

Kick it! Escaping the Stigmatization of Croatia Through Football

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Abstract

Stigmatization corrupts the view of an entire nation and impacts their perception in the international community. Engaging with stigma and stigmatization has been primarily researched by Erving Goffman and Rebecca Adler-Nissen. Building on Adler-Nissen's three particular approaches to stigmatization, which are accepting stigma, denying stigma or counter-stigmatization, this thesis proposes an additional way of engagement, which is escaping. In order to do so, this research looks at the relationship between stigmatization and its impact on the perception of a nation, as well as, the influence of football. This thesis will show that stereotypes lead to the stigmatization of a nation. Moreover, the aim is to show that there is another approach to stigmatization possible. This thesis focuses on Croatia which was stigmatized due to its past. In addition to that, the Homeland War in Croatia in the 90s and the leadership of President Franjo Tuđman were used to label Croatia as a violent Balkan country. The successful football results of Croatia from the 1998 and 2018 World Cups proved that a country is capable of escaping stigmatization. Thus, the work seeks to demonstrate that Croatia escaped this stigmatization through football.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Stigma and Stereotypes	4
1.1 Stigma	4
1.2 Stereotypes	9
1.3 Methodology	14
Chapter 2: Croatian National Identity, its development and the stereotypes of Croatia.....	16
2.1 Defining the National Identity of Croatia	16
2.2 Stereotypes about Croatia and their origin.....	19
Chapter 3: Football's role in the perception of Croatia	27
3.1 Croatia's football success story: Do it like the Croats do it.....	27
3.2 Kick it like Modrić.....	35
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	40

Introduction

“The ball is round, the game lasts ninety minutes, and everything else is just theory.”¹

Throughout history, football has developed into one of the most prominent sports in the world, and it can be argued that it is the most popular sport in Europe. Established in England in the 19th century, football progressed into a passion game. However, football also influenced the passion for national identity. Furthermore, each nation develops its own identity and features that distinguish it from other nations. These national qualities are frequently manifested through sporting tournaments, in this example Croatia’s participation in major international football tournaments. Nonetheless, the difficulty is that every nation is associated with some kind of stereotype, and unfavorable preconceptions frequently lead to a nation's stigmatization. More precisely, football has emerged as an indication of specific national qualities and has evolved into a representation of national identity and gives a chance to build national unity and solidarity. Through football, a country’s perception on the international level can change and counter the negative stereotypes the country may have.

Nevertheless, it is essential to mention that the status of a country in the international arena matters. As Renshon argues, a country’s international standing is of importance, because it refers to one’s rank in a status community.² He continues by stating that the status is referring to a state’s identity.³ As identity and perception of identity are volatile, it is essential to consider how they can change. In connection with this, Goffman raised the idea that there are people who are discredited and discreditable. Based on this argument every human being can be

¹ Peter-J. Jost, “‘The Ball Is Round, the Game Lasts 90 Minutes, Everything Else Is Pure Theory,’” *Journal of Sports Economics* 22, no. 1 (2020): 27-74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527002520939614>, 27.

The quote is attributed to the German football coach Sepp Herberger

² Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 23.

³ Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 23.

discreditable, meaning that each one of us has something that would not suit the shared definition of norms presented by our current world standards.⁴ Furthermore, the main point is that one can easily go from discreditable to being discredited.⁵

It is of crucial importance to consider the connection between the concept of stigma and football. Stigma is a quality that communicates preconceived notions based on particular, primarily negative attributes. Nevertheless, we cannot discuss stigma without mentioning stereotypes. This research will argue that stereotypes are connected with stigma. Moreover, stereotypes emerge before the process of stigmatization. In order to understand how stigma works, we need to pay greater attention to stereotypes. Additionally, stereotypes allow stigma to flourish. When a nation is stigmatized, it can be argued that it leads to the damaging of the reputation that a particular nation has. Observing the interaction of the countries with stigmas Adler-Nissen argued that there are three particular ways of reacting.⁶ A country can accept the stigma, deny it or counter it. However, as this thesis will argue there is an additional possibility of how to interact with stigmatization which is escaping it. Crucially, as the case of Croatia will show, there is the possibility to escape stereotypes through the influence of football.

The aim of this research is to show that the approaches to stigma can be revised. The goal is to show that a country can approach stigma by simply escaping it. Stigma does not need to be accepted or denied; it may simply be escaped. This thesis will focus on the example of Croatia. Croatia approached stigmatization by escaping it through football. In addition to that, key players, such as Luka Modrić, contributed to the “kicking” of stigmatization in the case of Croatia. Moreover, through the case of Croatian football, it becomes visible that the international environment of football changed, which also contributed to the popularity of

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Stigma : Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Touchstone, 2014), 41.

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Stigma : Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Touchstone, 2014), 41.

⁶ Adler-Nissen, “Stigma Management in International Relations”.

football. Essentially, the case of Croatia shows that there are additional ways of interacting with national stigmas, such as escaping them through the growing influence of sports.

Chapter 1: Stigma and Stereotypes

Stigma does not only exist in the sphere of sociology and psychology, it is also visible in politics, and more precisely, in international relations. Stigmatization does not exclusively refer to individuals who are stigmatized and being discriminated against because of mental illnesses, instead, it can refer to nations and certain societies. Erving Goffman, an American sociologist, developed the theory of stigma, while Walter Lippman coined the term “stereotype”. The aim of this research is to demonstrate, using the ideas of stigma and stereotypes, why these two concepts are the ideal ones to examine the situation in Croatia. Moreover, the aim is to show how Croatia is stigmatized and what negative stereotypes are connected to the country. Historically, football was indirectly utilized to escape the stereotypes and stigma about Croatia. Thus, the goal is to demonstrate that football conveys a radically different message about Croatia. The two key concepts of this chapter, “Stigma” and “Stereotypes”, will be instrumental for the comprehension of this work. We will get a more elaborate explanation of this understanding of stigma and stereotypes as this chapter progresses. But, before we get an overview of how these concepts evolved, we shall go through the numerous ways in how stigma and stereotypes are understood.

1.1 Stigma

As Adler-Nissen writes, stigma deals with the formation of deviance and its consequences⁷. In her article *Stigma Management in International Relations*, she developed the main argument that states are active agents of socialization.⁸ Furthermore, Adler-Nissen constructs her argument by connecting stigma to norms. She argues that stigmatization is

⁷ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, “Stigma Management in International Relations: Transgressive Identities, Norms, and Order in International Society,” *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818313000337>.

⁸ Adler-Nissen, “Stigma Management in International Relations”, 143.

essential to understand how norms operate.⁹ In addition to that, Adler-Nissen argues that stigmatization aids in the clarification of norms and the attainment of compliance by differentiating between two types of states; the normal and transgression states.¹⁰ Moreover, she points out that international society is also formed by ongoing stigmatization processes, resulting in stigmatization being one of the ways through which norms are instilled.¹¹ Furthermore, Adler-Nissen identifies two elements that are critical in determining how states deal with stigma.¹² The first is defined as the extent to which the norms supporting the stigma are shared, and the second is the importance of monetary and social resources in how states manage stigma.¹³

However, she illustrates her point by adopting it to three countries, Germany, Austria, and Cuba.¹⁴ According to her, Germany after the Second World War, went through the process of recognition, while Austria rejected the stigma. Cuba, on the other hand, faced counter-stigmatization.¹⁵ Through those three examples, Adler-Nissen highlights the difference of norms in all three cases. In the case of Germany, those were war crimes, while in the case of Austria it was the outcome of the elections. In Cuba, on the other hand, norms were outlined as the ideological confrontation of the Cold War, which produced counter-stigmatization.

What can be concluded from Adler-Nissen's points, is that a country has only three options to deal with stigmatization and these are: accepting, rejecting or simply stigmatizing other states. However, what Adler-Nissen does not mention is that there can be additional options, and that is to escape the stigmatization. Furthermore, Adler-Nissen is comparing incomparable objects. For instance, she gives Austria the opportunity to resist the

⁹ Adler-Nissen, "Stigma Management in International Relations", 144.

¹⁰ Ibid, 152.

¹¹ Ibid, 152

¹² Ibid, 154

¹³ Ibid, 154

¹⁴ Ibid, 145

¹⁵ Ibid, 145

stigmatization but not Germany. Moreover, in all three cases, distinct norms are identified which results into a different outcome.

Adler-Nissen continues and argues that stigmatization in International Relations is an ongoing and widespread phenomenon.¹⁶ In order to develop international norms and order, stigma processes are essential.¹⁷ The problem that various nations face is that there is one or even several stereotypes attached to them. Moreover, the nation then reacts to this stigmatization by trying to overcome this stereotype. However, what is missing from Adler-Nissen's approach are the stereotypes and the multiplicity of stereotypes. The problem is that stigmatization and stereotypes are linked, and Adler-Nissen ignores the significance of stereotypes. Thus, in order to gain a more elaborate definition of the importance of stigma, we need to re-examine the origin of stigma.

The term stigma was introduced by the Greeks to describe the "branding" or mark on slaves. Moreover, people who were stigmatized and cast out of society had a physical mark imprinted on their bodies in ancient Greece¹⁸. In his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, sociologist Goffman defined stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and claimed that society discriminates against these people and limits their opportunities because of it.¹⁹ Moreover, according to Goffman, a stigma exists neither in the person being stigmatized nor in the observer of the stigma. He argues that stigma occurs in the interaction between an attribute (the trait of the person) and an audience²⁰. However, according to Goffman, there are three distinct forms of stigma that are of importance²¹. First of all, there are the *abominations of the body*.²² With that, he refers to any part of the human

¹⁶ Ibid, 149

¹⁷ Ibid, 151

¹⁸ Erving Goffman, *Stigma : Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Touchstone, 2014), 1.

¹⁹ Goffman, *Stigma*, 3

²⁰ Ibid, 4

²¹ Ibid, 4

²² Ibid. 4

body that distinguishes one from other individuals. That could, for instance, be amputation or even a scar. Second, he continues with addressing the character flaws.²³ Under this category, he puts several character defects which lead to individuals being stigmatized because of that. One example of that can be a person that is an addict. Being an addict will immediately lead to the stigmatization of that individual and clearly to discrimination. However, what needs to be acknowledged, is that stereotypes are the precondition of stigma. Stereotypes open the way to stigmatization. Furthermore, the third and last form of stigma is, as Goffman puts it, *tribal stigma*.²⁴ Under tribal stigma, Goffman refers to the stigmatization of race, nation, and religion. As Goffman argues, not only individuals can be stigmatized but also larger groups such as nations.²⁵ This means that some nations are stigmatized because they differ from other countries. An example of that is the stigmatization of Eastern European Countries by the Western European ones. In addition to that, through immigration, and more precisely, through the refugee crisis, the stigmatization of certain groups and nations is visible. Race and religion can clearly distinguish people, which then leads to stigmatization. The problem we are facing today, and what the focus of this research will be, is that stigma is mostly referred to individuals or a particular group, and that the stigmatization of a nation is neglected. Thus, it is essential to point out what consequences the stigmatization of a particular nation brings.

Raising acute problems and the discrimination of stigmatized people was very well portrayed in the movie CODA.²⁶ CODA deals with a deaf family where the daughter is the only family member that can hear. Her whole life, she was the translator for her family. Here, one has to mention that the family has a fishing business and that according to the law, there needs to be at least one hearing person on every fishing boat. However, the high school girl

²³ Ibid. 4

²⁴ Ibid, 4

²⁵ Ibid, 5

²⁶ CODA, IMDb (IMDb.com, 2021), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10366460/>.

realizes that she has dreams of her own and that her dream is to attend the Berklee College of Music. Due to that, she is caught between her dreams and loyalty to her family.

In particular, CODA captures Goffman's theory of stigma very well. It demonstrates his claim that every condition, in this example, the circumstance of deaf people, stigmatizes people to various degrees. Thus, it also shows, that even though the family is part of the society, they are treated differently than other people. This is considered problematic because these people did not choose to be born deaf, and even though the daughter is not deaf, she is still being stigmatized just by association with her family. Furthermore, the discrimination of persons who are "different" is depicted throughout the film. CODA demonstrates how harsh our culture can be to individuals who are different from us. In addition to that, as Goffman mentioned, when stigma is long-lasting it can lead to a so-called "Spoiled Identity."²⁷ This spoiled identity is an idea of a person that is assigned as negative and stigmatized by the majority of society. More precisely, that person has been spoiled because their true self came to light. In the case of CODA, the family has been discredited because they are deaf. However, even though the daughter was not born deaf, she is still being discredited because of her family.

From this movie, we can see that certain current beliefs about individuals or groups of people are arbitrary, molded by pre-existing prejudices. Moreover, it highlights the importance of stereotypes and supports the point that stereotypes are the precondition of stigma.

To summarize, stigmatization may affect people, organizations, and even nations. However, stigma is linked to stereotypes. Stereotypes are crucial in this work since they lead to stigmatization. Moreover, stereotypes are socially constructed and systemic.

²⁷ Goffman, Stigma, 64

1.2 Stereotypes

Now that we understood the definition of stigma and its importance, it is essential that we define stereotypes. The word *stereotype* was first coined by Lippmann in 1922.²⁸

In his book, *Public Opinion*, he described stereotypes as follows:

*For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.*²⁹

As we can see from his definition, there is a strong tendency in people to judge first and develop an opinion about certain groups, rather than shaping their own opinion. These tend to be predominantly negative. The questions then are, how does that impact the group of people? How is that specific group viewed in society? All these judgments can lead to disrupting one's mental health and being "marked" for the whole life. In addition to that, Lovéc and Bojinović Fenko define stereotypes as either positive or negative types of generalization that relate to the personal qualities of members of specific social groups.³⁰ Because of that as the authors argue, they are reducing the intra-group diversity.³¹ Another definition of stereotypes is that they create simplistic images or ideas about a specific sort of people or object.³² In addition to that, stereotypes are not only focused on one particular group. Political groups, genders, or even nations can be stereotyped. Following the development of attaching stereotypes, the spectrum of stereotyping is much wider. It is also crucial to note that even though stereotypes may be both negative and good; they are more commonly seen as negative.

²⁸ Hamilton, David L. *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Books on Demand, 1993, 2.

²⁹ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Lawrence, Kansas: Neeland Media LLC, 2020), 55.

³⁰ Marko Lovéc and Ana Bojinović Fenko, "Populism in the Foreign Policy of Central European States," *Teorija in Praksa (Theory in Practice)*, January 2019, 1111.

³¹ Lovéc and Bojinović Fenko, *Populism in the Foreign Policy of Central European States*, 1111.

³² Pedro Bordal et al., "Stereotypes*," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 4 (2016): <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw029>, 1753.

In addition to this, I want to connect this to stereotypes about nations. Today, it is common for any nation to be associated with some form of stereotype. Germans, for instance, are seen as "cold," whilst Russians are regarded as "heavy drinkers." However, are these stereotypes real or false? What is the origin of these stereotypes? These are just some of the many questions that occur while reading such statements. Again, this demonstrates the problem of stereotypes. Stereotypes as such can influence a country's perception by people. Thus, they can negatively shape its role in the international arena. As we can see, stigma and stereotypes are very connected to each other. It can be argued that one complements the other. To clarify, stereotypes emerge over time as a result of members of one group acting in a specific way, and an outsider (in this case, other nations and groups) assigning these stereotypes to these groups of people. Stereotypes, however, can only be applied to groups of people. Furthermore, they are frequently used to pass judgment on others. For instance, by mentioning the previous cases of stereotypes, an upcoming meeting with someone from a stigmatized country might easily be influenced.

In some ways, the emergence of stereotypes may be considered a preconception or the first step toward stigmatization. Once there are unfavorable preconceptions, you may stigmatize individuals or groups. However, Goffman is stating unequivocally that stigmatization does not force individuals who are stigmatized outside of society.³³ The entire purpose is to keep them within and stigmatize them. As a result, their options and powers are restricted, and they are subjected to control. However, if you remove them from society, they are free to act as they choose. Nevertheless, building upon Goffman the notion of stereotypes plays a crucial role. More precisely, stereotypes are a prism through which we look at different actors. Moreover, stereotypes are already in our minds yet socially constructed. Nonetheless,

³³ Goffman, Stigma.

the most crucial point is that when it comes to stereotypes there is always a choice. There is the choice to choose from the existent stereotypes.

To illustrate the importance of stereotypes and to highlight that there is always a choice to choose from them, we can take the current War in Ukraine as an example. More precisely, through the current War in Ukraine, we can see how the majority of the people perceive it and associate it as a war where we have an autocracy versus democracy. However, in the case of the Homeland War in Croatia, the war was perceived vastly differently by the international community.³⁴ Even though Serbia was the aggressor and attacked Croatia because the country wanted their independence, the war was considered as something typical of the Balkans, meaning that the countries in the Balkans are more prone to engaging in conflicts with each other. From this example, one can see that this represents a perfect illustration of stigma. Furthermore, why is it that someone may be considered normal, and then the next day the same someone is considered deviant; how can sudden changes in shared societal norms and standards be explained? Building upon Goffman's theory of stigma, the answer is that there is always a choice of stereotypes. People have the choice to perceive topics differently. One can look at the Homeland War in Croatia and think about it through the prism of "Balkanization" or differently, even though the term "Balkanization" itself is a stereotype. Balkanization, according to Ellis and Wright, is a relatively negative term that refers to ethnic groupings embroiled in violent conflicts with governmental structures or other ethnic groups.³⁵ On one level, all states are merely nations and members of the international community, while on the other, they are members of specific regions, such as Southeastern Europe or in this particular instance, the Balkans. In addition to that, states can also be considered as great powers, as popular tourist destinations or as criminal states. These many stereotypes influence the

³⁴ Croats refer to the war in Croatia as the "Homeland War".

³⁵ Ellis, Mark, and Richard Wright. "The Balkanization Metaphor in the Analysis of U.S. Immigration." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no. 4 (1998): 689. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0004-5608.00118>.

decisions we make and the way we perceive states. Thus, in the case of Croatia, the stigmatization and stereotypes are quite evident. One example of that can be the role of the first president of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman. From an outside perspective, Tuđman may be considered a negative, war-related figure, however, the Croatian nation sees him in a different light. He is considered a national hero and more precisely as the “Father of the Homeland.”³⁶ This proves that we can perceive the same subject in different ways, more precisely, that there are different evaluations for the same exact topic.

When a state is stigmatized, it does not cease to be a state; instead, its options become limited. Nevertheless, this problem can be overcome by introducing the plurality of possible stereotypes, and in the case of Croatia, the country escaped the stigmatization by redirecting it to football. Consequently, this led to the formation of positive stereotypes about the country. The problem with the concept of stigma is that the range of possible strategies is incomplete. Meaning, that there is also the possibility to escape stigma, rather than accept or deny it. To understand how stigma operates, we need to pay more attention to stereotypes. Stereotypes are socially constructed and there is always a plurality of them. However, how they rise to prominence is due to the integration of a specific system or agency.

Connecting this to the case of Croatia, I will argue that Croatia neither accepted nor rejected the stigmatization. Croatia escaped the stigmatization by redirecting the stigmatization to football. However, I will show that process in more details in the next chapters. Nonetheless, Croatia is labelled with numerous stereotypes, not just a single one.

The remaining chapters of this research shall demonstrate if Croatia managed to change its perception on the international arena from its independence until now. Moreover, given the

³⁶ Ante Bralić, *Franjo Tuđman u Memoarističkoj i Publicističkoj Literaturi (Franjo Tuđman in Memoir and Publicist Literature)*, (Zadar, Croatia: Sveučilište u Zadru, 2016), 320.

variety of possible stereotypes, we need to examine the number of stereotypes that were accessible about Croatia. This discussion will be pushed further by looking at the impact of football and its role in changing Croatia's perception.

1.3 Methodology

To explore how Croatia has escaped the stigmatization of their national perception through football, descriptive discourse analysis will be used. More precisely, for the purpose of this research, I will analyze foreign newspaper and magazine articles, which offer a holistic perspective on the perception of Croatia abroad. The reason for choosing these particular articles is to analyze a foreign perception of Croatia in terms of football. Moreover, two major football events are chosen for more in-depth scrutiny; the World Cup in 1998 and the World Cup in 2018. Another reason for choosing these events is to highlight Croatia's biggest achievements in football. In addition to that, the Croatia football team achieved its greatest results during these two tournaments.

Furthermore, the message conveyed in these pieces will be examined. The discourse will be analyzed in order to reach the purpose of this thesis, which is to gain a deeper understanding of how Croatia escaped stigmatization and resisted it through football. Due to that, this chapter will be divided into two subchapters. The first one will deal with football in Croatia, the achievements of their national team, as well as its perception in the world. The second chapter, on the other hand, will examine the impact of Luka Modrić as an ambassador for Croatia in the world.

Nevertheless, before going in-depth with the football part, we need to analyze the changes on the systemic level. Back in the 90s, the international environment was changing. More precisely, after the end of the Homeland War in Croatia, the situation with football changed. It can be argued that football became more lucrative. Moreover, the age of television and the internet contributed to the popularity of football. In the 90s the world witnessed a change when it comes to television and the broadcasting of football. Football became much more televised. Furthermore, at the present age, there is the possibility to access any football

match online and everyone has access to it. Because of that, it can be argued that the digital change contributed to football gaining popularity.

In addition to that, because of developments in the international system, the Croatian government recognized the potential of football as a vehicle for promoting Croatia's favorable image. It should be noted that the Croatian government did not directly choose football; they were working in other areas, such as tourism, but the institutional conditions on the international level were advantageous to football. Moreover, the interplay of changing structures and agency was in favor of football.

Chapter 2: Croatian National Identity, its development and the stereotypes of Croatia

2.1 Defining the National Identity of Croatia

Today, Croatia is known as a popular and safe tourist destination. The country is well known for its local cuisine and warm welcoming culture of people. However, throughout history, Croatia was often associated with negative stereotypes, leading to the stigmatization of the country. In addition to that, Croatia went through a difficult period of time getting acknowledged in the international community and developing a favorable reputation among nations worldwide. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate a variety of stereotypes about Croatia. The historical part is of importance here, because, throughout history, there were changes on the international level. The goal is to demonstrate that there is a range of stereotypes that can be chosen from. Furthermore, this chapter will also highlight the stereotypes about Croatia, both negative and positive. Moreover, the question: “How can a country deal openly with reputation-damaging stereotypes on the world stage?” will be answered. Thus, the following section will articulate the importance of Croatia’s national image and its change throughout history.

In order to comprehend the complex history of Croatia and its path to independence, one needs to understand the significance of national identity for Croats. National identity is described by Greenfeld and Eastwood as a rather political identity than a religious one.³⁷ Moreover, they added that the national identity is linked to a specific “world image.”³⁸ Triandafyllidou argues that the nation is the most relevant form of collective identity that exists

³⁷ Liah Greenfeld and Jonathan Eastwood, “National Identity,” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, February 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0011>, 2.

³⁸ Greenfeld and Eastwood, “National Identity”, 3

today.³⁹ In addition to that, most of the nations that exist today had to fight for their existence and independence mainly from other states in order to liberate themselves and become independent.⁴⁰ Thus, Triandafyllidou's main point is that there is always a "significant other" that poses a threat to a nation and its independence.⁴¹

The argument above highlights the significance of one's national identity. The case of Croatia exemplifies this argument. Throughout history, Croatia had to fight for their independence on several occasions. Consequently, certain states, particularly Serbia, viewed the country's national identity as problematic. It is important to note, however, that national identity is inextricably linked to stereotypes. According to Lebedko, racial and ethnic stereotypes are by far the most harmful and dangerous sorts of stereotypes.⁴² Frequently, a country is associated with a variety of stereotypes generated by past events, some of which have a negative connotation. However, the mere existence of these negative stereotypes does not imply that they are real. This section aims to uncover the origin of both, the negative and positive stereotypes about Croatia and their impact on the country, as well as the formation of the Croatian identity.

As Sršen and Piskač argue, Croatian identity was formed during Modernism in the 19th century.⁴³ Korunić continues and highlights that the epoch of Modernism developed a new model of political order which brought a new social and legal system.⁴⁴ However, as Korunić contends, it is crucial to acknowledge that, the nations did not renounce the legal traditions of

³⁹ Anna Triandafyllidou, "National Identity and the 'Other'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (1998): 593-612, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198798329784>, 593.

⁴⁰ Triandafyllidou, National Identity and the Other, 594

⁴¹ Triandafyllidou, National Identity and the Other, 594

⁴² Maria G. Lebedko, "Interaction of Ethnic Stereotypes and Shared Identity in Intercultural Communication," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 154 (October 2014): 179-183, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.132>, 179.

⁴³ Andreja Sršen and Davor Piskač, "Hrvatski Nacionalni Identitet I Europska Unija (Croatian National Identity and European Union)," *Slavia Meridionalis* 12 (2015): 159-170, <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.2012.009>, 163.

⁴⁴ Korunić Petar, *Rasprava O Izgradnji Moderne Hrvatske Nacije: Nacija I Nacionalni Identitet (Discussion on the Construction of the Modern Croatian Nation: Nation and National Identity)*, (Slavonski Brod, Croatia: Hrvatski Institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2006), 174.

their country.⁴⁵ In the case of Croatia, there were several factors that formed the country's national identity.⁴⁶ Korunić identifies eight categories⁴⁷:

1. Loyalty to the Croatian tradition
2. Loyalty to the Croatian state idea (meaning the support of the Croatian statehood)
3. Loyalty to the Croatian state and political institutions (the loyalty to the Croatian parliament, to the government, judiciary etc.)
4. Loyalty to the Croatian political and state community
5. Loyalty to the program of the independent Croatian state (meaning the support of the independent Croatian territory)
6. Loyalty to the Croatian state and political territory (meaning the support for the regions in Croatia)
7. Loyalty to the cultural values of Croatia
8. Loyalty to the political environment in Croatia (meaning, support for the institutions, administrations etc.)

As we can see, all these categories form the Croatian identity. What can be concluded from this is that even though one nation has its identity, it does not necessarily indicate that it has its own independent state. Due to that, it is essential to keep apart the national identity and the creation of a state. What can be seen through the history of Croatia is that it took the country several centuries to become an independent state. Nevertheless, the world's perception of Croatia has shifted dramatically throughout time. After covering the national identity of Croatia, it is crucial to cover the stereotypes about Croatia. Moreover, this section will outline

⁴⁵ Korunić, *Raspava O Izgradnji Moderne Hrvatske Nacije (Discussion on the Construction of the Modern Croatian Nation)*, 174.

⁴⁶ Korunić, *Raspava O Izgradnji Moderne Hrvatske Nacije (Discussion on the Construction of the Modern Croatian Nation)*, 190.

⁴⁷ Korunić, *Raspava O Izgradnji Moderne Hrvatske Nacije (Discussion on the Construction of the Modern Croatian Nation)*, 190-191.

The categories were translated directly from Croatian

both, the negative and positive, stereotypes of Croatia, as well as their influence on the country. It can be argued that it progressed from negative to positive. For the sake of this research, I will begin with the focus on outlining the stereotypes about Croatia from the 1940s to the present day, because most of the negative stereotypes about the country originate from that period.

2.2 Stereotypes about Croatia and their origin

During the 1940s, Croatia became a puppet state of Nazi Germany. The country was known as the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (NDH)*, which is translated to the Independent State of Croatia. A lot of negative stereotypes about Croatia originate from that period. However, before delving into the history of NDH, it is critical to understand the political environment in Croatia prior to the establishment of NDH. Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, Croatia became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which was renamed as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia ten years later.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it is crucial to mention that the Croatian parliament never ratified nor approved the resolution to join the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.⁴⁹ During that kingdom, the aim was to establish a single Yugoslav nation with a single Yugoslav identity. It can be argued that the stereotype that Croats are “Yugoslav” started developing during this period. With the formation of this Kingdom the term “Yugoslav” developed. Furthermore, through a crucial change in 1921, a new constitution was enacted which centralized authority in Belgrade and transformed the country into a dictatorship ruled by Alexander I of Yugoslavia. Consequently, the Croatian statehood was abolished during that period which was opposed by the Croatian Peasant Party led by Stjepan Radić. The ultimate tensions between Croatia and Serbia started when Stjepan Radić, was assassinated in the parliament by the Serbian representative Puniša Račić.⁵⁰ Later

⁴⁸ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” *Časopis Za Suvremenu Povijest*, 1996, 441-453, 446.

⁴⁹ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” *Časopis Za Suvremenu Povijest*, 1996, 441-453, 446.

⁵⁰ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 447.

on, Alexander I of Yugoslavia declared a royal dictatorship as the form of government. It can be said that this period perfectly illustrates the Croatian strive for the creation of their independent and sovereign state. Due to the desire to establish their own country, Alexander I of Yugoslavia was assassinated in the attack of the Croatian radical groups, which led to the formation of the Banovina of Croatia (Banovina Hrvatska) in 1939.⁵¹ It was an autonomous province that aimed to give the Croats more autonomy and eradicate the centralism of the Serbian politicians. Following this, the axis power invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, which resulted in the partition of the country, and the establishment of the NDH.⁵²

It can be said, that NDH is the darkest chapter of Croatian history. The Ustaše (in English Ustashe), the Croatian far-right radical party, came to power with the support of the Axis. During this period there was a systematic confrontation, in which Croatia took a side. Moreover, the NDH was a puppet state of Nazi Germany that was ruled by Ante Pavelić. During his regime, Pavelić enacted racial laws, created concentration camps, and initiated a campaign to exterminate Serbs, Jews, Roma, and any other political opponents, the most numerous of whom were Croatian communists. Furthermore, in the middle of 1941 the National Liberation Army and Detachments of Yugoslavia, the anti-fascist and communist-led resistance was formed. Their leader was Josip Broz Tito. However, it is also crucial to mention the Chetniks, the Serbian nationalist guerrilla force. They fought against the Ustaše in order to establish a Greater Serbia state. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that after the Partisans' resistance intensified, the Chetniks began to cooperate with the Ustaše, in order to destroy the Partisans. In 1945, when the Second World War came to an end, it resulted also in the end of the NDH regime.⁵³ Following this, the stereotype that Croats are “nationalists” or even that all

⁵¹ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 448.

⁵² Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 448.

⁵³ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 449.

Croats are “fascists” dates back to the period of NDH.⁵⁴ Because of this regime and the crimes that occurred there, Croatia was negatively perceived by the international community.

Nonetheless, for Croats, with the end of the NDH regime, the dictatorship of Tito began. Moreover, even before Tito became the leader of the new Yugoslavia, he was responsible for the Bleiburg Massacre. In particular, the Bleiburg Massacre refers to the events that took place immediately after the end of the Second World War, when the Croatian soldiers of the NDH, wanted to surrender to the British Army.⁵⁵ Following this, the British Army sent them back to the area of the NDH where they got killed by the Partisans. However, in addition to the soldiers who were executed, also Croatian civilians who intended to flee from the partisans were prosecuted.⁵⁶ Even though the Croats were also persecuted, the stereotype remained negative. In particular, a common negative stereotype from this period is that Croats are Ustaše. According to Babic, the term “Ustaše” is still a synonym for Croats.⁵⁷

Following these historical developments, Croatia became a part of the new Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945.⁵⁸ Yugoslavia was made up of six republics, and two autonomous provinces, all of which were ruled by Tito. During Tito’s regime, the Croats yet again demanded more autonomy on several occasions. In addition to that, his regime suppressed protests and imprisoned political leaders. Even though Tito’s role is disputed, since some former Yugoslav republics saw him as a “true leader”, in Croatia he is considered a communist dictator. However, in the international community, he is mostly considered as a liberal communist due to the fact that he split with Stalin. Because of that, Croatia was

⁵⁴ Dubravka Oraić Tolić, “Kroatische Kulturelle Stereotype - Dissemination Der Nation (Croatian Cultural Stereotypes - Dissemination of the Nation),” *Neohelicon* 33, no. 1 (2006): 207-217, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02766259>, 208.

⁵⁵ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 449.

⁵⁶ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 449.

⁵⁷ Dragutin Babić, “Stigmatizacija Hrvata i Srba u Prijeratnome, Ratnom i Poslijeratnom Razdoblju”, (Stigmatization of Croats and Serbs in the Pre-War, War and Post-War Periods), *Migracijske i Etničke Teme* (1333-2546) 4 (2006): 379-397, 392.

⁵⁸ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 450.

considered a stable and peaceful country which people could visit without spending a significant amount of money. Nevertheless, during Yugoslavia, the stereotype about Croats was that they are “Yugoslavs” even when this was opposed by Croats. However, when Tito died in 1980, Yugoslavia started collapsing.⁵⁹ Political, economic and ethnic problems arose. As Tito's death exacerbated ethnic tensions between Croats and Serbs. After Milošević came to power in 1989, his aim was the creation of a “Greater Serbia state”.⁶⁰ Croatia and the other republics opposed that, which led to them demanding independence. Thus, Croatia and Slovenia were the first two republics that declared their independence in 1991. Croatia was led by Tuđman and his party *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union)*. Consequently, this decision was not accepted by Serbia which led to the invasion of both countries. When the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina started a common stereotype about these nations was that they are all “Yugoslavs.”⁶¹ However, the war in Slovenia lasted only ten days, while the one in Croatia lasted four years. During the Homeland War, the most tragic event was the Massacre of Vukovar, which was the largest massacre during the war. Croatia won the war in 1995 after the biggest military operation, known as the Operation Storm. Following this historical review, it is possible to conclude that the year 1991, with the formation of an independent and sovereign Croatia, ultimately designated the country and its people as a sovereign nation-state.

Another very common stereotype is that the Croats and Serbs are the same people and that Croatian and Serbian are practically the same language. As Bideleux and Jeffries argue, the only factor that makes them different is religion, since Croats are Catholics and Serbs are

⁵⁹ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 451.

⁶⁰ Jure Krišto, “Hrvatsko 20. Stoljeće (Croatian 20th Century),” 452.

⁶¹ Rupprecht S. Baur, “Die Konflikte Zwischen Serben Und Kroaten in Jugoslawien Und Ihre Auswirkungen Auf Den Muttersprachlichen Unterricht Für Jugoslawen Im Ausland (The conflicts between Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia and their impact on mother tongue teaching for Yugoslavs abroad),” *Interkulturelle Erziehung Und Zweisprachigkeit*, 1992, 141-165, 141.

orthodox.⁶² Moreover, the authors refer to the “same language” as serbo-croatian.⁶³ This statement is highly problematic, especially because it can be interpreted as a sort of anti-Croat sentiment since Croats do not consider their language as Serbian. However, seeing this statement from foreigners is perceived negatively by Croats, since it reveals what type of image they have about Croatia and their close association with Serbians, which goes clearly against the historical process of the creation of Croatian national identity. Furthermore, Razsa and Lindstrom also claim, that Croatian and Serbian are linguistically close, and that Croats and Serbs are both regarded “ethnically” Slavic.⁶⁴ Statements such as these are at the same time very provocative and sensitive for Croats. In particular, any association with Serbia is seen as problematic for Croats, due to the historical tensions. Another essential point to add is that, because of the country’s history, Croatia is often portrayed as a nation engaged in conflicts. Thus, this leads to the establishment of a negative image of the country. Moreover, because of the NDH regime and especially because of some aspects of the Homeland War, Croatia was stigmatized. Nonetheless, it is also essential to highlight that Croats do not consider the Homeland War in Croatia as a civil war. They consider it a war of aggression. Thus, because of the Homeland War, and more precisely the Croatian Operation Storm⁶⁵, the stereotype that Croatia is a “country of ethnic cleansing” exists.⁶⁶

Another point worth considering is that Razsa and Lindstrom argue that Balkanism penetrated the Croatian political discourse under the leadership of Tuđman.⁶⁷ Moreover, they

⁶² Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, “A History of Eastern Europe,” *Crisis and Change*, December 2007, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203018897>, 384.

⁶³ Bideleux and Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe*, 384

⁶⁴ Maple Razsa and Nicole Lindstrom, “Balkan Is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tuđman’s Croatia,” *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 18, no. 4 (November 1, 2004): 628-650, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325404266939>, 634.

⁶⁵ Operation Storm was a Croatian military operation in August 1995, that led to the regaining of the Krajina territory that was occupied by the Serbian army, and the end of the Homeland War. In Croatia the Operation Storm is celebrated every year on the 5th of August, while Serbia is accusing Croatia of ethnic cleansing.

⁶⁶ Andrijana Perković Palaš, “Operacija „Oluja” u Radovima Američkih i Britanskih Autora,” *Časopis Za Suvremenu Povijest* (Operation Storm in the Works of American and British Authors), 47 (2015): 579-596, 583.

⁶⁷ Razsa and Lindstrom, *Balkan is Beautiful*, 644.

claim that during Tuđman's leadership, Croatia was seen as another autocratic Balkan dictatorship by many Western politicians.⁶⁸ However, it is essential to note that Tuđman is considered a national hero in Croatia, referred to as the father of the homeland.⁶⁹ From this point, it is evident that one can look at the same topic through different lenses.

Connected to this, another prominent stereotype about Croatia is that it is a Balkan state. Croats disagree with this statement, as they see themselves as a European state. Even though there are different definitions of the term “Balkans” and different views about the countries that are part of that geographic area, the term refers to various parts of Southeast Europe and West Asia. Originally, it was named after the Balkan Mountains located in Bulgaria. However, there is a continuous debate on the geographical idea of the Balkans and about the states that are a part of the Balkans. Slukan-Altić emphasizes the importance of the different views, countries such as Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia have when it comes to the definition of the Balkans.⁷⁰ Thus, she argues that if we consider the geographical location of the Balkans, which is known as the Balkan Peninsula, Croatia cannot be a part of it since it is not located on the peninsula.⁷¹ Another crucial point highlighted by Čapo Žmegač is that the rejection of the Balkans as a part of one's own identity is incredibly strong, and an integral aspect of the new Croatian identity.⁷²

As previously mentioned, the negative stereotypes about Croatia date back to the NDH and the Homeland War. During the Homeland War in the 90s, the Serbian politicians, as well as the Serbian army, were referring to Croatian soldiers and the country as Ustaše. Overall, this

⁶⁸ Rasza and Lindstrom, *Balkan is Beautiful*, 634

⁶⁹ Ante Bralić, *Franjo Tuđman u Memoarističkoj i Publicističkoj Literaturi (Franjo Tuđman in Memoir and Publicist Literature)*, (Zadar, Croatia: Sveučilište u Zadru, 2016), 320.

⁷⁰ Mirela Slukan Altić, “Hrvatska Kao Zapadni Balkan – Geografska Stvarnost Ili Nametnuti Identitet?” (Croatia as the Western Balkans – Geographical Reality or Imposed Identity), *Drustvena Istrazivanja* 20, no. 2 (112) (2011): 401-413, <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.20.2.06>, 401.

⁷¹ Slukan Altić, *Hrvatska Kao Zapadni Balkan (Croatia as the Western Balkans)*, 402.

⁷² Jasna Čapo Žmegač, “Balkan i Hrvatska, Jedna i Različita (The Balkans and Croatia, One and Different),” *Erasmus – Časopis Za Kulturu Demokracije (Erasmus - Journal for Culture of Democracy)*, no. 22 (1997): 84-89, 86.

stereotype is often made by the Serbian population, and more precisely by the Serbian politicians.

However, despite these negative stereotypes, there are also positive ones about Croatia. Croatia is seen as a popular tourist destination. Tourism in Croatia also contributed to the positive image of Croatia. Tourists that visited Croatia witnessed the positive aspects of the country. Due to that, Croatia is now considered a friendly and welcoming nation. Furthermore, Croats are seen as loyal and helpful. The Croatian saying “tko će kome ako ne svome”, which can be translated as “who will you help if not your own”, perfectly illustrates the Croatian willingness to help, their loyalty and their warmth. However, Novak Milić also argues, that Croats would not only help their own “kind” but also everyone.⁷³ In addition to that, Croatia is seen as a coffee culture, where a coffee can even last two hours.⁷⁴ A German study that examined what stereotypes are ascribed to Croats, resulted in Croats being perceived as hospitable, friendly, family-oriented, and peaceful but also as national proud.⁷⁵ As Novak Milic writes, Croats are considered as “sociable people.”⁷⁶

Nevertheless, there are certain differentiations among the people in the separate regions of the country. The southern people are considered as warm and relaxed, while the ones in the north are seen as more hectic.⁷⁷ Additionally, another positive stereotype about Croatia is that the country is very good at sports. Since its independence, Croatia has achieved tremendous sporting success. In general, Croatia excels at football, handball, basketball, tennis, and water

⁷³ Sanda Lucija Udier, Suzana Angela Čolak, and Jasna Novak Milić, “Everyday Life in Croatia,” in *Croatia at First Sight: Textbook of Croatian Culture* (Zagreb, Croatia: FF Press, 2016), 361-387, 383.

⁷⁴ Sanda Lucija Udier, Suzana Angela Čolak, and Jasna Novak Milić, “Everyday Life in Croatia,” in *Croatia at First Sight: Textbook of Croatian Culture* (Zagreb, Croatia: FF Press, 2016), 361-387, 367.

⁷⁵ Rupprecht S. Baur and Stefan Ossenberg, “„Das Sind Doch Alles Jugoslawen.“ 1 Deutsche Heterostereotype Zu Bosniern, Kroaten Und Serben,” (They’re all Yugoslavs. German heterostereotypes of Bosnians, Croats and Serbs) *GEM: Germanistica Euromediterrae* 1, no. 1 (2019): 216-233, <https://doi.org/10.15291/gem.2871>, 223-224.

⁷⁶ Sanda Lucija Udier, Suzana Angela Čolak, and Jasna Novak Milić, “Everyday Life in Croatia,” in *Croatia at First Sight: Textbook of Croatian Culture* (Zagreb, Croatia: FF Press, 2016), 361-387, 366.

⁷⁷ Sanda Lucija Udier, Suzana Angela Čolak, and Jasna Novak Milić, “Everyday Life in Croatia,” in *Croatia at First Sight: Textbook of Croatian Culture* (Zagreb, Croatia: FF Press, 2016), 361-387, 384.

polo. Croatian athletes are also regarded as very successful, which is seen through the number of medals Croatia has at the Olympics. Croatia has in total 50 medals, out of which 18 are gold, 17 silver, and 15 bronze.⁷⁸ In addition to that, Croatian footballers and handballers are to this present day very successful. However, the next chapter will analyze the situation of football more precisely and it will show how football helped Croatia to escape the stigmatization.

To conclude, Croatia is considered a Balkan state, a state that had its part in a bloody war. In addition to that, the country is connected to a state that has war criminals. However, Croatia has made a conscious effort to dismantle these negative views and to escape them with the help of football. Thus, football sends the message that Croatia is different and shows that there is more than one lens through which we can look at Croatia.

⁷⁸ Hrvoje Tironi, “*Hrvatska Već Na 50 Olimpijskih Medalja: Prvu Su Donijeli Prpić I Ivanišević, Najviše Njih - Janica!*,” (Croatia Already on 50 Olympic Medals: Prpić and Ivanišević won the first, Janica the most), 24sata.hr (24 Sata, July 31, 2021), <https://www.24sata.hr/sport/hrvatska-vec-na-50-olimpijskih-medalja-prvu-su-donijeli-prpic-i-ivanisevic-najvise-njih-janica-776644>.

Chapter 3: Football's role in the perception of Croatia

Sport plays an essential role in the lives of Croats all around the world. Since its independence in 1991, Croatia, through the use of sports, is trying to promote itself in the best light possible. Out of all the other sports, the focus of this research will rely on football, since it stands out as a component that promotes Croatia in the world and also strengthens national sentiment among its citizens. In addition to that, Storey highlights that sport is a cultural practice.⁷⁹ Thus, he states that “it serves to normalise various other practices and phenomena”.⁸⁰ Because of that, it can be regarded as a valuable prism through which national identities can be examined.⁸¹ Black and Peacock, add that sports events and sports teams have been considered as enticing vehicles for governments and the variety of entities engaging in the so-called “network diplomacy”.⁸² Furthermore, as Bellamy argues, in the case of Croatia, the Croatian national football team was crucial in developing the Croatian unity, promoting the country globally, and instilling a popular feeling of national pride.⁸³ Nevertheless, after Croatia won the bronze medal at the World Cup in 1998, Tuđman stated that “football victories a nation’s identity as much as wars.”⁸⁴

3.1 Croatia’s football success story: Do it like the Croats do it

The Croatian Football Federation (Hrvatski Nogometni Savez, short HNS) was officially founded in 1912.⁸⁵ However, it was only admitted to FIFA in 1941. Nevertheless,

⁷⁹ David Storey, *Football, Place and National Identity Transferring Allegiance* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021), 4.

⁸⁰ Storey, *Football, Place and National Identity*, 4.

⁸¹ Storey, *Football, Place and National Identity*, 4.

⁸² David Black and Byron Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, January 2013, 708-725, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0040>, 708.

⁸³ Alex J. Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-Old Dream?* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 113.

⁸⁴ Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity*, 113.

⁸⁵ HNS, “Povijest - Hrvatski Nogometni Savez,” Hrvatski nogometni savez / Croatian Football Federation (n.d.) (Hrvatski nogometni savez / Croatian Football Federation), accessed May 31, 2022, <https://hns-cff.hr/hns/ot-nama/povijest/>.

after Croatia gained its independence in 1991 the country was readmitted to FIFA. In 1992 the country was then officially admitted to UEFA. The first official international friendly match of Croatia since the independence was in October 1990 against the United States.⁸⁶ Following that, Croatia qualified for the UEFA European Football Championship in 1996 and advanced to the quarterfinal round. In 1998, at the FIFA World Cup in France, Croatia won third place, achieving their first major result in history.⁸⁷ However, 20 years later, the Croatian national team reached the final of the World Cup for the first time in history and won second place. However, before the analysis progresses to these events, it is essential to cover the events prior to that. Furthermore, looking at how the news report about Croatia and what language is used, can change the perception and stereotypes. In order to understand how football helped Croatia to escape the stigmatization, this chapter will start by analyzing articles that deal with Croatia's third place at the World Cup in 1998.

To begin with, The New York Times, in an article titled "WORLD CUP '98; Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons", covered the importance of Croatia's first appearance in an international tournament.⁸⁸ Croatia was described as "a team with great confidence, rough strength, a compact defense."⁸⁹ Among others, words such as "small country" and "big player" were used to highlight the importance of the tournament for the newly independent country at that time.⁹⁰ In addition to that, the author emphasizes the significance of the war in Croatia and its influence on the players. For instance, parts such as "The soccer players continued to play their sport during the war, some inside Croatia, others outside, to save their careers and promote their country" show the connection between football and the perception of Croatia in the

⁸⁶ HNS, Povijest – Hrvatski Nogometni Savez.

⁸⁷ HNS, Povijest – Hrvatski Nogometni Savez.

⁸⁸ Jere Longman, "Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons," The New York Times (The New York Times, July 6, 1998), <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/06/sports/world-cup-98-croatia-and-its-fortunate-sons.html>.

⁸⁹ Longman, "Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons,"

⁹⁰ Longman, "Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons,"

world.⁹¹ It is apparent that these players represented Croatia to the world at large in a favorable light, challenging negative misconceptions about the country. Similarly, statements by several players in the article, who either fought in the conflict or had a close relative who fought, delivered a crucial message that it was important to differentiate them from Serbia internationally. For instance, Igor Štimac, states that “I think we are much stronger now on the field after what we've been through.”⁹² Slaven Bilić adds that Croatia strived for independence for 50 long years and that during their first international tournament in 1996, the national players were like warriors on the pitch, fighting to get Croatia acknowledged.⁹³ These statements leave the readers the space to build their opinion about Croatia. However, it is crucial to add, that from these statements, the reader acknowledges the importance of nation-building for Croats. In addition to that, the reader gets a clear idea of what football meant for the national shaping of Croatia at that time, but also what it meant for the national players. Thus, it is visible that football became the tool for escaping of stigmatization.

In addition to that, the article “The Making and Breaking of the Greatest International Side Never to Be”, published on OTB Sports, emphasizes the connection between war and sport.⁹⁴ More precisely, the sentence “when a war begins in a land, sport can never remain immune from the fires that rage around it” perfectly illustrates the political situation in Croatia at that time.⁹⁵ Moreover, it shows the tragic background the players had and how they overcame it.

⁹¹ Longman, “Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons,”

⁹² Longman, “Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons,”

⁹³ Longman, “Croatia and Its Fortunate Sons,”

⁹⁴ Off The Ball, “The Making and Breaking of the Greatest International Side Never to Be,” OTB Sports (OTB Sports, January 12, 2016), <https://www.otbsports.com/soccer/world-is-a-ball-yugoslavia-87-281234>.

⁹⁵ Off The Ball, “The Making and Breaking of the Greatest International Side Never to Be,” OTB Sports (OTB Sports, January 12, 2016), <https://www.otbsports.com/soccer/world-is-a-ball-yugoslavia-87-281234>.

Another article, “What is Croatia’s secret to sporting success”, written by Guy De Launey and published by BBC, shows the positive sides of Croatia.⁹⁶ While reading this article, one acknowledges the positive sides of Croatia. Compared to the above articles, this one primarily focuses on the positive impact of Croatian sport and does not focus primarily on the war in the article. Nevertheless, it is briefly mentioned. For instance, the sentence “Sportsmen are the best ambassador for us” shows the power individual players hold in order to promote the country through a positive prism.⁹⁷ Through these individual players and their behavior, the international community gets an idea of how Croatia actually is. Croatia is acknowledged as a sports nation, a nation that works hard to achieve their success.

Another article worth mentioning is “Why are Croatia so good at football with a population of only 4 million?”, published at I News UK, analyzes the reasons for Croatia’s success at football.⁹⁸ More precisely, they define it as good because “of coming together after hardship, and because, having advanced so far so quickly, the team has no mental block around reaching the latter stages of tournaments.”⁹⁹ Through this sentence, it gets visible that going through a war shaped the mentality of the players, as well as the nation. More precisely, by leaving the horrific atrocities behind them, Croatia demonstrates to the global community that it moved on. Another crucial point the author mentions is that football was used as a political tool by the Croatian government. More precisely, he describes it as “it’s simply a way of getting Croatia in front of people around the world – more people think about it than, say, Slovakia or

⁹⁶ Guy De Launey, “What Is Croatia’s Secret to Sporting Success?,” BBC News (BBC, May 1, 2013), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22338370>.

⁹⁷ Guy De Launey, “What Is Croatia’s Secret to Sporting Success?,” BBC News (BBC, May 1, 2013), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22338370>.

⁹⁸ Karl McDonald, “Why Are Croatia so Good at Football with a Population of 4 Million?,” inews.co.uk (Inews, October 14, 2018), <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/croatia-football-population-why-good-luka-modric-country-175658>.

⁹⁹ Karl McDonald, “Why Are Croatia so Good at Football with a Population of 4 Million?,” inews.co.uk (Inews, October 14, 2018), <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/croatia-football-population-why-good-luka-modric-country-175658>.

Belarus, who have never dazzled on the world stage.”¹⁰⁰ This sentence highlights Croatia’s visibility and acknowledgement in the world. A small country is being internationally recognized for its success. Moreover, from this sentence, it is visible that Croatia managed to be perceived positively. Thus, football contributed to the image “cleaning” of the country. Furthermore, touching upon the Croatian national players and their success in their teams shows the “evidence that Croats are adaptable and desirable in every league in the world.”¹⁰¹

Now that we analyzed the media coverage for Croatia’s participation in the World Cup in 1998, it is crucial to analyze the World Cup in 2018 when Croatia won the silver medal.

“Croatia Economy Eyes Windfall from World Cup Success”, an article from BalkanInsight writes about the positive impact of the World Cup in 2018.¹⁰² Essentially, the article describes how Croatia’s second place in the tournament led to an increase in tourism in their country.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the author highlights that “sporting success in Russia could have a major impact on the Croatian economy”.¹⁰⁴ In addition to that, the successful second place in the World Cup resulted in an increase in visits to Croatia. The author uses words such as “boost” and “sporting success” in order to describe the positive change in Croatia.¹⁰⁵ From this, it can be seen that the Croatian national team represented Croatia in the best possible light,

¹⁰⁰ Karl McDonald, “Why Are Croatia so Good at Football with a Population of 4 Million?,” inews.co.uk (Inews, October 14, 2018), <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/croatia-football-population-why-good-luka-modric-country-175658>.

¹⁰¹ Karl McDonald, “Why Are Croatia so Good at Football with a Population of 4 Million?,” inews.co.uk (Inews, October 14, 2018), <https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/croatia-football-population-why-good-luka-modric-country-175658>.

¹⁰² Anja Vladislavljevic, “Croatia Economy Eyes Windfall from World Cup Success,” Balkan Insight (Balkan Insight, October 12, 2018), <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/17/croatia-to-use-the-football-team-s-success-for-tourism-07-16-2018/>.

¹⁰³ Anja Vladislavljevic, “Croatia Economy Eyes Windfall from World Cup Success,” Balkan Insight (Balkan Insight, October 12, 2018), <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/17/croatia-to-use-the-football-team-s-success-for-tourism-07-16-2018/>.

¹⁰⁴ Anja Vladislavljevic, “Croatia Economy Eyes Windfall from World Cup Success,” Balkan Insight (Balkan Insight, October 12, 2018), <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/17/croatia-to-use-the-football-team-s-success-for-tourism-07-16-2018/>.

¹⁰⁵ Anja Vladislavljevic, “Croatia Economy Eyes Windfall from World Cup Success,” Balkan Insight (Balkan Insight, October 12, 2018), <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/17/croatia-to-use-the-football-team-s-success-for-tourism-07-16-2018/>.

which led to more tourists coming to Croatia. For instance, according to the Croatian Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the number of Spanish tourists, in particular, was increased by fourteen percent after the World Cup in 2018.¹⁰⁶

In addition to that, the article “Croatian football is ‘rebranding’ the country, says President Grabar Kitarovic”, published for the Deutsche Welle, writes that the “Croatian national team won the sympathies of football fans worldwide with its outstanding result at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.”¹⁰⁷ From this sentence, we can clearly see the positive impact on the perception of Croatia. More precisely, football led to this positive thinking about the country. Additionally, the article touches upon the role of the former Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. The former president sent a positive image of Croatia to the world. Furthermore, the article “With Her Victory Dance, Croatia President Wins Hearts At FIFA World Cup”, published at NDTV, illustrates that Grabar-Kitarović has “won hearts of all football lovers for lending a passionate support to the country's football team.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the former president is being praised for her unconditional support for the national team.

The Guardian’s article “Croatia’s real World Cup star? The president in the stands”, describes Grabar-Kitarović as “her country’s star of the tournament.”¹⁰⁹ Grabar-Kitarović’s appearance and cheering for her country during the World Cup in 2018 also contribute to Croatia’s national image. Unlike other leaders, Grabar-Kitarović stood out with her cheering

¹⁰⁶ “Croatian Ministry of Tourism and Sports, “Hrvatska 2018. Privukla 14 Posto Više Španjolaca, Aviokompanije I Nogometaši Dovode Nove,” (Croatia 2018 Attracted 14 Percent More Spaniards, Airlines and Footballers Bring New) mint.hr (Ministarstvo turizma i sporta, January 25, 2019), <https://mint.gov.hr/vijesti/hrvatska-2018-privukla-14-posto-vise-spanjolaca-aviokompanije-i-nogometasi-dovode-nove/17830>.

¹⁰⁷ Srećko Matić and Darko Janjević, “Croatian Football Is ‘Rebranding’ the Country, Says President Grabar-Kitarovic: DW: 28.07.2018,” DW.COM (Deutsche Welle, July 28, 2018), <https://www.dw.com/en/croatian-football-is-rebranding-the-country-says-president-grabar-kitarovic/a-44864387>.

¹⁰⁸ Srećko Matić and Darko Janjević, “Croatian Football Is ‘Rebranding’ the Country, Says President Grabar-Kitarovic: DW: 28.07.2018,” DW.COM (Deutsche Welle, July 28, 2018), <https://www.dw.com/en/croatian-football-is-rebranding-the-country-says-president-grabar-kitarovic/a-44864387>.

¹⁰⁹ Una Hajdari, “Croatia's Real World Cup Star? The President in the Stands,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 16, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/16/croatia-president-kolinda-grabar-kitarovic-world-cup>.

and going into the players' locker room to cheer them up. In this case, it was perceived positively.

The article titled “Croatia’s World Cup divides nation where football is never just sport” also published by The Guardian, emphasizes that “the Vatreni did not simply represent Croatian football; they represented the whole of Croatia in such a way that their fortunes and success were linked to those of the nation itself.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, the article states out that “Croatia has changed a lot since 1998 when its football team achieved their biggest accomplishment.”¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the statement that “in Croatia football is never just football. It always has far-reaching social and political implications”, shows how powerful football can become.¹¹² Moreover, it highlights that football was always used as a positive tool when it comes to Croatia.

Notwithstanding, the blog post titled “How Football Can Brand An Entire Nation – The Curious Case of Croatia” published on Mediatoolkit, deals with a media analysis of the impact of football and more precisely Croatia’s second place at the World Cup in 2018 on Croatia.¹¹³ Furthermore, the blog post analyzes the “exposure” Croatia received as a country because of this particular tournament. First of all, the author points out Croatia as the “ultimate surprise of the FIFA World Cup 2018.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, it is highlighted that “no one” was expecting that a “small nation of four million people” will win the silver medal at this tournament.¹¹⁵ Evidence illustrates that small country teams rarely win in big tournaments. The author states that the

¹¹⁰ Aleksandar Holiga, “Croatia's World Cup Run Divides Nation Where Football Is Never Just Sport,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 6, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jul/06/croatia-world-cup-success-divides-nation>.

¹¹¹ Aleksandar Holiga, “Croatia's World Cup Run Divides Nation Where Football Is Never Just Sport,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 6, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jul/06/croatia-world-cup-success-divides-nation>.

¹¹² Holiga, *Croatia's World Cup Run Divides Nation*.

¹¹³ Iva Glavinić, “How Football Can Brand an Entire Nation - The Curious Case of Croatia,” Mediatoolkit (Mediatoolkit, July 24, 2018), <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/croatia-world-cup-media-analysis/>.

¹¹⁴ Iva Glavinić, “How Football Can Brand an Entire Nation - The Curious Case of Croatia,” Mediatoolkit (Mediatoolkit, July 24, 2018), <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/croatia-world-cup-media-analysis/>.

¹¹⁵ Glavinić, *How Football Can Brand an Entire Nation*.

reason for it is that “countries like Croatia lack money, establishments and have a smaller pool of talent from which to choose top athletes.”¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, the author highlights a crucial point, which is that “Croatia is so small people use Google to find out not only where it is, but in which country.”¹¹⁷ This statement implies the enormous impact football had on the branding of Croatia. It illustrates that some people were clueless about the existence of Croatia. Additionally, after Croatia moved to the quarterfinal of the World Cup, the author declares that “Croatia went from having approximately 100 daily mentions to more than 150,000 mentions after the match”.¹¹⁸ However, these numbers rose after Croatia got into the finals. Another point is that after Croatia won the silver medal, there were in total “400.000 articles mentioning Croatia”.¹¹⁹ The majority of them were positive with 50 percent, while 35 percent were neutral, and only 15 percent were negative.¹²⁰ The author argues that it “is more online exposure than Croatia had in its entire history”.¹²¹ From this information, it is evident that football contributed to the shift to a positive perception of the country. Football contributed to people’s interest in Croatia. Continuing, the author emphasizes the meaning of Croatia’s football success to the country’s tourism industry.

In addition to that, BBC News, in an article titled “What is Croatia's secret to sporting success?” described the success of Croatia in several sports and most importantly the importance of the players.¹²² The author highlights the difference between Croatia and its neighboring countries as “the sustained nature of Croatia's success is what makes it so striking. Near neighbours in the Balkans have been unable to repeat the successes of the 1990s.”¹²³ From

¹¹⁶ Glavinić, *How Football Can Brand an Entire Nation*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Guy De Launey, “What Is Croatia's Secret to Sporting Success?,” BBC News (BBC, May 2, 2013), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22338370>.

¹²³ Guy De Launey, “What Is Croatia's Secret to Sporting Success?,” BBC News (BBC, May 2, 2013), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22338370>.

this statement, it is visible that Croatia, when it comes to sport and precisely football, that the country is way ahead of its neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the article consists of sentences such as “Croatia is different” or “naturally talented”, which also illustrate the positive contribution of Croatian football to the world.¹²⁴ Another point worth mentioning is that the article illustrates the example of a positive stereotype. That particular stereotype is described as follows: “One of the first things that visitors to the Western Balkans notice is how many tall people there are in Croatia”.¹²⁵ Even though it is a random stereotype that is not directly connected to football, it still highlights that Croatia and Croats can be perceived positively.

Another event worth mentioning is the welcoming of the Croatian players in Zagreb after winning the silver medal at the World Cup. As Dailyrecord writes, there were “more than 300.000 Croats in red and white chequered shirts and carves” who welcomed the national team.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the Croatian welcoming of the players went global and portrayed Croatia in a positive light.

3.2 Kick it like Modrić

Luka Modrić can be viewed as the symbol of a complicated process. For Croats, he is the most impactful player. He is the only Croat who managed to win the prestige award Ballon d’Or and the Marca Leyenda award. Currently, at the age of 36, the Real Madrid player is still one of the crucial players both for the club and the national team. The article “Luka Modric: Real Madrid's Croatian midfield maestro still magnificent at 36” published on BBC describes Modrić as a “midfield maestro” and as “even more important to Real’s overall structure than Benzema.”¹²⁷ In addition to that, the article “Luka Modric – Out of Croatia’s wreckage, a World

¹²⁴ De Launey, *What is Croatia’s Secret to Sporting Success*.

¹²⁵ De Launey, *What is Croatia’s Secret to Sporting Success*.

¹²⁶ Igor Ilić, “More than 300,000 Croats Welcome Home World Cup Heroes after Final Defeat,” Daily Record, July 16, 2018, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/more-300000-croatia-fans-welcome-12931799>.

¹²⁷ Andy West, “Luka Modric: Real Madrid's Croatian Midfield Maestro Still Magnificent at 36,” BBC Sport (BBC, April 26, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/61211531>.

Cup Hero”, published at Goal.com, highlights Modrić’s painful road of becoming a prominent football player.¹²⁸ The article starts with the tragic story of how Modrić’s grandma was shot by the Chetniks and how Modrić and his family became refugees. In addition to that, at the beginning of his career, Modrić’s size was often the problem. As the article states, “his boyhood club, Hajduk Split, turned him down because he was too small.”¹²⁹ Nevertheless, that did not stop him to be a football player. As the article illustrates: “What he’s got today is the logical culmination of years of grueling work, of eliminating every obstacle which confronted him along the way.”¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the British daily newspaper “Daily Mirror”, which engages in tabloid-style journalism, in an article titled “Croatia football team inspired by nation’s civil war past in quest to end England’s World Cup 2018 dream”, described the role of Luka Modrić in Croatia’s national team.¹³¹ The article also touches upon Modrić’s tragic past and illustrates his life as a refugee. Additionally, the article highlights Modrić’s statement about the war as the following: “these were tough times. I remember them vividly, but it’s not something you want to think about. The war made me stronger.”¹³² Furthermore, in the article, Modrić is described as “Croatia’s biggest star”.¹³³ FIFA, in the article “Modric: Croatia can be proud”, portrayed Modrić and his team players as “national heroes.”¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Peter Staunton, “Luka Modric - Out of Croatia’s Wreckage, a World Cup Hero,” Goal.com (Goal.com, May 2018), <https://www.goal.com/story/goal502018modricen/index.html>.

¹²⁹ Peter Staunton, “Luka Modric - Out of Croatia’s Wreckage, a World Cup Hero,” Goal.com (Goal.com, May 2018), <https://www.goal.com/story/goal502018modricen/index.html>.

¹³⁰ Staunton, *Luka Modric – Out of Croatia’s Wreckage*.

¹³¹ Warren Manger, “Croatia Football Team Inspired by Nation’s Civil War Past in Quest to End England’s World Cup 2018 Dream,” Mirror (Mirror.co.uk, July 9, 2018), <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/croatia-football-team-inspired-nations-12885673>.

¹³² Warren Manger, “Croatia Football Team Inspired by Nation’s Civil War Past in Quest to End England’s World Cup 2018 Dream,” Mirror (Mirror.co.uk, July 9, 2018), <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/croatia-football-team-inspired-nations-12885673>.

¹³³ Warren Manger, “Croatia Football Team Inspired by Nation’s Civil War Past in Quest to End England’s World Cup 2018 Dream,” Mirror (Mirror.co.uk, July 9, 2018), <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/croatia-football-team-inspired-nations-12885673>.

¹³⁴ Vjekoslav Paun, “Modric: Croatia Can Be Proud,” FIFA (FIFA, July 15, 2018), <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/2018russia/news/modric-croatia-can-be-proud>.

Finally, it can be argued that Modrić is the ambassador for Croatia. His love for his national team and his country can be seen in the world. Players such as Modrić contribute to the positive image of Croatia.

As mentioned, Modrić can be seen as the symbol of Croatia's complicated process. More precisely, during this process, a small player takes advantage of chances indicated in the system, by avoiding certain preconceptions (for instance, that his height is not high enough for him to become a successful player). Instead of giving up, Modrić adapts a different way of playing and never gives up. Furthermore, in Modrić's case, the real agency is visible. What this means is that he becomes big against all odds. Everything was stacked against him, including his height and financial position, but he persevered, which was critical. Modrić was voted "La Liga's worst signing" when he joined Real Madrid. Despite this, he went on to become one of the best players in the world. What is clear from his instance is that while structures cannot be denied because they exist, they may be worked around. Modrić accomplished exactly that. He worked hard and demonstrated to the world that he is a quality player and the Croatian national team's leader. Modrić's case perfectly illustrates that you can find an option to work around stereotypes and stigmatization.

Furthermore, what can be concluded from all these articles is that they all have one in common: they touch upon the Homeland War in Croatia. Furthermore, they show the importance of it for the national players, as well as, the impact of it on them. In addition to that, through these articles, it becomes visible that Croatia wanted to dissociate itself from former Yugoslav states, mostly Serbia. However, the most crucial point is that all of the articles support the main argument of this thesis: that through football, Croatia escaped the stigmatization. It is highly noticeable that football impacted the overall perception of Croatia in a good way. Players, such as Modrić also had a role in this positive image-shaping of the country. Modrić directly and indirectly "advertised" Croatia, which contributed to the positive

perception of the country, and even considering travelling to it. However, Modrić himself perfectly illustrates the example of escaping stigmatization, since at the beginning of his career the odds were against him. In general, it can be argued that without football it would be questionable whether the perception of Croatia as a state in the international arena would have shifted into the positive sphere.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis set out to understand how Croatia “kicked” stigmatization through football. In order to do that, this research initially examined stigma and stereotypes. The work was primarily based on the arguments of Goffman and Adler-Nissen. This thesis expanded upon Adler-Nissen’s three approaches to stigmatization. Adler-Nissen illustrated that one can either accept or deny stigma or counter-stigmatize, however, as I argue throughout this thesis, one can also escape the stigmatization. Following that, it considered the range of stereotypes of Croatia, their historical background, and the football’s role in the perception of Croatia. The research determined that stereotypes lead to stigmatization, making the stereotypes a precondition of stigma. Crucially, what this thesis showed is that there is always a choice when it comes to stereotypes. One can choose the way to engage with a range of stereotypes. Moreover, through this research, it was shown that there are more options to deal with stigmatization. Essentially, one does not have to accept or deny stigma or even stigmatize others; one can simply escape the stigmatization. The particular case of Croatia illustrated that one can “kick” stigmatization.

Croatia achieved this through the use of football. As foreign press articles demonstrated the Croatian football successes were contrasted with Croatia’s past filled with conflicts. Moreover, the articles highlighted the war background of the players and the national identity-forming experience of playing for the national team. In addition to that, the foreign press portrayed Croatian football as a success story which was unexpected to happen due to the size of the country. The individual story of Luka Modrić perfectly illustrates how to escape stigmatization. Even though the odds were stacked against him, Modrić became an excellent footballer, a widely influential player and an individual in changing Croatia’s perception. Crucially, through this research, it was shown that Croatia’s escaping from stigmatization through football worked through the interplay of changing structures and agency.

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