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Project: Football Supporter Culture in Serbia: Considering an anti-violent future

This final report is presented to UEFA as a position paper on the future directions for the football supporter culture in Serbia. The proposals with which the report concludes are admittedly ambitious, but not, in the opinion of the author, unrealistic. The proposed recommendations are achievable, depending on the commitment of relevant organisations. The author remains at the disposal of UEFA and the key organisations in Serbia for further advice and input towards the pursuit of positive directions in Serbia's football supporting culture. The research undertaken for this report has informed academic outputs that are presently in preparation for submission to refereed academic journals. These intended publications and a related larger, on-going, project on 'positive futures' for Serbian sport are outlined in the concluding section of this report.

Background

The key intention of the project is to contribute to the larger plan – actively pursued by UEFA – to eradicate violent conduct from football supporting in Europe. Although much has been accomplished since the darker years of the 1980s, hooligan type activity remains a problem and, understandably enough, UEFA has acknowledged its role as an organisation with responsibility toward the resolution of this problem. The answers are not simple and any attempt to present facile and easy solutions would rightly be dismissed by anyone with knowledge of football associated violence – right through from senior administrators in the sport, to the police, the media and the majority of violence

abhorring football fans. A key problem faced by UEFA is the practicality of administering the conduct of football being played across and within national boundaries. The organisational complexities cannot and have not been underestimated. Yet while the particulars of the different national contexts of European football are taken into account – including the potentiality of certain rivalries between the fans of different countries as well as rivalries between the fans of particular European clubs – a cohesive policy approach is required if violence is to be dealt with effectively. Accordingly, the President of UEFA has opted for a blanket ‘zero tolerance’ approach to fan violence to work across European football, with particular nations being both responsible and accountable for the conduct of fans of both the national team and clubs involved in European competitions. While it is recognized that only a minority of football fans in any one country make up a hooligan element within the football supporter culture, it is generally accepted that this minority cannot merely be treated as an aberration that will go away without some form of authority response. The responsibility for the exertion of such authority falls upon the organisations within football, especially national football federations, working in conjunction with the appropriate mechanisms and agencies of the state.

Some national settings are likely to be more problematic than others and in the current context of European football Serbia is regarded as a particular trouble-spot for football related violence (Jugović). There are a range of sociological, political, cultural and economic issues that can be addressed within a thoroughgoing consideration of why Serbia may have a more significant problem with football hooliganism than other European countries. An analysis of these issues will be undertaken by the author in subsequent academic publication on this topic. For the present report, these issues will be brought into discussion to the extent necessary to be informative to the present study and in

putting forward recommendations to UEFA for strategy and action. The methodological rationale for the study is set out in a subsequent section. Prior to this, it is useful to provide further highlighting of and comment upon the crowd disorder problem in Serbian football.

The Serbian Context

The problem with Serbian football hooliganism was highlighted on the evening of 12 October 2010 on the occasion of a Euro 2012 qualifying game between the national teams of Serbia and Italy in Genoa. A number of incidents on this evening caused alarm both inside and outside the football stadium. Of greatest visibility, given the presence of television cameras and newspaper photographers was the behaviour inside the ground. The throwing of ignited distress flares onto the playing field and the threat of Serbian hooligans invading the pitch, which led to the cancellation of the match and the game being awarded by default to Italy, received international media coverage. These rather dramatic scenes highlighted the necessity of a proactive response at the highest level and the recognition of such is indicated by the meeting of the UEFA President with the President of the Republic of Serbia Mr Boris Tadić. The governing national body of football in Serbia, the FSS was privy to the discussion and, via its president, Mr Tomislav Karadžić, has given a commitment to work with both the Serbian government and UEFA towards the eradication of the hooligan menace. Relevant in this regard is the National Council for the Prevention of Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events (NCPSV). Earlier in 2011 a working party was appointed to report on football supporter related violence, directly to the NCPSV. Via the active participation of this working party, in particular, the Serbian government and

the FSS are able to present a formal coordinated response to dealing with the so-called football hooligan problem. It is worth pointing out here that the formation of the NCPSV in Serbia indicates that hooligan-like behaviour occurs at other sports as well, especially basketball. Given the overlapping club system of sports in Serbia with major clubs such as Red Star and Partizan having teams in a number of sports, the interconnection of supporter violence across sports is a related problem that needs to be addressed. It also further highlights the need for government intervention and coordination across the interfacing of particular sports administrations and the point, long made by academics, that the actual sport of football is not the core problem of what has become known over the years as ‘football hooliganism’.

Nevertheless, this observation should not allow football bodies to shirk from the responsibility of dealing with hooliganism and there is an awareness of this in Serbia, gauging by the present response to the challenges faced. The NCPSV established working party stands as an all-important body in this regard and the representation of the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the Safety Commissioner of the FSS on this group should ensure a solid working relationship with the government. To this point in time, the most significant response to come via the working party to the NCPSV and, therefore, to the highest level of the Serbian government, is for compliance with the preventative measures to football crowd violence set out by the UEFA President in September 2011.

An Action Plan based on these measures has been developed for implementation by the working party. On this basis a signed undertaking of compliance from the Serbian Prime Minister Mr Mirko Cvetković has been

presented to UEFA. Understandably, the Action Plan and points of compliance focus on legal matters and social control, principally policing and the role of stewards within football stadiums. However, attendant to these measures the onus has been placed upon clubs in the Serbian SuperLiga to take greater responsibility for the behaviour of their fans by designating key members of fan groups to provide a leadership role (Supporter Liaison Officers) towards the development of a non-violent football supporter culture. This significant step articulates with the central point of interest in the present study and report, i.e. the possibilities for the eradication of football crowd violence and associated behaviours through cultural change rather than purely coercive measures. To insist of the former being able to occur without the latter would be fanciful, especially in the short term. Very recent events – to the time of writing – bring home the extent to which this is so. While the situation in Serbian football supporting, both in regard to games played by the national team and by teams within the domestic league, calmed down following the events in Genoa, the evidence of the continuing problem, at least in regard to the domestic situation, reappeared during a derby match between Red Star and Partizan at the Marakana Stadium on Saturday 26 November 2011. It is worth setting out these events briefly to reflect upon the type of problem within Serbian stadiums that still confront football authorities.

The Game in question was the 141st derby match between Red Star and Partizan. Referred to as the ‘eternal derby’ this fixture has developed historically as one of the best-known rivalries in international football. Unfortunately, on occasion, this rivalry has resulted in unacceptable crowd behaviour – sometimes involving violence and other potentially physically injurious practices as well as vandalism to facilities within the stadium. A particular problem at the recent derby match was the igniting and throwing of

distress flares onto the playing field, seemingly at players. Elements of both Red Star and Partizan supporters in attendance were engaging in this behaviour – i.e. directing the thrown flares towards players of the opposing team. The danger to Partizan players was so pronounced that it was regarded as unsafe for them to leave the field at half-time, as to go through the requisite tunnel to the dressing-room would put them in greater jeopardy of being hit by flares and other projectiles thrown from the terrace area occupied by the offending Red Star fans. A particular problem within the culture of Serbian football is the use by some fans of what is referred to as ‘pyrotechnics’. The use of the very term alerts us to the problem. Referring to marine distress flares – an item that should be used strictly for the emergency purpose intended – as pyrotechnics, lends to an image of fireworks being used within a carnival situation. While it is certainly reasonable to regard the football match as a form of carnival to be accompanied by certain festivities, there must be limits to the coinciding behaviour from fans in attendance at the stadium. While the fans make up part of the carnival atmosphere, engaging in potentially dangerous activities such as igniting, let alone throwing, distress flares cannot be allowed. The media in Serbia could play a more useful role in this regard than it has done thus far. Discussions with the FSS indicate that much media reportage represents ‘pyrotechnic’ displays in football stadiums by fans in positive terms. To, on the one hand, present reports that criticise violence from fans, while, on the other, implicitly condoning other prohibited and potentially dangerous activities is to send out mixed messages to the general public, young people in particular. This becomes a particular matter of concern in regard to youth and children.

Football in Serbia – as it is in so many other countries in Europe and around the world – is undoubtedly a significant cultural domain and one with great popularity to young people. Therefore, quite clear and consistent guidelines of

conduct are required and this may involve a degree of cultural adjustment. This is recognised in the initiatives of the FSS as that organisation works in tandem with the government, but cultural change will only effectively occur if other key institutions such as the media play their part.

The notion of cultural change is at the heart of the present study. The underlying rationale of the study is that while undesirable aspects of football supporting behaviour, especially violence and other forms of dangerous conduct can be dealt with and managed via control and security measures, the ultimate objective should be to alter the culture in which such behaviours are able to manifest. Two levels of prevention in regard to deviant football supporter behaviour can, then, be identified and elaborated. The first level of prevention can be referred to as prevention by coercion, the second level, prevention by consensus. Prevention by coercion involves the immediate responsive strategies targeted at halting illegal football supporting activity and associated disorder. This includes the various forms of policing and control measures that are deployed not only at football stadiums and on match days themselves, but also the intelligence used by the police and partner agencies to dismantle football hooligan groupings. Punishment via the legal system to deal with law-breaking behaviour associated with football supporting can also be regarded as within the category of prevention by coercion, given the intention of the law to have punishment serve as a deterrent to the repetition of illegal behaviour. Punishment by way of incarceration, in serious cases, also serves to remove the deviant individual from the relevant context of fraternisation, his removal in this way, therefore, constituting a preventive measure. Prevention by coercion will work in proportion to the seriousness of the problem faced. In contexts where the hooligan related activity is seemingly well-organized and recurrent, or at

least potentially so, there is likely to be an emphasis on prevention by coercive means.

As indicated in this report, and as highlighted by the response to UEFA's admonition, there is recognition within Serbia at the highest level of government and football authority that strategies of prevention through coercive measures are paramount to deal with the problem of football supporter disorder that no doubt exists. As discussed above, the implementation, enactment and success of such measures necessarily involve a high degree of cooperation, with the peak level of football administration centrally involved in the process. Be this as it may, prevention by coercion signifies an external impact upon the football supporting culture in that the process for change, even though involving football bodies, is driven from without rather than from within.

While prevention through coercive means is necessary, certainly in troublesome football supporter contexts such as that in Serbia, it is usefully matched by the initiation of measures of prevention through consensual means that are able to effect change within the football supporting culture. Measures with such ambition also require a high degree of institutional cooperation that put in place initiatives and strategies and support tendencies that militate against the minority hooligan element. Cultural change requires nurturing and, as such, will work more slowly than the social control measures imposed through coercive prevention. But, while coercive measures are intended as a response to meet the immediate menace of football supporter disorder, the consensual approach is aimed at a longer transformative outcome through which a non-hooligan ethos enters the lifeblood of the football supporting culture to the extent that violent and related behaviour is marginalised to the point of extinction. The following

section of the report examines how the cultural change to Serbian football may occur and considers initiatives that may help nurture, develop and sustain anti-violent and socially positive forms of football supporter culture.

Orientation to the research

The original plan for the project – as set out in the initial proposal – was for an ethnographic type study to be undertaken with a focus on an incipient supporter group associated with the Red Star Belgrade football club, which claims to disavow violence and other forms of socially negative behaviour customarily associated with football hooliganism. Initial contact made with representatives of this faction (known as *Delije* Peacemakers or New Force) gave reason for optimism regarding the merits and productive outcomes of a research process involving time spent ‘in the field’ with group affiliates. However, by the time the research was ready to commence the faction in question appears to have fragmented and its contact persons became unavailable. A website still appears for the group, but can at this point in time (March 2012) be regarded as idle. This development begs questions that have implications for the larger aim of the project in regard to the prospects for overcoming the anti-social tendencies associated with football in Serbia. Did the group retreat from its proposed approach to football supporting because of pressure from rival factions within the Red Star supporter culture? Were the ambitions abandoned simply because of a failure to gather enough people into the faction? Was the grouping ever seriously concerned with its stated ambitions, or merely concerned with overcoming rivalries internal to the Red Star supporter culture? Did the group really exist at all, or was it just a front put up by certain agents in an attempt to clandestinely penetrate the hooligan element within Red Star’s *Delije* supporter

network? Each of these possibilities has been raised in discussions during the research process and answers to the questions can only be speculated upon. However, that such questions were raised says much about the complexity and difficulty in analysing and coming to practical terms with the football supporting culture in Serbia.

Given the initial obstacle presented by the inability to pursue a field study in close association with a non-violent supporter grouping associated with a major football club, the research approach shifted to an unstructured interviewing process, involving interviews being conducted with people professing an interest in the development of a non-violent and socially positive supporter culture within Serbian football. Before setting out some detail on the research participants, the approach to the interviews, related ethical considerations and the actual viewpoints arising from the participants in the interview process, it is pertinent to reflect further upon the approach and ambition of this type of research in relation to other studies of football supporters.

The study of football supporter cultures is a well-established field of research within sociology, existing at the intersection between sub-disciplinary fields such as the sociology of sport and the sociology of deviance (for a summary of the relevant literature see Hughson, 1998). Mention of the latter sub-field gives indication of the focus of much of the dedicated research on football supporter cultures. Pioneering work in the field was conducted in the 1980s by researchers at what was known as the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research at Leicester University. Researchers, under the leadership of Eric Dunning, conducted field based studies of the football hooligan subculture in Leicester, by studying the young men in their local neighbourhood (Murphy et. al., 1990)

The research procedure adopted for this research was observational study and in related research involving field trips with football supporters, 'participant observation'. This latter type of research was taken further by Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti in their immersed 'participant observer' research in the 1990s of the hooligan supporter sub-cultures associated with the Sheffield United and Aberdeen Football Clubs respectively (see discussion of and references to this research in Hughson, 1998). A number of researchers have since followed this insider research approach to going 'among the thugs' (for example, Robson, 2000. For European studies see Spaaij, 2008).

The various research undertakings on football hooliganism have played a useful part in providing a better informed understanding of this social phenomenon. However the highly immersed 'participant observer' research approach raises concerns that have been long-noted within sociology. Since 'participant observer' research was pioneered at the University of Chicago in the 1940s to study American street gangs, it has been claimed by critics that this type of research tends to produce an over-sympathetic response of the researcher to the group being studied (Hughson et.al. 2005, chapter 8). In the worst instances, a researcher may be feared to over-identify with the group so closely that he (or she) 'goes native' and starts to engage in the deviant activities of the group he is supposed to be researching. It is easy enough to anticipate this possibility in regard to ethnographic research of football hooligan groups. Both Armstrong and Giulianotti address this matter in their published work discussing their fieldwork and both of them, especially Giulianotti, appear to have remained aware throughout the research undertaking that certain ethical lines, especially concerning the enactment of violence or vandalism should not be crossed (Hughson et al. 2005, p. 170).

However, although researchers may have avoided the worst excesses of over-identifying with the football hooligan groupings they are studying, especially by avoiding violence and associated behaviours, this does not mean that sympathy with the subject groups has not marked the studies. While not condoning violence the studies of Armstrong and Giulianotti remained aloof from recognizing football hooliganism as a social problem preferring to see it rather as a collective enactment of ‘social identity’ (Hughson, 1998). A resulting problem is that the studies provide limited value to subsequent policy related agendas because, by not regarding football hooliganism as a social problem, the studies cannot commit to recommendations aimed at overcoming hooligan activities. The positioning of the ‘participant observer’ also necessarily involves a level of perspectival bias in that the research field is seen through the eyes of the subject or participant group – in this case football hooligans.

What has tended then to be left out within the research on football supporter cultures is the perspective of the non-hooligan majority of fans. Rather, non-hooligan fans have tended to be represented in the research as a mainstream against which football hooligans in some way rebel. Again, while this is not to say that sociologists have celebrated football hooliganism, it is to suggest that their particular ‘participant observer research’ focus has at best caricatured the majority of non-hooligan fans as a mainstream, which tends to be conservative and compliant with the dictates of football clubs and football authority. This, of course, is not the case and research with non-hooligan fans promises to deliver a diversity of opinion and viewpoints on matters pertaining to football that are potentially just as radical as those of football hooligans, if somewhat less socially destructive.

In turn, care must be taken not to caricature football hooligans. After all, a key intention of the ‘participant observer’ studies is to breakdown stereotypes and resultant mythologies. One of the mythologies that most of the researchers using the different degrees of ethnographic research have exposed is that of the football hooligan not really having an interest in football as a sport or in the team that they misbehave in the name of. Some men will use football as a front to partake in violence and other anti-social conduct, but most will have a genuine attachment of feeling for the club, irrespective of how misplaced and unacceptable this expression of this feeling may be on occasion. And it is in this recognition that some hope exists. If we can accept that even the majority of those supporters engaging in disorder and misconduct are nevertheless interested in the sport of football and the fortunes of their team, then this gives some confidence that their behaviour is not beyond reform.

The primary research conducted for this project makes a further contribution to the research of football supporter culture, but its deliberate intention has been to focus on and give voice to supporters of a non-hooligan persuasion. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, not all of the research participants are football supporters. The nature of the project has not leant itself to ‘participant observation’ research, but as indicated above, a qualitative unstructured interview approach has been deployed. This is not to suggest that ‘participant observation’ research is not applicable to research of football supporters of a non-hooligan kind. Indeed, the initial intention had been to use this method for the research project. Ethnographic research, using ‘participant observation’, of football supporter groups dedicated to non-hooliganism and anti-social behaviour promises to be quite revealing and the undertaking of such research

in European contexts where such groups exist is to be encouraged. Hopefully, the emergence of such groups within Serbia will make such a research undertaking relevant to that context before too long. For the project at this time, a more conventional interviewing process has been appropriate.

The Interview Process

Interview subjects were obtained from the researcher's private and professional social networks in Belgrade. The intention was to determine how these people perceived the situation of the football supporting culture in Serbia, if they think it is marked substantially by socially negative attitudes and behaviours, how this impacts on their own supporting behaviours and how they believe positive advances within the football supporting culture might be made. The comments made during interviews are, of course, the opinions of particular individuals, and therefore cannot be treated as factual in regard to the account they give of the present situation or ways to an improved future. But nevertheless, they provide a necessary insight from people who either follow football or have an interest in football supporting in connection to significant others, with children being most significant in this regard.

Interviews or, more rightly, discussions were sought with people close to the organisation of football (the peak federation and football clubs) and within the government. These discussions gave valuable context to the viewpoints that came via the core interviewing process. This dimension of the research will be discussed further on, following a more detailed account of the interviews with the core participant sample.

To be clear: three categories of ‘interviews’ are identified within the research project. Firstly, the interviews undertaken with the core participant sample are referred to as ‘formal’ interviews. This is not because the interviews were conducted in a formal manner, but because they were undertaken in a systematic way, constituting the main qualitative research activity within the study. Secondly, random conversations, from which relevant opinions about football supporting in Serbia were noted, are referred to as ‘informal interviews’. Finally, meetings arranged with individuals from key organizations or institutions are referred to as ‘official interviews’. The ‘formal interviews’ with core research participant are discussed below and then the other categories are discussed under the heading ‘Supplementary Research’.

Formal interviews

Sixteen ‘formal’ interviews were conducted during the course of the research. As indicated above, only people believed to hold an interest in football supporting in Serbia being developed in a non-violent way, and in a way removed from intimidating and abusive behaviour of various kinds, were sought for interviews. This research was not meant to be an investigation into football hooliganism in Serbia, but, to reiterate, was focussed on looking for ways forward to change. Nevertheless, and somewhat unavoidably, interviewing involved, to some extent, discussion of people’s concerns with the present state of the football supporter culture in the country.

Again, as indicated, respondents were gathered from the researcher's professional and social network within Belgrade. Given that I am an academic, and move in professional and social circles consistent with this status, it was likely (and this proved to be the case) that finding respondents with a non-violent and non-abusive attitude to football supporting (and life at large) would be the type of people that I would readily make contact with. The interviews have been conducted over four field trips to Belgrade occurring between September 2011 and February 2012. The interviews were not audio recorded, instead notes were taken by the researcher during interviews. The interviews were not recorded as some respondents in the early stage of the interview process declared an unwillingness to have their spoken voice recorded. Accordingly, for consistency in the interviewing method, none of the interviews were recorded; i.e. with the decision to not audio-record being made early on in the process, the option of recording was not raised with subsequent interview participants.

Interview participants were aged between 31-55 years, although apart from the 55 year old, the other fifteen participants were aged between 31-46 years. Thirteen of the participants were male, 3 were female. Thirteen of the participants had some level of higher education experience. Some of the participants declined to have their occupational status named so further detail on this demographic overall will not be mentioned, apart from saying that the majority of the participants were involved in white-collar employment. All of the participants except one are based in Belgrade, this being due to the time limitations in the field. The relevance of the Belgrade focus of the research will be discussed in the project findings.

Being a supporter of football and a Serbian football club were not a requirement of interview participation, but the majority of participants indicated differing degrees of supporter commitment to football clubs with teams in the Serbian SuperLiga; declaration of the club support of the participants can be summarized as follows: Crevena Zvezda (Red Star) 7, Partizan 3, OFK Belgrade 2, FK Rad (Belgrade) 1, FK Vojvodina 1. Two of the participants, both female, had no supporter allegiance to any club, but had male family members, including sons, who were interested in football supporting.

Summary of participant views:

The interviews (conducted in English) each commenced with the researcher (viz. John Hughson) outlining the project in terms of its main aim being concerned with examining the possibilities for the development of a more positive football supporter culture within Serbia. The opening was deliberately phrased in this way in the belief that the researcher should not 'lead' the participant with an overly biased question. Of course, reference to a 'more positive football culture' contains the binary opposite idea of negativity and suggests there is something wrong that might be put right. However, such low level bias is unavoidable, as the project goal needed to be stated in the broadest terms to validate its significance to participants. The important tendency to avoid was leading into the interview with presumptions about the type or severity of the problems existing within the Serbian football culture. The purpose of this dimension of the research was to get the opinions of the participants on what they see as the problems and how or if they believe the problems might be addressed.

A related matter of interview sensitivity to be observed in this type of context concerns the interviewer being a cultural outsider, i.e. non-Serbian. Serbia is a country in which there tends to be a suspicion of outside interference from ‘western’ experts, so the position was taken in these interviews to show respect to the opinions of the participants in terms of them being treated as the ‘experts’ on their own country. The use of Serbian language by the researcher for greetings and ordering coffees etc., as well in some stages of the interview where opportunity arose to use relevant and particular terminologies, may also have helped, to some extent, in overcoming the problem of interviewer outsidersness.

Each of the interview participants recognised Serbia having a significant problem within its football supporter culture and in all but one case, the participants regarded the problem to be serious enough to be referred to as a crisis for the sport. Participants were asked as to how they acquired their ‘knowledge’ and formed their opinions on the subject. The media was the overarching answer (to be discussed below), while 8 participants also referred to their attendance of football matches as relevant to their opinion forming. To clarify this aspect those who declared the relevance of match attendance were supporters of Red Star (3), Partizan (1), OFK (2), Rad (1), Vojvodina (1). The Vojvodina supporter was the only female with a team affiliation among the interview participants. Only two of the aforementioned supporters were season ticket holders, both being supporters of Red Star. Only the supporters of Red Star and Partizan had witnessed higher range hooligan activity such as fighting and the propelling of distress flares in the direction of players, although all of those supporters who referred to match attendance said that they had witnessed disorderly behaviour such as the abuse of rival fans and players. Factions of the supporter base for the two largest and most prominent Serbian football clubs,

Red Star and Partizan were believed, by all interview participants, to be the main source of the disorderly and hooligan behaviour within Serbian football, yet all respondents declared that most football games and the live attendance of them passes without alarming or even notable crowd incidence.

Recent incidents of crowd disorder were discussed earlier in the report and will not be rehearsed at this point, but it is worth reiterating that football related crowd disorder has been a matter of media focus within Belgrade over the last few years. This focus is connected with a prevailing public image of football hooliganism in Serbia being connected to organised crime. This image gained particular media prominence in 2009 when an episode of the current affairs documentary-type television program *Insajder* (broadcast on Belgrade-based television station B92), titled ‘The Rules of the Game’, featured an expose on this topic. Among other allegations, the program reiterated these linkages and went further to suggest that both the failure to apprehend football hooligans and the leniency they tend to receive within the criminal justice system raises questions about the role of the police and the judiciary. In the wake of the furore caused by this program, the journalist responsible for its presentation, Brankica Stanković reportedly received numerous death threats. The documentary was regarded as such an outstanding contribution to Serbian public affairs that Ms Stanković was awarded the ‘Person of the Year’ award in October 2010 by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Mission to Serbia.

Thirteen of the interview participants referred to this documentary, without solicitation, and did so in a way generally indicating acceptance of its claims about corruption in Serbian football. The documentary is mentioned here not so much to make a case for its veracity or validation, but to show that the image it

presents of Serbian football appears to be in keeping with that held by people who desire a football supporter culture bereft of violence and other hostile forms of social behaviour. The image is one of football existing within a rather lawless terrain, whereby hooligans tend to go unpunished because they are protected by the criminal elements perceived to be associated with football.

The documentary (and hence non-fictional) depictions of football in Serbia being little more than a refuge for violent law-breakers is matched by the image occurring in fictionalised contexts such as feature film. A recent Serbian motion picture, *Šišanje* (Haircut), presented a story about the life of a talented teenage mathematics student being drawn into the world of neo-Nazi skinhead culture and violence associated with the following of a Belgrade based football team. While, as the historian Jeffrey Richards (1997) reminds us, a film is a film after all, that *Šišanje* was discussed within the media as though its plot was true to life, is an indication of the depth of negativity about football in Serbia. Young men may come to football hooliganism from different social backgrounds (in Serbia, as in other countries) but it is another matter to suggest that the highest achievers in education are at risk of spiralling into a deviant sub-world connected to football supporting. The point here is not to overstate the impact of a film, but to draw on its popular reading as an example of the alarm about youth and football related violence. Such an interpretation exaggerates deviance and under appreciates the normality of the football supporting ambitions of the majority of fans in the country.

Interestingly, within the context of the interviews, *Šišanje* was mentioned by the same 13 participants who discussed the *Insajder* documentary. However, in this case the participants were mostly critical of the film, the criticisms ranging from

the view that the film is an exaggeration to it being a complete fabrication. The tenor of concern from some participants is that the film is intended for an international audience and that if successfully marketed in this way it presents Serbia in a bad light and (some participants believe) according to stereotypes of Serbia that already seem to prevail in ‘the West’. Three of the participants expressed their concern more in terms of film criticism per se, i.e. they regarded it as a poor film irrespective of its impact. Only two of the research participants – i.e. those identifying as non-football supporters – believe the film to present a fairly accurate picture of the links between criminals, extremists political operatives and football hooligan gangs. Small as this sample may be, it does suggest that people in Serbia without an interest in football may be more predisposed to accept a deviant image of the sport presented via popular mediums such as film even if in a rather exaggerated way.

Although the majority of participants may have regarded the film *Šišanje* as an exaggeration, this assessment did not counter their prevailing view of football in Serbia having attachments to criminal elements. Interview questioning was not pushed too hard in this direction, and only two of the participants mentioned names of figures they believe to be criminally involved in football. As with much of the media debate the picture given was murky, without clear linkage being made to organised crime and hooliganism, apart from the claim that the hooligan ranks are used by criminals as a base for recruiting young men into criminal activities, especially drug dealing.

A number of respondents regarded this possibility as a genuine concern for male youth in Serbia within the broader socio-economic context. As young males are finding it increasingly difficult to gain employment during the economic crisis

the concern is that they will drift into crime and that the football terraces provide a gathering point for their recruitment. However, apart from the two female respondents who are not personally interested in football, none of the other respondents said that they would either prevent or attempt to dissuade their children from attending SuperLiga matches, except in the case of potentially fractious games with reputations for crowd disorder such as the Red Star and Partizan Belgrade derbies.

The problem of criminality and youth, although associated with football was seen as a problem for young people from underprivileged backgrounds coming from homes with little parental control. Although this was of concern to participants as a significant social issue, they did not see recruitment into criminality via the football stands as a dangerous possibility for their own children or for those coming from homes with strong parental influence. Indeed, the bigger fear for personal safety and those of family members was in regard to ‘being in the wrong place at the wrong time’ and caught up in violence – perhaps gunfire – occurring in neighbourhood areas between rival criminal groupings with football supporting affiliations. Groupings associated with both Red Star and Partizan received mention from participants in this regard.

In regard to dangerous match day environments Red Star’s Marakana Stadium received the greatest and most specific mention. But even here, the threat of crowd disorder on a scale to be a deterrent to attendance was regarded as being infrequent and associated with only keen fan rivalries, notably (again) that between the fans of Red Star and Partizan. In regard to the Marakana Stadium reference was especially made to the North Stand where the hard-core home fans of *Delije* take their place on match day. This was seen as an area to be

avoided at any cost by fans just wanting to see the match and remain clear of troublesome crowd behaviour. The Red Star supporters interviewed sat in either the East or West stands on match days, although two of them had on rare occasion over the years found themselves in the North Stand. On these occasions they had witnessed not so much violent but rowdy behaviour such as other fans jumping about and jostling while watching the game.

When asked about the cultural and social role of football each of the participants indicated the importance or significance of the sport within the country. Some, even those identifying as football fans, believed that football commands too much of a profile within Serbia and that this itself becomes a cultural problem – i.e. where sport is regarded as more important than other forms of culture such as art and literature and, relatedly, education. Three participants, each involved in educational vocations and having some knowledge of youth education and training schemes, commented that football should be used in connection with programs related to the arts and education. This was seen as a way to counter the negative tendencies within the football supporting culture that draw young men into hooliganism and, potentially, further criminality.

When asked where the responsibility rests for the implementation and administration of such schemes, the participants declared that the state should play a lead coordinating role, but that also ‘football’ should be proactive in this regard. By ‘football’ they elaborated to mean football clubs, with again the leading clubs Red Star and Partizan being singled out to take such a role. This opinion seemed to merge with a more general view held by participants that football clubs have a responsibility of putting something significant back into

the communities from which they derive their support and without which they would not survive. There was a prevailing attitude – not so unlike that detectable in other countries, certainly so in the UK – that football stands somewhat outside the economic crisis experienced by the majority of people in Serbia.

All of the interview participants made comment about the high level of relative privilege enjoyed in Serbia by professional football players. This led into comments by some that footballers should pay a special form of personal tax that is put directly into the state education or health budget. But, more general, was the view that footballers have a responsibility as role models given the high profile they have within the lives of young people. While the 3 aforementioned participants said that professional footballers should give their time to schemes connecting football with education and positive social values, others mentioned footballers being used within advertising campaigns opposed to criminality, drug-usage and hooliganism, as well as other problematic social issues in Serbia such as homophobia and domestic violence by men towards women.

The final stage of the interviews moved onto asking participants about how positive changes to the culture of football supporting in Serbia could be pursued. In each case, and to varying extent, this involved participants referring back to their perceptions of criminal connections to the sport and the need for the eradication of such connections for any positive change to be viable. A number of participants referred to hooligan elements having a say in club affairs (Red Star was the club referred to specifically in this regard) to the extent that altering the supporter culture will not be possible as long as such circumstances persist. Some participants believed that hooligan elements within clubs would

actively mobilize against initiatives designed to create a non-violent culture and environment within football stadiums although one participant – a Red Star supporter – and season ticket holder took a rather different view. He believes that criminal elements within the *Delije* of Red Star will comply with anti-hooligan initiatives as long as such initiatives do not effectively impact upon criminal activities that occur beyond the football – i.e. this participant believes the correlation between hooliganism and disorderly behaving football fandom and non-football related criminality to be an exaggeration that is popularly accepted by the public in Serbia.

During the latter stage of each interview the participants were asked if they would be prepared to become actively involved in supporter groups within clubs and/or within a network across the Serbian football league of supporters openly committed to the development of a non-violent and non-abusive football supporting culture. In each case the participants declined. The reasons for declination can be summarized into three: 1) too dangerous 2) unworkable 3) clubs would not be committed to such initiatives. Further comment is made on each of these reasons in the subsequent three paragraphs.

Some participants believed the football environment within Serbia to be too volatile for fans to take an active lead in countering hooliganism. While these participants were happy to speak in the research interviews and air their views anonymously, they believed it would be another matter to do so publicly and certainly not so as an activist openly rivalling football hooliganism. These participants each referred to the controversy over Brankica Stanković and the death threats that she allegedly received for her expose of football hooliganism

on television. The participants also doubted the goodwill of clubs to give them protection and of the ability of the police to do so effectively.

Other participants believe supporter led initiatives against violence and crowd disorder to be a good idea in principle but not achievable in practice. The key point raised here was applicable mainly to the large clubs with large factionalised supporter groups such as Red Star (*Delije*) and Partizan (*Grobari*). Participants believed that if a non-violent grouping of supporters were developed within the supporter bases of these clubs, even with the backing of the club and of some other elements within the supporter base, it would face destabilizing and possibly intimidating opposition from factions that did not welcome such an initiative. And, even if not reacted to in a hostile and intimidating way, it was believed that such a supporter faction would be marginalised within the larger supporter culture and be unable to draw in active and visible support even from other supporters who might be sympathetic to the vision for change.

Connected to the above reason for doubting the viability of supporter led initiatives for change within the football supporting culture, was the belief of some participants that the clubs would not seriously commit themselves to such an initiative. Reasons given for this view were twofold, and again related to other points. Firstly, some participants believe clubs such as Red Star and Partizan to be so beholden to the wishes of hooligan supporters that they could not genuinely work with an internal grouping committed to a non-violent supporter culture. Secondly, others believed that clubs are so driven by profit incentive that activities of this kind – even if not entirely unwelcome – would be regarded as a distraction and not given the type of backing needed to allow such

a group to function effectively in relation to the club and other fans. All participants accepted the reality that for a non-violent supporter group to succeed within the broader collective supporter context for any SuperLiga team in Serbia, the backing of clubs would be absolutely necessary.

This latter point has implication for the UEFA sanctioned directive on professional football clubs in Europe needing to have Supporter Liaison Officers in place by the 2012/13 playing seasons. None of the participants knew specifically of this requirement regarding SLOs, although two participants (both Red Star supporters) had knowledge of Supporters Direct and were broadly aware of the concept. Given the relevance of SLOs to the topic, the researcher informed participants of the SLO requirement and its ambitions. Participants were generally pessimistic about the prospects of this plan having a real impact of change on the supporter culture. Some commented that clubs will comply with the directive because of the requirement, but believed the installation of SLOs would be dealt with by clubs as little more than an administrative exercise. The implication of this attitude and further discussion of the SLO role in clubs will be discussed further in the next section of the report.

The pessimistic outlook regarding the development of a football supporter culture in Serbia in which violence and abuse are largely overcome resulted in participants tending to re-emphasise in their concluding comments the need for a strengthening of coercive measures. This entailed police being dedicated and more committed to dealing with hooligans and also a more concerted effort by the state to impose harsh sanctions. The response of political leaders was regarding as important, yet despite an awareness of the public statements made

in the wake of events in late 2010 and in regard to UEFA's ultimatum for Serbian football to improve its supporter culture, participants remain sceptical of the sincerity and the willingness of politicians to be genuinely decisive.

While generally supporting the toughening of control measures over football crowds and hooligan activity, interview participants (except one) opposed the idea of Serbian football clubs and the national team being suspended from European and international competitions. The visit to Belgrade by the President of UEFA in early 2011 was well-publicised in Serbia and all of the participants had an awareness of the resultant warning hanging over Serbian football should crowd disorder at SuperLiga and national team games be seen to continue. The almost unanimous view in opposition to banning action being taken was partly based on the opinion that the majority of football supporters in Serbia should not be punished for the poor behaviour of a minority. Yet, within the interviewing context regarding improvement to the football supporting culture within Serbia, this measure was viewed not just as punitive, but also as potentially damaging.

To summarize this view: the majority of participants believe that to banish the Serbian national team and club teams from external contact with the wider football playing world will risk intensifying the self-regarding perception of Serbia being treated as a 'pariah state'. In regard to the prospects for the culture of football supporting, this is deemed as detrimental because it plays into the hands of those who would proselytise the view that Serbia is being hard-done by, that 'there is nothing to lose' by continuing with unruly behaviour at the football. Within a climate of isolation it is believed that successfully mobilising

an opposition to violence and disorder in Serbian football will be even more difficult than it is already.

Contrary to the prevailing view was that of one participant (a supporter of Red Star) who believed that Serbian football (club teams and the national team) would benefit from suspension from European and international competitions. This research respondent believes the problem of crowd disorder to be so entrenched and connected to the corruption he perceives to be endemic to football in Serbia that suspension from the international stage would instigate some genuine response in Serbia to the problem and would signal to the outside world that the problem is being dealt with. Even though this participant regarded the corruption problem to be residing at the level of club football, he believed there was such a negative flow-on affect to the fan following for the Serbian national team that the ban should be comprehensive and thus apply to both club teams and the national football team. The respective views on the banning issue are reconsidered in the recommendation section of this report.

The problem of masculine identity within contemporary Serbia was clearly an issue recognized by most of the participants and was explicitly stated as such by four of them in connection with football hooliganism. The particular concern had much to do with the perceived crisis of masculinity in post-war, post-communist, post-Yugoslavia, Serbia (Blagojević, 2009a). A view coming from the interviews, in general, was of football in present day Serbia providing a forum to fill a social vacuum for many young men of the post-war (meaning the Yugoslavian civil war) generation. Yet, interestingly, the recognition by a number of research participants that Serbia is a country in transition, with a population socially and politically traumatised by war provides the impression

that the situation in the football culture is not permanent, but open to transformation in the longer term. While the participants tended to be pessimistic about the prospects for the development of a non-violent and non-abusive football culture, most agreed that there may be hope for positive developments in the football supporter culture if there is, in the medium to longer term future, an improvement in the social prospects for young men in Serbia.

Whether or not and as to how this might occur is, of course, a matter of some great speculation. Each research participant referred to the impact of the global economic crisis on Serbia and all believed the situation would deteriorate before possibly improving. In such economic conditions it was regarded that the crisis of masculinity would only worsen and this could have nothing but negative implications for the football supporting culture. When referring to broader matters of politics and economy, each of the participants referred to Serbia's possible incorporation into the European Union. During the early stages of the research process the possibility of this occurring did not look likely, but by the latter stages (March 2012), with a satisfactory resolution being reached on the Serbia / Kosovo relationship, Serbia was granted EU candidate country status. Opinions on the favourability of Serbia becoming a member state differed amongst respondents, but most tended to agree, even given the problems faced by member states, that EU inclusion was preferable to exclusion.

In regard to football, a general view prevailed that EU inclusion would potentially bring a change to greater professionalism as football along with other 'industries' in Serbia would be more inclined to comply (or be forced to comply) with European standards. However, during discussion of the EU

inclusion, three participants returned somewhat critically to discussion of UEFA's warning to Serbia about exclusion from European football competitions. These participants suggested that UEFA may be perceived, in some way, as a microcosmic version of the EU and that conditions laid down to Serbian football administrators by UEFA was an unfortunate reminder – in the minds of some Serbs – of unreasonable preconditions imposed on the government of Serbia for inclusion in the EU.

Supplementary Research

‘Informal interviews’:

The sixteen interviews discussed above constituted the core research activity for the study. However, during time spent in Belgrade the discussion of football supporter culture was not totally confined to this ‘formal’ interview process. During this time various opportunities arose for the researcher to converse with people on the topic of the football supporting culture in Serbia. Such opportunities included talking to taxi drivers, to family friends and to acquaintances in social sport playing contexts (not football). In these contexts and others, people showed interest in the study and willingness to put forward opinions. Given the brevity of such informal discussion people were inclined to mention what they consider to be the problem with the football supporter culture in Serbia, rather than to discuss directions towards positive cultural change. During the course of the research a notebook was kept and relevant informal discussions were recorded wherever possible. Given the informality of this aspect of the research, no personal details on individuals were gathered, and

nothing was recorded in the notes regarding even fairly obvious details such as gender. It should be noted though that the informal research notes only refer to discussion with people over the age of eighteen. This is not to say that the opinions of younger people about the football supporter culture in Serbia would not be of interest or value, but bringing them into the research would have involved a set of complicated ethical clearance procedures that would have hampered the study.

An examination of the informal field notes reveals a summary that largely overlaps with points of concern about the football supporter culture in Serbia raised in the formal interview process. Points most consistently raised within the informal research can be summarised as follows:

- 1) hooliganism creates an unsafe environment at football matches
- 2) hooliganism creates an unsafe environment in Belgrade on match days, especially when the major derby is played
- 3) football is being used as a forum not only for violence, but as a haven for the expression of anti-social attitudes
- 4) football hooliganism gives Serbia a bad name in Europe and elsewhere
- 5) football hooliganism makes attendance at football undesirable for women and children
- 6) football needs to break all possible connections to criminal figures or figures of dubious public character.

‘Official Interviews’:

Another type of interview held during the research will be referred to as ‘official’ interviews. These interviews were conducted with relevant organisations with a stake, presumably, in the improvement in image and reality of the football supporter culture in Serbia. The representative target organisations in this regard were 1) the peak representative body of football in Serbia (hence the FSS) 2) SuperLiga football clubs 3) the bureaucratic arm of national government responsible for overseeing football (hence the Ministry of Youth and Sport). Respective interviews related to these targets will be discussed in turn.

The FSS:

Two meetings were held during the course of the research with senior officials of the FSS – during the latter part of 2011 and early part of 2012. The meetings were held in English, although some of the discussion was in Serbian. The researcher was assisted in the meeting by his Belgrade based PhD student (that student’s project on sport in Serbia will be mentioned in the concluding section to the report) and, where necessary, the student translated points made in Serbian. The FSS was informed in advance of the research, its aim, and the sponsorship from UEFA. The intention was to be completely forthright with the FSS, and other organisations about the research.

As with the ‘formal’ discussion in the core interviewing process, the approach was via unstructured questions. The initial interview involved the FSS officials setting out what they believed to be the problems facing the football supporting culture in Serbia, before moving on to discuss remedies. At all times the focus of the discussion was kept by the FSS officials on their organisational responsibility to provide a lead, but this also inevitably involved reference to the relationship with other agents such as the police and the media. Officials frankly admitted to the problem of hooliganism and crowd disorder in Serbian football, of the kind outlined in the first section of this report. There was not so much an attempt to diagnose the underlying problem rather than just to refer to a minority of football supporters – within both the context of club and national team support – who use football as a means for behaving in a totally unacceptable way; i.e. in a manner contrary to the law and therefore in contravention of what can be tolerated within football stadiums or any social gathering point where connection to football might be drawn.

No reference was made to a connection between criminal elements in Serbia and football during the meetings with the FSS. A favourable working relationship with the police was mentioned. There was an admission that policing of football crowds may not always have been as efficient as might be required, but it was believed that a much more coordinated approach between the FSS and the police was now in operation. This was connected to the need to respond at a high operational level in a coordinated manner to the incidents of 2010. The FSS officials referred to and acknowledged their responsibility to ensure the provision of better in and around ground security on match days via the deployment of well-trained security personnel. The provision and training of such personnel is in place and with cognisance and recognition of UEFA requirements in this regard. The cooperative role of clubs was discussed, the

FSS officials referring to the need for all clubs to not only comply with dictates on security, but to recognise their social and cultural responsibility in regard to providing a safe and welcoming environment for people attending matches at their home grounds.

As indicated in the first section of this report, the FSS officials expressed dissatisfaction with the media, especially the tabloid press, in the reporting on and related discussion of crowd disorder in football matches in Serbia. To reiterate – the FSS officials referred to what they regarded as mixed message reporting, whereby on the one hand newspaper reports decry hooligan behaviour, yet, on the other, fail to criticise one of the key activities involved in the crowd disorder – the throwing of ignited maritime distress flares. This discrepancy was recognised as a major problem and was emphasised by the FSS official in regard to the matter of cultural change within football supporting in Serbia. As long as the igniting of flares is discussed by significant sections of the media as an acceptable part of the football supporting culture in Serbia it is particularly difficult for sanctions against flare throwing to win general favour with the public.

With more specific reference to what might be done to make positive steps towards change within the football supporter culture the FSS officials referred to the appointment of Supporter Liaison Officers. This was done in a way not just to highlight their readiness to comply with the UEFA directive on SLOs ahead of the 2012/13 season, but to indicate a belief that in the context of the supporter culture in Serbia such appointments will play a necessary role. Nevertheless, the FSS officials declared that this process would not be easy and required not only an undertaking by clubs to make the required appointment of

an SLO but a commitment to ensuring that the appointments are made not only in name, but also that the individuals occupying the appointments will be dedicated to working with clubs, in concert with supporters, to actively oppose disorderly and violent behaviour at matches and in association with football more generally. At the time of the second meeting with the FSS in February 2012 it was ascertained that SuperLiga football clubs are on track with the appointment of SLOs ahead of the new season deadline. However, at this point in time, no further detail on the actual appointments per club could be provided.

SuperLiga clubs:

Of obvious organizational significance in relation to the football culture in Serbia are the football clubs. Nevertheless, it is not especially customary for academic studies of football supporters to hold interviews with the official representatives or administrators of clubs. This has been especially the case with studies of football hooligan groupings, for which the officialdom of clubs tend to be perceived in oppositional terms. Even more generally in ethnographically based research studies or in related forms of qualitative research, concentrated on presenting the view of the social world from particular situational perspectives, opinions from 'official' bodies and organisations are not sought. While the present study has focussed on a supporters or grass-roots (bottom-up) perspective, the achievement of positive outcomes for the football supporter culture in Serbia necessarily involves a working relationship with football clubs. Extensive contact with football clubs has not been sought for this limited term part-time study, but it was decided that interviews with the two major football clubs in Serbia, Belgrade's Red Star and Partizan would be sought.

Initial agreement to meet was indicated by both clubs, however, only Red Star followed through with an invitation for the researcher to visit its offices to discuss the study. Accordingly, a meeting was held in November 2011 with a representative of the club's General Secretary. In this case, the meeting was conducted in Serbian and my PhD student served as the translator. As with the initial meeting with the FSS, the purpose of the study was explained and the support of UEFA reiterated (it had already been indicated in the preliminary correspondence). There is actually little to report from the meeting, which functioned as more of a diplomatic exercise than an interview for the purposes of research. This is not meant so much as a criticism of the club representative. It must be appreciated that the football clubs in Serbia exist in a difficult environment and carefulness with any form of investigation from the outside is to be expected. It might be mentioned too that suspicion towards enquiry remains a tendency within Serbia's organisational culture. The response from the club representative focussed on ensuring that the club was working cooperatively with the FSS to ensure better training of security personnel and it was also indicated that an SLO would be in place by the next season, although no comment was forthcoming on how this person would be drawn from the supporter ranks. Although there was an attempt from the researcher to mention the factional nature of the *Delije* this line of enquiry proved unfruitful. In regard to the issue of changing the football supporter culture for the better into the future, the issue of cultural change was not really addressed. The response went back to discussing the club's intention of improving safety and security within the stadium.

The Ministry of Youth and Sport:

An interview was also granted by the Ministry of Youth and Sport's Head of the Department for Legal Affairs, International Co-operation and Harmonization of Regulation with the EU, Ms Ana Kosovac. Ms Kosovac is a member of the NCPSV working party established to deal with football hooliganism and crowd disorder in Serbian sport and has been privy to various high level meetings on this issue. She indicated that a close working relationship is maintained via her office with the FSS and indicated that the Ministry is dedicated to supporting the coercive measures against crowd disorder set out earlier in the report. She also engaged with the idea of change occurring non-coercively and attitudinally within the supporter culture itself. Ms Kosavac indicated that the state will have a role to play in encouraging and even nurturing, where possible, this kind of positive development.

Discussion was had regarding the document *Sport Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2009-2013*, prepared and published by the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The strategy set out in the policy document stresses the importance of sport as it occurs at various levels in society, from the professional and Olympic levels to the school and community level, being imbued with positive social values. The report is prescriptive rather than proscriptive, but sets out certain terms to which those bodies responsible for the conducting of sport are expected to comply. For example, the report declares that sport in Serbia must be 'depoliticized'. The report provides a useful document through which the state, if indirectly, can play a part in developing a positive culture for football, by putting football clubs in better connection with the social agendas to which they should be responsive. This is discussed further in the concluding

recommendations, suffice to say here that Ms Kosovac was aware of the requirement regarding the appointing of SLOs at clubs and agreed that these appointments could serve as a very important means of conveying the positive social values within the *Sport Development Strategy* to football supporters.

Towards an anti-violent football supporter culture in Serbia – what can be done?

In conclusion to the report, recommendations are offered in regard to ways forward towards positive developments in the football supporter culture in Serbia. To reiterate a key point from the opening section of the report – overcoming violent and anti-social behaviour associated with football can be dealt with coercively and consensually (as is the case with such behaviours more generally within society). Coercive and consensual approaches are not mutually exclusive, both are aimed at prevention – coercive measures designed to have a more immediate control impact, consensual measures meant to develop attitudinal change that becomes culturally embedded over time. The interviews undertaken for this project indicate recognition of the connection between these two levels of response. Although the aim of the project was explained to participants in terms of its ambition to consider ways towards cultural change in football supporting, responses invariably referred to the coercive response to football hooliganism. The particular situation with football crowd disorder within Serbia and the media attention it has received over the last few years heightened the tendency for participants to refer to matters such as policing and the judicial process.

Acknowledgement of this connection notwithstanding, the conclusion of this report makes recommendations – in accordance with the project brief – only in regard to the so-called consensual measures required for a cultural change in football supporting in Serbia. However, it is worth reiterating, every indication has been given by the FSS and the Ministry of Youth and Sport that coercive measures of prevention involving the police and security personnel are being attended to in a manner consistent with the requirements recognized by UEFA. The process may be regarded as undergoing a teething period with further assessment most apposite after the commencement of the 2012/13 SuperLiga competition and the involvement of the Serbian national team in international matches for qualification to the 2014 FIFA World Cup Finals. The matching of Serbia against Croatia in the group stage will inevitably pose a crowd control challenge to which a highly coordinated response will be required.

The recommendations are made via reference to processes through which pathways to change might be established. Steps are currently being taking in some of these directions, particularly in regard to grassroots programs. In such cases the recommendation is aimed at enhancement and maximization of present measures. The recommendations are discussed under overlapping processes that can be identified as advertising, integration, community (grassroots) outreach, and leadership.

Advertising:

As much as cultural change needs to occur from within, internal processes of change require nurturing by means of positive input from external drivers. In

this regard it is recommended that an advertising campaign for the development of a football culture that is non-violent, non-abusive and socially inclusive be devised and disseminated. The State should be asked to take a role in directing the campaign and the FSS, as the peak football body in Serbia, would have a key administrative role to play in such an exercise. SuperLiga clubs in Serbia should be expected to actively support the program in a number of ways, including signage at grounds, placing relevant information on their websites and having players become involved as spokespersons for the cause. The media, particularly television, will be the central informational outlet through which the campaign is nationally disseminated. An advertising campaign, designed specifically for young people in Serbia, would need to be very carefully crafted by advertising specialists with input from various other professionals, including those associated with football. The campaign would need to register 'cool' credibility with young people, especially boys, to have any chance of success. Should it appear blatantly didactic and officially educative, its chances of impact will be minimal.

In this regard the input of players as idolised figures is undeniably important. Although the 'role model' responsibility of sports people may at times be overstated and unreasonably burdensome to those people, they have a cultural cache with young sports fans that affords a rare opportunity of getting a message across in ways that educators and other professionals without any kind of celebrity status cannot. The features of the campaign are to be mapped out, but should emphasise the importance of football's status as the most international of all sports, having the most genuinely global of World Cups. As such football should be regarded as a social forum for people of various backgrounds to come together in brotherhood, wherever it is played. This image should be used to convey the unacceptability of violence between football

supporters and also discriminatory behaviour against fans and players on grounds of race and ethnicity. The campaign should also mention the inclusiveness of football culture in regard to sexuality and gender.

This is not an easy issue to deal with in Serbia and careful collaboration will be required with organisations representing particular communities, such as the gay community, in regard to tackling an issue such as homophobia in the football supporting culture. Advice on how to deal with aspects of the campaign should be sought from other experts and organisations with experience in other settings and contexts where applicable. Thus The FA would be able to give advice on an anti-homophobia campaign. Difficult also in cultural terms, but necessary, is the need for the campaign to deal with some rather entrenched aspects of rowdy fan behaviour. In this regard the igniting and throwing of distress flares is a paramount issue. It is recommended that this particular behaviour be targeted in the campaign. A direct and well-advertised anti-pyrotechnics message would be welcome from leading football players. Cultural resistance to eliminating this behaviour may be stubborn and, as indicated in the section of the report on the Serbian Context, the media has not thus far been particularly helpful in changing public perceptions about this practice. While the speakers in the media operate with an editorial independence, it is hoped that a sponsored television campaign would give prominence to voices in criticism of this practice.

Integration:

In his paper on sports law, Dejan Šuput (p. 140) contends, ‘New Law on Sport and other regulations in Serbia need to be brought into accord with European

standards to pave the way for the country's eventual integration into the EU'. This principal of compliance to European standards can also apply, if less rigidly, to the culture of football supporting. While the cultural level of football support will always maintain a distinction of national character that should not be bureaucratically harnessed, the particular customs must be able to find an acceptable form of expression within the applicable context of their global interaction. Within the context of elite football, interaction for Serbia occurs via European competition and then globally for national teams in the FIFA World Cup competition. Therefore, it can be expected that the football supporter cultures in particular nations must be able to adapt themselves to the cultural patterns of the broader context. The failure of the Serbian football supporter culture to do this is evinced by the problems that have come to attention over the last few years. Addressing this problem is not especially easy. It is advised that care be taken within the recommended advertising campaign not to push European agendas explicitly. However, recent positive steps taken by Serbia towards acceptance within the European Union may play a useful part towards progress being made in football culture. While UEFA and the EU are different bodies there is a symbolic parallel between being a member of the European community and being a member of Europe in football. In this regard, the concern expressed by interview participants about the possibility of Serbia being suspended from European football competition at a time when Serbia as a nation finally appears to be gaining favour within Europe appears prescient. It is therefore recommended that priority be given to keeping the Serbian national team and Serbian clubs within the community of European football.

Community outreach:

A number of programs connected to UEFA's Grassroots Charter and associated activities have been put into place in Serbia, via the FSS and with the support of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Such programs running in Serbia include Mini-pitch Football, Mini-max League Football, Open Fun Football Schools, Football Unites the Alps, the Adriatic and the Balkans, United Football and the Week of Football. These programs, although targeted at creating positive social values in association with active participation in playing football, have a role to play in instilling the values that young people also take forward as supporters of football. It is therefore recommended that, where and as possible, these programs be used for the dissemination of materials developed within the advertising campaign for the football supporter culture, as discussed above. Some of these programs would also provide opportunity for SuperLiga players to come along and address young people about being positive football supporters.

It is further recommended that grassroots football programs be connected to non-sport programs such as Budi Muško (Be a Man) a social (non-formal) educational initiative operated by a consortium of NGO bodies across countries of the Former Yugoslavia. This program is designed to steer young men away from harmful social behaviours and to be respectful and non-discriminatory citizens. The Serbian arm of this program, based in Belgrade but operating across the country, is run by the organisation named Centar E8. Activities in this organisation's work with youth, to this point in time, have focussed more on the arts, including drama, music, film and dance. However, discussions with the Director of Centar E8 reveal a strong interest in having activities extended

to sport, especially popular team sports with affordable equipment – therefore, football. A connection with the program of this organisation could have a favourable impact on football supporter culture as young people come to see football within a broader cultural context as they are exposed to active participation in community arts. Such involvement would go some way to satisfying one of the concerns raised by interview participants that young men obsessed with football are not developed as well-rounded cultural citizens. The recommendation is therefore made that the FSS be put in touch with this organization with a view to exploring the possibility of making a working contribution to the development of football within the Budi Muško program.

Leadership:

The heading of leadership may appear slightly at odds with the idea of change needing to occur within the football supporter culture at the grassroots level. However, as already indicated, change is unlikely to occur within the culture without supportive mechanisms being put in place by football as an institution – meaning both the peak body (the FSS) and the football clubs. The advertising campaign discussed above is a key means through which football as an institution can show leadership and this campaign must be backed up and advanced by other means. The SLO initiative to come into place by the 2012/13 season is a key leadership mechanism through which the football clubs will be put more effectively in touch with their supporter base. However, care must be taken to not have the appointment of SLO's treated as a checklist exercise whereby people are installed into the positions, but little real benefit to altering the supporter culture comes as a result. Interview participants clearly indicated this concern in regard to the appointment of SLOs to football clubs in

Serbia. To militate against the appointment of SLOs being meaningless, the SuperLiga clubs should be transparent in the appointment process and the mission of the SLOs as advocates of anti-violence and crowd disorder should be publicly communicated.

The SLOs should be centrally involved at the clubs in disseminating the football supporter culture advertising campaign to fans at the games and beyond. The SLOs should be *au fait* with and committed to various UEFA charters relevant to fan behaviour and culture. It is recommended that, once appointed, the SLOs be coordinated by the FSS, to the extent that they work cooperatively with their peer appointments at other clubs. The SLOs should not work with a silo mentality focussed on one team, but according to the broader view in the interests of a better overall football supporter culture. The stated goal here should be to work against hatred towards opposition clubs and fans and, alternatively, to foster a supporter culture of good natured and sporting rivalry.

In regard to fan support of the Serbian national team, benefit could come from the establishment of an official supporters group in the manner of The FA sponsored 'englandfans'. This initiative has been accompanied by a decrease in social disorder associated with supporters following the England national team, especially abroad (Hughson and Poulton, 2008). While the establishment of such a group is partly aimed at controlling fans by having them formally register for membership, it also creates a supporter environment within which fans can root for their home country team as ambassadorial patriots rather than as vitriolic nationalists. An FSS officially sponsored supporter group for the Serbian national team would help to guard against the formation of unofficial groups which, in the Serbian context, could be highly problematic. Furthermore,

the formation of such a grouping would be usefully connected with the advertising campaign for a non-violent football supporter culture within Serbia, with a view to nurturing a healthy symbiosis between supporters of both the international team and domestic football clubs.

Follow up

The proposal to UEFA for this project referred to follow-up academic publications. There are presently two in preparation for submission to refereed academic journals. One paper nearing completion has been prepared for a special issue of the journal *Sport in Society*, published by Routledge. The theme for the special issue is ‘Sport, Conflict and Reconciliation in South-Eastern Europe: from problem to policy’. The guest editors for the issue are the present researcher and Dr Marina Blagojević (Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Serbia). All submissions, including those of the editors will be subject to the peer review process. The focus of this paper is on how the media representation of the hooligan problem in Serbia presents a difficulty towards changing the nature of the football supporting culture in Serbia. A second paper is in preparation for submission to the journal *Sociologija*. This is the leading academic journal for the discipline of sociology in Serbia and it publishes articles in English as well as in the vernacular language. This paper more explicitly discusses the football supporting culture in Serbia in relation to the ‘crisis of masculinity’, which has currency within the local academic context of sociology, gender studies and cultural studies. Connecting with local academic debates and publishing in a Serbian journal is regarded as a very important outcome from the research – i.e. giving it a presence within Serbia. Given that Serbia is a country within the European tradition where academic

voices are valued publically, publication of this kind will hopefully lead to some exposure in the public forum via the media.

This project is also connected to an on-going larger research project established by the researcher in Serbia – ‘Positive futures for Serbian sport’. This project is being undertaken in conjunction with a three year PhD studentship supported by the University of Central Lancashire. The incumbent student is a Serbian citizen located in Belgrade throughout the project. The author of the present report (Hughson) is the Director of Studies of the project and will continue to make regular trips to Belgrade while the research is undertaken. The research is looking at ‘established’ and ‘emerging’ sports in Serbia (football as a case study of the former) with a view to making recommendations to the government for a future coordinated sport policy. The Ministry of Youth and Sport and the FSS are aware of and supportive of this research undertaking.

Indeed, in closing the report I would like to thank both the FSS and the Ministry for their cooperation with the present research project and their support of the on-going research undertaking. The cooperative and good spirit of key individuals within these organizations gives optimism that Serbian sport will be steered in positive directions, beneficial to the nation’s citizenry.

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