# **QUEERING FOOTBALL:**

Addressing Homophobia at Mega-Sport Events

# EUROPEAN NETWORKING CONFERENCE

# 17–18 November 2017

University of Ljubljana Faculty of Sport Slovenia

# **CONFERENCE REPORT**

# Editorial

# Content

### Dear readers,

the following report provides a summary of the main statements and discussions of the conference **»Queering Football: Addressing Homophobia at Mega-Sport Events«.** It was the closing event of a joint two-years project called **»Queering Football – Tackling Homophobia and Promoting Anti-Discrimination around Major Sport Events« co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ sports program.** 

I wish you an interesting and insightful reading! Nikola Staritz (project coordinator)



#### DAY 1

Introduction – About the conference		3
1.	Welcome & Opening	4
2.	<b>Panel Discussion:</b> Tackling Homophobia in European Football: Progress Made and Challenges Ahead	5
3.	<b>Panel Discussion:</b> FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia: A Chance to Combat Homophobia and Ensure Human Rights?	7
4.	NGO-Fair	9
	DAY 2	
5.	Workshop sessions	10
	<b>Workshop 1:</b> Grassroots activism: Good practices, Initiatives and Lessons to be learned	10
	<b>Workshop 2:</b> Agency – Alliances to enhance Human Rights around Mega-Sports Events	11
	<b>Workshop 3:</b> Intersectionality – Racism, sexism, transphobia, exclusion – joint struggles?	13
6.	<b>Panel Discussion:</b> Future Perspectives: Towards a sports culture without homophobia? Sport against discrimination	14
Sp	eakers & Facilitators	16
-	pout the project	
	ntact	

### Introduction

### About the conference

On the weekend of November 17/18 representatives from international and national sports organizations, grassroots organizations, NGOs, clubs, athletes, LGBT fan groups, activists and academics came together in Ljubljana for a two-day-conference hosted by SPOLINT and VIDC-fairplay to discuss the issue of homophobia in sports. The conference "Queering Football: Addressing Homophobia at Mega-Sport Events" took place at the Faculty of Sports at the University of Ljubljana. It was the concluding event of an international 2-year-project of the same name.

In anticipation of the Football World Cup 2018, the conference focused on concerns voiced by LGBT communities about safety and discrimination surrounding the event in light of discriminatory anti-gay-legislation in Russia. 70 participants from 17 different countries took the opportunity to exchange information, present their initiatives, build and strengthen networks and discuss progress made and challenges ahead.



Participants of the Queering Football Conference © Spolint

# 1. Welcome & Opening

- Milan Hosta, Spolint Institute, host organization
- Tanja Hodnik, City of Ljubljana, Rainbow City
- Boro Štrumbelj, Director General for Sport, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia
- Miha Lobnik, Advocate of the Principle of Equality, Republic Slovenia

On the afternoon of Friday, November 17, **Igor E. Bergant**, Slovenian sport commentator and TV journalist welcomed the participants of the conference and introduced the first speakers from the host organization and city officials. In his opening words, Bergant said that Ljubljana was the perfect place for such a conference because the city stands for "love" – there is even a hint of love ("ljubezen" in sLOVEnian) in the name.

**Milan Hosta** from Spolint Institute then welcomed all guests, coming from 17 different countries, and explained that the conference was the concluding event of the 2-year project Queering Football. He introduced the project partners and thanked the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Sport for the support. Hosta then elaborated on the broader context of discrimination and homophobia in sport as the roots of violence and called on the participants to act as soon as they face or witness any form of discrimination or intolerance. Further, he pointed out that while there is some progress on the issue of racism, homophobia is still taboo and masculinity a driving force. He invited the participants of the conference to work together to reach the same level of awareness of homophobia as, for example, racism in sport.

**Tanja Hodnik** of the city administration of Ljubljana then presented a number of projects showing the city's continuous efforts in supporting the LGBT community. The city engages in several awareness-raising activities; for example, Mayor Zoran Janković is the patron of the annual gay pride parade in Ljubljana. In 2014 the City of Ljubljana published the booklet "Rainbow Ljubljana" which introduces LGBT initiatives in Ljubljana and established an LGBT-friendly certificate for businesses and public institutions. Ljubljana is proud to be a member of the Rainbow Cities network and to support LGBT people in different areas, such as culture, sports and leisure activities, successfully cooperating with Club Pritličje, an LGBT-friendly bar near city hall.

**Boro Štrumbelj** from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport pointed out that we also need to look at the history of human rights. He talked about the human rights situation in Yugoslavia. Homosexuality was still banned by law throughout the Sixties and finally decriminalized in 1976. Since then, Slovenian society has become more and more open. Štrumbelj reminded the audience that once established human rights always remain challenged and that Europe was not only the promoter of human rights, but also the place where the First and Second World War started. Conferences like this should take place in many more countries, he said, as there is a need for a broader discussion on the issue of homophobia. Referring to the Ministry he represents, he underlined the importance of linking education and sport and emphasized that hate speech needs to be publicly addressed, also in schools.

**Miha Lobnik** works for the Slovenian National Equality Body, a state institution to which people can report discrimination in different areas of society. The institution also engages in awareness raising activities in close cooperation with equality bodies from across Europe. While sanctions and fining policies are one way to deal with incidents of discrimination, Lobnik pointed out that his organization preferred a positive approach, as it was more effective in a long-term perspective. An example of positive awareness was when David Beckham appeared on the cover of a gay magazine in the 90s and publicly welcomed his gay fans in an interview. This had an enormous impact and shows us the importance of players publicly speaking out against homophobia. Homophobia and images of masculinity are a result of our socialization, thus, in order to fight homophobia we need to break this set of values. It takes courage to say that these are not the values one stands for..

After these opening statements, **Nikola Staritz**, Queering Football Coordinator of the VIDC-fairplay Initiative went on to present the conference program.

## 2. Panel Discussion

# Tackling Homophobia in European Football: Progress Made and Challenges Ahead

Chair:

Lou Englefield, Director, UK #LGBT Sports
Development & Equity Organisation and PrideSportsUK

Panelists:

- **Sofia B. Karlsson,** Officer of education in gender equality & inclusive Sports, Swedish Sports Confederation
- Nikola Staritz, Queering Football Coordinator, VIDC-fairplay Initiative
- **Rožle Prezelj,** Chairman of the IAAF Athletes' Commission, former Slovenian high jumper

**Rožle Prezelj** is chairman of the IAAF Athletes' Commission and a former Slovenian high jumper. The organization aims to promote social values among their members. It doesn't specifically address the issue of homophobia, but is working on raising awareness for equality. Prezelj's expertise is in the field of anti-doping. In 2014 the National Association adopted new testosterone rules that caused problems for some athletes. He pointed out that doping tests based on testosterone levels are an issue of discrimination. Prezelj was also a member of the steering committee appointed to adapt the Olympic Charter following the discussions around the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. A new version of the document was released in September 2017.

Being a former athlete in an individual sport himself, he believes that homophobia is less visible in individual sport and the situation for athletes might be different in team sports. He pointed out that there are different kinds of role expectations and stereotypes in different countries and sports. He underlined the importance of education, of athletes, and society in general and that educational programs should start at a grassroots level and reach athletes at a young age. Sofia B. Karlsson is an education officer in the Swedish Sports Confederation, in the Department of Gender Equality & Inclusive Sports. Her organization works in different sports, not mainly in football. She is a former athlete, tennis and football player, but also an activist in the feminist and LGBT movement in Sweden and has an educational background in sociology and gender equality. In her opinion, sport lags behind in the public discourse on homophobia. Questions of equality and discrimination are often seen as "too political" and athletes are discouraged from speaking out on these issues. In regard to working towards a more equal society. Sweden is on the right track, Karlsson said. Her organization implements trainings on "norm-conscious" leadership with sports coaches as part of their training and education. Especially in male team sports, the locker room is one space where homophobia is very present. This is not only a matter of being gay or violent homophobic incidents, but also about how openly athletes can talk and express themselves. Part of the organization's awareness raising activities focuses on promoting role models. such as the participation of athletes and sport clubs in the Stockholm Pride Parade. It is now generally accepted that the fight against homophobia is a necessity so that young people can feel included and are able to evolve. On the other hand, there are growing problems with hooligan fractions and violence, Karlsson said, and that in this respect football was the hardest field to work in. There is a rise of the far right in football, as in Swedish society in general, she added. The Sweden Democrats are gaining more ground, "Refugees Welcome" banners were taken down and far right banners can be seen at the stadiums. Threats have also been made against her personally.

**Nikola Staritz** works for the fairplay Initiative at VIDC Vienna. The organization implements projects on homophobia and sexism in sport, mainly in football, as football is the most popular sport in Austria. Discrimination in sport is not merely a reflection of society, as Staritz pointed out, but there are very specific forms of discrimination and some toxic behavior that is tolerated in the area of sport if not so much in other areas of society. In football we can see specific patriarchal, old norms of masculinity which exclude women by definition, but also some men. Talking also about her own experiences as an athlete and football player, Staritz then spoke about different role expectations (for example, that people commonly expect women football players to be lesbians) and how these images can make it very challenging to make football more inclusive. According to a study conducted in Austria, the major difference in where problems with homophobia occur lies in the gender images of sports (e.g. if it is a "tough" masculine sport, etc.) and if it's a full contact sport.

Staritz is ambivalent on the progress made; according to her, it varies depending on what level we look at (policy, fan culture, professional or amateur sport). More and more grassroots movements were founded that include homophobia in their antidiscrimination agenda. There is a different level of awareness of racism and homophobia, and the acknowledgement of homophobia on a policy level still remains weak. Football authorities are still failing to acknowledge that there is a problem with homophobia.

Staritz agrees that education is key for improvement, but criticizes that there is not enough funding for it. Existing campaigns against homophobia are building on the work of grassroots initiatives. High-level campaigns as promoted by FIFA, however, they seem to be primarily about image and marketing; in her opinion, more education and workshops on that level are needed. It would be most effective to include awareness training in the coaches' education programs of the national associations.

#### DISCUSSION

The general assessment of the panel was that there is some improvement regarding awareness of homophobia on most levels, on some levels more than others. For example, the discussion of human rights issues around the Olympic Games in Sochi has led to improvements and a revision of the Olympic Charter. One of the points made was that different sports are perceived differently, there are different images and role expectations. Those images vary in different countries or even depend on what region people in the same country are from. Lou Englefield pointed out that homophobia not only manifests in homophobic chants, but also in micro-aggressions, in silencing, the lack of visibility and a climate where people don't feel included and free to express their feelings. A growing problem that was brought up in the discussion is that there is a rise of the far right in football fan groups and that these groups are taking "too much room to speak". The panelists agreed that education is key to addressing homophobia in football. Raising awareness on the issue of homophobia and harmful gender norms should be included in training programs for

coaches. A problem that was brought into the discussion from the audience was that it is difficult to implement educational youth programs in a country like Russia, where it is forbidden to talk about homosexuality in schools. The panel highlighted the importance of allies and role models. Lou Englefield concluded the discussion by reminding everyone that we should not forget what we have achieved.



Panel 1: Lou Englefield, Niola Staritz, Sofia B. Karlsson, Rožle Prezelj © Aaron Hermann



Auditorium at Sports Faculty, University of Ljubjana © Aaron Hermann

# 3. Panel Discussion

FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia: A Chance to Combat Homophobia and Ensure Human Rights?

Chair:

 Andrej Pisl, project manager, EUSA, Out in Slovenia – Slovenian LGBT & sport organization

Panelists:

- Alexandr Agapov, Russian LGBT Sport Federation
- Ronan Evain, Director, Football Supporters Europe
- Pavel Klymenko, FARE network
- Brendan Schwab, Executive Director, World Players Association

Andrej Pisl from Out in Slovenia first asked the participants to introduce themselves and the work of their organizations. While the previous panel had focused more generally on progress and challenges in tackling homophobia in football, the second panel addressed more specifically the situation in Russia in anticipation of the upcoming World Cup in Russia 2018. Pisl asked the panelists for their assessment of their expectations for the World Cup. One of the main questions was how the rights and freedom of LGBT can be ensured in Russia for different groups, athletes, supporters traveling to Russia, as well as local LGBT groups.

**Brendan Schwab** presented the work of the World Players Association that brings together around 150 Players Associations in more than 60 countries and around 85,000 players, the majority of whom are football players. The organization is promoting a multi-stakeholder approach and is part of the Sports and Rights Alliance (SRA). Its major objectives are that human rights of everyone involved in sport should be respected and protected, explicitly including the players, and that sport should be a positive social force. It is part of the beauty of sport that players come from all different backgrounds, thus sport

needs to embrace diversity. Further, Schwab pointed out that when we talk about players' difficulties to publicly come out as gay, we should also acknowledge that it's difficult for athletes to come out on any issue, as it is discouraged or even sanctioned by sports authorities. As an example he mentioned the recent case of NFL guarterback Colin Kaepernick, who risked his career when he protested against police violence and racial profiling in the criminal justice system. In his opinion, there is reason for optimism as institutional change is taking place. Schwab underlines that we need to work in two time frames to make sure that everyone will be safe during the World Cup in Russia, but also to change policies in the long run. Governments must be held accountable; they need to change their discriminatory policies if they are going to host a major sporting event. Sporting organizations have a big responsibility, because what happens at the elite level translates back to the grassroots level. We have to act as a collective and make strong demands from FIFA; what we need is a binding FIFA human rights policy.

Ronan Evain from Football Supporters Europe (FSE) then talked about the football supporters' perspective. In many European countries it is difficult for LGBTIQ fan groups to be able to travel to games, to support their teams, hang their banners, etc. He shares Brendan Schwab's optimism, that there is momentum and a growing interest from international sporting institutions to improve the situation. Evain promotes a concept of social preventive work. Groundwork is weak at the moment, he said, and FIFA doesn't seem to be willing to engage. The situation of LGBTIQ (and their safety) is a non-issue, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also refused to address the issue. Improvements can be seen on the security side, in part because of issues with Russian football fans in 2016. There are definitely security issues in Russia, but the Russian authorities dismiss any criticism. Some slight progress on the racism issue has been made, in part as a result of the public debate after city officials wore "blackface" in Sochi. Evain then brought up the upsetting situation concerning the LGBT community in Chechnya and recent violent attacks on gay men. Stakeholders of the World Cup should get involved to address the problem, he said. Football Supporters Europe does not believe that boycotts are effective, but in the end it is the decision of the fans' organizations whether or not they travel to Russia. From now to the

kick-off of the competition, the different stakeholders need to work to create a safe environment in Russia, Evain underlined. His assessment is that the World Cup in Russia is going to be relatively safe, but he expressed doubts about the safety situation in smaller cities.

**Pavel Klymenko** (FARE network) began by saving that FARE works with UEFA and FIFA directly to fight discrimination and use football as a tool for social change. A big part of their work is lobbying for basic human rights and fighting discrimination. Klymenko has been working in Russia since 2014 and can't share the optimism regarding organizational changes. The opportunity and leverage is there, he said, but the experience from Sochi has shown that the situation does not automatically change for the better with international attention. He criticized the lack of stakeholder involvement in preparation for the World Cup. Representatives of minorities, NGOs and grassroots movements have been excluded from meetings by government and football authorities. In Russia we face a government that's instrumentalizing homophobia, Klymenko said, Russian leaders don't deny existence of homosexual people, but they claim that these were not Russian values. Criticism from outside can therefore be counterproductive, as it is dismissed as "Western values". However, this should not be a reason to abandon alliances but rather to strengthen them. Regarding the security situation, the concerns of the FARE network are two-fold: on the one hand, the question is, will it be safe for visiting fans to come to Russia. On the other hand, there is the big question of what will happen to the of the Russian LGBT community after the World Cup. As other panelists have mentioned before, progress has been made on the issue of racism. The situation remains different with homophobia. There are different perceptions of what homophobia is and often it is not acknowledged that there are LGBT people in the stadium.

**Alexandr Agapov** from the Russian LGBT Sport Federation then spoke about the difficult situation of the LGBT community in Russia in light of anti-gay legislation. Agapov shared his pessimistic view, seeing as the situation did not improve after the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. LGBT issues are highly politicized in Russia and the LGBT question became a part of public discourse. Political authorities deny the existence of gay athletes in Russia, and more so, the fights for fundamental human rights against discrimination based on homophobia are dismissed as "Western values". The Russian LGBT Sport Federation plans a number of events during the World Cup, a football festival, educational events, and roundtables. Former football player Alexey Smertin was recently appointed as Commissioner for Antidiscrimination of the Russian Football Association, but so far this position seems to be merely a formality, Agapov said, he does not speak up when there is a violation. It continues to be difficult for activists to reach representatives from FIFA and the Russian Football Association and engage them in joining roundtables and discussions on anti-discriminatory work.

Due to the difficult situation of LGBT communities in Russia, Agapov and Evain suggested organizing an LGBT fans embassy, similar to the fans' embassies of the national teams, where everybody can meet, celebrate football, and where a space free from discrimination can be offered.

Asked by Andrej Pisl about experiences during the Eurovision Song Contest, Agapov said that while people could feel safe in the protected area of the Eurovision Song Contest House and at the official events, some were hassled or even detained by the police in other places. Thus he believes there will likely be more problems with the police than with hooligans during the World Cup. He then also spoke



Panel 2: Andrej Pisl, Brendan Schwab, Ronan Evain, Pavel Klymenko, Alexandr Agapov © Spolint

about the situation of gays in Chechnya. While FIFA does not have the power to change legislation, he said, we can demand from FIFA that the football clubs from Chechnya speak out and make clear that LGBT people are welcome in football.

As Agapov explained further, the presence of representatives from international organizations and the acknowledgement of LGBT groups by the Football Association can make a big difference. Something as simple as a welcoming note to LGBT organizations from the Commissioner for Antidiscrimination can open doors. He concluded by saying that visibility of LGBT communities at the World Cup is crucial to challenge the Russian government's self-presentation as an example of tolerance. It remains important to put pressure on sponsors and FIFA, Agapov said, and to ensure, that the World Cup has a long-lasting and positive impact for LGBT people, to make sure people are safe after the World Cup. Andrej Pisl concluded the panel and opened the discussion for the audience by inviting everyone to put pressure on their embassies.

#### DISCUSSION

Many LGBT fan groups are preparing to come to Russia for the World Cup. The discussion after the panel therefore focused on the big question: Is it safe for fans to travel to Russia? And what can we do as a collective force? The general assessment from the panelists was that it is going to be relatively safe for LGBT fans to go to and from the stadium and that discriminatory incidents can be reported to UEFA observers who will offer support in these particular situations. However, there remain legitimate safety concerns regarding public spaces, particularly in the smaller cities.

# 4. NGO-Fair

At the NGO-Fair the participants had the opportunity to present their initiatives, share information material, expand their networks in a more informal exchange and to see the exhibition "Against the Rules: Lesbians and Gays in Sport" that was displayed throughout the conference. The exhibition was hosted by the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation and presents biographies of LGBT athletes, the history of discrimination and issues relating to self-empowerment of LGBTs in sport.



Exhibition "Tatort Stadion" about Football and (Anti-)Discrimination displayed in France ©FSE

## 5. Workshop Sessions

On Day 2 of the conference participants could choose between three different workshops that were each held in two sessions. After the second session the results of the workshop discussions were presented and discussed.

# Workshop 1

Grassroots activism: Good practices, Initiatives and Lessons to be learned

#### Facilitators:

John Ryan, Lou Englefield, Sarah Townsend, European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation

#### Rapporteur:

#### Aleksander Gorgiev,

queerplay & workshop facilitator, VIDC-fairplay, Vienna

The workshop highlighted strategies, initiatives, and lessons learned from grassroots campaigns to make football more inclusive, targeted at the UEFA European Football Championships in 2016 & 2017. The facilitators first each presented examples of their work with EGLSF (e.g. Pride House in Marseille, Pride House in the Netherlands at Women's EURO, a sports and media training program in Italy) and their lessons learned. Lou Englefield then presented a campaign strategy her organization used for the campaign Football Against Homophobia. She emphasized the importance of being well-informed about the subjects you're going to be dealing with in your campaign, thus it's crucial to have people from the field you're working in involved in the campaign (e.g. referees, coaches, players).

What you should consider if you plan a campaign:

- You need to be able to make a PLAN.
- You need to be able to articulate what the OUTCOMES will be.
- It is important to know what you want to ACHIEVE (and to talk about what you have ACHIEVED). This should be the starting point of the planning process (the next step is to decide what to DO)
- SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER. You need to know which STAKE-HOLDERS you should be speaking to, for example: where are you most likely to get some change (e.g. FIFA, the Russian government or the public)? Who is going to resist you, who is going to support you?
- Build ALLIANCES (for example at conferences like this); there is always strength in numbers.
- ADAPT and use the right tactics for your context (for example, strategies that have worked in the UK might not work in Macedonia)
- Use E-CAMPAIGNING: it is cheap and you can reach a lot of people. Social media is developing all the time, we need to adapt to that and think about how we develop our message to reach young people.
- (AND: we should not leave social media to the far right)!
- TIMING is everything. Use focus events and focus timing to convey a much broader message (We wouldn't necessarily be talking about homophobia this much if the World Cup was not in Russia).

The workshop participants were then asked to form smaller groups, discuss and afterwards present their own ideas for a campaign for Russia 2018.

# Workshop 2

Agency – Alliances to enhance Human Rights around Mega-Sports Events

#### Facilitator:

Martin Endemann, Football Supporters Europe

Rapporteur:

Antonio Saccone, Radio Capodistria

Workshop facilitator Martin Endemann from Football Supporters Europe (FSE) first introduced the organization's anti-discriminatory work with fan groups and their efforts in lobbying football authorities on the topics of discrimination and homophobia in a few words.

10-15 years ago there was no acknowledgment of homophobia in sports. The issue was first addressed by LGBT NGOs and the pressure on authorities came from grassroots movements. The first LGBT fan groups were founded in the UK and Germany, now more and more queer football fan groups are being founded in different countries. While there has been a lot of progress on the issue, there is still a hierarchy of different forms of discrimination.

Martin Endemann is one of the founders of Football Fans against Homophobia Berlin, an inclusive (straight ally) fan group that shows their presence with banners at the stadiums and organizes discussions and actions around football events. The organization was soon approached by fan groups from all over Europe, so that there are now different branches who use the same slogans in the country's language (Switzerland, Austria, Sweden...). Thanks to lobbying by fan groups, there is now a growing awareness of the issue of homophobia in many countries.

The discussion focused on the questions: How can civil society actors gain influence? What is the agency of fans, NGOs, players to effect change on a policy level? What is important and which alliances and lobbying strategies do we need?

#### PLAYERS

One of the problems organizations in lobbying work are facing is that players are often not allowed to speak out or comment on anything. The clubs regulate what they tweet on or what they are allowed to say in interviews; as a result, it is hard to get statements from players and rarely any comments from any high-ranking FA officials. David Beckham was one of the first players to speak out on the problem of homophobia in football. The focus is too often on the gay players that came out but not on straight allies. If more players would speak out against homophobia, the situation would be very different. On the other hand, the problem remains that there are homophobic comments coming from other players. Players are fined, but it doesn't necessarily hurt their career.

#### **UEFA & National Football Associations**

The #EqualGame campaign, the new UEFA awareness campaign following No to Racism, demonstrates that UEFA is working towards being more inclusive. As mentioned in the panel discussion the day before, discrimination based on sexual and gender orientation is not explicitly included in UEFA regulations. In the past, UEFA regulations that prohibit the "use of gestures, words, messages of political, ideological nature" have been used to fine racist statements, but also to ban rainbow flags from the stadium. This regulation needs to be changed and made clearer and human rights criteria must also be included in host city requirements. There is some resistance from National Football Associations in anti-discriminatory work. UEFA offers support and HatTrick funding to implement programs.

#### **FINING POLICY**

FIFA has now started to fine homophobic chants. The problem remains that homophobic chants are fined as "political insults" but not as a form of discrimination against a group, and fines are also lower than for other forms of discrimination. The question came up of how the money from these fines is used. UEFA currently uses these funds to support other projects in that country. The suggestion was made to use the money from fines for awareness and educational programs. It was agreed that mandatory programs for clubs that were fined would be the optimal solution.

#### REGULATIONS

Decisions have already been made for Russia and Qatar, now we need to make sure that decisions like this cannot happen in the future. Ensuring human rights must be a requirement for host cities in the future. FIFA just recently released new regulations for the next bidding process; there will be changes for the next events. One input from the participants was if the regulations become too strict, it could mean that only a narrow selection of countries could host the World Cup and thus, the opportunity to bring not only financial support but also the awareness, the opportunity to change the human rights situation could be lost.

The workshop then focused on the question of what could still be done to prepare for Russia and Qatar, and how the concerns of LGBT fan groups who are traveling to Russia for the World Cup could be addressed. The workshop participants then discussed and agreed on 4 demands:

- 1) Change regulations
- 2) Better use of fines (mandatory educational programs)
- 3) Rainbow flag should be allowed at competitions
- 4) Certain guarantees that people are safe

#### **OPEN QUESTIONS**

One question that was raised is, what happens to the local LGBT community when the World Cup is over and Russia is no longer in the international spotlight? What will be the consequences afterwards ("the afterblow")? Can this awareness be harmful?



Workshop 3: Layla Mousa, Aaron Herrmann and participants ©QueeringFootball



Workshop 1: Sarah Townsend, John Ryan ©QueeringFootball

# Workshop 3

Intersectionality – Racism, sexism, transphobia, exclusion – joint struggles?

#### Facilitators:

Aaron Hermann, Spolint Institute, Layla Mousa, UISP

Rapporteur:

Darryl Telles, Queer Football Fanclubs, Football Supporters Europe

The workshop focused on interconnected forms of discrimination, e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. It raised the question whether "homophobia" was still a discrimination of "second class" and why it seems easier to tackle racism than gender inequality in sports. The workshop also discussed the situation of transgender athletes that is too often neglected.

#### **COMING OUT**

The workshop started with a discussion on "coming out" and the situation of gay athletes in different sports and countries. It was agreed that a "don't ask, don't tell" solution only exacerbates the problem. The workshop also touched on the intersectional discrimination some athletes face if, for example, they come from a BAME (Black, Asian / Minority Ethnic) background. The participants agreed that the choice to come out is a personal issue, but that we need to work on a sporting environment that is more welcoming and inclusive. There was an exchange about different assumptions and expectations of gender roles in sport, about specific masculinities in football and the assumption that all men in football are straight and all women are gay. On the subject of why football and "macho-masculinity" are so closely connected, there was input to the discussion about the situation in Italy, where football was traditionally a sport only for men and closely related to macho culture.

#### TRANSGENDER ATHLETES

Sport is one area of society with particularly strict rules and regulations on what a man or a woman is. The group discussed the issue of gender verification and raised the question of how sport governing bodies could make the environment more supportive. The facilitators introduced the Sports Integrity Initiative that aims at changing attitudes. In particular, the workshop looked at the IOC regulations for sex/gender change from 2003 that required strict documentation. Athletes had to prove that they had undergone surgery and hormone therapy and that the country recognized their new name. Since the 2009 European Council recommendation, there has been some improvement; the IOC rules have been altered in 2015, athletes now no longer need to have had surgery.

#### **EXAMPLE FROM ITALY**

Layla Mousa then presented an example of a grassroots initiative from Italy. UISP has worked with a transgender organization. Together they initiated a confidential monitoring form which allows individuals to choose their own gender identity. They have prepared member organizations for this change by providing training on trans-discrimination.

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The rapporteur Darryl Telles then gave insight into the intersectionality of racism and homophobia in football through his experience of being a black gay supporter.

The workshop was concluded with a discussion on future perspectives. Some believed that there's a natural progression to getting rid of the separation of sports based on gender and that eventually all sports will allow sexes to play together. Questions that remained: Improvements were made for top-level players, but what can we do for athletes at the grassroots level? There was also a debate on the question whether mixed football could be possible at a higher level.

# 6. Panel Discussion

Future Perspectives: Towards a sports culture without homophobia? Sport against discrimination

Chair:

 Nikola Staritz, Queering Football Coordinator, VIDC-fairplay Initiative

Panelists:

- Sara Holmgren, Education, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, UEFA
- Di Cunningham, Proud Canaries Norwich City FC's LGBT Fan Club, Pride in Football UK
- Marko Levovnik, Slovenian sports syndicate
- Alexandr Agapov, President of Russian LGBT Sport Federation
- Kurt Wachter, Head of Department, VIDC-fairplay Initiative

**Nikola Staritz** asked the panelists to introduce themselves. She opened the panel by referring to the discussions on Day 1 that concluded with a pessimistic view and that this was now an opportunity to bring representatives of the different stakeholders together and discuss future plans.

**Sara Holmgren** works as Education Diversity and Inclusion Officer in the FSR team of UEFA, Switzerland. We should make the most of the diversity we have, Holmgren said. UEFA wants to focus on different aspects of discrimination. Most recently her department carried out an internal analysis with questions like how people feel in the organization and among their colleagues. UEFA has also started a benchmarking process with FIFA on HR and hiring policies. Based on the findings they developed a new handbook for staff. Holmgren then introduced UEFA's #EqualGame campaign that follows the No to Racism campaign and addresses different forms of discrimination. UEFA is supporting the anti-discriminatory work in the national football associations and initiated the HatTrick solidarity funding program. Every national FA can apply for 50,000 EUR a year. The FSR team works closely with Football Supporters Europe, and FARE and tries to support different organizations in campaigning, education, and support. UEFA also sanctions clubs if there are any homophobic incidents. Sara Holmgren concluded that UEFA gets valuable input from fans through conferences such as the Queering Football Conference.

**Di Cunningham** is an organizer of LGBT fan groups in the UK. She brought pictures of fan groups that show the great visibility in the stadiums. Cunningham welcomed the new criteria for awarding future host countries. She criticized that fans were not high on the consultation list when it comes to policy changes and reminded the panel not to forget about the fans' perspective. Often there is a division between fans and the sports people, she said, while the presence of the fans is very important for football.

Marko Levovnik works for the Slovenian Athletes Union that aims to improve the athletes' status and defend their fundamental rights. It is part of an international network and works together with FARE. The main goal of the organization is to tackle racism, discrimination, and violence, e.g. in the program Show Racism the Red Card. So far, homophobia has not been included in the work but is going to be in the future. Levovnik shared his thoughts on what the organization could do in the future: Educate athletes to recognize the signs of homophobia, include these issues in monitoring and work to provide a safe diversified respectful workplace for athletes in the future. Further, he pointed out that it needs to be recognized that unwanted disclosure of a person's sexual orientation ("outing") is also a form of discrimination. His organization plans on forming a group in the union to improve working conditions for athletes. In the future, there should be a possibility for athletes to report homophobic incidents anonymously and a protocol on how to deal with such an incident.

**Alexandr Agapov** spoke about the many events the Russian LGBT Sport Federation has planned next year, starting in February with a Month of Action. In March there will be events around International Women's Day, educational programs. During the World Cup there will be a Football Festival, a tournament and discussion panels. Agapov once again spoke about the difficult situation for the LGBT community in Russia and asked Sara Holmgren directly how it could be possible to do educational programs with young people in Russia in light of the so-called "anti-propaganda-law". His organization is active in implementing educational programs. Generally, the lack of education on different forms of discrimination even in high profile positions is a big problem. Therefore awareness of homophobia in hiring policies of international sporting organizations is important. More NGOs and LGBT groups should be involved in the process.

Kurt Wachter is head of the department of the VIDC-Fairplay Initiative. The initiative made its first steps in the 90s, when UEFA was not yet interested in dealing with racism. Then the organization went on to address gender identity issues. Around 2002, this still meant risking funding. Now 15 years later we can see a lot of improvement. The project Our Game to promote human rights in the context of mega sports events started in 2014 around the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, and included protests against resettlements. There is now a new project focusing on Russia that will be launched in November. With the slogan - Our Game - the organization aims to reclaim sports events and make them spaces where everybody can be represented. Wachter said he was reminded by the conference how powerful players can be and how important it is to engage them in the campaigns. When it comes to hosting rights, sport has always had clear rules and regulations. One criterion for host countries should be that if a country does not guarantee fundamental rights, they should not get bidding rights. Unfortunately, we have seen other interests and connections with businesses contradict this (e.g. Gazprom as a main sponsor in Champions League). There is a general agreement that there has to be a change. We have to set limits, the "mega-sports" events need to be downsized (cancel the "mega" in mega sports events). There is now more awareness than at the time when the current events (Russia and Qatar) were awarded. In the future, vulnerable groups need to be included in the process.

#### DISCUSSION

The panel was concluded with a round of statements from the participants, what the different stakeholders need from each other and how they can support each other. An important issue that was brought up in this discussion is the labor rights of athletes (e.g. the right to unionize, the right to choose their employers) and the labor rights of everyone involved in these events (e.g. the workers who build the sport sites). Difficulties in engaging National Football Associations were problematized several times during the conference. UEFA can support the creation of a platform for dialogue between NGOs and National Football Associations and educational programs at the grassroots level. The possibility of funding via the HatTrick program should be made more public.



Panel 3: Nikola Staritz, Marko Levovnik, Di Cunningham, Alexandr Agapov, Sara Holmgren, Kurt Wachter ©Spolint



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### About the project

"Queering Football – Tackling Homophobia and Promoting Anti-Discrimination around Major Sport Events" (January 2016 – December 2017), co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ sports program

Homophobia – prejudices and violence against LGBTIQs – is still one of the main and untackled problems in European football. Homophobic chants and physical attacks as well as ignorance and exclusion still happen on a daily basis. With Queering Football we want to **raise awareness for a wider recognition of homophobia** as a main problem and **create an inclusive football and fan culture** where respect is celebrated and solidarity is cherished.

The Queering Football project aims at using the UEFA EURO 2016 in France as a pan-European communication platform to tackle discrimination and hatred. Questions of inclusion, equality and minority rights have to be on the agenda. One main output of Queering Football is a handbook on fundamental rights and anti-discrimination standards in the context of mega sport events.

The partners in the European project are: European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF | www.eglsf.info), Football Supporters Europe (FSE | www.fanseurope.org), Fédération Sportive Gaie et Lesbienne (FSGL, France | www.fsgl.org), Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti (UISP, Italy | www.isgl.org), Spolint (Slovenia | www.spolint.org) and VIDC-fairplay (Austria | www.fairplay.or.at) as the lead organization

### Speakers and Facilitators (in order of appearance)

Milan Hosta, Spolint Institute, host organization

Tanja Hodnik, City of Ljubljana, Rainbow City

**Boro Štrumbelj,** Director General for Sport, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

Miha Lobnik, Advocate of the Principle of Equality, Republic Slovenia Nikola Staritz, Queering Football Coordinator, VIDC-fairplay Initiative Lou Englefield, Director, UK #LGBT Sports Development & Equity Organisation and PrideSportsUK

**Sofia B. Karlsson,** Officer of education in gender equality & inclusive Sports, Swedish Sports Confederation

**Rožle Prezelj,** Chairman of the IAAF Athletes' Commission, former Slovenian high jumper

**Andrej Pisl,** project manager, EUSA, Out in Slovenia – Slovenian LGBT & sport organization

Alexandr Agapov, President of Russian LGBT Sport Federation Ronan Evain, Director, Football Supporters Europe

Pavel Klymenko, FARE network

Brendan Schwab, Executive Director, World Players Association John Ryan, European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation

Sarah Townsend, European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation

Aleksander Gorgiev, queerplay and workshop facilitator,

VIDC-fairplay, Vienna

Martin Endemann, Football Supporters Europe, Footballfans versus Homophobia

Antonio Saccone, Radio Capodistria

Aaron Hermann, Spolint Institute

Layla Mousa, UISP

**Darryl Telles,** Queer Football Fanclubs, Football Supporters Europe **Sara Holmgren,** Education, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, UEFA **Di Cunningham,** Proud Canaries – Norwich City FC's LGBT Fan Club, Pride in Football UK

Marko Levovnik, Slovenian sports syndicate Kurt Wachter, Head of Department, VIDC-fairplay Initiative

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