



The influence of the football club brand on the formation of the image of the municipal territory

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Abstract

Objective of the study was to assess the possibility of using the achievements of a football club to shape the image of the territory on which the club is based.

Methods and structure of the study. The object of the study is the Sheriff football club. The empirical base was more than 450 publications about the activities of the club.

Results and conclusions. The image of the club is not formed due to one achievement (winning a match), but, on the contrary, a number of different events, especially dramatic ones, emphasize connections with the overall promotion strategy. One of the factors in forming a positive image of Pridnestrovie in the outside world is incoming sports tourism, the flagship of which is the Sheriff football club.

Keywords: *sports journalism, image formation, football club, sports diplomacy.*

Introduction. «Many of the attitudes replicated by the state instantly take the position of national, national ideas that naturally fit into the axiological system of the individual and, more broadly, of society; others require much more time and resources before they find understanding and support from a mass audience. Ideas transmitted by state institutions to the social environment are, in most cases, aimed at modifying the system of socially conditioned identities of the modern individual» [7]. «This study analyzes the phenomenon of states with a deferred foreign policy status as part of the modern geopolitical coordinate system» [3, 5] and the use of sport for the purpose of image formation, which ultimately can lead to recognition of the territory as an independent subject of international relations.

During the Soviet period, this «topic was unattractive for scientific research, apparently due to the fact that «the role assigned to sports publications as a propagandist and agitator of the mass physical

education movement, the limited number of publications and their similarity to each other made the study of sports journalism, from a scientific point of view, unattractive» [1]. The modern period practically everything makes politics or is made politics. Therefore, the topic of sports journalism becomes relevant. «In the information era, the volume and level of requirements for the amount of information and management of information flows in all spheres of society and, especially in such areas as culture, including physical culture and sports, have objectively increased» [2]. Some researchers consider football as part of the entertainment industry. «The development of the modern economy is characterized by the active emergence of new industries. One of them was the entertainment industry, within which several directions gradually emerged, including the sports industry» [8].

Objective of the study was to assess the possibility of using the achievements of a football club



to shape the image of the territory on which the club is based.

Methods and structure of the study. This article is a continuation of the collection of the empirical base of the study by E.O. Sizova, who noted that «the tendencies of the so-called pragmatic approach prevailed, according to which the main value of the sports movement is the sport itself and sports records, regardless of what they are used for and what purposes they serve, as well as the commercialization of sports, when sports are not perceived as a cultural phenomenon, but as an ordinary service, a «product», that is, as a business; aspirations for «high performance sports» pushed athletes to use drugs; stimulated doping and corruption. There is an increase in cruelty and rough play at international competitions; violence and inappropriate behavior of spectators at sporting events, and especially at football matches», and the solution to these problems is part of politics.

The object of the study is the Sheriff football club. «A recognized club that is based in an unrecognized country» - this is how today we can call the Sheriff football club, which took 86th place in the list of the best teams in Europe in 2023 according to UEFA. (UEFA. Club coefficients. Available at: <https://www.uefa.com/nationalassociations/uefarankings/club/#/yr/2024> (date of access: 19.01.2024)).

The empirical base was more than 450 publications about the activities of the club.

Results of the study and discussion. The club, representing the Republic of Moldova and having a training base in the unrecognized Transnistrian Republic, is a unique example of how politics has not yet influenced the development of football.

The modern flagship of Transnistrian football, FC Sheriff, was founded in Tiraspol on April 4, 1997, just a few years after the end of active hostilities between the two banks of the Dniester. Since then, Pridnestrovie has managed to maintain its own flag, local currency and borders, which, however, are not recognized by any country in the world. Despite this, Pridnestrovie has not pursued an independent policy on the football issue. Already from the first year of its existence, «Sheriff» has been taking part in the championships of Moldova. The stadium of the same name, built in 2002 near Tiraspol, is one of the largest and most modern in Moldova.

Over more than a quarter of a century of its existence, FC Sheriff has become the most success-

ful team in the history of Moldavian football, being a 21-time champion of Moldova, a twelve-time winner of the Moldavian Cup, a seven-time winner of the Moldavian Super Cup, and a two-time winner of the Commonwealth Champions Cup.

The club continues to play in the Moldovan football jurisdiction and has represented the country in European cups for many years. However, for a long time his greatest achievement was reaching the group stage of the Europa League, the second most important competition. For the first time, FC Sheriff received the opportunity to participate in the group stage in 2009.

In August 2021, FC Sheriff qualified for the group stage of the UEFA Champions League, becoming the first Moldovan team to achieve this. Thus, Moldova became the 34th UEFA member country whose clubs have ever played in the main tournament of the Champions League. The previous newcomer to the group stage was Azerbaijan in the 2017-2018 season, when Qarabag FC reached the group stage.

In the second round of the group stage of the UEFA Champions League, already in September, at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid, a match took place between Sheriff Tiraspol and Real Madrid, in which the Moldavian club won with a score of 2:1. The main headlines in all the world's sports publications were: «Champions League sensation» (<https://tuk.md/novosti/socium/sport/sensacija-v-lige-chempionov-tiraspol-skij-sherif-obygral-real-v-madrjde-video/>).

This event aroused great interest not only among rivals in the League, but also among a multi-million audience of football fans who learned about the existence of Pridnestrovie.

The example of FC Sheriff is unique in the post-Soviet space, where several self-proclaimed republics have been formed since the early 1990s.

In all other «unrecognized» territories, football is trying to survive, relegated to a secondary place in national championships. Abkhazia and South Ossetia hold their own championships, but their winners cannot participate in tournaments under the auspices of UEFA. Thus, during the years of «exile», FC «Garabagh» won the Azerbaijani championship eight times and represented its country in European tournaments, but its best result was reaching the group stage of the Europa League.

FC Sheriff is very interested in the development of football among youth. As noted in his work V.A.



Korovin «Playing football affects the development of the personality of adolescents. Teenage football players are distinguished by a higher level of achievement motivation compared to their peers who do not play sports. In this case, motivation simultaneously acts as a source of activity and direction of the individual's behavior» [6].

Not only the football club is interested in this, but also the administration of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. It should be noted that the Republic of Moldova, using the image of FC Sheriff on the world stage, is interested in developing the image of this football club, and therefore the involvement of young people in sports. The mass media, which can influence behavior and stereotypes through the use of different behavioral models and characters that are perceived as socially attractive and desirable, will solve this problem together with the club.

On August 16, 2003, the Football Academy of FC Sheriff was founded, the purpose of which is to select talented children and train them to the level of professional football players. Currently, more than 400 children from 7 to 17 years old are studying the basics of football at the academy. The Academy holds a number of international youth tournaments in which school football teams from neighboring countries take part. In addition, in 2022, by decree of the Government of Transnistria, changes were approved in the field of physical education of children and youth: the «Football at School» program was developed and introduced for grades 1-4 and the republican football tournament «Leather Ball» was organized among students in grades 5-11. Thus, Pridnestrovie is popularizing football not only as a national sport in the region, but also creating a new recognizable brand on the world stage.

Nowadays, the importance of sport as a diplomatic tool is noticeably increasing. The use of sports diplomacy is increasing as the development of a systematic promotion of a positive image of the country among other states becomes extremely important. However, the main goal of sports diplomacy is to establish certain relationships between the parties, which official diplomacy cannot always achieve.

In the CIS countries, the dominant sport is football (The Most Popular Spectator Sports Worldwide. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/10042/the-most-popular-spectator-sports-worldwide/> (date of access: 18.01.2024), and its

significant influence on people, public opinion and the prestige of countries and politicians has become an integral tool for solving not only foreign policy, but also domestic political problems, as well as interethnic relations.

Speaking about football diplomacy in relations between Moldova and Transnistria, two main aspects can be put forward: the first is official meetings of high-ranking officials during national or international football championships, and the second is the direct participation of football fans in creating public diplomacy with the aim of uniting people, regardless on their nationality, beliefs and language of communication. At times, this process is accompanied by some incidents.

Some of the official «football meetings» were held in 2010-2011. ex-Prime Minister of Moldova Vlad Filat and ex-President of Transnistria Igor Smirnov, including at the games of FC Sheriff (The Prime Minister of Moldova and the head of Transnistria will meet again at a football match. Available at: <https://korrespondent.net/world/1121837-premer-moldovy-i-glava-pridnestrovyya-vnov-vs-tretyatsya-nafutbolnom-matche> (date of access: 18.01.2024). Pridnestrovian and Moldovan media closely watched «football diplomacy», since at such informal meetings, in addition to sports, general issues of a bilateral nature were discussed and a number of agreements were even put forward on the Moldovan-Transnistrian settlement, most of which were never implemented [4].

An example of the second hypostasis of «football diplomacy» in Moldova is the incident on June 4, 2013, when during the final match of the Moldova Cup, before the start of the game, a military band was presented on the football field, which was supposed to perform the anthem of the Republic of Moldova. However, fans from the visiting sector began to show defiant behavior, thereby showing disrespect for the anthem ceremony («Football diplomacy» was replaced by a «football war»: the Transnistrian club was fined for «disrespect» for the anthem of Moldova. Available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1667359.html> (date of access: 18.01.2024). Thus, the failure in public diplomacy led to the fact that the subsequent place of «football diplomacy» between Chisinau and Tiraspol remained only in history.

OSCE Chairman Audronus Azubaris noted that football fans became the first «diplo-



mats» to establish informal relations on both sides of the Dniester (Audronus Azubalis. «Football Diplomacy» and Transnistria. (<https://www.golosameriki.com/a/obse-usa-prednestrovie-2011-02-09-115650684/202863.html>) (date of access: 18.01.2024). However, the possibilities of public diplomacy are not unlimited, but constant exploitation the possibilities of «sports dialogue» cannot replace official negotiations.

Conclusions. The image of the club is not formed due to one achievement (winning a match), but, on the contrary, a number of different events, especially dramatic ones, emphasize connections with the overall promotion strategy. One of the factors in forming a positive image of Pridnestrovie in the outside world is incoming sports tourism, the flagship of which is the Sheriff football club. By attending world sporting events, tourists can diversify their holiday and get acquainted with local traditions, expanding their horizons.

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