

MORE SAFETY FOR FOOTBALL EVENTS: IMPROVING THE COMMUNICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS AND THE DIALOGUE WITH SUPPORTERS

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Abstract

Safety and security in football events has been a heavily debated topic in the media for years. Research in this field, however, so far mostly concentrated on single locations or separate stakeholders. Especially communication processes between the police authorities, private security services, town councils, supporters and other spectators have often been neglected. The research project SiKomFan therefore inquires possible improvements of communication strategies, including technical solutions to support them. By using a broad perspective that involves 25 football locations in Germany's three professional football leagues the most relevant stakeholders are examined in order to contribute to a successful dialogue with supporters.

Keywords: Communication strategies, football, communication platform, mobile application, police, supporters, safety, security.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the football season 2012/2013 about 19 million people attended the matches of the German Bundesliga (first league). The games of the second, third and lower leagues were attended by several additional millions of spectators. On their journey to the stadium and back home, they travel through crowded urban regions and depend on using the local infrastructures.

In order to implement such big football events a cooperation of police forces, local town councils, football clubs and private security services is necessary to provide a safe and secure environment. Together with spectators and supporter groups, these stakeholders strive for a peaceful and positive sport event. By doing this, different perspectives on freedom, safety and security must be balanced. For being successful in this complex endeavour, a transparent communication among all involved actors is crucial. In many cases this can already be achieved, in a number of occasions, however, such attempts are failing and lead to serious, sometimes even violent conflicts. Factors for successful interactions between security actors, spectators and supporter groups, were not identified by research so far.

So, how can the safety and security creation in the context of football games be optimised *via communication*?

The research project *SiKomFan* (Mehr **S**icherheit im Fußball – Verbessern der **K**ommunikationsstrukturen und Optimieren des **F**andialogs), funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), aims at answering this question by combining four different research disciplines executed by seven project partners [1]. The project will conduct research in 25 football locations [2] of the first three leagues all over Germany. It is structured into five sub-projects [3] and financed for three years. *SiKomFan* started in September 2013.

SiKomFan focuses on analysing the structure, processes and quality of communication between the different stakeholders. Two working-presuppositions guide the inquiry: Firstly, a constructive co-action of all actors guarantees an effective and societal-oriented safety and security creation. Secondly, the more transparent and adjusted this process can be presented in public – in particular during dynamic situations – the better conflicts can be regulated or avoided. Therefore, it could be helpful to use a common communication platform for all involved security actors and a public channel for information concerning the public and especially the supporters and other spectators.

On the following pages we will first give an overview of the state of research in this field. Next, the research scenario of the overall project will be presented, followed by a first assessment of the third sub-project, covering public and private security actors. Fourth, the technical concepts of *SiKomFan* will be discussed, in particular the communication platform and applications for new technologies. Finally, we will provide a brief summary of the overall project.

2 STATE OF RESEARCH

The issue of safety and security in the context of football matches has received a high media attention during the past years. In social science research, the topic is covered too, however, mostly not with an empirical focus on the communication processes of the involved actors. There are only few publications that deal with the communication of police forces towards supporters [4] and even less work exists about similar processes between police forces and private security services [5]. Moreover, these studies are mostly focused on single issues, locations or events. Empirical inquiries about supporter cultures in contrast are a frequent phenomenon [6], albeit mostly not with a communicative connection to security actors [7]. Most importantly, there are no broad empirical studies that involve a wide range of football locations and stakeholders within Germany covering communication issues. Therefore, project *SiKomFan* aims at filling this research gap from interdisciplinary perspectives and at fostering the empirically founded discussion of safety and security in the context of football matches.

3 RESEARCH SCENARIOS

Four scenarios around football events are the basis for inquiring communication processes between the different actors.

The first sub-scenario deals with the arrival and departure of spectators on the railway system of Deutsche Bahn AG (DB). In this sub-scenario the (communicative) co-action of the federal police, the carriers and its services as well as the measures by football clubs are examined.

The second sub-scenario covers the travelling of spectators from a DB-train station to the stadium. There are many different models in existence, for example the organized supporter march, the use of shuttle busses and the individual arrival by foot or with public transportation. Foci of analysis in this context are actions by state police and town councils but also accompanying measures by football clubs and public transport services.

In both sub-scenarios requirements for freedom, safety and security by visitors and population are likewise of research interest.

The next sub-scenario focuses on the interface of public area and the responsibility of the match-host: the entry controls. There, co-operation modalities between state police, town council and the club security commissioner as well as the private security service in the stadium are being included in the inquiry. Additionally, also measures by supporter liaison officers or supporter projects [8] are supposed to be considered.

The fourth and last scenario examines the spectators' visit in the stadium area. Here, actions by private security services in the stadium, the cooperation of different safety and security actors, for example in the safety and security operations headquarter, and the integration of the stadium announcer into communication concepts are inquired.

In both sub-scenarios safety and freedom requirements by all visitors are supposed to be collected.

Examining the topic of communication processes in the context of football games can be done from different specialist perspectives and by using different methods. *SiKomFan* combines four disciplines, namely sociology, risk- and security management, law and computer science as well as their specific methods.

4 DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, DIFFERENT STRATEGIES

In the third sub-project "Aspects of Internal, Inter-organizational and External Communication in the Field of Public and Private Security Actors" a number of criteria were identified in order to find characteristics of the 25 research locations. Analysis of similarities and differences of local communication strategies can finally lead to recommendations for improving interactions between safety and security stakeholders as well as with supporters and other spectators.

The communicative role of different working areas of police forces and the club's private security services from a risk- and security management perspective is examined in three steps:

1. The sub-project has made contact with a number of stakeholders in the field all over Germany and identified analytical criteria of the single research locations, for instance the size of the urban context, the size and location of the stadium, or characteristics of the respective supporter cultures. Having determined these criteria, different basic conditions at locations will be identified in order to enable the transfer of successful communication strategies to similar places.
2. Next, an analysis of documents from local state police authorities, local federal police authorities, town councils and private security services of football clubs is pursued. Thereby, the existing strategies, concepts and their form of documentation for internal, inter-organisational and external communication with supporters and other spectators are examined.

Preliminary results reveal that most locations apply quite different models, e.g. for external communication: In Bremen the state police uses loudspeakers to welcome guest supporters by playing their respective football clubs' anthems and an entertaining moderation. Some other places, e.g. Hanover, deploy so-called "conflict managers" [9]. These are especially trained police officers, who serve as contact persons for supporter groups. These "managers" provide transparent information about police actions to these groups and try to establish a dialogue with them. Final conclusions about such strategies cannot yet be drawn, since data from interviews and police operations are still evaluated.

3. Therefore, starting in October, more than 100 qualitative expert interviews will be conducted. As a supplement and optional, also group discussions, telephone

interviews and online surveys are planned with further stakeholders. At the same time, 50 sessions of non-participant observations during football events will be undertaken at the research locations.

The collected data from documents, interviews, surveys and non-participatory observations will be analysed for each location respectively and subsequently compared in order to conclude about success models and potentials for improvement.

Increasingly, also the topic of social media communication enters the focus of security actors in order to build a dialogue with supporters and other spectators previously to the match day. Similar technical innovations are pursued by *SiKomFan*, which will now be presented.

5 SUPPORT COMMUNICATION WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Communication processes in the context of football matches can encounter technical limitations. Traditional communication channels are often characterized by a one-way communication structure, delayed forwarding of information or limited quality (e.g. stadium announcements). New media, such as Twitter, provide opportunities for flexible, timely and rapid exchange of information, but have the disadvantages of information overflow and uncertainty (the content is not reliable). To address these problems, a new communication platform is explored and tested in a demonstrator. Participating parties can communicate with each other by means of the appropriate form at football events. Using an app on a smartphone, football supporters and other stakeholders can access this platform in order to obtain relevant event information or to provide new information.

5.1 A domain ontology

As a first step, we need to model an ontology for the domain of football match events with a focus on security and safety. An ontology is a specification of a conceptualization [10]. With simpler words, it describes a section of the world (the domain), with the aid of a vocabulary consisting of basic elements and relations between these elements.

The application of the ontology is threefold:

1. It will store a model of the current situation during a football event. Information coming into the system will be annotated with elements from the ontology to create a common meaning.
2. All actors, which are involved into an event, are modelled including their relations, tasks and roles.
3. The structure of the ontology (relations between concepts) are used to navigate the system and the mobile app.

As a side effect caused by the formalized nature of an ontology, the understanding of the involved actor and their relations was hugely increased between the project partners during the necessary discussion.

Since no ontology existed which completely fitted our requirements we analysed existing ontologies for (partial) reuse. These ontologies can be divided into the following groups:

1. Generic base ontologies, e.g. DOLCE+DnS Ultralite (DUL) [11] or FOAF [12]
2. Geo locations
3. Time and Time Ranges
4. Events (in the meaning of “something happening”)
5. Events (like concerts or a sport event)
6. Sport and Football (both organisational aspects like leagues and the match itself)

Based on our study we decided to pick DUL as the base ontology because it already covers the basic elements like people, organisations, roles, events and all relations between them. Building on DUL all actors (supporters, transportation companies, clubs, unions, security organisations, police, press, etc.) and their roles were modelled. After that time (for events and phases) and space (e.g. location of stadium) was added.

The ontology was tested with queries and example data created from the *SiKomFan* use-cases.

5.2 The *SiKomFan* communication platform

The *SiKomFan* communication platform supports the safety and security aspects of a football game by improving the communication between all involved actors and providing the relevant information depending on the role of the actor. Some use-case examples are:

- A father has lost his child in the crowded stadium and wonders whom to contact for support.
- A security officer wants to give an information to people in a certain area, e.g. “this entrance is overcrowded, please use entrance B”.
- A supporter wants to know which supporter items are allowed to bring into the stadium.

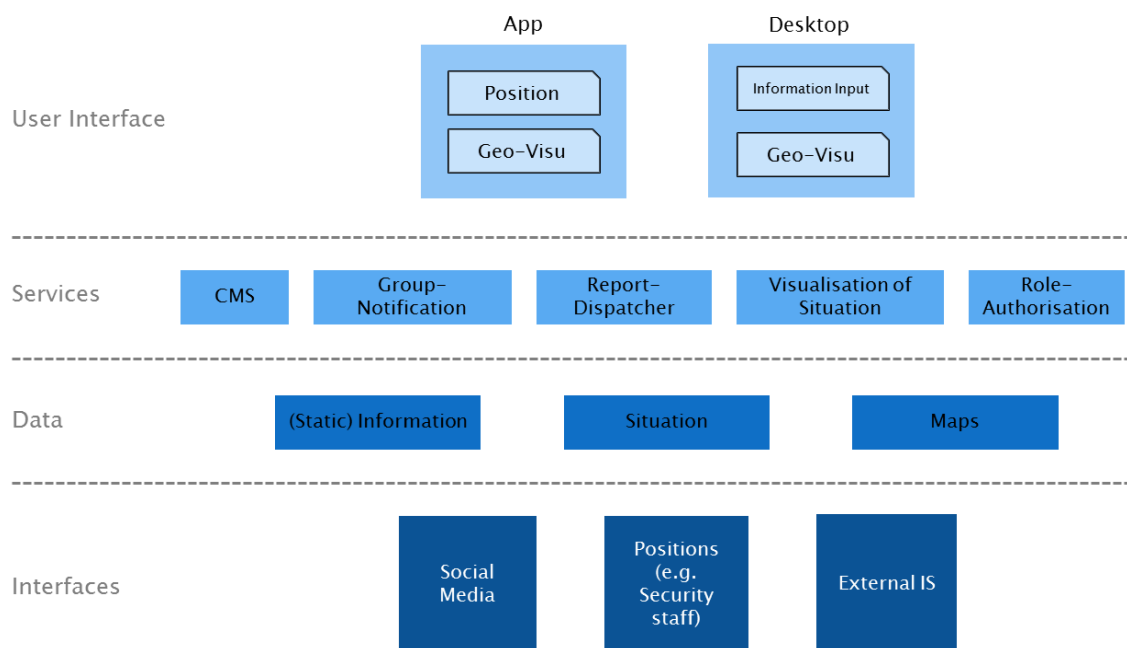


Fig. 1: System architecture for the *SiKomFan* communication platform

To fulfil the broad requirements of the diverse actor groups the system has several approaches. To be accessible to many people a mobile app is foreseen as well as a desktop version. Furthermore, to prevent the duplication of information existing external systems can be connected. Existing Social Media communication channels like Twitter are integrated for bi-directional communication with visitors.

The main part of the system is the *Situation*; it contains the connected information about the current football event. It can be visualised on a map in various ways for different actors and roles. For example, a visitor can see the location and availability of the transfer shuttle to the train station.

The system will be implemented in the next step of the project followed by a final usability test at the end of the project.

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

At best, research should always have a practical use and not be an isolated self-referential habit. For *SiKomFan* this phrase constitutes one of its main guidelines. The sub-projects therefore seek to deliver suggestions to optimize the communication strategies of the stakeholders, the communication processes between the stakeholders and especially to optimize the dialogue between supporters and the stakeholders. The third sub-project takes therefore a look on security actors. Additionally, as has been shown above, a communication platform for public stakeholders as well as a public application for supporters and other spectators will be developed by the fourth sub-project in order to increase the quality of technical communication processes and structures. Moreover, but not presented here, the second sub-project examines supporter cultures and their perspectives on safety and security while the fifth sub-project develops legal recommendations for a better information exchange and for optimizing the cognisance of public actors around football matches. *SiKomFan* is currently in its first year of research and will conclude with final results in August 2016.

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- [2] The 25 examination locations are situated in the following cities: Berlin, Bielefeld, Bremen, Bochum, Brunswick, Dortmund, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt/Main, Gelsenkirchen, Halle (Saale), Hamburg, Hanover, Karlsruhe, Cologne, Leverkusen, Mainz, Munich, Nuremberg, Offenbach, Rostock, Stuttgart.
- [3] The five sub-projects are working independent of each other and have their own agenda within the overall research topic. The first sub-project coordinates the research progress and the communication between the other sub-projects, keeps contact to practice and is responsible for external communication. Sub-project number two inquires supporter cultures and their perspectives on freedom, safety and security from a sociological perspective by using both qualitative and quantitative methods of social science. Sub-project number three examines the role of private security services and police forces in communication processes from a risk- and security management perspective by applying qualitative expert interviews/surveys, document analysis and non-participatory observations. Sub-project number four covers technical aspects of communication processes and seeks to develop both a communication platform for security actors and a new public media application. Sub-project number five focuses from a law perspective on legal aspects of safety and security surrounding football games. For more information see: www.sikomfan.de (in German language)

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