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Communities of Risk and Cosmopolitanism? A Comparative Study of Football Supporters' Resistance to Processes of Risk and (in)Security

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ABSTRACT

In the sociology of risk, existing literature commonly highlights the catastrophic nature of 'risk'. Following Ulrich Beck's theories, however, the (world) risk society also presents opportunities for cosmopolitan risk communities that emerge from shared experiences of risks and threats, whereby social actors mobilize in a response to experiences of risk. Though, a sociological puzzle—which this paper tackles—relates to what these risk communities look like within an empirical setting. By providing a comparative analysis of football supporters resistance to the management of risk and insecurity in Polish and English football, we analyse how football fans respond to the risks associated with the securitization of football and how they form risk communities in this context. As demonstrated, the risks experienced by fans in both countries have cosmopolitan origins (stemming from, e.g., regulations of supranational organizations), even if they are distributed by national agencies. The article concludes with a discussion of the possibility of a cosmopolitan community of risk emerging among fans from different countries and the potential obstacles to its formation and functioning. It advances our understanding of problems encountered within the redefinition of communities in risk societies.

1 | Introduction: Risk, Connecting People?

For over 30 years, the concept of 'risk' has constituted a central plank of mainstream sociology in line with the rise of emerging, global risks induced by modernity and the reflexive attempts to manage these (Beck 1992, 1999; Giddens 2006; Elliott 2019). Notably, this sociological 'risk turn' has been reflected and accelerated by Ulrich Beck's social theory. This article critically engages with and extends Beck's risk thinking. Specifically, it focuses on the *opportunities* that are inherent within risk societies and risks' potentially damaging consequences. Indeed, while much of Beck's work focused on the (potentially) catastrophic impacts of, and incomplete knowledge individuals and institutions possess about risk, there was always an acknowledgement within his work that risk *could* bring about progressive and even 'good' outcomes. Not only could risk societies, as Beck (1992, 1999) called them, open spaces for democratic scrutiny in traditionally closed off political realms, but levels of optimism is also evident in his later work (Beck 2011, 2015). In 2011, he argued that the existence of global risk, and people's exposure to it, could create and mobilize cosmopolitan *communities of risk* 'across all kinds of boundaries' (Beck 2011, 1350) acknowledging, however, that '[e]verybody is connected and confronted with everybody—even if global risks afflict different countries, states, and cultures very differently' (p. 1348). Therefore, in the face of risk, new transnational constellations of social actors may mobilize and emerge from 'common experiences'. These, in turn, may enable 'collective action, cosmopolitical decision-making and international norm generation' (Beck et al. 2013, 2).

Whilst this is a key starting point for this paper, we argue that, crucially, this aspect of Beck's work remains both theoretically and empirically under-developed, with the exception of climate risks (see Beck et al. 2013; Blok 2018). This is despite the fact that Beck et al. (2013) launched a research agenda for sociologists concerning cosmopolitan risk communities and their challenge of the (inter)national power structures and order; and despite the fact that there is a clear sociological puzzle here warranting engagement: namely, *if,* as Beck suggested, risk may lead to cosmopolitan-oriented 'risk communities'—then, what do they *look like* in an empirical context or in practice? How do they emerge? To explore these sociologically important questions further, this article examines the contestations over risk and insecurity in two empirical settings situated within the European football context, namely Poland and the United Kingdom (UK), and their connection to wider European supporter movements and politics.

In the context of the waves of globally networked, political contention across the 2010s and 2020s, the politicization of football supporters has become increasingly explored in the mainstream sociology (Turner and Millward 2024; Grodecki and Rura 2024; Amann and Doidge 2023). Further, in both Poland and the UK, football supporters have—from the 1980s onwards—been subjected to harsh legal regulations, dataveillance and surveillance technologies and risk categorizations that are unprecedented in modern risk societies (Kossakowski; Lee Ludvigsen; Pearson and Stott 2022; Numerato 2018). In the two countries, political authorities have even, at various times, waged 'war' against so-called 'football hooliganism' (Campbell 2023; Jasny and Lenartowicz 2022). Yet, similarly, risk and (in)security issues are also among the most contested dimensions of football supporter cultures, having led to the emergence of supporter movements challenging, for example, risk management techniques and technologies, the perceived risks to their privacy and their civil liberties being compromised, and football becoming stripped of its *localized* significance, via football and political authorities' infringement of supporters' cultures and spaces (Numerato 2018). Here, it remains important to point out that organized supporter movements that are politically engaged and may even take (political) action, remain only an 'active minority' (Numerato and Giulianotti 2018) and a smaller part of wider supporter communities (in the context of a club, or nationally). Within these wider communities, individuals' political engagement and support for clubs differ according to different subcultures (Pearson 2012), and along the lines of gender (Richards and Parry 2020; King 1997; Pope 2017), sexuality (Millward, 2023) and disability (Brown, 2022). This remains important because within supporter communities, independent supporter organizations cannot speak for *all* supporters (see Hodges 2019), as many fans making up these communities have other aims (e.g., hedonistic, ritualistic or consumption practices) and, while perhaps critical of football's transformations, do not necessarily take political action, or even want to engage politically (Amann and Doidge 2023).

Notwithstanding, to examine how risk communities (Beck 2011) emerge and what they may 'look like', we explore two more context-specific research questions. First, what can football supporters reveal about Beck's (2011) statement that risk connects everybody, although different cultures and countries are affected differently? Second, do supporters in Europe constitute an empirical exemplar of what Beck called a (cosmopolitan) risk communities?

Hence, this article contributes towards a clarification of our understanding of how risk communities may be imagined, realized or hindered beyond the case of climate risks (Beck et al. 2013). By addressing the research questions, we aim to determine whether the global nature of contemporary football fosters the development of cosmopolitan communities of risk, where individuals from different localities collaborate to address shared risks. We consequently argue that 'top-down' attempts to forge a 'cosmopolitan game' are responded to by supporters who primarily engage with new risks in their national, regional, and local identity context rather than through a coherent cosmopolitan community. We conclude by discussing the possibility of a 'cosmopolitan community of risk' emerging among fans from different countries and the potential obstacles to its formation and functioning. Sociologically, this remains significant because it extends our understanding of the tensions between what Beck (2011) called methodological nationalism and cosmopolitanism, while highlighting problems encountered in the *redefinition of communities* in risk societies.

To elucidate such argument, this paper is based on insights drawn from Kossakowski's earlier (2019, 2021, 2014) empirical research into football supporter cultures and 'hooliganism' in Poland and Europe, and Lee Ludvigsen's (2022, 2023, 2024) work on supporters' contestation over (in)securitization processes in English and European football. Yet, before exploring risk communities further in this new, comparative, and empirical context, we start by outlining Beck's theory with a particular reference to risk, cosmopolitanism and 'risk communities'. This, following Beck (2011, 1347), underlined the need 'to redefine the concept of imagined community [...] in relation to imagined cosmopolitan communities of global risk'.

2 | Theoretical Framework: Risk and Cosmopolitanism

It seems impossible to unpack Beck's concept of (cosmopolitan) 'risk communities' without outlining his theory of risk. The mentioned sociological risk turn witnessed from the 1990s and onwards was influenced by the work of Beck (1992) and Giddens (2006). Notably, in *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity,* Beck (1992) observed how new, manufactured risks—as side-effects of modernization projects—were increasingly and reflexively beginning to play out, causing larger societal insecurity and fragmentation than earlier (Mythen 2008), whilst concurrently:

> threaten[ing] to undermine the legitimacy of a whole range of societal institutions, from science and law to the market economy and parliamentary political decision-making, setting in motion also a range of critical civil society (sub-)politics and (self-)critical institutional transformations at local and global scales.
>
> (Blok 2018, 44)

Following Beck (1992), these changes may be located within the epoch of 'reflexive modernity'. Here, paradigms useful to understand the first modernity, including the nation-state, locally-embedded labour, and the individual bound by collective structures and identities, remain inadequate for social analyses. Furthermore, the notion of risk—including its technical and political management—grew into a modern-day preoccupation (Elliott 2019) that shaped politics as these new, man-made risks (e.g., climate change, nuclear power accidents) became less bound by time, space and grew largely uncontrollable within a technologization and globalization frame (Beck 1992, 1999). In this context, the impact of risk on the political and criminal justice levels remains significant. Scholars highlight how the slippery nature of 'risk', relating to its social construction and the paradoxical impossibility of guarantying it, means that authorities and law enforcers may adopt a language of risk and use its (ever-)presence and any alleged increases in risk to adopt new measures and categorize those deemed security risks and potential offenders (Garland 2001). This generates a pre-crime moment, where '[p]reoccupation with individual offenders is overlaid by concern with identifying and classifying suspect populations in order to manage the risks they collectively pose' (Zedner 2007, 265). The temporal preoccupation with the future, in turn, means a range of policies that target *potential* or *possible* risks to public order, anti-social behaviour, as evident in the EU's categorization of so-called 'risk' and 'non-risk' supporters (Pearson and Stott 2022).

Whilst much of Beck's prescribed societal diagnosis and work focused upon the *negative*—even catastrophic and, indeed, unforgiving—nature of risk, we seek here to elucidate his position on some of the opportunities afforded by the risk society in form of cosmopolitan risk communities. Going into the new millennium, in *World Risk Society* (1999), we spot early hints of this. Reflecting on the sociology of risk's future, Beck asserted that '[m]any theories and theorists do not recognize the *opportunities* of the risk society, the opportunities of the "bads"' (p. 152, original emphasis) including the sub-political contestation of expertise and decision-makers that could bring about democratic and progressive solutions. Beck also mentioned the possibilities of a 'community' of shared risks. As he continued, '[t]his, then, is one of the themes I would like to see explored further [...] on a comparative, transnational, transcultural, potential global level' (p. 152).

This article commits to such exploration. Yet, here it is required to invoke Beck's writings on cosmopolitanism—as he argued that '[i]n the second age of modernity [in contrast to modernity's first age] the relationship between state, business and a society of citizens must be redefined' (2000: 94)—beyond a nation-state fixated perspective. Concerning the notion of 'community', this meant that community ties in a cosmopolitan age are no longer confined by place, origin or nation, as Beck (2000) argued for an abandonment of the nation-state society as the 'dominant societal paradigm' in social sciences. Instead, he argued in favour for a *cosmopolitan perspective and turn* in 'social and political theory and research' (Beck and Grande 2010, 409). Accordingly, cosmopolitanism captures a world where risks like terrorism, climate change and financial crises give rise to the emergence of global public or cross-border political cooperation. Hence, Beck's cosmopolitanism does not entail a severance from local diversity but, instead, a methodological commitment to treating various 'modernities' on equal terms. Beck, therefore, moved *beyond* sociological propositions *vis-à-vis* globalization's homogenizing or heterogenizing forces (Petersen-Wagner 2017). This inclusive approach requires manoeuvring beyond methodological nationalism's dichotomic 'either/or' perspective. This is also determined by the etymology of the word 'cosmopolitan' combining 'cosmos' (literally: nature) and 'polis' (city/state). In line with Beck's 'both/and' perspective, cosmopolitanism hence entails 'rooted cosmopolitanism'—by having both 'roots' and 'wings' (Beck 2004)—while also combining both the local *and* the global.

Indeed, Beck's methodological and theoretical approaches seem tailor-made for studying football fans and the sport. This field, after all, has the 'wings' to soar across the global landscape (football as a transnational entertainment and business). Yet, it is deeply rooted at a human level (fans as 'roots'—the keepers of the local identity of the clubs). Both parties are interrelated, but also generate risks with interdependent meanings. Football authorities with global ambitions seek to 'uproot' football from its local foundations (posing a fundamental risk to fans). In turn, supporters—as unpacked later—utilize various means to hinder this—thus, 'clipping the wings' of globally oriented actors. On the one hand, global players like FIFA and UEFA (Włoch 2013) affect the modernisation of stadium infrastructure in the countries hosting the World Cup or 'Euros' (global unification of rules); on the other, though, the stadiums can be the site of an eruption of emotions connected with ethnicity/nationalism and shattering the transnationally imposed forms of participation. In this sense, football and its associated fan cultures cannot be analysed through a global/local dichotomy (Petersen-Wagner 2017; Kossakowski 2014). Essentially, the two spheres are mutually intertwined, rendering Beck's cosmopolitanism even more relevant to such analyses.

2.1 | Unpacking Risk Communities

Concerning the notion of risk communities, we may situate these within the context of what Beck (1999) called 'sub-politics'; where actors on the outside of 'official' or 'formal' politics like NGOs or social movements, increasingly, can have an impact on political decisions. In some writings throughout the 2010s, it is possible to extract a level of optimism or, indeed, a 'tone of hopefulness' (Blok 2018, 44) from Beck's work. For example, extending Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities', Beck (2011) remained adamant that global risks—no longer confined to space/time—enabled the universal possibility of imagined communities of global risk. Hence, the shared vulnerability and experiences of risk, despite national, political and cultural variances and circumstances, bring people together—for example, through transnational environmental activism (see Blok 2018). As Beck (2011, 1353) wrote, though mostly in relation to ecological risks,

> Global risks link people, who actually do not have anything to do with one another (or do not want to).

> Global risks mean that national peculiarities—culture, language, religion, law—have to be pushed into the background to allow cooperation across borders and differences, even where hostility exists.

Building on this, Beck et al. (2013), again focussing on climate risks, noted how one response to risk is the formation of communities seeking social change and transformation, this time using the term of 'cosmopolitan communities of climate risk', referring to:

> [N]ew transnational constellations of social actors, *arising from common experiences of mediated climatic threats*, organized around pragmatic reasoning of causal relations and responsibilities, and *thereby potentially enabling collective action, cosmopolitical decision-making and international norm generation*.
>
> (p. 2, our emphasis)

We argue, however, that the notion of common experiences, collective action, cosmopolitan decision-making and (global) norm generation in a response to risk must not be viewed as confined solely to ecological risk contexts which, admittedly, the majority of the literature focuses upon (i.e., Beck 2011; Beck et al. 2013; Blok 2018)—possibly explained by the fact that climate change constituted 'Beck's favourite example of a truly *global* risk' (Blok 2018, 44). Arguably, Beck's theory and concepts are yet to be fully embraced in studies of social movements and collective action beyond the environmental context (Lee Ludvigsen 2024). This is obstructing, we contend, a full realization of risk communities' potential theoretically and empirically.

Scholars have argued for continued efforts which document the applicability of Beck's concepts and methods (Mythen et al. 2018). Extending risk communities' value sociologically, essentially, remains important in the present-day, not only concerning transnational movements and sub-political responses to the climate crisis, but due to the various outbursts of political contention about risks caused by financial and digital risks and the effects of neoliberal policies, and declining democracy over the last 15 years (Ibrahim et al. 2023). Against this backdrop, this section maintains that —left with limited ideas of what risk communities *look like* in an empirical setting—the field of European football remains particularly promising for solving the wider, social scientific puzzle of how precisely, in Beck's (2011: 1353) words, '[g]lobal risks link people'. This question ultimately concerns not just the study of risk per se: it intertwines with analyses of cosmopolitanism, social movements and (in)securitization in contemporary societies. Such contention rests upon the fact—as unpacked next—that social scientists have established that European football is both an illuminating 'space for resistance' against the risks of political and football authorities promoting an idea of football different to that of the fans (Fitzpatrick 2024) and distinctive site of risk-based thinking and vocabularies in the macro-structural and 'on-the-ground' policing of football supporters (Pearson and Stott 2022; Tsoukala 2009).

3 | The 'War on Hooligans', Supporters and Resistance: A Comparative Analysis

What exactly makes European football supporter cultures a sociologically fertile avenue for understanding risk communities? To explain this, we turn to Numerato's (2018) work. Whilst media headlines and political authorities' discourses have contributed to a view of supporters as 'troublemakers' in Europe (Tsoukala 2009), Numerato (2018) documents how fan activists are reflexive *political actors* who have responded to, and sought to counter, the commercial and repressive powers of political and football authorities—as well as the globalization and commodification of European football. From the 1980s until the present-day, supporter movements have critically contested various aspects of football in their attempts to promote social change. This, crucially, includes security and repressive measures, which constitute 'one of the most commonly contested aspects of contemporary football culture' (p. 14).

Building on this, and incorporating principles from Beck's (1992) risk society, it can be argued that, paradoxically, many supporters across Europe feel that some measures taken by football (e.g., European football's governing body, UEFA) and political authorities (e.g., Council of Europe or the EU guidelines) to *manage risk* in football (i.e., make football 'risk free')—which commonly involves enhanced surveillance, identification cards, banning orders, dataveillance, covert policing—in fact, back-fire and generate new manufactured risks to supporters: for example, risk to fans' privacy and civil liberties; the risk of criminalizing supporters as a social group; or the risk of 'sanitizing' match-day atmospheres (Lee Ludvigsen 2024). Other contested areas of European football that have generated a level of solidarity among supporters include football's commodification. Indeed, we saw this emerge in 2021, when football fans across the Europe stood shoulder to shoulder in protest against the idea of a European Super League, which they felt would be an assault on the national and regional integrity of European football (Doidge et al. 2023). In this case, the power of 'rooted' identities proved so resolute that even actors pursuing cosmopolitan-oriented business strategies in football (e.g., the American owners of English clubs), withdrew from promoting the project.

Thus, if risk communities then compose local, national and transnational constellations of social actors that mobilize from 'common experiences' (cf. Beck et al. 2013), then supporter movements could, prima facie, compose a quintessential exemplar of this because shared experiences consistently lie behind collective action in football (Cleland et al. 2018). However, to fully understand whether this is the case, and what 'risk communities', in such context, look like empirically, or in practice, this paper will now zoom in on two empirical illustrations of emerging risk communities, through a comparative analysis of English and Polish football.

Our case selection is informed by three main points of rationalization. First, in both Poland and the UK, political authorities have, at different times, engaged in a 'war against (football) hooliganism' (Campbell 2023; Jasny and Lenartowicz 2022). In the UK, this occurred throughout the 1980s and involved the

Thatcher government's introduction of a 'war cabinet' to address 'hooliganism' (Campbell 2023). In Poland, a similar approach and rhetoric was evident from then Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, as Poland prepared to co-host Euro 2012 and oversaw the 'introduction of a new act on the safety of mass events' (Jasny and Lenartowicz 2022, 1821) In both cases, the responses to 'hooliganism' involved the implementation of new legal restrictions to manage football crowd following the securitization of football-related violence and disorder and its designation as a serious, urban and social issue (Tsoukala 2009; Kossakowski 2014). Second, however, the two contexts differ in terms of the *timing* of neoliberal policy implementation. Poland, having undergone a systemic transformation from communism to capitalism in 1989, introduced economic reforms significantly later than the UK. Consequently, the issue of 'hooliganism' was effectively addressed only in the second decade of the twenty-first century—long after numerous solutions had been proposed in England throughout the 1980s. Similarly, the processes of professionalization and commercialization of football in Poland occurred much later than their English counterparts. These historical differences provide an additional dimension for comparison. Finally, in terms of sporting significance, the cases of Polish and English football are particularly interesting to compare given their top leagues' status as what can be characterized as a 'semi-peripheral' and 'top' league in Europe respectively exemplified by UEFA's (2024), 2024/25 club coefficient currently ranking Poland 18th and England 1st on their ranking. Having accounted for the spaces of resistance and risk that co-exist in European football, the next section discusses our two cross-country, empirical illustrations that drive our Beck-informed analysis forward.

3.1 | Parallel Movements, Identification Cards and Mass Surveillance in English Football

In one way, the following excerpt from a late 1980s Cardiff City football fanzine provides an insight into the contestations over regulatory frameworks and supporters behaviour: 'Vocal support for your team is as part of football as crappy cups of tea and pasties at half-time are. It's about time the Police realised that no amount of trying on their part is going to stop people from singing and enjoying themselves in this way' (Watch the Bluebirds 1989). In English football, the 1980s became the formative years for football supporters' activism and critical, political engagement with football's securitization as enacted by 'top-down' political authorities (Lee Ludvigsen 2024). In the UK, 'football hooligans' were framed as the 'enemy within' (Campbell 2023) and like in the Polish case that we detail below, this had become a securitized issue which the authorities had to be seen to act upon (Tsoukala 2009).

The 1980s saw the roll-out of CCTV surveillance inside stadia. It also saw the introduction of several new legislative pieces targeting football fans. This included the Sporting Events Act 1985 that placed restrictions upon supporters' consumption of alcohol, but also the Public Order Act 1986, which 'introduced "exclusion orders", preventing convicted fans from attending specific games in England and Wales' (Giulianotti 2011, 3300). The Thatcher government also produced the Football Spectators Act in 1989 which enhanced police powers and suggested a membership (identification) cards for supporters that was abandoned (Campbell 2023). Taken together, this also reflected the wider intention to transform English football's political economy and its cosmopolitan image; involving 'the scapegoating and expunging of young working-class male supporters, with stadia "reclaimed" as "safe" urban spaces for "respectable" fans (witness "family stands")' (Giulianotti 2011, 3303). However, the securitized commodification of football is no linear process, and these measures were heavily contested by supporters of English clubs who, accordingly, began to mark and organize their resistance and contestations through more systematic, networked avenues (see Turner 2023). Significantly, this included the rise of the football fanzine (politicized magazines produced by fans) movement, the setup of the national supporters' group for fans in England and Wales—the Football Supporters Association (FSA) in the 1980s—and independent supporters associations in the 1990s (see Turner 2023; Lee Ludvigsen 2024). These parallel and inter-connected movements sought, broadly, to produce *alternative discourses* on the policing and repression of supporters—including its impact on supporter cultural practices and atmospheres (as seen in the above example); to reinvent fan politics; and, to 'restore the image of fans from that created by mass media politicians in the period of post-Heysel [stadium disaster] moral panic' (Numerato 2018, 33–34) which commonly conflated supporters with 'hooligans'.

While supporter politics in the UK was not without contradictions, a view that largely united these movements was that 'the game is, or rather ought to be, theirs [the fans'], not the private property of businessmen and remote administrators, or the plaything of press and television, or police and politicians' (Jary and Horne 1991, 28). Crucially, despite existing fan rivalries, FSA and fanzines of various clubs *coalesced* in their vocal opposition to the mentioned supporter identification. Here, supporters outlined the risks this ID Card posed to supporters' privacy and their clubs' finances given the cost of implementing computerized card readers (Lee Ludvigsen 2023). Further, supporters' questioning of civil liberty concerns *vis-à-vis* the collection of personal data and the identity card's potential commercial exploitation contributed to the scheme, eventually, being abandoned in the early 1990s (Numerato 2018, 15). With respect to the concept of risk communities (Beck 2011), however, this example remains highly pertinent. Ultimately, those potential risks *caused by* a proposed tool (identification cards) intended to *manage the risk* of supporter violence became one of several issues—including issues of club ownerships and enhanced commercialization—that brought national movements even closer together and even united fans from different, even rival clubs.

Historically situated across four-decades, supporters' contestations over football's risk and (in)security imperative remains ongoing (Turner 2023). In the late 2000s, the FSA also ran a campaign called 'Watching Football Is Not A Crime' which sought to provide legal support and protect supporters' human rights and civil liberties in the face of legal restrictions, enhanced police powers (Lee Ludvigsen 2023, 2024), and harsh policing and stewarding facing football supporters. The national campaign did so by 'monitor[ing] the police in their dealings

with football fans and work with them to ensure that all fans are treated fairly and within the law' (FSA 2012) and this followed instances whereby the police had detained supporters under Section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act. This consequently saw FSA team up with movements outside football; in this case the civil rights organization Liberty (FSA 2012).

Notwithstanding, concerns about fans' rights and civil liberties continue to exist and, most recently, the FSA (2019) and club-specific groups (Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust 2023) have continually shared their concerns about what represents a new chapter of mass surveillance technologies in football, specifically, facial recognition cameras. Here, it is this technology's risks to fans' (and citizens') privacy that are highlighted by supporters, along with warnings of letting supporters becoming 'guinea pigs' for new technology and enhanced powers. Consequently, the topic of biometric surveillance in football and its impact on human rights continues to be high on the agenda of the issues fans contest in English and European football (FSA 2023; FSE 2022).

Overall, the case of English football reveals how constellations of movements have emerged between the 1980s and the present-day in a response to risk, its management and paradoxes. Beck (2011: 1353) submitted that the experience of risk may give rise to—even if involuntary—a pressure to cooperate and, in part, these constellations have emerged from *common experiences* transcending traditional football club rivalry, including the unintended consequences of risk management techniques and technologies on supporter practices, cultures and atmospheres, supporters becoming trial subjects for enhanced state power, but also on fans' civil liberties and human rights. Against this background, the case of Poland, as unpacked next, reveals both continuities and discontinuities.

3.2 | 'Civilizing' Fan Culture, Legislative Efforts and Resistance in Polish Football

Unlike the situation in the UK, both fan activism and state responses to hooliganism (including the subsequent implementation of stadium security measures affecting all fans) gained significant momentum in Poland following the onset of political system change. Under communist rule, the formation of supporter's associations was prohibited, and any form of organized fan activism was met with state repression. Consequently, fan culture developed in a spontaneous and often underground manner. The 1980s witnessed a rise in hooliganism, partly influenced by the limited exposure to Western football cultures, particularly the hooliganism associated with English football (Kossakowski 2021). After 1989, the first period of political transformation (1989) saw the new democratically elected authorities, without stable structures, having to face the necessity of suppressing enormous inflation and high unemployment and supporting the collapsing economy, which was not able to compete in a free market environment. The instability of the situation in the country resonated in the stadiums. Indeed, in the early years of the post-1989 transformation, the culture of violence in Polish football stadiums developed on an unprecedented scale. It was not until 1997 that the Polish government introduced the first law after 1989 which aimed to tackle stadium violence. However, in the first years of the Law on the Safety of Mass Events (*Ustawa o bezpieczeństwie imprez masowych*) the fan community did not become subject to significant restrictions, as the new regulations were not enforced (Kossakowski 2014; Antonowicz and Grodecki 2018). Under such circumstances, being a football fan in Poland until the late twentieth century involved virtually no institutional risk, nor was there a basis for the formation of activist initiatives aimed at protesting restrictions.

In 2003, the Polish Football Federation proposed the introduction of chip cards, but this move was suspended in spring of 2004 after talks with fans (the cards were never implemented, which should be considered a victory for the fans). In the following years the restrictions did not ease up, and in 2006, many stadiums were the venue of a fan action called 'Ultra-protest', held against the ever-increasing penalties for firing flares. The first institutional result of fans' activism was the establishment the National Union of Fan Associations (*Ogólnopolski Związek Stowarzyszeń Kibicowskich* [OZSK]) in 2007. OZSK aimed to represent fans of different clubs in institutional relationships and build their positive image regardless of their club sympathies (Kossakowski 2021). Over the years, it has become evident that the National Union has failed to demonstrate any significant impact on negotiations with state authorities or in advancing the interests of fans and their role in civil society (for instance, the last post on their Facebook page dates back to 2020). This can be attributed in part to the fragmented nature of fan culture, where individual club loyalties often take precedence over broader collective interests, hindering the development of a unified fan movement. This lack of institutionalized activism and the fragmentation of the fan community have been the key factors in subsequent years, preventing Polish fans from effectively opposing further, increasingly restrictive amendments to the aforementioned law, which is already one of the most restrictive in Europe (Kossakowski 2014).

Polish football fans were subjected to a host of regulatory attempts during the preparations for UEFA Euro 2012, when the government, under Prime Minister Donald Tusk, adopted a hardline stance on 'hooliganism'. This was accompanied by a discourse of modernization and civilization that positioned fans as a threat to the nation (Kossakowski 2019). Despite these challenges, fans attempted to protest, as evidenced by banners criticizing the Prime Minister and the preparations for the tournament. Although the protests, often taking the form of highly visible stadium performances, gained media attention, they failed to alter the government's stance or strategy. Even after Euro 2012's conclusion and the subsequent change in government in 2015, there was no thaw in relations between the government and fans. While the new, right-wing government seemed more sympathetic to the fan community (particularly due to the nationalistic and conservative content displayed in stadiums; see Kossakowski et al. 2020), the law governing the safety of mass events was amended several times, always to the detriment of fans. Over time, the institutional risks faced by fans have increased, leading to numerous league matches being played without away supporters due to administrative decisions barring their entry to stadiums.

As today, supporters of Poland's largest football clubs are increasingly organized within formalized structures, operating as officially registered associations with legal standing, like typical non-governmental organizations (Grodecki 2018). The creation of these associations was necessitated by the increasing complexity of organizing away matches and procuring tickets for large groups, tasks that proved insurmountable for informal entities due to evolving football regulations in Poland. While some of these associations engage in non-football-related activities such as charitable fundraising, educational initiatives, and commemorating local and national heroes, their efforts remain largely uncoordinated at a national level. Instead, these associations primarily focus on their local communities.

Paradoxically, the largest nationwide initiative uniting fans from various clubs contemporarily—the project called 'Supporters United' - was initiated by the Polish Football Association and the Ministry of Sport. Modelled after German fan projects, this program relies on a network of local centres operated by fans of local clubs, financed mostly by the ministry, and coordinated centrally by the football association. These local centres concentrate on educational and promotional activities at the grassroots level, aiming to foster positive fan culture and engage younger generations (Kossakowski 2017). However, the most orthodox fans have been resistant to this initiative. The 'Supporters United' project has not played a significant role in challenging restrictive laws and government policies, and it has no impact on ultras and hooligan groups (even operating in this same football club). Hypothetically, the 'Supporters United' initiative would not have been possible if grassroots, nationwide, organized social fan movement had emerged, or if OZSK had proven to be viable. The above analysis demonstrates that, despite their social resources, football fans were unable to withstand the institutional risks posed by successive government decisions. By analysing the Polish case, in light of Beck's approach, we can see that, even at the sub-political level, forming coalitions is crucial, even if these involve alliances between informal actors.

A fundamental question arising from this case study concerns the cosmopolitan nature of the pressures and risks faced by Polish football fans. The empirical evidence suggests a more nuanced answer than might initially be expected. While the government's actions can be interpreted as a response to local and national pressures, the legislative measures were framed within a discourse of cosmopolitanism—followed the trends prevailing in Europe. The restrictive laws aimed to eradicate the 'uncivilized' element from football, as represented by fans who refused to relinquish their unique culture from the stands (despite obvious linguistic differences, the Polish Prime Minister used terms with a similar, 'degrading' connotation towards hooligans, as did authorities and the press in England). Fans' strong attachment to local identities posed a threat to institutional interests, particularly the risk of undermining the cosmopolitan image of the Euro 2012 tournament. The fans targeted by the government rejected this vision of the event and the associated style of fan culture, which emphasized a more sanitized and cosmopolitan approach (based more on 'banal nationalism' than nationalism per se). The hardcore fans' resistance to this vision hindered the government's efforts to present Poland as a 'modern' nation committed to European identity and values (Europe is considered as cosmopolitan project or even utopia; see Beck and Grande 2007).

Overall, the Polish case study exemplifies how, even in a semi-peripheral European football nation, a confrontation between 'cosmopolitan risk' and the 'rooted' culture of local fandom can occur, albeit in a more nuanced manner, mediated by the national government. In Poland, too, there is pressure from cosmopolitan bodies like UEFA or FIFA, as evidenced by the sanctions imposed on Polish clubs competing in European competitions for displaying content that contravenes UEFA's standards. Even clubs that do not participate in international competitions find their fans facing similar risks.

4 | Discussion: Towards a Cosmopolitan Risk Community of Fans—Or Not?

The paper set out to explore, using Beckian insights, how supporters in Europe may constitute a cosmopolitan risk community, and risk's connective power. As aforementioned, central to Beck's vision of cosmopolitanism is the pressing need for sociologists to move beyond what he called 'methodological nationalism'—which treats the nation-state society as the modern world's 'natural social and political form' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 302). Beck (2000) made this plea, as he saw the significance and sovereignty of the nation-state challenged by the ramifications of globalization and wanted to analyse 'how to imagine, define and analyse post-national, transnational and political communities' (Beck 2000, 90)—which would include risk communities.

Our preceding comparative analysis, however, problematizes and layers this idea. As evident, supporters in Polish and English football have—at different times with different intensity—resisted and contested regulations and legislation imposed upon them. Many of these regulative frameworks, as Tsoukala (2009) demonstrates, have been moulded from the 'top-down', including the UEFA, Council of Europe, and EU level, and ensured convergence in the policing and surveillance of supporters, relying upon cross-country information-sharing and adaption of identified best practices. Arguably, we can understand these cross-border frameworks within the frames of globalization and cosmopolitanism (see Giulianotti and Robertson 2007), which have seen the enhanced authority and development of supranational organizations, transnational regimes and regulations (Beck 2000). The 'top-down' desire for, and imposition of cosmopolitanism, we argue, is not necessarily matched on the level of supporters.

In the contexts of national and transnational risk management techniques, we observe how coherent, cosmopolitan communities of supporters in face of these risks to their socio-cultural lifeworld's, clubs, and identities are not necessarily emerging. Whilst transnational *solidarities* undoubtedly exist within supporter cultures (see Petersen-Wagner 2017; also on the discourse level expressed by 'Against Modern Football' motto; see Numerato 2018) our case analysis suggests that politically engaged and critical supporters in the UK and Poland are aware of the risks shaping the field of cosmopolitan football (UEFA,

global media and corporate sponsors), but they engage with these *risks in a way that protects their national, regional, and local identity context,* and not through a fully-fledged cosmopolitan risk community. As the cases of Polish and English football reveal, supporters' contestations over risk and insecurity management have, first and foremost, proceeded on the relevant techniques, technologies and laws' impact on local and national fan cultures; more so than their universal, European-wide scope and impacts.

Whilst the increasingly influential, democratic network of supporters in Europe, Football Supporters Europe (FSE), which has existed since 2008 (Lee Ludvigsen 2024), implies that Beck's 'both/and' position (e.g., supporters contesting surveillance *both* in terms of its impacts on local *and* European football) can be usefully applied to the case of supporters and constitutes an example of how common experiences of risk may mobilize transnational constellations of actors (Beck et al. 2013), it must be acknowledged that this does not necessarily constitute a *coherent* movement that has *replaced* national organizations like FSA and OZSK. In this respect, some supporters across Europe feel the organization is composed of 'ever more "professional" activists' and 'speak only to a certain subset of engaged fans' (Hodges 2019, 159). Similarly, Cleland et al. (2018) observe that organizations like FSE must balance between maintaining their access to football's political structures, while also representing the voices of a heterogeneous group of supporters and avoid criticisms relating to 'empire building' or 'quashing dissent'. Additionally, the FSE's efforts to build alliances with fans are complicated by its formal relationship with UEFA and its perceived ideological stance. The agreement with UEFA (2023), signed in 2023, may alienate fans who are critical of UEFA's policies, while the FSE's progressive approach may make it difficult to connect with fans in countries where right-wing ideologies are dominant in football culture.

This makes it questionable whether a cosmopolitan community of fans can emerge at all. While doubts about the activities of organizations like FSE persist (although it must be emphasized that the organization initiates many projects to protect the interests of fans, including those from marginalized groups), these doubts do not seem to be crucial in determining whether there is a possibility of a cosmopolitan supporter's community of risk emerging.

Our analysis reveals that fans are not coherently committed to a version of *European cosmopolitan football*. Crucially, while resisting cosmopolitan risks, fans are driven by a rooted cosmopolitanism, seeking to preserve their local identities and integrity. From a Beckian perspective, this stance might seem to contradict the ideals of a cosmopolitan community. However, it does not necessarily preclude the possibility of fans forming such a community. Instead, it suggests that a cosmopolitan community of fans must be inclusive of diverse local traditions and practices. A closer examination of two case studies suggests that an imagined cosmopolitan community of fans would only be viable if it incorporated local distinctiveness into its strategies and statutes. Such a community would be cosmopolitan in the Beckian sense only if it acknowledged—in line with the German sociologist's methodological assumptions—the diversity of fan-based 'modernizations'. Just as there is no single form of modernization in the broader context (there is not only Western modernization but also Asian, Global South, etc.), there is no single fan tradition and way of development. Beck (2015) saw the potential for cosmopolitan responses to the climate crisis through cooperation among sub-politics emerging from diverse modernization contexts. In the context of fans, we should consider how to facilitate cooperation among fan-based sub-politics that often adhere to differing viewpoints.

A cosmopolitan fan community focused on shared risks could be an effective way to unite supporters while respecting local differences. By concentrating on politically neutral issues that affect all fans (e.g., rising ticket prices), such a community could promote solidarity without imposing a single ideological approach. Cosmopolitan risks are restrictive for all fans regardless of their political views. Examples from the UK and Poland demonstrate that supporters in vastly different cultural, political, and historical contexts face very similar restrictions due to securitization policies. Other risks of cosmopolitan football, extending beyond those discussed here also encompass issues like ticket prices, ownership changes, match scheduling, venue selection, and many more (Numerato 2018). Hence, this section argues that a cosmopolitan fan community of risk could base its strategies on these shared concerns without interfering with the unique characteristics of local fan cultures. Instead, it could draw upon how fans navigate risks at the local level and implement these local strategies into a broader, cosmopolitan project to represent supporters.

5 | Conclusion

By arguing that political and football authorities' attempts to minimize risk in football, and consequent adaption of risk and control techniques (see Garland 2001) have seen side-effects emerge in form of risk communities, but that these communities remain more solid on national and local levels—rather than the transnational—this article plugs a gap, and extends Beck's theories on the communal and cosmopolitan aspects of risk. This is achieved by employing our comparative cases of Polish and English football supporters, situated in a wider European context. Some scholars suggest that football represents 'one crucial venue for considering normatively the potential outcomes of cosmopolitan glocality' (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, 184). By producing an empirically novel setting for Beck's theories, this paper adds to sociological debates on the role of (cosmopolitan) risk communities (Beck 2011; Beck et al. 2013; Blok 2018), specifically, on how such communities 'are disintegrating and challenging the national/international order and power structures' (Beck et al. 2013, 19). Yet, we *problematize* the suggestion that such communities are entirely cosmopolitan and proceed in the absence of a concept of the nation-state society as the frame of reference. Instead, the case of supporters reveals, we argue, how supporters' contestations whilst grounded in a wider cosmopolitan struggle within the European context, still are expressed in terms of, and rooted within national, regional and local identities and issues, and proceed within the parameters of the 'nation-state definition of society and politics' (Beck and Sznaider 2006, 2).

Beyond adding to the literature football supporters' political activism and engagement, as a key area of sociological enquiry (Turner 2023; Numerato 2018; Amann and Doidge 2023), the broader contribution of this article stems from how it partakes in a wider social scientific project of demonstrating the 'applicability of Beck's theory to real-world problems and issues' (Mythen et al. 2018, 99). Indeed, one significant question arising from Beck's (2011) scholarship speaks to how global risk conditions give rise to communities; as reinforced by Beck et al. 's (2013) research agenda on cosmopolitan communities of climate risk, which we tie into. Beyond ecological risks, this issue has been afforded limited scholarly analysis. As our cases illustrated, the side-effects of football and political authorities' attempts to make football 'risk-free', in fact, create new risks (e.g., the elimination of rituals and traditions, infringement on fans' civil liberties and rights) that have been countered by supporter mobilizations and the formation of communities—even transcending historical, national club rivalries (Turner 2023). Notwithstanding, this paper nuances Beck's understanding of risk communities through the case of European football whereby a potential, full-scale cosmopolitan community of supporters seems to hinge a preservation and inclusion of diverse and unique local and national traditions, cultures and practices.

In closing, we argue that adding this empirical dimension to Beck's theory remains sociologically important because it clarifies, beyond the context of climate risks, how exposure to risks can generate communities of solidarity and shared morals and understandings (Mythen et al. 2018). An important sociological task thus speaks to comparatively examining this further through various contexts including other supporter movements, but also other types of collective action responding to, for example, anti-austerity and social justice movements. Notwithstanding, Beck's urge to redefine the concept of 'imagined community' to 'cosmopolitan communities of global risk' is problematized by the case of football supporters' contestations and resistance, whereby supporters engage with risks in ways that protect primarily their nation-state society (i.e., national, regional and local identity context and supporter culture); and not necessarily following an 'awareness that dangers or risks can no longer be socially delimited in space or time' (Beck 2011, 1346).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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