

# **From the football field to the communicative field: Embedding entrepreneurial strategy and negotiating local past and future during Euro 2012 in the host city of Poznań**

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## **Abstract**

Sports mega-events are strategic instruments in the process of the (re)scaling of cities and regions under the preconditions of the global economy. In this article, I would like to propose a look at UEFA European Championship (Euro 2012) as a crowning achievement of this, and at the same time as a way of sustaining the urban entrepreneurial strategy, which had been realised in Poznań, the host city of the tournament, almost 25 years after Poland's transformation from a centrally planned to market economy in 1989. Anthropologists studying power indicate that in order to gain support of the masses, the elite must convince them that its sectional interests present the wider public or national interest. This is often done by exploiting the symbols of the past, which can be (positively) valued by the community. On the case of Euro 2012 I analyse how the local myths and traditions of resourcefulness were invoked in Poznań to embed an entrepreneurial urban strategy and how the same myths were called upon to legitimise new techniques of governance (governmentality), which mark the shift in attention from the system onto the entrepreneurial self. However, the very same tradition of resourcefulness was used by the opposition to challenge the urban policies, including the organisation of the mega-event. Euro 2012 triggered a discussion on the extent to which the urban strategy corresponds to the local knowledge. The government's performative actions opened the communicative field in which the local understanding of entrepreneurship, public good and development were negotiated, while the government's strategy and rhetoric was questioned as being at odds with the local beliefs and expectations.

**KEYWORDS:** sport, global economy, local policies, Poznań, Euro 2012

## **Introduction**

In January 2013, I was invited to a meeting with a high-ranking civil servant in the City Hall in Poznań to discuss the promotional effect of the European Championship in football (Euro 2012), which had taken place the previous June and July.<sup>1</sup> We had first met and cooperated a couple of years earlier, when the company I worked for back then negotiated the terms of the city's patronage of one of its annual events. In contrast to the professional conversations we had had previously, this one was held in a relaxed, even cordial atmosphere. However, the language my interlocutor used was far from colloquial. I knew it well from my professional experience: it was specific marketing jargon, in which one speaks about resources or customers rather than citizens or, simply, people, and when one's insights are often justified by reference to top publications on branding. From his appearance and patter, he might well have been an account executive in an advertising company. In fact, he seemed to be *more* like an account executive than a civil servant, and when, during our conversation, I talked about 'civil society,' he looked at me bewildered: 'I haven't heard this term in years.'

By that time, despite pre-event official prognoses that the Euro would 'boost the economy' on both the local and national levels (Euro to boost economy 2012) and change Poznań into a "dream city" (Rembowski 2007), the city authorities – now the main, if not the sole voice of the previously much more diverse political and business coalition lobbying for the tournament – had already announced that economic profit was never their goal, and what was really at stake during this game were the promotional benefits and the city's international image as an open, organised and European metropolis (Euro to sukces organizacyjny 2012). The tournament left the city drained of public resources and four years after the tournament its debt amounted to 1.8 billion zloty, approx. €420 million (Wieloletnia prognoza finansowa miasta 2016). The city stadium, the main infrastructural investment for Euro 2012, whose rebuilding was to be financed from state and EU funds, was almost solely paid for out of the city purse; moreover, soon after the tournament, the venue's private management announced that hiring it out for concerts and events other than football matches was unprofitable, turning it from a public resource into a football club's ground. Although the city made several infrastructural investments (known as the Euro investments and some of them co-financed from the EU funds or by private investors), their costs and the city's input were predominantly underestimated (cf. Flyvbjerg et al. 2003) and their opening often delayed, with probably the most striking example being the main junction in the city centre, the Kaponiera roundabout, which opened in September 2016, more than four years after the tournament. This discrepancy between the promises of an economic boom and the debt-laden reality made many formerly enthusiastic local politicians change their opinion about hosting the event. This explains why, in the autumn of 2012, just a few months after the Euro, the mayor asked the city council to support him in his bid to organise yet another sporting event, the 2018 Youth Olympic

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Games, and in borrowing 77 million PLN (approx. €17.7 million) for this purpose, he was supported by only four councillors, whereas twenty-seven voted against the project (MIO 2018 nie 2012; Grobelny chce milionów 2012; cf. Kowalska 2016).

However, my interlocutor interpreted this change as based solely on personal antipathies, and the voting as a *political* demonstration against the mayor in office. Interestingly, dividing the political from the non-political clearly helped him to sustain the logic in which authorities' decisions on strategy and promotion are *beyond* politics, hence indisputable and rational (Fairclough 2001; cf. Candea 2011). He pointed out that Euro 2012 had first and foremost a promotional function, just like the General National Exhibition (*Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa*, PeWuKa), a legendary mega-event of its time, held in Poznań in 1929, ten years after it regained independence from the Prussian regime after the end of World War I, and which acted as a sign of progressiveness and modernity of the young Polish statehood. The exhibition was a great propaganda success (PeWuKa Bis 2014). Although a financial failure, PeWuKa was highly praised afterwards, especially by the elites, as it both helped to reposition a formerly Prussian Eastern stronghold in the Polish state and demonstrated the organisational and entrepreneurial skills of the locals on the national stage (Znaniński & Ziółkowski 1984). It has had a symbolic role in the local narratives about the city's character and development and was used by the local authorities as a vital point of reference in justifying the decision to organise a sports mega-event, albeit an expensive one.

The long-term urban strategy encompassing the Euro 2012 campaign was focused on advertising the city as an entrepreneurial and business-friendly "metropolis" able to attract new "resources": people, money, and business. The audience to whom this message was addressed was not only the international guests of the football championship, but also local citizens, who, as my interlocutor told me, previously 'had not entirely got rid of their socialist mentality' and now had the opportunity to become and present themselves as proactive, modern and truly European. This was, therefore, a grand governmentality project (Foucault 1997; Rose et al. 2006) aimed at governing people both on the social and individual levels. When I referred to arguments raised by the critics of the event, who asserted that the tournament sucked public resources out of the city and benefited only the private sector directly engaged in the preparations for the event, the civil servant shrugged his shoulders: those who "knew how" to seize this chance definitely benefitted from the event. This, again, was part of the local understanding of the "art of government"; from spring 2009 onward, Poznań advertised itself as "the city of know-how", so this argumentation definitely seemed in line with the urban promotional strategy, whose goal was to present the city as a business centre with a long entrepreneurial tradition and inhabited by resourceful, active citizens.

When I went on to say that many citizens that I had talked to would rather see public money being spent on public services rather than on a promotional campaign and football club stadium, he became irritated and pulled a face: 'I am pissed off by criticism from people who do not know what it is all about.' These claims to knowing better "what it is all about" were repeated by many people who were engaged in organising the tournament. I heard that a modern city needs a stadium as much as it needs a sewage system,

that it is not built to make money, but for promotional reasons, and that ‘those people [the critics] simply have to understand this is the reality.’ Those were rational, *modern* and, as indicated above, non-political decisions. Any economic objections were discredited as “emotional” or made by ‘someone who cannot count at all,’ because ‘it is like in the old joke, if you do not play the lottery, you cannot win.’ The real experts, such as the auditing and consulting company Deloitte, which prepared reports brimming with praise after the tournament (2012; cf. Ministry of Sports and Tourism 2012), confirmed that the event was a great success. If some people questioned that, it was because of their lack of knowledge and/or irrational (based on personal antipathies) justification, as I was told by a member of the management company which took over the stadium after the event:

The question is, whether the public can actually understand everything ... whether people are experts in politics and governance, and whether they can rationally justify ... the work of people who are in charge of the city today. It is, let's be honest, a rhetorical question, and of course, the answer is no, they are not, because where would they have this knowledge from?

While discussing para-ethnography as a multi-sited method when researching institutions, Douglas Holmes and George Marcus (2005) advise us to acknowledge ‘that we are dealing with counterparts rather than “others” – who differ from us in many ways but who also share broadly the same world of representation with us’ (ibid.: 250), even if ‘it is perhaps disturbing to think that we are more like some managers of capitalism or some politicians than we would like to admit’ (251; cf. Shore & Wright 2011).

If we think of authorities as people with power acquired (Verlot 2001: 345), i.e. flux and contextual, it is easier to understand that they could see their activities as non-political and rational because they epitomised a specific knowledge that brought them to power (they were its *representations*). However, Euro 2012 was a moment of crisis – or rather, a peak or culmination of small crises – of those common-sense assumptions about governing and development, and crisis understood as a significant turning point (Narotzky & Besnier 2014) can be seen as ‘a concept [which] holds together two meanings of different orders that defy resolution’ (ibid.: 7). Although I would be reluctant to make such a clear-cut division between the old and the new (emerging) order, I propose thinking of a crisis as a specific moment when values, expectations and very often inexpressible assumptions about individual identity and social reality are being brought up and vividly discussed. As such, a crisis is the moment of *exposing* the local beliefs and expectations, which makes it particularly interesting for ethnographic observation.

## **Euro 2012 within the modernisation project**

The structural transition from the centrally planned to market economy in Central and Eastern Europe coincided with the global competition for increasingly mobile capital, which gave rise to entrepreneurial cities worldwide (cf. Harvey 1989; Hall & Hubbard 1998; Jessop 2013a, 2013b). Local governments taking part in the process of scaling adopt growth-oriented strategies, and their politics revolve around mastering urban branding (Brenner 2011; cf. Harvey 2005). As the functions of the European state be-

come increasingly decentralised and privatised, governments become highly dependent on their ability to attract private capital and investment and their willingness to govern through public-private partnerships.<sup>2</sup> Under such conditions, Urban Development Projects (UDPs), including sports mega-events, are perceived as valuable promotional opportunities (Swyngedouw et al. 2002).<sup>3</sup> Scholars studying UDPs note that ‘the relative decline of importance of the world fairs and expositions has gone hand-in-hand with the growth in the significance of sports mega-events for urban and regional growth and place competition’ (Hall 2006: 60). Sport mega-events, like big trade events before, are powerful tools of propaganda and “promotional vehicles” (Lowes 2002): they are intended to change the image, the form (infrastructure) and the people (Whitson & Horne 2006).

In this paper, I am not analysing *how* Euro 2012 enabled the private accumulation and control of capital of various sorts, nor do I tackle the *techniques* of governance (governmentality) aimed at ‘investment in civic image’ (Whitson & Horne 2006: 81) and producing more entrepreneurial, competitive subjectivities (cf. Rose et al. 2006; Rose 1999; Shore & Wright 2011).<sup>4</sup> Instead, I am focusing on the specific, dynamic *knowledge*, or regime of truth (Foucault 1997; Rose et al. 2006) behind the modernisation project in Poznań enacted there after Poland’s structural transformation in 1989. I look at the tournament as a crowning achievement of the project, which legitimised the transformation of the city toward being a business- and leisure-oriented location.

To emphasise the processual and changing character of this knowledge, I am referring to Douglas Holmes’ concept of “communicative field” (2014). Holmes argues that economic projects cannot be understood as top-bottom performative actions, but rather as ‘unfold[ed] with the public across a communicative field’ (ibid.: 25), where knowledge is produced relationally and in high dependence on contextual beliefs, sentiments and expectations (Holmes 2014). First, this perspective enables us to stress the reflexive nature of subjects (ibid.), who influence institutions in order to meet their needs. Second, I see it as shifting attention from the performative function of official discourses (including policies and strategies) to beliefs, sentiments and expectations, i.e. to the social scene in which those discourses are being embedded and to which they must refer in order to suc-

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<sup>2</sup> Although this statement is true for many other countries and locales, it would be abusive to speak about “the state” in general here; I would be also reluctant to talk about the “Western state”, as in the EU context I find this term more divisive than accurate. This account, therefore, is explicitly EU-centric.

<sup>3</sup> Large-scale Urban Development Projects, including mega-events have been studied in depth by sociologists and human geographers worldwide as both hallmarks and strategic instruments in the process of the re/scaling of cities and regions under the preconditions of the global economy, see also: Roche 2000; Flyvbjerg 2014; Swyngedouw 1997; Brenner & Theodore 2002a; 2002b; Brenner, Jessop, Jones & MacLeod 2003; Smith 2003; Gaffney 2015. This vast research, however, has been mostly focused on figures and procedures, whereas I analyse how urban strategy and policies, including Euro 2012, resonated with the set of local virtues and traditions.

<sup>4</sup> In Poznań, as the introductory ethnographic vignette demonstrates, ‘changing people’s mentality’ was one of the goals of hosting the tournament in the city. One of the main advertising slogans of the tournament, ‘We are all the national team’ (Wszyscy jesteśmy drużyną narodową), was aimed at engaging everyone in the project of building an image of a truly European, developed country of friendly people. This was part of the campaign which was ‘designed to legitimate the actions of urban growth coalitions by expressing them as being necessary for the betterment of the community-as-a-whole’ (Schimmel 1995, in Lowes 2002: 82–3). In Poznań, Euro 2012 was meant to encourage local citizens to support the great cause, and become active entrepreneurs and consumers.

ceed. I am proposing looking at the discussion which peaked during Euro 2012 as such a communicative field: an arena of negotiations to the extent that the proposed strategy meets local context, and the original “promissory vision” (Holmes 2014) of the post-transformational modernisation project.

## **Embedding entrepreneurial strategy**

On one hand, power holders are the movers and shakers: ‘groups whose “cultural capital” positions them above their fellow citizens and whose decisions crucially shape what happens in the wider society’ (Shore 2002: 4); in other words, whose interests and values turn out to be hegemonic (Gramsci 1971). On the other, the general public must affirm the power holders’ position of superiority, and ‘an elite must convince the masses that its sectional interests represent the wider public or national interest; i.e. it must seek to demonstrate its ‘universalistic functions’ of service to the public’ (Shore 2002: 2). Anthropologists studying power indicate that it is typically legitimised by exploiting the symbols of the past, which can be (positively) valued by the imagined community. Michael Herzfeld shows how through ‘monumentalizing the past’ (2000: 234) power holders influence what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. In his recent overview of influential anthropological research on political leadership, Shore recalls Maurice’s Bloch study of the Merina of Madagascar, where leaders ‘imbue their speeches with a repertoire of allusions, allegories, images, and metaphors that are typically confined to ‘a body of suitable illustrations, often proverbs or scriptures, which tend to be fixed, eternal and orthodox ... predetermined codes that Bloch calls “linguistic rituals”’ (Shore 2014: 186). This reference to the authority of the supreme, “eternal” order is also crucial for Marshall Sahlins’ analysis of how local founding myths influence decisions and actions of contemporaries (1985). The entrepreneurial strategy in Poznań was also developed by referring to symbols from the past, while the past was simultaneously monumentalised or articulated (Clifford 2001) to sustain the rhetoric and the practice.

One of the main founding myths in the narrative accompanying the post-transformational modernisation project in Poznań, especially Euro 2012, was the General National Exhibition mentioned previously, held in the city in 1929. In Poland, which was newly reunited following the Partitions (which at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ended the existence of the state for 123 years, dividing it between the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria), the exhibition established the image (or rather: self-image) of Poznań as a truly European city and trade centre. It initiated its long tradition of international exhibitions, also linking it with Western Europe in the post-war period: Poznań International Fairs was a window to the world during the communist times, with foreign guests brightening the city with their presence (and hard currency) a few times a year.

The legend of the event was brought up during my conversations in the City Council on numerous occasions. Mayor Ryszard Grobelny, one of the greatest advocates of the tournament, on several occasions compared Euro 2012 to the Exhibition, and himself to Mayor Cyryl Ratajski, “the father of PeWuKa” (Grobelny 2014). This comparison, however, as my interlocutors would stress, was highly debatable, as the General Exhibition, although the moment of a great surge in investment, was directly authorised in the local experience in international trade and business and tradition of scrupulous, organic work (*praca organiczna*), denot-

ing the local positivists' belief that the efforts and energy of the nation should be devoted to labour, education, and harnessing the economic potential of the Poles. According to narratives surrounding the promotion of the city, Poznań is located on old trade routes and, since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, has grown as a centre of trade and craft, and a vital economic, political, and cultural site in the region. Its turbulent history led to the incorporation of the city and the Greater Poland region into Prussia in 1793 as the Grand Duchy of Posen; these remained part of the Kingdom of Prussia, and then of the German Empire for more than 120 years (from 1848 as the Province of Posen). Traces of the Prussian regime remain visible in the city, particularly in the architecture and layout of the city centre. Moreover, as part of the Empire, Greater Poland benefitted from the 19<sup>th</sup> century's rapid development of capitalism and industrialisation, also thanks to Polish capital and the strong emphasis on the aforementioned organic work among the local community, devoted to educational and economic development rather than unsuccessful insurrections – the latter being, according to the locals, the domain of the other parts of Poland under the Partitions, divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Interestingly, in 1911 the Prussian authorities also organised the first exhibition in Poznań, partly on the premises where subsequent fairs were held, and where the first Polish fairs took place in 1921. The sociological surveys commissioned by the city in 1928 and 1964 (Znaniński & Ziółkowski 1984), a year before PeWuKa and in the heyday of the communist People's Republic of Poland, revealed the citizens' conviction that the character of the city and its inhabitants was defined under the Prussian rule: people learned that their existence and identity depend on hard work, not romantic uprisings, and through their focus on business and by absorbing 'some elements of law, order (or *Ordnung*, a German word commonly used by locals, often in saying "Ordnung muss sein", order must be kept) and culture', they 'became more German' than Polish, or Slavic. The Prussian legacy, therefore, obviously has both positive and negative dimensions. Poznań is seen as a 'Polish city', a 'stronghold protecting Poland against the German flood' (Znaniński and Ziółkowski 1984: 285); nonetheless, simultaneously some characteristics that were supposedly acquired by the citizens of Poznań under the Partitions, in the subsequently independent Poland were actually perceived as their greatest virtues (Znaniński & Ziółkowski 1984). Respondents in both surveys perceived the city as traditionally "clean", "orderly", and "of high western culture", and its inhabitants as diligent and good at business. As we can read in the exemplary response from 1928: 'Cleanliness, order and the solidity of buildings, and some features inherited from the Germans have made Poznań a typical western city ... Gone is the impetuosity, quick temper and Slavic hastiness, and instead there is slow and deliberate calculation typical for the German middle class' (Znaniński & Ziółkowski 1984: 115). Similar answers were given in 1968, with citizens describing themselves as 'diligent and disciplined' (Znaniński & Ziółkowski 1984: 198) and with a strong reverence for the 'virtues of order, scrupulous work and honesty' (ibid.: 199; cf. Karwowski 2005). The reference to the Prussian, bourgeois legacy determining Poznań's character in responses from the 1968 survey is particularly relevant when one realises that after 1945 the city and the whole country became part of the Eastern bloc and their politics was officially reoriented towards the East. This self-image continued to be articulated after 1989, in the post-transformational narrative about the character of the city. In official documents issued by the City Hall, one reads that 'Poznań is known for its tradition of good economy, high

work discipline and thrift' (Raport o stanie miasta 2013: 5), and that the city is 'the unquestionable Polish capital of trade' (ibid.: 6). The origins of this character could be traced back to medieval times; as one of the civil servants recalled, as a kid he liked playing computer games based in medieval merchant cities as they appeared to him to be representations of Poznań. In their research on Poznań, geographers from the city's Adam Mickiewicz University also referred to 'the historically developed features of human capital: entrepreneurship and a high standard of work' (Stryjakiewicz et al. 2007: 1–2), which distinguish Poznań from other cities in the country. They quote Ziółkowski, whose opinion they seemed to share, that the citizens of Poznań are 'perhaps less spontaneous and extroverted [than people elsewhere in Poland], but very reliable and hard-working' (Stryjakiewicz et al. 2010: 17–8). The region's economic and business character and its potential seemed to develop when Poznań belonged to the Prussian Empire: 'despite the restrictive policy of the occupiers, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Poznań's scientific and economic life flourished thanks to the operation of Polish institutions and private enterprises. They competed successfully with Prussian firms, and to do this the city residents had to muster up their dormant resources of creativity and entrepreneurship' (Stryjakiewicz et al. 2007: 3). Those features could truly flourish in what today is presented as the Golden Years of the city – the interwar period. With the legendary PeWuKa as the landmark event, the years 1919–1939 are associated with prosperity and development. In independent Poland, the city made use of its potential and strengths, progressively building up a strong position within the new state, which was only interrupted by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. As the discussion whether Euro 2012 can be compared to PeWuKa clearly shows, the interwar years were the point of reference not only for the mayor's team preparing for the Euro, but also for his critics.

In contrast, the post-war communist period is predominantly seen as a time of imposed power and developmental regression, although Poznań 'was lucky to avoid becoming a heavily industrialised city and had developed commercial functions' (Stryjakiewicz et al. 2007: 2–3). In the current official narrative, the years between 1945 and 1989 appear to be a gap in the country's development. The geographers' unfavourable perception of the communist era is by no means exceptional. My interviewees also differentiated between the glorious interwar period and communism, the latter brightened only by the presence of the International Fair, but overall 'a state of both structural and political-cultural backwardness ... as well as socio-economic stagnation' (Giordano 2009: 300). As Christian Giordano observes, '... the fifty-year period prior to 1989 has been portrayed nearly always as an abnormal hibernation phase or an imposed deviation endured by these societies during their natural advance towards "progress"' (2009: 299; cf. Nagen-gast 1991; Dunn 2004; Stacul 2014; Mokrzycki 2001; Buchowski 2012).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Polish sociologist Maciej Gdula notices that private initiatives were already being promoted by the national authorities back in the 1970s, and sees this as the beginning of capitalist entrepreneurialism and middle-class "culture" in the country. According to Gdula, that year 1970 was much more critical for Polish transformation than 1989 was as it marked a retreat from the egalitarian rhetoric of early socialism and the emergence of new active individuals. Notwithstanding the attractiveness of this perspective, I am more interested in a less universalistic, more local "articulated tradition" (Clifford 2001) of entrepreneurial and middle-class virtues.



In the official narrative, the post-transitional years reopened the region to Europe and gave hope for its desirable growth: new conditions ‘allowed the *rebirth* of entrepreneurship and organisational skills among the residents of Poznań and restored the city to its traditional ‘external openness’ connected with its commercial and communication functions’ (Strykiewicz et al. 2007: 3; author’s emphasis). Clearly, what the authors suggest here was that the transition from a command to a market economy was locally interpreted as getting back on the right track. As Édouard Conte and Christian Giordano write, in the uni-linear vision of history communism is seen as a historical aberration, whereas the passage to post-socialism ‘represents a “return to the future”’ (Conte & Giordano 1999: 6). According to the city’s PR strategy, modernisation of the region started under the Prussian regime and thrived in the interwar period, drawing on local resources and the predispositions of the people of Poznań: their flair for business and acquired virtues of the Prussian bourgeoisie. The years following World War II do not fit the local historical narrative and seem to belong to a different order (or rather disorder, *Unordnung*). Even in the communist period, Poznań was considered by contemporaries as slightly different to the rest of the country, more Western: because of its post-Prussian, middle-class virtues and tradition of diligent work, *Ordnung*, and thrift,<sup>6</sup> exemplified by the presence of the international fairs. In the capitalist system, the ‘natural’ skills of the city’s inhabitants could flourish. The narration on the entrepreneurial character of the city enabled and justified the introduction in the city of both market economy and business-oriented politics: the systemic change was embedded in the local context, linked to the self-perception and beliefs of the imagined community. Before the tournament, the city welcomed guests and prospective investors directly and indirectly referring to this imaginarium, presenting Euro 2012 as the natural consequence of the post-transformational urban project and employing, as Bloch would call them, certain codes, or “linguistic rituals” (1975) in the official discourse:

Poznań is a place where the energy of the New Europe is merged with the civilization of the West... situated in the most economically developed region of Poland, closer to Berlin than to Warsaw. Poznanians can be counted on – they are well-educated, competent and welcoming ... The city is focused on achieving success, grounded on a *1000-year tradition of competence* ... The state of Poland was born in Poznań and it was also the location of the Greater Poland Uprising, the only successful armed bid for independence in Poland and a proof of the *exceptional resourcefulness* of its citizens ... The people of this metropolis also stand out in terms of their *spirit of enterprise, renowned for generations*. During the great economic crisis at the beginning of the 20th century, Poznań managed to establish itself as one of the biggest trading areas in this part of Europe ... (About the city 2012, author’s emphases).

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<sup>6</sup> Those virtues are middle-class in the sense that they are derived from the Weberian understanding of bourgeois ethics, associated with diligence and accumulating wealth, yet living frugally and not consuming excessively.

This ‘spirit of enterprise, renowned for generations’ (About the city 2012) can be seen as the driving force of the developmental discourse in contemporary Poznań, which also justified the organisation of Euro 2012.

## Teddy-bear

A few months after Poland and Ukraine were awarded the championship, the economist Tomasz Achrem published an article titled *Ten myths about Euro 2012* (2007). Ignoring the national hype after the UEFA decision announced in Cardiff and contrary to the authorities’ claims that Euro 2012 would be an enormous boost to the country’s economy and its international standing, the author challenged the common assumptions about the championship: the prognosis of economic growth and the creation of thousands of new jobs; the prospect of cheaper and faster construction projects with new roads, airports and other modern infrastructure; additional funding from the European Union and UEFA; the boost to Polish football; promotion on both the domestic and local levels; the boom in tourism, the advertising industry and telecommunications; and finally, the alleged need for stadiums, which he dubbed the new “Potemkin villages”. While developing his argument, Achrem recalled a dialogue from the Polish comedy *Miś* (Teddy Bear), a cult production from 1980 about the realities and absurdities of the communist system. The protagonist in the movie, a director of a sports club, invested in an enormous teddy bear made of straw, the eponymous *Miś*, which was built in a field without any particular reason. Achrem suggested that Euro 2012 is a contemporary equivalent of *Miś* and argued that the idea of hosting the tournament in Poland did not differ much from the communist logic with its giganto-maniacal projects and monuments erected to the glory of the system. His fine comparison was later picked up by other opponents of the event. Stickers printed by the protest committee Bread Instead of Games (original translation, *Chleba Zamiast Igrzysk*) before the official demonstration against the Championship on the 10<sup>th</sup> June in Poznań pictured the National Stadium in Warsaw with a huge straw teddy bear leaning from behind. Leaflets distributed at the demo announced: ‘And what will we be left with after Euro 2012...? An empty public purse ... and savings ... on culture, social welfare, and education ... You can’t resist thinking of Gierek,<sup>7</sup> and his “modernisation” or “civilizational jump”’ (Chleba Zamiast Igrzysk 2012).

The coalition of business and political actors engaged in the preparations for Euro 2012 justified their actions with the need to dispose of the remnants of the socialist mentality; to “catch up” with the West after the setbacks of communism; to show Europe that Poland is back on the right track of progress and development. This was part of the modernisation project of incorporating Poland back in Europe after the communist “hibernation” (cf. Kowalska 2016). Contrary to the intentions of the organisers, Euro 2012 was not necessarily associated with Western-style modernisation, nor was it universally regarded as symbolising a definitive break with the socialist past. Quite the opposite. Crit-

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Gierek was the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party from 1970 to 1980, who promised economic reform and modernisation of the country. Gierek’s reform of increased availability of consumer goods was based on billion-dollar loans from Western countries, which led directly to the economic crises at the end of the 1970s, the rise of the Solidarity movement in 1980, and the economic turmoil of the 1980s (see footnote 4).

ics compared the logic behind preparing and organising Euro 2012 to the symbols of the bygone socialist era, for example, to the Five-year Plans synonymous with the command economy (*pięciolatki*); to the official celebrations of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, before which cities were cleaned and decorated, regardless of their actual economic and social conditions (in fact, on one occasion Grobelny himself heedlessly compared Euro 2012 preparations to the ‘grass painting’ accompanying the visits of communist first secretaries back in the day); and to the gigantomania of communist leaders (cf. Flyvbjerg 2013).

In Poznań, however, the discussion of the legitimacy of the tournament additionally referred to the local ethos, which seems to be a combination of post-Prussian legacy and attachment to the bourgeois virtues described above. The very same traditions of resourcefulness, *Ordnung* and thrift were used by the opposition to challenge the urban policies, including the organisation of the mega-event. Contrary to the authorities’ expectations, Euro 2012 triggered a discussion on the extent to which the large-scale business- and leisure-oriented urban strategy corresponds to the local self-image. The government’s performative actions opened the communicative field, in which the local understanding of entrepreneurship, public good and development were negotiated. The government’s strategy and rhetoric were then questioned as being at odds with the local beliefs, sentiments and expectations. Euro 2012 was associated with moments in the state’s history and with facets that are not highly valued in the local imaginarium, such as the unsuccessful national uprisings. The comparison to ‘fruitless spurs’ was frequently made in my conversations, first by the opponents, and later also by those city councillors and some business leaders who had since changed their opinion on hosting the tournament. The rhetoric of a “civilizational jump”, which is how the tournament was advertised on the national scale (Euro to boost economy 2012), did not gain sympathy in this city proud of its tradition of organic work, thrift and *Ordnung*. The investments were criticised as hasty, overpriced and uneconomic: poorly managed, not delivered on time, unnecessary, ‘not done in our Poznanian way’ (*zrobione nie po poznańsku*). As I was told in a conversation with a citizen concerned about the government’s politics, Poznań does not have a tradition of spectacular events but has always taken pride in steady work and diligence. He considered football to be rather vulgar entertainment (in contrast to high culture, it is ‘like the difference between vodka and a fancy cocktail’) and was worried that this new ‘taste’ of the power holders would lead to a situation in which Poznań becomes a Brazilian city, with a lot of poverty and a small group of princes who meet at the city stadium for fun and business. There was a significant discrepancy between this possibility and his vision of sustainable development:

Maybe Euro 2012 was a kick, an impulse for growth, for instance, to build highways, but isn’t it paranoia that we don’t build them without that impulse? It should be part of the local government’s programme. Otherwise, *it is as if you only cleaned your house for special occasions* (author’s emphasis).

The gigantomania behind the so-called Euro investments and uneconomical management of these investments (which was justified by the special circumstances surrounding the organisation of the event) was a trigger for discussions about the irrational

and short-sighted politics of the power holders. Euro 2012 was to “show off”, it was inappropriate and much too expensive, as was explained in detail by an urban activist:

Let’s use the metaphor of the family: we sit at the table and create a strategy for the future years, in 20 years we will have our own house, two cars, I don’t know, what else, a bungalow. How will we pay for them? Well, this is not important, it is written there – our own work and bank loans... This is what this city strategy looks like. There is no realistic and credible strategy for making money or fundraising... This *five-year Euro 2012 plan* was a spontaneous strategy, and a strategy should not be spontaneous, spending money like there’s no tomorrow... *Poznań, which seemed to be a rational city, turned out to be as irrational as others ...* Grobelny and his team betrayed the middle class in Poznań, they were interested in big business and it is clearly visible when you look at their priorities; all decisions are favourable to big business, not small or medium-sized (author’s emphasis).

Mayor Grobelny and his “five-year Euro 2012 plan” did not serve the interests of the people who appreciated the virtues of the middle class, which are a constituent part of the local identity: the ethos of entrepreneurship, of thrift, of German-like affection for *Ordnung*. The indebted city began to lack money for the services that determined its standing as clean, well-organised and “Prussian”. Because of the cuts in the budgets for public transportation and municipal roads, street lighting and cleaning, there were days where the streets in the city centre were covered either in snow or in dirt, and remained pitch-dark before dawn and well after dusk. Acknowledging the fact that the money was spent on Euro 2012 rather than on the everyday needs of the community, and that the biggest beneficiaries of the tournament do not rely upon efficient public schooling and the public transportation system led to concern being voiced about the direction in which the city is developing. Subsequently, after 16 years as the mayor of Poznań and the second-round run-off of the local elections at the end of November 2014, he stepped down from office. Significantly, on Internet forums, voters claimed that they did not vote for the other party or candidate but against Grobelny. Asked a few days later about the major successes of his governance, the former mayor pointed to Euro 2012. When the interviewer noted that paradoxically after the tournament everyone was convinced that the mayor would win the next election without hindrance, Grobelny replied that it turned out the citizens always vote for the future, not for the past. However, as I have attempted to show, it is indeed the past, or, more precisely, the imagined past, that had a crucial impact on the citizens’ votes. Citizens were deciding on representations of their past and future as an ‘effective component in the constitution of social practices’ (Rabinow 1986: 240) and ‘representations of a modern order’ (ibid.: 261).

## Conclusion

In Poznań, the local myths were used to embed the post-transformational, entrepreneurial, business-oriented strategy in the city; and to promote individual entrepreneurship among citizens who would simultaneously help to strengthen the image of a business city and know-how to use it for their own benefit. I have demonstrated how the very same

myths were incorporated against the politics of the power holders, which at some point seemed to be at odds with the local middle-class ethos. This is, therefore, a story about a rationalisation behind a specific governmentality: analysis of a particular style of thought, its condition of formation, and the principles and knowledges it borrows from and simultaneously generates (Rose et al. 2006).

That is, of course, just part of the story. Euro 2012 can be seen as only one of the government's "problems" and my interpretation as incomplete. However, I am not arguing that the Euro 2012 Championship should be blamed "for it all"; on the contrary, I tried to emphasise that it was part of a long-term form of politics justified by certain knowledge, albeit indeed a nail in the coffin. Since the Poznanians' self-image as Western and rational might remind the reader of van de Port's *Novosadjani* in the post-Habsburg Serbian city (1999); one can also be tempted to speculate what is the 'really real' (Van de Port 1999: 10), or the 'implicit social *knowledge*' of the city inhabitants that comes to the fore when bad winds start to blow (Van de Port 1999: 21). Posing such a question only stresses the correlation between politics and the specific knowledge behind it even further.

Douglas Holmes showed convincingly how the success of economic – and societal – projects depends on their ability to meet local beliefs and expectations (2014). The old order – and social contract – stops working when power holders fail to recognise and fulfil those expectations and beliefs, as he showed convincingly (and prophetically) for the UK few years before Brexit. This failure of representation can be observed everywhere in Europe under the conditions of the so-called migration crisis and the rise of forces that manage to answer European fears often in the most populist way.

Ethnographic research, by drawing our attention to the beliefs and expectations that shape and are shaped by local knowledges, aids in understanding the historically produced specificity and traditions of various places. As such, it tells a much more nuanced story of 'what rabbit is produced out of the hat of the past' (Smith 1999: 146) and enables a shift from simply *deploring the system* (cf. Ferguson 2014) towards better understanding how people remember their past, how they make sense of their present – and what they want for their future.

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## **Povzetek**

Športni mega-dogodki delujejo kot strateški instrumenti v procesu redefiniranja mest in regij v pogojih globalne ekonomije. V članku predstavljam analizo Evropskega prvenstva v nogometu UEFA (Evro 2012) kot enkratnega dogodka in hkrati dela dolgotrajnejše urbane podjetniške strategije mesta Poznań vse od prehoda v tržno ekonomijo v letu 1989. Antropologi, ki raziskujejo oblast, trdijo, da morajo elite, če si želijo zagotoviti podporo, množice prepričati, da njihovi partikularni interesi predstavljajo širši javni oz. nacionalni interes. To pogosto dosežejo z vpoklicom simbolov iz preteklosti, ki imajo za skupnost neko pozitivno vrednost. V članku analiziram, kako so bili v Poznańu za namene urbane razvojne strategije mobilizirani miti in tradicije in kako je Evro 2012 postal osrednji del te strategije. Posebej proučujem, kako so bili miti uporabljeni za namene legitimiranja novih tehnik vladanja, ki temeljijo na prenosu od sistema k podjetniškemu jazu. Toda ista tradicija je bila uporabljena tudi s strani tistih, ki so nasprotovali urbanim načrtom, vključujoč organizacijo mega-dogodka. Evro 2012 je sprožil razpravo o skladnosti razvojne strategije z lokalno vednostjo. Vladne performativne akcije so tako odprle komunikacijsko polje, na katerem so se srečala različna razumevanja razvoja, javnega dobrega in podjetništva, vladna strategija in retorika pa sta postali prizorišče za izrekanje opozicijskih stališč in pričakovanj lokalne skupnosti.

**Ključne besede:** šport, globalna ekonomija, lokalne politike, Poznań, Evro 2012

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