A PERSPECTIVE ON COACHING AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF SPORT COMPETITION. CASE STUDY: ROMANIAN 3RD LEAGUE, FOOTBALL

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ABSTRACT. The Romanian 3rd Football League is a socio-cultural universe of its own. The large number of participants (teams, players, technical-administrative staff, supporters, etc.), the fact that it takes place in a predominantly rural or small-town setting and its heterogeneous nature give it a specific diversity. Being a coach in this environment is a challenge. Merayo (2021) believes that the coach has to be part of the team, the club and the culture they are part of. However, in Romania's 3rd league, coaching can be considered a veritable art, with circumstances not found in any other sporting context. Coaches change very often, are caught between the same teams, having to radically change their perspective on a team, a player or a context in an extremely short time. Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem are part of a model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1987), and still considered relevant in the sport context by Merayo (2021). We also identify this in the 3rd league. The third league coach spends his whole life caught between these systemic units. And yet the whole coaching process must be seen as part of a competition with strong anthropological valences. So, is it the specific culture of third league football that is best developed in rural or small-town environments, or does the environment of these towns generate the culture of the third league and is it, in fact, a culture of theirs translated into football?

Key-words: *coach, third league, football, competition, anthropology*

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REZUMAT. *Perspectivă asupra coachingului și a integrării sale în contextul antropologic al competiției sportive. Studiu de caz: Liga a 3-a de fotbal din România.* Liga a 3-a de fotbal din România este un univers socio-cultural aparte. Numărul mare de participanți (echipe, jucători, personal tehnic-administrativ, suporteri etc), desfășurarea într-un cadru preponderent rural sau al orașelor mici și caracterul lor eterogen aduc acestui mediu o diversitate specifică. A fi cu adevărat coach în acest mediu este o provocare. Merayo (2021) consideră că antrenorul trebuie să se integreze în universul echipei, al clubului și al culturii din care acestea fac parte. Dar, în liga 3-a, din România, coaching-ul poate fi considerat o adevărată artă, cu situații care nu se mai regăsesc în alt context sportiv. Antrenorii se schimbă foarte des, sunt prinși între aceleași echipe, fiind nevoiți să schimbe radical perspectiva în care văd o echipă, un jucător sau un context într-un timp extrem de scurt. Microsistemul, mezosistemul, exosistemul și macrosistemul sunt parte dintr-un model propus de Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1987), și considerat încă de actualitate, în contextul sportiv, de către Merayo (2021). Identificăm acest lucru și în liga a 3-a. Coach-ul de liga a 3-a își desfășoară întreaga viață prins între aceste unități sistemice. Și, totuși, tot procesul de coaching trebuie considerat ca parte unei competiții cu puternice valențe antropologice. Așadar, este cultura specifică fotbalului de liga a 3-a cea care se dezvoltă mai bine în mediul rural sau al orașelor mici sau, mediul acestor orașe generează cultura ligii a 3-a și este, de fapt, o cultura a lor transpusă în fotbal?

Cuvinte cheie: antrenor, liga a 3-a, fotbal, competiție, antropologie

Introduction

Ralph Linton (1936), one of the most important anthropologists, considers status as the *place occupied by an individual at a given time in a system and his relationship to that system*. Thus, Dragnea et al. (2016) describe a coach's set-status as the totality of statuses that the coach has. A coach's set-status is broad because, in addition to the (main) teaching role, he or she also fulfils different functions within the club, family or group of friends. Coaches often work under pressure, manage problems, set goals, make decisions, etc. (Merayo, 2021).

We believe that in order to understand what it really means to be a coach, it is necessary to understand the context in which a coach works and the factors that influence their results.

The coaching process primarily includes the performer, the coach, the form, nature and extent of the relationship between them, the intervention programme, the sport performance and the context. Each of these elements is interdependent and has many sub-elements.

The Complexity of interaction Coach - Athlete - Performance (Teodorescu, Ganera, 2013)

However, the coaching process is circumscribed in the socio-cultural environment in which the sporting activity takes place, which led Merayo (2021) to state that we are dealing with an open system, concentrically included in the team, the club and the culture of the environment where the team exists (fig. 1).
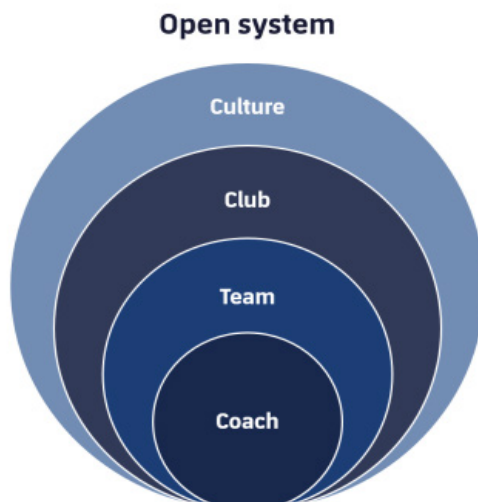
Figure 1. Open coaching system in the football team - Merayo (2021)

From this point of view, the Romanian 3rd football league represents a special system, in which we can say that being a coach is really a challenge, as the athlete-coach relationship implies a commitment, a social activity with emotional ups and downs, success or failure, interaction with different organizations, consumption and personal fulfilment, as well as a combination of short-, medium- and long-term professional satisfaction.

In performance sport, the coach is the person who ensures the optimisation of performance by raising the quality of the athlete's results and learning capacity, by providing feedback in the training process, but also by using methods of motivation, awareness and empowerment, development of creativity, communication skills and initiative, while the coach can be defined as the specialist who is in charge of designing, programming and directing the training process of athletes in order to develop their performance capacity and achieve victories in competitions.

As a result, the status of the coach includes a series of roles that cover managerial, projective, instructive-educational, scientific research and consultancy activities, but also a succession of behaviours and practices aimed at the stable and sustained increase in performance, by coordinating and integrating into the sports training all the input/ inputs specific to the coaching process.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to observe the defining elements of the 3rd league football setting, the anthropological perspective of competition in the context of this league and finding appropriate coaching strategies in these contexts.

The issue of the paper

Football environment in the 3rd league

The world in which we live involves a constant exchange of information and constant change, phenomena that also make people change. The environment influences the lives of people who, in turn, can reshape the social, physical and cultural landscape around them, a process that affects even the safest environments as they bring together subjects from the most varied backgrounds (Bronfenbrenner 1987). Sports environments are thus not immune to these changes and bear the brunt of them, resulting in socialisation, involvement and engagement effects. In this context, the coach must be a person in a continuous process of development and adaptation, with the ability to act in the environment while the environment acts on him/her (Merayo, 2021).

In the Romanian 3rd League, changes exist on all levels. Although the number of coaches working at the 3rd league level is not very high, it is notable that they actually rotate among themselves moving to different teams[2], so that

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[2] Although there are many examples, we will use the situation of coach Virgil Nițoi, who is constantly changing his 3rd league teams. It is remarkable that, although we are talking about an area where sources of information are not very rich, we still find enough information about these coach permutations. The year 2011 finds Virgil Nițoi, on the bench of CS Tunari, making fun of the defeat against Steaua Bucharest, with the score of 11-0. "Steaua surprised us with their two-touch game" (http://m.indexstiri.ro/virgil-nitoi-steaua-ne-a-surprins-cu-jocul-din-doua-atingeri.html). In 2012, coach Virgil Nițoi took over the reins of Victoria Chirnogi! Mayor promises support - https://liga2.prosport.ro/liga-3/stiri/virgil-nitoi-a-preluat-fraiele-chirnogiului-primarul-promite-sustinere-9850342). In 2017, he coached the Modelu team. The Calarasi team scored an away win,

they must be constantly prepared for changes. Unfortunately, for coaches change doesn't just mean changing the "name" of the team where they work, it means changing the players they work with and the coaching staff they have to prepare matches with.

Based on the premise that performance coaching is a way to achieve maximum results in the objective-pursuing competitions through fundamental changes in attitude and behavior by making athletes responsible and aware of their actions (Teodorescu, Ganera, 2013), it is necessary to analyze the specific elements of this process, in which the direct interaction of the coach with the players - "the team" is essential.

At the level of the 3rd league football, players are different in many ways - age, social status, level of training, level of aspiration, motivation etc. This requires a great deal of knowledge on the part of the coach in order to relate optimally to any of these players.

The second level of interaction of the coach with the club is affected quite a lot at the level of the Romanian 3rd league. Unfortunately, in the 3rd league, because, for financial reasons, a coach rarely transfers to a team together with his technical staff - assistant coach, physical trainer, etc., most of the time these specialists are considered as "club's staff", having their own circuit between teams. Thus, in the new club an environment is totally unfamiliar, and foreign to the coach. Bringing in some of his collaborators would have been beneficial for all parties involved, but is rarely seen in the 3rd league.

The final aspect of the sporting environment in which the coach operates - the culture - is, as Figure 1 shows, the one that governs everything else. Although the level of sport is not very high, the group culture is a particularly strong element in this league. This is particularly due to the rivalries between teams. The current format of the 3rd league sees teams divided into ten geographical series. This encourages rivalry in most championship games, making it even more difficult for coaches to switch from one culture to another, as they have to practically repudiate their former team every time.

Nițoi made his debut on the Modelu bench - https://www.frf.ro/competitii/competitii-masculin/liga-3/seria-a-iia-calarasenii-au-dat-lovitura-in-deplasare-nitoi-a-debutat-cu-dreptul-pe-banca-celor-din-modelu. Year 2019 finds him at Agricola Borcea (Agricola Borcea, drawn at the start with a chess-mindedness from coach Nițoi Virgil - http://obiectiv-online.ro/agricola-borcea-csm-medgidia-1-2-un-rezultat-mincinos/)

The coach in the Microsystem - Mesosystem - Exosystem - Macrosystem relationship

While first proposed more than four decades ago, the Systems Ecology model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1987) is still considered topical and with minor modifications is adopted by Merayo (2021) who believes that for optimal team leadership, the coach must be integrated into the four systems, each with its own characteristics.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model, 1976
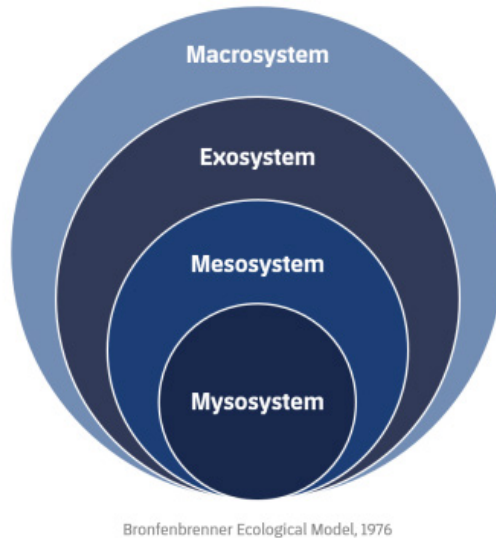
Figure 2. Model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1987),
adopted by Merayo (2021)

The microsystem is the environment in the coach's immediate vicinity, the one in which the coach lives and interacts on a daily basis. Values, beliefs, personality traits are shaped in this environment. The family, the sports club, the institution of continuous education (if any), friends can be considered as distinct microsystems. The more relationships in the microsystem increase in number, the greater their influence becomes. At 3rd league level we can exemplify this by the fact that a coach may initially have an assistant coach, then the club will also employ a goalkeeper coach. Thus, a new relationship will be created and a new element within the coach's microsystem will emerge. In the context of the 3rd league, noting the relatively frequent coaching changes mentioned above, we can say that the relationship with family and friends may suffer.

Mesosystem - is described by the interaction between two or more microsystems in which the coach lives. For example, if there is a regular meeting in the club restaurant with all the members of the coaching staff, it can be considered that they are part of the microsystem of friends, although they are part of the microsystem of the sports club. As a practical situation at 3rd league level such meetings are quite frequent, most of the time the interaction even includes the family microsystem, with coaches being accompanied by family members.

The exosystem - the coach is not an active part of the exosystem, but this environment includes him and everything that happens in the exosystem affects him. Mann (1995) finds that spectators and sports consumers have a wide range of reasons for attending sporting events. The exosystem is associated with cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices in the vicinity of the club. In this case we can say that the exosystem is created according to the rules and philosophy of the club, the geographical area it represents, the wishes of the supporters, etc. All these elements influence the behaviour of the coach and when a change occurs in the exosystem, the coach has to adapt his actions. In the 3rd league this is most often found in a team's "philosophy" of play. Unfortunately, the factors that lead to the change are often in the exosystem - the supporters, the team manager (mayor/local councillors).

The *macrosystem* - is the system that includes, in form and content, the other three systems - microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem, which it integrates as aspects of the same culture. For example, even an identically named team (e.g., "Dynamo") or a café ("Starbucks") will be created on identical principles, but the final form will not be identical, as it must have specific characteristics in order to fit into the macrosystem of which it is part. Therefore, at the level of the 3rd league, the value, religious and regional system specific to the area influences the whole sporting activity and therefore the coach. There are teams in areas with a predominantly neo-Protestant population that cannot schedule their games or training sessions on Saturdays, while other teams do not give the coach the chance to have the last word before taking the field, but meet and say a Christian-Orthodox prayer together.

Anthropological perspective of sports competition in the 3rd league

Anthropology can be defined as the complex, cumulative, integrative and synthesizing science of multilateral knowledge about man and his phylogenetic evolution, from hominids to humanoids, from the first racially undifferentiated human beings to the great diversity of ethnogenetic processes, from his biological,

social and psychological complexity to his creative activity (Vulcănescu 1979). At the same time, anthropology is a science that aims to study the man as a whole, both in terms of his biological structure and his human achievements; a science that studies in parallel the external and internal influences on human behaviour, work and social-historical community (Dragnea 2022).

In our opinion, the study of the anthropological phenomenon from the perspective of sociological and cultural anthropology is relevant to the competitive football context of the 3rd league in Romania.

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the focus should be on the analysis of the cultural phenomenon of the 3rd league competition in its natural environment. It is worth noting that only 31% of the teams registered in the 2022-2023 championship, the 3rd League, come from the county capitals, while in the 2nd League we have 80% and in the 1st League 87%. So, the question arises, *is it the specific culture of 3rd league football that is best developed in rural areas or small towns, or does the environment of these towns generate the culture of the 3rd league and is it, in fact, a culture of theirs translated into football?*

Of course, the answer to this question cannot be revealed through research. Perhaps it is, in fact, an intertwining of the two. It can be said that every culture is governed by an inner will, a common motivation. Thus, the cultural values of football find a counterpart in the everyday life of the environment where the third league teams exist. It is possible that the main architects of football teams (the players, especially those in leadership positions or with considerable seniority within the group) become real cultural 'images' for the community. The practice of the 3rd league shows us that the leaders of the group of players create a real tradition and culture around them. They manifest their culture from simple "cultural" decisions of no apparent importance in the economy of the phenomenon - today we play in X colour; we can't order red equipment because Y team has it, etc., to important decisions in sports performance - we don't transfer a certain player because two years ago he injured me and I missed 4 games; Mister, next game you move me to the right because there's one there I know.

We can talk about creating a cultural value. The team itself starts to become a cultural asset with its own identity, tradition and customs. Although the level at which this competition takes place is not very high, from a sporting point of view, we can say that the coaches and players of these teams become creators of culture. They become themselves a community that develops in the community of which they are a part, and the two coexist. The audience becomes a consumer of culture and thus the cultural act takes place. Accordingly, as Wann et al. (1999) point out, the sporting event satisfies both the cultural need

of male consumers (increased self-confidence, aesthetic aspects, motivation) and female consumers (belonging to family aspects). At the same time, Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) note that men will also participate individually as spectators, while women tend to associate stronger social values with participation (attendance largely with their family or group of friends). Mahony (2002) considers team attachment, community pride, drama, attachment to players and 'delegating success' as reasons why people in the community attend sporting events. Thus, in the most varied contexts, the act of sport is a living action in the midst of the community.

Within this culture that is created in and around a football team, the central element remains competition. Fletcher (2010) sees competition as a defining element of man but at the same time it is a vast, insubstantial field of study (Swab 2010). Competition is the cultural element for which the team exists. In small communities where there are 3rd league teams home match day is a real event. Regardless of social status, every member of the community knows they must exist in this cultural movement - the team match. Whether it's a discussion started (or continued) in the early morning hours between mere spectators of the game, or the families of the players, everyone tries to contribute to the event. Competition keeps the cultural spirit of the game alive in environments less exposed to outside interference. Since we are talking about a culture of competition, we cannot fail to notice the differences that occur from match to match. Each host team has its own cultural elements when organising a game. From elements of hospitality - sometimes opponents find snacks and coffee at their discretion in the common areas, other deliberately the changing room is makeshift and far more unwelcoming than the hosts'. Team administrators emphasise the importance of games from a cultural perspective. Not infrequently it is rivalry that determines the reward for victory, not place in the ranking. A win against a team with which, culturally, there is a certain history is much more coveted than a win against the first-placed team.

Discussion and conclusions

Consequently, there are many situations in which a coach is placed at the 3rd league level. This requires a special psychological ability on his part. Hence, we believe that the coach should be a "coach-psychologist", addressing the training of athletes based on and following the analysis of their personality (not only taking into account the essential skills detected during selection), "coach-innovator", "coach-democrat" - characterized by a high sociability. The coach should maintain many relationships, giving athletes a lot of freedom and shaping

their more independent behaviour, cultivating a sense of responsibility, organising and advising, encouraging creative discussions, teaching athletes to behave well in their relations with others, giving the process a profound educational character (Teodorescu, 2022).

At the same time one can see that the cultural element can hardly be separated from the social one. The artisans of culture are social beings and the culture they create is based on their social relations. At the level of any 3rd league team (and beyond) close social relationships are created. Many times, these go beyond the boundaries of the team or club. A player's experiences of the competition are transferred to the social environment of the family to which he belongs. A mayor who manages the team may take certain decisions based on social considerations relating to the team, etc. Thus, we can speak of a real social network that these football teams are becoming. It is the social network that supports the running of competitions. Without validation from family, colleagues in other workplaces, the community, the football team could not survive. The phenomenon is all the more interesting because even when a team is seemingly unable to cope with the competition it is involved in (either in sporting or financial terms), it continues to exist and is sustained by the social factor. The lack of funds is covered by the various members of the social network's own 'budgets'. Gilbert (2019) considers it absolutely necessary to explore the leadership dimension in the context of supporting leaders and developing the domain. A true coach needs to know and understand these aspects and be able to integrate them into the training of the athlete. The whole training process must be understood as part of the athlete's life, especially in such an environment where the social implications are big. We believe that the coach's efforts should be focused on harmonizing all social and economic factors in order to achieve performance.

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