogs, a cat, fish, the people and so many things that just move from one place to the other... It all means that the notion of "order" becomes something subjective. The football fan from Austria was probably going to have a good first impression, but sooner rather than later he would have to try and live with everything just as it is. We were trying to make the last elements of the "scene" even nicer just a few moments before I left... (Burszta, et al., 2012, pp. 16-17).

It is worth noticing that the slogan of Euro 2012 ("We are all Euro 2012 hosts!") was really reflected in people's spirits. The slogan was not only a catchy marketing phrase, but also a real description of people's behavior. It was a genuine cultural performance, which Victor Turner (Kolankiewicz 2005, 23) understands as a cultural institution founded in order to symbolically execute (formulate, play and feel) metasocial comments. According to Turner, cultural performances are an important area of our society's functioning. These performances are programmed in time and space; they are also ritually, ludically and esthetically organized and they require direct and massive participation. As such, they enable us to maintain and redefine traditions, as well as to rethink the social bonds and ways of communication, which in turn may lead to renewing these bonds.

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<sup>1</sup>All respondents' statements quoted in this article are taken from the research done by Professor Wojciech Burszta and his team in the Institute of Public Space Research in 2012. The research was commissioned by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as part of a programme called "Cultural Education and Culture Diagnose".

As we accept the cultural definition of a sporting performance, we need to stress the fact that hosting Euro 2012 told us – the Poles – a lot about ourselves. It was a time when we could feel the national pride. Also, it was probably the first time after the fall of communism (1989) when we felt like a huge community playing in one team. This event was very special in the sense that Polish people’s “social national team” did not play against any opponent; it played above all for its own success. This makes a significant difference, which we will exemplify and analyze below.

## **2. New social idea for Polish society**

What did we learn about ourselves after Euro 2012? How did the doubts about any possible success change into bursts of happiness and a genuine *fiesta* for all Poles? At the beginning hardly anybody believed that Poland had any chance at all to host a Project as enormous as Euro 2012. These doubts and fears had their reasons: we were afraid of yet another defeat, we were afraid to be ridiculed, we were afraid of our own ineptness. We did not believe in our potential.

Poland does not have any significant tradition of organizing big projects and huge formats. This is related to our history, as in the past we were often administratively divided. The partitions caused not only territorial fragmentation, but also a social and mental one (see Olech 2012, pp. 33-52). Such circumstances did not favor any big-scale projects requiring big-scale organization. Things happening in Warsaw did not concern Cracow and the other way around. Each region lived its own local reality.

Such a situation encouraged people to concentrate on smaller forms and local projects, which tend to require spontaneity rather than organizing skills. It is easier to mobilize people to begin a local uprising or a short-time protest, and not so easy to make them undertake efforts to organize something bigger, efforts that often require several months or years of work.

Hosting Euro 2012 brought an end to this trend. Even though the idea was not born in Poland –it came over from Ukraine– it was powerful enough to mobilize the community. We had been waiting for such an idea and such an occasion for more than 20 years. We were looking for an idea powerful enough to motivate the majority of our divided Polish society. We were longing after an idea that would bring enthusiasm, positive emotions and motivation to act. An idea that would engage people of different political views, different occupations, different social positions and financial situations. An idea that would bring along happiness and cooperation (as opposed to sadness and conflict). An idea that would level out any social divisions.

Euro 2012 proved to be THE idea, acting as a small miracle in our society. Euro 2012 liberated immense enthusiasm and creativity that had been hidden so far. It also freed the much needed energy for social development. Using a sport metaphor, one can say that Euro 2012 became a type of social doping. This doping (like the real one) accelerated our actions and made them more effective. It also motivated us to work actively towards certain aims. Paradoxically, in this case the doping for Polish society was also the aim itself. The society was given a kick of positive energy: the effects were almost immediate and we can see them today in a material form (highways, stadiums), in a mental form (increase of national pride, patriotism, faith in a unified Polish society), as well as in a professional form (we undertake more challenges, more organizational projects are under development). Representatives of Polish society demonstrated their national identity in a variety of ways. This is perfectly illustrated by the words of this particular participant of the event:

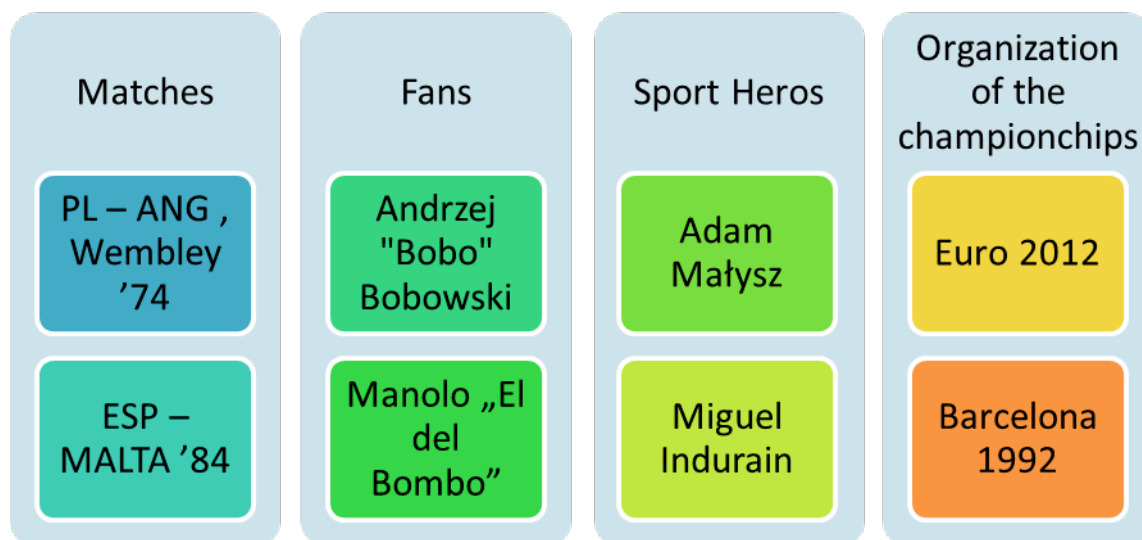
Yes, it's more than you felt in all these years. Suddenly everybody loved these teams,

they knew all footballers' names, huge faith, huge emotions. You know, everybody dressed up, I didn't see anybody in the fan zone who wasn't dressed up. Everybody made some effort to buy at least a T-shirt, a scarf or a hat. Something to express the nationality (Burszta, et al., 2012, p. 32).

In Polish society, the idea of a nation was reborn and redefined through Euro 2012. Hosting an important sporting event showed our best features and reinforced the feeling of national identity. Also, it revealed certain cultural changes that recently have taken place in our country and our mentality.

### 3. Sport and society – basic dimensions of sporting experience

Some sporting events help to build a social sense of self-esteem. It seems that the history of almost every country offers numerous examples to support this statement. Looking at the history of Polish and Spanish sport one can even find some analogies concerning the dimensions that significantly influence the social sense of self-esteem. Chart number 1 (below) shows various dimensions of sporting experience together with some examples of events and people that influenced the whole society. In both cases we observe certain cultural artifacts surrounded by such values as community, faith in success, patriotism, friendship, fraternity. They all have enormous symbolic power to mobilize and unite people; they also make us reflect on the values that accompany them. This is proved by numerous statements that appear in Polish research related to Euro 2012 effects; they all emphasize the importance of this very special event. One of the authors of an emotional diary writes: “We have experienced something like a nationalistic awakening. Every Polish person suddenly felt Polish and experienced a strong urge to manifest these emotions. [...] In my opinion we observed a certain emotional bomb, a hurricane of emotions in which everybody was involved (Burszta, et al., 2012, p. 36).



The four basic dimensions of sporting experience are: the actual events (matches), supporters (fans), sporting heroes and the organization of sporting events. Let's look at them more carefully.

### 3.1. Sporting events

The first dimension is constituted by particular events of sporting rivalry. In every nation's sporting history one can find some experience that helped to construct a feeling of national identity. Normally, such experience provides a foundation for a specific dimension of a given society's identity. In case of Poland, it was for example the famous match Poland-England played in 1973 at Wembley. The match finished with a draw, but since then it has always been perceived as one of the Polish team's biggest victories. For the Polish society of the 70s, our success at Wembley was something symbolic. In the People's Republic of Poland<sup>2</sup> the public was thirsty for success. The famous match made the Poles believe in themselves; they could feel like a partner and a proper rival for a representative of the West. The draw boosted our confidence and opened the door to the world football championship in West Germany the following year. Consequently, the national team's 3<sup>rd</sup> position in that championship was even a bigger success.

Sport seems to play different roles in the history of social development. The example above shows that the triumph (even though it was a draw) over a Western team had a magical influence on all Polish complexes; it boosted Poles' self-esteem and unified the community around the national values. Another event that gave us faith and unified the community was the 1976 Polish volleyball team match. Polish volleyball players received an Olympic gold medal in Montreal, and the match once again acquired a symbolic dimension, since after a dramatic fight we defeated Russians 3:2.

Spaniards have their own equally important event: Spain-Malta, the last qualifying match for UEFA Euro 1984 (played exactly ten years after the Polish team played against Germans in an attempt to win the championship). The match was called "the Spanish miracle". The first half finished with a draw 1:1, the second half, after a strenuous fight, brought a score 12:1. The Spanish players were full of determination and will of fight, so the match has become a synonym of faith in success for many generations of Spaniards. They were unified into one society. They understood that they can never give up, that they have to fight for their aims. The match had its symbolic meaning and, even today, a Spaniard saying "it will be like that Spain-Malta match" means that you have to believe in the success of your actions.

### 3.2. Supporters

The supporters constitute the second dimension discussed here. It turns out that even in this area there are certain similarities between Spain and Poland, as both countries boast quite similar supporter heroes who inspire the crowds by their commitment and perseverance. Both Manolo "El del Bombo" and Andrzej "Bobo" Bobowski are the most recognized football supporters in their respective countries. Their statistics are impressive (number of hours spent on stadiums, number of chants sung), however, their meaning for their countries goes far beyond that. Manolo and Andrzej exemplify the patriotic values, but they also catalyze them. Thanks to these symbolic characters the whole society (even for a short while) feels the need to dress up in national colors and feel proud of their country. Both "El del Bombo" and "Bobo" play an important social role in their respective countries. Not only do they act as informal leaders of the supporting movement, but also they provide a certain model of a supporter's behavior. Such characters certainly have an important function: they neutralize and stream negative emotions that unfortunately may and *do* appear between rival supporting groups. They remind everybody, via their performances, that being a supporter is a form of

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<sup>2</sup> People's Republic of Poland (in Polish: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL) – the official name of Poland from 1952 to 1989. In this period Poland was a socialist country, regarded as a satellite state of the Soviet Union.

entertainment, and that sport is more of a fun activity than a life-or-death fight. It seems that these two dimensions of sport rivalry and supporters represent two categories of play: agon and mimicry, discussed by Roger Caillois (1997) in his book “Man, Play, and Games”. Agon can be observed in match performances –in contest matches, where the idea is to compete and choose the winner. Being a supporter is rather described by the category of mimicry– that is, acting as-if, simulating. In this category, the game is about playing a role, acting as if we were somebody else, unleashing our emotions and using our fantasy. In Euro 2012 we can observe both agon and mimicry.

A sporting show itself has a great power which causes individuals to “feel moral unity and to reinforce mutual bonds by experiencing these events in an intense way” (Łętowski 2009). However, leaders of the supporting movement (along with their theatre of patriotic color and sound) influence the rest of supporters even more. Additionally, this form is a perfect example of modern trends of mediating both sports and supporters. The supporters are always spotted by the cameras, and all fans watching the match on TV are eagerly waiting for their appearance.

### 3.3. Sporting heroes

The third important dimension is great sportsmen. Without them, any sporting show would probably be totally devoid of its charm. National heroes exemplify the most important values of sport: fair play, pursuit of perfection, beautiful body and open mind. *Kalokagathia* (Kiereś 1999: 170) is a mix of beauty and goodness; a dramatic philosophy that inspires admiration in the whole society. Aside from that, the mediatization of sport turns these heroes into celebrities (Gwóźdź 2003: 7-21). On one hand, spectators want to perceive them as exceptional characters: the ones that poses extraordinary personal features, great talents, the ones that inspire dreams and achieve success. On the other hand, the same spectators perceive them as normal people, whose private lives become a part of the narration and an inseparable element of media show. Therefore, sporting heroes seem to play a double role: a hero, a demigod, but also a normal person.

Adam Małysz is one of the most important sporting heroes in Poland; he certainly influenced Polish national identity. Małysz is one of the most successful ski jumpers in history: four Olympic gold medals, four individual World Championship gold medals, four individual World Cup titles (three times in a row), 39 individual World Cup wins, Four Hills Tournament win, Nordic Tournament win (three times), Summer Grand Prix win (three times) and Polish championship win (21 times). He is not only a great sportsman, but also a grateful, warm and very modest character. As such, he inspired a real “Małysz-mania”: he was universally loved and admired, and the winter sports in Poland experienced a real revolution. The phenomenon of Małysz lifted the spirits of the whole nation; countless supporters were proudly accompanying their idol to all tournaments. The Polish people believed that they *could* defeat the (better financed) representatives of Germany, Austria or Norway. Back then we did not have any special achievements in any other sport discipline: this is why the society was eagerly watching each “flight” of Małysz resulting in another medal.

Władysław Kozakiewicz is another interesting character whose sporting appearances were highly meaningful. His golden medal won during the Olympic Games in Moscow had a very symbolic meaning, and Kozakiewicz will be probably always remembered for his “bras d'honneur” gesture, which in Poland became known as “Kozakiewicz's gesture”. Kozakiewicz used the gesture to manifest his protest and negative attitude towards the organizers and hosts of the Olympic Games. He defeated the Russian sportsman Konstantin Wołkow, and also established a new world record. The whole incident had a symbolic meaning, as it took place

in 1980, when social movement against the Russian-imposed system was being born in Poland. Kozakiewicz's success boosted the Polish confidence; once again Poland was thirsty for success. Kozakiewicz's gesture was brave (even though not really compliant with any sporting rules) and told the whole world that Poland is independent from Moscow and its policies.

Spain, of course, has its own sporting hero: Miguel Indurain, who won five consecutive Tours de France, the first cyclist ever to do it. He won the Giro d'Italia twice (1992 and 1993) and he also won a gold medal in Atlanta Olympic Games (1996) in the individual time trial. Every single Spaniard knows his name. Indurain exemplifies the immense effort and sacrifice necessary to achieve one's goals. He became a role model for young sportsmen who admired his passion and commitment. Indurain's triumphs unified Spaniards and made them forget their national divisions and conflicts.

### **3.4. Organizing sporting events**

The last dimension is the organization of big sporting events that are an enormous challenge for the whole society. In 1992 Spain hosted *the* sporting event: the Olympic Games, with Barcelona as the host city. All nationalistic ideas (for example, the Basque Country issues) disappeared at that time; the idea of hosting the Games as one unified country was prevalent. Relating to the classical idea of Olympism, one could say that in those days Spain was ruled by *ekechejria* (Porada 1980, p. 29), the “Olympic peace”, which once required all armed conflicts to stop during the Olympic Games. However, 1992 saw even more than this. The conflicts were not just stopped; they were virtually abandoned. The whole society contributed to these Games' success - it did not matter whether somebody was from Catalonia, Castille or Andalusia. Twenty years after that we witnessed a similar situation in Poland. Hosting Euro 2012 produced some synergic energy. Individuals and institutions unified, which motivated Poles – as the “social national team” – to play for a common goal.

### **4. Effects of Euro 2012 for Polish society – profit and loss account**

During Euro 2012 the Polish team was defeated. However, nobody seems to lament about it, as the country achieved another type of success, far more important than the match score. We can measure Euro 2012's success by observing social reactions and people's commitment to organizing this enormous event. We cannot forget about the positive opinions we received from abroad. And as far as the sport is concerned, it always gives us hope for success in the future.

Our culture affirms the attitude of a player. The idea of player, so characteristic for any sport, is also an important aspect of existence in a culture that requires and affirms the attitude of fight, quick recovery after defeat and readiness to face more challenges. The game is so attractive because it is repetitive and renewable. Competition never ends and the game begins over and over again. Upon achieving success or experiencing defeat, one immediately starts planning new challenges, new aims and new competitions. Sport does not take hope away. You can always work on your weaknesses, prepare more thoroughly, improve your fitness level, try out some new training methods. Next time anything can happen, as long as the supporters' doping is there. In this sense sport is a never-ending story. Sport is continuity and continuation. Sport is hope.

Lack of idea or lack of a common aim can kill a society. People have to concentrate around something they consider important, around something that builds their self-esteem and

renders their actions meaningful. Since the “Solidarity” times Polish society was lacking a positive idea that would spread enthusiasm and make people proud of their own country. There was one short moment of unity after Smoleńsk crash<sup>3</sup>, however, the society got divided again very quickly. Later the deep and authentic experience of the Pope John Paul II's death caused a strong community feeling. Again, this was rather temporary. Hosting Euro 2012 let the public understand that we can do better than just fight, rebel, antagonize and criticize each other. It suddenly turned out that we still have the ability to cooperate and support each other in order to carry out a large-scale event that requires several years of planning.

Another important element worth mentioning here is the fact that we managed to change certain negative stereotypes and clichés about Poland and its inhabitants. Hosting such a big event meant having the chance to meet many cultures and nationalities. Euro 2012 meant thousands face-to-face meetings, smiles, gestures. We had many opportunities to meet the ones we were afraid of because of some false stereotypes. This big European meeting provided an important chance to destroy false clichés. Direct contacts seem to be *the* way to destroy any stereotypes.

Therefore, the negative stereotype concerning Poles (presented for example in a BBC film<sup>4</sup> on the topic) was neutralized. A famous Polish supporter, Natalia Siwiec, responded to the film in a witty though effective way: she appeared on the tribunes wearing a T- shirt saying “BBC: Bad Boy Campbell”. This was broadcast all over the world. Natalia's photos appeared in British newspapers; publishing them was a British way to regain face, as before Euro 2012 a lot of black PR was aimed at Poland. We can even say that this media attack on Polish national identity reinforced it. Poles manifested their universal protest against the negative image of Poland promoted by BBC. In turn, this fostered a feeling of unity even further. There was a common enemy: the broadcaster who dared to publish a controversial film warning the British supporters against travelling to Poland for Euro 2012 due to incidents of racism and vandalism (Piłat & Wójcik 2012).

Euro 2012 provided a chance for Poles to be seen, finally not as a visiting party, but in the role of hosts. Metaphorically speaking, we opened our doors to all these foreign visitors. The “We are all hosts of Euro 2012!” slogan made us feel responsible for our guests' wellbeing. Consequently, many positive comments were made on Polish hospitality and open-mindedness. Foreign supporters were very enthusiastic when telling journalists about their impressions of Poland. They gave many examples of people helping them to buy a phone card, inviting them for a beer or simply offering to help. This contributed to the disappearance of negative clichés showing Poles as xenophobic car thieves.

Moreover, there was yet another stereotype that melted away as a result of Euro 2012 - the one about Poland being a provincial country. We got the chance to be seen from a totally different angle: as a modern country boasting very good infrastructure, lots of green areas, great cuisine, and, last but not least, fun-loving people who speak foreign languages, people who are helpful and hospitable. One month was enough to promote this positive image.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2010 Polish Air Force Tu-154 crash occurred on 10 April 2010 when a Tupolev Tu-154M aircraft of the Polish Air Force crashed near the city of Smolensk, Russia, killing all 96 people on board. These included president Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria, former president Ryszard Kaczorowski, the chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers, the president of the National Bank of Poland, Poland's deputy foreign minister, Polish government officials, 18 members of the Polish parliament, senior members of the Polish clergy, and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre. They were en route from Warsaw to attend an event marking the 70th anniversary of the massacre. As far as the number of victims is concerned, it was the second biggest crash in the history of Polish aviation and the biggest one in the history of Polish Air Force. No passengers survived the crash. (Wikipedia, accessed 12 April 2014).

<sup>4</sup> A fragment of this film can be found here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01j4vr>.



Without Euro 2012, it would not have been so easy – probably we would have needed to work many years in order to obtain a similar result. Thus, this positive image of Poland seems to be a priceless result of the tournament.

One respondent declares (and many others agree with her): I think that it was a positive event, even though many people were complaining: “What's the point of it? We are just spending money on this thing”. It was good for our economy, our infrastructure, it familiarized the Polish people a little bit with the world – because we are still, unfortunately, a small provincial nation. Maybe it helped somehow. For me personally it was great, because I had some really unforgettable evenings and I know that I will probably never have an occasion to experience something like this again [...] This and also the fact that, I think, the Poles finally got the chance to boast about their country and not complain about it. To somehow feel equal to other nationalities. [...] I think that in Warsaw people could see these situations before the matches, they could see that you can watch football as entertainment and it doesn't have to generate aggression. I still think, even though many of us just don't believe that, I think that many people abroad still see Poland as some kind of primitive province, you know, there is no electricity and such stupid things, that's what you hear. But Warsaw looked really nicely, and we have a lovely stadium, and Wrocław, Gdańsk – they are beautiful cities and I think that it's great to be able to brag a bit about them (Burszta, et al., 2012, pp. 33-34).

Another positive aspect of Euro 2012 was the highly professional technological show that TV viewers could follow all around the globe. Euro 2012 received its high cultural status due to the sheer class of Polish journalists. The TV show is not only about broadcasting the matches; pre-match and after-match studio discussions are also essential. Sometimes they were even more interesting than the matches themselves. These discussions were slowly building up the tension; they were influencing our emotions and providing us with expert information.

We could listen to top-class Polish journalists: Włodzimierz Szaranowicz, Jacek Kurowski, Przemysław Babiaryz, Piotr Sobczyński, Mateusz Borek, Roman Kołtoń, to name just a few. They were all thoroughly prepared, they all had genuine expert knowledge and very good manners. And of course they were extremely well dressed. Elegant suits, white shirts, intelligent and witty discussions –not only did this influence the atmosphere of the whole event, but it also gave football this very special touch of sophistication. Guests invited to studio discussions were sophisticated as well. Their discourse was so very different from the traditional political one. Even when some guests had a completely different opinion about an issue, they all managed to maintain their class. This gave football quite a different image and a different status –even though it might sometimes be seen as a rather primitive form of entertainment for the masses.

Additionally, we could see virtually everything –even the slightest details of the game– thanks to the great quality of TV broadcasts. Numerous close-ups and slow motion scenes were showing all movements of footballers' bodies. It was undoubtedly a top-class TV show.

The generational context is yet another issue that is worth looking at. Euro 2012 heavily influenced day-to-day life in many Polish families. Everybody wanted to go and see the matches with their children and families. These familiar activities (such as visiting the stadium, going to the fan zone or simply watching a match on TV together) were a breakthrough moment for the post-transformation society. It was like finishing 20 years of a civilization run towards better life. It can also be seen as a symbolic “passing the patriotic baton” from one generation to the other –with patriotism free of any tragic connotations.

Euro 2012 gave an important meaning to our national symbols. An exceptional, positive sense of identity was created. The tournament triggered something truly extraordinary: we started

the process of building a community, and it was based on positive emotions. Euro 2012 convinced us that we *do* want to parade the flags, paint our faces red and white, and sing the Polish national anthem at the top of our lungs. We want to do it without any pressure, and we want to do it happily. We are keen to see our national colors that are not mocked; on the contrary - they make us happy and give us a sense of satisfaction. We are happy, because we belong to a community that everybody likes and praises. The tournament provided a chance to unveil our day-to-day patriotism that can be displayed not only by celebrating holidays, anniversaries and national tragedies, but also makes its appearance in much more common, everyday situations. Many respondents paid attention to this fact:

Well, you know, I think it is showing attachment in its positive sense. I mean, we all have the need to be a part of some community, right? Community, I mean, we all want to feel that we are together, that we are close to each other. I think... that it was all about this, right? That we wanted to feel that we are together. These are some, you know, tribal rituals, but... but it works like this and we need it. Fewer and fewer people go to church. I think that earlier you could feel it there, in a church, you could feel that we are together. Family bonds are also different nowadays. I think that many people needed that. We were so thirsty for sporting success, we wanted to boost our wellbeing. I think that this is why we were all supporting. Because so many people were supporting, even these people who normally don't care at all about football... Euphoria... they were seduced by that, right? To feel closer, to feel together, and so on (Burszta, et al., 2012, pp. 34-35).

Euro 2012 revealed many features that nobody believed we had; maybe even the Polish people themselves did not suppose that. Suddenly it turned out that we are conscientious, responsible, trustworthy and reliable. We do not avoid effort. We are not afraid of big challenges. We are hard-working and persevere. We do what we have promised to do. Even our German neighbors noticed these features: “Gazeta Wyborcza” (on behalf of German Football Association and the German team) published acknowledgements to Poland and Ukraine, for “(...) enormous hospitality, for the friendliness and helpfulness of the people, for impressive stadiums and fantastic atmosphere, and for the perfectly organized championship that provided us with unforgettable emotions”.

## **5. Permanence of “Euro 2012 effect” in Polish society**

It seems difficult to predict how long the “Euro effect” will last. How long will this accumulated energy last? Zygmunt Bauman (2010) wrote about swarms that appear in important moments, buzz for a while and then go away.<sup>5</sup> We could observe this phenomenon on the example of Smoleńsk crash. We were unified for a while, but then the country separated into two Polands. As far as the “Euro effect” is concerned, we hope that it will come to a very different end. The situation when people focus on negative emotions is very different from a situation that binds us through positive emotions that unleash social enthusiasm and energy. Euro 2012 has resulted in new ideas, new enterprises, new plans and dreams. In this case, the social and cultural effect of Euro should last longer. There is already some proof of it.

After the Euro 2012 organizational success, Poland was chosen to host further big sporting events. Poland and Denmark hosted the Men's European Volleyball Championship in 2013

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<sup>5</sup> Bauman Zygmunt, Przyczynek do fenomenologii roju. (*Phenomenology of a swarm*) <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Opinie/Bauman-Przyczynek-do-fenomenologii-roju/menu-id-197.html> (accessed 12 April 2014).

(for the first time). 2014 will bring the Men's World Volleyball Championship, and 2016 the European Handball Championship. Euro 2012 success seems to have influenced the decisions to organize these events in Poland. Once again we will get the chance to have fun and do something together. We gained impetus and chose to focus on new ideas, ideas that Polish society was lacking so sorely in recent times. We proved that we are perfectly able to cooperate with another country –Ukraine– and also with ourselves, if we have an ambitious goal to achieve.

This post-Euro positive atmosphere could only be destroyed by an indispensable resume. The financial aspects appeared: problems with Polish Football Association, problems with highway construction works, and so on. However, none of these managed to destroy the “Euro effect”, that is, our reborn sense of national identity, our enthusiasm, pride and our willingness to continue working. Moreover, if some weaknesses appeared during Euro 2012, now we have the chance to improve them. Maybe it is high time that a generational change in Polish Football Association took place? Maybe some decisions can be made now in order to support the development of football in Poland? We do have some excellent examples in this area, for instance, the very well-organized Polish Volleyball Association. This can be seen as a positive thing about Euro 2012.

On a finishing note, let's look at what another respondent said about his experience of participating in Euro 2012. His words are a good illustration of the stressful preparation period; he also comments on the happiness triggered by starting the tournament and seeing the success of Polish society –for whom Euro proved to be the best social doping there could be.

Euro shows that we have reached the state of civilization normality. Earlier there was lots of blah blah blah, some unfinished roads, some buildings, but later, when the stadiums were completed and we suddenly saw the opening matches at each stadium, then we could see kind of big excitement in all host cities. I think that, just before the tournament started, people began to feel a little tired, it was probably the result of this atmosphere... and also because very often the politicians and media tried to point out anything that was not perfect, and tried to draw some political capital from it. I think that many people were tired by this and they just wanted the tournament to start. Many people had their doubts, because, well, this stadium was too expensive, and that road wasn't really finished, somebody must have cheated on something here, must have earned a fortune... And everybody wanted it to begin, everybody wanted it to be of some use, because up to some point it seemed as if everybody wanted to take some personal advantage of it. But when it started it was great I think, and this is confirmed by all these fans that came here, it's for sure difficult to find some negative opinion about the Polish people coming from a foreign fan... in spite of this rather black PR that we got just before the tournament [the respondent refers to the BBC film that we have mentioned in the discussion above] (Burszta, et al., 2012, pp. 13-14).

Euro 2012 appears to be an important breakthrough in the way Poles think about themselves, their capabilities, abilities, cooperation and organization skills. This permits Poland to set itself new goals and tasks, to look for sporting ideas and to act. A new myth was born for Polish society. It is a positive and optimistic myth. A myth is a story presenting an event which is important for a given community. Such an event shows the beginning of community formation, and also becomes a symbol that establishes this community's status. Nowadays, the Euro 2012 myth has become an element of the Polish people's consciousness. It means that we think about ourselves as a community that is considered and considers itself successful. The emerging story about Euro 2012 has immediately become a story of several generations. The event turned out to be powerful enough to bring together the old, the middle-aged and the

young ones. We need to stress once again that this myth was born as a burst of effort and energy of the whole society. People worked together regardless of their religion, gender, age and many more factors. It was not a myth stemming from any fight, conflict, tragedy or mourning. Euro 2012 is a new page in the social consciousness of a nation badly hurt by its history. It opened a new chapter and thus enabled us to build a new social and cultural capital based on a new myth, a new story.

This myth seems to be the Polish society's new history in the times of change. This story features ordinary people inspired by social energy. These people become the heroes of their times; they acquire organization skills, they learn how to work in a team and how to cooperate, they become able to set their goals and to achieve them. This new revived history of our society came to life in 2012 –the year of Euro. Let's hope that the Euro 2012 myth will prove socially and culturally permanent.

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