

„Football‘ - or how to reach every single Kowalski

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media than any other sport.” For Czapliński, as for many other social activists, football is a tool to achieve changes in society. However, there are lots of different approaches how this tool should be applied. Some NGOs, like the “Polish Homeless Street Soccer Association” are more directed towards the personal development of the players. As part of their activism they are members of an active football team, manage tournaments and support other teams or organizations. Other NGOs want to reach the general public through campaigns around mega-events, educational projects and other awareness-raising activities. Although motives and aims of NGOs using football as a platform for their projects may differ, they have a common expectation: generating more media attention, increasing their own network and reaching “every single Kowalski,” speaking in the words of Jacek Purski from “Never Again” Association.

NEVER AGAIN Association

This independent association is the most important anti-racist organization in Poland. It was founded in 1992 and since 2002 they are running a campaign that is called: “Let’s kick racism out of stadiums.” From that year on, the work on the pitch forms an active part in the activities of Never Again.

When Jacek Purski starts talking about his involvement in EURO2012 in Poland and Ukraine, one suddenly understands what an important role his association has played in this tournament.

With enthusiasm he describes the unique opportunity to organize the campaign “Respect Diversity – Football unites” in the scope of EURO2012. “We want to be part of this huge commercial event in order to reach this every single Kowalski who has never heard about racism. But when he goes to the stadium he would join any racist activity because he thinks it’s part of the support.” Purski states the message of the campaign very clearly: “All right, you can be a supporter, you can be Jan Kowalski. Have your own ticket at the EURO2012! But when you hear racism, when you see racist flags, just intervene and don’t be silent! Don’t just reject it but also react!”

With this main message Never Again together with “fare”-network started one of their biggest campaigns. In the run up to the tournament they developed specific training programs for teachers and for stewards, match day officials and police spotters. Furthermore there were many different sporting activities and cultural events promoting the campaign and putting anti-racism on the main public agenda.

HOMELESS Street Soccer World Cup

“You need bread to survive but the positive energy you get from books, sport, playing cards and

so on.” Jacek Czapliński, an elderly man with grey hair and belly is one of the initiators of the Polish Homeless street soccer national team. He knows what he is talking about. He has been an alcoholic as a young man and made his way back to a normal life. Since 2003 he is organizing the Polish Homeless Street Soccer National Team and preparing his players for tournaments all over the world. The association uses the power of football to motivate and help the homeless and addicted people to overcome their problems and find their place in the society. [When Czapliński talks about the feeling of taking part in the Homeless World Cup he quickly gets emotional. “When we stood on the pitch for the first time, I felt suddenly part of something bigger. And after singing the national anthem, tears were on my cheeks and also of my teammates’. Later the players realized that it was the first time in their lives that they felt part of Poland.”]

Through the Polish Homeless Street Soccer Team and the possibility to travel to such a big event in other parts of the world, the participants got energy to manage their lives back home. That’s why the most important work is to prepare the players for the World Cup so that afterwards they can directly return to start a new life, as Czapliński explains. However, he says further, the association will always be in touch with the former participants and also the friendships built during this intense process are kept in the future.

Bread instead of Games

Bread instead of Games is a campaign organized by a coalition of feminist, anarchist and worker activists from Poznan to protest against EURO2012. “We wanted to show that there are lots of people in Poland who didn’t want to host the mega-event EURO2012,” states Weronika Zawadzka, a young member of Konsola Women Association. “This decision was made only by elites and doesn’t consider the concerns of the citizens!”

Through a massive demonstration in front of the town-hall of Poznan, several publications and an alternative small scale tournament in the idle former stadium, the organizers spread their message: “Bread - not Games!” They are using the huge international platform of EURO2012 to kick off an open critical public debate. “Because media payed so much attention to the tournament, we also reached much bigger effects with our campaign!” Both Weronika and Krystian Szadkowski, a member of an academic anti-capitalist journal see the events as a chance to network with other local NGOs while promoting their own concerns. Furthermore Krystian says that it is important to always connect the discourse and activities of the academic or NGO-level to the broader society.

Or in the words of Jacek Purski: “Don’t make events from friends for friends but go out and reach the every single Kowalski!”

No sport is more subject to social campaigns, events, seminars and other social movements than football. In one way or another, this leisure activity serves as a platform for more serious and urgent topics, like gender issues, reintegration of marginalized people, or the fight against racism and for diversity. But what’s so special about football that it has the power to raise and unite millions of people?

Jacek Czapliński, founder of the „Polish Homeless Streetsoccer Association,” sees the main potential for football in its uniting character. “Football is team sport,” he says. “That means that everyone involved in it has a responsibility towards the team, has to engage in teamwork and is part of a bigger team spirit.” Additionally he stresses the popularity of the sport in Poland. Every Pole has, at least, some experience in the field of football, “because of this popularity it is easier to get funding for social projects connected to football,” he states further, “and what’s more, football gets much more attention by the