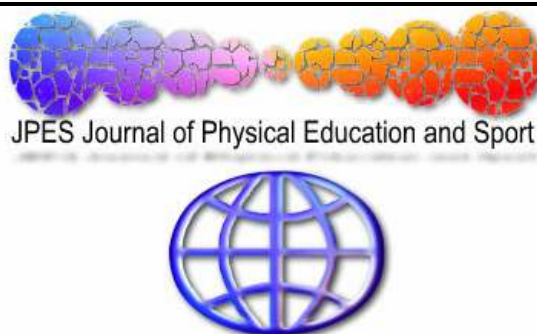




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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE ULTRAS PHENOMENON IN THE CITY OF TIMISOARA

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Rezumat: Fenomenul ultras în Timișoara este reprezentat de galeria echipei de fotbal Politehnica Timișoara și se identifică cu numele de „Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud”. Acest fenomen nu este nicidecum unul nou iar analizarea acestuia reprezintă o radiografie a grupului ultrasilor alb-violeti. Scopul lucrării de față îl reprezintă cercetarea modelului de suporter timișorean, caracteristicile și particularitățile sale la nivel de individ cât și grup.

Metoda anchetei, observației și a chestionarului au constituit mijloacele prin care s-au obținut datele cercetării. S-a constatat că în cadrul grupului se disting două tipuri de suporteri : suporterii simpli, veniți să încurajeze echipa și ultrasii, membri activi în Commando Viola, diferențele dintre ei remarcându-se la nivelul identificării : pentru ultrasii, echipa locală reprezintă totul în timp ce pentru suporteri, aceasta semnifică identificarea cu „a fi bănățean”.

Cuvinte cheie: fenomen ultras, suporter, identitate, galerie.

Summary: The ultras phenomenon in Timisoara has been represented by the gallery of the Politehnica Timisoara football team and has identified itself as „Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud”. It is not at all a new phenomenon and its analysis implies radiography of the white-violet group.

The aim of the present paper is the research on the model of the Timisoara supporter, his or her characteristic features and peculiarities, both as an individual and as a group. The investigation method used in order to collect the research data has consisted of observation and questionnaire. It has been noticed that there are two types of supporters within the group: mere supporters, present at the games in order to encourage their team and the **ultras**, active members in Commando Viola. The main differences between the two categories of supporters being defined at the identification level: to the **ultras**, the local team means everything, while to the **supporters** it means to identify themselves to the concept “to be born in the Banat region”.

Key words: the ultras phenomenon, supporter, identity, gallery

Introduction

“Journalists and football club managers call the ultras wonderful spectators when everything goes well, but they call them hooligans every time there is trouble. In both cases, it’s about the same people.” (Dal Lago & Moscati, 1992).

The ultras represent a genuine football phenomenon through a set of characteristics. From the sense of identification to their own territory – that specific public enclosure marked off with one or several flags/ banners that wear the name or the symbol of the group, to the supporters’ outfits: pieces of clothes with the favourite team’s signs on, to which is added the almost compulsory wearing of a scarf in the colours of the team.

The Explicative Dictionary of the Romanian Language gives the following definition to the word *ultra*: “very/extreme/over/excessively”. “Ultras” stands for a group of young, fanatic supporters of a certain football team, sitting on the stadium in that particular area called “public enclosure” (that section that comes perpendicular on the sport field, where the visibility is not the best but the ticket is cheaper) who encourage their team, regardless the final result in a home game or away, using their own means (drums, petards, colour lights, smoking devices, flags, scarves, choreographies).

“Those who feel attracted to this style of supporting a team are usually young people, aged between 15 and 25, and this way of manifestation appeals to them because it is rebellious by its nature and it can also stand for a form of opposition, rebellion against a given rule. To a teenager, the fact that he or she has the possibility to socially represent himself/herself as an *ultras*, a rebel who breaks any rules, represents a major temptation. Thus, the teenager has the means to “get out of the box”, to skip the daily monotonous routine of his age and join some contemporary rebels.” (Beiu A., 2004).

The stadium, with its large and open spaces, allows the development of the phenomenon.

There are four main elements in the *ultra* mentality and in the definition of the ultras:

1. Regardless the result on the score table, nobody stops singing and cheering.
2. Don't sit down during the game.
3. No matter what the distance and the costs of the trip might be, an ultras always or as often as possible must accompany his team, both at home and away.
4. Total loyalty towards the section of the stadium, usually the public enclosure that hosts the *ultras* group.

A brief historical analysis of the phenomenon reveals that its first form appeared in Italy, in the early 50s. The first appearance refers to the group “Fedelissimi Torino”, in 1955 and the first name of an ultras brigade appeared in Sampdoria, in 1968, and it was the “Ultras Tito” group. In the late 60s and the beginning of the 70s the groups of supporters dramatically detached themselves from the classical, adult model, of the football spectator and they filled the public enclosures of the stadiums, those sections positioned perpendicularly to the sport field, where the visibility was not the best but the ticket was, and still is, cheaper. Nevertheless, together with the positive aspects brought to the sport show by its new type of supporters, unpleasant events, conflicts which sometimes turned into street fights between the galleries of the opponent teams or between galleries and police forces, dramatically ending in death causing violence, started to appear.

These events induced immediately an association of the ultras to the famous British hooligans (Russo & King, 2007). The ultras supporters' reply used to be, and still is, very clear cutting and it was sent through by messages written on hangers used during the games or street marches: “Ultras does not mean hooligans”. In Romania, the ultras movement appeared in the early 90s, thus it has a relatively short history because before 1989 the communist regime banned any forms of rebellious and beatnik organizations of the supporters, even if there were some attempts of manifestation at that time, too. For example, the supporters of the Rapid football team used to have a flag written with: Ultras Rapid (Beiu, 2004).

In Timisoara, the ultras phenomenon is represented by the F.C. Timisoara gallery “Commando Viola Ultra Curva Sud” who are located on the south public enclosure of the “Dan Paltinisau” stadium. Commando Viola (C.V.U.C.S) represent a social group whose goal is to perform, with their own means, a show at every game of FC Timisoara.

In 2003, the Professional Football League awarded C.V.U.C.S the trophy “The most beautiful football gallery in Romania” but still, violence cannot be denied, despite its low percentage compared to other groups in the country.

Although there are other football teams in Timisoara, too, no other gallery of any football team can be called an Ultras group of supporters, for several reasons:

- Once constituted, an ultras group must declare their identity.
- They must occupy a certain section on the stadium and identify themselves to it.
- They must support their team regardless the final score, both at home and away, no matter the distance.
- They must wear a scarf inscribed with the signs and the colours of the favourite team, round their necks.

Even if Timisoara does not have any other ultras groups, in Arad, the supporters of the UTA football team formed a similar type group but, the fact that the team is no longer taking part into the First League games, determines the lack of a real derby in the western part of the country and consequently, the absence of confrontations between the galleries. Nevertheless, the games in the Cup of Romania inflame the spirits and generate true hooligan behaviours.

The characteristics and peculiarities of the ultras “white-violet” phenomenon represent the object of the present research, starting with the mere presence of the supporters in the public enclosures to this group’s identification to Timisoara and the Banat region. . The supporter’s behaviour on the sports fields, their degree of implication in the activities of the group constituted around the football phenomenon, the type of support, the group as a social structure, its place and influence in society represent the main elements of this research. Making use of individual questionnaires, the research will focus on the activities and manifestations of the ultra group in order to distinguish their peculiarities.

Tasks of the Research:

- Apply a questionnaire to the supporters present at the games in the southern public enclosure; the questionnaire aims at gathering information about the perception of the ultras phenomenon, of sports in general, of violence on stadiums, the structure and organization of the white-violet gallery, marital status and educational level.
- Identify the influence of the ultra group over the entire stadium during the games.
- Identify the causes that generate violence, reciprocity towards some opponent teams and implicitly, towards their supporters.
- Underline the positive and the negative elements of this phenomenon and their impact on the ultras type supporter and society in general.

Hypothesis

The difference between the supporters and the ultras group is obvious at the identity level: if to the ultras, identification to the team is total, generating thus a way of life, to the supporters it’s only a matter of local identification, generating the pride of “belonging to the geographical region” (banatean)

Materials and Method

205 questionnaires were given out and 198 were recovered (a percentage of 96,6%) over the time of the return games during the national championship in 2008/2009. The questionnaires were distributed into various locations: the south public enclosure of the “Dan Paltinisau” Stadium of Timisoara, on the bus driving from Timisoara to Cluj for the game in the quarters of the Cup of Romania, played between F.C. Timisoara and Gloria Bistrita (April 15-th 2009) and during the weekly meetings of the ultras groups „MCMXXI” and „Hell Unit”. Method used: questionnaire type investigation, observation, mathematical-statistical method, graphical method.

Results

a. Categories of supporters of the FC Timisoara team

From the total of questioned persons, it was noticed that the supporters of the FC Politehnica Timisoara, in the South public enclosure, are divided into three sub-categories of which the ultras group appeared to be the most representative (54%), followed by the supporters (43%) and in a very small proportion (3%), by the self-declared hooligan group.

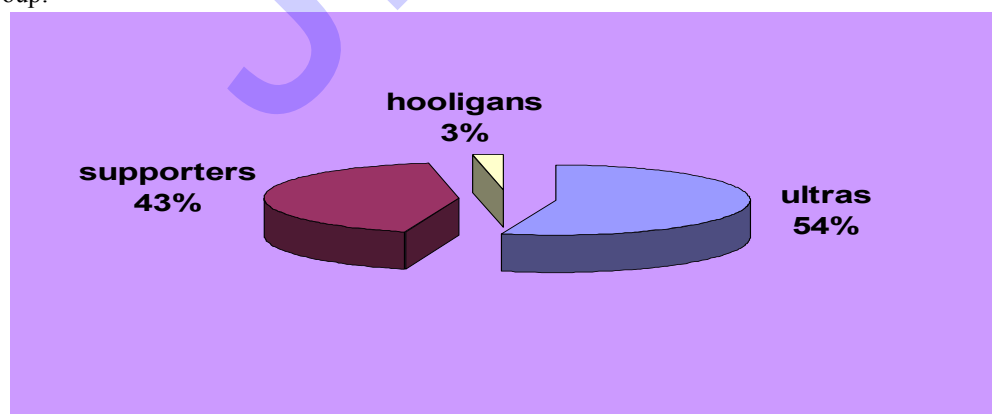


Figure 1

The questioned persons self-identified themselves as being ultras, supporters or hooligans.

In supporting their belonging to a specific group, we can notice from the table below that during a game played away, the ultras choose to support their team in proportion of 92% while the supporters only in a proportion of 66%.

Table no.1

Games Away	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
YES	92%	66%
NO	8%	34%
TOTAL	100%	100%

For the supporters, the games' selection criteria are set according to the level of the opponent's importance (70%) while for the ultras, they attempt to be present at half of the games played away (55%) and 34% of the ultras consider that being present at all the games is essential for their ultras status.

Table no.2

Travelling to away games	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
Important games	11%	70%
Every game	34%	5%
Half of the games	55%	25%
TOTAL	100%	100%

a. Team representation for supporters and ultras

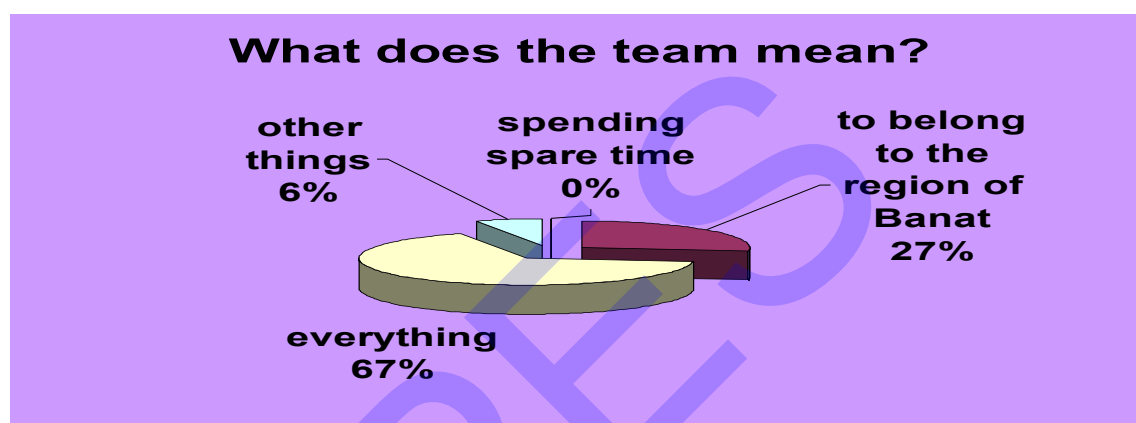


Figure 2- Ultras

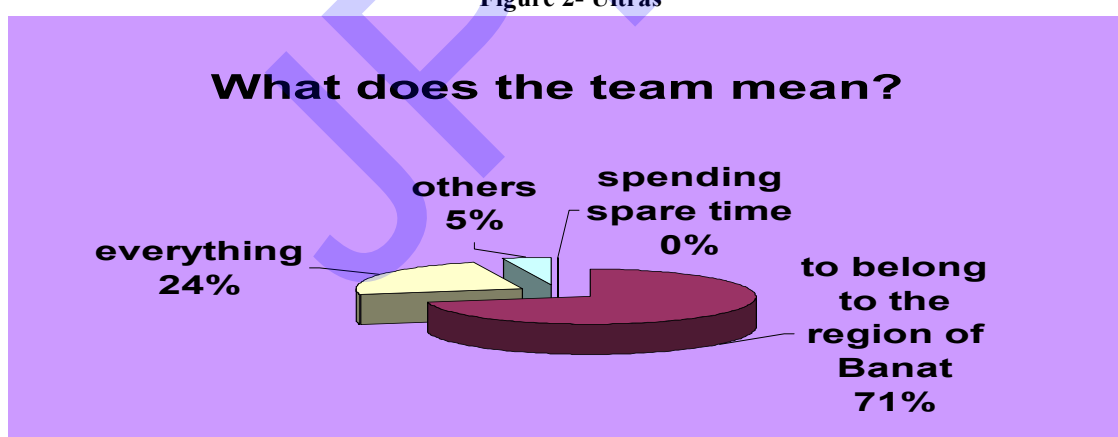


Figure 3- Supporter

The team is differently represented for the two groups that have the majority amongst the supporters; the ways of experiencing the phenomenon differs within the two groups: ultras and supporters. For 67% of the ultras, the FC Timisoara team represents “everything”, i.e. a way of life, while it represents only 24% for the supporters.

The difference between the ultras and the supporters can be also seen in their sense of identity, expressed in the concept “to be born in the Banat region”: if to the supporters, the concept is representative for 71% of them, in the case of the ultras, the concept is representative only for 27% of them.

Tabel no.3 illustrates that the majority of both ultras and supporters are born in Timisoara, which explains their local identity feelings towards the most representative club of the city.

Tabel no. 3

BORN IN TIMISOARA	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
YES	80%	81%
NO	20%	19%
TOTAL	100%	100%

b. Reasons for choosing the South Public Enclosure

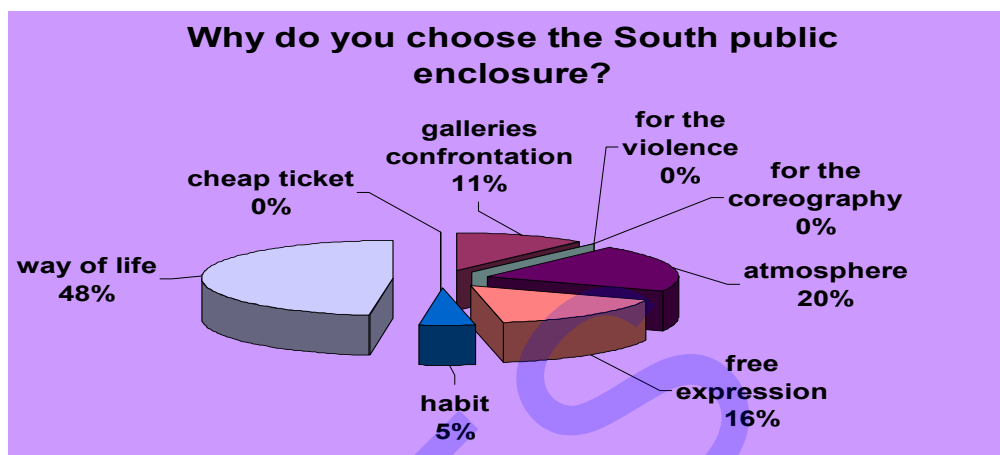


Figure 4 –Ultras

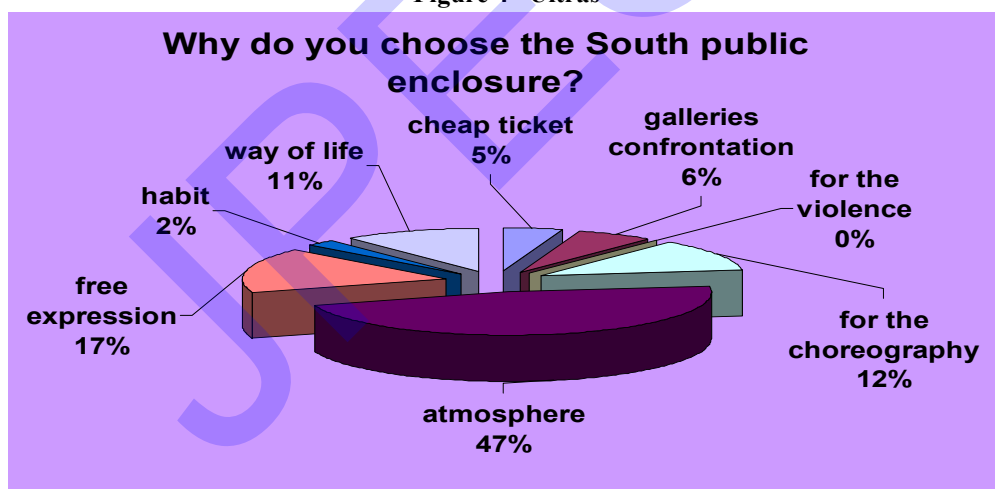


Figure 5 – Supporters

Comparing the two charts (figures 4 and 5), we notice that to the ultras, the South Public Enclosure is a way of life, a representative space in the entire architecture of the stadium, the place where they meet in order to produce their choreographies, banners, in order to send messages that most of the times go beyond sports and penetrates the social field that surrounds the football phenomenon. Among the supporters, those who choose the South Public Enclosure (47%) appreciate the atmosphere, taking part into the choreographies (12%) despite the fact that to the ultras, choreography is nothing more than a way of expressing the group identity, that “everything” which motivates the individuals to join the group.

Officially called “the most beautiful gallery” in 2003, for their fair-play spirit, the Timisoara gallery also chooses the South Public Enclosure for their possibility to express their feelings, to live the games (16% for the ultras, 17% for the supporters). The show created and performed during their team’s games is not an aggressive one, so even women and children spectators can enjoy it on the “Dan Paltinisanu” stadium.

Looking for a confrontation with the opponent gallery motivates 11% of the ultras and 6% of the supporters.

But the confrontation is achieved more at a symbolic level, by sending messages and not through violence (0% options both for the ultras and the supporters).

Table no.4 illustrates that in the direct confrontations between the galleries, 72% of the ultras were much and very much involved, which indicates a high level of implication compared to that of the supporters who declare themselves little involved (43%), the phenomenon being an accidental one and only when they have to face some aggression and defend themselves.

Table no.4

Level of involvement in the gallery confrontations	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
Very much	43%	12%
Much	29%	16%
A little	18%	43%
At all	10%	29%
TOTAL	100 %	100 %

To the ultras, the fact they are organized in an independent group, makes declare their attachment to the values of the group and the identity sense is expressed through that particular way of being, justifying thus their perception of the team as meaning “everything” to them, and inspiring a positive attitude (for 27% of them). The rate is the other way round for the supporters, to whom the positive attitude is the main reason to take part (53%). By “positive attitude” they mean taking part to the choreography, expressing their emotions, supporting their team.

Table no. 5

Reasons to participate	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
Group membership	49%	20%
Positive attitude	27%	53%
Decrease aggressive attitude	5%	5%
Self confidence	7%	9%
Socializing	12%	13%
TOTAL	100 %	100 %

d. Social Status of Supporters and Ultras

Table no. 6 illustrates that the ultras group's educational level is higher than that of the supporters. University and post-university education cover 43% of the ultras, while in the supporters group, this level of education represents only 29% of the group, the first percentage under the percentage of 33% of supporters with medium education (high school graduates). This picture can offer arguments for the fair-play spirit promoted by the gallery and for their fight against the decision made by the Romanian Football Federation concerning the sanctions that had been imposed to the club.

Table no.6

EDUCATION LEVEL	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
Elementary	1 %	6 %
Secondary	6 %	19 %
High school education	41 %	33 %
Post highschool	0 %	2 %
Vocational	9 %	11 %
University	27 %	24%
Post university	16 %	5 %
TOTAL	100 %	100 %

The age and the social status of the people questioned (table no.7) indicates the fact that adolescence (60% of the supporters under 20) is a time for exploring and searching for identity. Being present next to the ultras group, the possibility to express their feelings and emotions (17%), as well as a lower ticket price (5%) motivate teenagers' choice.

Table no. 7

AGE	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
Under 20	33%	60%
20-30 years old	61%	32%
Over 30	6%	8%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Table no. 8 shows that both ultras and supporters are not married (84% ultras, 83% supporters), thus having fewer obligations and family responsibilities which might prevent more or less directing their energy and feelings towards the football team.

Table no. 8

MARITAL STATUS	ULTRAS	SUPPORTERS
married	9%	11%
divorced	7%	6%
single	84%	83%
TOTAL	100 %	100 %

Conclusions:

The study reveals that there are differences among the supporters of the FC Timisoara team, regarding the way of involvement in the extra activities of the group they belong to.

If a supporter has a presence of 66% at the games away, an ultras will be present at 92% of the games away but the major difference is given by the sense of belonging to the team and the feeling of identity which come along with the status of supporter of the Banat team (for the supporters) as well as by the fact that the Banat team means “everything” to the individual who has declared himself an ultras.

Taking into consideration that both survey groups include mostly single individuals and that that are at the age of teen quests (under 20 for supporters) and of searching for their identity (between 20-30 years old for the single ultras) testifies the hypothesis of total or partial identification to the team of Timisoara.

A very low percentage (3%) think of themselves as hooligans, the type of supporter whose main feature is hatred for the supporters of the opponent team, expressed through physical and verbal violence, fanaticism which can get to the highest level.

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