10 - NEGATIVE SOCIAL ASPECTS IN FOOTBALL RELATED TO THE CURRENT STATUS OF SPORT WITHIN THE SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

During the 20th century sport has become an important phenomenon all around the world. We can't say it hasn't been in a similar position before, but due to the evolution of the society, industrial revolution, modernization and increased globalization, it has gained the worldwide character. Sport became social phenomenon and the medium of rivalry not only between the individuals, but often between whole nations.

The biggest of the sports events in the world are obviously Olympic Games, which are taking place every 4 years, both summer and winter games. These games were from its Antic origins a festival of sports perfection, but never managed to avoid some external social influence, in the past mostly political, which resulted in the boycott of this event. Nowadays, what can be most significantly seen on the example of Olympic Games, sport is influenced by many other factors such as professionalism, commercial influences and increasing media interests. These social aspects are bringing many negative aspects, which are in a sharp conflict with the original principles and philosophy of sport as it once had been defined by the founder of modern Olympics Pierre de Coubertin. Sport has been considered as a philosophy of life, bringing together physical fitness, the will and soul into one entity.

Besides the Olympic Games, some of the sports had become a huge business. Globally, the number one sport is football (soccer), which is vastly spread across the world and played at all the continents. Professional football can be easily used as an example for explaining all the aspects of modern sport. As we have already stated, hand in hand with the global sports commercial boom come the negative aspects. Along the above mentioned factors influencing modern sport, the most dominant negative aspect in sport generally is doping. Football has its own specifics though. Partly maybe because it isn't an individual sport, individual player's doping doesn't play such an important direct role in effecting the team's performance. Therefore we don't see many examples of positive doping tests in this sport. Football's dominant negative aspect is then violence and aggression among spectators.

Upon the conclusions of our broader research project on financing and organization of Slovak professional football, we could say that due to several reasons the popularity of Slovak football decreased dramatically over the years. To be fair, it's not the football itself, the most popular and worldwide sport of all, but the Slovak football in particular. Even though Slovakia has had huge success at a national level as its national team qualified for the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa, were the team made its way through into the company of last 16 teams of this planet, still it didn't raise the popularity of Slovak football within the society significantly. The football stadiums are almost “empty” during the domestic league matches and also the value of the TV broadcasting rights of the domestic football competitions has dropped very low.

Besides the typical aspects, which are causing the popularity decrease such as low sports quality and performance level, bad infrastructure of football stadiums or negative media presentation of football, we have also experienced the decrease of footballs' image, what comes as a big contrast in comparison to e.g. ice hockey. There are several reasons for this status, but the most significant one is that the people lost the trust in the fascinating game of football, they simply don't believe in Slovak football.

The questions we have been asking over the last years are: Why are the people not attending the football? Do people think that it's corrupted or are they not enjoying the atmosphere at the football stadiums, because the behavior of spectators is aggressive, dangerous and unfair? Are the negative aspects of Slovak league football playing the key role in the attendance decrease?

The aim of the research project

Those are the questions that we would like to answer in this particular survey, in which we have been focusing on the negative social aspects characteristic for Slovak football and also the way these are influencing the overall status of football within the society.

Tasks:

-Search for the reasons of the low attendance of Slovak football league games

-Find out whether the football is corrupted and therefore it has a bad image

-Getting to know whether the negative aspects typical for Slovak football are similar to those which are typical for Slovak society

-Overall influence of negative social aspects on the image of football

Methods used for the research project and the groups of survey respondents

For the purpose of collecting the data necessarily required for our research project we used standardized questionnaire, which has been tested during the pre-survey taken on a smaller sample of respondents. The conclusions of the pre-survey lead to the finalization of the questionnaire.

Overall we investigated a sample of 250 survey respondents who are taking a part in a different social group in the Slovak football itself or are representing the general community:

a)General public
b)Football fans
c)Football players
d)Employees of football clubs (including coaches)
e)Journalists
f)Football managers

Key method used for the interpretation of the collected data has been comparison of the different opinions of certain social groups on the overall role of Slovak mass media in relation to Slovak football. In order to retain the respective outcomes and results we used statistical methods for the evaluation of the data.

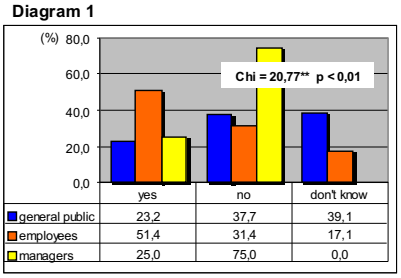
For the statistical evaluation of the results we used a Chi-square test to see whether the expected dependence of the investigated aspects and factors would prove true. The level of statistical significance for each of the examined cases is indicated in the respective diagrams ($p < 0,10 = 90\%$, $p < 0,05 = 95\%$, $p < 0,01 = 99\%$)

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

At first we were trying to find out why the public is not attending football matches. We assumed that it might have something to do with the negative environment and aggressive behaviour of certain groups of spectators.

Questions asked:
Do you feel safe at the football stadium while visiting football game?

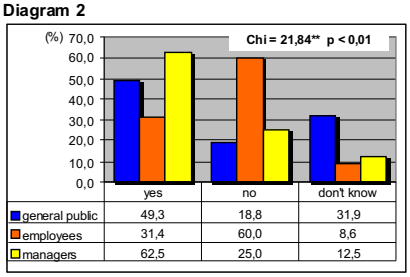
Diagram 1



	yes	no	don't know
general public	23,2	37,7	39,1
employees	51,4	31,4	17,1
managers	25,0	75,0	0,0

Are you afraid to take your kids to the football games?

Diagram 2



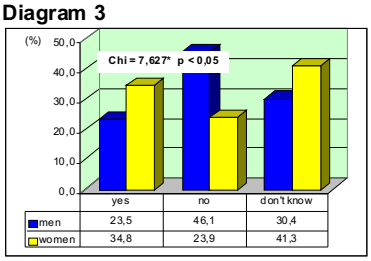
	yes	no	don't know
general public	49,3	18,8	31,9
employees	31,4	60,0	8,6
managers	62,5	25,0	12,5

As shown in diagrams 1 and 2, the 1st part of survey has been conducted on following three social groups: general public, employees of football clubs and football managers. The results are indicating that general public would be rather afraid to take their kids to the football games (49,3%), because they do not feel safe enough while visiting the games (37,7%). Very interesting is that the managers of football clubs (62,5% and 75,0%) are well aware of this fact, but the employees working in the clubs (60,0% and 51,4%) at the stadiums have an opposite opinion. In both cases the results of comparisons have a high significance ($p < 0,01$). We could say that the aggression of particular groups of spectators is discouraging general public from coming to the games and even more importantly they are not bringing their kids, who are very important group of spectators considering the future of our football.

In next case we were asking the respondents whether they believe that the football in general or globally is facing a problem of corruption. For the better interpretation of the results for our study, we have divided the respondents into different social groups upon preset conditions as indicated in the diagrams 3 and 4 below.

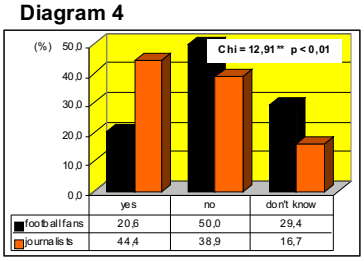
Question asked:
Would you consider corruption in world football as a certainty?

Diagram 3



	yes	no	don't know
men	23,5	46,1	30,4
women	34,8	23,9	41,3

Diagram 4



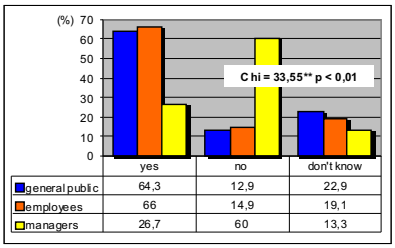
	yes	no	don't know
football fans	20,6	50,0	29,4
journalists	44,4	38,9	16,7

The diagram 3 is showing us the comparison of the answers between men and women. We can see that women (34,8%) are rather sure that the world football is facing a problem of corruption, but men (46,1%) are mostly thinking the opposite. Similar results are indicated in diagram 4, where we compared the answers from football fans and journalists. Football fans (50%) think that the world football is clean and fair, but the journalists are rather sure that it must be corrupted. We need to mention that many respondents didn't have their opinion on this matter or just didn't want to answer the question, as we can see respective numbers. Maybe it was due to the fact that we used the word “certainty” in order to underline the important condition of being sure about the statement in the answer.

More important, interesting and also very significant ($p < 0,01$) were the results of the comparison shown in diagram 5, when we were asking the respondents same question, but at this occasion in relation to Slovak football.

Question asked:
Would you consider corruption in Slovak football as a certainty?

Diagram 5



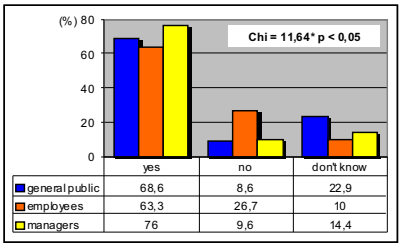
	yes	no	don't know
general public	64,3	12,9	22,9
employees	66	14,9	19,1
managers	26,7	60	13,3

Overall 77,7% of all the respondents who answered the question above are concerned about the corruption in Slovak football. As we make a closer look on the answers of following social groups: general public, employees of football clubs and football managers, we can say the general public (64,3%) and even employees of football clubs (66%) consider the corruption in Slovak football as a certainty (see the diagram 5), but on the other hand only small number of managers believe so. 60% of them believe that Slovak football is clean and fair, but this is the only group of respondents in our investigation who believe so. It is very strange, because shall there be any corruption, which is difficult to prove (therefore one might only assume it!), football managers would be the ones to perform it or at least know about it. Everyone can make their own judgement on these interesting outcomes of our survey.

Other thing we have explored is the coherence between the characteristics of society and the aspects of football.

Question asked:
Are the social aspects characteristic of our society also typical for Slovak football?

Diagram 6



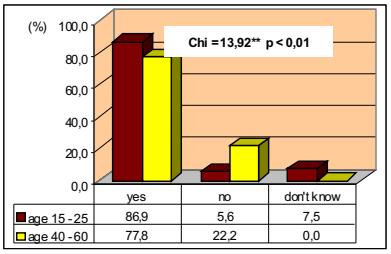
	yes	no	don't know
general public	68,6	8,6	22,9
employees	63,3	26,7	10
managers	76	9,6	14,4

What we can see here is the same opinion of all the social groups of respondents on the given matter (see diagram 6). Simply interpreted, general public (68,6%), employees of football clubs (63,3%) and also football managers (76%) believe that what is happening in the Slovak football is just reflecting what is typical for the whole Slovak society.

Final aspect that we focused on was the respondent's opinion on the relation between the negative atmosphere of football stadiums, influenced by negative social aspects, and the overall attendance of football games. The respondents were divided into two social groups of different age and were asked following question:

Is the overall environment (e.g. aggression of spectators, services, infrastructure) of the football stadiums influencing football games attendance?

Diagram 7



	yes	no	don't know
age 15 - 25	86,9	5,6	7,5
age 40 - 60	77,8	22,2	0,0

As we can recognize from the diagram 7, not only younger (86,9%), but also older (77,8%) respondents are well aware of the relation between the overall environment and atmosphere at the football stadiums and the attendance of football games.

From the analysis of the answers to couple of other questions we found out that people believe that both negative (e.g. doping, corruption, violence, politics, economics) and positive (positive media support, spectators cheering, professionalism) social aspects are significantly able to influence the quality or level of the sports performance. And of course, the better sports quality of in our case domestic football league would raise the attendance of the football games as well.

According to the high significance of respective results indicated above, we could say that in general negative social aspects in football do cause low attendance of football games. Slovakia has some specifics, which differ from the worldwide negative aspects. Abroad we have seen many problems with violence and aggression among some spectator groups. This is one of the biggest problems also with Slovak football, but it might not be the only and the most determining one. We have problems bringing people to the crowds, especially having whole families coming to the football games or even sport in general. It has different reasons though than just the aggressive environment. It is the atmosphere at the games, services and infrastructure of stadiums supported by the negativism, which the media are bringing so often while reporting about sport. Also the sports quality of performances is lower than in other European countries.

Following the conclusions of our survey, it is quite clear that people don't trust football and they think it has been corrupted over the years. Corruption, which is very hard to be proved, has a similar effect on sport as doping. It influences the performance of the players what leads to a different result. All the respondents apart from football managers, who are the ones to be blamed for the loss of football's image over last two decades, believe that this is the biggest reason why the football has dropped so low in the “eyes” of public. Football mangers tend to blame the media for the low interest in football and low attendance of the football matches, due to their policies, what doesn't seem to be correct even though media play their significant role in the process.

At last it is necessary to stress and proclaim that the very same troubles and problems, which we are facing within the society, can be also seen in football. One would say that the attributes of sport in the country reflect the whole society. Therefore it might be very difficult to overcome this in the future, because regaining back the trust of people is never easy and will definitely take many years.

Football is an important phenomenon in many people's lives all over the world and it had been so in Slovakia before as well. Popularity and image decrease caused the loss of football's position in the country's social life and lead to other negative aspects such as decrease of financial sources companies and government are willing to spend for its support. Hopefully outcomes of our research can help recognize all the crucial factors which shall contribute to a brighter future of Slovak football.

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