

The 'Inevitability' of Corruption in Greek Football

Introduction

From the late 1990s corrupt practices in Greek football have been considered as a serious problem and threat for the integrity of the sport in the country. To a great extent these practices were initially associated with the existence of the 'paranga' (literally, 'The Shanty'), referring to a mechanism of fixing games by selecting specific referees for specific games in order for particular clubs to be benefited. The ultimate goal of the 'paranga' was for a specific club to win the Greek league title as this is associated with significant income from Champions' League games and television rights (Kapranos, 2002).

Following the exposure of fixed matches in Greece in 2011, also known as *Koriopolis* (a pun name on the Italian scandal *Calciopolis* and the Greek word 'korios' or phone-tap), detailed information about numerous matches played in the 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 seasons that attracted UEFA's attention were brought into the public eye (Eleftherotypia 2011). Greek football has also attracted considerable attention from UEFA in light of other scandals including 'shady' football club owners' imprisonment (Homewood, 2015), which led national and international media to portray Greek football as a 'mafia-type' organisation especially after the former president of the Hellenic Football Federation was accused of being involved in a 'criminal organisation' that was allegedly directed by the current President-Owner of Olympiakos (Rumsby, 2015; see also de Quetteville, 2003; Hill, 2010).

In response to these events, both the national governing bodies of the sport and the Ministry of Culture and Sport have introduced a number of schemes and measures 2013 *in addition* to the existing relevant national (such as the Law 2725/1999 on 'Amateur and Professional Sports') and international legal frameworks (such as the UN Convention Against Corruption and the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime) (see European Commission, 2012). These include educational workshops delivered to young players that will be presented in some more detail in a section that follows.

The measures taken to tackle corruption have been introduced and implemented in the top tiers of professional football and were met originally with enthusiasm since they were seen as an effective way to protect and enhance the 'product' (see Mason, 1999) of Greek football. However, it can be argued that there has been no success in stamping out corrupt practices in Greek football and this is exemplified primarily –and among other - by a continuous discussion about how integral match-fixing in the country has been¹, a discussion that now has spilled outside the country (see, for example, The Guardian, 2014) as well as an enduring distrust among football fans towards the 'product' itself and the authorities that supposedly regulate and promote it. Mplounas' (2014) study shows that the Greek public is not interested in Greek football; since they think that the image of Greek football is 'bad' and that the quality of the sport in the country is 'low'. The public considers that the factors that contribute to the negative image and low quality of Greek football are among other, the systematic bias of the organisers of football leagues towards specific clubs (91.5%), and the tolerance of the government to criminal and corrupt practices in football (86.5%). In addition, the public consider that a significant number of football matches' results in Greece are a product of match-fixing, and have a negative perception of referees who are considered an integral part of the match-fixing process (Mplounas, 2014).

¹ It is perhaps interesting to note that there is a *weekly* TV show in a major national network (SKAI) focusing on football match-fixing as well as other corrupt practices in Greek football.

This negative perception appears to be the case among players too and this is highlighted not only by reactions to match-day injustices suffered by specific football clubs but also by a recent report that reveals that 12.8% of Greek football players interviewed admitted that they had been approached to ‘fix’ a match within the past year, and 64% of them said they were confident that matches in their league were fixed (Kovac, 2014).

The aim of this article is to show why corruption in Greek football is inevitable by offering a detailed account of a number of football-related corrupt practices and highlighting their contextual parameters (see Brooks *et al.*, 2013) as well as juxtaposing them against the set of measures implemented against football corruption in the country. Through the analysis of the data collected, three major areas of football-related corruption were identified: match-fixing; ticket ‘tricks’; and tax evasion through fake tax and insurance certificates. Although this is hardly an exhaustive list of corrupt practices in Greece, these areas were selected because they have either received considerable media attention, or because they have been identified as ‘normal’ practices in the working of the Greek football clubs that have been the context of our empirical research. This is why doping, for instance, is beyond the scope of our study. In our endeavour, and for the purposes of this article, we use Gorse and Chadwick’s (2010: 40) definition of sports corruption: “*any illegal, immoral or unethical activity that attempts to deliberately distort the result of a sporting contest for the personal material gain of one or more parties involved in that activity*”.

Our goal is neither to offer a systematic analysis of the causes of football corruption in Greece nor to provide an account of every type of football-related corruption in the country. Moreover, we do not have the objective of evaluating the measures implemented against football corruption in Greece. On the contrary, our aim is to examine the corrupt practices in detail, along with the measures against them, while highlighting the factors that suggest that corruption is an integral and almost inevitable aspect of Greek football.

The article is structured as follows: initially, an account of the data and methods utilised for this study is offered followed by a presentation of the measures against corruption that have been introduced in Greek football over the past years. Then we offer an examination of three major types of corrupt practices that takes place, in an attempt to highlight the key actors and underlying structures that support them. We finish with a discussion of our findings.

Data and Methods

The primary source of information for this article is ethnographic research that the first author of this article conducted while being employed on a full-time basis in two football clubs in Greece. One of the clubs is one of the major and most popular clubs in country, and part of the *Super League* (first division), whereas the other is a historic club in the second division (also known as ‘*Football League*’ in Greece). The ethnographic work offered the researcher the opportunity to study individuals who seldom offer themselves for examination, and a unique opportunity for exploration. This part of the research required immersion in the field for a significant amount of time (from August 2008 to February 2011 and from April 2011 to April 2013), and participation in activities that were not related to the collection of data *per se*. Within the context of the ethnographic research, additional information on the issues at stake was obtained through interviews with informed actors from the realm of Greek football.

Secondly, with regards to match-fixing in particular, we used the telephone conversations that were available as the result of wiretapping by the National Intelligence Agency (*EYP*) in relation to the latest football match-fixing scandal (2011). These wiretapped conversations were able to offer abundant information about the broad range of actors and groups involved, and identify patterns of social organisation across a number of

cases many of which were related to one another. Finally, we collected, examined and analysed published media sources which allowed us to obtain information not only on the process behind corrupt practices within football clubs, but also on the key actors involved, while triangulating the data collected through the first two methods.

As with any study, the current study presents some limitations, which should be acknowledged at this stage. The first one has to do with the ethnographic part of the study. There can be no guarantee that the information given is a wholly neutral representation of the activities and links between actors, though the researcher attempted to make them as close to that as possible; one needs to remember that accounts offered in an ethnographic study are consciously or unconsciously interpreted by the researcher. Moreover, the data are limited to what the participants have provided and what has the researcher observed, and they cannot be generalised to the whole football scene. In relation to the interviews with the informed actors there are issues of generalisability, and one can never be absolutely certain about validity, although ‘cross-checking’ and ‘member checking’ significantly contributed towards eliminating untruthful accounts. In addition, there is also the issue of representativeness of the sample. In many instances researchers used a method of snowballing sampling to identify participants, thus limiting the sample to the researcher’s own personal network and, as a consequence, the scope of the findings.

The second set of limitations is related to the wiretapped conversations by the Greek National Intelligence Agency. These are the result of law enforcement activity, which in turn is affected by resource restrictions, the competency of agents, organisational priorities, and wider political priorities. As with any product of the state derived from largely unaccountable agencies, wiretapped conversations need to be carefully handled and the extent to which their revelations apply beyond the clubs affected remain uncertain.

The final set of limitations is related to media sources. Not only do they most often refer to those cases which the authorities came across, thus not reporting ‘successful’ schemes, but they also tend to present the issues relating to the actors or the activity/market itself in a sensational and morally charged manner. Nevertheless, we think that the methodological triangulation throughout the study – involving both official and ‘unofficial’ sources - has created a net that has captured the most important aspects of the topic under investigation and we believe and claim that there is a high degree of validity in the findings.

Tackling corruption in Greek Football

The measures against corruption that have been introduced in Greek football over the past years (following the latest match-fixing scandal exposure in 2011) include educational programmes and tighter regulations in both financial control and match-fixing detention, which will be presented in more detail below. Presenting them will allow for a thorough understanding of the response to corruption to be achieved, while highlighting the actors and areas they have been focused on.

Two educational programmes were designed and ran by the Greek Super League and the Hellenic Football Federation: The first is the scheme ‘Staying on side: How to stop Match-Fixing’ (Transparency International, 2013), an educational workshop delivered to young players (playing in Under 17 and Under 20 national championships) who are urged to mind ‘[their] team, [their] career, [their] responsibility’ (according to the programme’s motto), have been introduced by the Greek Super League. This programme ran for the duration of a season and aimed at raising awareness on the effects match-fixing can have on the future of the sport and each individual player’s career. More than 800 players and coaches attended the workshop and were informed on the above mentioned repercussions of match-fixing, based on the principle that *ethics* and *integrity* can be taught and as a result key actors can be

trained to support fair play and reject corruption, leading to a better future for football (see Segal, 2013). The programme was sponsored by ‘Transparency International’, which aims at addressing corruption in any aspect of modern life (Transparency International, 2013).

The second set of programmes is educational courses run throughout the last few seasons, promoting *fair play* and *ethical conduct* in football to high school students (Super League Greece, 2013). Through these courses, the students were informed of the idea of fair play in football and were given the opportunity to appreciate the benefits of following such practices in regards to enjoying the sport and protecting its future. The programme was supported by the major football clubs of the country that urged their players to deliver some of the courses themselves. These courses were delivered in schools around the capital of the country and were welcomed by the local authorities and the Ministry of Education.

Both ‘Staying on side’ and the fair play programmes were run in conjunction with the European Professional Leagues Association (EPFL) and aimed at educating potential key actors in order to prevent match-fixing and non-fair play behaviour in general. By educating these individuals on the effects their decisions can have, and allowing them to visualise the repercussions of their actions, prevention of corruption can be achieved (see also Haberfeld and Sheehan, 2013). The basis on which the programmes were designed follows the INTERPOL-FIFA Anti-Corruption Training Initiative, which started in May 2011 with ‘*the overall objective of tackling sport corruption in football, with a principal focus on illegal and irregular betting and match fixing, through providing various training programmes to improve key individuals*’ (Abbott & Sheehan, 2013: 282). According to the Anti-Corruption Initiative protecting the *integrity* of football can be supported on three pillars; training, education, and prevention. All three pillars entail raising awareness on the phenomenon of match-fixing and the ways in which each individual actor can resist and report match-fixing, as well as how information on match-fixing can be shared between international organisations, in order for *transparency* on new updates on the phenomenon to be ensured (see Abbott & Sheehan, 2013).

Additional measures on addressing corruption on a European level including Greece focused on the appropriate governance of the sport, which as Jones (2013) suggests, resembles the way in which problems would be dealt with in the corporate world. These measures included the introduction of tighter *financial regulations on the clubs*, which was supported by UEFA’s financial fair play guidelines (UEFA, 2015a,b), and the establishment of firmer control on key events, such as match-days, through each league’s ‘independent official auditors’. The financial regulations imposed called for additional transparency on the accounts of each club, while ensuring that any money owed to either companies and individuals or the country would be paid in order for the clubs to be permitted to participate in the season’s championship. Introducing a centrally controlled electronic tax system would allow for each club’s ticket issue (one of the key income sources) to be managed and regulated more closely, while eliminating the room for individual errors or favouritism (see also Dimitropoulos, 2006). Appointing ‘independent official auditors’ to each club on a match-day would then ensure that detailed reports on these key events would be provided to the pertinent governing bodies, tax authorities and the police.

Finally, a tighter control on betting was regarded as a priority, having been identified as a major factor for corruption in football. The additional and firmer control was assisted by the introduction of the UEFA Betting Fraud Detection System (BFDS) (UEFA, 2014). The system allows for all legal betting activities world-wide to be monitored, in order for any irregularities to be noticed. These irregularities include unexpectedly high activity on significantly favourable odds for rather unanticipated results before and especially during a match. The system allows for these activities to be identified and for the betting system supporting them to be blocked. The system has also been used in order for matches that have

already been concluded to be reviewed thoroughly, especially when suspicion was raised due to unexpected events taking place within their duration. The BFDS enables the analysis team to examine these matches carefully and decide whether they can be considered ‘questionable’ or ‘exceptionally questionable’. Once a match has been classified in any of these two categories, the national football association is informed in order for an investigation to begin. Interestingly enough, 41 Super League and Football League matches played between 2008 and 2011 were considered to be ‘exceptionally questionable’, according to the system, probing the Hellenic Football Federation to investigate them further (see Proto Thema, 2010). It is worth noting that a significant number of Greek matches are being reported as ‘questionable’ or ‘exceptionally questionable’ by UEFA each season (UEFA, 2015).

Football-related corrupt practices in Greece

As mentioned earlier, through the analysis of the data collected, three major areas of football-related corruption can be identified: match-fixing; ticket ‘tricks’; and tax evasion through fake tax and insurance certificates. These types will be presented in this section in more detail, with emphasis drawn on the individuals and structures that have not been addressed by the corruption prevention schemes presented above.

Match-fixing

The match-fixing web revealed through the official case files of the *Koriopolis scandal*, appears to be a complex collaboration of a number of actors, participating willingly or unwillingly in order for the events and final results of particular matches to be set according to the pre-arranged agreements. The actors involved in match-fixing range from individuals initiating the process to unwilling members that participate under the threat of physical harm. As the following analysis will show, only a few of these individuals have been involved in the prevention programmes, with the initiators of the whole process remaining still not addressed.

As it was presented earlier in the study, the educational prevention programmes have been targeting young players and potential managers, while neglecting the professional footballers currently playing in the top tier of Greek football. Due to their role as the key constituents in the process that can secure a desired result for a match, players have been participating in match-fixing willingly or unwillingly. It was often suggested that their involvement was a result of intimidation or fear imposed to them by the owners or presidents of the clubs. However, while threat has been presented as a successful way to ensure their collaboration in match-fixing, additional evidence suggests that their involvement in the process can in reality be an informed and even calculated decision. In fact, as it was argued by a player in one of the many occasions in which one of the authors was present

‘I had to do it [ensure a particular result was achieved]. All five of us [pointing to an additional four players] were in. We got some good money out of it and it was so easy. They’re not paying us enough, so we have to find another way to make money’.

As this statement suggests, footballers can be aware of the repercussions their actions have, but chose to neglect them in order for ‘easy and quick’ profit to be gained. A closer scrutiny of the transcripts by EYP suggests that the Presidents (owners or chairmen) of the clubs are the individuals who initiate the process of match-fixing and ensure that the agreed result in each match will be achieved.

According to the transcripts of the recorded conversations, the Presidents, after being informed of a favourable betting rate on a match of the club which they own or lead, would attempt to reach an agreement on the required result that would secure them the rate. This agreement is either reached with the respecting President of the club they are playing against, the referee, or the players of either or both clubs. The means through which an agreement is reached entails either the promise of reward (*'I'll give you the number of my booker and you can bet a few grand on it and get a little something for yourself'*), or the threat of harm in someone's career or physical health (*'if you don't do it, my boys will break your legs and you won't be able to kick a ball ever in your life'*). The Presidents are also in charge of ensuring that the desired result is achieved and are, therefore, in contact with the individuals that are involved in the agreement before and throughout each match.

Another category of key actors that have not been addressed with the new measures is one that has been involved in one of the biggest scandals in Greek football in the early 90s, referees. The referees' role entails executing rather than initiating the match-fixing agreement. The referees' power relies on maintaining significant influence on the final result of a match through the decisions they make. Based on this power and on the fact that their decisions cannot in practice be disputed, a pre-arranged result can be achieved through the referees' collaboration. As our data show, referees have agreed to influence the course of matches in order for desired results to be attained, by making a wrong decision or turning the blind eye in key moments during matches. Once again, evidence suggests that both reward and threat have convinced referees to participate in match-fixing. Finally, bookmakers or illegal agents have been identified as the key actor in match-fixing, since they provide the incentive that primarily and predominantly created the need for this phenomenon (see Skokas, 2012). Either legally or illegally respectively, the betting rates set and promoted by them act as the inducement and reward for any of the above mentioned actors who decide to fix a match. Even though tighter control measures have been taken by both international and national governing bodies (FIFA, UEFA, Greek Super League) and local betting providers (OPAP), as it was discussed earlier in this study, betting still remains widely uncontrollable.

As the above analysis on match-fixing has demonstrated, the individuals involved in the process include groups that are not currently addressed by the schemes and structures that still remain uncontrollable. One could in fact claim, that the structure of this perplex web is not even examined carefully enough for the truth underlying issues to be identified. Additionally, even within groups that the current programmes have captured, the element of intention behind their choice to participate in match-fixing is not catered for.

Ticket tricks

Football clubs rely heavily on the income produced by match-day ticket sales, particularly in lower divisions where the agreements on sponsorship and TV rights are not very lucrative (Triandafyllou, 2012). However, compared to the other sources of income, ticket sales have also been considered the least controlled income source, since the actual transaction is completed when the exchange of money for a paper ticket takes place, without any additional paper trail. In order for this income source to be closely monitored, additional measures have been introduced that included the detailed reporting of the tickets sold and the appointment of 'official league auditors' in each match (see Kathimerini, 2012).

The process of selling and reporting the tickets sold (through which the taxable income is also calculated) is further perplexed by the existence of an additional match-day ticket category, that most people do not have access to. This category, known as *season (card exchange) tickets (antallagis diakeias)*, was originally created in order for an account to be kept on the number of season ticket holders that attend each match, while allowing for the

income generated through the season tickets to be distributed throughout each season. According to this process, the tax authorities would then rely on each club to report the exact number of season card exchange tickets validated in each match, which represents the number of season ticket holders that attended each match. The process would require for each season ticket holder to visit the ticketing office before entering the stadium, in order for him or her to get an additional paper exchange ticket. The validation of these tickets would then take place when entering each stadium, and would be overseen by both security staff and the league's 'official auditors' (see Kathimerini, 2012).

The way in which this process takes place in practice, however, deviates from the original plan. The league's 'official auditors' rarely oversee the validation process in detail, and instead prefer a more indirect way of calculation. At the end of each match, the auditors provide the ticket officers of the home club with a rough estimation of the number of season ticket holders that entered the stadium, in order for the corresponding exchange tickets to be 'validated'. Since validating the exchange tickets using an actual validation machine would be futile at this point, the 'validation' that takes place involves manually shredding the tickets that should have been given to the season card holders before entering the stadium.

Interestingly, the estimated number suggested by the 'auditors' is rarely undisputed. On the contrary, this number becomes a negotiation topic between the auditor and the head of the ticketing department of the club, who aims at agreeing on the lower number possible. The auditor is often asked to be understanding and lower the number substantially, which is regularly achieved. The final number agreed is then reported on the official reports of the match that are then signed by the auditor and submitted to the tax service, the local police and the league's governing body. These reports will be also used by the accountants of the club in order for the tax liability to be calculated. It is worth noting that this negotiation is anticipated by both parties and even encouraged by higher league officials. In one of the many occasions in which one of us was present, an auditor admitted that he was planning to be understanding towards a particular club, since one of the vice-presidents of the league in which the club was playing personally asked him to.

However, requesting the auditors' consent to disobey the laws is not limited to the above mentioned negotiation. A more complex and demanding negotiation can also take place in the occasion of a club being unable to issue an adequate number of match-day tickets caused by either financial problems (lack of tax or insurance certificates-see below) or a simple miscalculation of demand. The auditors are then asked to agree to 'turn the blind eye' in order for unofficial tickets to be used that would allow for an exchange of money to take place without any paper trail. The process that they are in fact agreeing to overlook is the selling of unofficial tickets that have not been issued by the pertinent governing body or stamped by the local police and tax service, which will result in untraceable and therefore un-taxable income for the club. In other words, the auditors are asked to sign the official reports stating that no additional tickets were sold, while unofficially allowing non-ticket holders to enter the stadium.

Surprisingly enough, this complex negotiation has been proven successful and has even been encouraged by the league's administration. It is worth noting that in one occasion when one of us was present, one of the vice-presidents of the league the club was playing in, joined the auditor and the director of the ticketing department before the negotiation begun and prompted the auditor to *'look after those guys as best as [he] can'*.

Fake tax and insurance certificates

Based on the additional measures of control introduced by the governing bodies of the sport, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Sport and the Ministry of Finance, more

thorough procedures were gradually introduced for football clubs. As a result, and in order for key tasks to be completed, such as signing a new player, getting permission to participate in the championship or even issuing tickets for the next home match, an additional step has to be completed. A tax certificate or an insurance certificate has to be obtained from the local tax authority or employees' trust fund respectively (see Dimitropoulos, 2006). A tax certificate can be issued when the club has settled any tax liabilities owed to the government, by either paying the debt off or by agreeing on a repayment scheme. Likewise, an insurance certificate is issued when the club has settled any outstanding debt regarding the employees' national insurance contributions, by paying it off or by reaching a settlement with the trust fund. By making one or both of these documents compulsory in a crucial task, such as the ones mentioned above, the governing bodies ensured that the clubs would be kept 'on a short leash' regarding their payments towards the government and the employees' insurance contribution.

However, Greek football clubs have succeeded in discovering creative ways to avoid this additional hurdle and continue their 'questionable' practices with significant short-term success. Firstly, securing a number of consecutive settlement agreements can 'buy' a club some valuable time, ranging from one to two months - from the moment the agreement is reached to the moment it collapses, when the next payment agreed becomes overdue. This short time window can allow for the certificates required to be issued and the tasks in mind to be completed, without any additional payments towards either the tax or the national insurance debt to be made. Secondly, using personal connections in the local tax service or the local employees' trust fund office in order for exceptions to be made regarding the club, has been a rather popular practice, especially in football clubs located in provincial areas of Greece. Favouritism or simply asking employees to turn the blind eye when a club has been unable to obtain a new tax or insurance certificate has proven to be particularly successful in Greek football, with a number of smaller clubs succeeding in completing various crucial tasks, such as issuing tickets for the majority of the matches of the season, without a valid issued certificate. This practice is *gradually* being abandoned by the clubs, since the newly introduced on-line country-wide filing system does not allow for individual employees to alter or omit any of the required steps, making it increasingly difficult if not impossible for favouritism to succeed (see Siomopoulos, 2013).

Thirdly, a rather risky and significantly more creative way to avoid this additional hurdle of control was invented, the creation of *fake tax and insurance certificates*. This practice has attracted considerable attention, when a number of first division clubs, currently facing charges and possible relegation for their actions, were caught using fake certificates in order for new players to be signed and tickets for home matches to be issued (Livanios, 2014). Regardless of the attention it has received, however, creating and using a fake certificate is still one of the most successful and common ways to overcome the additional control in Greek football. According to this practice, a fake tax or insurance certificate is created by the employees of a club, who ensure that the final product looks identical to an authentic tax or insurance certificate. The only thing that differs from the prototype used is the protocol number, which is updated accordingly, in order for the employees receiving the document to be convinced. This fake document is then filed along with the other documentation required, depending on the task in hand. In the odd occasion when the fake certificate has to be delivered in-person, for example in order for match tickets to be approved by the local tax service, the person in charge of presenting the document is offered additional advice on how to behave ('*act natural*', '*say that you don't know anything about it*') and what to do if the fake document is identified ('*call the President in case something goes wrong*').

Finally, a documented way of avoiding the additional controls, which is often used when all the above described practices fail, is personal political connections made by the

Presidents of the clubs. In those occasions, it is not the employees of the club asking local tax employees to turn a blind eye over a missing paper; it is the Presidents of the club asking a similar favour to a political figure, who is then requested to use their power over the local or national authorities, in order for the requested favour to be done.

Based on the secrecy surrounding this method, little information exists on the identities of the individuals involved, or the actual discussions taking place between them. What can be presented, however, is an overview of how this method works. Firstly, once an unexpected problem occurs, the President of the club is notified and is provided with details on the issue. The President then approaches a well-known politician who is often a close personal connection of his, in order for a favour to be asked regarding ‘overcoming this obstacle’. Since this approach takes place privately and often involves a single phone call from one party to the other, little information exists on the identity of the politicians engaged in this process. What has been observed, however, is the third step of this method, which is the result of the political figure’s influence. Depending on the problem, the politician makes the relevant authority (for example the local tax service) aware of his or her personal interest and ensures that the particular authority stops the process. This step often entails a personal phone call made by the politician to the person blocking this progress (e.g. the director of the local tax service) who is then asked to ‘turn a blind eye’ in his or her favour. Even though information on the actual content of this phone call cannot be obtained, this method has proven to be particularly successful in Greek football. As a director of a local tax service confided to a club’s employee during our research:

‘I shouldn’t really be doing this for you [signing the document that allowed the club to issue match tickets without a tax certificate)], but I am. I personally don’t mind what happens with the club. But if he [referring to the politician and pointing at the phone] comes through, then I am happy. I want to keep him happy, because I don’t want to be stuck here for long. He is a good connection to have and I want him to be happy with me’.

Discussion

Corruption in Greek football has significant repercussions on the sport. The measures that have been introduced to deal with corrupt practices in Greek football are, of course, positive developments however, they tend to ignore important aspects, *actors* and *processes* that are *integral* to the commission of corrupt practice. The educational programmes focus on players and prospective players while overlooking important actors that are instrumental in the commission of corrupt practices such as presidents of the clubs, referees and betting agents. Specifically, the individuals involved in the role of the President of each club have attracted considerable attention because they included people with dubious legal or even criminal past and equally ‘questionable’ motives (Dabilis, 2011). It is worth noting that although a *Fit and Proper* test has been a law of the Greek Government since 1999 (Law 2725/1999) (Efimerida Kyverniseos, 1999), in reality, it has never been actively applied.

Similarly, despite the numerous promises that the appointment and training of referees through the Hellenic Football Federation will become a transparent and closely controlled process, this has not been the case. Moreover, with regards to betting, one of the key drawbacks of the BFDS is that the system can examine and control the *legal* betting activities world-wide, however, it cannot trace and, therefore, assist to restrain any of the numerous *illegal* betting practices (UEFA, 2014). Unfortunately, as it was underlined by UEFA (2014), these practices account for 70% of the overall betting activities globally. The existence of illegal betting agents often located in Asian countries and, therefore, operating under different regulations have allowed for betting to remain a key lucrative incentive for match-fixing.

Even though tighter financial regulations were introduced gradually throughout the country and are now implemented in professional Greek football, a number of creative solutions have been invented in order to avoid situational constraints. The way in which these measures have been put in operation in Greek football has not stopped corruption. On the contrary, it has created the need for more elaborate or resourceful ways to maintain or even increase the level of corruption within it (see Jones, 2013) while exposing *cultural* and *economic* conditions that are conducive to corruption.

An important indigenous cultural condition favouring football-related corruption in Greece is politics (see also Nassif, 2014 on the case of Lebanon). As Dimitropoulos (2010) has noted in his work, Greek politicians have been unjustifiably favourable towards football clubs either in a direct or an indirect manner, in fear of the significant political cost entailed in possibly denying them extravagant favours. As a result, the role political figures have held in this practice has not been addressed, allowing for this method to remain successful in overcoming any problems created in any of the above mentioned practices (Eleftherotypia, 2013a). Perhaps unlike other contexts, what happens in Greece is that the clubs participating in corruption are in essence protected against any significant punishment by the politicians of the locality the clubs are based in. The level of interconnectedness between football and politics in Greece is -among other- exemplified by the fact that the current mayor of Piraeus (hometown of Olympiakos FC), Yiannis Moralis, who was elected in 2014, was formerly the vice-chairman of Olympiakos, while the current mayor of Volos, Andreas Beos (hometown of Olympiakos Volou FC), also elected in 2014, was previously the president of Olympiakos Volou (Kathimerini, 2015).

Measures implemented also ignore or overlook the *financial* football-related context in the country, which is, of course, an extension of the general financial and entrepreneurial landscape in Greece. Firstly, since the beginning of the 1980s when the sport became 'professionalised' and football clubs in the first, second and third division were transformed into companies, football has been used as a platform of action for extremely powerful individuals who use clubs and the popular support for them not only as an income source *per se* (season tickets, advertisements, merchandise, etc.) which is particularly the case for big clubs, but also as a vehicle for tax evasion and money laundering, as a protection shield against the state, and as leverage towards securing state bids. From the moment football clubs are companies that are to be protected as 'investments', sport itself becomes a secondary concern.

Moreover, the 'paranga' mechanism mentioned earlier in this study facilitated corrupt practices in primarily two ways: firstly, it consolidated the extremely low 'outcome uncertainty' within the Greek football causing significant competitive imbalance among the clubs (see Eleftherotypia, 2013b). This imbalance did not only lead to the creation of 'big' and 'small' teams, as Szymanski and Kesenne (2004) suggest, but also to the formation of 'rich' and 'poor' clubs. As Schmidt and Berri (2001) note, since the performance on the field in professional competitive sports has a direct impact on their financial income, the gap between these two groups is affected by the competitive balance or imbalance of the league. The low outcome uncertainty in Greek football has arguably led to high levels of competitive imbalance within the professional leagues of the sport, leading to the creation of 'rich' and 'poor' clubs, with the gap between these two categories being widened year after year as the clubs' financial records show (Direction Business Reports, 2015).

Another way to underline this competitive imbalance within the league would be to examine the level of probability of determining the winner of the league (see Buzzacchi et al., 2004). Taking into consideration that the Greek Championship has been won by the same club 17 times within the last 19 years, outcome uncertainty has reached an extreme low level in Greek football, with the Super League often being characterised as a 'monopoly' (see

Eleftherotypia, 2013b), with all the financial implications this entails. This also meant that no other major clubs in the country were able to profit from such an achievement creating a condition in which even major football clubs face deteriorating finances² which could have been avoided with participation in Champions' League and being obliged to search for additional funding sources.

In addition, the 'paranga' was instrumental in corruption becoming widespread in Greek football in the presence of self-governance and autonomy of the Greek football in which state monitoring is virtually absent. It created an environment of distrust in which most clubs had to 'pick sides' if they wanted to guarantee preferential treatment, better positioning in play-offs, avoidance of relegation, increased chances of promotion or playing in European competitions etc. This pervasive corruption in the world of Greek football has been demonstrated to basically act as providing a comparative advantage to those structures which do not operate according to officially established rules. Inevitably, some corrupt activities such as match-fixing in this endemically corrupt environment, have become viable, rather short-term solutions for many football clubs, as well as a way of making sure that money is being made under the enormous financial pressure that most Greek football clubs face in the current entrepreneurial and financial landscape of the country. Reasons for the financial hardship of football clubs include the continuous reduction in clubs' income especially after 2009, the reduced attendance in Greek stadia with an average of 4,328 spectators per Super League football match (and a reduction in attendance by 12% from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013), and the general low commercial value (brand finance) of the Greek football (Siemos, 2014).

Though these data might not be accurate, for reasons given in this paper, the order of magnitude is likely to be about right and gives an idea of the scale of the 'real' problem, which naturally has severe financial repercussion on individual players. In fact, the way in which footballers are treated in modern Greek football in terms of finances has led to numerous official complaints made to the international governing bodies of the sport, that have in turn resulted in the International Federation of Professional Footballers (FIFPro) issuing an official announcement, consulting footballers to avoid signing contracts with Greek clubs (FIFPro, 2013):

"[Clubs in Greece]³ do everything possible to win players over, offering them fabulous wages, a luxurious home, ambitious plans, bonuses or a percentage of future transfer payments. Unfortunately, many don't keep these promises. Generally, after a few months, the club turns out to be short of financial resources, so the player has to wait months to be paid. Very often, he never collects. Some players have to abandon their homes because the club cannot or will not continue to pay their rent. And bonuses are never mentioned again. A player who has to wait for his money has a greater chance of being approached to manipulate a match" (FIFPro cited in Slater, 2013; see also Hill, 2015).

Within the formation of this financial imbalance among clubs that we mentioned above, corrupt practices within football clubs many times are the product of the pre-emptive fear of the club 'not making it' and losing their finger-hold in the football industry.

Conclusion

The measures implemented ignore that corruption in the Greek football business world is not any more an aberration, a temporary anomic diversion from an industry guided by good

² One of the top and most popular Greek clubs, AEK, was a casualty of this situation declaring bankruptcy and seeking relegation to third division in 2013.

³ As well as Cyprus and Turkey.

values, or a set of immoral actions taken by individuals that 'hide' behind the rules in order to disconnect from any moral responsibility. Morals have been relocated from the core to the boundary to act as a guide to individuals and entities such as football clubs who compete hard in the football business environment (see Hall, 2012). With such a powerful amoral injunction at the core of the Greek the football industry, and failure punished by the threat of extinction from the football scene, it is unsurprising that many will resort to largely undetected unethical or criminal means (see also Hobbs, 2013). Corrupt practices in the Greek football are not the intrusion of 'anomie' (normlessness) at the core of an industry displacing traditional values and norms but the *new norm* (see Hall, 2012). The measures implemented give the false impression of being able to accommodate ethical sociability but Greek football clubs must continue to make profits or 'die', and in difficult circumstances, such as these mentioned earlier, ethical restraints can easily be overridden. As financial pressures intensify in Greece in general, and the Greek football industry in particular, ethical restraints for a range of actors associated with football clubs are under the strain placed upon them by corrosive forces that are imposed on the football industry by the economy's pathogenic core (Hall, 2012; see also Hall and Antonopoulos, 2016). Aggressive neoliberal political economy that has spread to Greek football now present us with corrupt practices as the 'only game in town'.

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