

## **Title: Assessing Accessibility in European football clubs' stadia: Developing a European Accessible Football League Scale**

**Keywords:** Accessibility; Disability, Sport Stadia

### **Abstract**

Research has shown that for people with disabilities and older adults, there are substantial differences in the supply side of accessible services and facilities, quality of service and experience at sport stadiums. This has led to increasing political, legal and social pressures on national governing bodies and professional football clubs to enhance accessibility, quality of service and experience for supporters with disabilities (SwD) and ageing supporters, described as the 'new generation of sport consumers' (reference withheld for anonymity). Sport management literature at present focuses primarily on regulatory pressures to ensure that stadia meet existing accessibility requirements, while at the same time most of the updated legislation and guidelines on access to stadia fail to incorporate the quality of service and experience for these supporter groups. Very few studies have sought to examine how professional football clubs seek to manage their human rights obligations and accessibility at contemporary stadia through policies and processes designed to cater to the needs and expectations to these groups of supporters.

This study begins to address this research gap by setting out the process through which we have developed a theoretically informed, integrative managerial and performance measurement framework that seeks to measure the extent to which professional football club stadiums are accessible. We outline the three-step methodological process through which we have developed the *European Accessible Football League Scale*: a scale containing seventy-one

indicators across five phases of the supporter experience that collectively provide the tool to better understand stadium accessibility within European football. These indicators were developed and selected from previous academic research practitioner reports and guides on accessibility at national and international level, ongoing exchange with an expert panel of several Disability Liaison officers and Access coordinators at the main football leagues, and integrated with the five phases of the Holistic Journey Sequence approach to stadia (the ‘HOPES’ model). This accessibility scale has managerial implications not only for the football industry but will also be applicable to other sporting venues and the events industry.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, requirements for universal accessibility and inclusion within stadia, particularly in professional football, have risen to the forefront of the political and public-private debate, notably in Britain (Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2016, 2017; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017). These political, economic, legal, demographic and social processes (at least as regards existing legislation and public awareness) can be seen within the context of the broader political and social pressures to ensure that disabled people have access to community and social life. For example, the UK Department for Work & Pensions (2014, 2015) and more recently the Equality and Human Right Commission (EHRC, 2017) have highlighted some of the stark issues facing disabled people over the years. According to the Chair of the EHRC, David Isaac, (EHRC, 2017, p. 5) “disabled people are still being treated as second-class citizens. Progress to date is not sufficient, and the road to disability equality is littered with missed opportunities and failures”.

The broader focus on accessibility has transcended into professional sport and in particular, professional football. Governing bodies and football organisations are increasingly faced with having to demonstrate societal legitimacy and credibility to the ‘new generation of sport consumers’ such as those with disabilities and older adults (SwD +OS) (Chadwick *et al.*, 2019; García, 2017; O’Boyle, 2015; Paramio-Salcines and Llopis-Goig, 2019). These pressures come from a range of sources, including governments, international and national football governing bodies, advocacy groups, and the media (Kitchin *et al.*, 2019), and impact on meso-level organisational policies and practices at professional football clubs. For example, these pressures have contributed to modify the approach of English Premier League (EPL) clubs to disability and accessibility at their stadia, with some positive effects, although it is still the case that many needs and demands of SwD are simply not implemented as standard in the offering of some EPL clubs’ stadia (EHRC, 2017). For example, a study by Leigh Day’ (2019) stated that, “as recent interventions by organisations like Level Playing Field, United Discriminates, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission have highlighted, many grounds have woefully inadequate accessibility. And it’s not just about being able to get into the stadium; the quality of the experience inside is just as important”.

In light of the increasing need to better understand issues and challenges around stadium accessibility, this study presents the *European Accessible Football League Scale*, an integrative managerial and performance measurement framework to assess stadium accessibility. It takes as a starting point, the development of other industry sector frameworks that look at accessibility such as the Hotel Accessible Scale (Darcy, 2010; Darcy and Pegg, 2011) and the Motivation Scale for Disability Sport Consumption (Cottingham *et al.*, 2014). The study aims primarily at developing a methodological framework by identifying a range of indicators for measuring levels of accessibility at all clubs’ stadia. Taking into account both quantitative and

qualitative services and facilities at stadia for our groups, our scale will contribute to manage effectively the entire “customer’s end to end journey” as Rawson *et al.*, (2013), Darcy (2010) or Hudson and Hudson (2013) contend for hospitality and tourism service sectors.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section we look at legislation that has developed around professional football stadiums before emphasising a shift towards perceiving and understanding SwD as consumers of the sport event. The conclusion from this shift is that we need to better understand SwD as well as the expanding group of older fans who develop age-related impairments as consumers, and thus it underpins our argument for the development of the European Accessible Football league scale. We then discuss the various stages that we have undergone in developing the European Accessible Football league scale framework, describing the process of identifying and selecting indicators through a three-step process. In the final section, we discuss applications of this scale for future survey research on accessibility to venues.

## **2. Accessibility in professional football stadiums: the legislative context**

Academic literature on accessibility and inclusivity at sports venues and stadia has emerged as a growing area of study, yet to date still covers a relatively small number of issues. One of the most prominent areas focuses on the development of technical documents that provide information on aspects of the design and operation of stadia and events and analyse the effects of the launching of legislation, guidelines and standards worldwide to address the constraints faced by people with different types of disabilities and levels of support needs in their daily lives (see Darcy, Lock & Taylor, 2017). Internationally the International Paralympic Committee have now included up-to-date stadium protocols within their host city guidelines

(Darcy, Frawley & Adair, 2017) and one of the most prominent documents in the UK context is the *Accessible Stadia Guide* (SGSA, 2004; 2015). Prior to the launch of supplementary guidance in 2015, only three EPL clubs complied with the basic legal requirements in relation to the required number of wheelchair spaces and their integration with seating for those attending with the wheelchair user (Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017, p. 3; Leigh Day, 2019; Revitalise, 2015). The supplementary guidance proved to be a turning point however, with additional standards have been added and all EPL clubs agreed to implement these in their stadia in August 2017 to ensure quality and availability of accessible services and facilities. This action led to an increase in the availability of wheelchair seating spaces between the 2015-16 season and the 2019-20 (Muscular Dystrophy UK, 2019).

Accessible amenities are also invaluable to SwD. The availability of accessible unisex toilets that are available via RADAR key (and therefore inaccessible to non SwD) are a key resource (Kitchin & Bloomer, 2017). A recent analysis of the supply of Changing Places toilets at all EPL clubs' stadia by Muscular Dystrophy UK, reveals that overall EPL clubs offer 16 Changing Places toilets. In particular, Tottenham Hotspur is taking the lead in consideration of the above with three Changing Places toilets, followed by clubs like West Ham United, Liverpool and Newcastle (two Changing places toilets), while newly-promoted trio Sheffield United, Aston Villa and Norwich, as well as Wolves and Bournemouth, do not have registered Changing Places toilets. In the same, other clubs such as Chelsea, Crystal Palace and Burnley are in the process of registering theirs.

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's evaluation into the state of EPL clubs' stadia showed that SwD and older fans have to overcome complex barriers just to attend matches at most EPL clubs (Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017). The report stated clearly

that “sport clubs, notably many of those with very considerable income and resources, have not given priority to sports fans with disabilities in recent years, despite the increase in income many of those clubs have received” (p. 4) (see also EPL, 2017; EHRC, 2017). For example, Downs and Paramio-Salcines (2013, p. 138) stated that, “despite the presence of “strong” legislation to protect the right of people with disabilities, a lack of enforcement by government authorities coupled with conflicting policies and procedures at different sport facilities can often result in a lack of uniformity in providing a high-quality experience for people with disabilities”. The failure by clubs to consider the ‘whole’ customer journey reflects a narrow perspective on how facilities integrate into the wider environment.

Nor are the pressures to comply with existing access regulations such as those set up by the *Accessible Stadia Supplementary Guidance*, demands from SwD and the consequences of compliance (or non-compliance) confined to clubs’ stadia at Premier League; studies have identified that there are substantial variations in compliance with legislations, standards and range of accessible facilities and services for different types of SwD as well as quality of service and experience at clubs’ stadia at the Bundesliga (Ackermann *et al.*, 2019) (table 2) and LaLiga (Paramio-Salcines and Kitchin, 2013; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to this, analysis has confirmed that while EPL and Bundesliga professional leagues have developed explicit guidelines and initiatives with the aim of improving the accessibility and quality of service and experience for different types of fans with disabilities at their stadia, other leagues, such as LaLiga, have paid insufficient attention to these critical issues, not having issued any official guidelines or regulation on this matter. As Ackermann *et al.*, (2019) state the Bundesliga offers an ‘Accessible Stadium Guide *Barrierefrei Ins Stadion*’ which aims to inform standards for stadia and as part of one of the critical aspect to enhance customer

service, all clubs of Bundesliga 1 and Bundesliga 2 offer Disability Liaison officers. After all, many aspects of our arguments have not only remained a marginal issue on the agenda at most football leagues and within the clubs themselves, but also those professional leagues and many clubs have failed to pay adequate attention to those fans' 'complete experience before and after the event'.

### **3. The Business Case for SwD and aged people and the shift towards a consumer culture**

The previous section focused on the development of legislation and related academic material, that has focused on accessibility at sport stadiums. However, there remains a paucity of studies examining emerging demographic, economic and managerial issues such as ageing or how to satisfy identified and unidentified needs for SwD. As an evolving area of sport management, a recent review by Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, (2018) identified novel areas of concern such as: developing an understanding of the profile and concerns from people with disabilities and the aged population as spectators (Garcia *et al.*, 2016; Southby, 2013; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2014, 2018); considerations about how the interaction between disability and ageing population fan base in many countries will impact on the design and management of sport facility and event management industry in the short, medium and long term (Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018; Schwartz *et al.*, 2015); how the planning, management and operation of stadia can impact on the quality service and experience for our supporter segments (Darcy, 2010; Darcy and Pegg, 2011; Kitchin and Paramio-Salcines, 2018), the main drivers that inhibit or facilitate the implementation of services and facilities that enhance the quality of service and experience of our groups at the same pace as those without disabilities (Kitchin and Paramio-Salcines, 2018;

Hudson and Hudson, 2013) or the structures of disabled supporters in football (see Ackermann *et al.*, 2019 for the German football).

In recent years, new perspectives on understanding the intersection between disability, ageing population and accessibility in relation to the business case, including attending events at stadia, have emerged. Support for this notion within the UK Department for Work & Pensions (2014, 2015), the US Department of Justice (2006) and by The Return on Disability Group (2016), Kaufman (2019) and Chand and Tung (2014). The UK Department for Work & Pensions (2014) estimated that customers with disabilities may account for up to 20 percent of the customer base for an average UK business with a combined spending power of at least £212 billion per annum. The US Department of Justice (2006) went further making the business case of the expanding market of older adults and PwD estimating that the spending power of PwD represents more than \$200 billion per year, while that economic impact of the elderly was even more significant as “more than 50% of the total U.S. discretionary income is controlled by those 50 years and older”. The Return on Disability Group (2016) also provides compelling figures, both demographic and economic, on the value of the disability market saying that ‘globally the disability community has exceeded the size of China at 1.3 billion people, their Friends and Family add another 2.4 billion potential consumers who act on their emotional connection to PwD and together those segments control \$8 trillion in annual disposable income’. Not least, Chand and Tung (2014) analysed the effects on global business by the increasingly ageing population.

These convincing evidences provide the ‘raison d’être’ for our study as ageing, coupled with disability, has become not only a global demographic trend, but also an emerging economic market to consider by the football industry: as Census data from European Union-28 , confirms,



the percentage of people with disabilities, including those with complex disabilities, and older populations is increasing rapidly, and is set to continue in coming five decades. Several authors have therefore argued that there is a business case underpinning the need for football clubs to focus on this untapped fan base (Downs and Paramio-Salcines, 2013; Kitchin and Bloomer, 2017a,b; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018; Southby, 2013). This shift in demand has been recognised by international sport organizations (International Paralympic Committee) (IPC, 2015), football governing bodies (UEFA and CAFÉ, 2011) or disabled advocacy groups (LPF, 2016). As in the hospitality and tourism sector suggest, “disability as a new group who they (tourism managers) had not previously considered (Darcy, 2010; Darcy and Pegg, 2011; Dickson *et al.*, 2016; Hudson and Hudson, 2013; Patterson *et al.*, 2012), catering to this expanding segment of fans has become an emerging managerial and customer service priority as well as an opportunity to generate new business opportunities for football clubs by expanding their national and international fan base. The importance of group dynamics to the economic arguments for those who recreate or travel with people with disabilities has also been established empirically where for example, for a day trip average group size is 3.4 and for an overnight trip is 2.8 demonstrating that not accommodating people with disability also causes the loss of business of those travelling with them (Darcy, 2010; Dwyer & Darcy, 2011). Not surprisingly, these concerns have been highlighted by UEFA and CAFE (2011, p. 11) saying that, “the number of disabled people wishing to attend matches with their families and friends will continue to increase. Disabled people should therefore be seen as valued customers, with good access not only as a moral issue but also as good business case”.

Previous studies stated that our groups as spectators have been ignored in different ways and that accessibility and disability have not been highly ranked high on the policy agenda of the football industry in Europe (Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018). Looking at the UK context for

example, Level Playing Field, an advocacy group for SwD, makes a conservative estimate that more than 30,000 people with different types of disabilities attend matches every week at English and Welsh stadia, with around 60 organisations for fans with disabilities at club level as well as many now also choosing to travel to matches abroad. Recently, the 2018 Statista survey conducted in the UK, on the share of the core fan base which is aged over 55, which are more prone to developing a disability, by sport shows that 24 percent of the respondent are football fans (see also Eurostat, 2018). Similarly, the Bundesliga in Germany has also considered disabled fans of all generic types at their club stadia by incorporating accessibility and inclusion as part of its culture over the years. Apart from this, the Bundesliga has also been pioneer in developing important schemes to provide better services and facilities and quality of experience for their SwD such as the Foundation of National DAO working group (2010), the DAOs become part of the licensing criteria for clubs in Bundesliga 1 and 2 (2014) or more recently, they have developed a National Training Certificate for DAOs (2017) (Ackermann *et al.*, 2019).

As The Return on Disability Group (2016) argues for business and other authors for the hospitality and tourism industry (Darcy, 2010; Darcy and Pegg, 2011; Hudson and Hudson, 2013), clubs in those leagues need to see universal accessibility as ‘added value’ and competitive advantage as well as it could open new business opportunities. In the meantime, there is a tension over normative legislation at sport venues and stadia and management and operation of those venues emphasising also the quality service and experience of those groups. Promoting a universal accessible and inclusive stadia environment to both groups, as we have been arguing, should not be considered in isolation from other managerial and economic decisions across European football and beyond (Anderson and Balandin, 2019; Hums *et al.*,

2016; Kitchin and Bloomer, 2017a,b; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018), though it has not been studied extensively in the football industry.

#### **4. Methodology**

Our previous analysis suggests the need to move away from understanding stadium accessibility from a regulatory or legislative perspective and more towards a consumer culture approach in which the consumer experience is paramount. Thus, we present the need for the development of a scale containing key indicators on the supporter experience that allow a better understanding of stadium accessibility within European football. Thus, the two research questions underpinning this research are:

- What are the key indicators needed to measure accessibility at stadia of the main European football leagues?
- How can we organise these key indicators into a framework that allows for measurability?

In order to align the research design with the two-research questions, the design of this study followed three steps.

##### **4.1.Step 1: Analysis from previous scales and practitioner guidelines**

The first step in the process of developing an accessibility scale involved analysis from previous academic literature and from practitioner guidelines on accessibility at sport venues and stadia (e.g. Darcy, 2010; Veal and Darcy, 2014). This included the audit of facilities developed by the National Association of Disabled Supporters in the UK (NADS, now Level Playing Field): this audit was completed by the views of SwD and ‘set in motion a process of real representation of the needs of disabled supporters’ (NADS, 1999, p. 1). However, this

study only focused on a limited information such as: a) general information (address & contact details of every club; disabled supporter club and directions); b) pre-travelling (2 questions); c) travel arrangements (3 questions); d) facilities inside stadium (6 questions), including places & positions at the stadium for wheelchair, visually impaired, hearing-impaired and ambulant disabled supporters; d) toilets and catering; e) leaving the ground (one question) and an open question.

In the follow up study in 2003, NADS developed an access checklist with 87 items, including among the following phases (first contact/tickets, 13 items); (arrival, 14 items), access to the stadium (5 items) and disability spectator viewing (Football Stadia Improvement Fund, 2004). Stemming from the 2003 NADS's study framework, Paramio *et al.*, (2012) conducted an exploratory analysis of the state of accessibility at a sample of top Premier League, Bundesliga and Spanish Primera Division clubs stadia, including seven stadia of EPL at the 2009-10 season and the new Wembley, seven stadia of Bundesliga at the same season and six top stadia of the Spanish Liga de Fútbol Professional. At that time, this comparative study used an holistic journey sequence approach, including five phases (anticipation, pre-travelling to the stadium, attending the event at the stadium, leaving the stadium and recollection). The emphasis of this study was on describing and quantifying the range of basic services and facilities offered by clubs for fans with disabilities (club name and web contact, date of stadia built and capacity, supply of seats for different types of SwD, percentage between capacity versus seats supplied and other accessible services). However, this study did not include an analysis of the quality of services and facilities for our target groups as are considered in the pre and post-event phases of the HOPES framework at stadia.

More recent analysis focus on all EPL clubs. One of them was undertaken by Revitalise which produced an Accessibility League table for football clubs in the English Premier League and the Football League Championships in 2015 (Revitalise, 2015). Further guidance from the Bundesliga which incorporates standards for stadia and DAO in their clubs (see Ackermann *et al.*, 2019) was also used. Similarly, LaLiga has only recently started to evaluate the level of accessibility at Primera and Segunda Division stadia (Paramio *et al.*, 2018). From the previous studies, evidence proves that there are significant variations in complying with legislative, regulatory and guidelines at club's stadia of the main Leagues as those set up by the *Accessible Stadia Guide* and the *Barrierefrei ins stadion* as well as on identifying and satisfying the needs of football disabled fans. Furthermore, some of clubs has a long history of addressing access at stadia going 'beyond an above' legislation (see Downs and Paramio-Salcines, 2013), while other top clubs still are failing not only to comply with national and international legislation, but also for offering a poor customer service to our target groups.

#### **4.2.Step 2: Feedback from practitioners**

The second step involved getting feedback on the initial indicators from practitioners working in the disability space. In this initial development of the scale, we have included the opinions of relevant Disability Liaison Officers (DLO) who have experience inside some of some of the main European football clubs and football practitioners with experience on accessibility and inclusion at stadia. Thereafter, these practitioners became collaborators in the co-design and validation of the indicators.

In this endeavour, each respondent was asked to rank all selected indicators from a value of 1 to the negative (as not at all important service or facility) to the most positive 4 (as very important service or facility). As the Hotel Accessible Scale proposed by Darcy to assess the

service for PwD in hotel accommodations in Australia (Darcy, 2010; Darcy and Pegg, 2011), this methodology appears suitable to validate the appropriate indicators of the *European Accessibility League* scale with which to assess and compare each club in the main European three leagues. In addition, Schwarz *et al.* (2015, p. 345) argue that ‘comparisons are also important in order to judge how the organization is doing in relation to other providers of similar products or services, whether or not they are competitors.

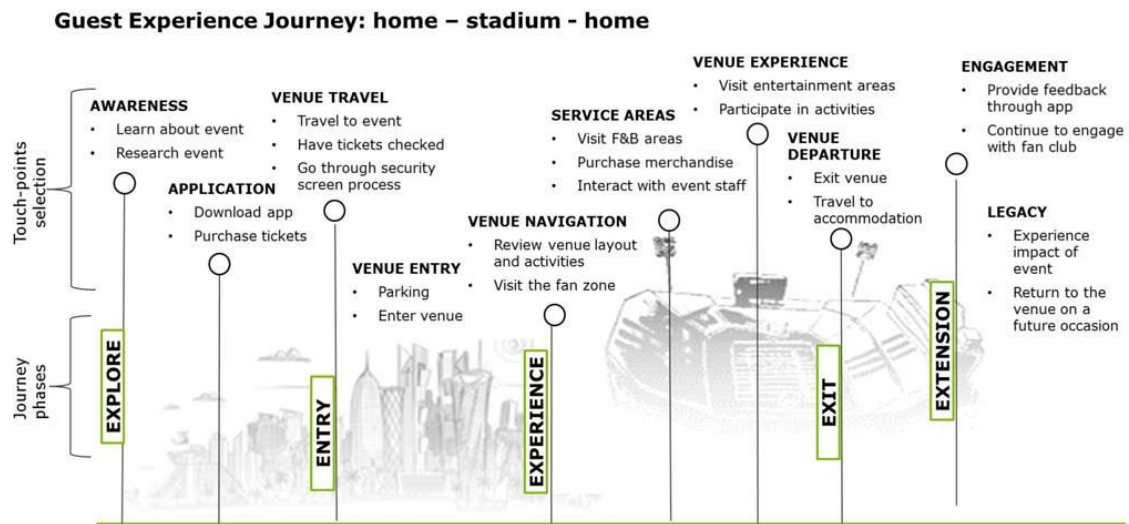
To this end, a critical aspect is to select those people that could provide a useful feedback in this process (Darcy, 2010; Veal and Darcy, 2014). Thereafter, authors in consultation with a panel of experts of DLOs at UK, German and Spanish clubs identify critical indicators and how those selected indicators are weighted to reflect the importance for accessible services and facilities at club’s stadia. As stated, there are not a common agreement on how many indicators should be used to measure the performance of different areas of professional clubs. The selection process cannot always be viewed or understood purely objective and it would be strongly influenced by the views and experience of practitioners and other academics. As Cottingham *et al.*, (2014), Schwarz *et al.*, (2015) and Veal and Darcy (2014) argue in evaluating different sport organisations, the list of indicators is not intended to be prescriptive because what works in one League’s social context will or not necessarily work in the other Leagues’ social context.

### **4.3.Step 3: Integration of the indicators with the HOPES framework**

At the end of the first two steps in the process, a total of 71 indicators had been identified.

The third step in the process of developing the initial scale has been to bring some organisation to these 71 indicators by integrating them with the HOPES framework (Paramio *et al.*, 2012; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018). The HOPES framework sets out five stages involved in the stadium experience: Hopes (Pre-experience); On the way to the stadium (2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the pre-experience); Participating in the experience (The experience itself); Enjoy the journey home and: Sharing (post-experience)

**Figure 1. Overview of the five phases of the HOPES model**



Source: Paramio *et al.*, 2012; Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018 (Permission granted from author)

As in other industry sectors, the management of the needs and experiences of SwD and older supporters should cover all aspects, including rational (regulations) and emotional aspects as part of what Rawson *et al.*, (2013) describe as the “customer’s end to end journey”. By doing this, the HOPES model is said to have the potential for understanding all factors that clubs need to supply in each phase to provide equal opportunities to access to facilities and services and quality of experience to SwD and older fans attending events at stadia. This model is systematic

about how access should be addressed by clubs and it ‘goes above and beyond’ standard regulations. The model is based on five discrete stages:

#### ***4.3.1. Pre-experience (Anticipation)***

From the first moment a previously non-attending SwD thinks of attending a match, the anticipation is quite likely to take them to the club or the disabled club/association website where they would expect to see the all the information they need. In effect, *the club website* should be a complete and comprehensive illustration of what SwD need to know to enjoy a good experience at club stadia (Paramio-Salcines *et al.*, 2018; SGSA, 2018). Technically club websites need to comply to W3C international standards and protocols on website accessibility (World Wide Web Consortium, 2020). With the increasing presence and dominance of the new media in our lives, one of the most visible changes is how social media could affect the quality of the experience of our groups in the pre- and post-event periods. Each policy will differ from club to club although large parts of the policy are likely to remain the same that should allow clubs to readily introduce policies by working from a template that we can provide. In this phase, eleven indicators were chosen to assess the anticipation experience of all types of SwD (see annex 1). If the information needed is not on the club website or in apps, it is unlikely to exist anywhere else except in the form of learning from the experience of those already enjoying the matches.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is a quick and simple process to add a webpage to any official club website, which contains significant information for a SwD and older fan planning to buy tickets to see their first game. This would include the following: a brief outline description of the whole process, which may involve becoming a member first, and purchasing tickets second (an



abbreviated Policy for Disabled Fans). This should include explanations for each generic disability, ie, whether the disability involved is physical (restricted mobility, using a wheelchair), sensory (visually impaired or hearing-impaired), learning/social/behavioural (ADHD, Asperger's, Autism, Down Syndrome or similar), mental health (anxiety, severe depression, schizophrenia or similar) and age related disability (Dementia, Alzheimer's or similar, can be complicated with restricted mobility).

A more detailed explanation of the part of the policy, which refers to the levels of disability, which fit the criteria for being considered disabled and entitled to a free personal assistant ticket or disabled and not entitled to a free assistant ticket. This section would also include justification for the criteria applied in relation to each individual, ie, it seems that a majority of clubs use the levels of statutory benefits received to determine the level of disability and, correspondingly, the entitlement to a concession for the assistant ticket. This should be quite clearly stated on the website and it should not become a matter of the discretion of any individual working for the club.

The above is an early indication of the amount of information needed to inform spectators with disabilities about the criteria they will be subject to as a member of a club. Both paragraphs above should be considered for expansion into a comprehensive Policy that clearly explains the criteria applied by the club. The policy should also explain how the above situations develop for each type of game (league, cup, friendlies... home and away) in the context of applying for tickets (and possibly accessible parking). It should also explain in more detail the specific criteria involved in assessments of entitlement to an assistant ticket.

#### ***4.3.2. On the way to the stadium (2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the pre-experience)***

Has sufficient information been provided in the context of travelling to, approaching and accessing the stadium? This element relies upon stadia/venues appreciating the logistics of disability to an individual, correspondingly providing adequate directions, information on public transport, and offering accessible parking facilities. Assuming a SwD has negotiated the process of becoming a member of a club or if they are simply interested in purchasing a ticket, they should ensure that they are requesting tickets in an area of the stadium suitable for their needs. As Hudson and Hudson (2013) highlight, the customer service at the hospitality and tourism sectors relies substantially on the staff/customer interaction and satisfaction, in the football industry the role of DLO of the club is critical to satisfied the identified and unidentified of SWD and older fans either by e-mail or by direct telephone. General guidance is provided below. In this phase, eight indicators were selected to offer significant accessible information to current and potential home, but also away, SwD and elderly supporters planning the trip to the stadium.

Ideally, a stadium should provide an equality of experience by having an accessible option for all viewing/ticketing categories, from general admission through to corporate box offerings. This allows SWD the same opportunities as any patron and generate pricing differences based on ticketing classes. The general design of an appropriate wheelchair user facility can be found at EU level (CEN/TR 15913:2009) and in the UK, the Accessible Stadia Guide and Supplementary Facilities and more recently on the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds; the relevant information provided within should be read and understood by every DLO (Access Officer or even an steward) as it is essential to initiate the process of assisting fans in deciding which available option is most likely to be the best option for them.

Purchasing the tickets, they need, the next step would be purchasing the appropriate tickets needed with clear information about the facility they are about to use and the various elements of detail needed for a successful trip to the stadium. This would normally include information about the different forms of transport available to people with disabilities including the availability of accessible parking. The above would be accompanied by maps of the stadium plus maps of the surrounding areas indicating the number of convenient 'stops' in respect of public transport. When including this information on individual club sites it would be most helpful if a high level of detail could be included. Where possible these should be accompanied by photographs, which allow instant recognition to each supporter as they make the journey towards stadium. It is also imperative that a match day contact is available for those in need of more guidance if they are having difficulties getting to the stadium; this would normally be the role of the DLO or Access Officer.

#### ***4.3.3. Participating in the experience (The on-site experience itself)***

This phase, which includes thirty-nine indicators, is to better understand the full experience of attending the game. It is essential the aim of each club is to provide any SwD, including older fans the same experience as a non-disabled supporter.

#### ***4.3.4. Enjoy the journey home***

This phase of the HOPES model takes into account a safe exit from the stadium into what can be large crowds. Some supporters will head towards the accessible parking (if provided), accessible taxi pickups, and others will use public transport. Individual clubs should provide

the information and location of the best route to both of these options on the webpage dedicated to providing information to disabled fans as six indicators consider.

#### **4.3.5. *Sharing (post-experience)***

As Paramio *et al.*, (2012, p. 378) stated “after the travel experience is over and fans have returned home, they are likely to reflect upon their experiences, which will include psychological and emotional benefits, that remain for a while”. Clubs should also seek to solicit these experiences from customers as part of their continual improvement program, benefit from those who wish to share their good customer experiences and mitigate the problems for those who had less than optimal experiences. Doing this provides a way to address poor experiences before these may be shared via social media where the club would then lose control of the issue and addressing this one-on-one with the individual customer. To analyse this final stage, we have included four indicators.

### **5. Conclusion and next steps**

There is a growing need for key stakeholders in the football industry at European level and beyond to understand more about the issues of accessibility and inclusion at football stadia. Moving beyond the regulatory or legislative perspective, there is a need for a better understanding of accessibility from a consumer perspective underpinned by the quality of service and experience delivered by sport venues. There is clearly a need to go beyond legal recognition (‘minimum standards’) into market recognition providing SwD and ageing supporters with a good level of services and facilities and an experience equal to that of their able-bodied supporters. The development of the Accessibility European League scale would

address this need, whilst also serving two further, important, purposes: firstly, it would highlight those clubs at the upper ends of the ranking system and demonstrate good practice; second, if an accessibility league table was produced on an annual basis it has the potential to become accepted and embedded in the sector, will give more prominence to the issue of accessibility, and shape the decision making processes of football clubs. This paper presents the first step in the process. We have developed our list of 71 indicators that make up our Accessibility scale. We need to follow this up with testing and validating of the scale.

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## Appendix 1: The European Accessible Football League Scale

<b>Phase 1: Pre-experience</b>	
1	The adequacy of information for SwD on the club's website or disabled club/association (accessible websites with a direct link if it is possible)
2	The presence of contact details for accessibility team (a named Disability Liaison Officer or Access Coordinator)
3	Dedicated and direct phone and email address for SwD
4	Dedicated current (and future) accessible mobile apps from club or the league
5	Alternative format materials available in Braille, large print or electronic upon request
6	Ticketing policy (Tickets and price for accessible seats for SwD and their helpers and older fans in all price categories available to the public)
7	Payment systems (card, cashless, apps)
8	Provision of a stadium guide –virtual tour of the venue (Stadium webcam) with the locations of seats for them and services outside and inside the ground for match days and non-match days
9	The presence of an Access Statement
10	Schedule of incoming accessible events
11	Tourism information about the city (club's website)
<b>Phase 2. On the way to the stadium</b>	
12	Offering significant accessible information to current and potential home, but also away, SwD and elderly supporters planning the trip to the stadium
13	Dedicated accessible public (airport, train, buses..) and private transport (taxi, private hire vehicles...) for home matches

14	Dedicated accessible public (airport, train, buses..) and private transport (taxi, private hire vehicles...) for away matches
15	Parking at the stadium: Number of parking spaces reserved for SwD and older fans and their location and distance to the main entrance to the stadium
16	Stadium plan with detailed information about access, egress and emergency procedures
17	Club Online Ticketing policy for SwD and their helpers and older fans
18	Contact details of the club and person responsible for the service
19	Information in different languages (especially for away matches)
20	Dedicated Visiting Supporters' Guide
<b>Phase 3. Participating in the experience</b>	
21	The proportion of accessible parking spaces (free or paid for) for cars and buses compared to total accessible seating
22	Number of dedicated accessible parking spaces for local and for away disabled fans and elderly fans and their companions
23	Existence (or non-existence) of match day stewards in the parking area
24	The location and distance of drop-off points to the designated entrance for disabled fans
25	Accessible routes from parking and transportation areas to the main entrance and that connects to all public areas in the stadium
26	Accessible information and signage in the route
27	Accessible tickets offices at the venue (including audio induction loop...
28	Ticketing policy
29	Dedicated accessible entrances to the stadium

30	Accessible entrance doors and lobbies
31	Interior Vertical Circulation- Number of lifts for SwD and older fans
32	Interior Horizontal circulation- Ramps and stairs
33	Accessible seating
34	The total number of accessible seats as a proportion of the stadium capacity for: Wheelchair users; People with impaired vision; People with learning disabilities; People with impaired hearing; Ambulant disabled people
35	The total number of companion seats and their location
36	Are all of the seats/positions provided sheltered from the weather?
37	The location and separation of SwD of each club in all areas of the stadium
38	Audio Description service and facilities for Blind/Partially sighted and deaf/hard of hearing supporters available in different languages
39	Dedicated Sign Language interpreters
40	Provision of accessible Family seats
41	Good Lines of sight at stadium stands (pitch level or elevated platform)
42	Provision of cover for all accessible seats
43	Space to accommodate assistance dogs'/service animals
44	Safe storage of mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs
45	The proportion of accessible toilets compared to total accessible seating (recommended 1 for 15 wheelchair spaces)
46	Provision of permanent accessible toilets facilities (Changing Places toilets)
47	Provision of gender-neutral/family toilets
48	Location and position of accessible toilets in relation to fans
49	Provision of radar keys from stewards servicing the area



50	Provision of induction loops in different areas of the venue
51	The proportion of accessible (hospitality areas) concessions, including food service areas, restaurants, shop, cafes (similar to the Ability Suite)
52	Dedicated stewards and any other staff involved with disability awareness training
53	Match day volunteers trained in Equality, Inclusion and Disability Awareness
54	Provision of a sensory room
55	Provision of a centre for visually impaired and blind reporters
56	Space to accommodate assistance dogs
57	Safe storage for mobility scooters/ powered wheelchairs
58	Access to other facilities: Executive boxes; Lounge & suites; Club offices; Club museum
59	First Aid room
<b>Phase 4: Enjoy the journey home</b>	
60	Provision of Exit routes
61	Provision of Refuges areas, Vertical Escape.
62	Provision of Evacuation Lifts, Stairs
63	Separate emergency routes for SwD spectators
64	Emergency plan
65	Existence of event staff members in case of evacuation announcements
66	Visual and audible fire alarms or emergency notifications
67	Post-match transport options
<b>Phase 5. Sharing</b>	
68	Existence of social network sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook; Instagram...)

69	Dedicated smartphones apps from club or the football league
70	Existence of regular social events on non-match days for SwD and their companions/families
71	Existence of Disabled Fans organisation at club level