

# FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CROATIAN SOCIOLOGY: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES 20 YEARS AFTER

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## Abstract:

The aim of this paper was to re-introduce the issue of football supporters in Croatia, after two decades of absence from sociological field research, in four steps: first, by giving a brief explanation of the changes in Croatian society, secondly, by giving a brief overview of changes in modern football, thirdly, by describing the theoretical and methodological framework of Croatian research done in the past as well as by describing the contemporary theoretical context in which our research has been performed, and finally, by presenting the preliminary results of our ongoing research within the FP7 MYPLACE (*Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement*) project. Croatian society passed through the painful process of war and transition, and football supporters strengthened their role as social actors particularly regarding their own formal structure which was not imaginable in a one-party system, as well as regarding social actions like protests, boycotts, demonstrations, petitions and other forms of resistance to the local and national political-economic elites of the new consumer society.

**Key words:** *social changes, modern football, ultras, ethnography, Croatia, Torcida*

## Introduction

The first study on football supporters in Croatia was written by Buzov, Magdalenić, Perasović and Radin in 1989. The original title was: 'The Social and Psychological Aspects of Violent Behaviour of Football Fans'; however, it was later published under the title 'The Fan Tribe'. The focus was on violent behaviour, but if we want to explain why political elites of the then one-party system financed this kind of research in the second half of the 1980s, we should emphasise the fear of forbidden nationalistic and other oppositional discourses as the initial intention to investigate football supporters, especially those supporters who explicitly expressed such discourses. Fanuko, Magdalenić, Radin and Žugić (1991) continued the research and rounded the portrait of The Bad Blue Boys (BBB), radical supporters of the football club Dinamo Zagreb. Lalić (1993) joined this wave of research with his study of Torcida, the radical supporters of the football Hajduk Split and this seemed to be the beginning of a new research tradition and a new phase in Croatian sociology. Although most of these authors had not pre-

viously engaged in the sociology of sport, they gave a remarkable contribution to this sub-discipline of sociology. Therefore the author of the first Croatian sport sociology textbook, Zoran Žugić (1996), provided an extensive coverage of these studies. Given that over the past 25 years the sociology of sport in Croatia has been limited to six or seven authors, it is not strange that research on football supporters played an autonomous role in a phase in the development of the sub-discipline itself (Perasović & Bartoluci, 2007). Nonetheless, the fieldwork research stopped at the eve of war; Lalić's study was the last one of its kind. However, the issue of football supporters did not disappear completely from Croatian sociology; some authors analysed the participation of football fans in The Homeland war, making links between the social context of war and activities of previously established fan actors (like Torcida or BBB) (Perasović, 1995; Vrcan & Lalić, 1999). Srđan Vrcan (2003) wrote about the conflict between Franjo Tuđman and BBB in an inspiring way, but from the perspective of classical sociological theory, without any fieldwork data gathering.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1945, after the Second World War, the new communist government of the then Yugoslavia banned the activity of the most popular football clubs in Zagreb i.e. of *Građanski*, *HAŠK* and *Concordia*, because of their collaboration with the puppet fascist state, the Independent State of Croatia. The football club *Dinamo* was founded on June 9 1945, and the club existed under this name until 1991 when, on the initiative of the then Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, it was renamed into the hybrid *HAŠK Građanski*. From the very beginning most of the fans expressed great dissatisfaction about renaming the club, especially BBB. In 1993 the club's management renamed it to *NK Croatia*. In February 2000, the holy name *Dinamo* was revived and the fans were delighted. (See Vrcan, 2003, for more details).

The only minor exception to the absence of field research on football supporters in the last two decades is an unpublished MA thesis in psychology, written by Damir Pilić (2002).

Since 2011, the authors of this paper have been participating in a large international EU funded research project FP7 MYPLACE (*Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement*) and within it field research (ethnography) was carried out on football fans in Croatia. MYPLACE<sup>2</sup> is a complex collaborative project that involves 14 countries and several research objectives, exploring how young people's social participation is shaped by the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe, mapping and measuring the forms of participation and engagement, and understanding the process of (re)production, transmission and (re)interpretation of local, national and pan-European political heritage and experience. We decided to include football supporters as social actors in this research for four main reasons: 1) The Croatian football is heavily marked by the unresolved contradictions of the legal status of clubs (Dinamo is a NGO and Hajduk is a 'privatised' joint-stock company with the city administration as the major stake-holder): the non-transparency of work and the problematic relationships between private and public subjects often imply organized crime (e. g. as discovered by the action 'Offside' executed by USKOK<sup>3</sup> police). In this situation, football fans act as social actors who are opposing the deviation and current situation in Croatian football<sup>4</sup>. In fact, football supporters present the only dedicated and stubborn social force against criminal activities within the Croatian Football Federation. 2) The biggest groups of football supporters (Torcida from Split and BBB from Zagreb) have from 300 to 500 core members but are able to mobilise thousands of people (much more than most political parties or trade unions), which has recently been proven on several occasions. 3) Radical football supporters also play a significant role on the youth (sub)cultural scene, presenting a youth subcultural style of its own, but also functioning as a certain common denominator for 'crossover' processes among other styles and

identities typical for youth (sub)cultures. 4) Football supporters participate actively in the production of memory discourses, especially when it comes to the Homeland war (1991-1995) and similarly related parts of Croatian contemporary history. Although our research is not yet concluded, at this stage we are able to present some preliminary results. The aim of this paper was to re-introduce the issue of football supporters after two decades of absence its from sociological field research in four steps: firstly, by giving a brief explanation of the changes in Croatian society, secondly, by giving a brief overview of changes in modern football, thirdly, by describing the theoretical and methodological framework of Croatian research done in the past as well as by describing the contemporary theoretical context in which our research is being performed, and finally, by presenting preliminary results of our ongoing research.

### Tectonic changes in Croatian society

In Croatia, as in other post-socialist countries, transition marks a conversion from a totalitarian to a democratic society, that is transition from a planned economy to a capitalist economic system, as well as the socio-cultural processes that comprise these two transitions. Kalanj (1998, p.12) labelled the transition as a "short, compressed process of integration into the capitalist modernity", while actual capitalist modernity, according to Castells (2000), consists of (global) markets, networks, individuals and organizations. It should be noted that there is no theory of transition that would generalize all transition models and cases. Considering the specifics of Croatian transition, Rogić (2000, 2009) stated that its fundamental difference in comparison to other post-socialist countries was that its key moments took place in a war, which caused huge material damage and, above all, heavy demographic losses<sup>5</sup>. Županov (1995) noted the controversy of the simultaneous strengthening of individual utilitarianism (at the individual level), nationalism and the heroic code (at the national level) and radical egalitarianism (at societal level), which outlines the framework ('re-traditionalisation') of the Croatian society and

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> USKOK – Bureau for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime

<sup>4</sup> During this police action (in 2010) 22 people were arrested on suspicion of match-fixing in the First Croatian Football Division and were later convicted. Six defendants made a pre-trial bargain with the prosecution. Fifteen players were found guilty after a seven-month trial in 2011. Two defendants were sentenced to probation, while the others were given a prison sentence. In addition the trial of Željko Širić, the former vice-president of The Croatian Football Federation (HNS), and Stjepan Djedović, the president of The Referee Commission, began in June 2013, at the Zagreb County Court because in 2011 these two requested 95,000 euros from the then president of Hajduk, Hrvoje Maleš and promised that, in return, "their people" (i.e. referees) would ensure fair refereeing in the following Croatian championship matches. Širić and Djedović were arrested after they collected 30,000 euros. Furthermore, the media made public an indication of the strong influence of Širić and the referees through the last ten years on the order of clubs in the rankings at the end of the national championship season.

<sup>5</sup> Casualties of the Homeland War: 21,000 people killed; war operations carried out on 54% of the Croatia's territory and 26% of the Croatian territory occupied; 550,000 Croatian refugees and 500,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina; \$27 billion of material damage. (Živić, D. & Pokos, N. 2004)

articulates the basic values in the first decade of transition in the 1990s. Croatian citizens witnessed the transition as an unequal race for positions of power and obtaining power over accumulated public resources. Franičević (2002, p. 5) pointed out: "My thesis resulting from research is that the institutional structure that developed in Croatia during the 1990s was ineffective, the credibility of formal institutions was low, law enforcement was weak, and uncertainty was very high, and all these facts have strongly contributed to the emergence of a *crony capitalism* rather than of an effective economy and a truly democratic society." The development and establishment of this type of national capitalism, as well as the political and social processes by which it is accompanied, could not, due to its speed of development, pass without serious socio-tectonic tremors and collateral victims of this process, which are colloquially referred to as *transition losers*. Most Croatian citizens are considered to be transition losers, because their self-perception is not related exclusively to the objective indicators showing the standard of living or some other economic and statistical categories. However, besides these transition losers, i.e. the population stuck in the lower part of the stratification pyramid due to social changes, there are also citizens whose aspirations and achievements in transition are markedly discrepant, and so all those people together form the dissatisfied majority in society and spur distrust in the political elite, whose legitimacy is at stake. These socio-economic changes were manifested in entirely new relations in Croatian sport, namely in the monopoly of the Zagreb clubs' success in national sporting events due to the fact that Zagreb became a new strong centre of political and economic power in comparison with the atrophied and war-affected centres from counties/regions in the Croatian east and south. The centralisation of power in Zagreb made the position of Dalmatia and Slavonia heavily dependent. During the war the centralisation was especially high and partly explainable because of aggression on Croatia and war operations<sup>6</sup> but after the war centralisation did not decrease at all. By focusing on the town of Split because of our research on Torcida, we can describe a special position of Split and Dalmatia as a *double periphery*, meaning that Croatia is on the periphery regarding the European centres of power, and Split is on the periphery when considering Zagreb as the Croatian centre of power.

## Modern football

Modern professional football in Europe is first and foremost a big corporate business. Although the commercialization process had already started in the 1960s, the real transnational character and market success of the globalized football business appeared in the 1990s (King, 2003; Sandvoss, 2003; Millward, 2011). Croatia successfully joined the world of football mainly because of the results of its national team, but the reality of the Croatian national league is far from the standards set up by the rich national leagues (for example 'the big 5'-England, Germany, Italy, France, Spain). Although the major football celebrities in the Croatian media's discourse/narrative are professionals with contracts abroad worth millions of euros (e. g. Luka Modrić - Real Madrid or Mario Mandžukić - Bayern Munich), many professionals with contracts in the Croatian First Football Division encounter the basic existential problems, as along with the other thousands of workers in bankrupt companies of the Croatian transitional economy<sup>7</sup>. However, football in western European countries is not immune to deviations or criminal activities either. Organised crime through match-fixing has been observed in a variety of leagues, for example, in Italy; the *Calciopoli scandal* shocked Serie A in 2006 and seized two national titles from Juventus: the 2004/05 and 2005/06 seasons (the club was relegated to Serie B with negative points, financial penalties and penalties for the former leaders of the club). Or in Germany for example, the football referee Robert Hoyzer admitted in 2005 his participation in fixing certain matches in the Bundesliga 2 and DFB Cups. Additionally, in 2013 Europol announced that 380 football matches across Europe were fixed (Wilson, 2013), including a match in the Champions League.

The implications of the impact of globalization and mediatization in football reflect in the 'McDonaldization of football' (Ritzer, 1998). There are numerous global tycoons who buy respectable football clubs and invest enormous amounts into constructing successful teams. On the other hand, the number of domestic players in national leagues decreases annually. During the 2012/13 season, amongst all the 54 members of UEFA, the English Premier League had the highest ratio of foreign players (62.4% of last season's players). Foreigners were also the majority in the Italian Serie A (53.8%), the Portuguese championship (53%) and the Jupiler League Belgium (51.4%). The Premier League of

<sup>6</sup> For example, during the war Dalmatia was linked with the rest of the country with only one pontoon bridge, whole region suffered from numerous attacks, electricity breakdowns etc. while at the same time centre of Zagreb (Ilica Street) was under renovation works for purely aesthetic purposes.

<sup>7</sup> Summarising damages caused to the football players in the competition season 2012/13, the secretary of the Croatian association Football Trade Union said that as many as 58 players from the First Division had their accounts blocked at the end of the season, and 43 percent of the players even admitted that they had failed to meet their obligations to the state regularly, or that they had not got enough money for the daily necessities of life. In addition, only half of the clubs in the First Division regularly pay contractual obligations to their players.



Russia had 49.8% of foreign players, the German Bundesliga had 48.7%, the French LeChampionnat 42.1% and the Spanish Primera 37.3% of players from other countries. In The Croatian First Football Division the percentage of foreign players was 14.3%. All this is a result of globalization and the fact that football has become a global business and therefore a part of the global economic market in which football players are also “goods”. The omnipresence of football in media is both a consequence and a cause of these facts. The most popular clubs in the world (such as Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, etc.) are corporations that brand their products and services, aiming at increasing the number of fans everywhere around the world. The focus of their marketing activities is not on the traditional, locally embedded supporters (represented by contemporary *ultras movement*), but on the new types of local, national and transnational *consumer-fans*. At the same time, the clubs on the margins of financial power have become merely a decor in the shop-window of the “global trade”. Football clubs have become bastions and promoters of consumerism culture, miles away from their former role of symbols of local communities (e. g. Inter Milan won the Champions League in 2010 without a single Italian in the team that played the final match), which is partly due to the so-called Bosman’s rule implemented by football organizations and associations since 1995<sup>8</sup>. Unlimited freedom at the market of professional football players in the EU has caused major changes in the power relations between the leagues and clubs. European football periphery is the seat of clubs that used to be powerful and important once in the past such like as: IFK Gothenburg, Sparta Prague, Slovan Bratislava, Crvena zvezda Belgrade, Ferencvaros Budapest, Aberdeen, Glasgow Rangers, Mechelen, Hajduk Split and many others. These clubs are now football dwarfs amongst powerful “club-corporations”. Clubs, sponsors, media, FIFA, UEFA and the national associations are focused on increasing their income, and thus to attract as many consumer-fans as possible. Traditional rituals of football supporters (like standing, jumping and chanting during the whole match) are no longer welcome and mostly not possible in all-seated stadia. Modern professional football is a part of the global economic system, and an inseparable part of corporate business in developed countries. Contemporary football is undoubtedly a part of the entertainment industry, which is itself a part of what Debord (1999) named the *society of*

*spectacle* in the 1960s. Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) argue that sport is an obvious example of the dynamic effects of globalization. Today, successful players have the status of celebrities such as movie stars and pop-singers. Football players’ loyalty to their clubs, typical for the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century has become nothing but an obsolete romantic ideal.

### **Theoretical and methodological background of research on Croatian football supporters**

The first research on the Croatian football fans had to deal with a new phenomenon, hence there was a certain confusion regarding key notions, but also a great creativity and originality in that research. For example, in the report by Buzov and associates, (1989) one author is describing Le Bon’s classic theory of crowd behaviour, while several pages later in the text, another author showed why classical notions in a new context are not valid any more, deliberately inventing a contradictory notion of ‘the permanent crowd’ to point out the characteristics of new urban tribes on the terraces. Regarding methods, the first research was based on the analyses of police statistics, personal experiences and participant observations, as well as on the group interview with Bad Blue Boys. It was the first time in the Croatian sociology that a researcher used the term ‘subculture’ outside the context of lifestyles and identities inspired by rock music. A later research focused on different types of the football club Dinamo supporters (Fanuko et al. 1991) and turned to the most commonly used method in Croatian sociology – the survey questionnaire. Research was done on four different groups of people: aggressive BBB, moderate BBB, supporters of Dinamo not belonging to BBB and the fourth group was comprised of the Zagreb youth not interested in football at all. Although the main aim of the research was to show the characteristics of different types of football fans, with no intention to prove or reject the ‘subcultural thesis’ proposed in the previous research, the results showed that the group of fans called ‘aggressive BBB’ expressed more similarities with the investigated non-fans (when it comes to leisure activities like listening to music, going to the gathering places in the city etc.) than with other supporters of Dinamo. It means that some of BBB belonged to a new subcultural style, a style of ‘football hooligan’. Such actors of the new style were also present at the broader urban stage of subcultural styles: meeting with others

<sup>8</sup> The Belgian Jean-Marc Bosman played for RFC de Liege. In 1990 his contract expired and he wanted to make a transfer to the French club USL Dunkerque. Liege would not let him, but he sought damages that the French did not want to pay. On December 15 1995, the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg declared a violation of the rights of work force mobility. This decision provided all players from the EU member states with the opportunity to change their club after the expiry of the contract expiration with no compensation to the other clubs of the EU member states League, which is consistent with the “free flow of people, goods and capital in the EU” and “the human rights and freedom in professional football.”

and participating in rituals of punks, metal heads, rockabilly followers and many others. It is not only that football fans appeared at concerts and other gathering places of the youth subcultural actors, but punks, metal heads and others appeared on the terraces as well, contributing to various 'crossover' and interaction processes, which made complex subcultural youth identities and lifestyles possible.

The subculturalization process among football supporters started in Croatia at the end of the 1970s and was completed by the mid-1980s. The subculturalization of one section of football fans could also be seen as a certain form of 'urbanization' since it marked a move away from the dominant culture and its traditional, folk elements<sup>9</sup>. Research on graffiti (Perasović, 1990, Lalić, Leburic, Bulat, 1991) also showed several dimensions of that process, especially when interviewed participants described their own biographies and subcultural affiliation (Lalić et.al. 1991). Understanding the process of subculturalization helped authors of the first Croatian research on football supporters to develop appropriate notions and typologies, thus facilitating them to move away from the traditional approach that tried to explain the behaviour of fans within the framework of the game and its wider sporting context. The third research, done by Dražen Lalić (1993) on Torcida, accepted the notion of youth subculture and placed it in an actual social context. This has become a very important and influential study, mostly because it has re-affirmed the forgotten tradition of qualitative methods in Croatian sociology. The study was based on the ethnographic approach, specifically participatory observation during the two last seasons (1989-1991) of the then Yugoslav Championship, with the focus on all home and away matches of Hajduk Split.

All three studies, although using different methods, described and partly applied a theoretical framework based on several paradigmatic traditions: Ian Taylor (1971) was quoted because of his thesis on different forms of protest of working class youth against the commercialisation of football, Eric Dunning (1981) was more frequently quoted because of his 'socio-historic' approach that helped to relativize media discourses on football violence who presented it as a new and modern phenomenon, and Peter Marsh and associates (Marsh, Rosser, & Harre, 1978; Marsh & Harre, 1981) were quoted because of the fruitful thesis on the ritualization of violence. Also, the CCCS<sup>10</sup> legacy (Stuart Hall, 1978; Dick Hebdige, 1979; John Clarke 1973; Phil Cohen 1972; Paul Willis 1978) helped to establish the 'subcultural thesis' in the first and third Croatian research mentioned. The perspective of Italian

author Dal Lago (1990) was also taken into account, as well as the concept of moral panic developed by Stanley Cohen (1972). It should be emphasized that the key notions of the previously mentioned authors were adjusted to the social context of socialism, which means that the Croatian authors used these notions outside their original context. For example, the notion of subculture was taken from class determinism and simply applied to groups whose norms and values differed from those of a wider society. The idea of 'aggro' (developed by Peter Marsh) was applied to describe the intentions of football fans without any broader implication of ethology. The thesis on 'segmented solidarity' (emphasized by Eric Dunning) and the description of working-class values was applied without the broader meaning of 'sport in the civilizing process', and so on. The concept of moral panic was justified in its integral form as in many cases media campaigns in Croatia repeated Cohen's classical framework (from the punk issue to panic surrounding dark/gothic styles). In the case of football hooligans moral panic was like a textbook definition – firstly generalizations and exaggerations of violence and nationalism, then descriptions of deviant actors (bomber jackets, flares etc.) and finally attaching the meaning of deviancy to objects, clothes, gestures, or the appearance of football fans.

### Some elements of the new theoretical and methodological context

While at the beginning of the research in Croatia it was relatively easy to discover new phenomena of young supporters and their autonomous subcultural roles by comparing local styles and identities with social actors described in British (sub)cultural studies, 20 years later the social stage became more complex even on the periphery, let alone in the fragmented mega-cities of the contemporary globalized corporate world. The mass availability of information technology and the rise of new media and communication tools changed the context drastically in comparison to the end of the 1980s. In sociology, after the 'post-modern turn' and the 'spatial turn', we witnessed 'the ethnographic turn'. This wave brought concrete contents, 'thick descriptions' to the academic and wider public, providing more ground for understanding a social phenomenon, in this case the football fandom. Although there were some signs of the ethnographic and qualitative approaches back in the 1970s and through into the 1980s (Marsh et al. 1978; Williams, Dunning & Murphy, 1989), there were many more ethnographic and other qualitative insights into the

<sup>9</sup> Identification with parent culture was visible in the period before subculturalization, when football fans used to chase and beat up hippies and other followers of rock culture.

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, known also as 'The Birmingham School'

world of football supporters in the last two decades (Giulianotti, 1991, 1995; Armstrong, 1998; Brown, 1993; King, 2003; Millward, 2006; Spaaij, 2006; Stott and Pearson, 2007; Testa, 2009; Pearson, 2012). As modern football increasingly changes towards transnational big business, the types of fans and their consuming practices multiply. Giulianotti (2002) offered an elaborate typology regarding new types of actors within a more complex football fandom. On the basis of two different binary oppositions (hot-cold and traditional-consumer), with differences in relation to types of solidarity (thick and thin) and to spaces, he proposed four ideal types to map historical changes and cultural differences among spectators: the traditional hot spectator is termed a *supporter*, the traditional cool spectator is a *follower*, the consumer hot spectator is a *fan* and the consumer cool spectator is a *flaneur*. This scheme is useful for sociological research into football fandom; even in peripheral countries like Croatia we found elements (at least rudimentary) of all these types of spectators in our observations prior to our fieldwork, however we decided to focus on traditional hot spectators, that is on supporters, because of the reasons mentioned in the introduction.

Considering the importance of the thesis that football supporters in Croatia at the end of the 1980s presented a distinct subcultural style and identity, it should be mentioned here that the contemporary sociological context regarding the notion of subculture has significantly changed. Steve Redhead (1990, 1993), Thornton (1996), Muggleton, (2000, 2005) and Bennett (1999, 2000) argued in favour of abandoning the key thesis of the previous (CCCS) theoretical legacy (for most 'post-subculturalists' it includes the rejection of the notion of subculture itself), proclaiming the new 'post-subculturalist' paradigm. However, parallel to the 'post-subculturalist' stream, authors like Hodgkinson (2002) or Pilkington (2004, 2010) reclaimed the subculture notion (and part of the CCCS legacy), pointing our attention not to 'paradigm wars' but to 'thick description' and the content of the research on youth (sub)cultures. The notion of subculture also survived in recent studies on football supporters, for example Geoff Pearson (2012) argued that 'carnival fans' are a distinct subculture within the wider body of football fans. Giulianotti (1991, 1995) used the term 'carnival' earlier, in a slightly different way, in his description of the behaviour of the Scottish 'Tartan Army'. It seems that the self-reflection of the Scottish fans, strongly supported by the Scottish media, emphasizes their intention to be separated from the 'hooligan' image reserved for their English neighbours, which shaped Giulianotti's use of the term 'carnavalesque'. The activity of carnival fans (in this case, Tartan Army) was regulated by the system and absolutely excluded violence. But,

carnavalesque includes the transgression of norms and could include violence as well. There are many re-interpretations and re-affirmations of the original Bakhtin (1984) study in sociology/cultural studies; we agree that the notion seems especially appropriate to parts of football fandom, but it is always good to locate its use within a particular local context. Our research showed that the borders between 'carnival fans' and 'hooligans' are less strict than in Giulianotti's approach, and Hughson (2002) provides the same argument.

## Torcida: notes from the field

### Notes on method

*Positionality:* Before the MYPLACE project started in the summer of 2011, both authors of this text renewed their involvement in supporting the Hajduk football club for private, non-academic reasons. Of course, it is difficult to separate professional and personal curiosity, especially in our case when it comes to social actions and the role football supporters play in contemporary Croatian society. Both of us, according to our age, have a long history of intensive involvement in Torcida. Because of this, we did not have 'problems of access' like do ethnographers in other fields.

The field research with a group of the football club Hajduk fans, members of Torcida, lasted from June 2012 until June 2013, and resulted in the creation of 62 diary entries, of which 32 records related to group visits to official and friendly football matches played by Hajduk FC and two tracks related to the Croatian national team matches. Other diary entries are related to various social activities, public manifestations or simply socialising. We conducted 21 in-depth interviews with the hard core members and wrote more than 100,000 words of field diary entries (we are still coding the material in Nvivo software 9.2).

#### *The hard core and its extensions*

The hard core of Torcida counts between 300 to 500 members, but due to the specific situation of the club and with the mobilisation of emotions, it easily expands to cover 1000 or 1500 people who regularly travel to, even minor, away matches. At regular home matches, 2000 to 3000 people could be counted continually to stand and chant, and this number could expand to 5000 on more important matches. On important matches or derbies, Torcida leads chants, choreographies and the general atmosphere on the whole north stand of the stadium, which means up to ten thousand people.

#### *Social class, age and education*

The core of Torcida mostly includes young persons between approximately 16 to 30 years of



age; however, it is not rare to meet, among others, people of 40 years of age or more. They come from different social classes, but mostly belong to families that would be marked as 'losers of the Croatian transition' as defined in the introductory part of this paper. Therefore, they are primarily the children of the working class and impoverished middle strata, amongst whom pupils, students, and the unemployed or seasonally employed persons dominate. Although the majority of the core belong to the working class, it is important to note that there are also highly educated individuals in Torcida. Several current members have a PhD-level education and there are also excellent lawyers and other intellectuals who support (in different periods and according to different occasions) the younger supporters with a variety of different methods of help. Social class is not a deterministic factor in the sense of the British sociological tradition from the 1970s, but most of the members of Torcida are embedded in their parents' culture, celebrating 'the ethics of reciprocity', hard work, masculinity and, above all, friendship, loyalty and group solidarity.

### *Organization*

Although there is a high level of spontaneity, there is also an organisational framework; Torcida is an NGO with a formal structure. Moreover, Torcida has branches outside Split; the branches from other Dalmatian towns and places outside Dalmatia have an important role. Apart from the formal hierarchy, which is reflected in the structure of 'The Supporters Club, Torcida Split', there are also influential individuals outside of the formal structure, from different generations of fans. When our research started, the younger generation had taken over the leadership and management of The Supporters Club. Branches outside of Split play a significant role; sometimes on away matches the attendance of branch members is so high that it equals the number of members of Torcida from Split.

### *Identity*

Split, Dalmatia, Croatia - the markers of identity are clear and non-questionable, but it is just one part of the complex identity of Torcida. At the same time, Torcida is a subcultural social actor. The process we called subculturalization can be used as a solid foundation for understanding the distinction between 'a sports audience', 'ordinary fans' or regular, mainstream people and those for whom supporting the club, travelling to matches, chanting at the stadium and participation in other fan rituals actually presents a mediation of their lifestyle and identity. One cannot be a member of Torcida only halfway, as the old slogan actualized on the banners says: "Either you are or you are not." (Ili jesi ili nisi). The issue regarding identity is a

mixture (sometimes a conscious play with both types of identity) of what is usually called 'achieved identity' and 'ascribed identity', where 'ascribed' (Dalmatian, Croatian) has been adopted and upgraded by subculturalization into an 'achieved' identity of ultras, the football hooligan. Sometimes, identity achieved through football supporters' rituals and belonging to Torcida can also be linked with the identity of a punk, a skinhead a biker or similar. The visual, individual image is addressed with special attention in some cases. Fans wear specific brands and props that follow current trends in the wider European subcultural ultras context, but at the same time some of them criticize that phenomenon and call their friends from the stands 'phonies'. It means that on the terraces, in the same group of friends (e.g. a sub-group of Torcida) we meet both people who care about brands (from Lonsdale and Fred Perry to Mentalita Ultra, Adidas (old logo) and Thor Steinar, Carhartt etc.) and their close friends who joke about the 'phonies' and 'branded hooligans'. It should be mentioned here that most of the core members accepted 'casual' image, nowadays widely present in the ultras world. Additionally, Torcida has its own web-shop where people can buy authentic clothing with the Torcida identity tag. One part of group identity within Torcida was based (and to some extent still is) on territorial identifications with city districts, neighbourhoods, and places of origin. But, gradually, other types of affiliation on the basis of various kinds of preferences, like preferences in musical styles, drugs, politics, or preferences of styles within the ultras identity (hooligan, flare head, coreo head etc.) play a more important role in sub-groupings within Torcida. Group identity can also be seen through self-perception by the Torcida supporter club members' answers when asked about the characteristics of Torcida. Compared with other ultras groups Torcida supporters can be distinguished by a number of actions: some of the older members emphasised successfully performed firework (pyro) show despite strict prohibitions and control since they were aware that Torcida was internationally known for pyrotechnics. Torcida is also known for their excellent intellectual actions (letters to UEFA regarding the ban of the 'white boys' banner and the confederation flag, or the success of Torcida's legal team in 'the Žilina case', when the higher Slovak court changed a previous sentence against Torcida members) including web development in some periods. However, some fans would like to prove themselves as hooligans, with a clear idea of a fair fight, without any weapons. Most of the interviewed members said that Torcida is known for a high attendance on away matches, great atmosphere and Mediterranean passion, and that faithfulness is the most important characteristic. Some would add a certain 'craziness', or 'madness', which goes along with the argument on atmosphere.

One part of the contemporary identity of Torcida is a very strong and official 20-year-old friendship with the 'No Name Boys', the supporters of Benfica as well as a non-official, but passionate friendship with the 'Magic Fans' of St. Etienne. Most people within the Torcida core feel that they belong to a broader, international ultras movement. It is not a coincidence that the banner 'against modern football', brought to Euro 2008, which appeared on the cover page of the book edited by Peter and David Kennedy (2012) was made by Torcida. During those days (of Euro 2008), that banner, together with other stories from Torcida's past, made some people believe that the group is a sort of avant-garde manifestation of the ultras movement. Moreover, the fact that Torcida is one of the oldest firms in Europe (founded in 1950) is a point of pride for supporters.

*Social action: boycotts, petitions, and demonstrations*

During the past few years Torcida has organized numerous actions, mobilizing a great number of people for different purposes including the boycott of the biggest Croatian derby (Hajduk vs Dinamo), in order to protest against the management of the club and the mayor of the city of Split. The north stand remained completely empty and 10,000 people watched the game at the old Hajduk ground (nowadays the rugby field) via a video wall. Torcida also organized protests in front of the city of Split authority office in October 2012 in order to obtain a warranty from the City authorities for loans necessary for paying off Hajduk's debts – this protest actually saved Hajduk from bankruptcy – and the silent and spontaneous boycott of the friendly match of the Croatian national team in Split, as well as the boycott of Hajduk beer and many other actions.. While some of these actions were battles against local or national political-economic elites and could not be won so easily, the boycott of Hajduk beer was, at least temporarily, successful. The beer company from Koprivnica, owned by Carlsberg, produced beer with the name Hajduk and made an agreement that from each litre of beer sold on the market one kuna (around 15 cents) would go to the Hajduk football club. Football supporters of Hajduk, on a large scale, not only Torcida, enjoy the beer so by drinking the beer they were also financially supporting the club. When the information came to

light that the company was not paying and was not willing to extend the contract, Torcida proclaimed a boycott of the beer, and soon the company paid its contractual obligations.

*Enemies: The police and the Croatian FF*

Apart from the usual and ritual hostility towards other ultras groups (especially BBB and Armada, supporters of Rijeka FC) Torcida is in a constant struggle against the police and the establishment of the Croatian Football Federation. Most members of Torcida perceive police forces as hostile to the fans, and describe how the police use the power of their weapons and the protection of their uniforms to beat up, humiliate, arrest and exclude fans from following football. Although we witnessed some cases when fans have provoked the police or started to throw bottles at them, in numerous cases we were witnessed unnecessary and unjustifiable behaviour of the police, who at times denied the basic human rights of fans without reason. After the match of the Croatian Football Cup on November 27, 2012, massive clashes between the police and the supporters occurred around the stadium, but on this occasion they were caused by the police<sup>11</sup>. The proverbial intolerance and the latent conflict between Torcida and the police culminated in the spring of 2013, partly as a consequence of the tragic event in Županja. After several days of police investigation in which an adult graduate and member of Torcida from Županja was under suspicion of a crime, the young man died<sup>12</sup>. Soon after the event, the latent conflict with police culminated in mass riots and fights in Split on the 4. May 2013, after the 'city derby' match between Hajduk and Split. Because of exorbitant tickets for visiting fans Torcida boycotted the match and gathered near the stadium. The police were present and fights began. On this occasion the riots caused great damage and numerous fans and police officers were injured. Seven arrested fans have been criminally charged.

Besides the clashes with the police, the struggle against the Croatian FF is also a very important issue, especially since it is becoming more and more important in the wider society and the media, as evidence of criminal activity by the high officials of the FF and the referee's organization comes to light. Resistance to the FF establishment often means resistance to Zdravko Mamić, the executive chairman of the football club Dinamo Zagreb

<sup>11</sup> As witnesses of the whole event, we were also summoned to appear at court for the defence of the accused fans.

<sup>12</sup> Family of the deceased claimed that the boy died because a month before he was beaten by the police. As announced in Večernji list (a popular national newspaper), after the death of the young man his family found a medical report issued on 20th March 2013 with the information that Marko Azapović told the doctors that he was beaten by the police. The autopsy determined that the boy died of a blood clot in the heart, and his family believed that this clot could have been caused by the beating. The young man died on April 21, 2013. Numerous fan groups from all over the world showed solidarity with the subsequent actions and protests of the angry fans of Torcida. The stadiums in Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Bulgaria and even Australia were full of large banners and messages from numerous fan groups paying tribute to "the victim of police brutality" in Croatia.



and the absolute ruler, 'the boss' of the Croatian football. People at the top of the FF are perceived to be responsible for the bad relations within and general state of Croatian football; the national team and the first division are viewed as the private toys of the boss whose main purpose is to make money. Although Dinamo won eight championships in a row BBB also oppose 'the boss', 'the mafia in the FF' and the non-transparent business of their own club, through protest and the organisation of various actions. Other groups of radical supporters in Croatia (Armada, Kohorta etc.) joined the struggle but apart from periodical promises of the Croatian government to 'drain the football swamp' nothing happened, thus Torcida has designed a big choreography on the north stand saying that 'the football swamp will be drained by the force of the supporters movement'.

### *Left and right*

Many members of the Torcida core classify themselves as right wing of the traditional political spectrum. Most of the wider public would also define football fans under the stereotype of 'extreme right wing' because of the slogans and songs which are characterized by hatred of national minorities, or the expression of intolerance towards people of homosexual orientation, or because of cases when some fans made 'monkey sounds' to refer to the black player of Dinamo, Sammir. However, sociological research and the understanding of the phenomenon of football hooliganism suggests that the conclusion is too simple and that the label of 'extreme right wing' is too superficial when considering the complex world of interactions within the group and the external expressions of Torcida. With this preconception and without delving deeper into the processes and dynamics of fan expressions, we lose a number of details that allow a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, including answers to questions about why fans chant in certain situations and why they do not do so in other situations, how many fans chant a certain slogan in a certain situation and how much a certain fans' expression was determined by events on the field, media discourses, police actions etc. For example, we were at the Dinamo stadium in Zagreb when Torcida supporters were 3000 strong. During the first part of the match, when Sammir had the possession of the ball, some fans, 10 or 15 of them, tried to chant 'hu-hu' (monkey sounds) but the majority of Torcida fans did not support such actions. In the second part of the game, when the referee awarded a penalty kick for Dinamo, which was regarded as unjust, Sammir prepared to execute the penalty kick and then almost everyone among Torcida made 'hu-hu' sounds. The traditional division between left and right, in the case of the analysis of Torcida

neither contributes to the understanding of ultras subculture nor represents an appropriate framework for discussion, especially when it remains at the level of superficial labelling. In the interviews and other discussions with members of the Torcida core there was a greater diversity of attitudes than it would be possible to derive from the simple concepts of traditional political divisions. Many fans, when talking about (neo)liberal capitalism, corporations, football institutions and the Croatian political elite expressed views which would usually be marked as leftist, and the same people would manifest views on national, religious or gender issues that could be characterized as right wing. Apart from the evident patriotism and nationalism within Torcida, many other activities of the group and differences within the group do not support the stereotype of 'extreme right wing'. Our study confirms the hypothesis of other authors about football fans as a good example of a 'glocalizing' process that opposes globalization. (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004) But in this instance it's not a simple formula of 'nationalism vs globalization'; instead it is a complex and multidimensional glocalizing process. In the case of Torcida, we must not forget the position of Split and Dalmatia as a 'double periphery', as mentioned in the introductory chapters of the article.

### *Gender*

Unlike twenty years ago, when Lalić (1993) conducted his research on Torcida, today there are a lot more women in the core of Torcida. The expression of masculinity is still strongly emphasized and women must submit to it if they wish to be accepted in the group, just as Pearson (2012) showed in his ethnography of English football fans. Talking to the women of Torcida, we found similar types of (non)reaction to sexism as was also the case in the study of Jones (2006) where women justified sexist chants as 'funny', or typical for football rituals, or, in some cases, separated themselves from certain chants. The world of football is masculine, but wider society is also patriarchal, which means that girls have to adjust to it or develop different tactics in order to survive, as one of them said 'Why would I react to the word pussy in the context of the stadium, when it is not directed at me directly, I should save my energy for the fight regarding my job on such things'.

### *Production of memory discourse*

Torcida, like other football supporters, use the public space of the stadium to express several kinds of messages, sometimes using 'one-time banners'. In most cases, apart from banners commemorating deceased friends or expressing attitudes against the police and the law, Torcida has demonstrated

a special focus on events from Croatian recent history, especially The Homeland War (1991-1995). In fact, Torcida is an active social actor in the production of memory discourse, not only by marking anniversaries of the fall of Vukovar and of the war operation Storm<sup>13</sup>, but also by mobilizing people in the city of Split to light candles along the Vukovar Street, paint big murals on the walls and by organising humanitarian help and collecting money for impoverished families in Vukovar. Recently the actions have also included protests against the introduction of the Cyrillic script in the town of Vukovar. The Homeland War is central because it symbolizes the birth of Croatia as an independent state. Torcida (and some of the other groups of ultras) began the mass marking of the anniversaries of the Homeland war and other social actors followed. This happens independently of the official Croatian policies, political parties in power, or the attention of the media. With the knowledge gained from the data of some other sociological research within the MYPLACE project and in particular considering the survey and interviews of young people from two zones of Zagreb who showed a great confusion and lack of knowledge regarding recent Croatian history, we could conclude that Torcida plays a significant role in the construction of social memory. Although the activities of Torcida cannot be reduced to one notion, because of the focus on the Homeland War considered with some other aspects of their attitudes, we could place them under the common denominator of 'new patriotic movements'.

#### *Playing football*

Contrary to stereotypes in the media, that the radical football supporters - 'the ultras' are not familiar with the game itself, our research showed that most members of the core group actively play football in several recreational leagues in Split. Some of them practice football on regular basis, or at least play one day in a week. Torcida organize football tournaments, 'The Torcida Cup' and attendance is higher than on average matches in the First Croatian Football Division. All sub-groups of Torcida register their teams for the Cup and most of them play and prepare for the Cup with the same players throughout the whole year, where support and a carnival atmosphere sometimes equals the big Hajduk matches. For the spectator, it looks like a real celebration of the game itself, a 'back-to-the-roots' movement in the enjoyment of football, without any mediation.

#### *The Internet*

Although Torcida had two web sites prior to the change in the generation of the Supporters' Club leadership, nowadays the main communication channel is through the Torcida Facebook profile and 107.000 users 'like' it. Torcida has recently issued its statements and all other announcements through Facebook, publishing photos, stories, and many other pieces of information. Internet tools are also used for the cultivation of the group's image in the international context. Documentary records of matches and, on occasion, of other events, are regularly posted on the YouTube network. Reports of supporters activity (as with many other ultras groups) are regularly posted on ultras.tifo.net site. Some Hajduk fans set up their own forums for virtual meetings, which sometimes include members of other fan groups.

### **Conclusion**

Two decades after the period in which football supporters received the sociological attention they deserved, we have noticed some similarities to that period and some radical differences. All authors, despite the different methods used or preferences towards the paradigm of Eric Dunning or Peter Marsh, agreed upon the rational argument and the development of the sociological discourse against moral panic in society. While sports journalists, representatives of various sports organizations, politicians and public 'opinion makers' of the socialist system presented the problem of radical football supporters as a deviation, illness, as something which could be, with a precise 'surgeon type' intervention removed from the healthy body of sport and the wider society, sociologists showed that the embodiment of the phenomenon existed within the structures of sport and social system in general. Expressions of nationalism, masculinity, ritual hostility, orgiastic hedonism and other characteristics of new football tribes were explained according to the socialisation process and according to actual social systems with all of its structural and cultural contradictions. This approach functioned as an antidote to moral panic, helping to develop an understanding of the phenomenon and enriched sociology with new (or renewed) methodological practices. While the concept of moral panic seems to be fresh and useful in present times, most elements of the old context have radically changed. The Croatian society passed through the painful process of war and transition and football supporters strengthened their role as social actors

<sup>13</sup> Vukovar fell on the 18 of November, 1991. After the long siege, the city was completely destroyed, and those who remained were killed, sent to the camps or into exile. The operation Storm occurred in August of 1995 and liberated the occupied territory of Croatia but also resulted in the mass exodus of the Serbian minority from the region.

particularly regarding their own formal structure which was not imaginable in a one-party system, as well as regarding social actions like protests, boycotts, demonstrations, petitions and other forms of resistance to the local and national political-economic elites of the new consumer society. The complex dynamics of the new types of spectators is open to various research perspectives: it means that Giulianotti's scheme (2005) is also fruitful in the Croatian context (logically because Croatia is not outside the globalised football world) where it would be worth exploring new trends and aspects

of 'televised' and 'networked' football following. While all sociological methods have their own legitimacy in this field, (we could easily imagine the applicability of content analyses, discourse analyses, survey and other methods in the context of contemporary networked football) our experience from the research is that the ethnographic approach, especially when it comes to traditional/hot supporters, provides an opportunity to collect data which is not comparable to other approaches both for the benefit of the sociological and wider understanding of social processes and social actors.

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## NOGOMETNI NAVIJAČI U KONTEKSTU SOCIOLOGIJE U HRVATSKOJ: ISTRAŽIVAČKE PERSPEKTIVE 20 GODINA POSLIJE

Cilj je ovog rada obnoviti sociološku raspravu o problemu nogometnih navijača u Hrvatskoj nakon dva desetljeća nepostojanja terenskih istraživanja, i to u četiri koraka: prvo, objašnjavanjem promjena u hrvatskom društvu; drugo, davanjem kratkog pregleda promjena u modernom nogometu; treće, opisom teorijskog i metodološkog okvira hrvatskih istraživanja provedenih u prošlosti i opisivanjem suvremenog teorijskoga konteksta u kojemu se odvijalo naše vlastito istraživanje; četvrto, predstavljanjem preliminaranih rezultata našeg istraživanja koje je provedeno unutar projekta FP7 MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engage-

ment). Hrvatsko društvo prošlo je kroz bolan proces rata i tranzicije, a nogometni navijači ojačali su svoju ulogu društvenih aktera, posebno u svjetlu vlastite formalne organiziranosti, nezamislive u jednopartijskom sustavu, i s obzirom na vlastite društvene akcije poput protesta, bojkota, demonstracija, peticija i drugih oblika otpora lokalnim i nacionalnim političko-ekonomskim elitama novog potrošačkog društva.

**Ključne riječi:** društvene promjene, moderni nogomet, ultras, etnografija, Hrvatska, Torcida