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# Policing football crowds in Sweden

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## Abstract

The policing of football crowds in Sweden is underpinned by a national coordination approach based upon a set of conflict reducing principles and supported by crowd theory. The approach is referred to as the Special Police Tactic (SPT). While focused on police capacity to exercise force, the SPT also gives primacy to tactics based upon communication, in the form of Dialogue Police. Existing research on the SPT focuses exclusively on the policing of protest crowds. This paper extends the existing literature by reporting on a large scale three-year observational research project examining the SPT as it is applied to football fixtures involving several of Sweden's major football clubs. On the basis of our analysis we draw out how policing operations in line with facilitation and communication were associated with effective outcomes. However, we also highlight deficiencies in national coordination and coherence as well as highlighting important innovations with regard to approaches to dialogue with football fans. We explore the implications of our analysis for theoretical understanding of effective football crowd management and engagement with fan culture.

Keywords: Dialogue; conflict; football; hooliganism; crowd management; policing

## Introduction

### Overview

Collective conflicts involving fans of Swedish top-flight football has attracted interest from The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention who called for more research on the interactions between fans and police (Brå, 2008). Swedish fan culture has been a research focus for academia since the 1980s (see Radmann, 2013 for an overview). However, where Swedish academics have conducted research on the policing of football crowds (e.g. Hylander & Granström, 2010; Rosander & Guvå 2012), very few publications focus on the policing of football matches in a Swedish context. Green (2006, 2009) and Radmann (2012, 2013, 2015) have conducted studies on the relationship between police and supporters but only provide limited observational evaluations of the nature of the work conducted by the police at football events in Sweden. This paper therefore aims to address shortcomings in existing literature by reporting upon a three-year Participant Action Research project on the policing of football in Sweden. The paper will utilize evidence from this research to address theoretical understanding of the nature of the risks to public order posed by football fans in Sweden as well as exploring the policing responses. On the basis of our analysis we will set out a series of recommendations for police reform as well as exploring implications of our research for theoretical understanding of the policing of football crowds in general.

### Policing crowds in Sweden

Following a series of 'riots' surrounding an EU and then EU-US international summit in Göteborg in 2001 the Swedish Police developed the Special Police Tactic (SPT), a single and nationally coordinated strategic and tactical approach to the policing of crowds (Adang, 2012).<sup>1</sup> As with similar approaches in other Western European democracies, the SPT is designed to enable the rapid mobilisation of small squads of officers trained to a common standard, deployed in lightly armoured vehicles with clear chains of command. These squads are designed to utilise high level force and protective equipment (body armour, helmets, shields, batons, etc.) in extremely conflictual and stressful situations such as riots. In Sweden, these units are commonly referred to by their radio call sign DELTA and mobilise in groups, which consist of one vehicle containing a commander and seven officers.<sup>2</sup>

Despite a clear focus on, and capacity for, the use of force the SPT is relatively unique in that it also includes specialist and distinct units of 'Dialogue Police' as an integral component of its tactical capability. Consequently, Dialogue Police work alongside DELTA units when policing protest crowds (Holgerson & Knutsson, 2011). The Dialogue Police are deliberately non-coercive, operate with a very high level of discretion (i.e. they do not use force or make arrests) and focus on working with groups over extended periods in order to build shared understanding and relationships of trust and confidence. By eschewing coercion, the Dialogue Police are able to improve two-way communication and the capacity to resolve

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<sup>1</sup> The SPT was based directly upon the Danish Mobile Concept (Vittrup, 2003) but must also be seen in the light of an international trend in public order policing in North Western European democracies stretching as far back as the 1980s (e.g. UK, Netherlands, Germany). Whereby, police forces seeking to control public disorder with non-lethal use of force developed vehicle-based squads of officers with protective equipment who could provide rapid coordinated responses (Delle Porta & Reiter, 2006; Neufeld Redekop & Paré, 2010; Northam, 1988; Waddington, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> An 'Avdelning' (a detachment, section or unit) consists of four Groups and a forward or 'Bronze' commander. In larger operations, the deployment can be escalated to a Division, which consists of four 'Avdelningar'. Any SPT deployment will be overseen by a 'Polisinsatschefen' or 'Silver' commander, who usually also has a separate command vehicle and support staff and any deployment will take place within a general strategic framework set by a 'Gold' commander.

problems through negotiation between crowd participants and police (Holgersson, 2010). The Dialogue police have become embedded, if sometimes embattled,<sup>3</sup> units across those policing regions within Sweden that adopt the SPT and are now widely recognised to have reduced the levels of conflict evident during demonstrations in Sweden (HMIC, 2009; Holgersson, 2010; Holgersson & Knutsson, 2011).

### An evidence and theory led approach

From its early development onwards the SPT has been underpinned conceptually by the Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behaviour (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998a; see also Reicher, Stott, Cronin, & Adang, 2004; 2007). From an ESIM perspective collective behaviour in crowds is best understood as an outcome of a shared contextually derived self-definition or 'social identity'. This collective identity serves as the psychological basis for deriving meaning, structuring relationships and defining normative social action among crowd participants (Reicher, 1984). Moreover, according to this approach, a crowd's social identity is contextually determined so can be shaped and reshaped through the dynamics – or micro sociology – of intergroup interaction (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000; cf. Nassauer, 2018). For instance, as a result of specific group level interactions with police and locals, initially peaceful collective action among England fans attending World Cup Finals in Italy in 1990 and in France in 1998 was transformed into widespread rioting (Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998b).

The dynamics of such interactions are assumed to be both social and psychological. Thus, when crowd participants see themselves as acting legitimately (e.g. expressing their identity as football fans) the same action can be seen by the police as illegitimate (e.g. a threat to public order). In such circumstances, the police often have the power (i.e. legislative legitimacy, weaponry, human resources) to impose their view and in so doing to change the social context for crowd participants (e.g. corralling or dispersing the crowd). This shifting social context can lead to changes to the social identity, and hence the group processes, driving collective action within a crowd. On the one hand, conflict comes to be seen as legitimate (e.g. as a reassertion of rights) by crowd participants who can also feel empowered by their united opposition to police action and thus more capable of enacting conflict. On the other, those engaging in conflict are seen as more prototypical and are thus more capable of influencing others within the crowd who share the same identity (e.g. Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000).

There is also a relationship between crowd theory and 'public order' policing. Police fears about the inherent hostility of crowds, based on outdated 'classical' theories of crowd psychology (Stott & Drury, 2017), can lead the police to act towards them aggressively, assertively and disproportionately (Drury, Stott, & Farsides, 2003; Hoggett & Stott, 2010; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009; Stott, 2003; Stott & Reicher, 1998a, 1998b). This can initiate the dynamics of escalation outlined above. In contrast, research also suggests that crowd policing underpinned by ESIM (Reicher et al., 2004, 2007) can be highly effective in the management of crowd conflict in the context of football (Stott, Adang, Livingstone, & Schreiber, 2007, 2008; Stott, West, & Radburn, 2018), protests (Gorrynge, Rosie, Waddington, & Kominou, 2011; Gorrynge, Stott, & Rosie, 2012; Waddington, 2012) and mass emergencies (e.g. Carter, Drury, Rubin, Williams, & Amlôt, 2015).

For example, during the UEFA European Championships in Portugal police utilized ESIM to structure their policy and practice for policing crowds. Strategically, this focused on the facilitation of legitimate behaviour (peaceful assembly, etc.), avoiding the disproportionate use of force and utilising police officers wearing

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2015 the entire contingent of Dialogue Police in Stockholm formally threatened to collectively resign if commanders did not address their negative working conditions.

ordinary uniform working in pairs or small groups focused upon facilitation, communication and friendly interaction, while keeping 'riot police' out of sight unless otherwise needed. This approach was associated with very low levels of conflict, high levels of perception of police legitimacy and important moments of 'self-regulation' among crowd participants (Stott et al., 2007, 2008). The underlying theory suggests these behavioural outcomes were because 'lowprofile' policing promotes perceptions of police legitimacy. This in turn facilitates identification between crowd participants and police and empowers 'self-regulation' (see Radburn, Stott, Bradford, & Robinson, 2018; Radburn & Stott, 2018). In this regard there is considerable similarity between ESIM and Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 1990), which also argues that there is a direct relationship between police procedural fairness and compliance with the law (Bradford, 2014; Bradford, Murphy, & Jackson, 2014). Research also suggests that proportionality and procedural fairness can be utilised by the police to deescalate conflict among football fans attending matches in domestic football leagues in the United Kingdom (Stott et al., 2018). There is as yet no published research exploring the applicability of ESIM to the understanding or management of football crowds in Sweden.

### The present paper

ESIM theory is used by police in Sweden to underpin two core SPT concepts that are intended to shape crowd policing in Sweden. The first, referred to as the Conflict Reducing Principles, are laid out more fully in Reicher et al. (2004). In summary, these are ensuring that police have Knowledge about the nature of the identities and cultures of those within the crowd. The second is to use this knowledge to orient policing towards the Facilitation of those behaviours and intentions judged as lawful (e.g. peaceful assembly, expression, etc.) in order to promote perceptions of police legitimacy and conflict reduction through 'self-regulation'. The third is ensuring that effective Communication is achieved with crowd participants and maintained throughout. Finally, if use of force is necessary that it should be based upon Differentiation and not targeted against crowds indiscriminately. These principles then underpin a second core SPT concept referred to as the Graded Tactical Approach, defined as policing tactics that are adjusted appropriately to situational demands but which, by definition, require police to utilise tactics that are communication led and styled around normal policing as far as is possible before escalating to tactics designed for coercion. However, while there has been extensive investment in the development and implementation of the SPT in Sweden (Adang, 2012) and research has been conducted on the role and positive contribution of 'Dialogue Police' (Holgersson & Knutsson, 2011), there is no research examining the application of the SPT to the policing of Swedish football. This paper therefore aims to address two inter-related research needs. The first is to report upon a series of observational evaluations of the nature of the work conducted by the police at football events in Sweden. The second is to explore the extent to which the SPT is being applied coherently in this context, as well as examining the extent to which such policing is related to outcomes consistent with its concepts and knowledge-based principles.

### Method

The data for this study was gathered between September 2014 and May 2017 within a project referred to as ENABLE.<sup>4</sup> The primary task of ENABLE was systematic evidence gathering in order to analyse, identify and develop good practice in the management of crowds attending Swedish Professional Football matches. The emphasis within ENABLE during this period was upon parallel processes of research and transformation

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<sup>4</sup> For further details see <http://enable-research.org/about/>.

which made the project ideally suited to a methodology referred to as Participant Action Research (PAR) (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005); an approach increasingly applied to a range of policing and criminal justice issues (e.g. Audrey, Fields, Goss, Robinson, & Morash, 2002; Geva & Shem-Tov, 2002; Rai, 2012; Stott et al., 2016).

We adopt a definition of PAR as a research collaboration involving academics and practitioners designed to improve practice through recognising that research can be an element of the process of change (Koshy, Koshy, & Waterman, 2010). The approach involved academic researchers and practitioners working towards knowledge co-production and creating a forum in which evidence-based reflection could occur and on the basis of which developments in practice could take place. The research adopted an ethnographic case study format enabling an in depth and detailed case analysis of the safety and security operations surrounding sixteen fixtures from the Allsvenskan and Swedish Cup and one Europa League fixture across three seasons in the three major policing regions within Sweden that have adopted the SPT, which include the major urban centres in Stockholm, Western (Göteborg and Borås) and Southern Regions (Helsingborg and Malmö).<sup>5</sup> The matches were selected based on a desire to secure some variation in terms of risk assessment and to achieve as broad as possible representation of clubs competing within the Swedish Allsvenskan.<sup>6</sup> However, given the focus of our research we selected fixtures that were likely to attract large followings of away fans and that would involve a high level of police deployment. While we did conduct observations at two 'low risk' fixtures we did not conduct any observations at 'police free' matches.

The sampling was also influenced by logistical issues because our observations involved multiple stakeholders, who were often required to secure availability and arrange travel some weeks in advance. These included academics from the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark. While either the first or second authors were both or individually present on each occasion the wider team participating in the observation were individuals that included experienced police officers from the Stockholm, Western and Southern Police regions in Sweden and from East Jutland in Denmark. Participants also included individuals from the UK's College of Policing, along with representatives from Hampshire, Sussex, Staffordshire, West Midlands and West Yorkshire Police in the United Kingdom as well as on one occasion from Queensland Police in Australia. Observation teams also included football supporters, Supporter Liaison (SLO)<sup>7</sup> and Safety Officers from several football clubs in Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom. Some participated in multiple while others only in single observations, and the project's working language was English.

For each observation, teams of between eight and sixteen people were drawn together either on the day of, or the day before, the fixture and briefed on the context and aims of the project along with its methodology. Each observation was supported by the Swedish Police National Development Unit and the host police force and therefore observers had access to aspects of the policing operation both inside and outside of stadia. On the day of the fixture, the observation team worked in small groups attending briefings, interviewing participants and making observations across the operational footprint of the event. On most occasions, one of the Swedish police observers would have access to a police radio and would record significant content. Observers would pay particular attention to areas where fans gathered and

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<sup>5</sup> These were in 2014: IFK Göteborg v Djurgårdens IF. In 2015: AIK v Hammarby IF; Hammarby IF v Djurgården IF; IFK Göteborg v IF Elfsborg; Djurgårdens IF v Hammarby IF; IFK Göteborg v Hammarby IF; Hammarby IF v Helsingborg IF. In 2016: Djurgårdens IF v Hammarby IF; Hammarby IF v Helsingborg IF; AIK v IFK Göteborg; Helsingborg IF v Malmö FF and IFK Göteborg v Djurgårdens IF & AIK v Bala. In 2017: IFK Göteborg v Malmö FF; BK Häcken v Djurgårdens IF; IF Elsborg v AIK and Malmö FF v Djurgården IF. In Sweden the football seasons run from late March to November.

<sup>6</sup> The Allsvenskan is the top division of the Swedish football league system.

<sup>7</sup> Supporter Liaison Officers are fans employed by their respective clubs to facilitate communications and dialogue.

focus on any issue that was of significance to the police or the research goals of the project. As the fixture approached, the team would gravitate towards the stadium and continue observations inside during the match. After the fixture, further observations would take place around key areas of interest such as transport hubs. The team was then drawn together the following day into a workshop where extensive discussion was undertaken. On occasions various practitioners involved in the event (e.g. police Silver commanders, club Safety and Security Officers, SLOs) would attend the event and offer their perspectives.

The discussion focused on drawing out and triangulating the data to construct an objective account of the chronological order of the event and nature of its behavioural dimensions as this related to safety and security issues. Discussion also focused on preliminary analysis of the underlying dynamics and key features of the event judged by the team to be relevant. The discussions were recorded and summarised as field notes. The analysis presented below drew upon the triangulated accounts of each event to provide an understanding of general patterns of police planning, strategy and tactics; a chronological ordering and overview of crowd action and policing deployment; and to identify moments where conflict was judged to have been avoided or had developed. The first author then considered the evidence as whole and drew out core themes based loosely on the principles of thematic analysis outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006).

Within each theme, several 'case study' episodes are used within the analysis to help illustrate, exemplify and characterise the theoretical processes judged to be at work.

## Analysis

### The dynamics of football 'risk'

As is normative for football fans across Europe, during the majority of events we observed groups of supporters gathered together some hours before the fixture with the primary focus on socialising, drinking and collectively expressing their identity and support for their club. These gatherings would then often lead into some large collective movements, or 'fan marches', towards the stadium. To a large extent, it was the collective movements of these fans that presented the greatest challenges for preventing confrontation. Moreover, it was evident that the geographical location of these gatherings and the routes of the marches and the infrastructure through which they were enabled had a profound impact on the likelihood of confrontation. Thus, a key feature of our observations was that the 'risk' of disorder could not be adequately understood outside of the context and dynamics of interaction within which it occurred.

First, gatherings tended to occur in locations that were either 'traditional' for fans, had been facilitated by the police or were otherwise symbolically meaningful for the supporter groups involved. For example, for fixtures involving the Stockholm club Hammarby, their fans would tend to gather in the Medborgarplatsen or 'Citizen Square' in Södermalm in Southern Stockholm. Likewise, the traditional places of gathering for IFK Göteborg fans are the bars on and around the Kungssportsavenyn or Avenyn, which is the main city centre boulevard of Gothenburg. Given this historical association between place and identity, it would be interpreted as illegitimate and therefore a major provocation if fans of a visiting team were to gather in or anywhere near to these locations, particularly if the opposing fans were affiliated to an antagonistic ultra or hooligan group. In this sense, there was a symbolic interaction at work whereby perceived legitimacy of behaviour was central to the dynamics of conflict between fans.

Second, it was evident that such perceptions were situationally embodied, historically informed and dynamic over time. One of the major sources of tension between fans of Hammarby and another Stockholm club Djurgårdens IF, during the period of our observations, revolved around the 'ownership' of

the 'territory' surrounding the Tele2 Arena during 'home' and 'away' fixtures. These tensions date back to 2013 with the adoption of the Tele2 Arena in Southern Stockholm (close to Södermalm) as a shared stadium for both clubs. As such Djurgårdens IF are portrayed by some Hammarby fans as 'homeless' interlopers with no legitimate right to be present in a stadium and area of the city that Hammarby fans have traditionally seen as their own. A key site of this dispute developed in and around the Arena, in particular the main pedestrian avenue to the stadium, the Arenagången. During the first Hammarby home fixture against Djurgårdens played at the Arena, a group of some 500 Djurgårdens fans, categorised as 'risk' by the police, gathered in a bar called the En Arena that is located just off the Arenagången just a few hundred metres from another bar called the Slakthuset, which contained around 300 Hammarby 'risk' fans. It would appear that this initial 'incursion' by Djurgårdens fans into Hammarby 'territory' then flowed into the dynamics of 'risk' at the subsequent derby fixture where Hammarby were the 'away' team. Prior to this second fixture a large group of Hammarby fans, including several known to be affiliated to their hooligan group the KGB, gathered in the Medborgarplatsen. However, on the train journey to the 'away' metro station an emergency cord was pulled on the train as it passed through the 'home' station where it had not been scheduled to stop. This enabled a large crowd of around 200 Hammarby fans to evade police cordons and access the Arenagången, where some of them initiated a series of violent assaults. Moreover, at the next derby fixture the following season Djurgården's 'hooligan' group – the DFG (see Scott, 2012) – mobilised into Arenagången in a deliberate action designed to 'protect their area' from any further Hammarby incursions.

These examples demonstrate a pattern evident across our observations as a whole showing that the geographical location of where fans congregated, combined with the infra-structure enabling and shaping their collective movement to and from these locations, were primary factors driving the 'risk' of conflict. What our observations suggest therefore is that the 'risks' that fans posed to 'public order' was neither inherent, fixed nor random but were the outcome of a complex array of contextually embedded and historical processes. Thus, it was the capacity of police to understand, influence and manage these processes that was the primary factor governing whether or not collective conflict materialised.

### Risk assessment and mobilisation

To become a football event to which the SPT would automatically apply it first had to pass through a risk assessment. Police risk assessments then directly informed police operational planning via a binary categorisation system that created two qualitatively different types of police mobilisation. If an event was understood by police to pose serious threat and risk, then it was generally classified as a 'special event'. In most cases during our research, this classification appeared to be largely determined by the historical reputation of the fan group, rather than the outcome of a contemporary and systematic intelligence assessment or reflections on knowledge about the complex historical and interactive processes outlined above. Indeed, one of the key features of all our observations was the absence of a nationally coordinated football intelligence framework and the relative weakness of the contemporary intelligence picture available for host police commanders. As such, there were several observations where substantial police resources were deployed when little if any subsequent threats and risks materialized and the judgement of our observers was that the majority of police resources were adding little value. For example, across our four observed fixtures in 2017 approximately 455 police officers were deployed, constituting some 3800 person-hours, whereby only two minor incidents of confrontation developed, both dealt with easily by a handful of officers.



When a 'special event' classification is applied, this allows the local police unit within which the stadium is located to mobilise SPT trained resources from across, and if necessary beyond, the policing area via their regional Operational Support Department (OSD). In other words, threat and risk classifications are important not just as an indication that 'disorder' is expected but because that classification allows SPT trained officers from across the region to be identified and placed into shift patterns days prior to the event such that they could be extracted from their scheduled normal duties on the day of the fixture. The classification also had the effect of sometimes handing over police command from the local unit to SPT commanders from within the OSD. However, if the perceived threat and risk was low and the event was judged not to justify the 'special event' categorisation the policing, if necessary at all, was commanded and staffed largely by the local police unit and did not draw upon the OSD. Our data suggest these organisational aspects of risk classification and their implications for police mobilisation and command had important implications in terms of police capacity to manage the dynamics of risk as well as to apply the SPT itself.

### Negotiated management, facilitation and graded deployment

Our observations provided several examples of the successful application of the SPT to 'special events' where substantial risks of public disorder were identified but at which conflict did not subsequently materialise. For example, as outlined above, in April 2015 the Stockholm club Hammarby IF played their local city rivals Djurgårdens IF at the first fixture between the two clubs since they had moved to the Tele2 Arena. This was seen from the outset by police as a fixture posing very high levels of risk. One of the key areas of concern revolved around the gathering of Djurgårdens fans in the En Arena. Given the close associations between risk and territory described above, the mere presence of the Djurgården 'risk' fans in this area was effectively a major provocation to the Hammarby fans. Unwilling to prevent the gathering the police commander decided to facilitate it and treat it exactly as he would if it were a protest, provided the Djurgårdens fans agreed to move towards the stadium along a narrow and enclosed service road rather than through the main pedestrian routes around the stadium. The police then set about utilising dialogue, working in partnership with the club's SLOs, to convince the fans to adopt the proposed route. Agreements were reached and just prior to the kick off the Djurgårdens fans marched along the previously agreed route to the Arena. Despite police measures to prevent it there were various points at which Hammarby fans moved into the 'controlled' spaces around the march and gestured towards the Djurgårdens fans to come and confront them. This had the effect of provoking several of the Djurgårdens fans who made serious attempts to confront and cross police lines. However, at this point a group of influential Djurgårdens fans that had been marshalling and leading the march, intervened and compelled the fans to continue towards the stadium. Those fans that had previously been confronting the police lines complied and the situation rapidly calmed. This was just one example of several observations across all three policing Regions demonstrating how the SPT can be and was successfully applied to the policing of football in Sweden. Of particular significance was police commitment to knowledge, facilitation and communication, the application of the graded tactical concept and a subsequent high level of self-regulation among fans.

### Evenemangs and Supporter Police

In April 2012, the then Stockholm County Police divided the officers involved in specialist tasks related to sports violence into two distinct sub-units, each performing different functions; on the one hand, the Evenemangs, and on the other, Supporter Police. Both are deployed in civilian clothing but the Evenemangs

police wear bright yellow tabards with 'Evenemangs Polis' written clearly across them. Both are also armed with a pistol and carry cuffs and batons, as is normal for police officers in Sweden. Evenemangs Police are in effect Dialogue Police for sports events as they share the same background philosophy, approach and function.<sup>8</sup> The role of the Evenemangs officers are focused on building links of trust and confidence among the fan groups and as such, where possible, they avoid coercion, do not seek to make arrests or to get involved with criminal intelligence gathering, prosecutions or securing stadium bans. In contrast, the Supporter Police deploy more covertly as 'spotters' with no identifiable police markings and focus primarily on the surveillance, categorisation, identification, prosecution and banning of 'risk' fans by gathering criminal intelligence on them. Both Supporter and evenemangs police travel to all home and away fixtures of the three major Stockholm clubs throughout the season with each unit supplementing the other. However, when deployed during the events, we observed they operated entirely separately, a differentiation the two sub-units sought to deliberately reinforce.

Our observations suggest that the impact of Evenemangs police has been positive in at least three distinct ways. First, there is evidence their deployments play a role in transforming previously polarised relationships between police and fan groups. For example, at the beginning of the research period relations between police in Stockholm and fans of AIK, one of the city's three major clubs, were extremely difficult. So much so that police judged they were effectively unable to enter into the concourse behind the north stand of the Friends Arena during matches without provoking major confrontation, the section that is occupied by several of the club's vociferous and powerful Ultra groups. Over the course of the 2016–2018 seasons, the Evenemangs unit described how they worked in earnest to build positive relationships with key individuals within these groups. Consistent with our observation officers from the unit assert that this was achieved across multiple events where they took various opportunities at home and away fixtures to build trust and facilitate positive interactions. By the end of the research period, the Evenemangs unit described how they were no longer faced with such polarity, were able to freely enter the area behind the North Stand and even offered opportunities for the research team to interview high profile 'risk' fans with whom they had now established positive working relationships. Such patterns of positive relationships between the officers of the unit and fans were evident across all three Allsvenskan clubs in Stockholm.

Second, there was evidence that the Evenemangs unit empowered police access to higher quality information about fans movement and intentions. For example, one of the Stockholm SLOs spoke very positively about fans relationship with the Evenemangs officers but drew sharp negative contrasts with their Supporter Police colleagues who they described as coercive and illegitimate. They made clear how, as a consequence, they would freely share information with the Evenemangs officers concerning fans movement and intentions that they would not share with Supporter Police. Third, through their capacity to engage in dialogue the Evenemangs unit was observed on several occasions acting as a powerful mediator between police and fan groups in partnership with the clubs' SLOs to help 'problem solve' otherwise intractable situations of high risk and de-escalate tensions that might otherwise have developed into confrontation.

During all our observations involving the Stockholm clubs, the Evenemangs Police were almost always present in situations where violent confrontations became likely or did develop. We suggest this is, in part,

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<sup>8</sup> On the basis of interviews with several police officers involved we understand there was considerable resistance among some Police commanders in Stockholm to the development of this new unit. There was a fear that the use of Dialogue Police in football and other sports was inappropriate and would compromise their operational capabilities on demonstrations. As a compromise, the new units were required to utilize the 'Evenemangs' title even though they operate with the same remit and operating protocols as their Dialogue Police colleagues

further evidence of their capacity to understand and predict where tensions will materialise, but this raises important issues regarding the challenges they face with regard to use of force. For example, just prior to a fixture between IFK Göteborg and Hammarby IF in September 2015, approximately 300 Hammarby fans, began to march towards the stadium following a prescribed route to the east and then south of the stadium. During an interview with an Evenemangs officer during that afternoon, we were informed that in the five years of deployment in that role he had never drawn his baton. However, as Hammarby fans reached the stadium a group of approximately 150 masked and hooded Göteborg fans ran towards them. There were only one Group of DELTA officers between the two groups, so police could do nothing to stop the oncoming Göteborg fans. Widespread fighting broke out. In this situation, the Stockholm Evenemangs officer we had spoken to earlier drew his baton and faced the oncoming Göteborg fans. The officer subsequently described how on this occasion he judged it was legitimate to use the baton to protect the Hammarby fans and that using force in this 'defensive' way would empower rather than compromise his relationship to them.

Indeed, as the confrontation was occurring there were members of the public in close proximity. The Evenemangs officer who had drawn his baton spoke at that time with influential Hammarby 'risk' fans and urged them to help get members of the public out of the situation. Our observations then record that in the vicinity of the fighting a Hammarby fan assumed that the first author was a member of the public and offered to help guide him from the situation. In other words, in a context of 'disorder' the Evenemangs unit was able to draw not just their baton but also upon their knowledge and relationships with the fans to influence the situation towards minimising the impact of the violence. It is also relevant to note that the officer himself was not targeted by anyone despite being in the midst of the violence and that minimising the impact of the event on the wider population was a core strategic goal of the policing operation. What was interesting about this episode is that it demonstrates that use of force in itself is not the issue for Evenemangs police, nor that they are no longer useful in situations that are already conflictual. Rather, use of proportionate force sensitive to the inter-group dynamics and identities at work within a confrontation may actually help cement their legitimacy among and cooperation from the groups they are working with.

### Uniformed Supporter Police

In Western and Southern Regions, the approach to supporter engagement was different in that they do not have or deploy Evenemangs police at football. In Western and Southern Regions specialised 'supporter engagement' is delivered through units also referred to as 'Supporter Police'.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Stockholm, officers in these units deploy wearing police uniform and tabards, with the words Supporter Police clearly displayed. Their role combined the functions of criminal intelligence, surveillance, coercion, liaison and prosecution (e.g. gathering evidence, providing testimonies in court trials, pursuing stadium bans, acting as deterrent, etc.) (SOU, 2012).

Our data suggest that this approach of combining the 'spotting' and 'dialogue' roles within single officers had a weaker capacity for engagement with fans in comparison to the approach adopted in Stockholm where the functions are separated. Indeed, we noted serious antagonisms between specific supporter police officers and fans, while the observed levels of proactive positive engagement between some of these officers and fans was relatively low. Overall, our data reflected a problem of the perceived illegitimacy of these officers among key elements of their associated fan base. Of course, there are some of these officers

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<sup>9</sup> The Supporter Police were originally developed for the European Championships in Sweden in 1992 and is thus a historical legacy developed prior to the SPT.

who were extremely skilled at engagement and did demonstrate high levels of friendly verbal interactions, but this was certainly not true of all officers deployed into this role. Regardless of individual variability, this form of uniformed Supporter Police also appeared to be associated with weaker information flow to commanders and therefore poorer dynamic risk assessment. As we have described above, in Gothenburg large group of masked and hooded fans initiated an attack on Hammarby fans. At no point during the police briefing delivered by the Supporter Police for this event was any expectation discussed that Göteborg fans may be the source of conflict that day, and as such, the first realisation was essentially when the masked group began to run towards the Hammarby fans. This was despite the fact that we had observed these fans leading a thousand strong 'fans march' from the city centre that had arrived at the stadium some minutes beforehand. Moreover, there were no uniformed Supporter Police observed in the vicinity throughout the confrontation.

There were several other examples of this relationship between uniformed Supporter Police and diminished information flow undermining command decision-making and police responsiveness. Prior to a match between Helsingborg and Malmö in May 2016, a number of Helsingborg and FC Copenhagen 'hooligans' were present together in the city centre before the expected arrival of a large crowd of Malmö fans by train. At one point, many of these 'hooligan' fans were drinking in a bar in the main railway station. Two uniformed Supporter Police officers stood some distance away merely undertaking a surveillance role. At no point did either of these officers approach the bar or speak with any of the fans. What is interesting is that, according to one of our observers, this was the first time since the incident involving the death of a Djurgårdens fan in Helsingborg in 2014 that fans affiliated to Danish hooligan groups had attended a fixture in the city. In this sense, their presence was a clear indication of increased risk and confrontations did subsequently develop. However, throughout the event the Supporter Police and therefore the policing operation as a whole remained unaware that Danish hooligans were present in the city.

### EVENT police

In March 2014, police in Helsingborg developed a new experimental deployment of officers they referred to via their radio call sign of INDIA. This squad of officers were developed specifically to empower proactive communication led supporter engagement, which they believed was not being effectively delivered by their DELTA units. The new unit was informed by the Danish 'Event Police' concept (Havelund et al., 2011). As with DELTA units, the INDIA units had good levels of cohesion and were effective at managing stressful situations since they had a history of working together in high-risk environments. They were configured in much the same way as DELTA Groups but were given a different style of uniform, similar to that worn by the Western and Southern Regions' Supporter Police<sup>10</sup> and briefed to provide a more active role than the DELTA units in engaging with fans, and oriented towards facilitation, communication and if necessary low-level use of force.

The initial deployments of the INDIA units were experienced by commanders in the Southern Region as very effective. As a consequence, a decision was taken at a national level, supported by the then Policing Lead for Football, to roll out this new approach, trialling it in Sweden's other major urban centres such as Gothenburg and Stockholm across the period of our research. However, there was no supporting formally recognized conceptual framework defining the role of these officers nor their required competencies and skills. Additionally, the roll out was not supported with a corresponding training package. Moreover, as the

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<sup>10</sup> The uniforms look identical apart from the INDIA units merely displayed the words POLIS printed in red rather than SUPPORTER POLICE. The EVENT units did not deploy with 'riot' equipment such as helmets and body armour.

concept began to be delivered elsewhere the units were categorised as either MIKE police, after their initial radio call sign in Stockholm, but also as DELTA units and more ubiquitously and confusingly these officers began to be referred to in English as EVENT police, bearing in mind the English translation of Evenemangs Polis is 'Event Police'.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we observed considerable variability in how these new EVENT police units developed, deployed and evolved across the three major SPT regions. Our observation in Helsingborg indicated that EVENT officers in the city were perhaps the most experienced and adept, some officers having in the region of twenty separate deployments in that role at the time we conducted our observation in the city. However, in other SPT areas the development of EVENT police units began later and has been conducted in a manner that raised several issues regarding their effectiveness. For example, during a fixture in April 2015 a unit of EVENT officers were operationalized and deployed to the Gamla Stan or 'Old Town' of Stockholm as the primary tactical response to a large crowd of some one thousand fans, including groups of Ultras, who were gathering there. Despite the briefing given to these officers outlining their engagement and communication role, it was apparent to our observers that there were relatively low levels of verbal interaction between some of these officers and fans throughout. The difficulty some of the EVENT police encountered may in some part be due to the piecemeal and novel configuration of that unit, which was drawn together by including some SPT trained officers who lacked understanding of the role and several of whom we understand were openly sceptical about the concept. Indeed, during the project our observers became aware that the new EVENT units were being widely referred to by police colleagues using a derogatory term, the 'hugging police'. Moreover, in an interview with a DELTA commander, it was made clear to us that while DELTA officers had no objection to the EVENT concept in itself many were angered by the fact that they were being forced to deploy into these new units against their will. Given the lack of clarity about the role, officers and commanders we observed often had to work through the challenges of applying the new approach in a very ad hoc manner.

Throughout our observations, the EVENT unit officers were often unclear about their roles and responsibilities and were forced to work out an approach in situ in ways that our data suggests could have had negative consequences for the longer-term development of the EVENT unit as a means of engagement and its legitimacy as a concept among both officers and fans.

Nonetheless, over the duration of our research our interviews with SLOs and fans consistently reported a positive reaction to EVENT police. Over time, we also observed development among officers who had been deployed into the role. However, the capacity to achieve consistency of deployment was at times very difficult as a consequence of the planning processes invoked through the categorization of 'special event'. On the one hand, this related to the fact that in the Stockholm Region EVENT police mobilisation only occurred with respect to Special Events. For example, two of the 'non-special events' we observed were based at the Tele2 Arena. For both of these fixtures the policing operations adopted a strategy that was in line with the SPT because the local Division mobilised their own DELTA units to deal with what had already been classified as an event posing little if any risk. These units were deployed primarily in and around the Arenagången but, as with all our observations of DELTA units elsewhere, engaged in very low levels of verbal interaction, despite the fact that thousands of fans were gathered in or progressing through this area.

Our observation teams noted that these scenarios would have been ideal opportunities to deploy EVENT police in order to allow them to exploit the lack of tension to develop their engagement skills and positive relationships with and reputation among fans. The Evenemangs Police, who were deployed, certainly made clear that for them the capacity to engage with fans offered by such 'low risk' contexts were extremely

valuable. Given the low-risk classification, it seems more consistent with the Graded Tactical Concept to use EVENT units than it does DELTAs who after all are trained to specialize in high-end use of force. However, given EVENT police were at the time a specialist unit that was mobilised centrally its officers were not located within the Division responsible for the Tele2 Arena. Consequently, none could be mobilised into either of these events and subsequently these important development, engagement and coherence opportunities were missed simply because of the nature of risk assessment and its relationship to the force mobilisation processes.

On the other hand, at one event in the Western Region towards the end of the research period the local police division responsible for the stadium actively resisted the classification of it as a 'special event'. Across the three years of our research, the city police Department had invested heavily in developing the skills among officers and commanders of the EVENT units under its jurisdiction and had been deploying specific individuals into the roles to develop their capacities. Faced with a challenging fixture involving fan groups with significant histories of conflict the city police were aware that if the match was classified as a 'Special Event' the Regional OSD would take control of the policing operation. As such they feared the regional planning team would not mobilise adequately experienced police officers into the EVENT police role and that this would undermine the effectiveness of the policing operation. As a consequence, the city police refused to classify it as a 'special event' and retained control. The event passed off without major incident and during which our observers noted several examples of very effective proactive verbal engagement between EVENT police and fans very much in line with the Graded Tactical Concept.

## Discussion

This paper aims to address two inter-related research needs. The first is to report upon a series of observational evaluations of the nature of the work conducted by the police at football events in Sweden. The second is to explore the extent to which the SPT is being applied coherently in this context, as well as examining the extent to which such policing is related to outcomes consistent with its concepts and knowledge-based principles.

Our analysis turned first towards highlighting the nature of the dynamics of risk. Far from conflict emerging as some fixed and simplistic manifestation of underlying hooligan disposition, our study identified how the collective conflict that we observed could not be adequately understood outside of its context of situationally embedded intergroup interactions. It was evident that these conflicts revolved to some extent around perceptions of intergroup illegitimacy. Our study also suggests that interactions between police and fans that built upon a facilitation strategy and gave a priority to communication meant that situations that might otherwise have precipitated into serious violent confrontation remained relatively peaceful. In this sense, our study highlights policing interventions that are in line with the SPT principles (Reicher et al., 2004, 2007) and further demonstrates the utility of its underlying concepts, specifically ESIM, for helping to understand the management of conflict in a football context (Hoggett & West, 2018; Schreiber & Stott, 2015; Stott et al., 2007, 2008; Stott, Hoggett, & Pearson, 2011; Stott et al., 2018). Moreover, the current study extends the ESIM literature by providing further evidence that there is a value in conceptualising and managing Scandinavian football crowds in such terms (see also Havelund et al., 2011; Scott, 2012).

Nonetheless, our study highlights a series of problems. We explored how the intelligence available for police commanders in the context was often extremely limited and consistently failed to provide in depth analysis of the fans underlying identities, intentions or cultural histories. In this sense, our work suggests

that the policing of football in Sweden was not always consistent with the knowledge principle of the SPT (Reicher et al., 2004). Our observations also identified the effectiveness of Evenemangs police in terms of both enhancing the information flow to police commanders but also in managing and responding to the interactional dynamics of risk. This was even the case in some extremely violent situations. Despite the evident value of Evenemangs police, our research has highlighted that similar units have not been developed nationally. Dialogue has always been an integral component of the SPT. Our study therefore provides a clear empirical demonstration that its core goal of creating a nationally coordinated dialogue based tactical intervention capability may well have been achieved in the policing of demonstrations (Holgerson & Knutsson, 2011) but has not yet been met in regard to the policing of football in Sweden. In other words, the lack of Evenemangs police outside of Stockholm represents a de facto breakdown of the SPT in its application to football.

It could be argued of course that elsewhere the dialogue function is delivered by uniform Supporter Police (units that somehow have managed to exist in parallel to – but at the same time separated from – the SPT). While this is evidently the case to some extent, our study indicates some issues with this assertion. With uniformed Supporter Police, the spotting and dialogue functions are combined into a single role and good working relationships with fans were less evident, and at times actually very polarised. Our observations also highlighted that in areas utilising uniformed supporter police there was often poor information flow about emergent risks and limited responsiveness when violence did develop. In this respect our study adds further evidence that there are benefits that flow from formally separating the more coercive ‘spotting role’ from the non-repressive ‘dialogue’ function when policing football crowds (Hoggett & West, 2018; Stott et al., 2008; Stott, West & Radburn, 2018). This differentiation has evident benefit in allowing police the capacity to repair, maintain and develop functional working relationships to ‘risk’ fans in ways that assist in the de-escalation of conflict, improve dynamic risk assessment and support the efficient delivery of police strategic goals.

As with all research, there are important limitations to our approach. Perhaps the most obvious is our reliance on observational data, which flows into narrative and somewhat partial descriptions of events that lead to obvious questions regarding objectivity. However, bearing in mind such important methodological caveats, we contend our study highlights key innovations that are taking place in Sweden. On the one hand, the extension of dialogue policing into football appears to be very valuable. On the other, the development of EVENT police appears to further empower police capacity for verbal engagement with crowd participants (see also Havelund et al., 2011). On this basis we would argue that significant developments to the SPT are being made within the context of football policing in Sweden that are models of good practice for developing additional police capability for communication. Taken together, we can speculate that these advances in the SPT are perhaps effective because they enhance the procedural fairness and legitimacy of policing and thus help promote self-regulation (Stott et al., 2016; Bradford et al., 2014; Radburn & Stott, 2018). However, variability with national mobilisation of Evenemangs police, the absence of training for EVENT police and confusing conceptual frameworks all pose apparent threats to coherence and the viability of these important innovations.

We conclude by drawing upon the study to make three specific research-based recommendations for policing football in Sweden. First, there would be value in developing Evenemangs units in the regions outside Stockholm that utilise the SPT and have a significant demand created by football. Second, such investment should improve the information framework around football so that local police units are better positioned with adequate knowledge to understand the identities, cultures and dynamic risks of football crowds. Finally, there would appear to be benefits in continuing to develop and embed the EVENT police

concept. Taken together we would argue that such reforms would position Sweden at the forefront of good practice in the delivery of research and theory led football crowd policing.

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