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New Training for Spotters

Development of international training standards

Spotters are regularly used at football and ice hockey matches and play an important role in the operational tactics of the police. Austrian spotters work in close proximity to fan scenes and enter into open dialogue with supporters before, during and after large sporting events to prevent security-related incidents involving problem fans. However, until now there has been a lack of national training programmes and uniform training guidelines for spotters. For that reason, in the present comparative study a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in Austria and in five other European countries has been carried out, and professional training and further training standards for spotters have been drawn up in an European Best Practice Manual, which is expected to be used as the model for developing Austrian training for spotters in 2013.

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the findings of the empirical surveys of Winter/Klob¹ and the use of dedicated spotters at large sporting events pursuant to the Decree on Spotters (GZ: BMI-EE1910/0012-ZSA/2009), uniform countrywide training guidelines, which until now have been lacking in Austria, are to be provided. As part of the empirical project study titled “The Spotting Service – Training and Professionalisation of Spotters in International Comparison”, training guidelines have been established for the first time for Austria by the University of Vienna, supported by the Federal Ministry for the Interior (Department II/11) and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency FFG (KIRAS Security Research).

During 2011 and 2012, both national experiences and relevant European experiences were surveyed for the purpose of

comparing training measures and training modules with the broadest possible applicability. By looking at what works and what does not, this best practice analysis is designed to ensure the development of countrywide, uniform training guidelines and to enhance the professionalisation of spotting in direct connection with Austrian security at large sporting events. The research involved the following:

- ▶ survey of the national training need for spotters,
- ▶ comparative survey of international training standards in five other surveyed countries,
- ▶ development of high-quality training standards and professionally sound training guidelines at the national and international level (European Best Practice Manual).



IREEN CHRISTINE WINTER,
university assistant at the Institute
of Criminal Law and Criminology of
the University of Vienna.



BERNHARD JÄGER,
research associate at the Institute
of Criminal Law and Criminology
of the University of Vienna.



PAMELA GEISSLER,
research associate at the Institute
of Criminal Law and Criminology
of the University of Vienna.

2. STUDY DESIGN

For the purpose of the research it was necessary to study the whole working environment of spotters, as they are predominantly called internationally, in order to identify precisely the specific professional and personal requirements that spotters need to fulfil. To that end, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative survey tools were used in the countries studied, in particular in Austria, Switzerland and Germany. We participated as observers in police operations and training courses both in Austria and abroad. We also carried out a total of 58 expert interviews with spotters, the Spotting Service (SKD), the National Football Information Point (NFIP), operational leaders, fan delegates, steward trainers and NGOs from six countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, Croatia and Poland). In addition to qualitative data, quantitative data was collected using an online survey in Austria and Switzerland. The online questionnaire was divided into the following main content areas: socio-demographic details, current information, especially concerning areas of responsibility and knowledge, exchange of experiences and prevention projects. In Austria 168 male and seven female spotters were active in this special role at the time of the survey. The leaders of the Austrian Spotting Service did not take part in the online survey since they had already been questioned during the expert interviews. The online questionnaire was fully completed by 71.4 % of all spotters at the time of the survey in Austria. In Switzerland a response rate of 55.9 % of 258 active spotters was achieved.

3. TRANSNATIONAL RESULTS

Spotters were used at large sporting events in all six countries surveyed. However, the specific titles given to such officers, the equipment used and their tasks vary from

country to country. It should be noted that in federalist countries like Germany and Switzerland the titles, clothing, working methods and tasks of the spotters can differ greatly from one federal state/canton to another.²

In terms of the collected data, significantly fewer expert interviews could be performed in Poland, Croatia and Great Britain than in the other countries surveyed. With the exception of Great Britain, few or no documents were available in English and in some cases were not even available in the language of the given country.

3.1. TITLES

Spotters are given different titles from country to country. In Austria the currently 175 active spotters are called “Szenekundige Beamte (SKB)” and work in the service of the Austrian Spotting Service (“Szenekundiger Dienst”). In Germany, a distinction is made between “Szenekundige Beamte”, whose number is not recorded centrally and who work for the police of the various federal states, and the 150 “Fankundige Beamte”, who work for the national police force. Switzerland has over 259 “Szenekenner” or spotters, with those terms essentially being used as synonyms. In Croatia there are 44 “police officers for public order and public gatherings”. Only officers used for football matches are termed spotters. In Poland there is a countrywide spotter system (120 police officers) and in Great Britain a distinction is even made at the national level between non-centrally registered spotters, football intelligence officers (FIOs) and football liaison officers (FLOs).

While in countries like Great Britain it is usual for spotters to work in uniform, the majority of spotters in the countries surveyed wear plain clothes or, as in Austria, are identified by an operational jacket

with the words “Szenekundiger Dienst” (Spotting Service) as per the Decree on Spotters with the aim of de-escalation and prevention. According to the experts, particular importance is placed on the principle of dialogue and de-escalation in Austria, requiring a high degree of ability to communicate with fans in the stadiums. This does not carry such strong emphasis in the other countries studied. The task of the Austrian spotters is to resolve conflicts by intervening to de-escalate the situation, thereby removing the need for the tougher measures of the uniformed operational forces.³

In Switzerland and Germany spotters generally wear plain clothes. Whether spotters are identifiable varies from region to region and sometimes even from spotter to spotter. Opinions differ greatly with regard to whether spotters should be identifiable at all times or not. While some experts believe there are many advantages to identification, others feel that this makes them targets unnecessarily and point out that they are recognised in any case by “their” fans. In both countries the focus of spotters’ work, in addition to gathering information, tends to be on reconnaissance, i.e., in contrast to in Austria, emphasis is placed on observing fans and identifying disruptive elements. For that reason, spotters are typically not positioned directly in the sector of the fans.

In Great Britain, according to experts, all police officers are deployed in uniform, including FIOs and spotters. The philosophy is that spotters should always be recognisable as police officers and should establish contact with fans. Problem fans are warned by the presence of the spotters since these can recognise them. The chief tasks of the spotters are to observe fans in the stadium, make contact with them and gather information. The FIO has the task of coordinating the spotters and of

gathering and evaluating information. In this “leadership function” the FIO is the contact person of the operation leader.

Croatian and Polish spotters work in plain clothes, but can don an identifying vest if needed. In addition to observing fans and gathering information, Croatian spotters, for example, also have a say in stadium bans, which in Austria, for example, lies in the competence of the club or the federal league.

3.2. ORGANISATION

It is interesting to note that the organisational structure of the spotter systems in all the countries surveyed is very similar even though the general structure of the police forces is very different. According to the experts, in federalist countries problems can arise domestically in coordination and information exchange between spotters, uniformed police and the operational leaders.

At the highest level, the National Football Information Point is fundamentally responsible for sport affairs as an (inter) national coordination point.

At the regional level, a subordinate authority usually coordinates tasks within a specific region. In Austria, a Spotting Service is in place by decree in each federal state in the respective police headquarters.⁴ The Spotting Service is the first contact point for the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department II/11 and subordinate agencies, especially if measures need to be taken pursuant to the Austrian Security Police Act in connection with large sporting events. The Spotting Service also serves as an information hub and link to supporters and clubs.

In Switzerland there are decentralised specialised agencies in most of the cantons, while in Germany there is an information centre for sport operations in each federal state. In Great Britain Football Intelligence Officers (FIOs) are used to coordinate the spotters. In Croatia spotters belong to the

Public Order Department of the County Police Administration. Detailed information could not be obtained concerning which body/bodies spotters in Poland belong to.

3.3. TASKS

It can be established that in most of the countries there is no uniformly established or documented description of tasks for spotters or even no such description of tasks at all, and the understanding of the powers and tasks of spotters partly differs from country to country. It is only in Austria that there is a countrywide description of the responsibilities of spotters, which is formulated as a decree and is therefore binding for all spotters. In Great Britain, there is a document named “guidance”, which contains all the regulations on the topic of “policing football”, including task descriptions of the most important police actors, among them spotters.⁵

What they have in common is that such police officers chiefly act in the proximity of fans, and play an important role in operational management (operational planning, manpower) by obtaining information and assessing risks. The spotters should be able to identify fans who commit misdemeanours or offences and remove their anonymity. In addition, one of their main tasks is observing and assessing the behaviour of fans, partly to gather information and partly to make fans aware of improper conduct and to have a de-escalating effect on them. There is particular emphasis on dialogue with the fans and de-escalation in Austria.

Regarding both Austria and the other countries surveyed, the following main tasks can be established:

- ▶ information gathering and analysis,
- ▶ evaluation of information,
- ▶ creation of risk analyses,
- ▶ observation of fan behaviour and travel movements,

- ▶ observation and identification of problem fans.

Quantitative analysis of the survey in Austria and Switzerland in particular showed that spotters find it most difficult to evaluate the reliability of information in the core field of information management. In both countries, the most difficult tasks include dealing with pyrotechnic offences in and around the stadium and having a de-escalating effect on fan groups. While in Austria cooperation with the uniformed police (Operational Unit/EE and WEGA⁶) is classified as rather difficult, in Switzerland cooperation with the clubs is considered the most difficult. It should be noted, however, that in both cases the difficulty ratings are generally at a low level.

3.4. TRAINING

A significant element of the study was the comparative survey of existing training programmes, guidelines and content in the countries surveyed. The training seminars which were attended by the authors in Austria, Germany and Switzerland during the data survey, have similar content structures. Topics covered were in particular psychology, operations management in the context of sporting events, actors of the police and other relevant institutions, the role of spotters and their tasks, fan work, club structures, law and pyrotechnics. The focus, however, differs from country to country. In Austria, with the exception of special training in the course of EURO 2008, training takes place exclusively internally through annual or biannual spotter leadership conferences and spotter further training, as well as by the principle of “learning by doing”. In the field of psychology, uniform countrywide training was provided in 2011 in the form of a seminar that was targeted in particular at spotters who had not received any training/further training at that point.

The Swiss Police Institute (SPI) provides a five-day course for spotters in Hitzkirch titled “Averting Danger at Sporting Events” by the Swiss Central Agency Tackling Hooliganism.⁷ This course is primarily designed for spotters, but is also relevant to operations leaders and transport police officials and police officers from abroad (in particular from Austria and Germany). In Germany there are several training locations. The content relevant to the study was surveyed during a several-day seminar for spotters at the Academy of the Baden-Württemberg Police in cooperation with the Sport Operations Information Centre for the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg in Wertheim. This seminar is attended by police spotters of the federal states and by spotting officers of the national police force and regularly invites foreign speakers and participants.

4. FINDINGS FROM AUSTRIA (SELECTION)

Below are some important findings of the studies completed in Austria. In order to be able to develop adequate training guidelines for spotters in Austria, the authors studied

- ▶ professional/personal requirements and characteristics,
- ▶ scope of tasks and
- ▶ necessary knowledge for spotting.

4.1. KEY REQUIREMENTS

Currently there are no formal requirements in Austria, aside from the general requirements for police officers, for working as a spotter (e.g. in terms of rank, age, period of service). However, according to the findings of the study, the experts take the view that it is advantageous to have several years of police experience. Spotters often encounter difficult members of the public (problem fans) and require a high degree

of self confidence and professionalism at sporting events where large crowds of people are gathered. Routine and experience can be of extreme importance in dynamic situations requiring quick and precise decisions. According to experts, it is also very important that the spotter has a basis for communication with the fans, i.e. also speaks the language of the young fans and understands them from a human perspective. A team consisting of older spotters with long experience in service and younger spotters is considered optimal. At the time of the survey, more than three-quarters of the spotters questioned in Austria were aged between 35 and 54. Just 4 % of those surveyed had served as police officers for five years or fewer, while almost 60 % had been in service for more than 20 years.

4.2. QUALITIES

High-level communication skills are necessary for work as a spotter, since open communication with supporters is just as important as the internal communication and coordination of the team. Spotters need to be able to adapt flexibly to supporters, so empathy and patience are vital in order to have a de-escalating effect, particularly when dealing with adolescent fans and problem groups (e.g. heavily intoxicated fans).

In addition, spotters need to be as resistant to stress as possible in order to keep an overview even in difficult situations. According to the findings of the online survey, the spotters surveyed have few difficulties in this field. Spotters work very closely with fans and need to develop a relationship of trust with them. For this reason it is particularly important for spotters to have stable personalities, since they must be aware at all times that they remain police officers despite proximity to fans and must behave accordingly. In dealing with fans there are many situations in which it can be difficult to keep a professional distance.

Source: Winter/Jäger/Geissler

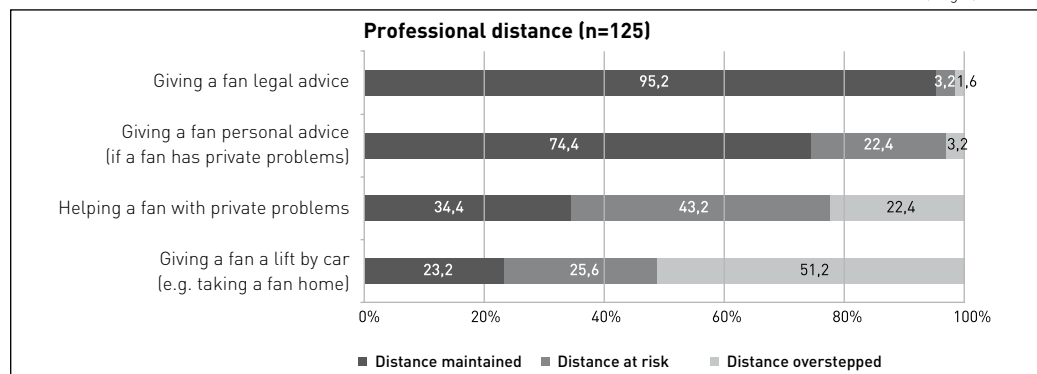


Figure 1: Online study findings on professional distance

The quantitative analysis shows, however, that the evaluation of operational situations differs greatly. While 95 % see professional distance as maintained when giving a fan legal advice, only around three-quarters of those surveyed see such professional distance as maintained when giving a fan personal advice. Helping a fan with private problems is only seen by a third as unproblematic, while taking a fan by car is viewed as unproblematic in terms of professional distance by barely a quarter of the spotters surveyed. More than half feel that professional distance is clearly overstepped in such a case (see Figure 1).

4.3. TASKS

Spotters have a series of tasks to perform before, during and after a match, relating to the core fields of

- ▶ information management,
- ▶ operational tasks and
- ▶ cooperation.

Analysis of the online questionnaire showed which tasks the spotters find difficult or easy and which of these tasks they would like to be included in future training/further training. The most important tasks from the three core fields are described in more detail below.

With respect to information management, two-thirds or more of the surveyed spotters

would like the following topics to be included in training:

- ▶ evaluation of risk potential,
- ▶ online research (searching forums etc.),
- ▶ creation of risk analyses,
- ▶ assessment of reliability of information.

These tasks are extremely important since the entire operational preparations are based on them. They typically cause the surveyed spotters few problems, although the evaluation of the exact levels of risk is considerably more difficult.

The experts also indicated clearly in the interviews that obtaining and categorising information are core tasks of the spotters.

With regard to operational tasks, more than two-thirds of the spotters would welcome increased training/further training in the following fields:

- ▶ conversations explaining norms to fans,
- ▶ de-escalating effect on individual fans or fan groups,
- ▶ assessment of situations and the necessary consequences (e.g. observe further, intervene, have Operational Unit/EE and WEGA intervene),
- ▶ dealing with pyrotechnics offences in or around the stadium,
- ▶ acting as an intermediary between uniformed police and fans.

These are key tasks that spotters are confronted with regularly during operations

and which are categorised as being of only average difficulty. Nevertheless, spotters see the need here for comprehensive training with strong practical relevance.

With regard to cooperation with other actors, more than half of the spotters would like the following areas to be included in training:

- ▶ cooperation with the uniformed police (Operational Unit/EE and WEGA),
- ▶ cooperation with operational leadership,
- ▶ cooperation with spotters abroad.

Smooth cooperation between these actors is particularly important during operations. According to the experts, occasional communication problems arise between spotters and uniformed police. That may be due to the fact that spotting in some cases is still not fully accepted and occasionally inconsistent courses of action cause friction. In the opinion of the experts, problems frequently also arise if operational units intervene too quickly from the point of view of the spotters or if spotters hinder such intervention from the point of view of the operational units. In the view of the authors, cooperation between these two groups could be improved at least to some extent through reciprocal lectures during training/further training in the interest of professional communication.

4.4. KNOWLEDGE

Analysis of the online questionnaire in Austria showed that the knowledge that the spotters use during their work has a clear impact on the core fields of information management, operational tasks and cooperation. Spotters with a higher general level of knowledge have significantly fewer difficulties in performing their core tasks. For that reason, such knowledge should be conveyed during training. Particularly important to spotters are the fields of:

- ▶ mass psychology,
- ▶ pyrotechnics and
- ▶ conflict management.

More than 90 % of the spotters surveyed believe these fields are essential to future training because of their high practical relevance. These terms were repeatedly also mentioned in the expert interviews since such knowledge is particularly important for spotters due to the proximity to fans and the frequent use of illegal pyrotechnic objects in stadiums.

More than 80 % of the spotters surveyed take the view that political knowledge, operational and organisational structures of spotters in other countries, stress management, background knowledge about adolescents and problem and fringe groups, general knowledge about the fan scene and communication techniques should be included in training courses. The studies also showed that general knowledge of the fan scene (e.g. hostilities between fan clubs) and knowledge of legal foundations (e.g. Austrian Security Police Act) are exceedingly importantly not only during operations, but also for operational preparations (see Figure 2, page 38).

5. EUROPEAN BEST PRACTICE MANUAL

The aim of the research was to develop, for the first time, uniform training guidelines for spotters in Austria that can also be adopted by other countries. For that purpose, national and relevant European experiences and training standards for spotters were also included and compared. Based on the preceding extensive research, participatory observation and qualitative and quantitative findings, comprehensive recommendations for the training and professionalisation of spotters can now be put forward on the national and international level (European Best Practice Manual).

Source: Winter/Jäger/Geissler

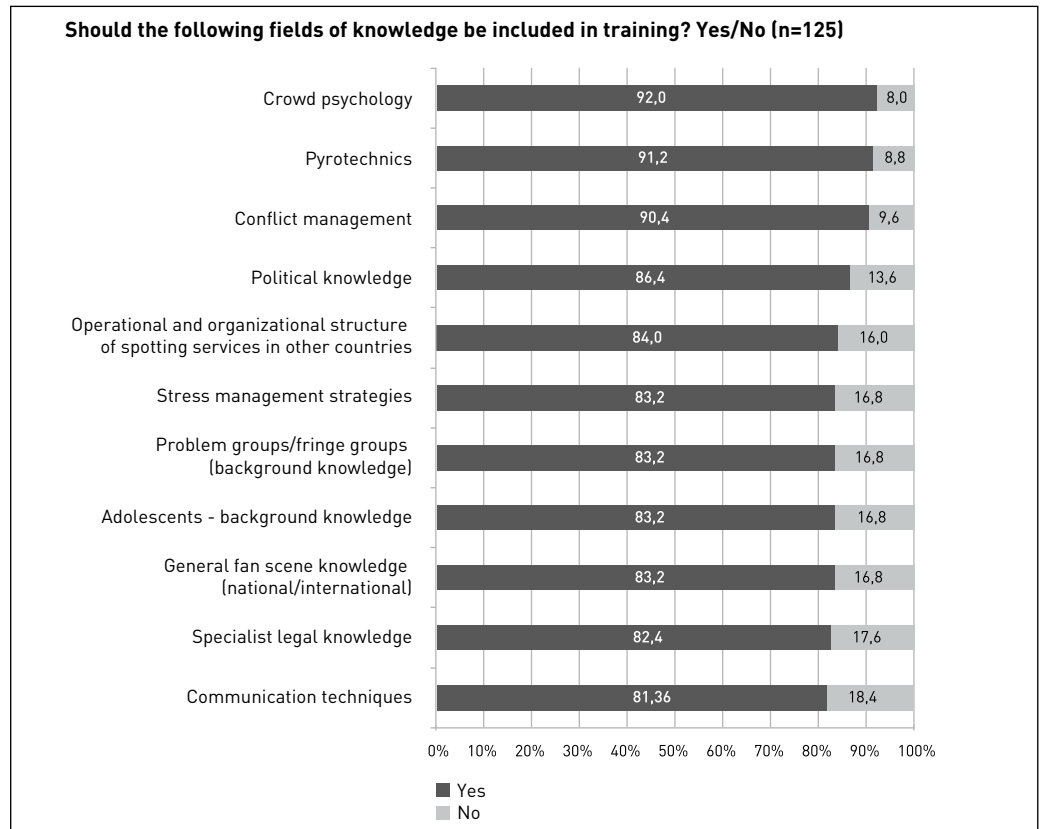


Figure 2: Online study findings on fields of knowledge that should be taught

Thanks to the kind support of the police in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the authors were able to participate in spotter training courses and benefit from the wealth of experience of the training organisers. All elements of these courses were checked for their feasibility in Austria and supplemented with the findings of the data collected from qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires, as well as further considerations. In addition, representatives of the Security Academy (SIAK) responsible for the training/further training of the police and a teaching professional were consulted specifically with regard to methodological implementation of the content. The content recommendations of the research team were presented in a practice-oriented approach at several interdisciplinary workshops – also with regard to whether they can be implemented in

practice, taking into account personnel and material resources.

As a result of the studies conducted, training recommendations were drawn up (European Best Practice Manual) enabling Austria in particular, as well as other countries, to develop their own uniform spotter training flexibly based on available resources. In addition, national, uniform training should enable the harmonisation of courses of action and thus a more rapid achievement of clarity with regard to issues of competence. The spotters are also taught practice-oriented courses of action through targeted training. The European Best Practice Manual provides recommendations in various areas, using a specially developed modular, tiered model, that is applicable both nationally and internationally.

This model enables simple and flexible exchange of individual training modules

as required. For example, in Great Britain, Switzerland and Germany, the railway police plays a large role, but not in Austria. For that reason, it does not necessarily need to be a topic of training in Austria. The modules are essentially self-contained units that are not built upon one another, and so can be combined flexibly (see Figure 3).

The basic training is centralised to create a uniform starting basis for all spotters. Further content and more specific content are conveyed through internal further training. The possibility for conducting workshops for problems relating to incidents that arise during the work of spotters that cannot be solved through training/further training is integrated into the model. These workshops include the participation of an expert council composed of experienced persons from the whole spotting field (spotters, dedicated spotters, spotting service leader, NFIP) analysing problems of all kinds in a small circle of experts and developing feasible approaches to solving the problems. In first implementing this concept in Austria, it is envisaged that a workshop will be held straight after the first basic training module for spotters in order to combine experiences of all kinds (content, organisation etc.) and to enable possible adaptations for following courses.

In addition to detailed recommendations with regard to designing the training, practice-oriented recommendations are also given with regard to the training environment (location, duration, frequency, number of participants), and it is explained which professional groups the trainers belong to and who should take part in the further training. The recommendations also contain guidelines concerning methodology and the content of the lectures. The topic areas for the training of Austrian spotters were determined based on the findings of

Source: Winter/Jäger/Geissler

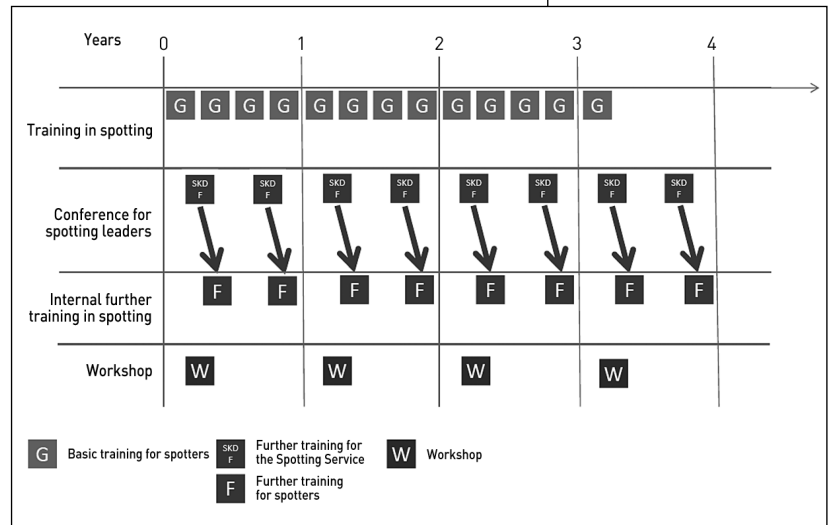


Figure 3: Modular, tiered model

the online surveys and the interviews performed. The emphasis is chiefly on spotters and their environment. In addition to the tasks of the spotters, the Spotting Service and the NFIP should therefore also be covered in the training. Great importance is attached to operational management in the context of football matches, mass psychology, fan scene information and pyrotechnics. Both internal police experts who are familiar with the security-relevant processes and problems and external experts who can provide an external view of certain issues should be involved in the training as speakers.

Spotters from abroad should also participate in the training so that important contacts with colleagues from abroad can be established. The participation of officers of the operational units would also be beneficial to the training in promoting acceptance and transparency of both jobs. That would enable the clearing up of misunderstandings, the exchange of experiences and the demarcation of the tasks of spotters and members of these units.

6. OUTLOOK

The importance of the implementation of qualified training standards, the documentation of uniform training guidelines and professionally sound training of spotters for optimising operational management at large sporting events is self-evident. Spotters play an important role in the operational activities of the police as intermediaries between clubs, fans and the police. The risk prognoses to be prepared by the spotters enable the security authorities to react individually and commensurately with the risk assessment in each case. Spotters are also contact persons for clubs and fans. The possibility of solving conflict situa-

tions preventatively in the fan sector by showing boundaries and engaging in conversations calming supporters or making clear norms is less intrusive for fans and also helps to optimise the operational strategy within the police, particularly with regard to the manning level of the uniformed units.

Currently, we are working together with Department II/11 of the Ministry of the Interior and the Security Academy (SIAK) on implementing the present recommendations for practical use in policing. It is anticipated that training of the Austrian spotters will take place for the first time based on the present empirical studies in 2013.

- ¹ Cf. *Operation and training of dedicated spotters Winter/Klob 2011*, 231 ff.
- ² Cf. *Operational management at sporting events in Switzerland: Conference of the Cantonal Justice and Police Directors/Specialist field of hooliganism: Policy against Violence in Sport – Draft 2009*.
- ³ Cf. *Bundesministerium für Inneres 2007*, 49 f; *Bundesministerium für Inneres 2009a*, 57.
- ⁴ *Bundesministerium für Inneres 2009b*, 7 f.
- ⁵ Cf. *National Policing Improvement Agency 2010*, 15 ff.
- ⁶ *Vienna Operational Group Alarm Department*.
- ⁷ *Further information of the Swiss Police Institute 2012*.
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