

# Examining Stakeholder Outlooks on Football Policing and Security: The Case of Euro 2020

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/jss](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jss)**Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen** 

## Abstract

In the case of the 2020 Union of European Football Associations European Championship in men's football ('Euro 2020'), this article investigates stakeholder perceptions on the 'policing' of fans. On a European-wide scale, the policing of fans is a contested topic. Meanwhile, the policing and security efforts required for sport mega-events like Euro 2020, uniquely planned to be staged in 12 different countries, require years of planning and enormous resources. Adding to this, the Championship's timeline was prolonged following the coronavirus disease-2019-related event postponement. Drawing from original insights from documentary research and qualitative interviews conducted before the postponement, this article argues that stakeholders strongly advocated for a communication and dialogue-based approach to fans. More specifically for Euro 2020, consistency in the policing approaches across all 12 countries was highlighted by stakeholders as being of paramount importance for fans' security perceptions. The study thus extends existing insights into football policing and the wider understanding of security and policing in the present-day world.

## Keywords

football, sport mega-events, organization, security, football tournament

## Introduction

This article employs a sport mega-event (SME) as an entrance to understand broader trends related to 'policing' and 'security' in present-day society. Subscribing to such a position, this article examines outlooks on football policing and security in the

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context of the 2020 Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Men's European Championship ('Euro 2020'). From a policing perspective, Euro 2020 represented a novel challenge. For the first time in history, this championship for national teams – originally expecting 2.5 million visitors (The Independent, 2020) – was to be staged in 12 different countries (rather than one or two) in June and July 2020. Faced with an array of threats, risks, and unknowns, SMEs like the Euro 2020 call for complex security and policing operations that take years to coordinate (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010) and require transnational collaboration (Boyle & Haggerty, 2012). Notwithstanding, this event's pre-planning was temporally prolonged: on March 17, 2020, Euro 2020 was provisionally postponed to June 2021 following the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Parnell et al., 2020). Later, it was confirmed that the event's name would remain 'Euro 2020' (UEFA, 2020a) and, crucially, that it would preserve its multi-host format (The Guardian, 2020).

Normally, fears over 'terrorism' or 'hooliganism' are outlined as the main threats prior to football mega-events. Further, past events have seen clashes between fans and law enforcements, and it has been suggested that the policing approach towards fans taken by the police and/or relevant security agencies has been a contributing factor to the situations or climates of disorder at football events/games (Millward, 2009; Stott et al., 2012). Against such a backdrop, this article draws from formal discourses and original insights from stakeholder organizations and individuals in the policing of football in Euro 2020's context. It develops two key arguments. First, stakeholders advocated for a policing approach that was liaison-based and emphasized communication and dialogue between the police and security on the one hand (Stott et al., 2012), and fans and attendees on the other. This was seen to promote positive atmospheres and order. Secondly, given Euro 2020's unorthodox and pioneering hosting format, this enhanced the need for a perceived event-wide consistency in the policing and security delivery during the event. This was stressed by the stakeholders, and worked toward in publicly announced pre-event networking activities, although obstacles existed vis-à-vis achieving this in reality. Consequently, my findings provide insights into the policing of a European-wide mega-event and add new perspectives of the arguments linking football policing and security developments to wider Europeanization processes (Tsoukala, 2009).

'Policing' can refer to a distinctive type of social control that 'connotes efforts to provide security through surveillance and the threat of sanctioning [and is] the set of activities directed at preserving the security of a particular social order' (Reiner, 1997, p. 1005). Accordingly, 'order' and 'security' are two aims of policing, and in a globalized age of (in-)security (Bigo, 2006)—in distinctive ways reflected by Euro 2020's format—policing has become a transnational endeavor. Crucial to note, however, 'policing' at contemporary SMEs is not solely carried out by the police. Further, 'the police [...] do not form a single, unique and homogenous network' (Bigo, 2006, p. 18). Such remark certainly applies to an international mega-event spanning 12 host countries. As Hester (2021, p. 3) maintains, "[t]he policing of football is a key area of policing," and ultimately, there is a scholarly need for understanding diverse stakeholders' views on football policing.

Stakeholders in football crowd security and policing can play a role, with the police and relevant agencies, in the development of progressive and effective models of crowd management and football policing (Pearson & Stott, 2016). This study reflects this, and concerns itself with the wider stakeholder group in Euro 2020's context, including organized fan networks and fan representatives. Anchored in a case study, this article aims to (a) voice stakeholder perspectives on football policing, and (b) examine policing outlooks faced by Euro 2020's novel format. With its findings and arguments, the study contributes both academically and practically. It adds to our understanding on the policing of football and mega-events (e.g., Stott et al., 2007)—with a new mega-event case study—and fills a gap in the inter-disciplinary mega-event securitization “project” that has emerged in a post-9/11 world (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010). The article may also give some orientation for future event hosts on how to (or not to) operate future football mega-events and subsequently assist security perceptions among visitors.

## Literature Review: Situating the Policing–Security Nexus

Mega-events like the Olympics, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup and the Euros enjoy enormous popularity worldwide (Wloch, 2012). They attract large numbers of visitors and fans who physically attend events in stadiums, fan zones, or host cities in general. However, in light of socio-historical developments and occurrences—ranging from the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010), ‘hooliganism’ at past events, and the general securitization of urban, crowded places post-9/11, SMEs are now increasingly subjected to large-scale security and policing efforts (Aitken, 2020; Armstrong et al., 2016; Boyle & Haggerty, 2012).

Partly, this is demonstrated by the number of involved police officers and other security actors at contemporary SMEs. A total of 40,000 police officers and thousands of security actors were present throughout the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010). Meanwhile, merely months after the terrorist attack targeting Paris's Stade de France on a match day, Euro 2016—hosted while France was in a state of emergency—was marked by the deployment of nearly “100,000 police, soldiers, and private security personnel for the month-long tournament” (Cleland & Cashmore, 2018, p. 465). Networked actors involved in these operations work towards multiple aims including prevention of “terror,” “crime,” and “hooliganism” (Armstrong et al., 2016; Tsoukala, 2009).

In various ways, mega-events express wider developments in the realms of “security,” “policing,” and “surveillance” (Klauser, 2017). Both in terms of what threatens public safety and in the management of “security,” which, for example, may rely upon risk categorization of individuals or fan groups (Stott et al., 2012). Following Tsoukala (2009), this article analytically approaches the policing of Euro 2020 as related to broader European security shifts, developments and practices between 1965 and today. Football policing could also be seen in light of Bigo's (2000, 2006) work showing how “(in)security” has become globalized and that “external” and

“internal” security actors in Europe, increasingly, operate and “manage unease” within the same fields.

Such shift intensified following the Cold War and was amplified by 9/11. It has meant that, in the quest for “security,” external security agencies (i.e., the army and intelligence services) and internal security agencies (i.e., police and customs) are now preoccupied with the same “threats” and engaged in the same “security fields” where the assigned tasks are de-territorialized (Bigo, 2000). In a sporting context, this may be observed in the above description of Euro 2016’s security assemblage, which accurately demonstrates the argument holding that “internal” and “external” security have become harder to discern.

Importantly, Tsoukala (2009) argued that existing academic analyses of football policing (mainly “counter-hooliganism”) had “made no attempt to relate it to the strategies and interests that underlie the design and establishment of security policies at the national, European Union (EU) and international levels” (p. 8). Despite a “plethora of studies on the changes that have taken place in the security realm,” the impact of these changes on policing in football is seldom examined, she argues (Tsoukala (2009)). As such, it draws upon two literature bases; one that may be regarded as the mega-event securitization literature that has grown largely since 9/11 (Boyle & Haggerty, 2012; Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010), and the literature base examining the policing of “hooligans” and/or football crowds (O’Neill, 2005; Stott et al., 2012).

Upon proceeding, it should be highlighted that across Europe, the policing of football still differs between countries. It is not the intention of this article to downplay this, nor provide a lengthy account of what “works” or is being practiced in each country/region. Rather, “football policing”—approached deliberately broadly—both at SMEs and in professional leagues, is unpacked in this section. Historically, supporter violence has been dedicated significant volumes of research (see O’Neill, 2005, pp. 19–32). As such, scholarship on responses to this has grown significantly. In a European context, some responses covered in the extant literature have included increased intelligence gathering and surveillance, transnational information-sharing, and other legal responses (Tsoukala, 2009). Thus, “counter-hooliganism” policing in European countries has mirrored wider security trends, and since the mid-1980s increasingly converged with a turn toward intelligencegathering, sharing, multi-lateral cooperation, and information centers (Tsoukala, 2009). While these trends have continued, Tsoukala also argues that football policing has become increasingly de-compartmentalized, as a consequence of the “internal” and “external” security agencies operating in the same fields and dealing with the same threats that both exceed transnational borders and networks.

Tsoukala (2009) also maintains that in the late 1990s, a “human factor” was introduced into football policing. Evidently, several studies address the ways through which interactions between football fans and law enforcements occur and develop. The thesis that can be extracted from these studies is that a widely considered effective approach in the policing of football crowds is one that is less confrontational, more interactional, and emphasizes two-way dialogue and facilitation. The theory informing this, rooted in social psychology, is the Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behavior (Stott

et al., 2012). Studies repeatedly find that policing styles being perceived as “illegitimate” (by, for example, being confrontational, disproportionate, wearing riot gear, or being generally heavy-handed) can influence crowds’ internal dynamics and create a social identity among the fans which, again, can escalate conflict. Conversely, when the police are seen to be “legitimate,” interactive, and emphasizing fan–police dialogue, this is found to reduce levels of conflict (Stott et al., 2012). This suggests that disorder and conflict ultimately may materialize because of the inter-group dynamics between the police and the crowd. This theory and existing empirical records—often drawn from observations—have impacted how football policing is practiced (i.e., UEFA policy and EU policy on international police cooperation surrounding football matches with an international dimension, see Stott et al. (2020)). Evidence from football policing in the UK (Stott et al., 2008, 2012), Sweden (Stott et al., 2020) and Switzerland (Brechtbühl et al., 2017) also support this.

The approach adopted by the law enforcements and security actors towards football fans is vital. And so, the policing of fans is socially complex. Millward (2009) observed how one of the reasons that clashes between the police and Glasgow Rangers fans in Manchester escalated, during the 2008 UEFA Cup final, was its policing. The policing was friendly throughout the day, but during the evening, when the disorder broke out, the police became increasingly visible and “more draconian measures were adopted, especially by the Tactical Support Group officers who appeared to use unnecessarily ‘heavy handed’ methods” (p. 394). In Scotland, O’Neill (2005) found that the police and fans constantly interact socially and negotiate “rules” and “norms” concerning what constitutes “acceptable” behavior and what will cause police or steward intervention. Drawing upon Erving Goffman’s work, O’Neill argues that football fans are a rule-governed group. However, such “informal and unofficial group rules” are “developed in conjunction with the police” (p. 189). Moreover, these “subtle yet vital negotiations and interactions” occurring between police and supporters throughout the seasons, “produce the informal rules of interactions,” and instead of formal legal sanctions, it is these normalized, negotiated rules that maintain order (p. 190).

Pearson’s (2012) ethnography of “carnival fans” in English football also identifies unspoken negotiations between fans and the police. These are often developed from previous encounters. Pearson suggests that when the police “was perceived as treating the fans fairly by facilitating their desire to create a non-violent football carnival of drinking, colour and song, [it] was likely to be one that was respected and listened to” (p. 131). Thus, the normative order—characterized by the police being “in control” is challenged. Often, the police would leave fans “to their own devices, often turning a blind eye to minor infractions of the law” (p. 113) including public drinking which the police occasionally may be aware of. While there is less option for negotiation inside the stadium, there is arguably a degree of mutual understanding regarding where boundaries are, in terms of intervention, and where the law enforcements feel “compelled to do so by public shows of illegality” (p. 113).

Existing research demonstrates a link between policing styles and approaches to football fans and levels of “conflict” or “peace.” Hence, there is also a potential link

between the style of policing and the extent to which fans perceive themselves as “safe” or “secure” when travelling to individual games or mega-events. As suggested, the relationships between football fans and police or other security actors, like stewards, are contested and complex (Cleland & Cashmore, 2018; Numerato, 2018). Whereas fans appreciate when their safety is prioritised, and expect a security presence (Lee Ludvigsen & Millward, 2020), it is important, as Numerato (2018, p. 74) writes, that “[f]ootball fans express their discontent with a variety of security measures, including fan cards, fan databases, surveillance systems, policing, stewarding or physical separation.” The criminalization of fans and “policing” represent contested terrains in football, both “on-the-ground” and on policy and legislation levels. Still, football supporters—composing a large social group—are often viewed as a threat to public order across Europe (Tsoukala et al., 2016).

Against this background, this study aims to examine stakeholder perceptions of, and outlooks on football policing in the current climate deploying Euro 2020 as a case. As the discussed theoretical perspectives suggest, however, the policing of fans express important power dynamics and social relations and interactions (O’Neill, 2005; Stott et al., 2007). These positions will be utilized constructively to make sense of the stakeholders’ voices. Essentially, SMEs involve diverse stakeholders that all can impact, or be impacted by the event organization, policing, and/or security. This includes, for example, fan networks. However, despite the sociological complexity of football policing, as this section shows, less is known about how stakeholders perceive this, and what outlooks that existed before the geographically peculiar Euro 2020.

## **Methodology**

This article draws from a wider evaluation of the perceptions, meanings, and constructions of “security” at Euro 2020 (see e.g., Lee Ludvigsen, 2020). The study is methodologically designed as a case study and uses different sources and approaches to record empirical evidence. Concerning the site of analysis, Euro 2020 was originally due to be staged between 12 June and July 2020, but as mentioned, the event was postponed following the COVID-19 pandemic (Parnell et al., 2020). The new dates for the tournament, proposed by UEFA, are 11 June–11 July 2021. To clarify, this study’s data was predominantly collected before the outbreak impacted Euro 2020 and some reflections on COVID-19—and the pandemic’s impacts on sporting event security—are provided toward the end of this paper. Typically, SMEs are housed by one country or, sometimes, two host countries. Unique in that sense, Euro 2020’s hosting rights were divided between no less than 12 different countries (later, 11 countries). The semi-finals and the final were assigned to London (England), which was assigned the largest number of games out of the host cities (seven overall).<sup>1</sup> The other host cities included Amsterdam, Baku, Bilbao, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dublin (though Dublin lost the city’s fixtures in 2021), Glasgow, Munich, Rome, and St. Petersburg.

This study is explorative and employs three qualitative methods. First, there was a document analysis of publicly available policy documents, bid evaluations, and press

releases. Second, qualitative semistructured interviews with nine Euro 2020 stakeholders were conducted to supplement this. Such sample size is comparable with similar studies into the “Euros” (Klauser, 2011; Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010). Third, I use secondary data including existing research on policing and mega-event security. Collectively, these methods assisted an understanding of what exactly stakeholders say about football policing. Stakeholders refer to individuals/organizations that have direct or indirect interests or stakes in the activities of a particular organization (Freeman, 1984). Whereas this definition is broad, there are still, as Rookwood (2020) points out, some considerable challenges involved in accessing senior staff, organizers, and personnel in mega-event research, and ‘footballing elites’ more broadly. Therefore, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were employed.

The interviewed stakeholders included one active Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) (based in a Euro 2020 host city), one crowd safety professional, one individual covering mega-events in national media, and six individuals working in some capacity for UK or European organized fan networks. Crucially, this reflects Hester’s (2021) recent call for more research on football policing that engages the views of organized fan networks. However, it remains important to highlight that seven out of the nine stakeholders that were interviewed were UK based. Two stakeholders were based in Norway and Germany, respectively. Thus, in terms of national contexts, the interviewees spoke largely from a Western and Northern European perspective. This remains important to outline as a limitation to the study, as it advances. Networks like Football Supporters Europe (FSE), for example, have members in 48 countries across Europe (FSE, n.d.-a). And, essentially, football fans compose a heterogeneous social group, and this article cannot—and does not aim to generalize fans nor stakeholders’ views on football policing. For example, the interviewees’ backgrounds or biases may have impacted how they viewed or compared football-related policing in their own location to that of the other Euro 2020 host countries, and their own experiences from attending games or football mega-events.

For context, fan networks are increasingly involved—as stakeholders—in the organization, security, and policing planning before international championships (Cleland et al., 2018). Organizations such as FSE and SD Europe are both observers on the Council of Europe’s Standing Committee of the European convention on Spectator Violence (T-RV) (Numerato, 2018), while actively involved in the Euro 2020 Working Group. FSE are also responsible for, and central in the organization of fan embassies at the European Championships (Cleland et al., 2018).

After ethical approval was obtained, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a pre-event setting, between January 2019 and February 2020. These lasted between 25 and 60 min. Three took place in-person, three took place via Skype, and three via email (with opportunity to follow-up on answers). The interview guide was primarily focused on Euro 2020’s organization and planning, policing, fans, and the event’s unorthodox format. Given the background of the stakeholders, a number of the interviews focused quite specifically on London as the city assigned with the most games. All interviewees gave consent and were promised anonymity. Interview data was supplemented by publicly available and official documents and press releases from stakeholder

organizations of Euro 2020, such as UEFA, the Council of Europe and FSE. For the documentary analysis, documents were purposively sampled and included nine evaluations and official handbooks (including Euro 2020 tournament requirements, bid evaluations, and UEFA safety regulations) comprising more than 700 pages of material, and 16 press releases and media articles (i.e., FSE, n.d.-b; Council of Europe, 2019). One caution is that documents may not always correspond with the eventual social realities. Sometimes, they may be published to convey images of preparedness (Boyle & Haggerty, 2012). Yet, it is also important an argument, as Braathen et al. (2016) write, that SME bid books may become the *de facto* planning documents. Available policy documents before mega-events should therefore be treated carefully and seriously as the relevant organizations' formal discourse and public and transparent position on specific matters. Policy handbooks and guidelines also serve as mechanisms through which specific mega-event-related policies and practices are recirculated (Klauser, 2017)—adding to their importance as a data source in order to advance the field of study and allow for a comparative study. Lastly, existing research was used to supplement this again, acting as secondary sources.

When analyzing the interview data, a Straussian application of grounded theory was applied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to the manually transcribed interviews that were all read, then systematically analyzed with the use of open-coding techniques which were followed by axial coding and selective coding processes (see also Lee Ludvigsen, 2020). The latter two processes largely determined the dominant categories discussed next. That includes 'communication and dialogue', and 'consistency', before Euro 2020. Having mapped these categories, the selective coding stage then involved the constant comparison of transcripts, documents, and literature, and the identification of quotes/excerpts that encapsulated their categories most fittingly.

## Communication and fan Interactions

From the official discourse and the interviews, it was clear that a policing approach to fans that emphasized communication and dialog was strongly advocated. This connects with the themes discussed previously and speaks to the "human factor" of policing which "relies heavily on proactive policing" and "on drawing a clear line between football hooligans and the vast majority of peaceful football supporters" (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 121). It was also expected before Euro 2020 that interactions would be based upon constantly developing "norms" mutually known between fans and the police.

Already in the document with formal requirements for the Euro 2020 hosting rights bidders (seemingly from 2013), it was clear that the tournament's policing and security ideally would be assembled so that it did not negatively impact the event's atmospheres. For example, UEFA (n.d. Sector 6, p. 4) highlights the need for "[c]reating a welcoming atmosphere for foreign visitors is crucial to minimising public order risks and to making the tournament a great national and football occasion." In the same document, host countries are also encouraged to adopt an "appropriate policing model in keeping with the spirit of UEFA EURO 2020 as a major sports event"



(UEFA, n.d., p. 8). Interview accounts revealed a similar notion. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized the vitality of communication, a friendly appearance, and the ‘human factor’ for fans to feel safe and secure. Such approach can be juxtaposed to more confrontational approaches to crowd policing (Della Porta & Fillieule, 2004) and is particularly clear in the below accounts:

I think the policing style will be low-key, friendly, engaging, welcoming. Because we’re all on show to the world. I have no doubt there will be extra resources in the background if needed (Stakeholder 1).

There’s an ongoing program around that, about promoting a model of dynamic risk assessment, early, low-level intervention in policing, and communication and dialogue, and police officers seeing themselves as facilitating football fans and their experiences (Stakeholder 8).

It’s the principle. If you get the service right then you going to solve of your security problems, because people who are treated correctly in a friendly way are less likely [to cause disorder], I mean it sounds simple and a bit of a cliché but it’s true. If you’re treated well, if you are hosted in a friendly manner, if everything is working fine and there’s no problems, then you’re much less likely to cause problems or experience problems (Stakeholder 7).

I can only comment on the three forces that I’ve spoken with. London, Glasgow and Dublin [...] And they seem to have the same approach and the main approach when dealing with any issues is engagement. They want to engage before having to step in to do anything that could potentially make things worse (Stakeholder 9).

A more relaxed and laid-back approach allows fans to express themselves and makes the event much more enjoyable as there is no threat of violence or conflict (Stakeholder 5).

Broadly, all these accounts advocate “friendliness,” “de-escalation,” and “low-key” or “laidback” in football policing’s visible aspects. However, it was expected that “extra resources” would be available “in the background.” The quotes reinforce existing research documenting the importance of “legitimacy” when approaching football crowds (Stott et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, it was also noted that the policing and security actors communicating well with fans and engaging in dialogue in itself would not automatically translate into “order” or “peace.” Indeed, a level of mutual respect was seen as a prerequisite if a friendly and interactive approach was to maximize its potential. As one stakeholder, associated with a European-wide fan network, said:

[The existing research] found that public disorder at football matches can be reduced when police adopt a policy of dialogue and facilitation rather than deterrence and force. [...] That is in my experience the best way to deal with football supporters [...] *It is all about respect and that has to go both ways* (Stakeholder 4, emphasis added).

To ensure this, evidence suggested that norms and informal rules in the football culture and supporter contexts—that base themselves upon (re-)negotiations between police, security, stewards, and fans (O'Neill, 2005; Pearson, 2012) would play a role in the attempts to avoid disorder. When asked about expectations to the policing in London for Euro 2020, one stakeholder expected a degree of leeway and a temporary, situational departure from the normal notions of order, given football's cultural importance:

They [the police] know where the red lines are, and they understand, also, that football is of enormous cultural importance. And they don't see it as a threat. I think that England has a particular problem with its national team and supporters travelling abroad, but although there are security problems around club matches, they are nonetheless on a smaller scale than what you will see in Italy or Spain (Stakeholder 3).

In the UK, consuming alcohol and chanting is often considered an important part of the fan culture (Pearson, 2012). And so, ahead of London's seven games it was expected that elements of fan culture, that may be seen as disturbing or boisterous (public chanting, alcohol consumption, waving large flags) in other non-football contexts would be allowed to go on, although mutually developed "red lines" would act as a boundary of what constituted 'acceptable' behavior and what would result in intervention. The above quote therefore yields an insight into football policing's social complexities and meanings. Here, there are also some similarities with the policing of protest. For example, Gillham and Marx (2000, p. 212) note that protest policing involves a significant degree of police–protestor "indeterminacy" and "tradeoffs."

Some stakeholders even argued that the actors in the policing of football crowds could enhance their chances of being seen as "legitimate" if they played into the event's desired festivity. Here, the policing of other cultural and urban events, including the Notting Hill Carnival and Pride, were viewed as both appropriate, relevant, and transferable to Euro 2020:

I think it's important that the police sort of engage and play into that dynamic of festivity. You know how they do it at the Notting Hill Carnival or Pride events, they're all there with their paint on, dancing and everything else. So, come to [Euro] 2020, if they [the police] are sort of seen as participants within that, I think that would be very helpful (Stakeholder 1).

This account advocates an approach that maintains or even contributes to the atmospheric dimensions of the event and invites a reference to the idea of football events as carnivalesque, festive gatherings (Pearson, 2012). That is, however, not to say policing of carnivals are unproblematic. However, in her research, examining the policing of the Notting Hill Carnival, Kilgallon (2019, p. 13) finds that, the police here were working with people in order to mediate and negotiate "co-produced solutions." The comment on the police attempting to be seen as quasi-participants in the landscapes of festivity also connects accurately with Pearson's (2012, p. 130) assertion holding that the police

and football fans can be “either participants in the same carnival, helping each other in the creation of a peaceful environment, sharing jokes [...] or they could be violent adversaries.” The evidence underscores that the former was not only favored by the stakeholders, but expected and recommended.

Communication was seen as crucial, but in order to assist this, the use of SLOs (most typically used in club football) was recommended by some in the context of international football. SLOs were implemented by clubs playing in European competitions in the 2012/13 season. According to Numerato (2018), this implementation represented an “institutional response to fans’ transnational activism” and was “accompanied with the de-securitisation of the authorities’ perspective, and a stronger attention was given to dialogue and communication” as tools to prevent football-related conflict (Numerato 2018, p. 75). SLOs can liaise with and strengthen the communication between fans, football authorities, security, and the police (Stott et al., 2020). Some interviewees stressed how SLOs could add another layer to the discussed and desired communication and dialog:

On away days they [SLOs] are the main link between the football association and the fan organization and individual fans and organized fans which has proven very successful but also at home games they are able to engage with away supporters. It could be diverse, and through dialogue, engaging with away supporters, maybe spot potential problems in advance and work with them before anything can happen. Also liaise with the visiting police (Stakeholder 7).

The same stakeholder also commented that SLOs had been an important feature around other national team games or tournaments, noting that: “it’s [SLOs] proved such a success. It’s become a regular feature every time Sweden play. They use the SLO and they even used them at the women’s World Cup in France” (Stakeholder 7). SLOs may thereby constitute another “human factor” (Tsoukala, 2009), and these findings, overall, speak to how communication could be improved. Thereby, this reinforces the main argument sustaining that communication and social interactions were considered crucial for effective football policing and strongly advocated by stakeholders before Euro 2020.

## **Consistency as the Event-Specific Challenge**

Stakeholder 8: The problem we got with this one [Euro 2020], or the extra challenge we got with this one, is that when you got 12 host cities then you got 12 host police forces.

JL: That was literally what I was going to ask you next as well.

Stakeholder 8: That will have very different policing styles.

The second theme, encapsulated by the above excerpt, should be positioned and framed as more event-specific to Euro 2020’s untraditional geographical format, and

the political and international security contexts within which Euro 2020, eventually, would occur. In the 21st century, Tsoukala (2009, p. 117) argued that internal and external security agencies became “entangled” and security knowledge decompartmentalized. This decompartmentalization, together with the novel hosting format, meant that, pre-event, “consistency” was seen as highly necessary but simultaneously an emerging challenge. Simply put, Euro 2020’s format was completely untested for an event of the Euros’ size, and one concern was that individual countries would take different approaches to the policing of fans under the umbrella of the same event, as exemplified here:

It’s going to be very different to any other tournament. So, for example, for the Euro 2016 although you had the multiple different provinces in France, ultimately, they all worked under the same title. Whereas now you deal with the Spanish police [...] Spain’s even more complex because you got the Basque police, then the Spanish police. So, they operate differently anyway [...] and have their own independent police force, and so on. Then you have the police in Dublin for example, who are very, very cooperative (Stakeholder 9).

Indeed, lack of consistency has been a challenge at past events within one country as well (i.e., Euro 2004, Portugal), where different forces within the police may operate dissimilarly (see Stott et al., 2007). Yet, before Euro 2020, the 12 countries and diverse set of policing traditions and security actors within these countries were collectively regarded a novel policing-related challenge.

Tsoukala (2009, p. 117) writes that the search for effective football policing requires international collaboration and the “transfer of practices from other areas of policing and further enhanced international cooperation.” In the context of European “counter-hooligan” policing, she argued that “it seemed essential to decompartmentalize knowledge, bring services together and allow everyone to benefit from the experience already acquired within any specific field of police activity” (p. 18). The search for uniformity may be observed in pre-event announcements and press releases following conventions, meetings, and peer-review exercises. While such statements and announcements may be released for reassurance purposes and to convey images of preparedness (Boyle & Haggerty, 2012), these also suggest that consistency in policing was an issue deliberately worked toward by relevant organizations and authorities in addition to being on the agenda in the frequent meet-ups, networking events, and knowledge exchange activities (i.e., Council of Europe, 2019). Although, the extent to which consistency could be applied to the 12 countries is of course a matter that must be approached with caution since policing and security practices in European football still differ between countries.

The abovementioned activities can be traced to the end of 2016 when an ad hoc Euro 2020 Working Group was established, and it was noted in a statement by the Council of Europe, regarding the hosting format that “[s]uch a peculiar feature raises the need for stronger cooperation and communication amongst all concerned stakeholders” (Council of Europe, n.d.). Then, between 2017 and 2020, numerous

consultative visits and meetings took place in Euro 2020 host cities, including Baku, Budapest, and Bilbao (Lee Ludvigsen, 2020). A year before the stadium and host city, originally, would host seven Euro 2020 games, a peer-review exercise took place at Wembley (London) in May 2019 coinciding with the English Football Association (FA) Cup final. The aim of this exercise was “to promote the exchange between police match commanders of the hosting cities of the tournament [Euro 2020]” (Council of Europe, 2019). Among the involved organizations one could find a range of delegates representing both state and nonstate actors. In a statement, it was announced that the peer-review exercise at Wembley, for example, included:

A team of police match commanders from Hungary, The Netherlands, Romania and Scotland, accompanied by the Chair of the Standing Committee (Romania), a Bureau member (Austria) and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, met with the British National Football Information Point, the London Metropolitan Police Service, the English FA and the Wembley Stadium management (Council of Europe, 2019).

Worth noting, such activity first demonstrates the blurring “conceptual and operational” lines between “external” and “internal” security agencies in football policing (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 6), with agencies ranging from local police, sporting bodies to European institutions. Second, with such activities promoting “best practice,” they can also be read as attempts to ensure a degree of consistency, regarded as particularly important for this event. This came to fore in another interview as well, 5 months before Euro 2020 was originally due to commence:

And we know that UEFA works to try to spread messages about styles of policing, they try to make this as uniform as possible. But whereas in some tournaments you get generally a uniform style of policing across the whole tournament with maybe a little bit of variation from city to city. With this one [Euro 2020], *it's inherently built into the structure that there will be very difference policing styles match-by-match* (Stakeholder 8, emphasis added).

Above, Euro 2020's 12-host format is seen as an organic obstruction for consistency. For fans to feel safe, however, this degree of consistency emerged as a critical matter by the interviewees. As highlighted later, consistency in the policing and security arrangements across all 12 countries was outlined as a feature desired by the fans likely to attend:

The main thing that supporters want though is consistency and clear instructions regardless of which country/city the game is being played, for instance you don't want to be met by riot police at one venue being very heavy handed and strict and then the opposite at the next venue (Stakeholder 4).

Studies examining fans' perceptions of “security” and “risk” in sporting contexts find that fans expect “security” when attending events. Fans also accept the need for “security” in form of stewards and police officers (Cleland & Cashmore, 2018).

Simultaneously, this means an increase in supporters' expectations to policing and security actors—and their ability to manage large crowds, unanticipated emergencies, and (subsequently) make the “correct” decisions. Arguably, this comes to the fore in the above quote. There, it is suggested that fans expect “security”—however defined—but that it ultimately should be marked by uniformity. For Euro 2020, however, it was also highlighted that consistency related to acceptable behavior, items, and objects in addition to policing approaches. As emerging in interviews, the issue of “consistency” in the policing was promoted and stressed by independent fan organizations to the local police forces, FAs and governments.

In spite of this, it remains important to note that this does not automatically translate into a situation where the security and policing at the relevant event would be applied consistently. Despite the work toward consistency and convergence on a policy level (Tsoukala, 2009), the policing of football still differs between European countries. Following Atkinson et al. (2020, p. 3) it is important to recognize the “nuance of national contexts.” Further, SME hosts typically have “unique combination[s] of existing security capacity and arrangements, police and security culture, and potential threats to public safety” (Taylor et al., 2018, p. 10). This, again, can complicate the transfer of best practice—and indeed impact the actual degrees of consistency and the security realities as the event takes place. Furthermore, as Rookwood (2019) rightfully highlights, so may the qualification process, tournament draw, and emerging fixtures within the relevant tournament. All this may influence a potential departure from recommended practices.

Further, the stakeholders pointed out that a degree of uniformity was not merely an important challenge for the active police forces in the 12 different host countries. Rather, it emerged that consistency was a matter that had to be coherently strived towards by all the different security actors who, ideally, would conform to similar ideas, approaches, and principles. That included stewards, occasionally hired by private companies. For example, it was commented that:

One thing I would say as a caveat is that it's okay to have brilliant policing. But then, if you get into the stadium and the stewarding is poorly, it kind of doesn't make a difference in many ways (Stakeholder 2).

This quote reflects what was aforementioned around the emerging issues with multiple actors within the same football security field. However, particularly, it illuminates the potential challenges when the agencies, both public and private, operate within the same security fields and are expected to cooperate (Tsoukala, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, football and SMEs can, in contemporary societies, be employed to make sense of broader social trends and different sets of mainstream sociological issues. That includes “policing” and “security.” This remains an important starting point for this article, which examines stakeholder outlooks on football policing before Euro 2020

(now to be staged in 2021). I have advanced two arguments with wider implications. The article's findings also build upon, and empirically extend the arguments sustaining that policing of European-wide has become increasingly convergent in styles and then, decompartmentalized in terms of security knowledge, activities and actors (Tsoukala, 2009) within broader globalization discourses. The article provides us with fresh insight to exactly this, in the context of the exceptional and under-researched case of Euro 2020.

First, I argue that stakeholder organizations and individuals advocated a policing approach to fans that was communication and dialog-based between police and present security agencies, on the one hand, and supporters on the other. Importantly, such outlooks support the existing scholarship (Stott et al., 2008, 2012). My second argument is more event-specific in nature. However, it remains highly important *if* staging events across a higher number of countries and geopolitical contexts becomes increasingly normal—perhaps indicated by FIFA's decision to award rights for the 2026 World Cup to Canada, Mexico, and the US as co-hosts. It is argued that before Euro 2020, to be spread across 12 European host countries, ensuring consistency in the policing and security delivery was highlighted by the stakeholders as central. To help ensuring this, several transnational networking activities took place in the event build-up, though importantly, the extent to which consistency could be successfully applied and achieved when the event eventually was staged would be subject to various factors and obstacles, including distinct national security and policing cultures and contexts, and emerging fixtures/situations that may require a departure from the intended or recommended policing approaches.

Perhaps more broadly, these challenges and activities serve to illuminate the transnationalization of “security” and “policing” knowledge and the entanglement of external and internal security stakeholders in football (Tsoukala, 2009). This, coupled with a pioneering hosting format, meant that consistency was highlighted as increasingly important for fan–police relations and for making fans feel safe and secure. If the policing approaches were to be characterized by a pronounced discrepancy, this was viewed by the stakeholders as potentially impeding the event atmospheres, fans' enjoyment and, overall, impacting affecting the event's organizational success.

There are also some more practical dimensions to these arguments. These are related to the potential of these findings in informing, supplementing, or molding how fans and future football mega-events can be policed, operated, or secured. To contextualize the sociological relevance of football policing in Europe, the following argument by Tsoukala et al. (2016, p. 177) provides accurate indications:

Across Europe it is clear that football supporters are still considered a threat to public order, and a social group that requires both innovative new laws and policing strategies to prevent them from engaging in violence or disorder [...] Our contention is that European states need to approach the management of football crowds from a different perspective. Football supporters should first and foremost be seen as a peaceful social group whose rights to free expression and assembly should be actively protected by the state.

This article's presented findings speaking to the policing of fans—as viewed from stakeholder perspectives—may say something about how football fans can be approached as a “peaceful social group.” To do so, the study shows how key tenets to such an approach would be to appear welcoming, communicate with fans, de-escalate situations, and have designated individuals working between fans, police, and sports' governing bodies. The advocated ways of policing football, offered by stakeholders, are compatible with the above excerpt calling for social change. Acknowledging that it may not always be the case that communication and dialog-based approaches can be, or are subscribed to in mega-event or football contexts, the evidence suggests that when possible, it offers a fruitful starting point. To be sure, it is not argued that individuals that cause disorder or intend to engage in violent behaviour should not be policed sophisticatedly (see Pearson & Stott, 2016) and an interactive approach is not necessarily fixed.

This article contributes to the existing scholarship on security and policing in sports with original insights and perceptions of football policing and security ahead of a new and event-specific context. Indeed, these perceptions were articulated in a pre-event context, and could be contextualized by post-event studies, which, for instance, explore whether tournament-wide consistency was actually achieved, and the extent to which this was felt by attending spectators. However, the study's contributions are still valuable because the voices of fan networks and representatives—which this article captures empirically—as well as fans more broadly have remained largely “absent from the literature on security and SMEs” (Doidge et al., 2019, p. 713). In football's social world, fans are important stakeholders (Cleland et al., 2018) and this study advances our knowledge and understanding on how a group of stakeholders and fan representatives perceive policing-related matters in football. Further, the study extends investigations into previous European Championships (Klauser, 2011; Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010) and European football policing and security more broadly (Tsoukala, 2009). Euro 2020's hosting style was truly unprecedented in global sports. This renders this mega-event an important case. Hence, this study fills an important research gap while employing this case to identify wider security and policing-related trends and processes in the present day.

Naturally, there are limitations to the article's sample size, pre-event nature, and case study approach. While, these are not unusual traits in mega-event research they should be acknowledged. Further, the article does not pretend to be a strategical analysis: it merely investigates stakeholder perceptions, while the tournament is yet to be played and faces an uncertain future. Moreover, as reflected on, the interviewed stakeholders spoke primarily from a Northern or Western-European perspective. This remains a limitation, because fan networks like FSE, for example, have active members across the whole European continent (Cleland et al., 2018). Notwithstanding, this also invites future research that captures the perspectives of fans and fan representatives located in Southern and Eastern European countries; both in the case of Euro 2020 and in European football more generally. Crucially, the discussed limitations related to the interviewees' backgrounds and the study's pre-event nature invite comparative,



future research in this area, whereas this decade offers a range of important transnational mega-event case studies.

Lastly, the impacts of COVID-19 on policing and security in sports remain important to critically explore. Hence, researchers could consider how COVID-19-related developments will impact the policing approaches to fans during Euro 2020 (in 2021) and other forthcoming mega-events. However, at the time of writing—and despite the development of a vaccine—it remains uncertain if crowds of fans will be allowed into Euro 2020's stadiums and fan zones, or if fans may merely be allowed to attend in some of the 12 host countries, with reduced crowds to ensure social distancing (BBC, 2020). For example, from October 2020, UEFA allowed certain stadiums to open up for fans—up to 30% of the relevant stadium capacity—subject to local authorities' approval (UEFA, 2020b). And, in the context of policing, security, and stadium surveillance, the eventual return of supporters is likely to require the testing or implementation of new practices and stadium monitoring technologies to, for instance, facilitate social distancing inside the stadiums and upon fans' entrance and exit of the arenas. Ultimately, even pre-pandemic, sporting spaces have worked as testing grounds for new technologies (Yang & Cole, 2020) and "security methods" (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 118). Meanwhile, should games take place behind "closed doors," processes of policing and security are still likely to impact the facilitation of "COVID-secure" events for athletes, staff, and media workers. Hence, while acknowledging that the global health crisis remains an "ongoing issue" and a "moving target" (Domingues, 2020, p. 13), the dynamic nexus between sports and security opens up a range of wider empirical and theoretical questions speaking to the sociologies of global sport and the pandemic.


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### **Note**

1. London was assigned games for the whole duration of the tournament, from group stage to the final.

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