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**Football and refugees:
cultural anthropology of the
Balkan corridor (2015 – 2019)**

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1. Executive summary

This report presents the results of the research supported by the Croatian Football Federation and UEFA, through its Research Grant Programme 2019/2020. The qualitative research, entitled “Football and refugees: cultural anthropology of the Balkan corridor (2015 – 2019)”, was undertaken by Rahela Jurković, PhD, in five countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The fieldwork was done between September 2019 and March 2020, having a main focus on refugees: persons either searching for asylum or recognised as refugees, i.e. those who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection in one of the countries involved in the research. The aims of the research were: to bring to the light different meanings of football for refugees; to question football as cultural capital, and its role in refugee integration; and to get insights about the procedure of registration of refugees in the local football clubs. The methods employed in the research were participant observation, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were held with 84 persons: 71 refugees and 13 persons working with them. Refugees originate from 17 countries, of Asia and Africa. Besides, interviews in five football associations were held with their representatives, having registration of refugees within local football clubs as the main focus. The core concept examined in the research is the concept of cultural capital, as Pierre Bourdieu named it, while discussing three different types of capital (economic, cultural and social). Refugees’ narratives of football as their cultural capital demonstrate significance of football for the ones who are often characterised as unknown strangers knocking on our doors, as Bauman (2016) put it. Refugees love to play football, as they are happy when they play it; it makes them to temporarily forget the problems they have; it is good for their health; and, as one refugee pointed out: “in psychological terms it gives you a motivation to carry on, helps you to be positive, find people who are good and healthy, and in a refugee crisis it avoids you to be disappointed, to be negative. In that gap that is created in our lives, football can fill it.”. Football is played by refugees almost everywhere where they have a place to do so. Furthermore, when the approach is adequate, football represents social capital as well, and can serve as social bridge between refugees and the local community. Meaning of football as cultural capital of refugees is further emphasised by the fact that football for the interviewees who played it every day (or almost every day) was the only capital they possessed, and they hoped it could bring them economic value, i.e. that it could be converted to economic capital. However, the research results have demonstrated that conversion from its form of cultural to the form of economic capital does not run smoothly. Before it can happen, football as refugees’ cultural capital, in

Bourdieu's terms (1986), from its *embodied* state has to take an *institutionalized state*, meaning that the national football associations should grant refugees approval to be registered as players in the local football clubs.

In order to raise more awareness about the importance of football for refugees and the local community they are settled in, the results of this research are suggesting to UEFA and football in general the following recommendations.

As refugees equally play football in the places they are temporarily and permanently accommodated in, there is a need to support the refugee centres, camps, as well as organisations and informal groups that implement refugee-supportive initiatives regarding football. That support can have a form of supplying them equipment, ensuring adequate locations to play, and supporting them in organisation of training sessions for refugees. Good practices discovered in the fieldwork (Hope Refugee FC, Hestia FC, Football for All, and Arsis in Greece; Info park and Community Centre ADRA in Serbia; Mazen's team in Croatia), of football serving as social capital and having potential to build important social bridges between refugees and host societies, demonstrate that there is a need to consider a possibility of providing to such and other similar organisations and initiatives a long-term support.

Among the refugees in Southeast Europe there are talented football players. However, they are faced with obstacles, as in some countries their registration in local football clubs is burdensome. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how the administrative procedure of FIFA concerning the international transfer of players and refugees is implemented in practice. Also, there is a need to raise awareness in local football clubs about the possibilities of refugee registration, and to consider the ways to facilitate their understanding and remove unnecessary obstacles to this process.

The recommendations that result from this research are valid for UEFA and national football associations as well, and also for European institutions that decide about the policies concerning integration of refugees into society. Finally, the results of the research can assist UEFA in reaching its goals set in its Strategy "Together for the Future of Football", for 2019 – 2024, namely to: "ensure football in Europe is accessible and available to all", "promote good governance and increased transparency", and "examine the potential impact of new competitions to provide more opportunities for more teams to play meaningful matches, allowing players to excel".

2. Introduction

According to UNHCR's data, the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement: an unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home, with nearly 25.9 million of refugees among them¹. Some of these people have been arriving in Europe, and since 2015, their migratory route has intensively involved the countries of Southeast Europe. In 2015 and early 2016, more than 600,000 refugees and migrants travelled through the so-called Balkan corridor, to reach Germany and other Western European countries and apply for asylum there. Though officially closed, that migration route is still alive, representing the trajectory that many refugees take in order to reach the mentioned countries, where it is considered that they will have better life opportunities than in Southeast Europe. The research presented in this report covers five countries of the Balkan corridor: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Though many research studies (cf. Borgogni & Digennaro, 2015, p. 114) tend to demonstrate that participation in sport can have an integrative role for socially disadvantaged groups, the role of sport for new migrant communities have been less in the focus of researchers (Spracklen et al. 2015, p. 114). Considering the unprecedented character of inflow of people who are, in the search for asylum, passing by the Balkan corridor since 2015, the topic of refugees and sport in Southeast Europe has been scantily researched (cf. Spaij et al. 2019), including football and refugees. However, the latter can be an important area of the researchers' interest, as this report tends to demonstrate. In 2019, there were 77,275 asylum seekers in Greece² and 1,986 in Croatia³. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the last two years the number of refugees has significantly increased, with more than 45,000 persons arrived since the beginning of 2018, including almost 21,000 in 2019, while in October 2019 there were around 7,500 refugees in the country⁴. In Serbia, in December 2019 there were 5,199 refugees accommodated in 19 asylum and reception centres⁵. In North Macedonia, according to a person working in one of the asylum centres, there were around 90 refugees in the three of the country's active refugee centres at the time of the research. In each of these five countries, according to the research

¹ Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed 21 March 2020).

² Source: Asylum statistics of Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics (accessed 3 April 2020).

³ Source : <https://mup.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-16/statistika-228/statistika-trazitelji-medjunarodne-zastite/283234> (accessed 3 April 2020).

⁴ Source: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/bosnia-and-herzegovina_en (accessed 3 April 2020).

⁵ Source: website of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (accessed 3 April 2020).

done within this project, the refugees have spent from several days to four years. Some of them are still in the process of searching asylum, i.e. waiting to be officially recognised as refugees, some of them got asylum, and some were just in a transit, on their way to some other European country, to paraphrase Bauman: a country richer in opportunities, and where the grass is green (Bauman, 2016, p. 6). In this research all of these people are named by one term: refugee. There are two more terms that will be used frequently in this report and therefore need some clarification. The first one is the term paper, with the meaning (depending on context) of a document granting asylum or subsidiary protection to a person (hence, confirming him or her as a refugee that has certain rights in society), or a document needed for registration with the national football association. The second term is camp, referring to a reception or asylum centre where refugees are accommodated.

For the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), as the governing body of European football, this research has the following relevance. Firstly, it gives an overview of involvement in football of the persons who have been mostly invisible in European society: contemporary refugees who currently live (temporarily or permanently) in Southeast Europe. The overview is based on the views and opinions of the refugees themselves, in five countries. Secondly, through an evidence-based data, the research enables UEFA to meet some of its core objectives, more specifically, the objective of promoting football in “a spirit of unity, solidarity, peace, understanding and fair play, without any discrimination on the part of politics, race, religion, gender or any other reason”⁶. In that respect the research offers to UEFA insights about what is going on at the grassroots level, and which issues have to be tackled in order that the quoted objective is fully achieved. Also, the research results give to UEFA, as well as to its members, the national football associations, a tool that might help them in designing and organising activities that will respond to the needs of refugee football players and football participants at the grassroots level. In that sense too, it offers short insights into the best practices spotted in the researched countries that could be replicated in another ones, inspiring the football associations to create new projects for the years to come.

⁶ Source : <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/about-uefa/what-uefa-does/> (accessed 25 November 2019).

3. Research questions, aims and objectives of the research

This research has started with a view to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the meaning of football for refugees in the countries that are part of the Balkan corridor: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia?
- 2) Which dimensions of integration and aspects of cultural capital can be associated with refugees' participation in professional and recreational football?
- 3) How many requests have the national football associations in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia received from persons who are refugees, concerning their registration as football players in local clubs, and what are the difficulties and issues the national associations encounter in that respect?

The aim of the research was to try to get the answers to these questions by conducting qualitative research within agreed timeframe of eight months. The research was undertaken in five mentioned countries, and the fieldwork was done between September 2019 and March 2020. The objectives of the research were: to conduct the ethnographic fieldwork and to undertake semi-structured interviews with at least 75 interviewees (refugees engaged in football and persons working with refugees in the field of football); to get meaningful material and narratives about individual refugee experiences related to participating in football in the concerned countries; to detect the best practices employed in local communities when dealing with involvement of refugees in football; to analyse the data and present the research findings to UEFA and the Croatian Football Federation.

The research was done starting from a position that refugees should not be regarded as “simply unreliable informants” as they have been frequently regarded, as Malkki (1996, p. 384) discerned it well, adding that “their bodies were made to speak to doctors and other professionals, for the bodies could give a more reliable and relevant accounting than the refugees' ‘stories’”. In this research an emphasis was given to refugees' stories: their views on football and obstacles they encounter in the countries involved in the research. Besides the interviews with refugees and members of local communities who work with them, the research aimed at getting the information from representatives of the national football associations on the refugee registration procedure, their eventual initiatives regarding refugees, and figures about refugees registered in the local football clubs.

4. Literature review

In late 2019, a critical review of literature on refugees and sport was published (Spaij et al., 2019), involving a total of 83 publications published globally since 1996, in fourteen languages. In that review, the authors outline the following: “The existing scholarship on refugees and forced migrants covers a broad spectrum of issues, experiences and impacts, and has been closely connected to political and policy developments. Sport and physical activity have historically received scant attention within the field of refugee and forced migration studies” (Spaij et al., 2019, p.1). Though, they emphasise that in recent years there have been an increase in scholars’ interest for investigating the role of sport in the context of refugee well-being and settlement. However, a figure (map) presenting geographical location of studies they reviewed (Ibid., p. 8) shows that not a single publication on the subject was published regarding the countries covered by this research, except one concerning Croatia, written by the author of this report (Jurković, 2019).

When considering one of the main concepts that this research investigates, the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), that will be discussed in more details in the next section, some of the literature exploring it, is the following. Smith, Spaij & McDonald (2018) examined the cultural capital of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants in the context of participation in sport and physical activity. They searched for papers published in peer-reviewed journals between 1990 and 2016, and their findings show that migrants’ cultural capital can be both an asset to, and a source of exclusion from sport participation. Sport and physical activity are, according to them, sites where migrant specific cultural capital is (re)produced, where new forms of cultural capital that are valued in the destination society are generated, and where cultural capital is negotiated in relation to the dominant culture. The authors suggest that there is a scope for further empirical research on the nexus between migration and cultural capital in the context of sport and physical activity. A fruitful area for future research, according to them, concerns the ways in which migrants deploy their cultural capital to navigate social exclusion and related barriers to participation, and how their ability to do so varies across different community segments, especially gender, ethnicity, visible difference, etc. Furthermore, McDonald, Spaij & Dukic (2018) had researched the Seekers, a football club in Melbourne, Australia, that was initially set up to provide social recreation for various refugees and asylum seekers, and later on entered a team in the mainstream league competition. Their research has

shown that the solidarity among players was the core potential of football to provide moments, as they called it, of social inclusion for participants.

As regards the most recent work of scholars on the theme of refugees' integration through sport in European societies, Waardenburg et al. (2018) focused on the meanings of sport activities for refugees living in a reception centre, conceptualised it as a liminal space. Based on interviews with refugees living in a reception centre, they showed how sport is experienced as a way to overcome the boredom, to forget about refugee's daily struggles, but also how it has a large social function, being an easy opportunity to meet with others. They argued that liminal spaces constrain the organisation of sport activities and its possibilities for realising sport's ascribed positive spill-overs, such as increasing feelings of belonging. They also called for future research, including creative social research approaches, that would focus on refugees' own narratives in order to better understand the role that social space plays for the meaning of sport activities for refugees. Ley, Rato Barrio & Koch (2018) conducted a case study which attempted to fill a gap which they found in scientific literature regarding physical activity with traumatised refugees, torture and war survivors. Their findings describe diverse effects of a sport and exercise therapy programme on a war and torture survivors, showing the complexity of interactions between various processes and effects. The effects, according to authors, seemed to contribute to an improved sense of well-being of the participant (i.e., enjoying life more, having less depressive moods, being more active and motivated for living), a respite from posttraumatic stress (PTSD) symptoms, more presence, body- and self-awareness, and exercise adherence. Therefore, their findings supported the application of sport and exercise in the rehabilitation and recovery process of war and torture survivors and people living with PTSD, adding some implications for practitioners about how sport and exercise can be implemented, which precautions need to be considered, and which effects and processes may be targeted.

Stura (2019) demonstrated that integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual learning for both refugees and (other) members of the sports clubs. The key role in facilitating the refugee integration is played by refugees' sports teams, coaches, and club leadership. Club managers are important for balancing difficulties at the individual and the societal level, but the refugees' performance has to match the clubs' level. In this process personal in-depth encounters at the club level are necessary, as well as acceptance of cultural differences and culture sensitivity from all involved. If the focus of refugees and club members is on the sporting performance only, according to the author, separation and marginalisation occur, rather than integration.

As a final note, Besnier et al. (2018) noticed that, although cultural anthropology is “particularly well suited to shed light on the nature of sport as both a universal and a particular human activity”, in that discipline “with a few notable exceptions, sport was not recognised as a topic that led to major theoretical breakthroughs”. That was, along with a lack of research covering refugee participation in sport in general, and particularly football, in the countries of Southeast Europe, one of the main reasons for initialising the research which results are presented in this report.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research design, methods employed and justification of the approach taken

The methods employed in this qualitative research were participant observation, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As Gobo put it (2018, p. 80), the main research design involved discursive interview (listening), ethnography (observing), accompanied by the documentary methodology (reading). That approach was taken not only as it is considered to be an appropriate method used by cultural anthropologists (cf. Aime, 2016), but also because it allowed to maximise the time that the researcher spent in the field, in places where refugees played football in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The fieldwork done within determined research period (September 2019 – March 2020) has demonstrated that, though there are similarities in what football is meaning to people, the whole environment surrounding refugees as football players differs from country to country, town to town, and hence the researcher’s presence in five countries and experiences from the fieldwork constituted an important element of the research. In other words, being there, with the interviewees, enabled the researcher to grasp the facets of reality that otherwise would be less evident, and to immerse, though shortly, in their worlds “in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important” (Emerson et al. 1995, p. 2). For instance, to experience how refugees play football in an almost closed camp, improvised at the premises of an abandoned factory of refrigerators, was an evidence that gave further explanation to the meaning of football for refugees interviewed in the camp. Another example: the first day that the researcher arrived in Thessaloniki, Greece, she approached a policeman, asking him to recommend her a place in the town where refugees play football. The policeman showed her the way to a refugee camp at the suburbs of Thessaloniki, called Diavata. Assuming that she could find, at the entrance of the camp, a guard or somebody from the camp administration and ask him or her for assistance

related to the research, the researcher was surprised to notice that nobody from security or administration was there, in the camp, and that she could freely move alone through the camp. That was opposite of what she experienced in some other camps, or in the first example mentioned, a refugee camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where an authorisation to enter from the International Migration Organisation had to be granted. In dealing with different ways of approaching refugees who played football in five countries, the researcher's prior experience and the fieldworks done related to integration of refugees, enabled her an easier entry into contact with different interviewees in five different settings, in such a short research period of eight months. Besides that, the subject of research requested from the researcher to have the skills of gaining confidence in a short time from interviewees; firstly, from gatekeepers (or, better, gate-openers), and then from the interviewed refugees.

Furthermore, this research had relied on the method of "extended field site" (cf. Andersson, 2014), that, as "one site, many locales" allowed for tracking, tracing and mapping the involvement of refugees in football, and understanding what participation in football means to people in the position of insecurity and *dépaysement*. At the end of the research, by combining bottom-up and top-down approaches and following the method of grounded theory (that builds inductive analysis from data collected in research and creates new conceptual frameworks or theories, cf. Charmaz, 2011), it was possible to determine concrete issues that refugees, on the one hand, and local organisations working with them, on the other hand, recognise as key for involving refugees in local community through football.

5.2. Key concepts and dimensions explored

The main concept examined in the research was the concept of cultural capital, as Pierre Bourdieu named it, while discussing three different types of capital (economic, cultural and social) and specifying that cultural capital "can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of the cultural goods [...]; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because [...] it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243). Starting from that Bourdieu's concept, Wacquant (1995) investigated, by way of an ethnographic inquiry, as he called it, the bodily (or corporeal) capital of boxers and how its abstract form converts into pugilistic capital, "that is, to impart to the fighter's body a set of abilities and tendencies liable to produce value in the field of professional boxing in the form of recognition, titles, and income streams" (Wacquant,

1995, pp. 66-67). As Smith, Spaaij & McDonald (2018) argue, notion of embodied cultural capital has been particularly relevant in the context of sport and physical activity, while Stempel extended understanding of sport as cultural capital, examining it within the principles of cultural distancing derived from Bourdieu's theory of class status distinctions (Stempel, 2005), and explored its relation to economic capital (Stempel, 2006). The concept of cultural capital as examined in this research is focused on football and refugees, as well as on other forms of capital (social and economic), and possibilities of their mutual conversion, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1986). The second concept considered while analysing the research results was integration into society through sport, and dimensions of integration that football can have. While integration is "a heavily contested term" (Dukic, McDonald & Spaaij, 2017), the definition given by Spaaij (2012) is taken into account as appropriate to this research, where integration is "the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and political activities while maintaining one's cultural identity, as well as a two-way process 'by which settling persons become part of the social, institutional and cultural fabric of a society' (Valtonen 2004, p. 74), requiring adaptation on the part of both the migrant and the host society (Castles et al. 2002)" (Spaaij, 2012, p. 1519). Regarding dimensions of integration, Esser (2001, op. cit. Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, p. 13) identified four dimensions: culturisation (similar to socialisation), placement (position in society), interaction (social relations and networks), and identification (belonging). Heckmann and Schnapper (2003, op. cit. Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, p. 13) distinguished between structural, cultural, interactive and identificational integration, while Penninx (2007) referred to three dimensions of integration: the legal/political, the socio-economic, and the cultural/religious one. The results of the research have, however, pointed out that the three forms of capital, as explained by Bourdieu (1986), represent the most relevant conceptual framework for the research findings to be analysed, and that all three forms of capital are important, as well as relations among them, while considering the role that football has and can have for refugee integration.

5.3. Sampling and recruitment of interviewees

This research is based on semi-structured interviews held with 84 persons: 71 refugees and 13 persons working with them. The refugees originate from 17 countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, South Sudan, Somalia, and Syria. Besides, interviews in five football associations were held with their representatives, on the subject of registration of refugees

within local football clubs, and other issues concerning refugees playing football. The process of interviewees' recruitment consisted of two components. The first one was related to the language of interviews. The interpreters and cultural mediators for Arabic, Farsi, Dari, and Urdu were employed in the research, based on the need in each country. The researcher was present and leading all the interviews, conducting interviews directly (without interpreters) in English and French, whenever the interviewees were fluent in those two languages. The second component, related to the interviewee recruitment process, was the selection of interviewees. The first month of the research implementation was fully engaged for that, and then each preparation for fieldwork was as well concerned with the selection of interviewees. The most challenging issue in that process was realisation that through social networks (emails, messages via Facebook and other social media), little or nothing could be done in the sense of arranging in advance with whom and when the interviews would take place. Hence, a kind of pressure to the researcher was imposed before going to the fieldwork in North Macedonia, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. The pressure was mitigated by the researcher's prior experience and confidence that the hard work and persistence, at the end, should produce satisfactory results. Once in the fieldwork, the interviewees were successfully approached, by the snowball method, through intermediators (gatekeepers or gate-openers), majority of whom were also interviewees important for the research, i.e. themselves refugees or persons who worked with refugees, or engaged in activities involving refugees and football. In North Macedonia two key gatekeepers for the research were FARE network coordinator for that country, and director of Skopje's Asylum Seekers Centre. In Greece key gate-openers were a football coach who worked with refugees, and a humanitarian worker who has been leading the first women refugee club in Greece. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the gatekeeper was a refugee, known to the researcher from her previous research. In Serbia, gatekeepers for two refugee camps were persons employed at the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. In Croatia, the researcher had acquaintances from previously implemented research, and her friend, having a refugee background, served as a key gate-opener to the refugees she did not know from before. Also, the Croatian Football Federation served as an information source for locating some of the refugees, while its role was very important for the organisation of interviews in other countries involved in the research. Thanks to the support of Ms Ivančica Sudac of the Croatian Football Federation and her notes sent to each of the football associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia, the researcher was able to smoothly organise and conduct interviews with responsible persons in these institutions.

5.4. Data generation and analysis

Data generation had begun once the start of the research was approved in August 2019, during the kick-off meeting held with the representatives of UEFA and the Research Grant Programme Jury. After that date the researcher started to arrange meetings and interviews, and did the fieldwork, in: Croatia (September and October 2019, then February and early March 2020), North Macedonia (October 2019), Greece (October 2019), Bosnia and Herzegovina (November and December 2019), and Serbia (January 2020). The data was collected by the means of semi-structured interviews, and the field notes taken during the participant observation of football games, training sessions and other football-related events involving refugees. The researcher then proceeded with questioning existent concepts and theories in the light of empirical results obtained in the research, having in mind that qualitative researchers “conceptualize, define, and hypothesize [...] in ongoing relationship with data collection (Gubrium & Holstein 2018, p. 36). One of the most important features of this research is a full and comprehensive involvement of the researcher in the fieldwork. According to Emerson et al. (1995), ethnographic field research implies the ethnographer’s entry into the social setting of the people he or she is researching, and getting to know the people involved in it, as well as writing down, in a regular and systematic manner, what he or she observes and learns while participating in the daily routines of others. The research also relied particularly on participation with observation and researchers’ presence (“being there”) within the time and space of those she was studying, learning through mutual experience and her situatedness within the social world (Ó Riain, 2009). The interviews held with refugees were semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth (when possible), encouraging the interviewees to narrate about their everyday experiences related to football.

Analysis strategy used in this research was the one employed by the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2011). The narratives of refugees collected in semi-structured interviews (that were all audio-recorded) were analysed by categorisation techniques, while the emergent categories were compared, further developed and recoded to form the basis of an analysis against the background of relevant literature in the field, in order to undertake its external validity. The importance was given to the analytical inspiration, as Gubrium and Holstein call it, needed during the research process as: “Research guided purely by procedural rules, sequential or not, misses the point, which is to provide understanding” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2014, p. 37). Hence, the main goal of the analysis strategy was to provide understanding about refugees playing football, based paramountly on the personal views and opinions of the refugees themselves, followed by the views and opinions of other stakeholders involved in football that

is played by refugees. In that respect, the strength and significance of the results are to be found in the following. Football has an important integrative potential for refugees, if approached by its organisers appropriately. However, the link between football and integration is not at all straightforward and there is a lot of discrepancies between a refugee who loves (adores) to play football and the new, host society where she or he would like or is supposed to be integrated. There are some important gaps to be filled, as it will be presented in the section discussing the research main findings. Furthermore, football is an area that could be used more (or better) by local authorities while developing and implementing policies of refugee integration. In fact, in the researched countries, there is a huge need not only to use football as a tool for integration, but there is a first and basic need: to raise awareness among local authorities that refugees play football, that they wish to play football more, in an organised way, and play it with local inhabitants. Besides that, the results are pointing to the fact that refugees who played football in a refugee supportive environment succeeded to overcome depression and found hope and new energy to overcome the life difficulties they were facing in Europe, i.e. the countries that this research covered. Some next research should go into more details and investigate the influence of playing football in a refugee-supportive environment on health of refugees.

5.5. Ethical issues

The researcher, working independently of any university or research institute, is a member of the Croatian Ethnological Society and the Croatian Sociological Association. The research was done abiding to the Ethic Codes of both organisations.

6. Overview of the main research findings

6.1. Snapshot of the places where the research took place

The research took place in five countries, and firstly a brief summary of the fieldwork, as a snapshot of participant observation, is made, before going into details about the main issues that the research was concerned about.

North Macedonia was the first country where the research was undertaken, and there the interviews took place in two refugee accommodation facilities: Asylum Seekers Centre in Skopje and Migrants Temporary Transit Centre in Gevgelija. The latter has been also known under the name Vinojug, after a factory for grapes and vegetable production that was once there. While the refugees can freely move outside the Skopje centre (though within certain hours of day), the camp in Gevgelija is of a closed type, meaning that refugees can only leave it if accompanied by the persons working in the centre. The entrance to both centres for the persons who are neither refugees nor employees of the institutions working in the camp, is not free and appointments had to be arranged in advance, with the persons responsible for the camps' management. In both refugee centres there is a need for football equipment (balls, shoes, clothes). While in Skopje there is a pitch that can be used for football, in Gevgelija refugees and humanitarian workers play football in a tent within the camp, and hence an appropriate ground for football would be a better option to have there. In both centres they play football when there are enough available players. Usually it is once or twice per week. Most of refugees temporarily settled in Gevgelija camp are there because they were injured in traffic or have some other health problems. Yet, they still play football there. When the research took place, around 20 refugees were accommodated in the Skopje's Centre, and 24 in Gevgelija. In 2016 and 2017, when the migrant route was stopped, 160 persons lived in Gevgelija camp during a period of twelve or more months. At the peak of refugee movements along the Balkan corridor, in 2015 and until mid-March 2016, up to 18,600 refugees were temporarily accommodated there on a daily basis.

Greece was the second country where the research took place, first in Thessaloniki, and then in Athens. In Thessaloniki there was a group of refugees for whom the organisation Terre des hommes (TDH) paid a qualified coach who had training sessions with refugees four times per week, from Monday to Thursday, from 13:00 to 15:00 hours. The training was open to everybody, no matter of age, and was free of charge for attendees. The coach of the group was

also initiator of an event called Football for All, that he started in 2017. It was organised on Saturdays, once a month, when a football pitch was rented for few hours, and all players, no matter if local inhabitants, migrants or refugees, could come there and play football for free: “it’s open for everyone and the idea is to come and play with people you do not know”, explained the initiator of Football for All. The event was attracting from 20 to 200 participants. In Thessaloniki there was also the organisation Arsis that had, twice a week, training sessions for men aged from 15 to 27. The football team of Arsis, created in 2018, was competing in a league that was not registered as an official one, and hence Arsis players did not need to be registered with the national association. That was, according to a representative of Arsis, beneficiary for them, as they could play against local teams that were part of that, as she said, company’s league. In Athens, the research took place around two teams of men and women refugee players: Hope Refugee FC and Hestia FC, which will both be described in more details in the section 6.3., on social power of football.

After Greece, the research was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in November 2019, in two refugee camps situated in the town of Bihać: Bira and Sedra. The former camp has been established at the place of an old factory of refrigerators⁷, and was supposed to shelter single men. Gradually, with an increase of refugees in the town of Bihać, Bira became a shelter for minors and families too. The latter camp, Sedra, was previously a hotel, while in the time of the research it was accommodating refugee families and minors. To enter in both camps an authorisation was needed, which was granted to the researcher thanks to the support of the mayor of the town and the social and humanitarian workers of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) working in both camps. When the research took place, an attitude towards refugees of local authorities of the canton where the town of Bihać belongs to, was such that it was not possible to conduct interviews in local restaurants, as they were not “serving migrants”, as an employee of a restaurant said to the researcher.

In Serbia, the fieldwork was done in January 2020, in two refugee centres, Reception Centre Obrenovac and Asylum Centre Krnjača, run by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. Before entering in these two centres and interviewing refugees, the permission of the Commissariat was sought and granted, while the responsible persons in the two centres were in charge of identifying the refugees who play football, and connecting them with the researcher. The fieldwork in Serbia involved also interviewing the employees of two non-governmental organisations that organise football for refugees in Belgrade. The first one

⁷ Bira is actually an acronym for *Bihaćka industrija rashladnih uređaja* (Bihać's industry of refrigeration devices).

was Community Centre ADRA, where football training sessions were organised for children refugees, and the second one was Info park, that was offering, also to young refugees, leisure activities, including football. ADRA was faced with a problem of regular attendance of children to scheduled football sessions, while the Info park's approach was more flexible: football was used as a time for fun and relaxation. They played football on Sunday afternoons in one of Belgrade's sport facilities open to everyone, which enabled them to spontaneously arise interest and positive attitudes of local inhabitants towards refugees. Their flexible approach was very much appreciated by refugee children, and one of them wrote a note that was posted in Info park's premises: "I feel very, very, very good. We play and we are laughing. I have 4 very good days in a month. These days are Sundays", referring to Sundays spent with Info park playing football.

In Croatia, where the researcher previously, and since 2016, has studied a football club which goal was integration of refugees (Jurković, 2019), the research involved participant observation of football playing by refugees in autumn 2019 and in February 2020, as well as interviews conducted with refugees who got asylum in Croatia, in February and early March 2020. Most of them played football recreationally, within a team informally called Mazen's, following the first name of the person who initiated playing football with a group of migrants, refugees, and local inhabitants. One interview was held in a small town, Lipik, in the eastern part of Croatia.

6.2. Football as cultural capital: meanings of football to refugees

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 243), embodied state of cultural capital is one of its three forms, a form of "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body". Starting from that definition, in this section the research results concerning football as a form of cultural capital are presented, centered around a starting question that was posed to refugees during the semi-structured interviews: "What does football mean to you?".

On that question, many interviewees, with a smile in their eyes, just replied this: "I love football". While trying to get a further explanation, one of them said: "In our culture, in Afghanistan, wedding is very important. Once, in 2018, there was a match between Real Madrid and Bayern Munich, and instead of going to wedding, I sat at home and watched UEFA Champions League, and Real beat Bayern Munich. I was happy", adding that he was a fan of the football club Real Madrid. Another interviewee said: "We have just grown up with that, because it is our love, our dream, our ambition. Football is a hobby that we all have. I mean, most of the hobbies we have is around athletes, sport, football. For example, for weekends we

just can play PS4⁸ and the Champions League. it is not something that we can explain, but it is always in our mind, and specific players. It is 90 per cent of our time, of our life. Even our hobby, activities, discussion, everything is about football”.

Hence, for interviewees football has an important role in life: “After my family, the most important thing for me is football. Playing football is more important for me than eating food or other things. Without football you cannot live”.

Football is a source of good feelings:

“Football makes me very happy. When I am sad and think about football, it makes me very happy. I always feel happy in my mind. It is a game I like.”

“Football gives me just happiness. I like football as it makes me happy.”

Other related statements are: “it is a pleasure”, “football is exciting”, it is “a relax for the soul”, “if you want to enjoy your time, you play football”. As a social worker from a refugee camp in Gevgelija said: football is “an exhaust valve”, remarking that around 70 per cent of refugees who passed through the camp opted for football, as a leisure activity they wanted to engage in.

Football has an appeal that triggers interviewees’ wish for play:

“I love football because it is too famous sport, I love football players.”

“Football is a popular sport. All of people are watching, all of people are playing. I was thinking that I would play football as a good player and become popular, and all of people they like to be popular.”

Part of its appeal lies in the fact that it is an easy sport to play: “it is easy to find 4,5 people and play football. In Morocco we play with plastics or old clothes”, and “we played on the streets in my city: you find two children and two more, and they serve as goals. With the ball you play and your foot – it is football”.

Another part of the appeal is its competitive side: “you play against another team and you wish to win. There is some adrenaline in that, wish for victory, to show that you are better than the other team. I like to win”.

Also, football “comes from inside, from the person, to play, to have intentions to play and have interest to play. When you kick the ball and it turns around the air and goes inside the goal, that moment is very joyful and we remember that we put the goal... When you are doing something good, like some good tricks or you are scoring, that somebody is like supporting you, you will

⁸ Play Station 4.

have some feelings, like it's the best feeling you ever have, you know, that somebody is saying like bravo, like they are supporting you. “

Football is also about reaching the state of respect: “Football is about respect. Football is any kind of fun, you make fun with your friends, you didn't know before, then you know each other, you know this guy against you, against any team, how he's playing, how his tactic is, any aim that he uses to play and then you show him your aim and your tactics and then respect him. Respect him inside stadium, respect him to the referees, other teams. The goal of football is only the respect.”

Furthermore, football is good for the whole body:

“Jouer au football signifie se reposer moralement et physiquement. Après football je me sens très bien : je mange bien, je dors bien.”⁹

“Football moves everything in your body. For the spirit – it's like a food to your mind. It also opens your mind. It activates the mind because you have to be so concentrated and fast, sharp.”

“I think football for health, for body and muscles, it's good. I think for football I'm getting healthy and strong body. So that you don't get a big stomach. You know, six pack, stomach muscles.”

“For me, first of all, what they say, the health. And second, when I score the goals, I forget about stress, I become happy, I get support from the stadium, when I come back from the stadium that night, I sleep good, you know. Other times, when I didn't play, all the time I was using my phone, I didn't sleep. When I play ball, I sleep very well.”

Football is also leaving the traces on the body of player. Some interviewees' reminiscences about football were accidents (made while copying the tricks of their famous football players) and scarves they have on their bodies, because they were injured while playing it.

Football is a way to forget the problems a refugee has in life: “For me, playing football one hour a day is enough to forget that I am in the camp. It is a break”, or: “I forget everything in my life, and on the pitch, I am trying to give the best of myself”, and football is about forgetting

⁹ As French is one of the three official UEFA languages, statements of refugees that were given in French are quoted in original, with English translation in footnotes. Translation of this statement is: “Playing football means to take a rest, morally and physically. After football I feel very good: I eat well, I sleep well.”

“all bad things. But after, they are back”. One interviewee combined capability to forget and well-being that football brings: “We are playing football to forget everything. Football is like medication for us.”

Football is a connection to other people: “You talk with so much people, new people. That's why sport is so famous in our country”. Because it connects people who do not know each other and enables meeting new friends, “it is a friendship game”, as one interviewee said. Furthermore, “all the people in the world speak the same language in football. It unites people and people become friends through football.”

Football is also a happy connection to others:

“You are happy to play with others, to share with them your time. To mark a goal makes you very happy. Football is happiness as well and also you learn some good skills (like from Zidane), when you do it, you are very happy in your heart.”

Even: “If you do not like somebody, through football you can get to know that person better, and change your mind about him. Football can help the world to make a better place”.

And also:

“Football is life. It is a way to forget the reality. It takes to another place. It's one of the things in life because it gathers people. For instance, when the Syrian national team was playing against Australians 14 million people were watching the game and cheering for them – everyone was together and supporting the national team. It is one of the sweet things that happen in bitter times. They were so emotional about it, one man even got heart attack and died.”

Through football, refugees: “learn how we can find our way. Football can help you meet new friends, get a job, football is like a bridge. Also, I could find jobs to some of my friends through football.”

Football gives you a wish to copy other players: “when you see a good person, a winner, who succeeded as a footballer, you take some steps to follow him”.

Football is also a “dream to make true”, but:

“When you live in an Arab country, you do not have that opportunity to achieve that level. Because in European or other countries it is easier to make your dreams come true. Dream is to play with a big team.”

“Football is a dream. I believe I can play football in big teams. When I play good football, I have a very relaxed mind, I am very happy, and when I do not play, I am

angry, but I tell himself: ‘Ok, I did this wrong, so I have to try more and more to be better’”.

Through football these “strangers knocking on other people’s door” (Bauman, 2016, p. 8) can “show to others that we still have abilities, and we can show our skills to others”.

Some interviewees gave more complex answers on the meaning of sport in general, and football in particular, to them, which are a kind of summary of previously mentioned, but also insights into new aspects football has for interviewees:

„Le sport pour les immigrants est pour se rassembler autour d'un ballon, pour se détendre, se connaître et communiquer, briser le racisme, et apprendre aux réfugiés comment se défendre à partir du sport. Comment réagir face à ces émotions personnelles grâce à sport, parce que le sport c'est quelque chose qui rassemble, quelque chose qui donne la joie, qui chasse le stress, qui te fait rencontrer des amis, tout. Donc, c'est très important le sport pour les réfugiés. Ça nous protège nous-même, ça nous permet de se défendre et se protéger¹⁰. “

“If you are playing football, you can be creative, if you are a creative person. You can express yourself, play with your mind, make new friends. There are too many options football is offering. When we play, we are trying to do our best and show our abilities to the coach. Sometimes it is stressful, sometimes you are happy. It is like in life. In order to be healthy, you need to do physical activities, and also in psychological terms it gives you a motivation to carry on, it helps you to be positive, find people who are good and healthy, and in a refugee crisis it avoids you to be disappointed, to be negative. In that gap that is created in our lives, football can fill it. Our life is here, you do not know what’s going to happen, so in this free time we have, we can use football as a tool either to have fun or to find your way. “

“Football for me is a kind of entertainment, when I get worried sometimes, I use to play football to forget about the worry, sometimes I use it for exercise. Before, it was my big dream to be a footballer, but unfortunately, my dream doesn’t come true. When I was playing in my country in the division C, I was very, very good football

¹⁰ „Sport for immigrants is to gather around a ball, to relax, get to know each other and communicate, to break racism, and teach refugees how to defend themselves starting with sport. How to react to these personal emotions thanks to sport, because sport is something that brings people together, something that gives joy, that drives away stress, that makes you meet friends, everything. So, sport is very important for refugees. It protects us, it allows us to defend and protect ourselves.”

player, I was playing defence. Then when we won the Somali cup, we passed to the division B. But I got an injury, bad injury for my knee, then I stopped to play football. Before this injury, it was my dream to be a footballer, then I began to study at university, then to work, to help my family. Now I play football as an entertainment to help my body, to be tight, to feel some goodness for my body, to gain health.”

Unlike the previous statements of refugees who play football recreationally, some of the interviewees wanted to become professional football players:

“I want to play football professionally because I know it gives good money, and then to help others. I want to do this in all the world. Now everybody cares about themselves.”

“I would like to play more, to improve my skills and to become a professional player. That is a dream that we grew up with, and this is the only activity that we have now, and the one that is gathering us, that bring us all together.”

“Football gives me hope, and I am still hoping to become professional, and if I do not succeed in that, I will try to be a coach.”

“Mon désir est de jouer au football, d’être professionnel. Gagner de l’argent, avoir beaucoup de choses dans mon avenir, c’est football.¹¹”

However, the ones who trained football several times per day in Thessaloniki, put an emphasis on the obstacles they encounter while trying to reach that goal, to become a professional player:

“Mais il n’y a pas d’aide ici. Si tu as passion, ça te donne du courage. Mais ça me rend triste de ne pouvoir être enregistré de jouer. Mes amis jouent, et moi, je ne joue pas.¹²”

“Je suis né avec ce talent, donc ce n’est pas difficile pour moi d’intégrer dans les académies, etc. Mais depuis que je suis là, c’est la merde. On n’a pas d’opportunité de jouer des matches officiels. On joue des matches amicaux et c’est tout.¹³”

Therefore, football is a source of both, love and pain:

¹¹ “My desire is to play football, to be professional. Earning money, having a lot of things in my future, that’s football.”

¹² „But there is no help here. If you have passion, it gives you courage. But it makes me sad that I cannot be registered to play. My friends play, and I don't play.”

¹³“I was born with this talent, so it is not difficult for me to integrate into academies, etc. But since I've been here, it's been shitty. We don't have an opportunity to play official matches. We play friendly matches and that's all.”

“Ça, c’est mon rêve, et je n’ai pas autre chose à faire si ce n’est pas football. J’ai arrêté l’école à cause de football. Je suis sorti de mon pays pour traverser la mer à cause de football. J’ai eu les coups durs à cause de football. Rien, vraiment rien ne peut m’empêcher de jouer au football. Quand je joue au football je me sens bien à l’aise. Et quand je joue au football je me sens comme avec mes parents. Ça me souvient à ma famille, surtout à mon papa. Mon papa aime le football comme ça, il ne jouait pas. Football est quelque chose que j’aime, mais aussi j’ai eu beaucoup de souffrance à cause de football.¹⁴”

If they have a chance to become professional football players, they think:

“I would give Greece joy and happiness, and I’ll be so happy to play in Greece or some other country. Also, that they see that I was a refugee and I succeeded in football. People will be so happy to see me. I want to play better football than I play today.”

“We want to show to others through football what we can do.”

“We keep on going, and we know that we are young, and we pray our God that things become better for us.”

“Ma vie est un gaspillage si je ne deviens pas un professionnel¹⁵. ”

Returning to the bright side of football, one interviewee compared football with other ways of dealing with problems in life: “When people are angry or sad or have a big problem in their life, they go to drink to forget or going to the doctor to take medicine. For me it’s just to go inside the field and when I’m inside the field I forget everything. And these things I also hear from children, they told us we are waiting for the training just to come and forget all our problem.” He was referring to the children he is coaching in the refugee camps in Athens. When asked about their age, he replied that they were 12 to 14 years old, adding that “the age is not the matter, they are mature, because they have been in difficulties.”

Some statements refer to specific conditions that refugees find themselves in, that connect them (even more) to football:

¹⁴ “That, it is my dream, and I have nothing else to do if it is not football. I left the school because of football. I left my country to cross the sea because of football. I got hard blows because of football. Nothing, really nothing can stop me from playing football. When I play football, I feel comfortable. And when I play football, I feel like I’m with my parents. It reminds me on my family, especially my dad. My dad likes football just like that, he didn't play. Football is something that I love, but also I have suffered a lot because of football.”

¹⁵ “My life is a waste if I don’t become a professional.”

“I play football because I have nothing to do here. So, it is better to play football and learn something new about it than doing nothing.”

“When I was in Porin¹⁶, there were no activities for guys. Especially none outside of the camp. So, football was the only thing I had. I was just going to football and forget about Porin and that made me happy. I enjoyed playing football, and I forgot about problems, thinking nothing when I came back to Porin.”

“Football is a moment when you forget everything, it is a moment when you get out of what you are, for a while, and then you come back. It gives you those few moments when you leave everything somewhere and you go to some other place, where you enjoy for a while, and then you come back. “

“It makes me forget. The problems will stay, but football means to me something I love to play, and then I forget about everything else. It is a moment of joy, and when you enjoy, you do not think about your problems. And when you are back, you are in a better mood, you are physically tired, you can sleep better, you can eat better, you are more fit. It helps in many ways. It’s good for everything, it is a sport.”

“It is a moment we are out of our reality, and the things that bother us, the problems. It is not an easy sport, so it keeps me fit, it makes me tired. If I run, I would run for 20 minutes, but when I play football, I run for two hours. And all eyes are on the ball, everyone runs, enjoys, makes fun... it is difficult to describe by words. It is a joy for my spirit.”

“It makes you calm when you are angry, when you are fighting with family, with friends, with the situation. When you have problems, in the camp, I told you, it was summer, August, 42 degrees, I was the only one in the field inside the camp under the sun, 3 o’clock afternoon. I was playing football, alone. “

To some of the interviewees, preferences for sport have changed in the country they asked for or got asylum in: from cricket to football. It was the case of a young Afghan man who got asylum in Croatia and said in the interview that his priorities were: first family, then football, and after that friends and education. In a refugee camp in Serbia, Afghan men started to play football for the first time, encouraged by their African fellows.

¹⁶ Porin is a familiar name for the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Zagreb, Croatia.

Furthermore, football can teach you how to behave with others, as another Afghan young man, who worked with adult and children in a refugee camp in Bosnia, suggested:

“What I learned from the guys – other refugees - is to never give up, to work hard. These guys were lazy, but I always invited them and slowly they accepted. That’s why I learned never to give up. And when I came here, I learned from kids how to play relaxed. I did not want to beat them, so I was doing slowly, patiently when I played football with them. I know with older people I am playing like that, very relaxed. When you are like that, you are focused. I learned also not to care if they are older or younger against me. Before I played harder, I was trying so much. Sometimes working smarter is better than working harder.”

The interviewees also underlined some differences in culture of playing football in the host society and their countries of origin:

“When we play against Europeans it’s different than against Arab people. In terms of tactics and football culture. Here¹⁷ they are more committed to the rules of football, and in Arab countries it is less discipline, they are more motivated, they are faster. There is more enthusiasm, more feelings. Here they are more organised, more tactics, there is a vision. In Syria, they are freer, faster. Arabs are more motivated for football than here. They invest in it more feelings too.”

Similar conclusions were raised by a young refugee woman from Cameroun, who had an ambition to become a coach. During a match of the first women’s football Greek league, in Thessaloniki, that the researcher attended with her and the coach of refugee men, she commented that football players in Africa were faster, more energetic and enthusiastic.

Although the scope of the research was not to cover differences in gender when discussing refugees and football, some of the statements were specific for female interviewees. A young Afghan woman playing football in Athens said that “with football you can raise a voice. I think everybody can do these things in a different way and my way is with football.” Being raised in Iran, she pointed that:

“I remember my dreams inside the football, I find freedom, I now know what freedom means. For the truth way, I can understand what it is freedom, and what my right is in this world. For me, I didn’t know exactly what is my right, because I grew up in a

¹⁷ Meaning: In Croatia.

country where they didn't accept refugees at all. But here, inside the football I know my right, it's full of energy this football, really. When I was a child, every time I think about this to be someone in the world, to change the people. I see my country especially, they beat women, they rape them, they don't have any value. They have nothing and they are just quiet. It makes me crazy, why you are quiet?"

She also pointed out the fact that women's football in Afghanistan was not forbidden, but it was very hard to practice it: "Because in Afghanistan they don't know what is their life. They just think about they should bring the children in this world, and the babies, they don't know their right since they are child. They just say 'Be quiet.' In Afghanistan they just say 'Woman, be quiet!'. And you are quiet. Very unfair quiet. I don't want this. Football is wonderful and you can learn a lot of things."

Other interviewed women also mentioned that football changed their life when they joined the refugee team in Athens: "I was playing football and feeling so happy. Before, I felt depression, and now I don't have this feeling. It changed many things in my life. First of all, it changed my health. I had a problem, I was going to the psychologist, and the doctor said 'you don't have a good health, good feeling'. Now I don't have this problem, I don't have a lot of things, like I feel depression, or I'm sick."

From the same team, another woman said: "In the last four months I had depression, psychological problems, and it was very difficult time. I find this team and every day for me I'm waiting for Monday and Wednesday to come and play football." Even her child is recognising the change: "after the training I would go home, I have one son, he is 14 years old and he was telling me all the time: 'hey mum, you have a lot of energy after the training when you come back home'."

However, to acquire that meaning for a refugee, football needs to be played in an environment capable of making a change in the life of refugees, after they arrive in a new, host society. Examples of how that change can happen are presented in the next section of the report.

6.3. Social power of football

Considering that capital equals to power in Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) and that "the concept of social capital has been an influential one in identifying assets associated with social connection and trust" (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 178), in this section

the results of the research are presented in the light of social power that interviewees have assigned to football.

Firstly, the research results suggest that football is an efficient means for creating social bridges, which are defined as connections between refugees and host communities (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 179). According to Ager and Strang (2008, p. 178), “theorists have distinguished between three differing forms of social connection: social bonds (with family and co-ethnic, co-national, co-religious or other forms of group), social bridges (with other communities) and social links (with the structures of the state)”. The interviewees in all five countries have pointed out the importance of playing football for making social bridges, i.e. connecting them with either members of the local community or to other refugees originating from countries different than their countries of origin. The interviewees also became friends with other refugees originating from the same country, demonstrating that football is also a means of creating social bonds.

Some statements that refer to social bridges that football creates, and ways of learning about and through football from the fellow players from other countries, are the following:

“When you play, you find friends from new countries, you learn more about his country, culture, religion... Through football you learn a lot of things and they learn from you too. The people will become your friends. Each country they have some talents in football. Afghan people are stronger, physically, than Iranian people. But Iranian people they have better tricks than Afghan in football. Afghan people can learn from Iranian people about football, learning tricks. With time, you will see that you do the same tricks as the guys you are learning from. That happened to me many times. I was watching videos on tv/internet and after that I accidently did the same. If you are trying to do it, you will focus just on that trick and you will forget about everything. If you want to do it, you will not do it. If you let your mind be free, then you will succeed to do the trick. That’s why I started to watch videos and then accidently I did the tricks I saw. It’s with everything like that.”

“All people here¹⁸ I know because of football. I didn’t know them before. Because of football, now we are best friends, we are playing together.”

“I meet a lot of friends from different countries because of football, they saw I was playing football, they called me, they took my number, I played with them and I enjoy

¹⁸ Meaning: in a refugee camp in Serbia.

with them, sometimes they come to me inside the camp, when I was in Leros, Greece, they picked me in car for playing football to stadium then they take me back to home again. I made a lot of friends because of football, also here, this guy, we were on the same island in Greece. All other guys I meet here because of football. We are the same nation, but we don't know each other. Some of them, because we meet through football, right now we are friends because of football.”

A refugee originally from Somalia, interviewed in a refugee camp in Serbia said:

“I meet most of these boys in Greece and travel but I have some friends for football, maybe that Eritrean, I met him for the football. We became friends. And some Afghan people they became our friends because of football. A new culture for me. Football bring the people friendly.”

An interviewee explained the difference in relationships between refugees who play football and the ones who are not playing, by the following words:

“When I'm playing football, they come and play with us, we talk English. After that, when you go outside, those ones who play will come to ask people and start talking to us. But the other ones, we don't know each other, they don't talk to us. But I know, one friend of the Afghans, he comes and talks to me when I'm standing alone, he comes and talk about football, sometimes I ask where they come from, but other ones, we don't know each other, we don't talk to each other.”

The social connections created through football have changed the mind of a refugee regarding his plans for leaving Croatia, as a country where refugees have not many opportunities for a good life, instead making him wish to stay and considering how to build his life there:

“When I started football, it stopped me to want to go to other countries. When I came to Croatia, I wanted to go to other countries, but when I started to play football, I forgot about my problems and it made me stronger to stay longer and wait for my documents. Because I was playing football, had my team, I was improving myself. And if I stayed in my room, I would think about going to another country, about my future, etc. But when I play football, my mind changes: I could wait, I have my team, I am learning language, I have new friends, I learn about country. That's why football stopped me going to other countries.”

The same change happened to a woman, refugee in Greece:

“Before I had a plan to leave Greece, to go to another country. Now I know more people and I’m feeling happy here because I have more chances to communicate. I was thinking to go somewhere to feel safe and happy and now I have this feeling here. I’m also so relaxed because I got my asylum in Greece, just need to take my ID¹⁹.”

Furthermore, football gave to interviewed women a desire to find other persons, not necessarily from the same country as they were, but in the same situation as theirs, before joining the football club Hestia FC, and to motivate them to joining the football club in order to deal better with the hardship of the refugee life in Greece: “If I can, I will try to find another women like me that have difficult life to help them to come and play football. And throw them out of that life they had. Depression. They’ll come and join in, and have a happiness in life.”

The social bridges created through football gave to women playing it a motivation to improve others aspects of their lives:

“Before, I could not understand Greek lessons, but now I play and I don’t have many things, I’m relaxed and if I go to my lessons, I don’t have anything in my mind and I can understand better now.”

“The teacher told me to come to lessons, learn something, and I didn’t have a feeling to go, but now I’m running for the class, I’m trying to find a class and go to it, I want to communicate with the team and Greek people. Now I try to run to keep the ball and now the football teaches me to run for everything. Football gives me hope and gives me a feeling like I’m born again, able to change many things.”

Members of the local community who are working with refugees use football as a tool to learn young refugees about the culture of the host society. It is not a formal education, but it is an equally important one, possible to happen because a social bridge was first created between refugees and members of the local community, built on trust and confidence. For instance, a social worker in Serbia is fighting the prejudices of refugee boys about women playing football and then these boys are defending girls in the refugee camp, when they want to play football or even go to local school, as some parents there think that neither football nor school are meant for girls and women.

To refugees who got asylum in Croatia football has also become an important factor of acquiring social power (capital) in the host society, considering that “the volume of the social

¹⁹ Meaning: identification card.

capital possessed by a given agent [...] depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Not only the network established by playing football in a non-formal group of migrants, refugees and members of local community helped interviewees deal with everyday life in the host society (“they²⁰ help us find a job, inform us if there is a course of Croatian, they translate the papers for us, they indicated where we needed to go, how to apply for a job, they would call for me persons to find an apartment”), it also helped them to understand better the local culture, get insights on functioning of the host society and find their own strategy and way to find a place within it. One interviewee said:

“The people who are here. They came as strangers, and now they are settled – they are like role models for us. Some of them are doctors, directors. Two-three hours I played there and I heard them: they were translators, lawyers, etc. I asked them: ‘if I work hard, will I make it?’ They said ‘yes’. I asked ‘what did you study?’, etc. They gave me many, many answers to the questions I have, and information that benefits me in my future. Because, you cannot ask such questions people you meet in the street. It somehow encouraged me to stay here.”

However, it is not enough just to play football in a club and quote “refugees welcome” in order to establish a social bridge that has a meaning and sense for a refugee (cf. Jurković, 2019).

A good example of creating social bridges within a football team is demonstrated by the first refugee and migrant women team in Greece, that was also the sole women refugee team in all five countries discovered during the research. It is Hestia FC from Athens, Greece, established in 2019 and run by the International Olympic Truce Centre. The interviews with refugees who are taking part in it, and two days of befriending the team, have shown that the success of this initiative is a result of the work that the manager of Hestia FC described by following words:

“We are not here only about football. So, we have training but we also have workshops, seminars once per week, or other activities in order for us to have necessary time to open up, to express ourselves, to bond, to support each other, to understand what kind of needs, desires are, to make decisions together. It is really important. One of the biggest mistakes, in my opinion, that many humanitarians do, although it is one of the basic

²⁰ In this case, refers to a father of Syrian origin, who lives in Croatia for over 30 years, and his son, born in Croatia, whose mother is Croatian.

principles of the humanitarian aid, is to forget that you must take into account the desires of the beneficiaries. If I wake up today and decide that I want to teach the refugees how to fly a drone, this does not mean that they are interested. It is the priority, to take into account what are their desires and their needs. So, they know from day one that: okay, I do have experience, and I am more mature, older, and also their coach regarding football knows better. But at the same time, they know from day one that some, if not most of the decisions we take after conversation. We always take into account their ideas. We brainstorm together and that is really important. During all these procedures they open up, they express themselves and we become one. I told you from the beginning, this is a family, this is not just a team.”

The second important element of Hestia FC’s approach to working with refugees through football is the one that the same interviewee explained in the following way: “Balance in everything. Balance between the humanitarian aid and the football aspect. I cannot check only the humanitarian or the solidarity view and forget the football ones. At the same time, I cannot apply the same rules, have the same behaviour to vulnerable people that I would have with ‘normal’ football players, so there has to be a balance. You have to give them some space, some time to adjust. At the same time, you cannot be ‘Aah, refugees, they can do whatever they want, they’re traumatised’ – No! [pause] This is a balance and it is not easy”.

When we consider the environment that is created around the ball that can change the world, to paraphrase the Hestia FC’s slogan, then it is easier to understand the feelings expressed by two members of Hestia’s team:

“I had a problem before, I was alone at home, I didn’t do anything and I got like a psychological problem. Then I find the team, I was communicating with different people, I find new friends and slowly, slowly, now I don’t have psychological problem and I don’t go to the psychologist any more. It’s changed me a lot.”

“A friend of mine was talking to me before and she told me ‘come and play with us football’. I said that I cannot play football, and she said that it doesn’t matter if you can play or not, you can join the team and they will teach you how to play and also you can forget your problems, it’s good also for your health and you can find many new friends.”

The second example of how a football team can successfully integrate refugees within it and serve as a social bridge to the local community is Hope Refugee FC²¹. It is a men football team from Athens that helps refugee players to connect with the society. They do so by participating in, as its representative called it, an independent league of Attica, comprised of amateur football clubs and companies' clubs. The league is not a part of the official national league, and hence there is no need to register refugees as players. However, where refugees play football games for Hope Refugee FC, not only the players and coaches from other clubs can see them, but also a broader audience around football, enabling them to spot the talents of some refugee players that would otherwise be hidden, or unrecognised, like it was the case in other researched places (especially in refugee camps). The effort to join such a team depends on the refugees themselves, as one of them said: "if you want to stay home, nobody will come to your door and say 'come play', 'come to work'. You have to go to search for a team, for the things you like, so it's a big thing to start to play with Hope Refugee." Hope Refugee was founded by the Organization Earth in 2016. Its representative, a sport psychologist, said: "Hope Refugee is a team that consists only of refugees and asylum seekers. It started without a clear view of what we are going to do but we decided if we could use football to make these people have fun and spend time. They have the whole day as free time, so we thought that football would be a good way to do so". In the beginning, the club received support from UEFA and Olympiacos FC. The club is not only offering football training sessions and matches to refugees, but it also serves as a social bridge for them to the local community, in the form of organised workshops related to finding a job, learning English and Greek, upgrading their professional skills. From its foundation to the time the research in Greece took place, almost 200 players from 22 different countries went through Hope Refugee. Two or three players stayed with the team from the initial squad. Every year they have try-outs, when 50 to 60 players are given the opportunity to participate in training and play with the team. Such a fluctuation is due to the fact that many refugees have left Greece since 2016, mostly through the programme of relocation to some other countries of the European Union. Two interviewed players of Hope Refugee FC were also the ones who succeeded to turn football, as their cultural capital, into economic capital, and the case of one of them will be presented in the next section of the report.

Capacity of football as social power for refugee integration in a host society is clearly explained by one of the interviewees, a member of Hope Refugee from its start:

²¹ In 2020 the club changed its name to Hope Sports, but in this report the original name, valid in the time when the research took place, is sustained.

“... the teams we played with, after the game we were talking, we were telling that we are refugees. They changed their mind, they asked ‘where are you from’ and I said ‘Afghanistan’. First, they were afraid and when we were talking, they were asking to go for a coffee. So, with football we changed their mind. Imagine, we are 20 refugees in one team, we play against Greek people, each of this Greek people have family, so 20 families, they will talk: ‘the refugees, they are not what we hear in the TV, they are more, they are good’. So, this was how football integrates.”

While considering football as social capital or power, as a final note it is important to mention the constraints that football organisations such as Hestia FC and Hope Refugee FC are facing. It is a lack of sustainable funding, i.e. funding that would give them possibilities to maintain the core team necessary for the club’s functioning for a period that is longer than a year or two, which is usually the way such initiatives of the organisations are funded by donors. By the words of the Hope Refugee FC’s representative: “If there was a project from my Federation or UEFA, a long-term project for 5-10 years, at least for supporting the very basic stuff for the team, I mean a minimum salary for the coach, some equipment for each year or the cost of playing matches, it would be much easier to have a long-term plan.”

6.4. Football as economic capital

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 243), economic capital “is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights”, while the “real logic of the functioning of capital” lies in “the conversions from one type to another” (Ibid., p. 252). In this section, the aim is firstly to analyse if football for refugees in five researched countries constitutes economic capital, and if football as an embodied state of cultural capital can easily be converted to economic capital.

The research results have demonstrated that there are two main ways in which two forms of capital that we can assign to football – cultural, i.e. bodily or corporeal capital (cf. Wacquant 1995), and economic capital - are related one to another when refugees are concerned: the first one is impossibility to convert the former to the latter one, and the second one is the possibility, though a rare one, to do such a conversion. In other words, those interviewees who wanted to make a profession from playing football emphasised the difficulties which they are facing: not in finding a club that would have employed them, but in getting the right papers, as they said, that would allow them to be registered with the national association, which was a precondition

for playing in a club competing in one of the official leagues. The reason why it is important to refugees is summarised by the words of one of them:

“Because if they give you that opportunity you can also do something about it. But, if you only train football, who can see your performance? Nobody. We do not play any competitive league and if other clubs can see us, maybe they would say: this guy is very good, and that guy is very good. That is the problem we have: we always go to training; we come back and go to sleep. And if you really want to play, you are supposed to play in a league. So that people will see your talent, will see the kind of football that you are in. That’s the problem that we are facing.”

Therefore, in this section firstly the procedure of registration is shortly presented, followed by a short summary of interviews held in national football associations of five countries involved in the research. After that, the views of refugees who wanted to play football professionally are presented, followed by a successful example of football as economic capital.

6.4.1. Registration of refugees with national associations

A football club competing in the national league, that plans to register a refugee as its player, needs to pass through the administrative procedure governing the international transfer of players, led by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and implemented through national football associations. In the FIFA’s Circular no. 1635²² regarding the international transfer of players, with “particular reference to refugees and ‘protected persons’”, it is stipulated that for:

“all transfer of players (minors or players over the age of 18) moving internationally for humanitarian reasons, i.e. in situations where the player has had to flee the country of his/her nationality for specific humanitarian reasons related to his/her life or freedom being threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, belonging to a particular social group or belief in a particular political opinion and who cannot therefore be expected to return to it, international clearance in the form of an international transfer certificate (ITC) must be obtained from the association of his/her former club. In such circumstances, it must however not only be guaranteed that the association intending to register the player for one of its affiliated clubs adheres to the relevant provisions governing the administrative procedure for the international transfer of players [...], but

²² Source: <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/1635-international-transfer-of-players.pdf?cloudid=hyk6n3kadamjksysfn6u>.

also that the government authorities in the country of the player's nationality and former club are not able to potentially find out his/her whereabouts due to the ITC proceedings, which could otherwise possibly jeopardise his/her safety as well as the safety of his/her family.

As an exception to the strict application of the pertinent provisions of the Regulations, the association of the club for which the player concerned intends to be registered must therefore directly request that the Players' Status Department of FIFA (FIFA PSD) intervene [...] rather than requesting the ITC from the association of the player's nationality and former club. Together with the request for intervention, the new association must provide the pertinent documentary evidence to corroborate that the player involved has indeed been granted the status of a person in need of protection by the competent authorities of the country of arrival."

Furthermore: "This approach applies to all female and male refugees or 'protected persons', regardless of whether they are registered as professionals or amateurs, within the scope of 11-a-side football or otherwise".

In order to start the procedure, national associations are asking the club who intends to engage a refugee as its official player a list of documents about him or her. As it would be too exhaustive to enumerate all the documents, just few issues will be mentioned here that, during the research, have shown to be a matter that needs clarification. In another document of FIFA regulating the international transfer of players²³, it is written that a proof of refugee status of the player has to be submitted, and the explanation that FIFA provides for that document is: "a copy of the decision taken by the relevant national authority that grants the player the status of refugee or 'protected person', or alternatively, an official confirmation from the relevant national authority that the [...] player has been admitted to the procedure for being granted the right of asylum, as well as a copy of his temporary residence permit in the host country". From that explanation, it can be concluded that not only the persons who got asylum, but also "asylum seekers", i.e. the persons still waiting for the asylum, should be able to enter in the procedure of registration as players of the local football clubs. Furthermore, a proof of birth of the player and a proof of his/her identity and nationality are requested. Explanation given by FIFA for the proof of birth is that it "must contain the player's birth date and filiation", while for the proof of identity and nationality it can be "government-issued ID card or passport". It is not written

²³ Source: <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/protection-of-minors-minor-application-guide-2930706.pdf?cloudid=uof9ezgxs7tyyoffen0f>.

that the government of the country of origin of a player should issue such a document. Many refugees travel without documents and, since they left the countries of their origin, they cannot contact their governments, which is also observed in the quoted parts of the FIFA's Circular no. 1635. On the other side, when a refugee gets asylum, he or she has a right to ID and a passport in the country the asylum is granted to him or her. From the official documents that Croatian association is requesting for the refugees to be registered at local football clubs, which actually are transposed FIFA's regulations²⁴, it is evident that the first of the mentioned documents (birth certificate) is required only for minors, and the second one (proof of identity and nationality) is requested for both minors and adults.

Therefore, a short summary of this issue is this one: according to FIFA regulations, a person who is in the process of searching asylum, as well as a person who got asylum in a host country, with the valid documents issued by that country, should be able to register as a player in a local football club.

The research has also involved interviews with the national football associations in the five concerned countries, on the topic of registration of refugees in the local football clubs. The information gathered during these interviews is the following. Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, in the time when interviews were held, had not received any request for registration of refugee in a local football club. In Serbia, furthermore, foreigners (including refugees) above the age of 18 could only play in the first and the second national leagues, hence as professionals, and the registration of them for lower, amateur, leagues was not possible. In Croatia, since 2015 and until April 2020, there were 5 refugees registered, and 3 of them were minors. The Croatian Football Federation (CFF) received several more requests, but they were not proceeded after the clubs got information which documents they should submit for refugees. As the researcher had more time to research this issue in Croatia, her home country, it turned out that the difficulty of getting the documents for refugees was not lying in the procedure itself, but in unpreparedness or a lack of knowledge within the local football clubs on how to reply to the request of CFF. In Greece, from 2015 until October 2019, there were 4 refugees registered in the local football clubs. As a representative of the Hellenic Football Federation said: "The clubs are not willing to follow the procedure because of the mandatory documentation". The number of requests for registration of refugees in local football clubs was not provided to the researcher, but, according to the interviewed refugees and persons working with them in Greece, it was significant. Finally, when asked about the registration procedure that applies to

²⁴ Source: <https://hns-cff.hr/hns/medjunarodni-transferi/>

refugees, all five associations said that they were following or would follow (the ones who had not received any request for such a registration yet) the procedure established by FIFA.

6.4.2. Registration in a local club from the perspective of interviewed refugees

Regarding the registration procedure as viewed by refugees themselves, the research results are the following. Among interviewed refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were few interested to play as registered players for a local club, but they thought the registration for refugees was not possible. One interviewee added: “You saw that they don’t even let immigrants enter the restaurant.”. In Croatia only one interviewee was interested in being registered in a local football club, in the amateur league, and his registration was successful. In Serbia there was also one interested interviewee, but he said that, because of not having asylum, the clubs he contacted told him that it was not possible for him to be registered. In North Macedonia the interviewees have shown no interest in registration with a local club, and in Greece registration has shown to be a source of frustration for many interviewees. There they have encountered two types of obstacles: either they were asked to provide the documents they could not provide, or they had only so-called white paper, valid for six months, with possibility of extension, which was not sufficient to be registered as a player in a local football club in Greece.

The following statements of interviewees, playing recreationally football in Thessaloniki, and some of them training with the first league football clubs (such as Paok and Aris), illustrate the scope of this issue.

“Je joue à l’académie d’Aris, tout le monde m’aime là-bas. Je joue avec eux ensemble chaque jour, mais mon problème est ce qu’on n’a pas de papiers. Ça me rend triste que je ne peux pas jouer au match. Je n’ai pas des parents ici qui peuvent m’aider. Personne ne m’aide ici. Je continue mais ce n’est pas facile et ça me rend triste chaque jour. J’ai parlé avec des responsables dans le club, et ils m’ont dit qu’ils ne peuvent rien faire.²⁵”

“You are good, the coach will tell you, but at the end they will ask you for papers and we do not have residence here yet. I am waiting for my residence, as without that I cannot play for a professional club. You do not have anybody who will help you with this. What we need is somebody who can push us, maybe from the second

²⁵ “I play at the Aris football academy, everyone loves me there. I play with them every day, but my problem is that we don’t have papers. It makes me sad that I can’t play the match. I don’t have parents here who can help me. No one is helping me here. I keep going but it’s not easy and it makes me sad every day. I spoke with officials at the club, and they told me they can’t do anything.”

division, to see how good the person is. [...] I am 18 years now, and I will wait for my interview²⁶ for 4 years. In 4-year time, I will be 22 years old, and maybe then I will start to play in a division, and will I become a professional player? When will I get that chance? Maybe in 2 or 3 years from now. How can I improve myself to become a professional player?”

“Quand tu leur donnes des papiers, on t’impose encore des papiers. On te demande ton passeport de pays. Et comment les réfugiés puissent obtenir le passeport de leur pays ? Il y a des talents cachés, pas découverts parmi des réfugiés et ils font que la Fédération ou FIFA facilite l’accès au football professionnel aux réfugiés. Il y a des gens qui vraiment savent jouer au football, mais ils n’ont pas l’opportunité de réaliser leur rêve. Moi, ça fait 4 ans que je vis ici. 4 ans j’ai cherché les papiers. Même que j’ai eu des papiers, ils m’ont encore imposé d’autre system. Je ne peux toujours pas jouer ici. J’ai passé par beaucoup de clubs, de 3ième, 2ième divisions... Mais quand tu joues dans un club grec, il n’y pas de ségrégation raciale entre les joueurs. J’ai joué en 2017 dans un club de 2ème division à Mytilini, Kalloni, je n’ai pas eu des papiers mais on m’a donné l’opportunité de m’entraîner avec eux. J’ai eu des amis grecs là-bas et j’ai appris la langue. Mais je ne veux pas me décourager, je vais partir dans un autre pays européen.²⁷”

6.4.3. Football and successful transition from cultural to economic form of capital

Football can serve as a means of acquiring economic capital in an indirect way: through the use of social capital. Just to quote a common example: by an intermediary of social connections made through football, interviewees (especially the ones who got asylum in the country they were interviewed in) found jobs, mostly not related to football. The ones who had jobs related to football (as a coach or a part-time player in a professional club) found them through social connections also established through football. One of such rare examples is a football player

²⁶ Meaning: interview as a part of the procedure of granting asylum or a subsidiary protection to a refugee.

²⁷ “When you give them papers, they impose more papers on you. You are asked for your country passport. And how can refugees obtain passport from their countries of origin? There are hidden talents, not discovered among refugees, and the Federation or FIFA need to facilitate access to professional football for refugees. There are people who really know how to play football, but they don't have the opportunity to realise their dream. I have been living here for 4 years. 4 years I asked for the papers. Even though I got the papers, they still imposed other system on me. I still can't play here. I've been through a lot of clubs, 3rd, 2nd divisions... But when you play in a Greek club, there is no racial segregation between the players. I played in 2017 in a 2nd division club in Mytilini, Kalloni, I did not have papers but I was given the opportunity to train with them. I had Greek friends there and learned the language. But I don't want to be discouraged, I'm going to leave for another European country.”

who arrived in Greece as a refugee in 2016. His case is presented shortly in the next sub-section, as an example of how transfer of football from its cultural form to economic form of capital can happen.

Never losing hope

The interviewee, a professional football player from Palestine, was 26 years old when interviewed in Athens, in October 2019. He left Palestine in 2015, as, in his words: “the situation there is really bad, because everybody knows, I think, about the problem between Palestine and Israel and how is difficult the situation there”. About his professional life in football he said: “I started when I was 16, and at the age of 18 I was playing in the first division in Palestine. All the people were telling me ‘you are destroying your life here’. You have something, you can do something and you can change your life, the life of your family, if you move from this country and continue with football. I decided to move from Palestine”. In the beginning of 2016, he arrived in Greece. He lived for six or seven months under a tent at the port of Piraeus, in Athens. He was at that time speaking only Arabic: “So it was difficult to have communication with other people, difficult to make friends, but I decided: okay, I don’t have anything but at least I know how to play football. So, I started with some friends in front of the tent to play football. It was a small space and we had nothing to do. We were just eating, sleeping, not doing anything and we couldn’t do anything because the situation there was really bad. We were taking showers with cold water, sleeping 2,3 people inside this tent. We were sometimes waking up, our clothes totally wet from rain. It was a bad situation, it is difficult to remember this”. Playing football on the street, he was approached by a member of the Organization Earth, that few months later founded Hope Refugee football team. The interviewee became a member of the team. He was also approaching local football teams in Athens and trained with them. He learned English with the help of the Organization Earth, and in 2017 became a coach of Barca Foundation for children living in refugee camps. After three years of living in Athens, he got asylum in summer 2019, and after that succeeded to be registered with the Hellenic Football Federation, as a player of Ifestos football club. The assistant coach of that club was trying to facilitate the registration of refugees in the local Greek clubs. According to the interviewee:

“He was running, trying to change even the law. He was going to say everywhere that these guys, these players in Hope Refugee, they are talented. We have to do something; we have to take them to our team to improve the level of our football. He was telling

this to everybody. He talked with the president of the Hellenic Football Federation and he was telling him this: ‘they can help our football players to improve our level’”.

After registration, the interviewee started to play official games with Ifestos. He described how that event changed his life:

“The Greek people are really nice, they are really close to us, because even in my training I didn’t find the love I find in this team, I didn’t find it in my country... And it’s so nice what I hear from other Greek people, so nice how they start to talk to me, if you go to see my Facebook, how many people start to write things about me in Greek and some in English. My life has changed completely in the last 2 months. I made hundreds of interviews...”

When asked to explain how that interest for him has happened, he replied:

“... from the first time I fixed my document. You cannot imagine how many teams started contacting me: ‘we need you’. It was a big fight, the coach, the organisation, they supported me: ‘no, go to this team, it’s better to start here, they will give you good things’, but I decided to start with Ifestos because they support me and the love I find there, I’m sure I will not find it anywhere else, they are so close, they are so friendly, they are so lovely.”

About football he said the following:

“It means everything, this is the only thing that, when I arrived, it was giving me the power, giving me the energy, giving me the hope, it was football, the only thing. I was sure I was going to change my life because of football. It is beautiful to believe in yourself, and I was believing in myself. I never lost hope. I was fighting for everything. And now I have everything, some people are having example of me. Like my family, at the beginning they were saying: ‘no, don’t play football, there is nothing, there is no future in football’. But now they see how other people go to my family to talk all the time: ‘your son, he’s playing, your son he’s doing this’. They are so proud of me.”

This example is also demonstrating that, on the one side, in 2019 it was exceptional in Greece to have a refugee playing for a local team competing in the national league, and, on the other side, perhaps not everybody can be a great and rich football star, but can be a player in a competing European league, where everybody can come to see him or her playing, and enjoying the game.

7. Limitations of the current study

There are three limitations concerning the research done. The first one is related to the limited time and other resources which, in the researched case and countries involved, did not allow to consider a longitudinal stance. Concretely, observing the changes happened after a certain period of time and undertaking a second round of interviews with the same interviewees would allow to test the results originally obtained. However, this limitation is mitigated by the fact that this report presents the results of the first qualitative research encompassing five countries of Southeast Europe done so far, and involving contemporary refugees as the main interviewees, presenting their narratives about meanings of football for them and their enrolment in football in the refugee camps and other places they play football in host societies. This fact is also supported by a group of refugees the researcher met in a refugee camp in Bihać, who, after the interviews were done, thanked the researcher for talking to them, as nobody, as they said, on the whole Balkan corridor they passed by, asked them anything, especially not about football. On the other side, this limitation of time and other resources involved in this study can be compensated by considering the ways how to continue the research.

The second limitation is related to the fact that, due to its nature, the research in some of its parts depended on gatekeepers or intermediaries, as well as interpreters. Undertaking the research in such a way, the originality of interviewees' expressions could be lost. The third limitation was a specific nature of a part of the fieldwork: the interviews had to be done either in an environment that was in a certain manner controlled (refugee camp), or liberty of doing interviews where it would best suit to both interviewees and the researcher, was somehow restricted. For instance, the researcher could not conduct the interviews in a restaurant where it was calm and comfortable, as the restaurant, in vicinity of the refugee camp Sedra in Bihać, "does not serve migrants", as the waiter told the researcher. After her protest, the waiter confirmed that she would get the same answer from the restaurant's owner. However, the second and the third limitations have to be considered as the ones that such a research should take into account, as otherwise it would either not include some interviewees, which would be a loss, or would not get a significant number of refugees' views about the researched questions. At the end, views of 71 refugees were well heard during the research and are presented, though in a summarised way, in the form of this report.

8. The impact of the research and recommendations to UEFA and football

This research and its results aim at filling a gap identified by scholars reviewing the literature on sport, refugees and forced migration, which is: “a need for more research into emotional and bodily sensations and dynamics of sport and physical activity among refugees and forced migrants” (Spaaij et al., 2019, p. 14). Having a focus on football, the research has shown, as the doctor working in a refugee centre in Gevgelija pointed out: “football is demonstrating that we are all the same, we all love football and there is no religion nor nationality that would have any influence while we are playing football”. For many interviewed refugees, football represents cultural capital in its *embodied state*, as “most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244). When the approach is adequate, football has social power, serving as social bridge and social bond between refugees and others, in the local community. Meaning of football as cultural capital of refugees is further emphasised by the fact that football for the interviewees who played it every (or almost every) day was the only capital they possessed, and they hoped it could bring them economic value, i.e. that it could be converted to economic capital. However, as the case of refugees in Southeast Europe demonstrates, conversion from its form of cultural and bodily capital (Wacquant, 1995) to the form of economic capital does not run smoothly. Before it can happen, football as cultural capital from its *embodied state* has to take an *institutionalized state* (Bourdieu, p. 247), meaning it should be recognised by the national football associations, with the act of granting refugees the approval to be registered as players in the local football clubs.

Recommendations that are based on the results of undertaken research are the following.

- Refugees equally play football in the places they are temporarily and permanently accommodated in, such as refugee camps, and in cities and towns of Southeast Europe. No matter if they are playing football in refugee reception centres, local football clubs or informal recreational groups, there is a need to support such initiatives, by supplying them equipment, ensuring adequate locations to play, and, when a need exists, supporting them in organisation of training sessions for refugees.
- Good practices discovered in the fieldwork, of football serving as social capital (power) and having potential to build important social bridges between refugees and host society, demonstrate that there is a need to consider a possibility of providing to such

organisations and initiatives a long-term support, which would enable them to concentrate more on football and related activities with refugees, than on concerns about finding finances at a yearly basis.

- Among refugees in Southeast Europe there are talented football players, who are doing their best to make their talents flourish. However, they are faced with obstacles, as in some countries their registration in local football clubs is burdensome. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how the administrative procedure of FIFA concerning the international transfer of players and refugees is implemented in practice. Also, there is a need to raise awareness about it among the football clubs, and to consider the ways to make registration of refugees in local football clubs easier, especially where the clubs need them. As one of the interviewees in Athens pointed out: “You’re allowed to work, with this paper of asylum seeker, but you cannot play football, how is it? How do you give the right to work and you do not give us the right to play?”

As another refugee pointed out: “We are discouraged, but we hope that things will change”. The change is needed in order that the obstacles are removed, as these obstacles are also a barrier that FIFA mentioned in one of its documents, where also FIFA’s view on football, relevant to this research, is emphasised: “Every person should be welcomed with respect and appreciation, and should have the same opportunity to access all levels of football. Many millions of people see football as an important part of their lives and thus want to become involved in it in the best possible way. To ensure that they can contribute to the social and economic aspects of the game, any barriers need to be identified, examined and removed. FIFA has always made it clear (and always will do) that football is all about teamwork – in other words, it is what you do that counts, not who you are. Football is for all!” (FIFA, 2017, p.11).

The recommendations that result from this research are valid for UEFA and national football associations as well, and also for European institutions that decide about the policies concerning integration of refugees through football. Finally, this report has an ambition to support UEFA in reaching its goals set in the Strategy for 2019 – 2024, namely to: “ensure football in Europe is accessible and available to all”, “promote good governance and increased transparency”, and “examine the potential impact of new competitions to provide more opportunities for more teams to play meaningful matches, allowing players to excel”²⁸.

²⁸ Source:

https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/General/02/59/06/32/2590632_DOWNLOAD.pdf

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