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Outside the Stadium

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a little part of discussion surrounding preparations for Euro 2012 tournament in Poland and Ukraine. Characteristically, for the participants of this discussion football doesn't seem to be the most important topic. Columnists and internet users much more place dedicate for analysing infrastructural or security issues. Particularly worth to notice are these voices, which show significant aspects of the social mind of Poles, because they allow to discover auto-stereotypes of the participants of the discourse. Article is divided into two parts. First part is dedicated to the scientific narrations about Poland, which appear in Polish academic discourse. Second part contains few example of opinions from the newspapers and internet forums of the period 2007–2012 directly connected with UEFA Cup 2012.

Keywords: Euro 2012, Poland, auto-stereotype, provincialism, periphery

Introduction

Before FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa a great international media debate occurred to discuss the problems: is it reasonable to organize an expensive party in a poor country? Can state with a high crime rate protect thousands of football fans against the gangs? Finally, can periphery succeed? In the discussion scepticism (or realism) went hand in hand with optimism, as for example in the statement of Richard Pithouse: "We could have mobilized all the money and political will invested in the World Cup for houses, schools, libraries, parks, crèches, hospitals and sports facilities in every part of every city" and response of Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa: "We want to show that Africa's time has come" (Cowdell 2009).

To some extent the same questions preoccupy Europeans since the information about host countries of UEFA Cup 2012 has arrived. Newspapers, magazines and websites became full of speculations which are not necessarily connected with football, much more with the common views of Poland and Ukraine. As both countries have not yet organized such event, many observers focus on tournaments preparations, declaring their scepticism or trusting in success. Recently, the great interest arouse political situation in Ukraine and the possible mistreatment of the imprisoned former Ukrainian Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. This information led leaders of few European countries and EU officials to announce boycott of the Ukrainian part of tournament.

This paper shall concern only Polish perspective on Euro 2012 championship. Reader of the articles in Polish newspapers gets the impression that there is much more place in media devoted to the organisation of the tournament than to the football itself. As Polish national football team is ranked 65 in the latest FIFA Rankings it seems to be fruitless to speculate on possible football success. But also opinions concerning infrastructural preparations expressed in Polish media don't seem to be euphoric. Particularly in the beginning of preparations, many columnists argued that "only miracle" can help Poles to organize this event (Pawłowski 2007). On the contrary, Mirosław Drzewiecki, former Polish Minister of Sport and Tourism claimed opinion similar to the cited words of Mr Mbeki: "Organization of Euro 2012 is a great chance for civilization development in Poland" (Newsweek 2008).

The main aim of this paper is to discuss the views and opinions on Euro 2012 articulated in Polish media as well as comments posted by internet users on forums. Taking into account bitter notions represented by many journalists and internet users concerning Polish development disabilities one can conclude there is terrifying lack of self-confidence among Poles. Even if these notions have been changing with the course of time the traces of self-depreciation are still present in Polish public discourse. This raise many questions: is complex of younger brother of old Europe still present in Poland? How the concept of worse part of Europe has been internalized in Eastern Europe? Is Poland a periphery of EU, despite its fast-developing and not harmed by crisis economy? And finally, where is a real centre of Europe?

Narrations about Poland

Eastern Europe – as many researchers underline – is not only a geographical reality, but also theoretical construction developed in the age of Enlightenment. But division of the Europe into two parts at no time was unambiguously

stated. Particularly vague was the status of the territory situated between more powerful neighbours, as for example former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Good example of this view brings the prose of the nineteenth century Austrian novelist, Karl Emil Franzos, which invent impressive image of “Halb-Asien” (“half-Asia”), relating mostly to Galicia, Austrian partition of Poland (Franzos 1876). This description, ironically, spread by the writer born in Galician Czortków (today Ukrainian Chortkiv), suggests semi-barbaric character of the province manifested both in the economical underdevelopment and mental provincialism. Interesting point of Franzos’ view of Galicia is transitional character of the province:

Also regarding political and social relations of these countries there meet each other in bizarre way: European education with Asiatic barbarism, European strive for progress with Asiatic indolence, European humanism with such wild, such savage national and religious conflicts, that for inhabitants of Western Europe they must be not only unfamiliar, but simply unbelievable or even incredible! (...) On the whole, Galicia, Romania and Russia are neither as civilized as Germany nor as barbaric as Turan, they are a mixture of both – half Asia! (Franzos 1876, III–V)

From historical point of view, Franzos had grounds to formulate such an opinions, resembling conclusions one of the pioneers of Galician mining industry, Stanisław Szczepanowski, who wrote: “Every Galician works for a quarter and eats for a half of a normal human being” (Szczepanowski 1888). Although similar, both statements had opposite ideological value: Franzos represents aggressive domination of German culture and predicts imminent victory of German race, whereas Szczepanowski demands social and economical reforms in order to change the situation of the province.

Negative image of “Halb-Asien” resembles a stereotype of “polnische Wirtschaft” (“polish industry”), traced by Hubert Orłowski in German literature and described in his valuable study (Orłowski 1998). Main difference between them is that the first concerns broader region and not necessarily distinguishes different nationalities of this area, whereas the second is dedicated specifically to Polish national faults. It needs to be added, that Orłowski make also insight into Polish responses for opinions hold by the neighbours. Author notices two general types of reactions for stereotype “polnische Wirtschaft”: self-glorification and self-accusation. Whereas in the course of the nineteenth century both types appeared in Polish discourse, in the twentieth century dominated the latter, changing into negative auto-stereotype. Orłowski concludes that the birth and raise of negative Polish auto-stereotype was only possible as a result of the influence of foreign hetero-stereotype.

As Eva Thompson claims, nineteenth century was for Polish history a crucial period, which shaped Polish attitudes still present in minds and behaviours (Thompson 2000). Ewa Woydyło-Osiatyńska adds that besides the partition of Poland and its consequences the other oppressive factors still determining current Polish social mind are: Catholicism, period of communism after World War II and tradition of serfdom (Woydyło-Osiatyńska 2011). These factors compose the complex of “mental provinciality” still persisting in Polish national character and which, as Woydyło-Osiatyńska argue, must be overcome in order to make individuals as well as all nation more self-confident and positive thinking.

All mentioned views are based on the “Self” and “Other” relation. This dialogical perspective can be used not only to describe the problems of identity (both self or collective), but also to discuss international or broader, non-national relations. So it is also the fundament of centre–periphery or empire–colony relations. Of course, the basic opposition doesn’t limit the number of elements: as we could read in the Franzos’ writing, dichotomic relation Europe vs. Asia includes intermediate grade of “half-Asia”. Influential researcher of socio-economical relations, Immanuel Wallerstein also avoids such simple oppositions putting into his core-periphery theory also third, middle ground called “semi-periphery” (Wallerstein). Poland is usually situated as a peripheral or semi-peripheral country in the world economical system.

Transitional position of Poland, imposed by philosophers and writers and transformed into socio-economical reality, seems to have strong connections with social mind. This transitional status can be also noticed in the contemporary discussions surrounding Euro 2012, as it is a great occasion for Poles to confront with the Other and re-define their own position.

Above-mentioned scientific narrations related to Eastern Europe, taking into consideration provincialism, persisting of stereotypes and auto-stereotypes, or focusing on political and economical dimensions of the division of Europe, offer interesting interpretations of the status of this region. For the purpose of this paper they have an inspirational meaning, but none of them can be recognised as a primary, so the following examples will not be framed by a specific methodological approach.

Vicious circle of comparisons

Provinciality is not only a geographical term, but mostly is located in mental sphere. In the negative sense it consists on the sense on inferiority towards group which is recognised as a more valuable. Therefore inhabitants of province pattern those from the region of dominating culture, even though this transfer can lay them open to ridicule. On the contrary, if the province is not copying the patterns of the centre, is also criticising because of ascribing backwardness. Vicious circle of endless comparisons is one of the most visible sign of provincialism, and indeed it can be also noticeable in the context of UEFA Cup in Poland. Good examples of this process are articles contrasting Euro 2012

with Olympic Games 2012 in London. Broadly expressed and commented differences between both events include various aspects e.g. promotion. When in 2011 video promoting Warsaw was presented, there has been a lot of discussion in the media, mostly critical. Main topics of concern for columnists and internet users were: banal script (in the morning young man met pretty running girl and started to chasing her), clumsy realization (in the spirit of "Matrix") and – last, but not least – good visible erection of the young man. Three-minute spot, which cost about 125,000 euro, was comparing with the movie promoting Olympic Games in London, judged as much more clever, witty and artistically valuable. Opinions expressed on the forums were anything but gentle:

it is such a rubbish that only provincial women from the village can be impressed. In London's video there are at least famous people and it is somehow corresponding with Olympic Games, because various disciplines are represented... and what is the connection between Euro 2012 and pervert chasing the chick? (czar-par 2011)

It is well seen a strong demand of perfection, which means following the model of British production. "Familiar" is much worse than "foreign" and can only be a reason to shame. It is significant, that even on the Facebook a new group has been created: "Warsaw 2012 video – shame on Poland", although only about 800 users clicked "Like it" button. This suggests that even if there is strong criticism of the video, Poles unwillingly slander own country.

Characteristic opinion posted another internet user: "Warsaw is closer to Bangladesh or Mexico than to London. Ha ha ha ha :))) All Europeans know what I mean." (biorytmix). Comparing Warsaw (and Poland as a whole) to the countries regarded as belonging to the "Third World" (even if this statement is not true) is a kind of auto-depreciation, which shows Polish resentments, longing for joining the world's elite and constant feeling of being apart from it, even after Poland became EU member and was promoted to the group of 47 most developed countries in the world, according to the newest Human Development Reports (UNDP 2011).

It doesn't mean that there can't be found different opinions on the video promoting Euro 2012. Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, the Mayor of Warsaw, judged that Polish spot "is not better" than English. but it have another advantages. "Script is really a little bit banal, but there is presented beautiful Warsaw", said Mrs Gronkiewicz-Waltz. "Video promoting London (...) is boring and chaotic" (ps 2011). Obviously, opinion of official responsible for public funds hardly is neutral, but there are also posts on forums, which represent more balanced and unemotional view:

I don't understand such a wave of negative comments concerning this movie. Did we get used to criticize anything which is Polish? Video is surely not brilliant, but it is also not so bad. The idea of jogging in Warsaw is ok. Such cities like London or Madrid don't need to present themselves (as a cities), they can be content with spots of famous sportsmen etc. because everyone knows what is in London etc. Warsaw is in more difficult position because must promote itself as a city, it is not well known in the West, it must arouse interest, show it is not the same city as in the People's Republic times, it is not the same Poland. Advertise make it quite well. Let take into account that we judge it in a different way as a Poles than people that haven't been here or were a few years ago. I know such people, after watching this spot they are surprised in a positive way. (nekhbetwaw)

Other example of comparisons between Warsaw and London in context of forthcoming championships is contrasting accompanying events offered by both countries, especially in the field of culture. As many observers conclude, London's Cultural Olympiad, described as "the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic Movements" (Cultural Olympiad 2012) has hardly any equivalent in Poland. Dorota Jarecka, journalist of "Gazeta Wyborcza", titled her article: "Poland – England. Cultural walkover", and bitterly convinces that the main problem of Polish project "Cultural Stadium" (which in January 2012 had no financial assets granted), is "lack of this momentum, which appeared in London" (Jarecka 2012). This statement became supported by opinion posted on forum: "maybe it is a high time to confess that we are hundred years behind the English?" (karmarys 2012). But surprisingly this topic attracted much less attention of internet users than above-mentioned and not all posts were as bitter as the article of Jarecka, for example: "Olympic Games and Football Cup is something very different. Cultural offer always should be, so there is something. (...) I see no point to make a loss in this business" (quiconque 2012). This opinion correspond with analysis of the rationality of organising cultural events accompanying sport by Mariusz Herma. Author, commenting poor Polish cultural offer at Euro 2012, asks rhetorically: "Perhaps we are right?" (Herma 2012), underlying the fact, that promoting the culture during Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver in 2010 bore a failure. So apart from complaints and undervaluation there are also the voices which praise Polish common sense.

Tradition and identity

There was much less common sense in a great debate which occurred after the song of Polish team has been performed on May 2, 2012 at the concert transmitted by Polish TV Channel One, which gathered almost 3mln of viewers. Interestingly, list of players of Polish national team, announced at the same event by the coach, Franciszek Smuda, caused much less comments. Song "Koko Euro spoko" ("Cluck Euro cool"), chosen from 10 candidates by viewers sending text messages, is very different than official song of Euro 2012, chosen by UEFA. Whereas "Endless Summer" performed by Oceana is a kind of international disco-style song (with the video shooting both at the exotic beach and in Poland), Polish song is performed by Jarzębina (Rowan) – group of women in the age of 30 to 80, living

in the small village Kocudza, well-known from the living tradition of ancient music and dance. Melody of “Koko euro spoko” is based on the traditional Polish folk music and the women performing song in traditional Polish suits. Only lyrics have been changed to connect them with tournament: “Poles are happy / Ukraine is happy / That here for everybody / Euro begins / Cluck cluck Euro cool / Ball flies far away / Everybody, let’s sing together / Let’s cheer our boys / Our brave boys / Are the white and reds / They’ll manage to win / Smuda will be happy / Little eagles, run / Briskly on the green / Score the goals / And everything will be ok / Don’t think, brother / That we won’t get along / Don’t bother yourself, sister / We will win Euro.” It is worth to add, that Jarzębina represents very high level of performance. According to Encyclopedia of Warsaw Dance House, Jarzębina

is one of the best folk singers’ band in Poland. Among many groups of traditional singers still performing in Lublin area, Jarzębina is distinguished by archaic repertoire, perfect harmony of voices and characteristic, shrill timbre (Kocudza 2012).

Lyrics of Polish team anthem, although unsophisticated, represents similar level than it can be found in other songs composed for football events and can be compared for example with “Waka waka” of Shakira. Moreover, performances of the latter song (both video clip and live) contain elements of traditional culture. But although reception of “Waka waka” was generally positive, Polish song has been attacked by professional musicians as well as internet forums.

Jan Pietrzak, Polish satiric, commented the song: “Pure nonsense and horrible thrash”. He argued that anthem must not be chosen by ordinary people, but “there should be a closed competition for professionals, who could choose song that better corresponds to the atmosphere of football fest” (Dziennik 2012). Other satiric, Krzysztof Piasecki, replied, that such choice was “spontaneous” and “democratic”, and that folklore is a part of Polish culture (Dziennik 2012). Much more emotional were opinions related with this news posted on forum:

It is now clear, what ordinary Pole like, in various dimensions: cultural, political, ethical. This level doesn’t allow to look with trust and optimism to the future. We depreciate, insult and demote ourselves. Jarzębina band should sing this hit while driving with the cart between unfinished A2 [highway] and capital city (Polak 2012)

Significant is the comment of 17mw: “[national] stadium [is a] wicker-basket for beetroots, wiocha, wiocha, wiocha [wiocha – augmentative form of “wioska” – village, contains very negative connotation of provinciality]...” (17mw). Similar opinion posted Kamila:

For me this song brings us additional shame. Someone wrote, that we should not feel ashamed because of our national tradition – but is such a village-style jumping our tradition? Poland is not a country that should be associated with pigsty and stink of cowshed; this is the country with a very rich tradition full of touching moments which can fill us with proud and this should be reflected in the anthem of our team. And what does this song show? That our country is a great village [wieje wiochą na prawo i lewo] and that young people are dominated by older. Just look at the songs of other countries – young girls support their football players, and here? There will come grandmothers, start to jump, that guys will no longer feel like playing football. Thank you. And I’m proud because of Polish tradition, but tradition is a broad concept (Kamila 2012).

Many internet users found that “Koko Euro spoko” is a kind of joke, though it is not clear, who really originated this joke: singers, organisers or viewers. Also there is no consensus on the meaning of the joke: some internet users claim that the viewers decided do choose Jarzębina because of the weakness of other songs, for example performed by Maryla Rodowicz or Wilki, regarded as a Polish pop-stars.

But there are also the posts which defend the choice of Poles because of the real values represented by victorious song. Some internet users indicate, that we should not be ashamed of our origins:

If Germans were yodelling and sing their Bavarian songs, no German would protest, and we gripe as always. It is our folklore, tradition and it’s a pity we are ashamed because of that. It is all about good joy, and this song, comparing with other candidates (extremely boring) has a good melody and I think it will cause a furore at the stands (Rita 2012).

One can feel surprised because of the emotional tone of the discussion, especially in the posts disregarding national tradition. This phenomenon is not only a kind of “americanization” (or “McDonaldization”) of Polish culture, nor it is only thoughtless following fashions promoted by media: youth and sexual attraction, but has also deep historical justification. After World War II, during the period of communism, Polish traditional culture become situated ambiguously. On the one hand, communists announced alliance of peasants and factory workers, and officially the traditional culture was propagated during countless parades, stage productions and academies. But on the other hand, industrialization of the country caused that village started to be regarded as a field of backwardness. Official support of traditional culture did not help to its development, in fact it was seen more as created by officials than regarded as a real tradition. In effect Poles rejected traditional dances and songs as a synonym of backwardness. In the 90’s and early 21st century this processes increased, as Poles desperately want to catch up with Europe. But on the other hand, there are also numerous initiatives that have rehabilitation of Polish national culture in view, especially organized by Warsaw Dance House and other associations.

According to the poll conducted by Polish TV football section “Koko Euro spoko” became more popular than official Euro song of Oceana (Piłka nożna TVP 2012). Perhaps it means that the time of proud of tradition is coming instead of the belief that Western culture is much more interesting than local.

National therapy?

Many columnists underline the benefits which bring for Poland organization of Euro 2012 and show its connections with self-esteem of Poles:

Earn the right do organization of Euro 2012 by Poland did not mean that in some miraculous way there will appear roads, hotels, modern railway lines and stadiums – and it all for free. But this decision gave us great progress impulse, which effect we will consume not only for 23 days of tournament, but also long after its finish. This, what we have done and what still wait for finish no one will take away from us. Not to mention the prestige, promotion and sport emotions. (Pieńkowski 2012)

In the numerous articles concerning Euro 2012 there can be seen the longing for changes in society. Many columnists write a kind of “therapeutic manifestos”, sometimes even citing psychologists, as for example in the article of Radosław Leniarski, who interviewed a scientist from Warsaw School of Social Psychology. Dr Konrad Maj said:

For the tournament Poland will visit people with greater confidence, more open – in this sense Euro 2012 is a therapy. Germans after World Cup 2006 awake in themselves the desire to manifest their identity and national proud. Perhaps the same will occur in Poland. For some time we felt the community after death of Pope [John Paul II], after the crash in Smoleńsk [in the air crash in Smoleńsk, which occurred on April 10, 2010, died former President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, and many Polish officials]. But it was a sorrow. Now we have chance for positive emotions, for extra-Mafyszomania [Adam Małysz – famous former Polish ski jumper, one of the most successful ski jumper in the history]. We will recognize, that we have a steady place in Europe, that we are not a fifth wheel. Until today we only took from Europe, now we can prove that we are attractive. Let’s show Europe clean, renovated house and say: look, how we live like. Finally we will feel good – driving on comfortable highway, cheering on beautiful stadiums. Let us jump for joy and realize that we are going forward. (Leniarski 2011)

Dr Maj underlines positive dimensions of organizing Euro 2012, which will bring Poles greater self-confidence and the sense of success. But it is worth to pay attention to the details of Dr May words. They contain an imperative tone: “we will prove”, “let’s show”, which means that Poles must make extra effort in order to be judged well. This tone is more distinct in the article of Rafał Stec:

Despite of its changing image, Poland is still harmed by damaging or even untrue opinions on the country situated on the periphery of civilization. This is experience of each correspondent of international sports events. Perhaps no one claims that there live cannibals among us, but an ordinary fan, for example from Portugal, hardly believe that for each of us Russian is not a second language. And that in the village plough is not pulled by horse, but by machine. Euro 2012 destroys such idiotic common opinions and will foster these more sympathetic and more true. There will be no better opportunity to prove, that we really are hospitable and we love to have fun. (Stec 2007)

One can conclude, that columnists don’t really believe that Poles are “attractive” or “hospitable”, or at least want to remind compatriots the need of correct behaviour. Moreover, they clearly state that only after Poles prove the Others that they are a valuable nation, they can feel proud of themselves. This opinions arouse suspicions that Polish low self-esteem is in fact co-created by intellectuals creating simple and unreal world in the spirit of progress-oriented positivism at the same time strengthening national complexes.

This understand well the sociologists from Warsaw University, which in 2008 started realisation of *Social Project 2012*. The idea of the Project is far from academic non-alignment policy, but has significantly practical purpose: “inspiring social changes by the way of Euro 2012” (Projekt Społeczny 2012: O projekcie). Researchers stated in their manifesto:

UEFA Euro 2012 is not only a great sport event which stimulates infrastructural development, but also unusual social event, excellent pretext for talk and action in the area of public sport, voluntary, social consultation, auto-stereotypes of Poles, image of Poland and relations with Ukraine. Preparation of the tournament is not only a challenge, but also an unique occasion to learn. (Projekt Społeczny 2012: O projekcie)

Project is based on the results of the studies which show that Polish auto-stereotypes are mostly negative and generate negative effects in social sphere. But according to the report of Maria Rogaczewska and Aleksandra Goldys these negative auto-stereotypes are to a large degree imposed by intellectuals, researchers and journalists trusting in their apostolic mission of changing national faults in the spirit of positivism (Rogaczewska and Goldys 2008). Authors of the report also show that self-image of Poles is much more complex as it is commonly considered and that it often overcomes the frames of great narrations concerning Polish national character and factors determined it.

Conclusions

Mentioned examples are only a little part of discussion surrounding Euro 2012, but show characteristic trends and views of the participants. One can ask, if these examples can be regarded as representative for whole society, and the answer must be negative. Presented opinions are limited to two main groups: columnists and internet users, which have their own peculiarity. Nevertheless, as sociologists show, mentioned characteristics: moans, low self-esteem, comparisons with other, dislike of the tradition, future-oriented thinking exist in various part of Polish society, although they co-exist with opposite, or at least more moderate moods. But the question is, if the features regarded as a negative are really specifically Polish, or maybe they belong to the broader tradition of dissatisfaction of the presence and continuous longing for improvement. Tradition which is not only specific for peripheries.

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Bio-note

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