

Czech football fans and some aspects of their declared and applied approaches

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Abstract

Problem statement: Football is a collective ball game that is the most popular team sport in the world. Given the long history of spectator sports events consumption it is not a surprising fact that there have also been serious manifestations of spectator aggression. **Objective:** The purpose of the study was to examine the behavior of selected Czech football fans (violence and hostility, especially). **Methods:** The data were collected in a questionnaire survey carried out in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. The sample included 462 participants, aged 26.29 ± 10.19 years (men 26.67 ± 10.20 years, women 25.05 ± 10.14 years). The declared approaches to some followed expressions (whistling, booing, vulgar chants in the stand, firing pyrotechnics, etc.) were compared to the rate of their active experience in the same kind of behavior. For the evaluation Correlation Matrices, Cluster Analysis, and Correspondence Analysis were applied. **Results:** Within Correlation Matrices based on 7 versus 7 (opinion versus experience), 22 statistically significant items were found. The highest scores were seen in the cases of racism (0.43), firing pyrotechnics (0.32), and vulgar chants (0.28). Within Correspondence Analysis three main issues were identified. Vulgar chants displayed 2 major clusters: 1Opinion/1Experience (Rate 1 in Opinion versus Rate 1 Experience) and 3Opinion/3Experience. Firing of pyrotechnics displays 1 major cluster: 3–4–5Opinion/4Experience. The expressions of racism included 1 major cluster: 4–5Opinion/4Experience result. Within the discussion, we tried to describe and explain some concrete cases in which the contradictions between the declared and applied approaches are remarkable. We state there are several limitations in this paper, too. The research cannot be generalized as it was merely interested in a professional football club in Czechia. We believe that a comparison with other countries would be desirable.

Keywords: Aggression, participation in behavior, questionnaire survey, violence

Introduction

Of course, it should be no surprise that football is easily the most popular sport in the world. Football making extremely popular in almost every country recreationally. Ai et al. (2020) state that there is also no gender inequality in football. Although football is enjoyed in particular by men, women's teams are well-known and popular in the world as well. The number of female supporters following football clubs has been constantly increasing in Europe (Antonowicz et al., 2020) and approximately one-fifth of the stadiums' visitors are women (Scholz, 2020). Meier et al. (2017) indicate that the feminization of football reflects not only inauthentic consumerism but also increased team identification. Thus, football is quite democratic; it is played by professionals and amateurs (Ai et al., 2020). This case study strikes up with some previous research regarding Slavia Prague football visitors. According to Mareš et al. (2004) and Sahaj (2007), the division of football visitors in Czechia and Poland is the same. In this context, it is possible to define three large groups: football spectators, football fans, and football hooligans. The spectators can become fans over several seasons or even matches, especially if their football team plays well. However, we must state that the more used division of football visitors is into four groups. Nikl & Volevecký (2007) divided the visitors into four groups: novices (12–15 years old, who are gradually drawn into the world of football), those who wear a jersey (die-hard fans identified with their club), veterans (about 25 years old, gradually turn into football spectators) and hooligans (about 5% of them). Novices can become fans, or those who like the club and identify with it and buy some symbols such as jerseys, scarves, etc. However, the most common division into four groups is inactive spectators, traditional fans, ultras (supporters), and hooligans (Doidge & Lieser, 2018; Hodges, 2016; Leite et al., 2020; Scholz, 2018). The practical aspects visible from our empirical research proved that this division makes good sense for practical research reasons.

It is true that in some specific cases, it was not easy to exactly define the border between fans and ultras (and in a few cases also between ultras and hooligans). Still, in the majority of cases, the four defined groups were quite significant. We can register many studies devoted to the development of fan groups and the changing position of hooliganism in European football within the last few years (Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Hodges, 2016; Nikolic, 2016).

Here, use of a term “hoolifans” introduced by King & Knight (1999) can be mentioned. Rookwood & Pearson (2012) develop the issue of “hoolifans” and emphasize that sometimes it is not easy to “recognize the views of a significant proportion of match-going fans who consistently express positive attitudes towards the ‘hooligans’ who follow their team.”

Recently, ethical problems in football have been examined in very diversified approaches. We should mention at least some of the great range of research also focused on violence in football (Brechtbühl et al., 2017; Cashmore & Cleland, 2014; Davis & Ryall, 2017; Kossakowski et al., 2017; Kural & Özbek, 2019; Leistner, 2017), or some other problem aspects of fandom, typically homophobia (Cashmore & Cleland, 2014; Frosdick & Marsh, 2005; Krøvel, 2016), or using alcohol (Ayres & Treadwell, 2011; Dunning et al., 1988; Palmer, 2014). Some studies were devoted to racism (Alegria, 2012; Amara & Henry, 2010; Cashmore & Cleland, 2014; Cleland, 2013). Of course, demonstrations of racism are usually very closely linked to hooligans, but the ideology of racism is not completely avoided by any of the selected groups. Gender issues were solved in the context of female football (Berg et al., 2014), or from the feministic approach examining sexual assaults in media applied in the study by Waterhouse-Watson (2016). Some authors approach the problem from a broader philosophical perspective in which they transcend the ethical framework with in some studies devoted to football and football fandom (Borge & McNamee, 2017; Davis, 2015). Leite et al. (2020) state that football fans in Portugal demonstrate significantly higher psychopathological symptoms than spectators in somatization, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, hostility, paranoid ideation and psychoticism, and psychopathological indexes. Football fans introduce values very close to those of populations with emotional distress in hostility. They are above the general population's mean in obsession–compulsion, hostility, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism.

Material & methods

We obtained the data mainly at the Eden stadium and some other football stadiums in Czechia through a questionnaire survey in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. The sample consisted of 462 participants (372 men, 88 women, 2 participants did not indicate their sex). The surveyed participants in this research were aged 26.29 ± 10.19 years (men aged 26.67 ± 10.20 years, women aged 25.05 ± 10.14 years) and all of them attended a stand of home team fans and supporters. The selection of participants was based on pre-defined factors; seats 1, 3, 5, 7 in the first row; seats 2, 4, 6, 8 in the second row, etc. from all the rows. It was a random selection.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty-nine questions. In our investigation, we applied 7 types of demonstration of violent behavior: using vulgar expressions, damaging the stadium, expressions of racism, the firing of pyrotechnics, throwing objects onto the pitch, pitch incursions, and booing. The answers were scalable, where participants marked on the Likert scale (1-5) their opinions concerning these activities. The least serious case was rated as 1, the most remarkable activity (perceived as negative behavior) received 5. The active behavior was also expressed via the Likert scale. The rate of participation was assessed like this: 1 = always, 2 = often, 3 = rarely, 4 = never. We were searching for a logical link which can be simply described like this: the more serious problematic behavior in the opinion of the participant, the less participation should be registered in his/her case. We labeled the two examined approaches as “opinion” (=O), and “experience” (=E). The term “experience” is more precise here than “behavior” because within the questionnaire, the rate of experience with the followed kind of activity was enquired and identified.

We investigated the experience of football fans during the selected matches, and simultaneously, we examined their opinions about some controversial football supporter behavior.

Nowadays, we can ask about the situation concerning traditional fans. Do fans get involved in several controversial behavior (at least sometimes)? Coming from Rookwood & Pearson (2012), we argue that it can be a very difficult task to establish the exact line between fans and supporters/ultras. Of course, there are two ways of how to identify their affiliation to one of these groups – the objective one (some external features in their appearance and behavior) and the subjective one (their identification with a particular group). Within our research, we tried to assess very carefully which participant belongs to which group.

On the other hand, the groups are not homogenous either in their thinking, or in their behavior. On the individual level, no participant behaves in the same way all the time. There are some changes in their thinking, approaches, and specific ways of behaving. We can assume that the ethical approach of traditional fans could differ from the ethical approach of supporters/ultras (and diametrically opposed to hooligans). Still, concerning the complexity of the problem, we need some exact instruments for how to obtain the relevant data.

We aimed to examine the nature of these ethics in more detail and a philosophical discourse distinguishing between the approaches based on deontology and consequentialism. In a simplified way, we can say that we focused on the difference between “what should I do?” and “what did I do?”. The limitations of the questionnaire investigation, in this case, are presented by some subjective factors concerning our participants – different levels of knowledge of ethical principles and trying to approach something which can be labeled as “the appropriate expectation.” However, the number of participants is high enough for the necessary statistic evaluation, and the “law of large numbers” could eliminate some extreme data and can help overcome these limitations. However, it is necessary to remember that we consider that fans represent a very diverse and inconsistent group of football visitors in which we can find many extremes. We investigated Czech fans, and we discuss that some general results obtained from the study can be considered. We focused on a sophisticated

selection of participants. The primary goal of this study was not to explain the exact results in a general way of understanding, but to highlight some trends displaying the ways of thinking of our surveyed participants' basic ethical issues. Our results come from quantitative research methods, but their statistical evaluation presents just a framework for the interpretation of some ethical approaches. In some modern investigations concerning football visitors, we can hardly find any studies which are strongly tied to several significant ethical issues coming from the philosophical background. Within this case study, we applied the following methods: Correspondence Analysis (henceforth COA), Cluster Analysis (henceforth CLA), and Spearman Correlation Matrices (henceforth CM). Then the results were processed in Statistica 13 EN Program.

Results

Some more general goals and results of the complex questionnaire survey have already been published by e.g., Scholz (2016). Here we were interested in the interpretation of some special ethical issues. Within Spearman CM, we established 14 variables (7 cases of opinion, 7 cases of experience). Within the matrix based on 7 versus 7 (opinion versus experience, Table 1), we found 22 statistically significant items (7 – the same versus the same, and 15 – duplicate). This proves that in the case of fans, there is the stronger connection between opinion and experience than in the case of different kinds of visitors (e.g., supporters) in comparison to Hurych & Scholz (2017). Firstly, we focus on the data displayed in the diagonal (the selected opinion versus the same experience). We can see statistically significant correlations (on the 5% level) in all 7 cases. All these correlations are positive. The highest scores are registered in the cases of racism (0.43), firing pyrotechnics (0.32), and vulgar chants in the stand (0.28). Concerning all the correlations displayed in Table 1, we can note that there is just one case of a negative correlation (throwing object onto pitch/opinion versus pitch incursion/experience). However, this negative correlation amounts to just -0.01 and is not statistically significant. Thus, we don't register any controversies in our general prediction that the logical links between opinion and experience would be positive within our sample.

Table 1: Spearman Correlation Matrices

Spearman Rank Order Correlations MD pairwise deleted / Marked correlations are significant at $p < .05000$							
Experience Opinion	Vulgar chants in the stand	Firing of pyrotechnics	Damaging the stadium and other riots	Racism	Pitch incursion	Throwing an object onto the pitch	Boos
Vulgar chants in the stand	0.276348	0.145381	0.074255	0.249558	0.048922	0.151148	0.149519
Firing of pyrotechnics	0.266691	0.315353	0.053933	0.248928	0.139200	0.138003	0.215737
Damaging the stadium and other riots	0.132418	0.284410	0.117090	0.230706	0.116062	0.074779	0.163741
Racism	0.047485	0.114949	0.231051	0.428119	0.038195	0.117466	0.164052
Pitch incursion	0.124907	0.022453	0.086063	0.181528	0.185168	0.099196	0.110182
Throwing an object onto the pitch	0.179884	0.136806	0.042381	0.137425	-0.009370	0.159094	0.174170
Boos	0.230622	0.086268	0.088235	0.178727	0.125831	0.156495	0.199596

For a further detailed examination, some other statistical instruments were applied. Some more detailed relations could be discovered via the CLA because this instrument focuses directly on searching for connections like these (Figure 1). The linkage distances display the higher rate of correspondence between the experience with different kinds of behavior (firing pyrotechnics versus damaging the stadium, firing pyrotechnics versus racism, etc.). Our focus is more on the links between opinions and experience. Here we can see the link of damaging the stadium/opinion and a cluster of experience containing five kinds of experience. The second higher correspondence of any kind of opinion is between racism/opinion, and a cluster consisted of all 7 kinds of experience and is damaging the stadium/experience. This figure proves the numbers coming from Table 1, but it is more illustrative to state some facts. One of them is that the participants' answers concerning experience are more compound than their answers concerning opinion (these are more diversified).

Although the correlations between the pairs (the selected opinion versus the same experience) are statistically significant in Table 1, the rates of their linkage distance in Figure 1 show that the scale values concerning opinions of the selected participants were highly diversified.

For this reason, we decided to apply one more statistical method, which is based on a slightly different principle of data evaluation. We selected the COA. This method is based on examining the row and column coordinates. This method was applied in all 7 cases of the same kinds of behavior (opinion versus experience). The COA displays clusters of coordinates that have to be described, evaluated, and interpreted individually. No matter how clear the basic logic of making clusters is, there is always some space for a subjective decision of the investigator on how to construct the real cluster. We selected four cases where some clusters can be identified and present them here in the results with brief comments. More detailed interpretations are provided in the discussion.

Figure 1: Cluster Analysis

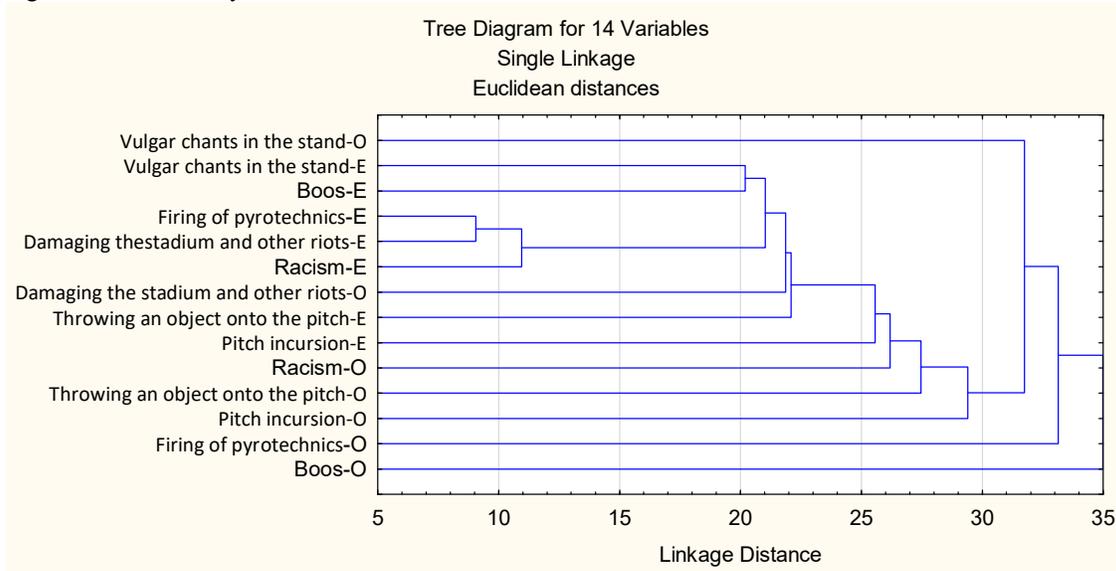


Figure 2 deals with vulgar chants in the stand. We identified two clusters here. The left cluster (containing the 1-value) shows that those who don't consider vulgar chanting as a problem (their rate of opinion is 1 = 1O) often belong to the ones who always participate in it (always participate = 1E). Those who display an average rate in opinion (3O) are clustered with those who rarely participate in vulgar chanting (3E), which means the results: 1O/1E and 3O/3E. Figure 3 deals with the firing of pyrotechnics. The cluster expressed of the solid line shows the fact that those who never participate in firing pyrotechnics (4E) often belong to those who consider pyrotechnics as a serious problem (3–5O). The dashed line makes a cluster in which those who never participate in this behavior (4E) can also belong to the group for which it presents not such a serious problem (2O). The major cluster brings 3–5O/4E.

Figure 2: COA – Vulgar Chants

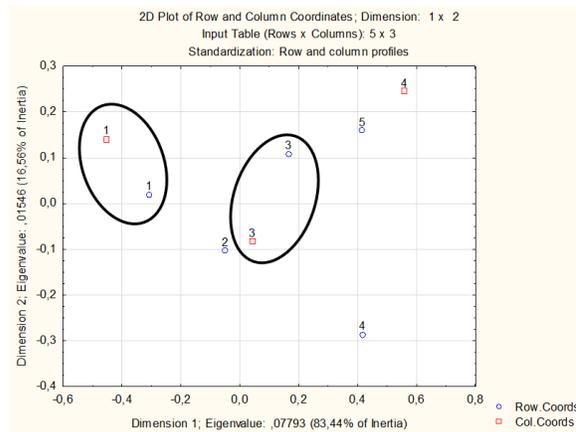


Figure 3: COA – Firing of Pyrotechnics

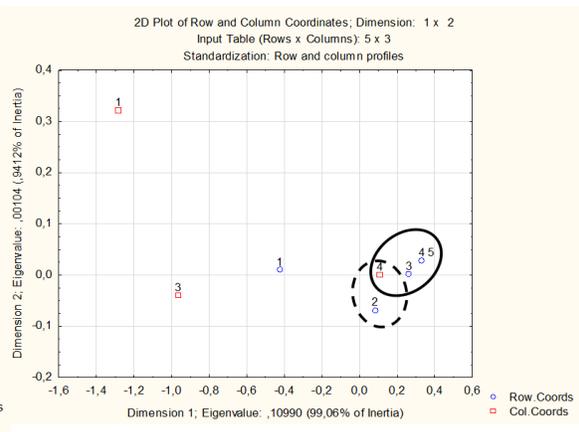


Figure 4 deals with expressions of racism. The cluster marked with the solid line expresses those who consider racism as a very serious problem (4–5O), and never participate in any demonstration of it (4E). The dashed-lined cluster presents quite a neutral group concerning expressions of racism (2–3O versus 3E). The major result is 4–5O/4E. Figure 5 deals with booing (it includes booing the referee as well as booing players). Here we can identify two dashed-lined clusters. Both the clusters are relatively ambivalent for the interpretation. This figure is included as an illustration that some cases of the COA can hardly be applied in displaying the links between the rates of opinion and rates of experience. Here the participants consider booing as a small problem (1O, or 2O), but they participate in it just rarely (3E), or never (4E).

Figure 4: COA – Expressions of Racism

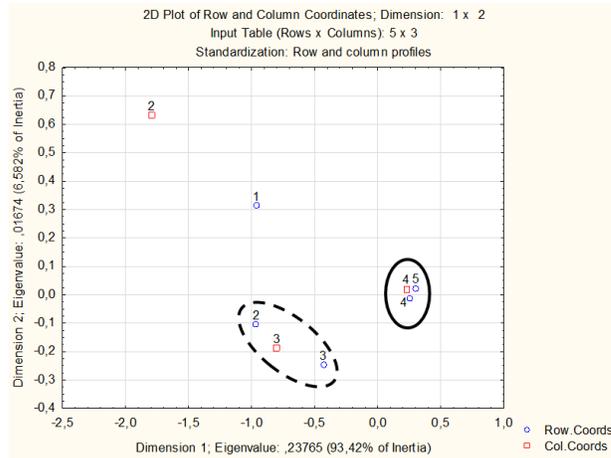
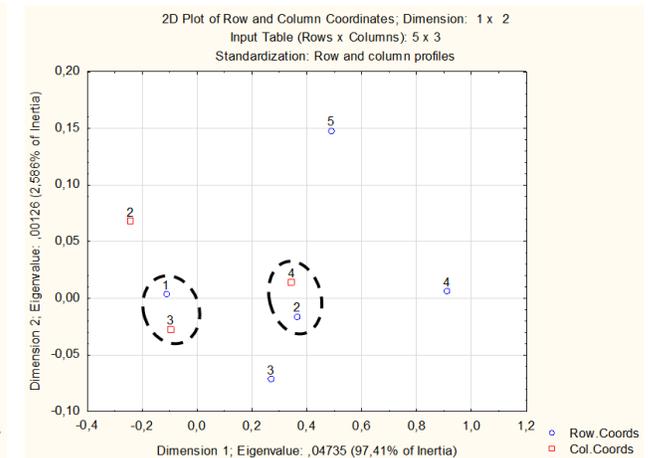


Figure 5: COA – Boos



Discussion

Within the sample, which in the case of fans has quite a significant number of participants, we can focus on some interesting results linked to our methodological goals. The critical question is how much and in which way are outputs displaying the rates of opinion related to the outputs concerning the experience.

Studying the results, it seems as though there are some consequences, but their interpretation can be quite complicated. The links are not linear, and even if some of them are statistically significant and some of them aren't, we need to get closer to the core of the problem and try to explain the selected cases particularly. We aim to focus (within this discussion) on three cases that are included in the COA.

There is quite a visible trend observed in the case of Figure 2 (vulgar chants). Here we can state that those who consider vulgar chants as a small problem often participate in it (1O versus 1E). Those who consider it a problem on level 3O participate in it just rarely (3E). Here we can see quite a significant logical link. This could be seen as a kind of harmony with the deontic ethic discourse (harmony in opinion and experience).

Examining Figure 3 (firing of pyrotechnics), we can see that the situation is slightly analogical to the previous one, but it's different in detail. Those who never participate in firing pyrotechnics (4E) are located in a cluster together with those who consider it as a medium or big problem (2–5O). Those who think pyrotechnics are a small problem (1O) could be found on diverse levels of experience. None of them is significant for the clusters, but they are closer to 1–3E than to cluster 4E. This means that they participate in it, always, often or rarely. We could interpret this figure like the majority of those who consider pyrotechnics as a substantial problem and never participate in it. This also corresponds to the principles of deontic ethics. For the rest of the participants, there are more different positions included. They are not clear from the locations of the clusters.

Concerning Figure 4 (racism), we can identify two clusters. One is significant (solid-lined) and includes those who consider racism as a substantial problem (4–5O). In the figure, it is clear that the majority of these participants never participate in it (4E). Here the cluster is very cohesive. The other cluster is not a compound one, but it displays those who participate in demonstrations of racism just rarely. These belong to the participants who don't consider racism as an urgent problem (2–3O). The participants included in 1O and 1E cannot be evaluated within the Correspondence Analysis. It is the third case where we can find a deontic link. This concerns the group which considers racism a substantial problem. For this group, participation in demonstrations of racism is unacceptable.

The last examined figure is presented in Figure 5 (booing). Here we can see two dashed-lined clusters. We can see that a significant group of those who never participate in booing (4E) is clustered with those who consider it quite a small problem (2O). Those who participate rarely (3E) are grouped with those who believe that booing is a tiny problem (1O). The reason could be that booing is generally considered a small (and not very dangerous) problem. Coming just from the figure, we cannot find any significant logical links concerning deontic ethics.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the results of the COA of the other three examined phenomena (damaging the stadium, throwing an object onto the pitch, and pitch incursion) weren't statistically significant at all. Within our investigation, we tried to find several interconnections between the opinion and experience manifested by the participants which are deontologically-grounded. It consists of the care of duties and obeying rules during some specific situations. Some logical links between opinion and experience should be evident in the ground of deontological ethics. However, the sample of participants cannot be considered as a representative resource for any general interpretation. On the other hand, this group was large enough to provide some results with the potentiality of statistically significant outputs.

Our research can present just a few initial steps of investigations into the ethical aspects in the area of football visitors. Our aim to examine the possible links and contradictions between the opinion and experience of

football visitors can also represent just one of some possible directions for future investigations. We are aware of this fact and consider this paper a modest contribution to the problems of examining the ethics of football fans and visitors.

Some selected ethical aspects concerning contradictions in the stated opinions and real experience were examined within this particular group of participants. Research conducted by Hurych & Scholz (2017) points out that the results were interpreted under the deontic and utilitarian positions. It is necessary to stress that the mentioned interpretation was based on the ethical approach, and the focus of the paper was mainly philosophical. There were some primary obtained data presented as a matter of the ethical issues within the discussion. Concerning the focus of this paper, no more sophisticated statistical method was used to prove the results within the article. However, the extensive investigation brought numerous interesting outputs that deserve a more detailed examination.

Within some further papers, we found out that Hurych & Scholz (2017) tried to apply some more exact methods of the quantitative research to the examined sample in order to search for a statistical explanation to some contradictions visible in the comparison of stated opinions and real behavior (or direct experience) concerning some other groups of participants. According to deontic ethics, which focuses not on results but on processes, some logical link between the opinion and experience of the participants should be visible.

The group of supporters/ultras was selected for the paper, which again was based on the ethical approach (deontology versus consequentialism). The authors Scholz & Hurych (2018) used for their interpretation the statistical methods of the CLA and COA. We must state that the outputs from their paper were quite interesting. On the other hand, the limitation of this study was the insufficient number of supporters (only 158 participants). Some relations were not strong enough to provide a significant meaning and clear explanation. For this reason, it makes good sense to focus on the most numerous groups of participants – traditional fans. The three-fold greater number of participants than in the case of supporters can offer at least for the chance to obtain more significant outputs, and that is why this paper was written.

There are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the inability to generalize the research findings could be an issue that deserves mention. In our research, we focused on a Czech football club only. Second, we could not compare and carry out subsequent correlations between other Czech or abroad clubs. No case studies have been published on the unsportsmanlike behavior from a broader philosophical point of view. Nonetheless, the surveyed results must be interpreted with caution and some limitations should be borne in mind.

Conclusions

After evaluating the results and their interpretative examination, we can argue that in the case of Slavia Prague football fans, some links in the discourse of deontic ethics were discovered. It applies especially in the demonstrations of vulgar chanting, the firing of pyrotechnics, and manifestations of racism. Here we can see that the participants who consider those demonstrations a substantial problem never participate in them (or participate in them very rarely). We cannot state the same in the cases of the other four kinds of demonstrations (damaging the stadium, throwing an object onto the pitch, booing, and pitch incursion) where the results were ambivalent. Although we succeeded in finding the correlations in some of these cases, we cannot find any significant outputs within more sophisticated statistical methods of evaluation (the COA, especially). Quite a difficult task is presented by the question of how to apply general principles of deontological ethics in the empirical sociological investigations. The contradiction between expressing an opinion and manifesting behavior is just one of the possible ways. Some limits of our research were mentioned above. Despite these limits, we believe that our approach could be profitable for some other future investigations.

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