

TOWARDS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICERS



TPDS

Needs Analysis Report



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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As part of the initial stage of the project, the University of Malmö, the University of Gdańsk and the Centre de Droit et d'Economie du Sport (CDES), with the support of the rest of the consortium conducted a needs analysis in their respective countries to identify the status of SLO implementation and analyze the social, cultural and legal environments, as they represent key aspects to be addressed in the development of a training and in the promotion of a professionalization of the SLO role in each country.

Each of 3 partners also conducted a National Workshop in which key stakeholders were invited to discuss the steps for building the SLO role and to identify the most important aspects that would need to be covered by the training program which will be part of the Piloting Stage of the TPDS project.

This report will provide a summary of this stage of the project and a brief explanation of the planned approach that each University will adopt for the next stage.

Poland – University of Gdańsk

Country Needs Analysis

Fan culture in Poland has undergone huge changes in the last few decades. The 1990s were characterised by high levels of violence and aggression. The beginning of the 21st century saw the development of the movement's institutionalisation: formal supporters associations were formed, and the fan community became increasingly a reliable partner for cooperation. The hosting of Euro 2012 was another driving force for the development of the fan movement. On the basis of the championships, the 'Supporters United' project was created, and it is now operational in 19 cities. It is the result of official cooperation between fans of local clubs, local authorities, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and the Polish Football Association.

Polish clubs are also undergoing modernisation and are becoming organisations managed at a similar level to clubs in Europe's top leagues. The clubs' professionalisation process and the maturity of the fan community influenced the implementation of the SLO role in the clubs' structures in 2016.

Since 2016, the employment of SLOs has become a licensing requirement for clubs in Poland. As a result, more than 50 clubs have employed SLOs. The short tradition of this role within the structures of Polish football means that there is an urgent need for training courses that will allow those preparing for this position to gain the applicable knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Per the project guidelines, the University of Gdansk carried out a needs analysis concerning the implementation of SLO's role in the Polish context. The needs analysis was based on the following components.

1. National Workshop involving thirteen participants with varying levels of experience and involvement in a football-related organisational structure.
2. Individual in-depth, expert interviews.

The data collected enabled the collection of multidimensional and nuanced knowledge regarding the role of SLOs and the expectations of SLOs. The diverse pool of respondents and participants served to gain the most diverse information possible.

Data from the needs analysis allows the next steps planned in the project to be implemented.

National Workshop and stakeholders engagement

Among the participants of the national workshop, the following actors were interviewed:

- SLOs of Polish clubs representing different levels of the game and smaller and larger fan communities.
- students of the course 'Sport and Social Change'. The course is dedicated to analysing the importance of sport for social change in the broadest sense. The course also addresses the social activism of football fans, including their institutional significance in the field of football (including the role and significance of SLOs in European and Polish football).
- supporter coordinator at the Polish Football Association - the person responsible for the SLO programme in the PZPN, including supporter projects.
- Person with experience of working (in club management, as president) in the following football clubs: Górnik Polkowice, Zagłębie Lubin, Widzew Łódź, Cracovia Cracov.
- representatives of the social sciences involved in the study of sport, football and fans.
- representatives of the local press from Gdansk.

Summary of the discussion

During the discussion, a number of postulations about the role and importance of SLOs emerged.

From an SLO perspective, the key aspects are:

- a) Many clubs lack an understanding of the role of SLOs. There was a call for training on the role of SLOs for club boards and management.
- b) Organizing visits of SLOs from well-known foreign clubs, where SLOs are an integral and important part of the clubs (e.g. Eintracht Frankfurt, Glasgow Rangers, etc.) – as practical help to understand the role of SLOs
- c) PZPN delegates do not understand the role of SLOs and put forward unrealistic expectations.
- d) Police treat SLOs as "informers" and "spies", which makes cooperation difficult.
- e) Cyclical meetings (four times a year) between Polish SLOs are needed to exchange examples of good practices.
- f) SLOs express their concerns connected to the conditions of their work (e.g. low salaries vs overtime)
- g) The most important training needs for SLOs are knowledge of law (mostly dedicated to the safety of mass events), soft skills training, conflict management training, and communication skills training.

From the perspective of other stakeholders, the key aspects are:

- a) SLO's relationship with and links to the supporters' community is the key issue.
 - a.1) When it is too 'deep' – in such cases, SLO can look after the interests of supporters first and foremost. The most undesirable situation is if the SLO also belongs to a group of hooligans or is involved in illegal activities.
 - a.2) When it is too “weak” - Due to the specific, hermetic structure of fan groups in Poland, poor relations and ties between SLOs and supporters can result in communication problems and, consequently, an inability to manage crisis situations. This could result in a situation where the organisation of away and home matches could suffer significantly. It is desirable the SLO should be a member of the community (which makes easier to proceed with difficult decisions) but with a social good reputation (trust to be 'let in' to the club structure)
- b) SLO should be more engaged in other activities than match day (development of other areas of fandom culture). SLO should be more engaged in other activities than match day (development of other areas of fandom culture). Football clubs would expect that the SLO, as an employee of the club and also a person connected to the supporters, is the ideal person to implement such initiatives. The SLO, therefore, should be competent in project management. The role of the SLO should also be to look after supporters from sectors other than ultras - regular supporters, families with children, etc.
- c) Key competencies to be acquired by SLO according to other stakeholders:
 - Soft skills - negotiating, communicating, reacting in difficult cases (primarily in the context of prevention)
 - Knowledge of law - Law on the safety of mass events (determines practically every aspect related to the match)

Piloting Stage

The implementation of the pilot site will be organised in consultation with and with the institutional support of the Polish Football Association. The Polish Football Association is an institution open to cooperation in the field of SLO training. The role of SLOs is relatively new in the Polish football space and, therefore, requires continuous competence expansion and development on many dimensions.

The University of Gdansk will implement the pilot site, ensuring that the training modules meet the standards of an academic course.

The implementation of the pilot site is planned in successive stages of the project in accordance with the project schedule.

Sweden - University of Malmö

Country Needs Analysis

Challenges

Some of the challenges for the Swedish adaption of an SLO education:

1. To define the common ground for the SLO function.
2. Since the SLO role is different to each club, shaped by culture and history, every SLO function has a difference in employment, work definition, expectations, and responsibility.
3. The SLO function is often misunderstood by other staff and, in some cases, even the clubs.
4. The SLO role can not be restricted to normal work hours, since most of the contact with supporters takes place during evenings and weekends.
5. The work an SLO function does is visible in a lack of conflict and irritation among supporters, making it difficult to measure, since it is preventive.
6. If the clubs are going to invest in SLO and the SLO education, this must be regarded as an investment, not an expense.

Questions to ask

Some of the questions raised during the national workshop was:

1. Who will participate in the course? If its only SLOs, then it is approximately 40 persons. What happens with the course after these?
2. How do we define the common denominators for the SLO function?
3. How should the students be examined? A lot of the SLO persons have no experience from higher education.
4. How do we get the clubs to invest in the SLO function?
5. What level should the education be at?
6. How do we deal with geographical distance and work load?
7. How can the education combine flexibility, digitally recorded lectures and physical meetings in an available way?

Academic knowledge

A discussion about academic knowledge lead to the wish to include knowledge from the following subjects:

- Sociology, behavioral science, psychology, social work
- Police, police students, commanding officers, supporter police
- Law

National Workshop and stakeholders engagement

For a long time, Malmö University has a well-developed network around the culture of Swedish football with representatives from the Swedish Football Association, clubs, SLO's, journalists, the Players' association, academics and others. For the discussion about an SLO education, we have involved representatives of the following organizations:

Malmö University

Malmö FF

Hammarby IF,

Djurgården

AIK

Swedish Football Supporter Union

FIFPRO

Svenska spelarföreningen. Professional Football Players Organisation in Sweden

Swedish Professional Football Leagues, (SEF – Svensk Elitfotboll)

Football Supporters Europe

Piloting Stage

Action plan for Malmö University

1. Needs Assessment have been done so we understand the current skills, knowledge, and challenges faced by SLOs in our football clubs.

- We have gathered feedback from stakeholders including SLOs, club management, fans, Swedish football associations and security personnel to identify specific areas of improvement.

2. We must further define objectives and align these with existing courses at Malmö university – we will combine existing courses with:

- Enhancing communication skills between SLOs, fans, and club management.
- Improving conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques.
- Increasing knowledge of safety and security protocols.
- Promoting inclusivity and diversity within the fanbase.
- Include modules on effective communication, conflict resolution, crowd management, gender, fan engagement, safety protocols, diversity awareness, and ethical decision-making.
- Incorporate case studies, role-playing exercises, and interactive sessions to enhance learning and application of skills.

4. Resource Allocation:

- Allocate necessary resources

- Identify qualified staff in relevant areas such as sociology, history, sports management, security, psychology, and community engagement.

5. Delivery:

- Schedule sessions in collaboration with SLO's, football clubs and other relevant stakeholders.
- Offer a mix of in-person workshops, online courses, webinars, and on-the-job training to accommodate different learning preferences and logistical constraints.

6. Evaluation and Feedback:

- Implement a system for ongoing evaluation and feedback to measure the program.
- Collect feedback from participants, club management, and other stakeholders to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- Use evaluation results to refine and update the curriculum and training methods as needed.

7. Certification and Recognition:

- Establish criteria for certification or accreditation of SLOs who successfully complete the education program in dialogue with Malmo University
- Work towards recognition of the certification by relevant football governing bodies or associations to enhance the credibility and value of the program.

8. Continued Support and Development:

- Provide ongoing support, mentorship, and resources to SLOs to reinforce their learning and professional development.
- Offer refresher courses, advanced training opportunities, and networking events to keep SLOs updated on best practices and emerging trends.

9. Promotion and Advocacy:

- Promote the value of SLO education and its positive impact on football culture and security through marketing campaigns, press releases, and social media.
- Advocate for the integration of SLO education into the policies and practices of football clubs and governing bodies at local, national, and international levels.

10. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:

- Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among SLOs, clubs, and other stakeholders through forums, conferences, and online platforms.
- Encourage the exchange of experiences, resources, and innovative ideas to continuously improve football culture and security management practices.

By following this action plan, we hope to establish a robust education program that empowers SLOs to play a vital role in creating a safer, more inclusive, and enjoyable football experience for fans and communities.

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

Country Needs Analysis

The SLO function has been gradually implemented in France from 2016 onwards and are at a crossroads in terms of recognition. On the one hand, numerous legislative and reglementary dispositions have been taken by stakeholders to create, and develop the SLO's position in the French sports ecosystem. The SLO (in French "Réfèrent Supporter" or RS) position was created in 2016 by the French legislative body, which was aiming at easing supporters' movements within the French territory during professional football, basketball and rugby matches. Professional Leagues then took it upon their shoulders to enshrine the SLO role in their respective sets of regulations. This is especially the case of the Ligue de Football Professionnel (LFP, the French Professional Football League), which added the SLO in their Club License¹ specifications as an incentive to develop the role in French professional football clubs.

In addition to this gradual and growing recognition of the SLO, a national training programme has been held between 2018 and 2020, to train national SLOs. This training module was conducted by the French Ministry of Sports and was dedicated to SLOs from the three major sports (football, rugby, basketball). The training course was composed of 6 different modules aiming at accompanying the SLOs in their functions and helping them to acquire new competencies. It is in this context of growing professionalisation that the TPDS training module will be set up in France, inscribing itself in the continuity of a journey which started around the late 2010s.

However, and although a lot of progress has been made since 2016, several difficulties remain, which hinder the development of the SLO role in French football. First and foremost, it must be noted that, if every single professional football club can name at least one SLO, this currently contractually translates into part-time jobs or volunteering for some.. Moreover, SLOs often combine several roles in a club (ex: ticketing officer, communications officer, etc.), meaning that they have less time to engage in their SLO activities. A final difficulty at the club level is the fact that SLOs are struggling to find their place in the club's hierarchy. In the French

¹ Club Licenses partially determine the share of TV broadcast revenues a club can expect to receive.

system, SLOs are directly placed under the Safety and Security Director (DSS), with whom the working relationship can sometimes be difficult or even conflictual. A general lack of consideration for the SLO position can be observed in France, due to the recent nature of the position. This lack of recognition is also present at the national level, with stakeholders like the “Prefectures” or police forces which don’t necessarily consider SLOs. However, some progress has been made with the creation of the National Supporters Institution (INS), which contributes to gathering all stakeholders around the table.

As a conclusion, the 2016 law sparked the creation and development of the SLO role in France, which has expanded a lot in less than ten years. All football clubs from Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 have SLOs nowadays, mainly thanks to the LFP’s work on the matter. However, there seem to be a few issues with the SLO position, both at the club or at the national level. Unsurprisingly, the main issue is the lack of recognition for the position. The lack of coercive measures on clubs also slows down the development of the profession, as they can only be incentivized and not forced to develop the SLO position (e.g. no obligation to have a full time SLO). Finally, the working relationship between SLOs and other stakeholders needs to be improved.

National Workshop and stakeholders engagement

CDES has contacted a variety of stakeholders to conduct qualitative interviews between February and March 2024. Three main types of actors were identified and contacted. All the interviews were conducted online using the semi-directive format, meaning a general frame was drafted for each interview, according to the interviewee’s profile, while the discussions held could also influence the conversation and our questions. First, football institutions were interviewed, with two people from the LFP. Second, academics known for their knowledge on the matter of supporters were interviewed: We carried out interviews with a sociologist specialised in fan culture and a lawyer whose main area of expertise is the French legislation on the topic. Finally, SLOs themselves were interviewed. France has the particularity of having a core of few but very experienced SLOs, which therefore constitute a tremendous source of information. Two of these SLOs were additionally interviewed in order to assess their needs in terms of training and competencies.

Following the interview phase, a national workshop was organised on March 19-20, 2024 in Paris. Around 38 SLOs representing 34 clubs attended, making it the largest reunion of SLOs in France, up to this date. Various stakeholders either attended or participated in the event, including: the LFP, the DNLH (anti-hooligan division from the police forces), sociologists, lawyers, representatives from anti-racism and anti-homophobia associations, and CDES. Various topics were covered during the two days. The two main issues tackled were the following: the use of pyrotechnic in French stadiums and the recent multiplication of travel bans for away fans which can be observed in France. Other topics were addressed, such as a

report of the latest INS works, the organisation of European matches, anti-discrimination measures, post-covid evolutions for supporters, etc. It is to be noted that many current SLO intervened during this workshop, presenting their work and sharing their experience with their peers. Finally, a sequence of the workshop was dedicated to CDES and the prospects for a national SLO training module. This sequence lasted around 1h30 and was divided as follows. First, CDES presented its post-interviews conclusions and first module ideas to the SLOs. Then, SLOs were asked to react to the proposed modules and tailor the programme so it could fit best their needs. The module propositions were well received and a general feeling of enthusiasm could be sensed during this module.

Piloting Stage

The action plan in France can be defined as follows:

1. Validate the training modules content and the shape of the overall course.

CDES will meet with the LFP on June 4, 2024 to discuss about the implementation of the training course in France. This discussion will include talks about possible synergies between CDES and the LFP in order to deliver a training module as qualitative as possible. The final modules outline will then be discussed and validated within CDES, considering French administrative constraints related to training deliveries which may impact the format and content of the training modules.

2. Training course engineering

Once the training modules have been validated, CDES will have to abide by Qualiopi regulations, the French certifications put in place to validate national training modules and certify their quality. Qualiopi's approval will be sought once CDES has validated the training course and modules contents as well as found a solid economic model to fund the training course.

3. Training course delivery

After all the administrative details are taken care of, CDES will proceed to deliver the training course to existing French SLOs. The aim would be to deliver four two-days modules over a twelve-months period. The modules will be taught by a variety of actors, ranging from academics to lawyers to SLOs themselves, as peer-learning and experience sharing are two pillars of CDES training strategy.

