



GALGENWAARD STADIUM, A PLACE TO ENJOY OR A PLACE TO AVOID?

A qualitative study on perceived safety of local fans
at Galgenwaard stadium during FC Utrecht
matches.

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1. Introduction

Football is the most popular sport in the world, with millions of fans going to the stadium every weekend (Strang et al, 2018). Last year, during the European Football Championship, there was a cumulative attendance of 1.238.845 fans ⁽¹⁾ and this statistic would have been a lot higher if covid restrictions had not limited the availability of seats. Indeed, the previous 'Euro 2016' held in France, had a cumulative attendance of 2.427.263 fans ⁽²⁾. Not surprisingly, football is the most popular sport also in the Netherlands. The KNVB (Royal Dutch Football Association) counts more than 1.2 million members making it the biggest sports association in the country ⁽³⁾. For a country with around 18 million inhabitants, this number is very impressive; basically, almost 15% of the population is affiliated with the KNVB.

Undoubtedly, football has a strong impact on society, with an important socializing and fraternizing function (Van Bottenburg & Schuyt, 1996). Football is a universal leisure activity that has the power to bring together families, communities, and even strangers, supporting their beloved clubs (Sfintes, 2019). The beloved football club represents an important component of the social lives of numerous fans. Indeed, Giulianotti highlights how the majority of fans enjoy '*a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club*' which is considered by them as '*a totemic representation of the surrounding community*' (2002, p.36). In this light, football can foster social cohesion; as Sarbin (2005) states, stadiums serve as urban spaces within a city where the 'human drama' can spread out and fans can interact with others like themselves (Melnick, 1993). According to Gaffney (2008), sports clubs and stadiums serve as physical locations and symbols that embody social memories, representations, and meanings that have the power to bring people from different backgrounds together.

Nevertheless, football also brings conflicts and tensions between fans, and not only, both in the stadium as well as in urban spaces (Schaap et al., 2014). The media constantly reports critical situations involving football fans which intrigue the public and raise political considerations (Havelund et al. 2013). During the previously cited 'Euro 2016', for example, images and videos of violent confrontations between supporters of England and Russia, in the streets of Marseille, circulated worldwide generating political and public anxiety (Boffey, 2016). Public authorities, jointly with football clubs and associations have the challenging task to limit and prevent any possible conflict during football matches; conspicuous amounts of money and resources are invested every year to tackle the problem (e.g. Mensch and Maurer, 2014). Before, during and after every game, they introduce and enforce security measures aimed at guaranteeing a good turnout of the event. The proper management of risk is a fundamental aspect of facilities management for large gathering spaces, such as sports stadiums that are frequently utilized by large crowds. The failure to address this critical aspect can result in tragic crowd-related incidents; this has been demonstrated by the numerous tragic events that have occurred globally (Alkhadim et al, 2018).

1.1 Objectives

This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of specific football fandom, namely F.C. Utrecht supporters, and its relationship with Galgenwaard stadium and the security measures implemented during match-days. It evaluates the sense of security perceived by the Utrecht supporters within the stadium and its surrounding areas, while also considering their personal experiences related to this particular urban location. Moreover, the research examines the perspectives and viewpoints of other relevant stakeholders, including public authorities and the KNVB, which are frequently neglected despite their significant role in the security processes. The findings of this study could prove beneficial for both the municipality of Utrecht and the football club as it provides an assessment of the existing security measures during FC Utrecht matches.

1.2 Research Question

Having explained what the central inquiry of this study is, the following research question was formulated:
How do local supporters experience the sense of safety in and around Galgenwaard stadium at FC Utrecht matches?

To answer the central research question, the following sub-questions were established to guide the investigation.

Sub 1- *How do the physical and social spaces of Galgenwaard and its surroundings look like during FC Utrecht matches?*

Sub 2- *How do local supporters make use of the physical and social spaces of Galgenwaard during FC Utrecht matches?*

Sub 3- *What are the perceptions of local supporters regarding sense of security at the stadium?*

1.3 Academic and Societal Relevance

Football fandom has been a topic of interest for many scholars in various academic fields, including sociology (e.g., Dunning, 2000), psychology (e.g., Stott & Reicher, 1998), and geography (e.g., Bale, 1990). However, much of the research available is limited to the topic of violent-football fans, commonly referred to as football hooliganism (Wann & Hamlet, 1995). Hooligans represent only a small percentage of the overall fan base (Spaaj, 2006), moreover, by focusing merely on problematic supporters, there is the risk of giving a distorted view of reality (Herd, 2018). This narrow focus ignores the positive effects of football on society. In order to address this gap in the literature, it is important to study the entire fan base and not just the hooligans. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that each football club and its fans are unique and cannot be generalized. Previous studies tend to include in their research multiple sub-groups of problematic supporters coming from different cities and even different countries (e.g., Spaaj, 2006; Stott et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the level of violence associated with football fans varies depending on the location and the team involved. Comeron (2002) claims that football hooliganism is ‘equally acute everywhere’, I strongly disagree with this statement. In the Netherlands, the police maintain a national database that lists disruptive fans for each club. For instance, in 2014, Feyenoord had the highest number of fanatical supporters among Dutch clubs, with 1102 registered individuals, while FC Eindhoven had only one registered individual (Schaap et al., 2014). To overcome this problem, I decided to focus on one specific club, FC Utrecht, and its supporters in order to have a more in-depth understanding of this particular fandom. Utrecht was selected as the case study due to its historic importance of the club and popularity, indeed it is the only Eredivisie club in the homonymous region attracting more than 20.000 fans every time it plays at home.

However, regarding the study of crowd policing, previous research conducted in the Netherlands has mostly been quantitative and has therefore not considered the opinions of different stakeholders involved in the process (e.g., Schaap et al, 2014; Spaaj, 2012). Indeed, in the Dutch football context, different parties such as the KNVB, football clubs, private security companies, and supporter associations have a prominent role, jointly with the police, in security policy (Spaaj, 2012). All these entities might have diverse beliefs and reactions regarding the security measures implemented to guarantee security at football matches. To address this, I decided to conduct interviews with state and non-state actors to understand their perspectives on security measures implemented at Galgenwaard stadium (home of FC Utrecht) during football matches.

Alongside the extensive literature available on football fandoms and crowd policing, I strongly argue that it is extremely interesting to consider the relation of the actors present in this study with the urban space of the stadium and its surroundings. As Gaffney puts it: *“sport affects urban and social landscapes in ways that*

are complex and contradictory, and there is always a need for geographic analysis of sporting phenomena" (p.131, 2008). By making use of the three-dimensional dialectic used by Lefebvre in his production of space theory it is possible to analyze how diverse actors produce and shape the urban space during match days. This approach highlights that urban spaces should not be considered solely in physical terms, but rather as expressions of social relations that are shaped by the interactions, power dynamics, and cultural norms of the actors present in the space. A prominent example of this is the impact of large gatherings of sports fans on the residents of surrounding areas, as highlighted by Bale (1990), which can result in conflicts and tensions due to issues such as traffic congestion and unauthorized parking.

In conclusion, this study holds both societal and academic significance by offering a comprehensive examination of the interplay between football, society, and urban areas through a focused analysis on the entire fan base, on a specific club (FC Utrecht) and its stadium (Galgenwaard), as well as by taking into account the perspectives of various parties involved in crowd management.

2. Theoretical foundation

In the first section, I will explore Lefebvre's spatial theory, which consists of three main components. I will provide concrete examples to illustrate each concept proposed by the author. Next, I will delve into the topic of perceived safety and examine the various physical and social factors that influence individuals' sense of security. Lastly, I will provide a concise overview of recent studies on the policing of football crowds.

2.1 Triad of space

As expressed at the end of the introductory section, an excellent way to study relations and encounters in specific urban settings is through the innovative 'spatial triad' concept raised by Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space* (1991). The author does not consider space merely as an autonomous entity and reflects on the role of social relations in the production of space. Indeed: "space is not natural but is constituted by a physical presence and social processes" (Leary, 2009 p. 175). Cities have urban boundaries and therefore space within them is contested. As a result of the contestation of space, different spaces carry different meanings for different people. Space exists physically but it is subjectively shaped by our experience to the extent that its meaning can be completely divergent from person to person.

"Rather than seeing social processes and relations happening in the empty container of space, according to Lefebvre, space is constituted by social relations which are in turn constituted by space, forming a triad: ..." (Leary 2009, 195).

The first concept of "spatial practice" is the perceived space: the physical space within a city, its development, and maintenance. Briefly speaking, the perceived space or physical space is something that we can see and can be easily mapped. Let's look at the Galgenwaard case study to have a practical example. The spatial practice of Galgenwaard will therefore be the structure of the stadium itself, the parking lot, the streets that surround it, the central square, and every physical characteristic that we can perceive with our eyes.

Conversely, the second concept expressed by Lefebvre, 'representations of space' refers to the conceived place. This consists of "*conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers ..*" (Lefebvre 1991, p.38). Here we have to take into consideration the discourses and ideas behind an urban area such as the one surrounding Galgenwaard. We might look for example at the installation of CCTV cameras, types of commercial use of the area surrounding the stadium, the position of the stadium itself (close to the freeway, far from the city centre), the presence of bus stops to reduce the number of cars and traffic, etc. 'Conceived spaces' are "*... forms of abstract knowledge that are connected to formal and institutional apparatus of power involved in the organization of space*" (Butler

2013, p. 40). Even though representation of space is abstract, it plays a fundamental role in shaping social and political practices, therefore, according to Lefebvre it is the dominant form of space in any given society (1991, p. 38-39). Nevertheless, the author emphasizes that, although being the dominant form of space, it can change over time. For example, Leary, in a study conducted in Castelfield, inner-city area of Manchester, shows how what was once considered merely industrial ruins is today considered cultural heritage (2009). Moreover, individuals might ignore and transgress the abstract laws of a particular space, for example by parking their cars in a non-designated area or by performing behaviors that are not considered appropriate. This clarification is fundamental to introducing the third form of space.

Finally, the third concept 'spaces of representation' or rather the lived space comprises "*...space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' ...*" (Lefebvre 1991, p.39). People attribute different meanings to places, according to their memories and experiences. The home club stadium is a symbol of topophilia for supporters, providing affective ties with the environment surrounding it (Bale, 1990). This however is valid for local fans. For the police on duty or security personnel, instead, it simply represents a workplace, so obviously different parties attribute different meanings to certain urban spaces and carry on different activities within them. Utrecht's fans might consider Galgenwaard as a symbol of pride for their city which brings back memories of joy, while the residents living in the vicinity of the area might simply see it as a form of nuisance, especially on the weekends. The contrasting meanings that social groups give to a particular place can either lead to conflicts or optimistically can improve tolerance among these groups.

Those three forms of space are always intertwined among themselves and therefore indivisible. It is therefore important to consider the conflictual interplay between the perceived, conceived, and lived space in the stadium and its surrounding area. By understanding the dynamic of these three forms of space it is possible to reduce conflicts and increase tolerance among different users of the urban area. Lefebvre concept can be applied to the most diverse urban places within a city, such as a square in the city centre or an industrial area in the periphery. Van Ingen suggests that a Lefebvorean approach should be used also to analyze sports landscapes (2003).

2.2 Perceived safety

The previous paragraph has addressed the multiple components from which space is made, in particular it is clear that space is intrinsically made up of physical and social characteristics, now it is time to examine how those physical and social aspect of an urban space can influence the perceived safety of its users, but first it is important to address the concept of perceived safety.

As Sorensen and Mosslemy (2009) clarify, safety in urban environment is composed of both objective and subjective elements. Objective safety refers to the actual recorded level of safety in a specific place through concrete measures such as crime rates and accident statistics. On the other hand, subjective safety, or perceived safety, relates to the individual's personal experience of feeling safe in a particular space, taking into account their emotions, memories, and social factors (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014). Both of these elements play an important role in shaping the overall safety of a particular urban space.

2.2.1. Physical factors

Studies in the field of urban geography have demonstrated that perception of safety in public spaces is influenced by various characteristics of the urban environment, such as physical conditions, their maintenance and the way it is configured (Mehta, 2013). Various physical factors that influence perceived safety in urban environments have been analyzed by scholars. In the next paragraph I will briefly consider 4 physical elements of public space that shape user's perception of safety.

- **Street lighting**

It has been demonstrated that adequate street lighting can improve perception of safety among residents and users, especially during dark hours (Loewen et al., 1993; Knight, 2009; Markvica et al., 2019; Painter, 1996). Individuals could be prone to take different routes or even avoid the area due to its bad lighting and the subsequent decrease of personal perception of safety (Rahm et al., 2021). Good street lighting has also the effect of reducing risk of accidents, for example between pedestrians and bikers, improving individuals' safety perception.

- **Landscaping**

Several researchers have investigated the relationship between green spaces and urban crime (e.g., Bogar & Beyer, 2016; Mancus & Campbell, 2018). The results suggest that green space within the urban environments can either have a positive or a negative effect on the perception of safety; this mostly depends on whether the green areas are maintained poorly or well. When urban green areas are maintained well, they can increase the feeling of safety for users by providing a place for people to relax and enjoy nature, and by promoting a sense of community and social interactions (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; Jennings & Bamkole, 2019). On the other hand, poorly maintained green areas within a city can have the opposite effect. This can occur when green spaces are claimed by gangs as their territory, used for illegal

drug sales or distribution, or become a site for illegal dumping (Branas et. al, 2011; Brownlow, 2006). These negative experiences can impact people's perception of safety in the area.

- **Urban Design**

Various scholars have researched the effects that urban design features have on perceived safety (). For example, street layouts can influence individuals' safety perception in urban spaces. A street layout that prioritizes pedestrian safety, such as wide sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly intersections, and pedestrian-only zones, can create a sense of security and comfort in public spaces (Koohsari et. al., 2013). On the other hand, street layouts which prioritize cars over bikes or pedestrians have a negative impact on people's perception of safety. Moreover, open, spacious areas with good visibility are generally considered safer than narrow, cluttered spaces (Stamps, 2010). Public art within urban spaces has also a positive impact on perceived safety, it encourages people to spend time in urban spaces and can foster a sense of community among them (Sharp et. al., 2005).

- **Population density**

Population density represents another physical factor that can influence perceived safety in urban areas (Walton et. al., 2008). When the level of population density is high, urban areas have a higher concentration of users which is considered as a deterrent to criminal activities. Moreover, high population density can increase social cohesion and sense of community in a neighborhood (Mouratidis & Poortinga, 2020). Nevertheless, when population density in an urban area is too high, it can have negative consequences on the perception of safety. For example, the work of Tseng et al. (2009), confirmed that an increase in the perception of crowding can have a negative effect on individuals' sense of safety in an urban environment. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to look at the composition of the crowd. Alnabulsi and Drury (2004) conducted a study on Muslim pilgrims, and they found that social identification within a crowd plays an important role in perceived safety. They concluded that the increase level of crowd density increases the perceived safety of the pilgrims (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014).

2.2.3. Social factors

In addition to physical factors, social factors can also play a significant role in shaping people's perceived safety in public spaces. I will summarize 4 social factors that influence people's perception of safety.

- **Social diversity**

Social diversity is believed to foster a sense of community and improve perception of safety within a neighborhood. Public spaces are intrinsically democratic ones (Peters & Haan, 2010), in the sense that they are open to everybody. In her influential book "Space, Place, and Gender," Massey argues that social diversity can contribute positively to the social and cultural vitality of a community (1994). Moreover, according to Peters and Haan (2010), public spaces are the ideal locations for promoting cohesion because they provide a clear representation of the social diversity in a multicultural society. Therefore, it is important to ensure that public spaces are inclusive and welcoming for all individuals, regardless of their background in order to fully realize the potential benefits of social diversity in these spaces.

- **Community involvement**

When community members take an active role in maintaining and enhancing public spaces, they tend to feel a stronger connection to these areas and take responsibility for their security (Sampson et al., 1997). Chavis and Wandersman (1990) suggest that participating in neighborhood organizations can lead to an increased sense of community and belonging. When informal social control is weak, there tends to be more resident turnover, higher levels of crime, and greater physical decline in the environment (Rich, 1980; Maxfield, 1981). Nevertheless, it is important to include all the various groups present in the community, by marginalizing certain social groups, community benefits will not be reached.

- **Perception of crime**

People's perception of crime can contrast quite clearly with the actual level of crime in a particular urban area. Individuals' perception of safety can be influenced by various macrosocial aspects which not necessarily go hand in hand with the recorded level of crime of the neighborhood (Lub & De Leeuw, 2017). As Tulloch (2000) and Ferraro (1995) have demonstrated, an individual's personal background and experiences can also have a significant impact on their perception of safety. For example, studies have demonstrated that women experience higher levels of fear of crime compared to men (Yavuz & Welch, 2010). Koskela (1997) notes that people's fear of crime is unique to each individual and can be influenced by their past experiences and memories. For example, someone who has been the victim of a crime in the past may have a heightened sense of fear when it comes to crime, while someone who has never been directly impacted may have a lower one. In addition, when reporting crimes media have a major impact on the neighborhood reputation (Romer et al., 2003).

- **Public Trust**

David Harvey has written about the importance of public trust in shaping people's experiences in public spaces. In his book "Social Justice and the City," he argues that when people trust their local government and public authorities, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and belonging in their community and participate in public life. Conversely, when trust is lacking, people may feel excluded or marginalized, leading to a sense of insecurity and disaffection (1973). Nevertheless, it is important to consider trust levels among diverse social groups present in the same environment, as Setha Low suggests in her book "Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America". The author argues that the growing trend of private ownership of public spaces and the growing number of gated communities can result in a loss of trust among different social groups leading to feelings of anxiety and fear (2004). Therefore, it is essential to establish trust not only with the government or public authorities, but also with the diverse social groups that inhabit urban areas. This can help promote a greater sense of security and reduce fear among different communities.

2.3. Football crowd policing

A considerable number of studies related to football fandom investigate the policing of football crowds and the measures enforced by the public authorities (e.g. Stott et al, 2012; Jack, 2021; Stead & Rookwood, 2007; Norris & Armstrong, 1999; Laursen, 2019; Stott et al, 2006.). Stoot et al. (2012) analysed crowd dynamics using the elaborated social identity model of crowd behaviour (Drury and Reicher 2000; Reicher 1996) highlighting the role of police and the impact of perception on how football fans are policed. The research is particularly important because it demonstrates how actions and protocols carried out by public authorities during football events can influence and upset the social and psychological dynamics within a particular crowd of fans. For example, during the world championships held in Italy in 1990, Stoot & Reicher (1998) affirmed that the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the police towards the English fans led to the creation of a common social identity within the crowd. The authors continue by stating that this act, in their opinion, exaggerated by the Italian police, somehow united the crowd of English fans, both fanatics and not. In short, the English fans therefore united against a common enemy which in this case were the police and responding to the violence received by coming to blows was therefore considered a legitimate action, not only by fanatics.

In a similar vein, Laursen (2019), through participant observations and interviews with Danish ultras groups, analyses and evaluates the Danish police strategies when dealing with football crowds. The results of this study support the ESIM model previously developed by Stoot. When the strategy used by the police to deal with a football crowd is perceived as excessive and illegitimate, fans who are normally not inclined to using violence may turn against the police collaborating with those seeking confrontation. On the contrary, when

the action carried out by the authorities is considered legitimate and proportional to the offences, the majority of crowd members, even fanatics, accept the action and try to differentiate themselves from those seeking confrontation at all costs. This is an important point raised by the author; indeed, the challenging task of the police is to differentiate the different types of behaviours within a crowd. If a deterrence approach is needed, then it should be directed only to those causing problems, football crowds are not homogeneous and therefore rapid differentiation is fundamental in order to avoid an escalation of the conflict.

Recently, in the Netherlands, scholars researched the effectiveness of security measures implemented at Dutch football matches using a quantitative approach. Schaap et al. (2014) evaluated a series of measures to reduce violence at football matches in the Netherlands. They analysed the effectiveness of measures enforced by public authorities using the data collected by the CIV (Central Informatiepunt Voetbalvandalisme) (the Dutch Football Vandalism Information Office). The study covers 3431 matches played over 5 years (2006-2011). Their results demonstrate that football matches played early during the day are less likely to witness incidents than ones played in the evening. Statistics show that the mandatory transport measure for away supporters reduces the probability of conflicts. Interestingly the authors suggest not to enforce alcohol prohibition inside the stadium because this could lead to an increase in incidents outside the stadium. Similarly, Ramon Spaaj (2013) investigated security and risk management technologies adopted to pre-empt disorders among football fans in the Netherlands such as compulsory club card and biometric identification. The author concluded by stating: *“The autonomy and civil liberties of football supporters have clearly diminished. Supporters are more and more controlled and disciplined and have less freedom to set their own behavioural tolerance levels.”* (p. 179).

3. Case study description

3.1 History of football disorders in the Netherlands

3.1.1 Origins

According to Spaaj (2007), the British terrace culture played a major role in influencing and shaping the experience of Dutch supporters inside and outside the stadium. British fans were the first to introduce creative styles of support, making use of flags and scarfs and chanting loudly together, Dutch fans simply copied this innovative trend. Already during the 70s, the four most populated cities in the Netherlands observed the appearance of the so-called sides in the stadia, respectively: Amsterdam (F-Side), Rotterdam (Vak S), The Hague (North Side), and Utrecht (Bunnikside). Once again, this new trend can be explained as a continuum of the British terrace culture. Young fans, mostly in their teens, started to concentrate en masse in the cheapest sector of the stadium, often behind the goal posts. Rapidly these sides became unique in terms of atmosphere, the youths started supporting their local team with chants, flags, and banners. The phenomenon rapidly spread from the major cities to the whole country and the overall level of spectator violence in Dutch football saw a dramatic escalation. As explained by Spaaj (2007), the degree of football violence in the Netherlands, before the emergence of the 'sides', was relatively low and unusual. Early incidents mostly involved spurious acts of violence directed towards players or referees. These problems were more likely to happen following a defeat or controversial referee decisions (Van der Brug, 1994). Violent actions were rarely directed towards away supporters and, most importantly, there had not been any signs of collective incidents until that time. Nevertheless, the emergence of these notorious sides marked a huge turning point in the Dutch history of football-related incidents (Stokvis, 1991). Already in the early 70s, violent actions committed by football supporters started to generate public concern and awareness of this new phenomenon. Utrecht fans, for example, became notoriously famous for using bicycle chains when confronting rival fans. Early confrontations between different sides put in motion an intrinsic system of inter-group rivalries. However, it must be clear that only a small percentage of the fans that regularly visited the 'sides' was involved in violent incidents. Most of the supporters were attracted to the side due to its unique atmosphere rather than to indulge in violence. The first incidents instigated by the sides were rather spontaneous and disorganized, things started to change after Dutch fans witnessed the behaviour of English supporters directly in their stadiums. On 29 May 1974, Feyenoord faced Tottenham at De Kuip Stadium in Rotterdam on the occasion of the UEFA finale. During the match, English fans attacked home supporters and more than 200 people were injured. (4) The incident is considered to be the first collective violent incident to occur on Dutch football grounds; the episode shocked the public

authorities who were not prepared to deal with such an escalation of organized violence. The episode had two major effects: on the one hand, it greatly disturbed the authorities and the general public who for the first time witnessed a major football-related incident while on the other hand, a sort of admiration towards the English subculture, in particular football hooliganism, started to grow among young Dutch supporters who were willing to recreate the British phenomenon in Dutch stadiums.

Media and journalists became rapidly aware of the problem and started to closely cover the unacceptable behaviour of football supporters. The four notorious sides cited previously, or more accurately, a small portion of them, were accountable for most of the violent football-related episodes. On the 24th of October 1976, the first televised local football disorders in the Netherlands appeared, showing FC Utrecht fans confronting and running after Ajax supporters while branding bicycle chains. If on the one hand Utrecht fans were infamously notorious for the use of bicycle chains, on the other FC Den Haag and Feyenoord hooligans were specialized in the production of home bombs. Over the years, the actions of football fanatics deteriorated to such an extent that, in 1982, Den Haag fans set fire to their stadium following the relegation of the team. ⁽⁵⁾

The dangerous actions carried out by the pioneering sides and the resulting attention given by the media stimulated a process of national diffusion. Different municipalities throughout the country saw the emergence of their own sides in the stadium; especially after home fans personally witnessed the behaviours of one of the main sides on their ground.

3.1.2 The 1980s

During the 80s, Dutch football, as well as international football, saw an escalation in the continuity and seriousness of violent actions committed by fans. In 1983 there another major accident occurred during a UEFA cup game between Feyenoord and Tottenham played at the Stadium De Kuip in Rotterdam. This was the period of the Falkland war, and, during the game, home supporters started singing: "Argentina, Argentina!". Rapidly, the English supporters attacked home fans who were located in the adjacent sector. The aftermath resulted in more than 50 injuries and the stabbing of a British supporter by a Dutch fan which was captured by the cameras and reported on national television. ⁽⁶⁾ Violent or dangerous acts were not limited only to club matches. In October 1987, an international match between Netherlands and Cyprus was suspended after a bomb was thrown into the pitch. The device injured Andreas Charitou, the Cyprus goalkeeper, and forced him to finish the match prematurely. Because of this disgraceful act, the match had to be replayed behind closed doors in the following months. The use of bombs in the Netherlands was very frequent among fanatical supporter groups, especially during 'high risk' matches. Respectively, fanatics of Ajax and Feyenoord (Ajax – Feyenoord is one of the fiercest rivalries in Europe), caused numerous disorders when the two teams were facing each other. On the 22nd of October 1989 during a match between Ajax

and Feyenoord played in Amsterdam, away fans threw homemade bombs containing small bullets toward Ajax supporters, injuring 14 of them. A home fan risked his own life after an arterial hemorrhage. The infamous episode was widely reported by national and international media; however, it was only one of the many shocking episodes that regularly occur when Ajax plays against Feyenoord and vice versa.

Spurred by the intensification of disorders, public authorities introduced measures to contrast the phenomenon, but rather than stopping it they transformed it. Dutch football grounds were converted to all-seats stadiums and fences were eradicated to separate the different sections and keep supporters segregated. Moreover, CCTV cameras were installed both inside and outside stadiums and fans began to be searched at entrance controls. Opportunities for confrontations inside the stadium diminished because of the containment strategies of home and away supporters. Nevertheless, violence did not stop or decrease, the strategy simply pushed violent fanatics to relocate their confrontations outside the stadium, mostly in city centres and central stations. Over 70 percent of soccer riots take place outside the stadium and out of sight of the players (De Vreese, 2000).

3.1.3 The 1990s

The 90s will be remembered as a dark moment for Dutch football and its fandom. Numerous riots broke out in various Dutch cities and in particular the rivalry between Ajax and Feyenoord supporters led to a dramatic escalation of violence. Eventually, the hatred between the two factions culminated in tragedy. On the 23 of March 1997, Ajax had to play away at Waalwijk, while Feyenoord faced AZ in Alkmaar. Feyenoord hardcore supporters were driving in the morning on the A9 highway towards Alkmaar until they suddenly stopped their vehicles in the vicinity of Beverwijk. Some of them had recognized a group of around one hundred Ajax fans in a meadow which was visible from the highway. Immediately, hundreds of Feyenoord fans ran toward their rivals and a violent clash began. Both groups were armed with knives, bats, iron bars and other weapons. Even though the fight only lasted five minutes, the aftermath was tragic, a 35-year-old Ajax fan, Carlo Picornie, died after being heavily assaulted with various objects. Jorien van den Herik, Feyenoord's chairman, when speaking to the media, dubbed the battle as "a black day for Dutch football".

On the day of Picornie's funeral, in De Telegraaf, one of the major national newspapers, a memorial message appeared signed by Feyenoord supporters. In the memorial, the Vak S side (Feyenoord hardcore) expressed its regrets and concerns regarding the death of Picornie, father of two children. (7) Although the battle of Beverwijk shocked the whole country, the violent actions of football supporters were still making the front-page headlines in the following years and did not seem to stop. On 25 April 1999, Feyenoord won the Eredivisie, and thousands of fans celebrated the title in the streets of Rotterdam. What initially was perceived as a festival and a celebration, suddenly turned into a full-scale riot. Groups of hardcore Feyenoord supporters attacked the police who even had to shoot warning bullets. Numerous shops were

targeted and looted, and one fan had to be urgently transported to hospital after being injured by a police bullet. (8)

To conclude, Dutch football lost its innocence after the emergence of the sides, initially there were only 4 major sides causing problems already during the 70s. One decade later, a process of national diffusion was set in motion and football fanatics became a cause of major concern in the Netherlands as a whole. Public authorities tried to minimize and reduce the violent actions committed by supporters by implementing new security measures and technologies. The strategy did not reduce the number of conflicts, but instead pushed football fanatics to reorganize themselves by, for example, rearranging their fights far away from the heavily controlled stadiums.

3.2 Measures to contrast football violence in the Netherlands.

Until the 1980s entrance controls at Dutch stadiums were generally fluid and fast, stewards checked tickets by hand and then the ticket holder was able to enter the stadium and sit down, if possible, or stand wherever he/she wanted. This straightforward trend started to change during the 1990s when football stadia in the Netherlands were being renovated and equipped with new technologies and physical barriers to prevent disorders. (Spaaj, 2012)

These challenges were established in line with the guidelines given at the European '*Convention on spectator violence and misbehaviour at sports events and in particular at football matches*' stipulated in Strasbourg on 19 August 1985. The convention was established less than three months after the Heysel disaster occurred in Brussels on the 29th of May. On that occasion, 39 people lost their lives and 600 were injured. (9) The tragedy shocked Europe as a whole, and it was clear that fundamental changes had to be made to avoid similar tragedies in the future.

"The Convention requires States to take practical measures to prevent and control violence and misbehaviour by spectators. It also includes measures to identify and deal with offenders." (Council of Europe) (10)

Rapidly, Dutch stadiums were reshaped according to European directives; CCTV systems were installed in and around, sectors within the stadium were clearly divided with fences to prevent contact between rival supporters, automatic entrance controls were implemented, and fans started to be searched at the entrance. Away fans were strictly segregated from the rest as suggested in article 4 of the convention:

"segregate effectively groups of rival supporters, by allocating to groups of visiting supporters, when they are admitted, specific terraces". (11)

The Netherlands signed the treaty and in 1986 the Ministry of Interior instituted the Central Informatiepunt Voetbalvandlisme (CIV). The CIV is a Dutch police unit that has the task of gathering, evaluating, and

exchanging information regarding troublesome supporters. This information is collected in a national database called Football Track System, and the CIV disseminates the data with other parties such as football clubs, the KNVB and municipalities. The CIV was the first European example of an intelligence gathering institution on football supporters; rapidly, similar departments were inaugurated in other European countries (Van Netburg, 2005). Once the CIV assumes to have collected all the necessary data, it stipulates a risk assessment before every fixture and exchanges recommendations with the police and the municipality where the match is played. The CIV also cooperates with similar foreign police branches when Dutch football clubs face teams from other countries in European competitions. It is therefore clear that collaboration among different parties, both at national and international level, is fundamental to prevent possible conflicts at football matches.

3.2.1 Stadium refurbishment, redevelopment, relocation

In the Netherlands, Frank van Dam conducted research in 2000 where he analyzed the various factors that pushed Dutch municipalities and football clubs to renovate and relocate stadiums. This innovative trend went hand in hand with the changing nature of football itself all over Europe in the previous years, indeed during the 90s, this beloved sport experienced an escalation in investments and sponsorship and municipalities were eagerly prone to attract entrepreneurs.

Over the years, football started to cause a nuisance to those living in its vicinity (Bale, 1990). These nuisances/disorders, according to van Dam, should be attributed to the growing number of attendances as well as a growing number of car ownership among fans leading to higher levels of traffic and congestion during match days (van Dam, 2000). In addition, hooliganism was flourishing also in the Netherlands, giving a negative international image to Dutch football. Initially, the government tried to tackle these problems by adopting more repressive measures and by deploying a multitude of agents on match days. Subsequently, the idea of renovation and relocation of stadiums started to be seen as a better solution.

After the victory of the Dutch national team at the European championship in 1988, football in the Netherlands drew the attention of many investors opening the door to costly projects of renovation and relocation of stadiums. This tendency had its beginning in the beautiful city of Utrecht, precisely at Galgenwaard stadium, home of FC Utrecht. The old Galgenwaard was inaugurated in 1936 and, as was common during those years, it was fitted with a cycling track surrounding the whole pitch. As time went by, the cycling track became unused and was seen as an obstructive element, the distance between supporters and players was indeed remarkable. In addition, with the rising number of average spectators, it was clear that more covered seats were needed as well as more security measures. As already said before, hooliganism was starting to cause problems in the Netherlands, not to mention the infamous Utrecht

hooligans that during the 70s and 80s were responsible for various violent actions against their rival supporters (Spaaj, 2007).

It became clear that a stadium built in the 30s could not overcome certain problems, therefore the municipality of Utrecht started to embrace the idea of a new stadium. The ambitious project was entrusted to Ballast Nedam, one of the most important constructions and engineering companies in the Netherlands, which came up with simple but revolutionary innovations. First of all, the disturbing cycling track was removed, and new stands were built adjacent to the pitch, resolving the problem of distance between fans and players. Behind the goals, an antitank ditch was built between the pitch and the stands. It was built for safety reasons, indeed it provides rapid escape routes in case of an emergency, and it prevents pitch invasions, moreover, it also avoids the need to use fences that would have inevitably obstructed the view, thus damaging the atmosphere. Moreover, the stadium was equipped with numerous entrances and exits, so that in case of emergency it could be evacuated in 3 minutes. Finally, the stadium was fully completed in 1982.

What is revolutionary about the new Galgenwaard stadium is not simply the attention given to safety, comfort, and design within the ground itself, but, in particular, the special consideration given to the exterior of the stadium. Ballast Nedam rightly recognized that, from a business perspective, a stadium is highly inefficient because it is used for only 20-25 matches a year by the local club. They thought that using a structure like Galgenwaard stadium solely and exclusively for football purposes was a waste. For this reason, they came up with the idea to attract businesses by creating office spaces in the open corners of the new stadium. In doing so, the area outside the stadium, for example the parking space, may be used every day and not only once every two weeks. The new design and the revolutionary ideas behind the project of the new Galgenwaard stadium were even mentioned as a role model in the influential Taylor Report published after the Hillsborough disaster in Sheffield in 1989. The stadium had a particularly good reputation due to its safety measures, its design, and its ability to attract businesses and investors (Taylor, 1989). In a short time, the benefits of Utrecht's stadium were taken as an example by Dutch municipalities, football clubs, and the KNVB. Following the Taylor Report and new UEFA guidelines, the KNVB ordered clubs to implement all the necessary security measures and transform the stadium to all seat stands.

When it comes to building a new stadium, its position within the urban context is a fundamental aspect to consider. Even in the case of Utrecht, there has been a long discussion regarding which was the best location for the construction of the new stadium. In the end, it was decided to rebuild the stadium exactly in the same place where the old one used to stand. Even though it is located very close to residential areas, it is also very well secluded from the rest of the urban context. Indeed, the stadium is surrounded by sports fields on two sides, on another side there are shelters for the military, and on the remaining one lies a

motorway. Moreover, the Galgenwaard is easily accessible by bike, car, or public transport with numerous shuttle buses departing from Utrecht central station during FC Utrecht home matches.

The football stadium of the 21st century must fulfil certain standards, respectively comfort, safety, accessibility, and a pleasurable atmosphere. In order to meet the new demands, municipalities (or the club: municipalities are usually the owners of the stadium) have three different solutions: refurbishment, in situ redevelopment, and relocation. The decision among the three diverse solutions depends upon various factors, such as financial capacities, pressures from residents, negative external effects on urban areas, etc.

Refurbishment

Refurbishment is the less drastic and relatively cheap way to meet the new standards stipulated for stadiums. It is important to note, however, that this solution can be suitable only if the structure of the stadium complies with the directives given by the KNVB and its position does not constitute risks for the urban context. A good example of the refurbishment process is the stadium of Feyenoord, De Kuip, located in an industrial area in the south of Rotterdam, easily accessible by car and perfectly connected with the train service. In addition, the stadium is considered a monument by the fans, and it functions as a symbol for the prestigious Feyenoord football club. Interestingly, the construction of the famous Camp Nou, home of FC Barcelona, probably the most famous stadium in Europe, was inspired by De Kuip (van Dam, 2000). Feyenoord was built during the 30s and its structure remained unchanged for approximately 60 years when, following directives given by the KNVB, it was modified. As in the case of Utrecht, originally, De Kuip presented itself with a track field surrounding the fields, subsequently, new stands were built on the track field, expanding its capacity, and reducing distances between fans and players. By 1994, the historic De Kuip became a completely covered all-seater stadium permitting the fans to enjoy a football match even in adverse weather conditions. Other examples of stadium refurbishment in the Netherlands are the Philips Stadium in Eindhoven and the Goffert stadium in Nijmegen. A peculiarity of Philips stadium in Eindhoven is that it is situated in the heart of the city centre, less than a 10-minute walk from the central station; one would have expected a relocation project of the stadium nevertheless the new stadium still lies in its original position.

In the majority of cases, stadium refurbishment limits itself to complying with compulsory directives given by the football federation and the introduction of sky boxes to accommodate VIP fans.

Redevelopment

Redevelopment, or more precisely in situ redevelopment, is the second possible option for municipalities (or the owner of the stadium). It implies the total demolition of the old structure and the subsequent construction of the new stadium in the same location as the old one. This example has already been analyzed in the Galgenwaard stadium in Utrecht, and the same process was carried out in different municipalities across the country such as Tilburg (Willem II stadium), Maastricht (De Geusselt), and the Hague (Zuiderpark) (Van Dam, 2000).

Relocation

Finally, municipalities can opt to relocate the stadium to another area of the city. The most famous example in the Dutch case is the relocation of Ajax stadium from the old De Meer to the modern Amsterdam Arena located on the southeast edges of the Dutch capital.

The idea behind the construction of a new stadium in Amsterdam was firstly formulated in 1985 when the city was vying to host the Olympics of 1992 (entrepreneurial urbanism). Eventually, Amsterdam did not succeed in hosting the games, however, the challenging intention of building a new stadium remained, Ajax, the football club of Amsterdam was particularly enthusiastic about the idea (Van Dam, 2000). The old De Meer was too small to accommodate Ajax fans, especially during European competitions. In addition, the success of the club, both at the national as well as European level, notably increased its revenues; Ajax was ready to invest a large amount of money for its future home. Besides that, the municipality of Amsterdam was also pleased to invest in the project. Because of the relocation of the stadium, the city of Amsterdam was able to build new dwellings in the vacancy left by old De Meer, as a response to the high demand for houses. Finally, the new Amsterdam Arena opened in 1996 and it can hold up to 55.000 spectators. In the following two years, every match that Ajax played at home has been sold out; proof that old De Meer could not meet the high demand of tickets.

The same path was undertaken also in other municipalities in the country, in Breda, for example, the outdated NAC stadium, situated in the city centre, was replaced by a new one built at the edge of the city. Once again, the project was commissioned to Ballast Nedam, the experienced company that rebuilt Galgenwaard stadium in Utrecht. The contemporary practice to build new stadiums on city edges or in suburban office park areas circumvented any possible reaction on the part of the residents (Meurs, 1994). Indeed, stadium relocations in the Netherlands did not trigger any possible NIMBY countermovement, as opposed to the many local reactions that regularly occurred in the United Kingdom whenever possible relocations were discussed (Bale, 1990). Furthermore, Dutch municipalities understood that the vacancies left from the old stadium, usually situated in central areas, could be used to build new dwellings, meeting

the high demand for new houses in the country. In doing so, the municipality was not only able to repay the substantial investment for the relocation but was also able to make some profit out of it, therefore cities were prone to invest and facilitate stadium relocations. Other famous examples of stadium relocation in the Netherlands are Arnhem (Vitesse), Enschede (FC Twente), and Groningen.

Finally, stadium relocation can be considered an easier task in the Netherlands than in other European countries. Indeed, in the Dutch case, there was no significant opposition from the fans against stadium relocation contrary to what happened in Italian and English cities (van Dam, 2000). The largest cities in Italy, Spain, and England are home to more than one professional football club, and each football club has its distinctive fandom that is identified by its socio-cultural roots and for historical reasons (Campbell & Shields, 1993). In the Netherlands, cities are normally home of only one football club, and they recruit their fans from all over the region, therefore they are usually indifferent to a stadium relocation. The only exceptions are Rotterdam, home of Feyenoord and Sparta, and Eindhoven, home of PSV and FC Eindhoven.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Netherlands appears as a role model in Europe for the renovation and relocation of stadiums, with safe and comfortable structures all over the country. Nevertheless, once a stadium has been built or renovated, good maintenance is fundamental. Recently, there have been two alarming examples of bad maintenance that were cause of concern both for the authorities and for the public. In 2019, part of the roof of AZ stadium in Alkmaar, collapsed due to high winds, luckily there were no people present when this fact occurred, and no injuries were verified (12). In October 2021, part of the away stand at Goffert stadium in Nijmegen collapsed while Vitesse fans were celebrating the victory over their historic rival NEC. This time, many fans were present in the sector but fortunately no injuries were registered, nevertheless, it was a very frightening incident for both fans and players (13).

3.2.2 Ticketing and travel restrictions

Over time, Dutch public authorities, jointly with private football clubs, began to experiment and implement new measures aimed at contrasting football vandalism. They proposed the implementation of a compulsory club card to prevent malicious supporters from entering the stadium. A first attempt was made in 1989 in 5 different football clubs. Theoretically, fans without an identity card released by their club were not able to enter the stadium. Nevertheless, on the first day that the restriction was implemented many fans entered the stadium without a card, which was put aside for a while (Spaaj, 2012). During the 1996-1997 season the compulsory club card was back, and the card was mandatory to attend every Eredivisie match (Spaaj, 2013). A similar card scheme was implemented in Italy in 2007; only fans in possession of a fidelity card were able to enter the stadium. The measure had unexpected consequences; average attendance clearly diminished leading to a considerable loss of the club's revenues (Di Domizio & Caruso,

2015). The card was considered a good tool to keep troublemakers outside the stadium, and supporters who had behaved in a troublesome way in the past were denied getting one. It is important to consider that the issue of a compulsory identity card implies costs for the clubs as well as for the fans. Moreover, as Spaaj (2013) highlights, the club card was seen by many supporters as an excessive punishment because even though it was aimed at contrasting a minoritarian group of fans, it influenced the fandom as a whole. Furthermore, even though it could prevent violent supporters from entering the stadium, fights of course still happened outside, as the dramatic battle of Beverwijk demonstrated.

Nowadays, the card is required for high-risk matches, such as derbies, while for low-risk and medium-risk ones the decision is left to the clubs and public authorities. Some clubs have also opted for a distinctive away-match card for their fans, the card is compulsory to attend away matches, and tickets can be sold only to card-owners.

Usually, supporters who desire to follow their beloved teams on away matches must comply with a compulsory travel arrangement, which is called in Dutch 'combiregeling'. The measure was introduced in 1984 (Spaaj, 2013), it obliges away fans to travel together by bus or car while being closely escorted by the police. The measure is intended to prevent and limit any possible contact between away supporters and home supporters; however, it also restricts individual freedom of movement. For this reason, the measure is highly debated in the Netherlands and Van der Aa (2011) states that over time the restriction will disappear in that country. Moreover, just as in the case of the club card, it is a procedure aimed at handling a small number of fanatics which inevitably affects all the fans. If on the one hand the measure seems intrusive for the fans, it must also be said that research shows that the combiregeling is effective in reducing the probability of incidents between supporters outside the stadium and, to a lesser extent, also within the stadium (Spaaj, 2013). Nevertheless, fanatical supporters seeking confrontations at all costs found countermeasures (leaving the day before or showing up at matches that do not involve their clubs) (Spaaj, 2007). Today the combiregeling, as in the case of the club card, is mandatory for high-risk matches; clubs and authorities can choose it also for medium risk matches if deemed necessary.

To conclude, both ticketing and travel restrictions are still widely used in Dutch football to prevent and limit incidents among fans. In the near future, however, these measures might become less intrusive for the fans, as the KNVB states in its official website: *"The association is in favour of reducing generic security measures such as body searches and ticket sales being restricted to membership club card holders. We would also like to see more away fans in the stadiums and a more flexible mandatory transport scheme for these supporters"*. (14)

3.2.3 Hooligan in beeld

Recently, the Netherlands has started experimenting with an innovative approach to intelligence gathering. This new project consists of a perpetrator-oriented approach, it is called 'Hooligans in beeld' (focus on hooligans). The project consists of compiling files on known or potentially violent football supporters. *"The methodology consists of mapping problematic groups and supporters at individual football clubs, and to link the information obtained from different data systems. The collection of information focuses on the identity, role and behaviour of individuals within supporter groups, as well as on the linkages (if any) between different groups. Attention is paid not only to their behaviour on match days, but also to possible offences and disorderly behaviour at other moments and locations. The collected information is analysed and cross-checked using existing police data systems, enabling police to enhance their insight into the behavioural patterns and social networks of suspected supporters. The information from the different sources is integrated and recorded in public order dossiers, which can be accessed by the municipality and public prosecutor".* (Spaaj, 2013 p.175). The project brought positive as well as negative outcomes. On the one hand, it provided the police and all the relevant partners involved in security management with detailed information on (possible) problematic individuals or groups. On the other, it polarized the relations between fanatical supporters and the police. Once necessary information on individuals or groups is collected, the police visit the targeted individual at home or work to intimidate him and let him know that he is constantly watched. This trend was recurrent in the mid-2000s when spotters visited fanatical supporters in their homes warning them that troublemakers would be immediately arrested (Tsoukala, 2009). Targeted supporters strongly reacted to this; since the method was implemented, there have been various episodes of coercion and aggression directed against police officers involved in the project. Once again, being considered a troublemaker supporter brings serious repercussions upon the privacy of the individual concerned. In 2007, Danny Dyer, an English actor, and presenter participated in a documentary series called 'The Football Factory International', which takes a deep look at football firms worldwide. One episode of the series focused on football firms in the Netherlands; during an interview, one of the leaders of Ajax F-Side said to Dyer:

"It's crazy, it's a crazy country, you talk about a liberal country? No fucking way. This is a police state. Even murderers and child molesters and everything, they are not allowed to put their faces on telly. But hooligans? You are a football supporter? You are nothing". (15)

3.2.4 MBVEO Act (Wet maatregelen bestrijding voetbalvandalisme en ernstige overlast)

The MBVEO is a Dutch act that came into force on 1 September 2010. The law gives additional powers to the mayor and the public prosecutor to deal with troublemaking football supporters. These powers include the imposition of restraining orders, group bans, and the requirement to sign at the police department during football games. (artikel 172a Gemeentewet) Orders imposed can have a maximum duration of 3 months and these can be extended 3 more times for a total duration of 12 months.

Moreover, under the act, minors aged below 12 can also be prosecuted in case of public nuisance. Originally the law was intended exclusively to prevent vandalism and disorders during football events. In due course, these special powers have been used also to contrast other types of urban disorders not related to football events. The MBVEO act can also be used against loitering, public drunkenness, drug use on the streets, and public nuisance. For example, the municipality of Almelo used this law in 2012 against a homeless 37-year-old man who regularly caused public nuisance in the city centre together with other vagabonds who distinguished themselves in their aggressive behaviour and public drunkenness during the day. Due to this implementation of the law, the individual concerned was no longer welcome in the city centre of Almelo for three months. It is important to note however that the decision of using this law falls exclusively on individual municipalities. Nowadays many cities still do not make use of this act either because they are not familiar with the law or because they believe they can cope with certain types of problems in different ways. (16)

4. Materials and Methods

Multiple techniques were applied in this research study to gather data, analyze the findings and draw conclusions. First of all, an extensive literature review was conducted to examine the various theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic under investigation. Through the literature review, I was able to identify and synthesize concepts and ideas related to the research topic. Afterward, I carried out in locus observation in and around Galgenwaard to gain a deeper understanding of the context, as well as all the interactions and processes which take place in the area. Finally, once the collection of data was terminated semi-structured interviews were carried out with individuals belonging to diverse social groups (supporters, police, KNVB, etc.). Through the interviews, I was able to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the individuals in the researched area.

4.1 Study area

This research was carried out in and around Galgenwaard stadium, home of FC Utrecht. The stadium is located in the southeastern part of the city of Utrecht, less than three kilometers away from the city center and adjacent to the Science Park neighborhood which is home to Utrecht University and various research institutions. The stadium was built in 1936, rebuilt in 1982, and finally renewed in the early 2000s. The northern and eastern parts of the stadium are surrounded by two major roads, respectively Waterlinieweg and Herculeslaan which connect Galgenwaard with the freeway. The south side of the stadium is confined by the Kromme Rijn, a river, while on the west part, various commercial buildings arise. During match-days, tens of thousands of people flock to Galgenwaard to watch their favourite team play, while during the week the area appears much less chaotic. Spaces within the urban areas consist of variable and negotiable boundaries to which different populations give different meanings (Gieryn, 2000). Individuals carry out different activities in the same urban space, and experiences vary according to their roles and intentions.

My research population comprises the head of competitions of the KNVB, the project manager of the 'Auditten Voetbal en Veiligheid' (Football and Safety Audit Team), Utrecht police, a board member of the SVFCU (Utrecht fans association), a steward, and Utrecht fans. This choice is justified by the fact that all these parties collaborate with each other to ensure safety during football matches. There is, of course, a hierarchy and different parties have different roles, nevertheless, the voices of all should be taken into consideration when deciding which are the most effective policies to ensure a good turnout of the events. These parties meet periodically in order to discuss critical points and the best solutions to overcome those; needless to say, each group has its own interests to protect, therefore impressions might be contrasting.

The KNVB is the national football federation. It organizes the professional competitions, from the lowest to the highest (Eredivisie), in addition, it also has a role in the security process; for example, it is responsible for all the stadium bans in the Netherlands.

The Football and Safety Audit Team carries out research on violence in football in the Netherlands. The audit team also advises organizations on how to deal with hooliganism and football violence. The team advises municipalities, police, public prosecutors, professional clubs, and the KNVB football association.

The police is responsible for security outside the stadium and if needed, they can also intervene inside the stadium. Their presence is fundamental to avoid contacts between opposing fans and to deter individuals from acting improperly.

SVFCU is the Utrecht fans' association that represents almost 6000 members. Founded in 1981 it is one of the biggest in the country and serves as a meeting and dialogue point between the fans and the club; in fact, the members of the board are in close contact with the club and even with the police, moreover they also organize meetings with other fan associations in the country.

Stewards, as well as security personnel, are appointed directly from the club and they are present both inside and outside the stadium. They assist the flow of spectators and prevent disorders, and if necessary, they have the help of the police in critical situations and collaboration between the two is fundamental.

Utrecht fans are inevitably influenced by security measures, there are around 20,000 fans at every game, so it is legitimate to also include their views in this study. They are represented by the SVFCU, however the association only represents a part of them (those who are members). Given that fans are those most directly influenced by safety measures, I think it is important to also include their opinions, which usually take second place.

4.2 Methods

The study is based on participant observation at Galgenwaard stadium during FC Utrecht home matches and on semi structured interviews with state actors, non-state actors, and supporters.

As already pointed out before, the home club stadium is a symbol of topophilia for supporters, providing affective ties with the environment surrounding it (Bale, 1990). This however is valid for local fans. For the police on duty, instead, it simply represents a workplace, so obviously different parties attribute different meanings to certain urban spaces.

The choice to carry out observations directly at the stadium during matches is useful for two reasons. First of all, being on site before, during and after the matches, I was able to observe the various movements/actions and interactions that take place both outside and inside the stadium. Having been present at several matches I was able to get an overall view of what the organization of an Eredivisie match implies and how this affects the urban space surrounding the stadium. The second reason was to be able to have contacts with my research population. In fact, due to my presence at the stadium I was able to

establish my first face-to-face relationships with local fans, and as a result I was able to explain the reasons of my research and take their contacts if they agreed to be interviewed.

Given that the driving factor of my research is to increase and to contribute to the knowledge of experiences and opinions from different parties, I believe that conducting in-depth interviews will be the most suitable method for my purpose. Jonson and Christensen (2011) argue that the logic behind undertaking a qualitative study is to explore and investigate something, rather than analyzing numbers.

Qualitative studies with fans have already been conducted in the past (Marsh et al., 1978; William et al., 1989; Giulianotti, 1991; Stoot et al., 2011) and have been particularly effective in analyzing some groups of fans of certain clubs. Unfortunately, sometimes, as explained by Laursen (2019), the decision to follow groups of hooligans in ethnographies makes it impossible to conduct interviews with other parties such as the police, who are considered as rivals. In my case, rather than focusing on hooligans, I decided to focus on fans in general and on other parties like the police and the club. Nevertheless, my study is also based on a specific case which is Utrecht, and for this reason I believe that a qualitative approach is the most suitable to obtain the desired results. Moreover, as pointed out by Stoot & Reicher (1998), research conducted in the past tends to ignore the point of view of law enforcement and the fact that public order events are intergroup processes based on continuous interactions between various groups. As Pearson (2015, p.3) states: 'Ethnographic study of football crowds helps us to overcome the prejudices and misunderstandings that may result from 'outsider' research, particularly that carried out by those in authority with vested interests, or by media outlets searching for the sensational.' Ethnographic research of supporters based on interacting observations could be very useful to witness and analyse unexpected issues or uniquenesses which could be omitted when conducting quantitative studies.

4.3 Data collection and data analysis

The data resulting from the observations was collected on 5 match-days in the Eredivisie in the second half of the season 2021/2022, one Eredivisie match in the season 2022/2023 and one friendly match played between the two seasons. The matches analysed were either low-risk matches, or medium-risk ones and for the latter a club-card was compulsory to enter the stadium. Interviews were conducted after I had already visited 3 matches; the first ones took place towards the end of the 2021/2022 championship and then continued during the summer.

As for the participant observations at the stadium, they allowed me to be embedded in my research space, to spend a considerable amount of time getting to know my research subject, and to establish a relationship of trust and mutual respect with local fans. As Wylie (2005) and Murphy (2011) suggested, the practice of walking is a very useful method of geographical examination. By walking around the stadium

before and after the matches I was able to witness the casual interactions and processes that occur during match days among different populations. Initially, during the first observations, I didn't even enter the stadium, but I focused on the external space and the interactions that took place before and after the match. Once I had collected enough external data, I decided to go in and follow the matches together with the local fans, establishing the first contacts and having the first chats.

Regarding the interviews, I opted for different approaches depending on who I was interviewing. With the Utrecht fans, for example, establishing contacts was not that complicated, as we were present at the stadium during the matches, so several conversations took place with people sitting close to me and with whom I have kept in touch. Many suggested that I contact the SVFCU whose board members turned out to be very helpful and friendly. For the first league match of the 2022/2023 season, I was even given a ticket to watch the match from the SVFCU stands and was given a tour of their clubhouse inside the stadium. In order to reach other groups, such as the KNVB and the Football and Audit Team, I sent emails explaining the purpose of my thesis since reaching them directly, as one can imagine, is not an easy task.

Subsequently, again by email, I received the contacts of expert representatives followed by an exchange of messages and finally the interviews took place via teleconference. Since I had already established spontaneous and close relationships with local fans at the stadium, interviews with the fans turned out to be more informal, and I was even invited to the homes of the interviewees where I was warmly greeted. Instead with the experts, the first contacts occurred online, like also the final interview, which was more formal and I also felt a little nervous because I was interviewing people with whom I had never had any close contact and who also hold important positions. The interviews with the fans, on the other hand, took place face-to-face, not at the stadium but instead I was kindly invited directly to their home. The face-to-face interviews were the most spontaneous, also because people were in their own homes and were therefore more at ease, the online ones more formal and detached, nevertheless there was still eye contact, but it was the first time that we saw each other's faces. However, Novick (2008) argues that there is no difference in the quality of data collected with technological tools than that collected in person, Moreover, as already explained above, programmes such as Skype or Teams allow us to conduct video chats that break down visual barriers. As far as Utrecht police are concerned, this interview was the most complicated one to arrange. At the beginning I tried to establish contacts directly with the police present at the stadium, but as one could imagine, police agents were on duty and thus not willing to give interviews, nevertheless they told me to make a formal request at the police station. I followed their suggestion, but as days passed by without hearing back from them, I had to make the request over again, multiple times. Finally, after about a month of attempts I was contacted by a football police agent from the Utrecht department who kindly invited me to the central station to carry out the interview.

The criterion for selection required interviewed supporters to be in possession of an FC Utrecht season card. This criterion excluded those fans who did not regularly attend matches and therefore could have a misleading/partial representation of the facts. Moreover, I included fans that were seated in different sectors of the stadium in order to have a broader representation of the fan population. Regarding the interviews carried out with state actors and non-state actors, the criterion was that they had to be employees of some federation or association that plays a prominent role in the security process and had to occupy important positions within them.

Interviews range between 15 to 50 minutes, all interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed with the only exceptions of spontaneous chats with local fans or security personnel during matches. Once the interviews were transcribed, I began to analyse them one by one reading them several times. When I had finished doing this, I started sorting the data of every interview into small categories, creating several clusters. After following this process for each interview, I looked for common categories among them and grouped the opinions of the various parties under each category, looking for similar or conflicting viewpoints. Afterwards, I collected some quotes that did not belong to categories that emerged from the interviews; however they are still relevant since they show the distinctiveness and the exceptions of every party interviewed.

In total, 10 interviews were conducted, five (six counting the board member of SVFCU) with fans, one with a member of the SVFCU board, one with the head of competitions of the KNVB, one with the project manager of the 'Auditten Voetbal en Veiligheid', one with a FC Utrecht steward and lastly one with a football police officer. I carried out interviews until I thought I had found my point of saturation. When the emerging themes resulting from the interviews were similar and no further information was added I decided to stop the interviewee process and I started examining the multitude of data in my possession. Guest et al. (2006) argued that data saturation can be achieved by conducting no more than 6 interviews, nevertheless, as suggested by Dibley (2011) in order to find data saturation, we should think in terms of rich (quality) and thick (quantity). Having more interviews does not necessarily help in finding data saturation, especially if the quality of those is not sufficient (Burmeister, & Aitken, 2012).

Interviews at the stadium did not occur (with the only exception of the one carried out with the steward), these were scheduled at a later time, both via video calls and face to face, depending on the availability of the interviewee. As can be imagined, the Utrecht fans present at the stadium just want to enjoy the game, a quick chat is part of the atmosphere and it is legitimate, but other than that, conducting on-site interviews was not possible. Those who agreed to be interviewed were extremely helpful, none of them expressed their willingness to remain anonymous, despite this, for ethical reasons, I decided not to include their names in the study so they would not incur future consequences, pseudonyms will be used in the result section. This consideration was also taken with regard to the fact that most of the interviewees

spoke on behalf of complex and numerous associations such as KNVB, FC Utrecht, and SVFCU.

Nevertheless, no minors were interviewed; the research population was composed of 6 males aged between 24 and 50 years old and one female in her 20s.

Those who did not wish to be interviewed had their reasons; for example police officers on duty during the matches could not participate in the interview because they were working, other fans instead were either not interested or, according to them, did not have enough knowledge about security measures to participate in the interview.

5. Results

In the result section the key results of the qualitative research will be presented. First, the physical and social display of Galgenwaard during FC Utrecht match days will be presented. Secondly, I will analyze how local supporters make use of the physical and social environment of the stadium itself by focusing particularly on possible conflicts that might arise with diverse social groups. Finally, the sense of safety of local supporters will be researched both within and outside Galgenwaard, by taking into consideration the emotions, memories, and past experiences of the fans interviewed.

5.1. Sub 1- How do the physical and social spaces of Galgenwaard and its surroundings look like during FC Utrecht matches?

5.1.1. Physical space

The physical space of Galgenwaard and its surroundings contrasts quite significantly with the rest of the city. In primis, as already mentioned before, the stadium is surrounded by large streets with up to 4 lanes each. The reason behind it is to facilitate the flow of traffic caused by the fans, and not only, who decide to reach the stadium by car. There are parking spots reserved for cars on the west side and on the north side of the stadium, moreover, a big garage was recently built within the stadium following the last refurbishment. Nevertheless, the cycle-friendly layout, typical of the city of Utrecht is still visible also at Galgenwaard. Indeed, bicycle lanes surround the whole stadium and multiple parking spots reserved for cyclists can easily be found all around the stadium. The majority of fans still reach the stadium by bike, also due to its vicinity to the heart of the city. For those who do not opt for a car or bike, the stadium can be reached by bus and tram with stops positioned in the vicinity of the infrastructure.

The presence of large spacious areas around the stadium gives its users a sense of open space, which, according to the literature, has positive effects on the perception of safety of individuals (Stamps, 2010). An example of this is the large square positioned on the north-west side of the stadium, in front of the sector called 'City Side'. During match-days, there are numerous stands in the square, mainly food stands and sponsors who give away free gadgets. Most of the time there are also stands dedicated to the entertainment of children. For example, on one occasion they put up a goal post and children played football while their parents enjoyed some snacks, while on another, the square was equipped with gaming spots where youngsters could play videogames. The structure of the stadium itself, with the corners between each side left open, also gives its users a sense of open space. These corners accommodate different types of businesses and offices, in the corner between the away side and the family side, for example, there is a popular pub that attracts numerous local fans even hours before the match starts. The south-side of the stadium is delimited by the Kromme Rijn river, and it's dedicated mainly to walkable

green areas; literature suggests that when green areas are well maintained within a city, they have positive effects on the users (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). On the other side of the river there are multiple sport fields dedicated mainly to football and tennis which are used by sport enthusiasts also during match-days.

The stadium inside is composed of four distinctive sides, respectively the Bunnik Side, the Zuidtribune (family side), the Noordtribune, and the City Side; separated by the open corners which accommodate offices and businesses. The stadium can host up to 23.750 spectators, each sector is equipped with services such as restaurants and bars. The Noordtribune is furnished with business seats and skyboxes, moreover, on the 4th and 5th floor there is also the FC Utrecht Museum. The Noordtribune is where there are usually family seats, the left end is adjacent to the away side. The Bunnik Side is the standing side of the stadium, home to the most passionate local fans. Interestingly inside the Bunnik Side, there is the fan clubhouse, composed of two big rooms where fans gather before and after the games to enjoy drinks and music together. Lastly, the City Side is positioned in front of the Bunnik Side; part of this side, the one on the right end, is reserved for the away fans. Both the Bunnik Side and the City Side are separated from the pitch by an antitank ditch for security reasons. The presence of CCTV cameras is highly visible both inside and outside the stadium; the control center is positioned on the higher part of the Zuidtribune.

5.1.2. Social space

Having described how the physical space of Galgenwaard and its surroundings appears, it is time to analyze the social space of the stadium during match-days. As already mentioned before, FC Utrecht attracts around 20.000 fans every time the game is played at home. Clearly, home fans are the biggest social group present in and around the stadium, nevertheless a multitude of other social groups are also visible. First of all, inside the stadium, hundreds of away fans are also visible. Nevertheless, during my observations I was not able to witness their presence outside, the reason behind that was well explained by the project manager of the 'Auditten Voetbal en Veiligheid' who stated:

"Most of the time there is what we call 'combiregeiling', where the away supporters they have to go to the club with a bus or, yeah, mainly by bus and they have to go to a point where the bus leaves, so they can go there by their own transport as to enter the bus at a specific place and then they go to Utrecht, there they go to a parking spot..... there the buses are parked and they can enter the stadium by a tunnel that goes underneath the parking spot. It's a very long tunnel and then you enter the away stand directly, which is from a security perspective quite nice. Because you know they can't go outside of the tunnel, they get directly to their own stand and when, of course, the fences are closed, they cannot leave the stands, so it's quite, it's quite good".

Furthermore, all around the stadium there are traffic wardens who control if people who park their cars around the stadium have a permit. Stewards and security personnel are present both within and outside the stadium, they are appointed directly by FC Utrecht, and they are easily recognizable due to their

fluorescent vests. Outside the stadium the police force is always present; there are horse and bike patrols, agents standing around and for medium or high risk matches also the ME (mobile unit) is deployed. Interestingly, before the Utrecht-Fortuna Sittard match, I was walking around the stadium when, turning a corner, I noticed a police van. All this would seem normal but what caught my attention was that in the van there weren't any men in uniform, rather they looked like undercover agents disguised as normal fans. Intrigued by this fact I later asked the project manager of Auditten Voetbal en Veiligheid if this was common practice and he answered:

“Yeah. Most of the time, police departments they, they have spotters so they try to spot within a crowd who are the more heavy hooligans or the more heavy supporters and they tend to keep an eye on them and it's quite common every... I don't know how many there are every match or something but when...we go to the match and we have an audit and always one or two or maybe a little bit more of those spotters by the police in in the crowds, and supporters normally they also know who they are because they're either known or seen more often or not the typical hardcore supportive from a club especially if, you know, when the group is quite close, then you know, they tend to know who those supporters are. But they are normally you know, they can walk around a little bit more freely within a crowd because they know a lot of people don't know who they are, don't see them as police officers. So the.... so, it's quite common that they are in a stadium”.

It is important to stress the fact that in the Netherlands, and thus also in Utrecht, state actor parties and private parties have different duties and roles at football matches. This distinction is based upon the stadium boundaries; briefly speaking, the police should be held responsible for the area outside the stadium, while the club, FC Utrecht, for the inside. As explained by the head of competition of the KNVB: *“The police is in control outside of the stadium, so in Holland we call the club business the civil party and the police of course is a government party. Civil party cannot interfere of the open places, like the whole park square or something, they can only, civil parties like us but also like the club they can only be held responsible for the area they own. Like in Utrecht, the club they rent the stadium and they ran the parking and shop form the stadium. So, they are responsible for the safety and security in that area. But, if you cross the road, that's not their responsibilities anymore”.*

Finally, it is possible also to encounter individuals who are present at the stadium during match-days even though they do not belong to the social groups previously described. This is due to the presence of businesses and offices in and around the stadium which are not related to FC Utrecht; for example, I witnessed many times people getting out from the gym present inside Galgenwaard with their sporting bags, struggling to reach their bikes due to the multitude of fans arriving in the stadium at the same time.

5.2. Sub 2- How do local supporters make use of the physical and social spaces of Galgenwaard during FC Utrecht matches?

5.2.1 Outside Galgenwaard

In Utrecht, it is a common sight to see supporters of all ages arriving at the stadium well before kick-off, particularly on dry days. Whether they are young or old, with families or alone, most supporters choose to travel to the stadium by bike. It is not unusual to see a group of cyclists, all wearing white and red scarves and shouting "UUUU" to each other, making their way towards Galgenwaard. This same chant is also heard inside the stadium when the team takes to the field, creating a sense of pride and unity among the fans. Overall, this shows the strong sense of community and belonging that Utrecht supporters have towards their team. The urban area around Galgenwaard gets busy very quickly, most people have chit-chats in little groups, composed usually of 4 or 5 people. The atmosphere of the fans is usually very relaxed, especially before the game. Outside the stadium different type of supporters make use of different spaces, families and kids are mostly present in the square in front of the City Side sector. Here they buy snacks in the various kiosks, they can sit at the tables and children can play with each other, various activities are usually organized for the youngsters. On the corner between the City Side and the Zuidtribune there is a popular bar mostly used by supporters from the Bunnik Side, wearing clothes that are typical of their own groups, mostly black, here they gather in small groups while enjoying a beer and a cigarette, it is common to hear them singing together. To reach the entrance of the Bunnik Side, you have to walk through the green areas surrounding the Kromme Rijn. In these areas, small groups of fans gather together and drink beers that they have brought with them from home. As explained by a local fan called Floris: *"You can just get around and chat and maybe have some beers before the game. And that's, I mean, that's why the park next to the stadium is quite nice because you can just stand there on greenery which is just a better atmosphere"*. It is also quite common, to witness fans urinating in the bushes close to the river, even when police pass close buy to petrol, but it seems like the latter are very tolerant of certain bad behaviors and they close an eye. When I interviewed the police, I asked the agent if this relaxed approach was their tactic to deal with supporters and he stated: *"I think that that's the way the Dutch police maybe is, more deescalating and more having chit chat and we are also civilians and citizens of the Netherlands, so it's easier if you just talk with people and that's the quest of the football police to just talk with people but also the mobile squad, for nowadays, they also got instructed to just talk with the people and if it is necessary we will act, but in front of it we will just talk with the people."* After passing the entrance of the Bunnik Side, if you continue walking you will reach the passage way to the Noordtribune. The area in front the sector is usually very busy with a lot of local fans shopping in the official FC Utrecht store which is positioned on the ground floor and accessible to everyone. Interestingly, in the Bunnik Side sector, a lot of fans entered the stadium well in advance, even two hours before the game started. I was not sure of the reason behind it till I interviewed a

board member of SVFCU who gave me elucidations regarding a peculiar characteristic of Utrecht's stadium. In fact, in the Bunnik Side there is the supporters club house, its particularity lies in the fact that *"it's the only one (in the country) when you can go through the tribune"*. Briefly, Utrecht's supporters who have their tickets or season cards can enter the sector directly from the club house. The member of the board continued to describe what the clubhouse looks like: *"We have two parts actually, the British pub and something like more disco, and in the disco side is more like house music and in the British side is more like Dutch music and pop music and on good days both sides are really full and everybody is making fun and drinking beers, and from those parts you can go to the stadium"*. Fans are very enthusiast regarding the supporter's club house, as explained by one of them named Tim: *"it's sick man because, you know, you're all you're with the boys like, you know, I mean, if you're in there in the clubhouse, like my dad, I'm pretty sure he knows, like 300 people..... we can just go there whenever you want. Yeah, it's perfect. They really did that well."*

Interestingly, on multiple occasions I witnessed volunteers wearing SVFCU vests collecting all the rubbish, especially glass bottles, left from the supporters on the ground. This operation starts right before the kick-off, when the majority of the fans is already inside, and it continues until the whole area has been cleaned up and then the volunteers enter the stadium to enjoy the remaining part of the match.

5.2.2. Inside Galgenwaard

Inside the stadium, the behaviors and actions carried out by local fans differ from section to section, as explained by Tim: *"The very long parts like next to the Bunnik Side and the main tribune that's really for families, you can just sit if you want to sit, relax, you can do it there. But if you want to stand and you want to, you know, just some guys with a lot of emotions so they will scream, some will throw beers, and if you're more fanatical, you can do it, you will stand on the Bunnik Side."* He then continued: *"we have a lot of hardcore fans like the Bunnik Side can have like, I don't even know, like 7000 people and they pretty much all sing"*. Therefore, it is clear that depending on the sector, different activities are performed by supporters. I was present both in the Bunnik Side as well as in the family sector. The main difference is that, on the Bunnik Side, people can stand, and in fact, the majority of fans present there stand for the whole match singing along with their peers. Moreover, behaviours that are prohibited inside the stadium are still performed in the Bunnik Side even though the stewards are still present. For example, I witnessed a lot of fans smoking either cigarettes or joints even though the whole stadium is a no-smoke area, in addition I also experienced individuals selling drugs, especially cocaine, to fellow fans. As explained by a fan called Job it is not difficult to hide illegal stuff on you and bring it inside: *"I mean, if you want to smuggle drugs or fireworks inside, just put it in your underpants your underwear. You can get it in its they've never touched it. They touch your pockets, your legs, they just feel that part, but they don't touch your private areas"*. Moreover, he also added: *"And I also know that the home supporters also like the guys who are kind of*

representative of the supporters who are there as like they're in close contact with the club do a lot of the atmosphere actions, I've seen them tell 'Yo, they are checking on drugs, they got a drug dog there, put your drugs away, put your fireworks away, either drop it now or put it somewhere where they cannot find it'."

Therefore, preventing illegal objects to come inside the stadium becomes even more difficult because fans speak among themselves, and they are well informed about the ploys used by the security personnel. In the Bunnik Side it is also very frequent, especially when FC Utrecht is losing, to assist at beer throwing into the pitch and sometimes some pyros are lit, but I only witnessed it once. On the other hand, the family side is definitely quieter and calmer, here fans are obliged to take a seat, nobody smokes, and fans are rarely loud. Interestingly, if they do scream it is mostly versus the Bunnik Side, especially when the game gets suspended because of beer throwing. This recent trend was noticed also by the head of competitions of the KNVB who stated: *"Well, this is a new phenomenon since pandemic, we have seen it for the first time, well, we saw it but not in the way we are doing right now"*. Job was particularly annoying by this negative tendency: *"Don't throw shit on the pitch, it's very simple. Just boo the team, do what you want but don't throw shit on the pitch, it's costing the club a lot of money, you're bringing yourself into problems and you're annoying 20.000 other supporters which just want to watch the game. And it happens every single game now."*

5.3. Sub 3- What are the perceptions of local supporters regarding sense of security at the stadium?

The following section delves into the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of the local fans who regularly attend the matches at Galgenwaard stadium.

To gain insights into how FC Utrecht fans perceive their safety at Galgenwaard stadium, I conducted interviews asking fans about their experiences before, during, and after match-days, as well as their feelings towards the stadium and its positive and negative aspects. In addition, I also inquired about the fans' past experiences at the stadium to provide context for their perceptions of safety.

5.3.1 Perception of safety of local fans at Galgenwaard

The experiences of Utrecht fans at Galgenwaard stadium regarding sense of security are generally positive. Overall, the majority of fans are satisfied with the security plan implemented during match-days. As declared by Tim: *"I think they've done it pretty well, I've never really felt unsafe"* he then added: *"I would say that Galgenwaard in general is one of the best protected stadium, not that much action happens in general"*. The same statement was also confirmed by Floris: *"I think it's handled quite well, the police does quite well, it never escalates too much you know like in the bigger cities, even though Utrecht is still a big club, because the local police handle it quite well"*. Nevertheless, sometimes, as explained by Job, there can be critical situations : *"there's definitely times that it is unsafe, of course I'm a Utrecht supporter so for me*

there isn't really that much problems because I don't have problems with anybody, you know, but I've definitely seen hooligans run around the stadium trying to get into a fight and then police came on horses and yeah, I've seen that kind of stuff that was like this, you know, you feel the tension". Job continued: *"And now I'll probably be like not really safe, but I'm not scared, but when you're younger, you're very afraid".* Interestingly Job also pointed out how a massive presence of police might affect his sense of safety: *"me as a supporter who has nothing to do with it, and has just to go to his normal seat, I don't want to see too much police because then I might start feeling unsafe because then I think 'Alright they are expecting shit to go down'... and I don't want it to be more because then I start being suspicious".* He then continued by suggesting that one of the reasons behind this fear is to be wrongfully confused with a hooligan if disorders happen: *"Look, I don't look that different from these hooligans, I also have a black jacket on, I just have nothing to do with them. So big chance that I'll get hit if I walked there. So this isn't necessarily safe."* The above statements confirm the elaborate social identity model of crowd behaviour theory previously discussed in the theoretical framework (Drury and Reicher 2000). Conversely, another fan named Niek declared: *"I personally I don't feel threatened by the presence of police. Actually, I think it comforts me a little because I think it's also a deterrent for escalation."*

5.3.2. Emotions

An aspect that emerged from almost all the interviews with the fans, is that the first people to have introduced them to the stadium were family members. For example, Tim stated: *"I came in the club, you know following the club with my dad when I was five years old I think, whenever there was a season card available from his friends you know I could go with him or you know just buy a ticket back in the day".* Similarly, Floris said: *"The first one that brought me to the stadium was my brother",* and Siem also added: *"when I was younger, I always used to attend with my uncle which was a good fan".* An older fan, who I will refer to as Colin, proudly stated that he regularly attends FC Utrecht matches with his daughter: *"She's 9 years old now. She was, first time, she was two or three and now we have the season ticket together. So we go every home game".* Therefore, it is clear that attending a match is closely correlated also with past and present familiar connections.

The stadium itself contributes to building a strong sense of community among the local fans, as can be deduced from a statement given by Floris: *"The stadium itself, for me, now that I actually live in Utrecht and not in Woerden anymore it's part of being an Utrechenaar, because usually when there is a game you can see it everywhere in the city no matter where you are you can see the Galgenwaard lit up, so whenever I drive past even if there is no game I feel like, you know, that's part of being an Utrechenaar, someone from Utrecht, so it's part of the identity of being an Utrechenaar".* In a similar vein, Tim added: *"when you walk in the stadium on match days, is always a special feeling, that's you know, is like second home".* The declarations given by those fans confirm Bale's findings: stadiums function as a symbol of topophilia for

local supporters (1990) and can help to improve social cohesion within a community (Gaffney, 2008).

Nevertheless, not every fan has this particular place attachment towards Galgenwaard, as Siem declared:

“Well for me it just feels like any other soccer stadium there is, I’m just excited, I think I have some very fun memories on just watching the game”.

5.3.3. Positive Elements

Regarding the positive elements of Galgenwaard, some fans were more enthusiastic about the layout of the stadium, others stressed the fact that away supporters are well segregated, while others also mentioned the services provided at Galgenwaard.

Floris is particularly delighted by the green areas adjacent to the stadium: *“I think positive outside is, well I already mentioned this, but the park and definitely the water that goes through the park. And also, where you often park your car is at the swimming pool a little bit further ahead it’s separated from the stadium so that’s a lot more, when people come to park their car, when they leave it’s a lot more calm down and friendly. So the fact that it’s separated the parking spaces and the green areas from the stadium is very much a positive influence I think”.* As Kuo and Sullivan demonstrated, urban green areas can enhance safety by providing a space for relaxation, promoting social interactions and community, and offering opportunities to enjoy nature (2001).

Siem is satisfied regarding the measures implemented to isolate away fans from local supporters: *“I think that especially during a match, there’s a good system where they separate the inside the In and the Out fans, which is good”.* As already mentioned before, Galgenwaard is provided with an underground tunnel from which away supporters access their designated sector directly from the parking spot reserved for them.

Tim and a board member of the SVFCU are very happy about the presence of the fan clubhouse within the Bunnik Side. As Tim said: *“what I really like about Utrecht stadium in specific is the supporters home, which is like in the stadium, which is very rare, I really like that”.* He then continued: *“Yeah, it’s sick man because, you know, usually what other clubs have to deal with you know, you’re all you’re with the boys like, you know, I mean, if you’re in there in the clubhouse, like my dad, I’m pretty sure he knows, like 300 people. So you just can go there for way ahead of the match, but let’s say you are from Ajax, I mean, you have to go, way ahead of the match you have to go like one, two kilometers away or like, you know, some time away from the stadium. And then you have to walk all the way there and maybe after you have to go walk back. But we can just, we can just go there wherever you want. Yeah, it’s perfect. They really did that well”.* The board member of the SVFCU also highlighted the fact that the presence of the club house functions also as a deterrent for possible conflicts: *“It’s good because before the game, you have all the guys inside, they eat something, they drink something, sometimes a little bit too much, and there are no problems in the city and after the game there are also no problems in the city because most of them stay and doing something, have*

talks about the game and they go back home in little groups and before they were 2000, 3000, 4000 they went go out and there were some problems in the city, but now it changed because, and also the police is very happy about the way we do it now”.

5.3.4. Negative Elements

During the interviews, some negativities about Galgenwaard also appeared. Mostly, fans mentioned problems regarding the position of the stadium and its layout both inside as well as outside, moreover, some of them complained about the security checks that happen before entering the stadium.

According to Siem, the stadium is not well-located: *“it's just it's kind of weirdly located Galgenwaard in my opinion because it's not really in a pedestrian zone, so to say, so you're quite close to a provincial road, which is quite crazy”*. Prioritizing cars over bikes or pedestrians in street layouts negatively affects people's safety perception (Koohsari et al, 2013). Siem also continued: *“ the surrounding physical space, I always used to cycle, from my previous home to the university I used to cycle past Galgenwaard a lot, you have the back road thingy on the side which was okay, just don't go through there when it's raining because it used to be very muddy, and there weren't really any proficient lighting on some areas, there were some very dark corners to say”*. As discussed in the theoretical section, people may choose to avoid poorly lit areas and take alternative routes (Rahm et al., 2021). In addition, Floris further commented: *“the area is very industrial in a sense. So, you know, it's all concrete, if they make the whole around the stadium more green like a park I think that would be better”*. As previously explained, well maintained green areas improves the individual's sense of safety (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). Floris was also critical about the presence of military buildings in front of the stadium: *“ I forgot to mention, maybe might be interesting is that one other part that kind of separates the stadium from the rest of the city is that right across from the stadium is like a military arsenal thing and that does not help the vibe, to build a good vibe for the stadium if there is a military arsenal right across the street, you know ”*.

Tim did not mention any negativities regarding the outside of the stadium, however he identified a physical element that can be improved within Galgenwaard. Indeed, the fan is annoyed by the antitank ditch that separates Bunnik Side from the football ground: *“there's like, I always call it the canal, but there is a bigger wall right on the field, it's not as bad as with like Feyenoord where you literally have a death pit if you fall in it you will break you're legs and stuff, It's like, you know, where you can walk in there right? It's pretty cool but also , I would, you know, it would be pretty sick if there wasn't that you could just literally stand next to the pitch, like really close, because we always have like three, four meters in there”*. On the one hand, it can be said that the removal of the antitank ditch will improve fans' experience of the game. On the other, it must be said that the antitank ditch was constructed for safety reasons, indeed it provides rapid escape routes and prevents pitch invasion (Van Dam, 2000).

In addition, some fans were perplexed by the process of security checks when entering the stadium. As Siem declared: *“I think that the checking that occurs when you enter the stadium, sometimes it seems very random, so easy to get picked to be patted down or not. I think that there’s a lot of possible improvements, especially with the modern age technology that we have, so perhaps do that in a more systematic manner instead of just randomly checking people. I know that if you go a major Ajax competition for example, I think that they use metal detectors”*. In a similar vein, Niek added: *“I think the fireworks, this kind of things with also the visitors and the Bunnik side maybe they could like check that more maybe they should search everybody that comes in. Like it’s actually pretty weird that I’ve never been searched for like, I don’t know, maybe fireworks, explosives or whatsoever because it’s a big gathering of people”*.

5.3.5. Past Experiences

In my interviews with fans, many recounted witnessing challenging situations both inside and outside Galgenwaard. Some fans recalled incidents that occurred several years ago, while others cited more recent occurrences, including some from the previous season. According to Ferraro, how safe a person feels can be influenced by their own unique experiences (1995).

In particular, Job still remembers incidents that happened at least 10 years earlier during a home game against ADO: *“There were multiple occasions, the worst one was versus ADO Den Haag, this was like, I don't know, 15 years ago, 10 years ago. And the away side, the away supporters, they both broke to the gates and they have like these walking paths beneath the stance, they broke through it, and they were walking and running beneath where I was sitting. And I was like, 10 years old. So I was I was scared to death, I was so afraid... like I go to a place where kids, families, there's just normal people there who have nothing to do with the violence. And then it gets so close that you feel unsafe.”* Nevertheless, he later explained how he was traumatized by the episode because at that time he was just a kid, nowadays he does not feel this tension anymore: *“And now I’ll probably be like not really safe but I’m not scared, but when you're younger, you're very afraid.”* However, fights, or rather attempts to fight, still happen under the eyes of families, as discussed by the previous fan: *“I know that a couple of years ago, it was against Twente, this also happened, the Bunnik Side tried to get to the away fans and they were trying to bash through the gates. And they were doing like right underneath a children's stand where just families and kids are, and all these kids, they were scared and traumatized and Utrecht had to formally apologize offered him free tickets for another game, because these hooligans really messed up their experience.”* Job's childhood experiences and recent incidents involving Twente suggest that children may be particularly susceptible to trauma when witnessing disorderly behavior. As a result, both children and their parents may develop a reluctance to attend stadiums due to lingering negative memories.

Similarly, Siem also remembers an adverse occurrence verified in his adolescence: *“when I was younger, I used to attend, and I didn't really quite grasp the concept of being a cool fan of one singular football team.*

So I would attend an FC Utrecht match whilst it was FC Utrecht-PSV I think, and I was more of a fan of PSV, so I wore a PSV cap whilst not being in the outside (away) section, and I remember that I was like, I don't know think 12, 13, 14 or so. And that like people would curse me to fuck out even though I was a minor for wearing a cap of the outside team in the inside section which was kind of strange".

In addition, Colin cited an episode that happened last season when FC Utrecht played against Vitesse: *" , I was with my daughter, she had a little thing with cookies, and she came to the stadium and then the security said: 'no you can't take it in', so you are gonna ask a girl, 9 years old, to throw away the cookies, but you are not gonna say to the Vitesse guys to throw away the fireworks, so that's no good. So, then I go to the board and I say: 'hey what's this? Is not normal!' and I explained the situation and then they said: 'You're right, it's not good, we did it wrong' and then they tried to make it up and then my daughter got an invitation to go with the referee on the field, so that's good. But that's just nice, but they actually have to think another way, you have to think before it happens, you're not gonna take some cookies from a little girl when you don't get the fireworks from the big guys. Because they are the problem, not the little girl. And it's difficult to make them to understand that".* Also Job remembered the match against Vitesse: *"Vitesse was terrible. I don't know what the result of the game was, I think Vitesse was even winning the game and then they just decided to throw pyros to the pitch and to the Utrecht supporters which was fucking insane".*

Furthermore, Niek witnessed a critical situation at the beginning of last season after a match: *"In the beginning we went out of the stadium on the side, on the same side where the visitors also come out and I don't remember which game but it was last season it got pretty fighter with throwing of beer bottles and police with forces had to step in. So that was kind of aggressive we were just like 'okay, we need to get the hell out of here'".* The supporter later continued by stating that since that occasion, he began to go out from another exit of the stadium and did not experience disorders outside anymore. A fact that emerges from the interviews with the fans is that disorders outside the stadium, whenever they occur, always happen after the match, not before; as highlighted by Job: *"There's never been anything that the police had to get into before a game in the 15 or 16 years that I went to the stadium".*

Despite those negative past experiences, fans are still enthusiastic to attend games at Galgenwaard, as expressed by Siem: *"like the most recent match that we went to, was just with friends when I was a bit older, it's a completely different experience from when I was younger, because I'm so enamored by the entire concept of seeing a game live, it's way better than on TV, you really get the crowd and stuff going. Of course, you always have Bunnik Side chanting weird stuff, but besides that, it's pretty good".* In a similar vein. Tim declared: *"I just love it, I know a lot of friends there, you know, drinking beers with the lads is always good, and you know when you go European away days you go somewhere, so yeah, the club wins means a lot, it's fun".*

6. Conclusion

In the previous chapters, it was analyzed how Galgenwaard stadium is a particular urban area within the city of Utrecht. Different populations make use of the spaces of Galgenwaard simultaneously during FC Utrecht matches, influencing at the same time the physical and social space of the stadium and its surroundings. Previous research on football stadiums and football fandom focused mostly on a small percentage of fans, those seeking violence, the so-called 'hooligans', leaving unheard the majority of fans that regularly attend matches. In the literature section, it was discussed how an urban space is physical and social at the same time and therefore contested. Moreover, different users of the urban space experience safety in different ways, their perception can be influenced by social and physical aspects. This qualitative research aimed to explore how fans experience safety in a stadium and its surrounding areas during a match. Different populations that are present at Galgenwaard during match days have also been included, such as the football police and the stewards.

Direct observations were carried out at Galgenwaard stadium prior to, during, and after FC Utrecht games. The stadium was even cited as an example in the Taylor Report (1989) due to its safety protocols and modern design. The stadium is situated in the southeast area of Utrecht city, within a distance of three kilometers from the city center; adjacent to the Science Park neighborhood, which houses Utrecht University and several research institutions. It is surrounded by large roads for car traffic, but also has bicycle lanes and parking spots for bikes. The stadium is located in a spacious area with green spaces and a large square where fans can gather before matches. The social space of Galgenwaard during match-days includes home and away fans, stewards and security personnel, traffic wardens, police officers (including undercover spotters), and individuals not necessarily related to FC Utrecht who are present due to the presence of businesses and offices in and around the stadium.

Local supporters make use of the physical and social spaces of Galgenwaard during FC Utrecht matches in different ways. Most supporters choose to travel to the stadium by bike, and the atmosphere is relaxed, with families and kids mostly present in the square in front of the City Side sector, while supporters from the Bunnik Side gather in small groups at the popular bar or in the green areas surrounding the Kromme Rijn. It is also common to witness fans urinating in the bushes close to the river, and police seem to have a relaxed approach towards certain bad behaviors. Inside the stadium, behaviors and actions carried out by local fans differ from section to section, with the Bunnik Side being the most enthusiastic, where supporters can enter the sector directly from the supporters club house, which has a British pub and disco section.

Local fans were interviewed to examine their opinions and encounters, both positive and negative, regarding the stadium. The research discovered that fans have varying perceptions and experiences of safety, influenced by factors such as age, seating position, past experiences, and memories. For instance, some fans may feel intimidated by the boisterous Bunnik Side supporters, while others enjoy singing along with them and passionately cheering on their team. Furthermore, children and teenagers may be more prone to experiencing trauma if violent clashes occur between rival supporters.

The focus of this study was to provide a response to the research question: *How do local supporters experience the sense of safety in and around Galgenwaard stadium at FC Utrecht matches?* The findings of this qualitative research indicate that supporters of FC Utrecht have varying experiences of Galgenwaard. Some consider Galgenwaard as their second home, a symbol of the city, part of being an Utrechenaar. While others don't give particular attention to the stadium but just want to enjoy the match. Overall the majority of local supporters seem satisfied level of safety in and around Galgenwaard, even though some suggested some improvements, especially regarding the security checks before entering the stadium. The opinions and perspectives of local fans obtained through this research could prove useful if any modifications to Galgenwaard or its surroundings are planned.

Limitations and future outlooks

The research was conducted in a limited time frame, during the second part of season 21/22 and the first part of season 22/23, thus results are confined to this particular period and different outcomes might be found by taking into consideration different seasons. Secondly, even though my research population includes various parties such as the KNVB, Utrecht police, and FC Utrecht fans, it was not heterogeneous from a gender point of view. Indeed, out of 10 interviews, 9 were conducted with males, further research might include more voices and opinions coming from females thus giving a more diverse and complete perspective. Moreover, this study only collected interviews coming from an adult population, minors were not included, also for ethical considerations. Still, from the interviews, it emerged that those who might feel more threatened at the stadium are kids present with their families, therefore it seems logical to try to include also their opinions in future research. In addition, future research conducted at Galgenwaard might also encompass opinions and beliefs of away fans regarding the security process, since, as explained in the result section, their freedom of movement is strictly restricted when compared to Utrecht fans.

Nevertheless, findings that will help to prevent, or at least limit, disorders in the future can be derived from this study. Primarily, investing in good infrastructure is extremely important to prevent disorders and facilitate the work of the police. As we have seen, the redevelopment of Galgenwaard stadium clearly put a

limit to the constant disorders that Utrecht fans were causing in the past. The presence of the tunnel for the access of away fans has been demonstrated to be a very efficient measure that should thus be replicated in other stadiums in the country. Moreover, the presence of a fan clubhouse from which home supporters can directly access the stadium was also seen to be a very efficient security measure that not only satisfies the police and security personnel but is also acclaimed by the home fans who enjoy spending time there before and after the match. As explained by a board member of the SVFCU, the Utrecht fan association is not the only one in the country that has its own clubhouse, the peculiarity of the Utrecht case is its accessibility: *“there are a few more, but it’s the only one when you can go through the tribune”*. Indeed, when the board showed me the clubhouse, I was impressed by the fact that you could easily see the pitch from the windows and access the Bunnik Side directly from the pub by scanning your ticket through the turnstiles. Therefore, I strongly believe that this system should be replicated in other Dutch stadiums also due to its efficiency in limiting possible disorders.

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