

Swedish Supporter Liaison Officers in Action

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The Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) role became incorporated into the UEFA licensing system from the 2012/13 season (UEFA 2012). The introduction of article 35 into the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations demanded that clubs across Europe have an appointed SLO to ensure the flow of dialogue between clubs, supporters, and other stakeholders. This interview study focusses on how the SLOs themselves perceive their role, its challenges and its adaptation in the Swedish national context. The article documents how SLOs use their position to make the voice of these supporters heard by the club and police. They work to resolve issues and prevent conflicts which hold the potential to develop into arrests and the criminalisation of supporters. Despite emphasising their role of being a spokesman for the supporter community, the aim for the SLO is to be seen as a credible and trustworthy mediator between the stakeholders who often have conflicting goals. This is achieved by working to a particular code of ethical conduct that allows them to operate with high levels of discretion amongst supporters, while also maintaining an effective working relationship with the club and the police.

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Introduction

The relationship between football supporters and their clubs is one full of love, passion and devotion – but can sometimes involve conflict and mistrust. Sweden is no exception. The need for improved channels of communication between stakeholders was recognised by UEFA, who incorporated the demand for a designated ‘Supporter Liaison Officer’ (hereafter SLO) into their UEFA licensing system from the start of the 2012/2013 season (UEFA, 2012). The introduction of article 35 of the *UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations* thus demanded that clubs across Europe appoint an SLO in order to ensure effective dialogue between supporters, clubs and other stakeholders. In Sweden the introduction of the SLO role was facilitated through the project “Stå upp för fotbollen” [Stand up for football] and coordinated by Svensk Elitfotboll (SEF). The project, which was initiated in 2012, made it possible for five clubs to employ full time SLOs through seed money from the project. Not all countries have experienced similar projects, and this underlines the fact that implementation processes vary from country to country and even between clubs within the same country (Numerato, 2016). However, few academic articles have touched upon the SLO role, and those which have given the role attention have typically focused on specific aspects of the role, such as their work with disabled supporters (Paramio-Salcines and Kitchin 2013). There is thus a general lack of research on the matter despite the overwhelming, yet often anecdotal, evidence that SLOs contribute to the reduction of conflict within the wider arena of football culture (SOU 2012). Observations highlight that SLOs enable effective communication between clubs and supporters, and that SLOs also are proactive in de-escalating and mediating high risk situations (Stott et. al., 2018). While observations indicate that SLOs can play a significant role in facilitating a more amiable football supporter culture, there has not been a focus on how the SLOs themselves perceive their role or its challenges, as no previous study has focused on the SLOs’ perception of their role and its adaptation in a national context. This article explores the background and modus operandi of Swedish SLOs, and thereby seeks to enhance understandings of the SLO role, and how it contributes to the relationship between supporters, clubs and police.

The research that is presented in this paper reports the findings from an interview study that was conducted as part of the ENABLE Sweden project, which is a larger development project on supporter culture and the policing of football in the Swedish context. The project involves a number of stake-

holders including supporters, club representatives, and police institutions. The findings from this research component of the wider project demonstrates that the role of the SLO is highly complex, reliant on mutual trust between the SLO and other stakeholders, and in practice has a narrower focus than that specified in the UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook (UEFA, 2011). We also argue, that the model is dependent upon the SLOs being able to – and allowed to – develop legitimacy and mutual trust with different stakeholders. This is done by applying a high degree of discretion to their work. Legitimacy is a key component in the work of the SLOs as it reflects the need for positive recognition by the stakeholders for the role to be effective (Tyler, 2004).

This article begins by giving an introduction to the background of the study. The background section introduces the UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook (UEFA 2011) and describes some of the challenges surrounding Swedish football, with a special focus on supporter culture. It will then go on to introduce the research methods used to conduct the research, before moving on to a descriptive section about the SLOs and their role. Challenges to the role will be considered in the discussion section. The paper concludes with an outline of the implications that this research has for the SLO role in Sweden, and the development and implementation of the role in other countries.

Background

UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook

The role of the SLO is described in the UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook (UEFA, 2011). The development of the handbook has been largely influenced by *Supporters Direct Europe*, a supporter association that was appointed by UEFA to assist in the implementation process of the SLO role. The role serves several purposes, one of the most important being to ensure that a minimum level of communication flows between the clubs and their supporters. The general idea is that this flow of communication will reduce the likelihood of supporters becoming disenfranchised, while at the same time strengthening the ability of supporters to feed into club decision-making. According to the handbook, SLOs have a wide target audience of stakeholders, including safety and security staff, police, local authorities, national and European fan organisations, stadium managers, the media, as

well as a number of fan and club associations. Building relationships with the various stakeholders is a key part of the SLO role. However, one of the stakeholders is more in focus than the others, and that is the supporters. The handbook is cautious not to define the supporters as one homogenous group. On the contrary, it describes football as a mirror of society with all its diversity. This is reflected in the variety of supporters with which the SLO is expected to engage with through dialogue. This includes, but is not limited to, virtual fans, under-represented fans, disabled fans, active fans, unorganised fans, families and children, but also potentially violent fans and hooligans (UEFA, 2011). The tasks of the SLO are described in very wide terms and the prescribed involvement with multiple stakeholders is ostensibly extremely demanding – not simply in terms of quantity of engagement but also with regards to having to balance the perspectives of the different stakeholders who often have different values and different approaches to football culture.

Swedish supporter culture and its challenges

Over two million people attended games in Sweden's top football league – Allsvenskan – in 2017; this is an average of more than 9,000 attendees per match (Svensk Fotboll, 2017). The great atmosphere surrounding the games has been described as a central part of the events and the main reason for high attendance numbers (SOU, 2013). Sweden has many well-organised official supporter clubs (SOU, 2012). Their main activities involve dialogue with the club, selling souvenirs, and making travel arrangements for away games. However, there are subgroups that receive a lot of attention from the police, media and the clubs. These subgroups are highly influenced by two foreign supporter cultures, the British and the Italian. During the late 1960s, Swedish national television began to broadcast British football every Saturday. Almost 22 percent of the Swedish population watched these matches, indirectly experiencing British supporter culture with full stands and organised singing, but also the violence and stadium riots (Andersson, 2016). The broadcasting of British football has been described as the “biggest reason for the definitive change of the supporter culture in Stockholm and Sweden during the seventies. It was the single largest inspirational source for all of those who came to form the stands in Stockholm and made it develop to its own sub culture” (Hagström, Johansson and Jurell, 2010, p 22). Inspired by British supporter culture, supporters in Sweden began to organise them-

selves (Green, 2009). The songs heard on television were often copied and the souvenirs were made to look like the ones sold outside the stadiums in England (Hagström, Johansson and Jurell, 2010).

The Swedes were not only inspired by the large standing and singing sections, but also the violence. Football violence has been an issue at stadiums throughout the 20th century (Andersson 2010; Andersson and Radmann, 1998). However, it was not until the early 1990s that the first “hooligan” firms were formed in Sweden (Hagström, Johansson and Jurell, 2010). With the firms, the violence became increasingly organised, going from a situation where more or less everyone with scarf or other souvenir in the color of their team could be attacked by supporters of an opposing team, to a subculture wherein confrontations predominantly took place between firms (Radmann, 2012, 2015, 2016). However, although the creation of firms made it less likely that other supporters would be attacked, the “ideal view” that firms only fight each other is not entirely supported (Radmann 2012; Hagström, Johansson and Jurell, 2010). Hagström et al. state that the firms began to affect other supporters in several ways, partly via violence that occurred in the vicinity of other supporters (e.g. the violent confrontations between firms whilst travelling to and from the arenas), but also by the power the firms were able to wield through their reputation for violence. This “power of violence” is used by the firms to affect stakeholders’ decision making (Radmann, 2012; Scott, 2012).

During the 1990s the other major aspect of Swedish supporter culture started to form – influenced by the stands of southern Europe, a younger generation of Swedish supporters began organising the first ultra groups (Hagström, Johansson and Jurell, 2010). Visual effects on the stands, such as organised jumping, flags, banners, tifo choreography, and pyrotechnics are central to these groups. Ultra culture has been described in terms of its distrust of authorities, and as a part of an emergent counter-movement to social liberalism (Kennedy, 2013). Aspects of the behavior of ultras, especially surrounding the use of pyrotechnics, have been challenging for clubs and the authorities. This is acknowledged in the publication on the national strategy for reducing insecurity, criminal behavior, and public order disturbances in connection with sporting events 2014-2017¹. The report

1 The national strategy is formulated by The Cooperative Council to Counter Sports-related Criminal Behaviour (Samverkansrådet mot idrottsrelaterad brottslighet) under the authority of the Swedish National Police Board. The following institution have taken part of the development of the strategy: Swedish Prosecution Authority, the Swedish Football Association, Swedish Elite Football, the Swedish Ice Hockey Association, Swedish Hockey League, and the Police Authorities in Stockholm, Västra Götaland and Skåne.

mentions pyrotechnics as an issue which requires special attention, and the masking related to the use of pyrotechnics played a significant role in the government's proposal for a law banning masking during sporting events, which was eventually passed and implemented on the 1st of March, 2017 (Löfven and Ygeman, 2016). The development of Swedish ultra culture has been described as a key factor in the future of Swedish supporter culture (Radmann, 2015; Radmann 2016). Even though the ultras do not have an explicit agenda of violence they are described as being situated "in the grey area between the legitimate and illegitimate" (Radmann, 2015, p. 139). To avoid a chain of escalating violence and disorder, a working communication between ultras and other stakeholders has been described as essential (Radmann, 2015).

Swedish supporter culture embodies the diversity anticipated in the SLO Handbook (UEFA, 2011). As outlined above, Swedish supporter culture requires that clubs engage in dialogue with a wide range of supporters and stakeholders; this dialogue, in many clubs, is the primary responsibility of the SLOs, and therefore places many demands on the SLO role.

Research methods

The research was carried out using qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Gillham, 2005; Seale et. al., 2004). The interview question guide was constructed using data collected during field observations of football matches in Sweden, which were also conducted as part of the above mentioned ENABLE project (Stott et. al., 2018). Potential participants were contacted by telephone and recruited among Swedish SLOs. In all fourteen interviews were conducted. Of the included interviewees, two were female and the other twelve males. We were also aware of the wide variation of employment status amongst SLOs, and therefore recruited interviewees who are employed fulltime and on a voluntary basis. Participating in the study, thus, were five fulltime SLOs, one part-time SLO, two matchday SLOs and five SLOs, who work on a voluntary basis. As the Swedish SLOs are well-organised through the "Stå upp för fotbollen" campaign, they appointed a liaison who functioned as our intermediary. To secure maximum variation, we asked for participants to be recruited from both sexes. The liaison made initial contact with the SLOs and confirmed their willingness to participate in the project, before sending the contact information to our research team. Once the participant had agreed to be interviewed, initial contact was made

by the first author who then arranged for the interview to take place. All interviewees received an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research prior to the interview; this information sheet also made it clear that their participation would be voluntary and that they would have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. The interviews took between 40 and 85 minutes and were conducted between the 19th of July 2016, and the 9th of January 2017. The interview guide focused on the educational and supporter background of the interviewees. This was followed by questions about the roles and responsibilities of the SLOs, the nature of their working relations with different stakeholders and the dilemmas which might result from working with stakeholders who hold different, and often conflicting, interests and goals. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim by the first author; the transcripts constituted the raw data for further analysis. The data was coded during consecutive coding processes using QSR International's NVivo data analysis software (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Richards, 2005). Through the coding process the information was broken into initial, generally descriptive, themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Silverman, 2000). After the initial coding and theming process, the codes and initial themes were refined into coherent themes; the raw data was then re-examined to ensure that no relevant content had been overlooked.

SLOs in action

Understanding of their own role

The main description of their role as SLOs is that they function as a “bridge” or “link” between the supporters, clubs, police, and other stakeholders. With few exceptions, the interviewed SLOs had a history of being active supporters of the clubs for which they worked. Most of the interviewed SLOs had been voluntary board members in their clubs' official supporter groups and some of them had also been members of unofficial supporter groups, such as ultras or hooligan groups. The following quote illustrates how their background as a supporter is central to their understanding of the role.

I believe that I can help supporters who have gone astray to get ahead in life. I can picture myself in the situations that occur and understand how they're thinking in that place. [interview no. 12, Voluntary SLO].

This quote also exemplifies how the SLOs view their role as having a broader perspective than just being a bridge during and surrounding matches. They also take a social responsibility to help supporters with other issues, such as drug problems. In such situations, they acknowledge the boundaries of their role and adopt a consultant role in which they facilitate and guide supporters in seeking the appropriate help. Trust is understood as the key element in the role of the SLO. It relates not only to the high integrity displayed by the SLO regarding the information they receive from different stakeholders, but also to the trust in the SLO as a competent worker (i.e., the right person for the job). The SLO could be described as a “filter” through which information from all stakeholders is processed as it is entered, confidential information is filtered away, and information relevant to other stakeholders is repackaged before it is delivered. However, for the role to be effective, it is important to add value to the discussion and not just mediate or perform lip service to the parties involved.

./.../ It is a constant balancing act. It is certainly easy to say something that does not matter to anyone but you must really try to represent both parties the whole time. And take care of it. And as mentioned, add a few of your own views and values as possible. (Interview no. 11, Voluntary SLO)

This process is highly dependent upon mutual trust and understanding from the different stakeholders. When the role was initially established, the first step was to create an awareness of the role amongst stakeholders. However, the main challenge now is how to develop the understanding amongst stakeholders for what the SLOs can and cannot do. Sometimes this creates tensions, which is an on-going challenge to the role.

The target audience for the SLO role is expressed as all supporters (UEFA, 2011). However, most clubs only have one, or in some cases, two SLOs working full or part-time. Therefore, the possibility of maintaining an ongoing dialogue and relationship with all the supporter groups is severely constrained. The supporter groups with which they interact are primarily the “active supporters”, usually located at the standing sections inside the arena. Among others, this includes ultra groups, tifo groups, and for some clubs the hooligan groups. The reasons given for these groups taking priority is that they are the groups that both want and require the attention of the SLO. For example, tifo groups require a substantial amount of the SLOs time since they need access to the arena early on, or even before match day, in order to

prepare their displays. A wish to be able to give more attention and focus to other segments of supporters, such as elderly supporters, children, and families, was expressed. Especially for those SLOs who work part-time, or even on a voluntary basis, it was clear that the opportunity to engage with wider segments of the supporter scenes was limited due to a lack of resources.

Preparations for matches

Before every match there are several routines in which the SLO plays an important role. The exact nature of the routines varies from club to club, and is influenced by the supporter engagement model adopted in the police region in which the game will take place. In Stockholm, the police have established a cadre of commanders who engage in preparations with the SLOs and designated Event Police officers (“Evenemangspolis”) weeks, or sometimes even months, before a match takes place. This setup secures effective channels of communication between the SLO and the police officers in charge of the operation on match days. In other police regions, the channels of communication are more sparse and informal.

Before away matches, it is frequent practice for the SLOs to collect relevant information from the home team and create a document for visiting fans. The information is published on the club’s website, and also spread across social media. This usually includes information such as, but not limited to, instructions on how to buy tickets, travel information, pubs to gather in, and contact information for the SLO(s). In preparation for high profile matches, such as derbies, there is also a preparation meeting with the same stakeholders as the pre-match meeting. This is held some time before the match day. The objective of this meeting is primarily to perform a risk-assessment for the match, based upon topics such as: visiting supporters (number, travel arrangements, tickets), tifo-arrangements, security organisation, police preparations and issues surrounding the event. In contrast, the informal match day activities of the SLO can vary from match to match. However, the common denominator is that the SLO’s informal work before a match consists of dialogue, preparation and facilitation. The on-going dialogue with supporters, other SLOs, and the police involves a wide spectrum of issues, covering anything from ticket sales to bus parking or arranging with a player to sign autographs at the children’s section etc. Regarding pre-match preparations, SLOs also made a clear distinction between “larger” and “smaller” matches. Before matches considered as “high-risk”, largely

due to a history of supporter rivalry, the preparation activities by the SLO are rather intense and time consuming. On the other hand, the preparations for matches considered as “low-risk” might be limited to brief contact with the other club’s SLO, police, and supporters the days before the match.

Matches

Despite all the preparation, match days are generally the busiest day of the SLO’s working week. The routines of the SLOs are very varied, both between different clubs and SLOs, but also depending on other factors e.g. whether it is a home or an away match, high or low risk match. SLO preparations can be divided into formal and informal activities. The formal activities involve pre-match meetings with representatives from all the major stakeholders, including the clubs (the SLO is considered part of the club’s delegation), the police, the league, the arena owner, the fire department and others, such as medical staff. The SLO’s main contribution to these meetings is to describe the current situation in the supporter community and to give a somewhat tentative view on how the supporters are expected to act before, during, and after the match. Besides the pre-match meeting, there are few, if any, formal routines that the SLOs collectively follow. Even though the SLOs always have an ongoing dialogue and communication with supporters throughout the week, it peaks on matchdays. Depending on the context, the SLO tries to engage in dialogue with as many supporters as possible. For instance, it is common that the SLO, after the pre-match meeting, goes to meet supporters at their pub gatherings and then follows, or even leads, the supporters during their march/walk to the arena. Other activities shortly before the match involve facilitating supporters in their preparations at the arena, such as hanging banners and flags, and greeting the visiting supporters as they arrive at the arena. During the match, the SLOs usually stand close to the stands in case they are needed to help with any emergencies or to help deal with any incidents which may develop between supporter groups. At the clubs that have several SLOs they are often positioned in different areas throughout the arena. In the clubs that have one SLO, he or she is usually positioned in the proximity of the standing section that holds the most active supporters.

Those standing in the active sections. I feel that this is where I am needed the most. So that's my "market". And there I might have the most skills within the club as well. (Interview no. 11, Voluntary SLO)

The SLOs highlighted two major challenges which they face on matchdays. Firstly, it was expressed that they do not have the time to be able to be available to all supporters, and therefore must prioritise some sections or groups of supporters. To assist the SLOs who are employed on a full-time basis, some clubs have also hired one or more "match day SLOs"; who, as the title suggests, only work on match days. Their role could be described as an extension of the main SLO, with the purpose of enabling more points of contact with supporters. For instance, as the main SLO attends the pre-match meeting, match day SLOs could be with supporters at pubs or other pre-match gathering places. During the match, some of the match day SLOs will focus on designated sections, whilst others have more spontaneous contact with different supporter segments. As with the main SLOs, match day SLOs generally also have a history of being active supporters of the clubs for which they work.

The second great challenge is that events are often unpredictable. The SLOs receive a lot of information about marches and walking routes, the number of busses travelling, planned tifos or shows involving illegal pyrotechnics. This puts them in situations where they are reliant on understanding from both colleagues within the club and supporters:

I have a good relationship with the people I work with. Event organisers, Security, CEO and so on. We like each other. But they are aware that it's a problem for me to tell them everything. They don't demand it from me. And many supporters are also aware of what a dilemma it can put me in, so they keep [sensitive information] to themselves. (Interview no. 1, Full-time SLO)

However, for several SLOs, including the one quoted above, it is common to have agreements with supporters that they will warn the SLO if there is going to be a planned pyrotechnic display, in order for the SLO to alert the club's security personnel. By doing this, the SLOs can help minimising the risk by ensuring that sand buckets are available and having fire marshals on hand. But none of the SLOs see it as their role to identify the supporters using pyrotechnics. If they do that, they would lose their respect and trust from supporters. In order to be able to be a successful bridge of communication

between the stakeholders, the SLOs need to be respected and trusted by all stakeholders. This makes it necessary for SLOs to display a high level of discretion and integrity; information gained in confidence can only be mediated to other stakeholders if the person giving that information consents to it being passed on. It's highly important that both the club which employs the SLO and the other stakeholders understand and respect this. Further, it is hard to predict when and where the SLO will be most needed. Situations that the SLOs might need to handle during a match include everything from supporters hanging banners that cover advertising, highly intoxicated supporters, the use of pyrotechnics, to objects thrown at the pitch. The challenge for SLOs is to work together and coordinate responses with different stakeholders (police, stewards, medics and others) who often hold different views regarding the most appropriate and effective approaches and solutions to "high risk" situations. Especially in hostile situations between supporters and police it is important for the SLOs that other stakeholders understand their role. And the role is by nature very dynamic. If, or when, "high-risk" situations occur involving violent confrontations, the main strategy adopted by the SLOs is an attempt to pacify the situation through dialogue. On some occasions, police officers have "instructed" the SLO to approach the supporters and "fix" the problem which suggests that there is still a lack of knowledge among some police officers about the roles and responsibilities of the SLO. The relationship with police officers working on match days is complicated, even though there has been some improvement in recent years. It was described that there are still situations where there is tension in the relationship between the SLOs and police officers. One example is when police officers want SLOs to identify people or give orders to the supporters. The main reason for this seems to be a lack of knowledge and understanding of the SLO role from the police officers involved in such situations, mainly about the centrality of the SLOs need to display high levels of discretion and integrity so as to maintain the trust of supporters.

Between matches – ongoing dialogue

The working hours for the SLOs could be described as anything but 9 to 5. They are usually available for communication and dialogue most of the day, and sometimes even at night. The interaction with supporters, police and other stakeholders in both formal and informal situations and around topics

not directly related to football, is understood to underpin the relationships that the SLOs draw upon during a match day.

The SLOs are highly dependent on building and upholding channels of communication between supporters and other stakeholders. Therefore, the SLOs are very active in communicating. In most clubs the SLOs are brought into discussions inside their own organisations in order to give a supporter perspective on issues that in one way or another affect supporters. For the SLOs it is highly important from time to time to demonstrate that they can influence key decision making that affects the supporter environment whether it is within the club or in relation to the police. Otherwise they will eventually lose credibility among supporters who potentially would stop spending time discussing issues with the SLOs. The communication channel with the police is mainly through the Supporter Police in most of Sweden or the Event Police in Stockholm. The SLOs' relationship with the Event and Supporter Police was described mostly as constructive with a mutual respect for both parties.

/.../ The relationship that we have with the Police [in our city] and our “own” supporter police is really good. We have an exchange in which we “give and take” and where it’s easy to call [each other] and have a collaboration that flows continuously during the whole season. (Interview no. 4, Full-time SLO)

National SLO collaboration

The SLOs across Swedish football work in close collaboration, discussing ethical dilemmas and practical issues with each other whenever necessary. They have formed a social media group where they can discuss and post messages to each other, but a lot of communication goes on between individuals depending on their own “personal chemistry”, or, in other words, who they get along with.

I talk a lot with [another club’s] SLO. We have built a good relation after educational activities and such. It feels like we are more than colleagues. (Interview no. 12, Voluntary SLO)

Besides the educational activities coordinated by SEF through their project “Stå upp för fotbollen”, they work closely together during preparations for

matches and on match days. All interviewees appreciated the collaboration and emphasized the importance of the possibility to consult one another. Despite their teams being rivals and competing on the pitch, SLOs work together and see one another as colleagues.

Discussion

An initial objective of this project was to describe the SLO role in a Swedish context. Article 35 of the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations stipulated that all clubs must appoint a Supporter Liaison Officer (UEFA, 2012). However, as this study elucidates, several Swedish football clubs have taken further steps. The project “Stå upp för fotbollen” made it possible for certain clubs to hire full time SLOs; other clubs invested in the role on their own accord. Several clubs have more than one full-time SLO employed. Recently, some clubs have also invested in so called match day SLOs. This proves the strong commitment to the role in Swedish football and highlights the important role that they play. However, the interviews also show that it is a complex job that demands flexibility and discretion, in combination with an understanding of the role amongst the stakeholders. The involvement primarily with supporters, but also with the other stakeholders, seems to be akin to a balancing act given their apparent differences in values and approaches to football. The role, like others that involve working with marginalised and often criminalised groups, is highly dependent on being perceived as legitimate by all stakeholders in order to function in a successful manner (c.f. Tyler, 2001). It seems especially apparent that due to the high level of discretion necessary to perform the role, the SLOs will find it hard to avoid situations in which they encounter ethical dilemmas. As mentioned earlier, the SLOs strongly believe that they will lose respect and trust from supporters if they help identify supporters using pyrotechnics (or people who have violated other rules or regulations). Nevertheless, they are aware of the fact that they can be put in situations where they have to choose – or even be forced – to assist with prosecution, which would effectively mean that they would lose the trust of their supporters. The SLOs are aware that there is no simple rule or regulation how to handle such a situation and that it is up to their own moral judgement. What seems to guide their judgements is their desire to maintain perceptions of legitimacy whilst also benefiting the club and the other stakeholders.

The SLOs are thus vulnerable as they on the one hand gain their value through their ability to build trustful relations with supporters. On the other hand, the inside information that they have about supporter activities can also be detrimental to their relationships with other stakeholders. This part of the role can be compared to that of the Swedish Dialogue Police, who need respect and mutual understanding from both protesters and their own police organisation, in order to collaborate and function effectively in a protest environment (Holgersson, 2010; Holgersson and Knutsson, 2011). To deal with these ethical dilemmas SLOs seek help from other SLOs as they demonstrate a great willingness to collaborate with one another. However, the ethical dilemmas which emerge from the management of this sensitive information and the SLOs decision to hold it back from club colleagues and the police is an important issue for future revisions of the *UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook* (UEFA, 2011) as well as future research.

The main contact point between the SLOs and the police seems to be through the Event or Supporter Police outside of Stockholm. Trust and understanding are integral to the relationship between the police and the SLOs, just as it is in the relationship between the supporters and the SLOs. This reinforces the importance of dialogue and communication in general, but also highlights the fact that stakeholders in football culture, as a whole, must invest in more specialist units or functions dedicated to dialogue in order to foster more successful collaborations between all the stakeholders.

Conclusion

The UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook provides a large number of potential target audiences and tasks for the SLOs (UEFA, 2011). This underlines the demand for people with experience of supporter culture and a high level of competency in communicating supporter cultures' core values to key stakeholders, including the management and staff of the football clubs that have employed them. The aim of this research was to examine the SLO role in the Swedish context. With the introduction of the SLO role in Sweden, clubs have recruited people from the stands which have improved their channels of communication with supporters in the everyday management of the clubs. Observations of Swedish football matches, and supporter culture more generally, highlight that Swedish SLOs play a significant and positive role both in the planning phase and during events (Stott et. al., 2018). They see themselves as a "bridge" or "link" between

the supporters, clubs, police and other stakeholders. But as this interview study shows, the Swedish SLOs have to prioritise their time and resources on a limited number of groups and tasks compared to the long list of stakeholders listed in the UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook (UEFA, 2011). Most of the SLOs expressed regret in relation to routinely not being able to give their time and attention to all segments of the supporters. The active supporter groups that they mainly work with are some of the most visible groups, some of them both in terms of positive expressions of supporter culture and in terms of tending to pose challenges to organisers and authorities. The SLOs use their position to make the voice of these supporters heard by the club and police, and to enhance positive and responsible behaviour within the supporter community. However, at the same time they work to prevent disorder and conflicts that hold the potential to develop into arrests and the criminalisation of supporters. The SLOs achieve this by working to a particular ethical code of conduct that allows them to operate with high levels of discretion, have credibility among fans (including those that present ‘risk’) but also have an effective working relationship with the police. With trust and legitimacy as their main tools they are highly reliant on stakeholders understanding the context within which they are operating, and the underpinnings and understandings that enable them to navigate it effectively. The study is by nature limited to a Swedish context. However, this study suggests that national coordination through the project “Stå upp för fotbollen”, together with the national collaboration between the SLOs, plays an important part in building a strong solidarity and working relationship among the SLOs across the country, which in turn creates a distinct Swedish model for SLOs that has a strong focus on conflict reduction.

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