

TOWARDS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICERS



TPDS

Academic Evaluation and External Quality Review



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The TPDS consortium involved Dr. Mark Turner from Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, to carry out a first academic evaluation of the modules developed and piloted by the University of Gdańsk, the University of Malmö and the Centre de Droit et d'Économie du Sport.

Dr. Turner is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Sociology within the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences and Institute of Sport. His research explores football-based social movements with a specific focus on fans; community; political economy; place; and globalisation. He is also a member of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority's Academic Advisory Board and has been consulted as part of the UK Government's review into the football stadia all-seating legislation.

Dr. Turner carried out an analysis by focusing on the content and the methodology of the pilot modules, sharing comments and recommendations that will be taken into consideration as the consortium, and in particular the three partners in charge of the modules development and delivery, finalize the modules for their future implementation.

Initial Academic Evaluation for Towards the Professional Development of SLOs (TPDS)

Dr Mark Turner
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

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Context

TPDS was designed to identify the specific knowledge, skills and attributes – known as occupational standards, needed for SLOs to be effective in their role. The project aims to establish pathways for individuals to learn and become experts in supporter liaison through a series of higher education degrees. Working with several universities from across Europe, TPDS aims to promote the professional of SLOs across diverse contexts, through a series of modules designed to address specific needs and challenges identified in those respective countries. It focuses on the development and professionalisation of the SLO role by enabling higher education institutes to establish a network in which to learn from one another and contribute to the wider European process of ensuring football is safe for all.

This represents an important milestone in the longer-term mobilizations of stronger governance, democracy, and safety-securitization across European football, led by Football Supporters Europe (FSE), in partnership with the Council of Europe and UEFA. There is a clear rationale for TPDS based on the knowledge that UEFA SLO education programme only offers a limited four days of training on what is clearly, a complex, challenging, and multifaceted role, through which SLOs as expected to deliver on a wide range of issues and responsibilities linked to service, safety, security, dialogue, brokerage, and communication. Addressing this directly, TPDS extends the educational development and welfare of SLOs by building on the work conducted at the University of Kassel, in partnership with Potsdam University of Applied Sciences and the German Football League (DFL) through scientific, conceptual, strategic and action-driven problem solving and skills required for future leadership, planning, coordinating and evaluation work in the field of fan and spectator management.

The challenges for other universities to adapt and develop similar programmes centres on an understanding, and appreciation for context specific environments, cultures and practices, and thus it will take time for these respective programmes to interpret the professionalization of SLO work through common standards setting and best practice analysis, in ways which reflect and address diverse societal dialogues; football communities; and indeed, educational pedagogical philosophies, particularly in new continents.

Despite this, the pilot modules at the University of Gdansk (Poland); University of Malmö (Sweden); and the Centre de Droit et d'Economie du Sport (France), are connected through a commitment and approach to better understanding the role of SLOs; their recognition; and establishing realistic expectations. The courses developed are thus an important mechanism to

standardizing the key purpose of SLOs, in terms of relationship building with supporters; the clubs/federations; and other key stakeholders. This initial academic evaluation focuses on the content and methodology of the pilot training modules from each of the three universities, to assess their quality and relevance in relation to the projects objectives.

Evaluation

University of Gdańsk – Poland

Course content

Based on the needs analysis undertaken, key competencies to be acquired by those taking the course are soft skill development (communication; negotiation; prevention management) and knowledge of law on safety at mass events.

These competencies are developed through four modules; understanding fans and fan cultures; investigating fan support as a professional field of work; project management; and understanding the basics of law on safety at mass events.

Comments

- To be able to build and sustain effective working relationships with fans, an understanding of fandom (typology) and fan cultures is essential. The course addresses this by examining theoretical approaches to fan culture (historically and contemporarily). Whilst the emphasis on Polish context (and thus Polish literature) is key, it is important that this body of work is situated within the wider Europeanization of football research conducted in sociology and political science. The module is clearly research informed, delivered by staff working in the sociology of football. There is scope however, to engage with the political economy literature. It is important that the development and professionalization of SLOs recognise the wider political economies of European football and associated leagues and national associations as mobilizations on governance, sustainability, democracy, brokerage, and safety-securitisation reflect these wider political economies and impacts at the macro-meso-and-micro levels.
- There is clear evidence of engagement with the functional mapping of SLO roles and responsibilities through the professional field of work module albeit the professional competencies could be a little clearer in application to football. It would be useful also to get a fuller, detailed breakdown of the total workload – this is a significant chunk of the course and thus there is scope to be clearer on the teaching content in terms of what specific topics are studied which constitute a wider understanding and application of the functional mapping of the SLO role.
- The modules on project management and safety law speak directly to the following SLO functions: ‘Help to promote a safe, secure and welcoming environment for football events’ and ‘Manage and develop oneself in the role’ but it would be useful to understand – again in more detail, the proposed assessment and employability skills.

Methodology

The needs analysis was based on the following methodology: a national workshop involving thirteen participants with varying levels of experience and involvement in a football-related organisational structure, and individual in-depth, expert interviews. The national workshop included participation from a diverse range of multi-stakeholders (academic, practice – SLOs, media, policy, and industry).

Comments

- The clear omission from the multi-stakeholder workshop is fans. It would be useful to understand why a sample of active fans was not involved.
- The methods are appropriate for a needs analysis specific to this context – but scope also to have included some participant observation and personal SLO diary/reflections.

Centre de Droit et d'Economie du Sport (CDES) – France

Course content

The development of the course follows significant national mobilizations on SLO training from 2018 but there is a clear understanding that the role is not fully recognized both at club and national level, and that the part-time, voluntary nature of the role lacks a clear, coherent, function which is line with how SLO is constituted in Germany for example. Here, the combination of dialogue and brokerage work alongside other functions including ticketing and communications, means SLOs have less time to engage in key liaison activity. Based on the needs analysis undertaken, key competencies to be acquired by those taking the course are strongly aligned with the functions and key roles of the SLO functional map. These competencies are developed through four modules; contextualising the SLOs position between stakeholders; understanding the domestic legal framework; assimilating the domestic security policy; and experiencing a European game.

Comments

- The approach here appears to be comprehensive in design – for example, the positioning of SLOs module bridges both sociology (fan culture) and stakeholder management. Other modules (on other courses) focus on fan culture distinctly, but the duration of the module offers more time and space to incorporate analyses of fan culture within the wider ecosystem. This will ensure the module develops in line with the communication and working relationship roles SLOs are expected to undertake (as per the functional map).
- It might have been possible to bring both the security and legal assessment together under one larger module as they are interdependently linked (safety-security nexus), which then provides scope for further sociological analysis of the political economy of French football and its relationship with processes of Europeanization and

Globalization. Despite this, the modules are appropriate in that they reflect the needs analysis undertaken, specifically around issues of pyrotechnics, travel bans, etc.

- The experiential learning approach should be commended – where new SLOs are given the opportunity to shadow experienced SLOs during European matchdays. It is important that some reflexive analysis is built into this approach so that SLOs can monitor and evaluate their experiential learning (this could be active research diaries for example).

Methodology

The needs analysis was based on the following methodology: online semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Ligue de Football Professionnel, sociologists of football fan culture; legal experts on French legislation; and a small sample of working SLOs. This was followed by a national multistakeholder workshop with 38 SLOs and other stakeholders (police; academics; legal experts etc).

Comments

- As with the Polish case, the approach appears to have neglected fan representation – so it would be again, useful to clarify if active fan groups were invited to participate and if not, why not.
- One of the strengths highlight centres on the engagement with SLOs throughout to ensure the programme is tailored to their real, everyday needs in liaison work.

Malmö University – Sweden

Course content

Based on the needs analysis undertaken, the course has developed in a way which seeks to: standardise SLO functions, recognising distinct club cultures and histories; address wider misunderstandings of SLO work; recognising the importance of evenings and weekends to SLO practice; importance of clubs investing in SLO education. The strength of the programme centres on a commitment to ensuring students engage in active learning in a way which bridges theoretical and practical approaches to SLO education. The modules designed, are consistent with approaches in Germany, Poland and Sweden, namely, the importance of understanding supporter cultures, security law and legislation, and communication. Together, along with additional focuses including, media, ethics, and gender, the course is mapped to the four key SLO roles which constitute the functional map of the full SLO role (create and sustain working relationships; facilitate effective communications; promote a safe and secure welcoming environment; and the personal development of SLOs).

Comments

- The supporter culture module blends sociology with social history to understand the historical and contemporary development of fan identities and practices. As per the

other fan culture modules in Poland and France, political factors could also be considered here – to understand local, regional and national responses to Globalization and Europeanization. Some key literature is not covered (for example Anthony King's classic work on the European Ritual and Fandom).

- The media, security, laws and regulations module appear in some parts, to extend the supporter culture module (namely around supporter moral panics and mediatization of hooliganism and ultra cultures). The scope thus exists to stretch and problematize the SLO role within this module to evaluate the SLO functional map, specific to the Swedish context.
- The module on ethics, gender, conflict resolution, communication and relationship building extends the previous two modules – there is some constructive alignment here, but also one or two overlaps and potential points of repetition (i.e., ideological critique of modern football in Sweden and problematizing football's late development). Be clear how the learning outcomes from these modules are distinct in relation to each SLO functional map role.
- The inclusion of gender and ethnicity as key components of the sociological analysis is important – and this has scope to shape future developments to functional map of SLO roles.

Methodology

The needs analysis was based on the following methodology: national workshop and stakeholder engagement, including feedback from SLOs, club management, Swedish football associations, security-safety personnel, and importantly, fans.

Comments

- The Swedish approach has consulted fans in the design stage which ensures the pilot modules are 'legitimate' in the eyes of all key stakeholders.
- There is a clear action plan in place to continually monitor and evaluate learning outcomes and impact which ensures the course remains updated on best practices and emerging trends.
- There is a very strong emphasis on role playing exercises and interactive sessions through case study analysis which ensures participants are engaged in real, applied learning and skill development.

Additional points of analysis

- These are very strong pilot modules at all three universities which are constructively aligned with the functional map of SLO roles and wider project objectives.
- Some are more online guided learning focused (whereas France appears to have a stronger in person delivery). Important for the project to be clear on these divergences and how the methodologies will be evaluated.

- There is good use of independent tools, namely personal interviews, and other stakeholders to develop the methodology used in the development and delivery of pilot modules, but it would be useful to speak with the project partners to learn more on how they plan to monitor and evaluate these tools.