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PRESS COVERAGE OF SPORT-RELATED VIOLENCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract. This article explores press coverage of sport-related violence in the Czech Republic by applying Stuart Hall's analytical framework to articles published in selected newspapers between 1998 and 2017. Covering a gap in the current scholarship, this case study shows that in the Czech Republic there are similar trends to the ones present in other European countries when it comes to media coverage of sport-related violence. However, the typical simplifications and exaggerations associated to the topic are present only in a minor part of the analysed sample and even tabloid press articles report rather neutrally on the matter. There is also a marked difference in how the newspapers report on football – and ice hockey – related violence, with the former largely explained by football supporters' characteristics and the latter more readily interpreted as directly influenced by the game. The scarce calls for action and reactions from politicians, as well as the fact that police and game authorities are usually those who seem to frame the topic support the thesis that sport-related violence is more often politicised by actors that deal with it as part of their everyday duties, while politicians only exploit it under certain socio-political circumstances.

Keywords: hooliganism, sport-related violence, press coverage, football supporters, ice hockey supporters, political treatment of sport.

Press coverage of football *hooliganism* in Europe

For Stuart Hall (1978, 20) the press treatment of football-related violence was worth analysing because "over and above the so-called 'problem of

football hooliganism,' there is also the problem of the nature of the press coverage given to football hooliganism and its retroactive effects on football hooliganism." In his view, press coverage contributed to the construction of this phenomenon as a social problem, and it then further amplified it mostly by suppressing its true nature. From this perspective, the treatment of football hooliganism is "brutal, short-hand and simplifying."

Since the publication of Hall's influential article, other researchers have repeatedly concluded that the press simplifies and amplifies the phenomenon, as we summarise below. For example, Whannel (1979, 331-337) found four themes in the media description of football hooliganism. At the time of his analysis, football hooligans were seen in news stories as (1) "mindless/senseless" and thus having no rational motivation for their behaviour, (2) "maniacs/lunatics," (3) "foul/sub-human" individuals who behave like animals, and finally, they were considered as (4) "minority/so-called supporters", i.e. different from genuine supporters. These themes were, however, only partially constructed by journalists: "[the] striking feature of football hooligan stories is the central importance of quotes," most of which are supplied by the authorities (Ibid.). In short, journalists tend to support the official views rather than challenge them. Once a "frame of reference" is established, the presentation of other incidents became subordinate to this treatment. Alternative explanations did appear in the press, but mostly when they were voiced by privileged sources, and they had no impact on the overall 'conventionalised' treatment of the issue. While very little space was devoted to discussing the causes of football hooliganism, the press was much more fervent in offering solutions. Whannel also exposed the gradual shift in the media treatment of football hooligans from defining them "on the basis of what they did" to "who they were." He criticised how this construction of a "folk devil" was eventually used to redefine the football audience by contrasting the image of football hooligans with a family audience that the hooligans were allegedly driving away from the stadiums.

As suggested by Melnick (1986, 1) for the case of Great Britain, "the nature and severity" of football hooliganism was "largely overstated by the popular press and unjustly elevated to the status of a major social problem by the State." He identified eight myths of football

hooliganism which were "largely defined and promulgated by the popular press" while also reinforced by politicians and a part of the academia (Ibid., 6). Some of those myths constructed the image of football hooligans as a "mindless, irrational, maniacal bunch of thugs," composed mostly of "[u]nemployed, working class male youth" who were by no means "true supporters." The myth of hooliganism as "essentially a discipline problem" led to the idea that "punitive measures are the only answer," while deeper causes of the phenomenon were largely ignored by the popular press (Ibid., 11-16).

Additionally, Murphy, Dunning and Williams (1988) observed how the press treatment of football hooliganism contributed to the development of the phenomenon itself. They suggested that during the 20th century the press played an important part in both its amplification and de-amplification, in the latter case mostly by underreporting. It was not until the 1960s that the media tended to present supporters (labelled as hooligans) as folk devils by exaggerating the frequency and seriousness of the incidents. In particular, the popular press embraced sensationalist reporting, including a military rhetoric. This development in the press coverage increasingly interwove reality with perceptions of the phenomenon. The media also called for "remedial action" only to later criticise the authorities for failing to solve the issue, thus ignoring their own contribution to constructing football hooliganism as a social problem. The media and the popular press in particular were also seen as partly responsible for "directing hooligan behaviour into the football context," which Murphy et al. contradicted by the argument that the roots of the problem were "deeper and wider than the game itself."

Contributing to this conversation, Giulianotti & Armstrong (1998, 4, 14, 21-24) remarked that the distinction between "quality" and "tabloid" newspapers was becoming increasingly blurred in the treatment of football hooligans. Irrespective of the source, the coverage typically sensationalised hooliganism through militarist and cabalist metaphors. In addition, Giulianotti and Armostrong noticed the striking absence of any fieldwork or encounters with hooligans on the part of the media, who instead used academic explanations of the phenomenon. They also nonetheless admitted that the divergence between reality and the media representation was "not governed purely by prerogatives of the

newsworthy or the ideologically sustainable" but, in fact, access to football hooligans raised indeed "numerous risks and problems."

Similarly, Poulton (2005, 28, 33–34) identified the stereotypical image of English football supporters as "shaven-headed, beer-bellied, tattooed, drunk and disorderly young males" and that this image has been again constructed mainly by the media, particularly through "[h]ysterical headlines, emotive language, evocative imagery and graphic photographs." She noticed that media mostly reported on the behaviour of the violent minority, while ignoring the non-violent majority. Press coverage also dissociated that minority from football by refusing to label them as supporters and resorting instead to stigmatising and dismissive labels. At the same time, in-depth analyses were absent. These led Poulton to conclude that "the news values that characterised the reporting identified by Hall still prevail; as does the enduring mediated stereotype of the 'Neanderthal fan'" and that this representation was "self-sustaining." (Ibid., 43)

A more recent study by Tsoukala (2006) confirmed the "discursive construction of the 'otherness' following a strict binary logic" in British press discourses during the 2000 European Football Championship. However, whereas the theme of irrationality prevailed in the discourse, the theme of bestiality was absent, possibly due to its prevalence in the popular press, which was not included in the author's research. Tsoukala (2011) also found a similar use of "deviance-amplification techniques" and a "binary representation of football hooligans" in the Italian and Greek press. However, such a treatment did not seem to have occurred in Italy until the early 1980s and in Greece until the mid-1990s, a fact that she explained through the particular social and political contexts of both countries at the time. Most significantly, football hooliganism did not previously seem a "serious enough" problem given the much more worrying public order issues such as political violence and terrorism. As she further noted, "the perception of the dangerousness of football-related violence is to a great extent dissociated from the scale and seriousness of the phenomenon and what finally changed the press treatment was in fact 'unrelated to football hooliganism'." (Ibid., 605). She also found a similar discrepancy in the British press, which, in her view, could be attributed to a "static representation of the issue over the

last forty years" that was largely independent of the newspapers' political affiliation (Tsoukala 2006).

Based on such studies, we can identify the following key features of press coverage on the topic of sport-related violence. First, the press has contributed significantly to the public perception of football hooliganism. Depending on a country's social and political context, the media can both amplify and de-amplify the phenomenon. Quotes supplied by authorities with privileged access to the press are also of central importance in the overall treatment of the matter. Usually, when the context is conducive to amplification of football hooliganism, a change in reporting does not coincide with a change of the phenomenon itself. Instead, the seriousness and frequency of the incidents are exaggerated, while the true nature of the violence is suppressed. Reality and perceptions of it become increasingly blurred. Media simplifies the image of football hooligans by depicting them as irrational, insane, behaving like animals, and diametrically opposed to genuine supporters. At the same time, the behaviour of the non-violent majority is ignored. Underlying causes or alternative definitions of the phenomenon are also mostly neglected by the journalists. On the other hand, calls for action and suggested solutions are more often put on the agenda. This overall understanding of football hooliganism has gradually become established as a self-sustaining "frame of reference" in the public discourse, one that is later difficult to alter even under changed circumstances.

Several factors explain this exaggerated attention to football hooliganism and its simplified treatment by the press. First, crime and especially violent crime as a social problem, and crime control have always caught the public imagination and have received tremendous attention in TV shows, movies, literature, and mass media. Crime is news "almost by definition" (Hall et al. 1978). While most crimes are mundane and routine, some acquire a special status for the "pathological criminal mentality" of their perpetrator or for the extremity of the means used (Hall et al. 1978, 31). There are good reasons to believe that football-related violence satisfies one or even both conditions. Football hooligans are often represented as lacking any rational reasons for their deviant acts, which makes their behaviour irrational and, as such, pathological and dangerous (cf. Hall 1978;

Tsoukala 2008; Tsoukala 2009). Since an event as ordinary as a football match is the context of "football hooliganism," any violence, vandalism, or disturbance may seem excessive (gratuitous) given its seemingly absent or at best irrational end. At the same time, this assumed pathology and extremity make the phenomenon exciting for outside observation and consumption (cf. Crabbe 2003, 418; Crawford 2004, 135; Poulton 2006; Poulton 2007; Poulton 2008; Poulton 2013; Poulton 2014).

Not least, transgressions have always accompanied football matches, and there is no reason to believe that these incidents should disappear any time soon (Armstrong 2000, 316). For media working under a significant time constraint, risk sports events provide a regular and predictable source of newsworthy stories to report and set into a ready-made frame. The predictability of scheduled matches and the high risk associated with certain sports events present newspapers with the opportunity to deliver additional reports by covering security arrangements adopted for the event and by presenting concerns voiced by the police, the clubs or the public or the journalists' own predictions of possible disturbances.

Press coverage of *hooliganism* in the Czech Republic

As suggested by Tsoukala (2011, 598), despite an increase in football-related violence in different European countries, "research in the media coverage of the phenomenon remained an essentially British affair" (cf. Zákravský 2016). In the Czech Republic, no comprehensive study on the press coverage of football hooliganism has been published and only scarce attention has been paid to the topic so far.

According to Duke & Slepička (2002, 54-55, 57) the relaxation of restrictions on the country's media in the mid-1980s led to the dissemination of information about English football hooliganism and then to "copycat" behaviour among Czech football supporters. The role of media coverage in the 1990s was also rather limited: "[amid] all the social, political, and economic problems, football hooliganism [was] not regarded by politicians and the media as a priority" (Idem). Around the same period, another study analysed the "exaggerated interest of the

media" after a football supporter had assaulted a referee, explaining that "hysterical media reflection" of the incident was connected to the previous press focus on "football racism," which was supposed to be further justified by the assault (CDK 2003). However, the incident turned up to be unrelated to racism in any way whatsoever (Ibid.). Similarly, Vochocová (2007) analysed the image of Czech football hooligans as presented in the press in 2003 and 2004 and contradicted it with their self-image constructed through a supporters' fanzine. She emphasised the following features of the press treatment of football hooliganism based on her sample: expressive language and offensive labelling, war-like metaphors, the narrative of football hooligans as one of the reasons for declining stadium attendance and for allegedly driving the family audience away. She also observed that quotations by hooligans formed a tiny minority while the violent behaviour was mostly explained by police spokespersons, football officials and psychologists. Smolík (2012) also mentioned several problems related to media coverage of football hooliganism in the country, such as disinformation about football-related disturbances, frequent inaccuracies, and distortions of reality that, in his view, could affect the behaviour of other people.

The present paper attempts to fill this research gap by providing an in-depth study on the media treatment of "hooliganism" in the Czech Republic. The results are then compared with those obtained in the previous research briefly summarized above. In our analysis we include not only football but also ice hockey, as violent incidents regularly occur in both sports in the Czech Republic. This broader focus allows us to evaluate whether there are substantial differences in the coverage of both sports. This could also shed light on the assumed causal relationship between football as a game and the supporters' violence which has already been called into question by Murphy, Dunning & Williams (1988).

Data and methods

The often-absent methodology in the studies cited above prevents us from replicating them in the Czech context. Moreover, it is impossible to evaluate how pervasive the media coverage trends discovered are since

they rarely describe the size of their sample and detailed sampling methods. For greater validity and replicability of the results, this paper attempts to provide maximum transparency in its methodology. This will prevent a possible search – conscious or not – for results already found in previous studies on the media coverage of football hooliganism (see above).

The case study is limited to Czech national print newspapers ("quality" as well as "popular" journals) issued between January 1998 and December 2017. They were accessed via a commercial media database that provides access to national print media issued since 1998. Articles were searched using a set of keywords connecting football or ice hockey with supporters and their violent behaviour (e.g. violence, hooliganism, disturbances, riots, brawls). All relevant articles for the first four years of the sample were coded to obtain an overall grasp of the Czech press coverage of football and ice hockey-related violence.

Based on the pilot analysis and to reduce the sample to a manageable size, two newspapers, *Lidové noviny* and *Blesk*, were selected. Both newspapers were issued during the whole 20-year period and rank among those with the highest circulation and readership in the country. As of 2017, the estimated daily readership was 986,000 for *Blesk* and 207,000 for *Lidové noviny*, while the daily circulation was 216,359 for *Blesk* and 37,525 for *Lidové noviny* (Unie vydavatelů 2017). *Blesk* was selected as a tabloid in which the articles frequently violate the traditional line between news and editorial, as it mixes opinion with news and it frequently uses emotional / biased language. *Lidové noviny* (hereinafter also abbreviated as *LN*) represents a quality newspaper that dedicates more space than other journals to features and editorials, often displaying diverse opinions. Because of this sampling, the results of the analysis are not representative of the Czech press in general. Nevertheless, the initial coding of all print newspapers for the first few years indicated that each these two journals most accurately represented one type of newspaper (tabloid and quality, respectively).

We analysed the articles according to a set of categories developed on the framework provided in Hall (1978). Each article was assigned to a newspaper genre: news, editorial or feature. This sorting proved helpful in evaluating how much space the journals devoted to sport-related

violence coverage and what importance they attached to it by publishing personal opinions on the subject. We also noted whether the article was entirely devoted to the topic of sport-related violence or whether the topic was only mentioned in a different context (such as a weekly summary of sports events and results). We also examined what labels were attached to the supporters whose behaviour was considered deviant or criminal and whether metaphors were used for their or the incident's description. Further attention was paid to the source of information (primary definers) – what persons or authorities the article quoted and whether it included an attempt to explain the deviant behaviour (causes) or any alternative definition of the problem. Finally, calls for action by the journal or another authority were registered for further analysis.

The analysed sample includes 471 articles, of which 274 were published in *Lidové noviny* and 197 in *Blesk*. Table 1 below summarises the distribution of the journalistic genre by news, editorial and feature. In *Lidové noviny*, almost two-thirds of the articles are news. Considerable space was also reserved for editorials, while features offering more detailed analysis were rare during the researched period. However, analyses of the phenomenon – albeit less focused and less balanced – were also present in the other types of articles. In the tabloid *Blesk*, news stories represented the vast majority of the articles, with only 20 editorials, but, as already mentioned, the line between news and editorials is often transgressed in this journal

Table 1

Distribution of journalistic genres in the sample

Journal	News	Editorial	Feature
Lidové noviny	201	55	18
Blesk	177	20	-

As for the overall focus of these articles, two-thirds of them dealt exclusively with sport-related violence (195 out of 274 articles in *Lidové noviny*, 133 out of 197 in *Blesk*). In the rest, the issue was not of primary importance to the story, and it was only discussed or mentioned in a different context.

Evolution of the Czech press coverage of sport-related violence

Figures 1 and 2 on the next pages show how the press coverage of sport-related violence evolved between 1998 and 2017 (cf. Horky 2016). The graphs for all national print newspapers and the two selected newspapers reveal the same development. After a low level of coverage in 1998, a peak can be observed in 1999 following a severe incident in which supporters of Baník Ostrava threw rocks at a passing train carrying fans of Sigma Olomouc, causing heavy injuries to a 32-year-old woman (*Peak 1*). A several years' decline followed.

The coverage again gradually increased from 2002 and culminated in 2004 with several football-related riots involving, in most cases, Baník Ostrava and Sparta Prague supporters. The history of the Baník–Sparta rivalry dates back to the early 1990s. Until the Czechoslovak Federation's dissolution, Sparta Prague mostly perceived several Slovak football clubs as its enemies. The first event that laid ground for the rivalry occurred in 1983 when Baník supporters attacked a train with Sparta supporters. Eight years later, a Sparta supporter stabbed one supporter of Baník. The causes of this rivalry are mostly interpreted as a continuation of a more general animosity between the two cities– one representing a rich capital city in Bohemia and the other a rather poor coal-mining city located in the region of Silesia. In this regard, Sparta came to be seen as one of the symbols of the capital city, but it was also perceived as a favoured "government" club by Baník fans, while Sparta supporters criticised the friendly relationships of Baník fans with Polish hooligans from Katowice (Petrák 2010; Procházka 2022; cf. Divišová 2019).

The worst incident took place in connection with a SFC Opava – FC Baník Ostrava match (*Peak 2*). It is believed that the rivalry between the two Silesian clubs only began with the ascent of SFC Opava to the Czech First League, in which it beat Baník Ostrava in their first match played at Baník's home stadium. Since then, the relationships between both clubs have been affected by mutual animosity. The partnership of the Opava club with the supporters of the Polish club Śląsk Wrocław has added even more fuel to this rivalry (Vaněk 2019).

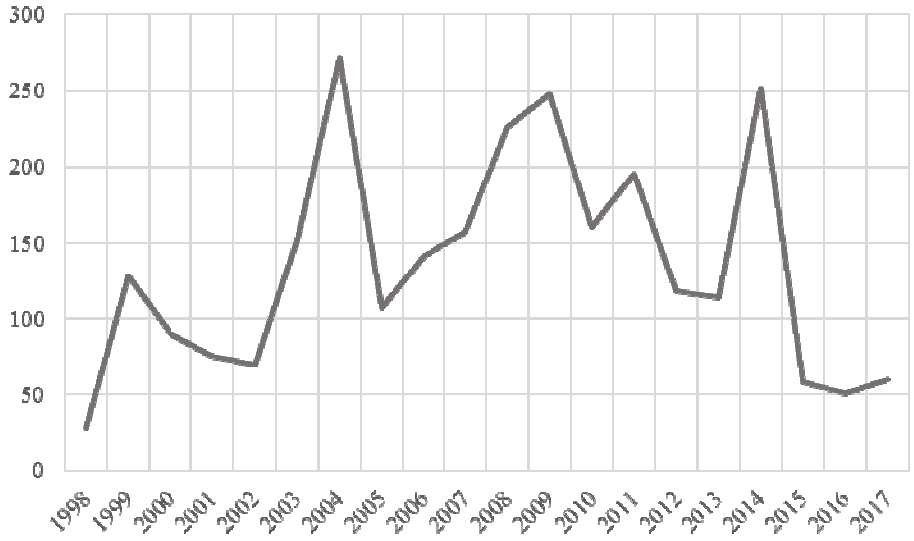

Fig. 1. Coverage of sport-related violence in Czech national print newspapers (no. articles / year)

Another increase in coverage is visible in 2008 and 2009. In March 2008, violent disturbances at the stadium and in the streets accompanied a derby match between SK Slavia Prague and AC Sparta Prague, launching a moralising campaign in the public discourse. The rivalry between the two clubs goes back to 29 March 1896 when their first match took place. Sparta Prague scored the only goal in the match. However, the referee cancelled the goal since the captain of Slavia Prague disputed it and the then rules of the game required both teams' captains to agree on all the scored goals. Another match planned for the same year did not take place at all and Sparta won by default due to an anonymous tip that most of the Slavia players were grammar school students, who were not allowed to participate in football matches, and their school principals had forbidden them to appear on the pitch. To Slavia supporters, Sparta Prague was behind this "plot". It took 11 years for the next match between the two clubs to be played (Čermák 2013).

In 2009, a major outrage followed disturbances provoked primarily by Baník Ostrava supporters in Brno (*Peak 3*). In fact, this league round had been under close watch as a new deal between the Bohemian-Moravian Football Federation and the police had just become effective.

Under the deal, the police would no longer be present at the stadiums as the clubs, as match organisers, had primary responsibility for security in the stadium; it was only upon their request, when unable to handle the situation on their own, that the police was supposed to intervene. At the time, it was heavily disputed whether security around football matches should be a public or private issue. Another leap came with SK Slavia Prague supporters' protests against their club management in 2011 that culminated in mass pitch invasions and vandalism; later that month, disturbances occurred around the cup finals between FK Mladá Boleslav and SK Sigma Olomouc (*Peak 4*). Riots that occurred during a FC Baník Ostrava – AC Sparta Prague match in March 2014 represent the last peak in the press coverage of sport-related violence (*Peak 5*), followed again by a steep decline.

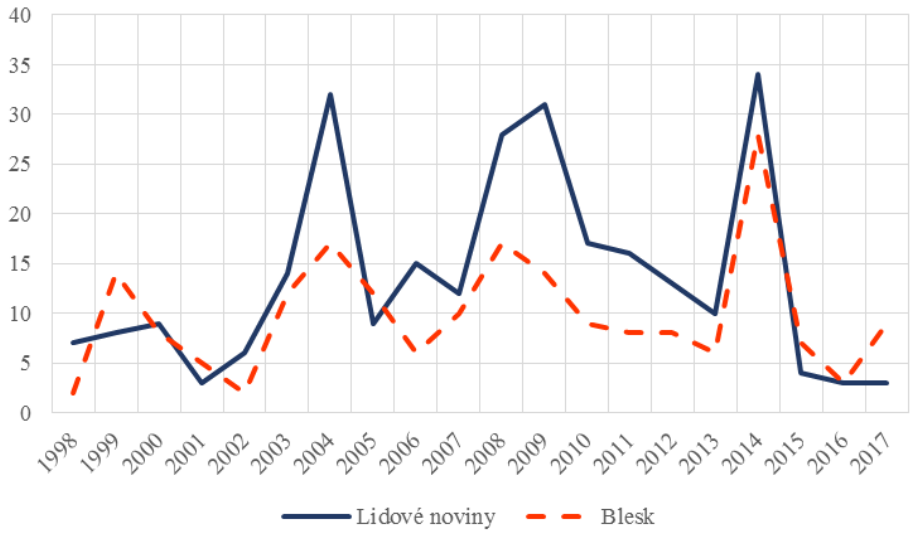

Fig. 2. Coverage of sport-related violence in selected print newspapers (no. articles / year)

This most recent drop in media interest is remarkable. At least in March 2017, a derby match between SFC Opava and FC Baník Ostrava was accompanied by riots in the streets. However, this event (or other cases of football-related violence) did not receive greater attention from the press, unlike similar incidents in the past. This could be explained by a recent shift in the media

and politicians' attention toward more pressing and publicly contested issues, particularly the migration crisis. In fact, football- or ice hockey-related violence occurs regularly up to this day, only its coverage is mostly limited to supporters' websites or police outlets (for example the *Policie* weekly). The same explanation was given by an interviewed police officer who works in a criminal service department specialising on extremism and sport-related violence. Based on his work experience, he did not think there had been an actual significant decrease of football-related violence such as indicated by the drop in media coverage ([Anonymous 2018]).

Treatment of sport-related violence by selected newspapers

Newspapers' attitude towards sport-related violence

In theory, the writing styles of quality and tabloid papers sharply differ, the latter being primarily characterised by emotive language and less objectivity. To assess the overall tone of the press treatment of sport-related violence, each article was coded as either neutral or expressing an emotion. While expression of emotions was not decisive, an article was coded as "emotive" when the *style of writing* (not content on its own) clearly exhibited a stance of the paper towards the issue – for instance, but not exclusively, by using informal language, offensive descriptions, exclamation marks, ridicule, sarcasm, or "shocking" phrases/headlines. For *Lidové noviny*, the writing style was coded as neutral in 246 cases and emotive in the remaining 28 (19 of them editorials, eight news, one feature), while for *Blesk*, we coded 120 articles as neutral and a minority of 77 as emotive (including all 20 editorials).

The proportion of emotive writing style corresponds with the respective journal type (quality vs popular press). However, the predominantly neutral treatment of sport-related violence by the tabloid comes as a surprise, especially in comparison with previous research. Two factors may have influenced these results. First, in a part of the articles that only mentioned sport-related violence in a different context, the absence of emotive treatment may be just due to the little attention and space devoted to the issue. This explanation is partially corroborated by the analysis. A total of 56 of the 64 articles that mention

sport-related violence under a different topic are indeed neutral in their treatment. Nonetheless, the proportion of emotive and neutral treatment is almost fifty-fifty for the articles that focus exclusively on sport-related violence. A second factor is that many of the presented deviant or criminal acts are clearly "mundane and routine" while still retaining their newsworthiness related to, on the one hand, the alleged irrationality and pathology of football (ice hockey) supporters, and, on another hand, the routine organisation of news production based on a regular supply of events. As Whannel (1979, 335) noted, "[t]he details of specific incidents become subordinate to the overall newspaper picture of hooliganism" as the treatment of the issue becomes conventionalised. This explains why a tabloid press would repeatedly report on sport-related violence without "raising their eyebrows."

Labels and metaphors

Several authors observed how the label "hooligan" or "hooliganism" contributed to simplifying and exaggerating the nature of the phenomenon (Pearson 1998; Stott & Pearson 2007, 15; Tsoukala, Pearson & Coenen 2016, 14-15). In their study of social reaction to mugging, Hall et al. (1978, 72) emphasised that "the simple attribution of the mugging label was sufficient to bring many discrete and commonplace crime events into the orbit of the newsworthy." They also used the term "hooligan" as an example of how the imagery of criminality and illegality was used to justify action against the problematic group (Ibid., 70).

In the Czech Republic, the term "hooligan" is typically used in the press or academic descriptions of sport-related deviant or criminal behaviour, while government authorities usually employ the term "spectator violence", which is more neutral and not limited to the football context. The term hooligan/hooliganism (in the media used either in English, sometimes in plural, also abbreviated as "hools," or in the Czech version *chuligán*) appeared in 84 out of the 274 articles in *LN* plus one more time in a headline, while *Blesk* used it in 72 out of 197 articles and in 18 headlines. It is not surprising that the term was more widespread in a tabloid journal given its negative connotation.

In most articles, multiple labels (whether neutral or offensive) were attached to people whose behaviour in the context of football or ice hockey matches was considered deviant or criminal. Naturally, for stylistic reasons, the journalists avoid repeating words and thus produce diverse expressions. Both journals commonly used labels such as (football) *fans/supporters* (sometimes accompanied by adjectives such as aggressive, drunken, over-excited, furious, violent, hardcore, problematic), *spectators*, *troublemakers*, *rowdies* or *vandals*. The tabloid journal proved much more inventive in its use of such labels, which were often offensive or ironic: *brainless*, *dull heads*, *feeble-minded*, *morons*, *louts*, *punks*, *primitives*, *simpletons*, *idiots*, *savages*, *wild animals* or *boys with the intelligence of a rocking horse*. However, one should note that most articles in the sample treated the phenomenon neutrally, and the most frequently used labels were *supporters*, *hooligans* and *troublemakers*.

In *Blesk*, the use of metaphors to describe supporters, their behaviour or control was also more common. While in *LN* a metaphoric description appeared in approximately 10% of the articles, the proportion was double in *Blesk*, with 1 of 5 articles including metaphorical language. The most popular metaphors in both journals were those evoking the state of war or terror, including terms like *(football) war*, *battle*, *battlefield*, *warriors*, *enemies*, *bloody terror*, *organised terror*, *war zone* or *hell*. The second group of metaphors likened supporters to animals, typically by means of terms such as (*wild*) *animals* or *jungle*. This animal imagery was almost twice as much likely to be found in the tabloid. Moreover, terms such as *savages* and *mass* or *horde of supporters* served the same function of dehumanising and de-individualising the subjects.

Primary definers

Hall et al. (1978) found that the question of who is quoted by the media is crucial since such "primary definers" have the privilege to frame what the problem is. They observed that "[t]he media do not themselves autonomously create news items; rather they are 'cued in' to specific new topics by regular and reliable institutional sources" such as the police, politicians or the courts (Hall et al. 1978, 57–58). The media repeatedly resort to

such sources for two main reasons: the time pressure of news production and the requirement of balance in their articles. Through this "systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions," media tend "to reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power" (Ibid.).

Table 2

Most frequently quoted sources in the newspapers

Lidové noviny		**Blesk**	
Source	**Count**	**Source**	**Count**
Police	53	Police	45
Game authorities	50	Club officials	29
Club officials	48	Game authorities	17
Politicians	19	Players	14
Team players	17	Supporters	14
Supporters	14	Politicians	12
Experts	10	Eyewitnesses	7

Most of the articles contained a statement from an institution or a relevant person in the field. Both journals relied on the same kind of sources (see Table 2 above), although they differed significantly in the proportion of those sources' quotations. *Lidové noviny* journalists gave an almost equal platform to the police, game authorities (i.e. Czech authorities responsible for organising football or ice hockey competitions) and club officials. Politicians, players, supporters (including "hooligans") or experts were also quoted repeatedly. The tabloid, on the other hand, relied most heavily on the police and a few times even quoted police officers that were present or intervened at the scene. In comparison, club officials and game authorities were less often interviewed. The tabloid gave a slightly larger platform to supporters including those responsible for the deviant or criminal behaviour than did the quality journal. Approximately one-third of the supporters quoted in both journals belonged to hooligans or radical supporters. However, in both journals, the supporters had a somewhat limited opportunity to present their point of view. The *Blesk* was also much more likely to quote eyewitnesses and unlike the *LN*, it even occasionally interviewed transport officials or hospital personnel. The relatively infrequent

quoting of politicians, judges or prosecutors may be surprising. So far, the police and game authorities have had the greatest influence on the subject coverage.

Explanations of sport-related violence

Studies on media treatment of football hooliganism point out that in-depth explanations are almost absent. Hall (1978, 31-34) found some clues in the press that he argued "may begin to explain something" but functioned as mere "fillers" set in "the quiet spaces between the punch-ups" and were forgotten with the next violent event. He argued that this lack of serious explanation may be due to the practical consideration that such factors would be harder to contain and control than a simplified view of the phenomenon (Ibid., 34).

In our sample, there were two kinds of factors that shaped media's understanding of the phenomenon. First, several situational factors, such as the poor state of a stadium or an inadequate intervention by the stewards or the police, helped to clarify how the violence or deviant behaviour were enabled or facilitated. Second, several distinctive features of the problematic supporters were used to explain their deviant behaviour. In this regard, two elements were common to both journals' narratives: sport-related violence was (1) dissociated from the game (football), and (2) understood as mostly ignited or facilitated by alcohol consumption.

A narrative that "hooligans" or deviant supporters exploit football as a pretext for violence or vandalism and do not care for football or "their" club helped to dissociate the violence from the game itself. So did the use of labels such as "pseudo supporters," "wannabe supporters" or "supporters" put in parentheses. Even though some sources emphasised that this narrative only applied to a smaller part of supporters, it frequently served as a quick "explanation" for violent incidents without any deeper reflection on why the persons involved behaved aggressively in the first place.

Only rarely sport-related violence was put in a wider context. Almost exclusively in the quality journal and rarely in the tabloid,

violence was represented as a mere reflection of an allegedly growing level of aggression within society or, more generally, of the alleged state of society and its tensions. Fandom and related activities, including occasional participation in violence, were also interpreted as reflecting a collective identity and solidarity of the supporters. Furthermore, "hooliganism" was associated with loyalty to the club and devotion to the game that came above anything else for some supporters. Fights among supporters were then framed as an expression of this loyalty, while violence came to be seen as channelling frustration resulting from an unfavourable situation of the supported club. Occasionally, what happened on the playing field was interpreted as a trigger for the supporters' transgressions – whether the blame was on a referee's decision, players' behaviour, or the course or result of the game. In some cases, the emotions and violence present on the field were depicted as spilling over to the terraces. However, these explanations that did not dissociate the deviant persons from the game – rather the opposite – were rare in the quality journal and had no place in the tabloid, except for the narrative of game "spill-overs."

Interestingly, it was much more common for ice hockey news to explain supporter deviant behaviour as generated by what had taken place in the field. Two factors could explain this tendency. First, in the Czech Republic, ice hockey is not as strongly associated with spectator violence as football. Second, violence among ice hockey players is not only sanctioned as legitimate but also considered desirable (see Young & Smith 1988, 302-307). When preparing our sample for analysis, we excluded many irrelevant articles that only mentioned fights among ice hockey players. However, in those articles, journalists openly appreciated such fights by describing them as "spicing up" the game and "exciting" the supporters.

The second common feature of media explanations of sport-related violence is the connection between alcohol consumption and aggression. This fact was usually only briefly mentioned as additional information about the incident instead of serving as a plausible explanation for the deviant behaviour. In fact, alcohol consumption is only one of multiple factors which support the alleged lack of rational justification for the supporters' deviant behaviour. The above-discussed dissociation of violence from the game also supports this irrationality thesis. It tells

readers that "hooligans" commit violence only for the violence itself. This framing was typically found in the popular press. In *Blesk*, poor intelligence was the most common feature, as illustrated by the frequent use of offensive labels such as "drunk primitives," "feeble-minded persons," "owners of dull heads" or "brainless." To construct an image of insanity and complete irrationality, journalists described supporters as "deranged nuts" or "deranged supporters" and as being "out of their minds."

Alternative definitions

Hall et al. (1978, 69) observed that "crime is less open than most public issues to competing and alternative definitions," arguing that "a police statement on crime is rarely 'balanced' by one from a professional criminal." The analysis of primary definers in this paper corroborates this finding as supporters were rarely interviewed and even less were those involved in the incidents, who were only quoted in a few tabloid articles. Even though it is much more challenging to access hooligans than the police or game authorities (see Giulianotti & Armstrong 1998), at least football or ice hockey supporters as a group could be reached to obtain a more complex view of the issue or the subculture. On one hand, alternative definitions did appear in the newspapers, at least owing to the journalistic principle of balance, but possibly also with a view to increasing the story's newsworthiness by presenting it as a debate with opposing opinions (Hall et al. 1978, 58). On the other hand, we can argue with Hall et al. (1978, 58) that, since the initial definition had already been established by the primary definers enjoying their privileged access to the media, "[a]rguments *against* a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into *its* [i.e. the dominant] definition of 'what is at issue'" (emphasis in original).

Before we can look for alternative definitions, we need to establish a conventional interpretation of sport-related violence. This conventional understanding is a set of assumptions constructed mostly by sources with privileged access to the media – above all the police, game authorities or club officials, or the journalists themselves – that together create a stereotypical image of the "hooliganism" problem. As reflected

in the previous section, "hooliganism" is commonly seen as having nothing to do with the game and as usually provoked by excessive alcohol consumption as well as by the supporters' poor intelligence, insanity and irrationality.

Alternative definitions of the problem could be found in about 34 out of 274 *Lidové noviny* articles, compared to only 10 out of 197 articles in *Blesk*. The most frequent counter-definition embodies a belief that criminal behaviour committed in the context of football matches should not be treated as a particular form of crime just because of such context and that its causes lie beyond the game itself. Here, the journalists opposed a debated football-specific law by depicting it as populist and challenging its usefulness, by arguing that the existing legislation was sufficient to tackle the problem (Kubita 2004). Closely related were articles questioning the alleged seriousness of the phenomenon either by arguing there was very little actual violence or only a small number of problematic supporters, or by juxtaposing the gravity of football-related violence with other types of crime. This narrative also led to several objections against the idea that football clubs should bear responsibility for the behaviour of their supporters. Occasionally, security arrangements adopted for a match were evaluated as excessive given the actual risk. The quotations below exemplify this alternative narrative:

> "In people, there is often anger, dissatisfaction. And it is unlucky for football that it takes place every week." (Jakoubek 2002)

> "Even disorderly conduct of supporters is just disorderly conduct." (Zvěřina 2004)

The second most frequent alternative definition criticised the generalised punishment of all supporters (most of whom are considered decent) through restrictive measures and proposed instead targeting only the problematic minority. This counter-narrative accompanied a later-abandoned project of nominal ticketing. Critics further argued that, with its low level of attendance, Czech football could not afford to anger and drive away supporters by intrusive security measures. In this sense, attempts to "copy" English counter-hooligan legislation were also contested on

the ground that they would ignore the context in which such laws had been adopted, as well as the fact that the demand for football as a product was much lower in the Czech Republic.

It was also repeatedly claimed that inadequate treatment by the police or stewards could ignite or exacerbate the violence instead of suppressing it. Others presented transgressions such as verbal abuses as intrinsic to football (some even as desirable), while hooligans were presented as a group who could never be eliminated from society.

> "Absolute peace will never be established. Football has always attracted problems and it always will. No one even wants peace at football matches. It is more about eliminating inappropriate behaviour that is discouraging other fans." (Suchan 2012)

Media was also blamed for contributing to football-related violence mostly by exaggerating and simplifying the issue. However, only rarely was the stereotypical image of hooligans or hooliganism refuted in the newspapers.

> "Unfortunately, it has become a stereotype that a football fan with a club scarf is a priori considered as a fool longing for violence. This image is being ceaselessly fed [to us] by what we see on TV." (Kopřiva 2013)

Calls for action

An explicit call for measures to be taken against "hooligans" was observed in about 1 in 9 articles published by *Blesk*, compared to just 1 in 15 for *LN*. Most of the calls were voiced by the journalists or other newspaper contributors (13 in *Blesk*, 7 in *LN*). However, in the quality newspaper, all except one of these were articulated in the editorials (and one in a feature), while in the tabloid they were also articulated in news articles. Both journals also quoted calls voiced by politicians or officials representing the game authorities. Calls for action by other people (readers, fans, experts) or authorities were rare.

The calls for action took several forms. Either there was a general declaration that it was "high time to start doing something about it" ([*Blesk*] 2011) or more specific demands were made for a new law, changes in existing laws, or harsher punishments. A narrative of "waiting for a fatality" was used repeatedly, mostly by game authorities' officials or politicians. In other words, unless the responsible authorities adopted some measures, someone would inevitably, sooner or later, die as a result of football-related violence. Occasionally, football tragedies that happened abroad such as the Hillsborough or the Heysel disasters were also recalled.

> "In England, the changes were initiated only after [having] dead people and sometimes, I have the feeling that we are waiting for them." (Filip 2003)

> "Thus, football in the Czech Republic is waiting for its Brussels […] for a similar shock with a healing effect." (Nenadál 2009)

The tabloid occasionally waged its own campaign against football hooligans in which it openly called for harsher punishments.

> "*Blesk* has a clear punishment for these animals: Ban them from football and make it forever!" (Krejča et al. 2012)

> "The last and most important step remains: To make sure they will not attend football for a pretty long time. Currently, the clubs are not able to do that and *Blesk* is fighting for a change!" ([*Blesk*] 2014b)

A few times, the tabloid published photographs of "hooligans" with a call upon readers to contact the newsroom in case they recognised any of them while instigating fear among the public:

> "Take a good look. When you meet them at the stadium gate, run away. This scum has no interest in football. They want one thing only: blood!" ([*Blesk*] 2014a)

Conclusion

Compared with the studies on the press treatment of football hooliganism summarised in the first part of the article, we found similar features in the Czech case, albeit they are mostly concentrated in the tabloid press. Emotional language was often used to describe the problematic supporters and their behaviour, including offensive names and metaphors. Causes or alternative explanations were seldom present, while the issue was predominantly defined by the police, game authorities and club officials.

This type of media coverage is aligned with the gradual politicisation of the sport-related violence that the country has seen in the last two decades. Back in the 1990s, the phenomenon was perceived as reflecting the general state of the Czech society and the opportunities presented by the poor state of football stadiums and the stewarding service, while it was the government that was primarily held responsible for addressing crime and deviancy. This line of reasoning began to change approximately around 2003. Football-related violence and its perpetrators came to be seen as pathological and irrational, as well as using the football game as a pretext for their deviant behaviour. Since their rehabilitation was not considered an option, the solution lied in their harsh punishment and exclusion from the stadiums.

The debate on "anti-hooligan" policy has been characterised by populism embodied in proposals to adopt a football-specific law or other legislative measures targeting football-related violence, even though their role was rather symbolic. At the same time, clubs were supposed to assume greater responsibility for the deviancy of their supporters while the police were only to intervene at the stadiums if organisers were unable to restore order on their own. Overall, the policy has been characterised by risk aversion and lack of efforts to understand the respective violence in a broader societal context, as it is reflected in the media coverage.

This development is consistent with broader changes in crime control and criminal justice in other (Western) European countries (see Garland 2001). However, to focus on the bigger picture, we find that the above-mentioned features of media coverage only appear in a lesser part of the sample. Even in the tabloid *Blesk*, the treatment of sport-related

violence was mostly neutral. It has been suggested that sport-related violence, which is newsworthy almost by definition, can be at the same time mundane and routine and, as such, reported without any moral indignation. This neutral treatment can also be explained by the already conventionalised treatment of the issue in the press. Only a small number of disturbances provoked the greatest increases in press coverage and outrage. Each of these peaks of interest was, however, soon followed by a steep decline. The sharpest drop that took place in the last two years of the sample indicates that a social and political context must also be conducive to greater press coverage. Rather than the real seriousness and frequency of violence, it is the overall socio-political context that seem to matter the most for the media perceptions of "hooliganism."

We have also observed a remarkable difference of press treatment between football and ice hockey. Football violence was mostly explained by the problematic supporters themselves, who allegedly use football as a pretext for disturbances and whose behaviour is heavily influenced by alcohol consumption. By contrast, violence in the context of ice hockey matches was more often explained by what occurs on the playing field and subsequently spills over to the terraces. At the same time, the violence committed by ice hockey players was glorified. This discrepancy supports the idea that football-related violence is only treated as a special case of offensiveness due to its geographical and temporal association with the game (see Waiton 2014). Paradoxically, the violence is simultaneously dissociated from the game when the deviant individuals are labelled as pseudo-supporters, which bolsters the image of football hooligans' pathology. The press only rarely refuted this narrative by putting the respective violence in a wider context or by plausibly explaining it beyond the stereotypical characteristics of the deviant supporters.

Quite surprisingly, calls for action were also rather infrequent in the Czech press. The "waiting for a fatality" narrative accurately reflects the current "counter-hooligan" policy in the Czech Republic as calls for measures to curb football- or ice hockey-related violence are hardly ever translated into reality at political level. The low presence of politicians among primary definers also indicates that in the Czech Republic, the

issue is mostly shaped by the police or game authorities, which are responsible for dealing with it as part of their everyday duties. Nevertheless, the frequent belief that the responsibility for sport-related violence should be with the clubs largely ignores the broader context of the problem, with its at most only a weak causal link to the game itself.

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