

WeAreVOST 2018

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Campus Freudenberg

Book of Abstracts

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VOST Europe in the Catalanian Attacks of August 2017

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The 1st attack happened shortly after 17:00h on the 17th August in Barcelona, and the 2nd around 01:30 on the 18th in Cambrils. VOST Europe volunteers participated from very early on, mainly to support VOSTcat and VOST Spain, but also to amplify key messages (including the ones from foreign offices).

Laurent Alfonso and Iratxe Gomez were active for VOST Europe; Iratxe was also active with her local team (VOST Euskadi) and Laurent was in continuous contact with VISOV. We used Twitter for publications, and Whatsapp for communication between us and with other teams and influencers. Mistakes were also made.

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VOST Europe in the Stockholm Attack of April 2017

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This terrible attack happened on the afternoon of April 7th 2017. With no local VOST presence, but with several international VOST teams looking into it, the VOST Europe core team felt the need to amplify and translate key messages into English, French and Spanish.

Incidentally this happened right after the end of the EENA Conference 2017, in which VOST Europe had had a relevant presence. In part thanks to this, we had a strong support from Benoit Vivier from EENA, who helped greatly by translating key messages from Swedish for us.

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Fighting hoaxes across borders

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At 22h on August 19th 2017, just after Barcelona & Cambrils attacks, and with the Spanish Vuelta about to start from Nîmes (France), media and social networks in Spain began talking about an active shooter situation in the train station of Nîmes.

Cpt. Alfonso from SDIS30 (also coordinator of VOST Europe) was on shift in Nîmes, and Iratxe Gomez was monitoring the situation from Spain, and we were able to quickly relay verified information. A communication from the Gard Prefecture, coordinated from the MSGU Cell of SDIS 30 under the responsibility of Lt. Col. Paletti, allowed to close the situation, which was nothing like an active shooter situation.

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How to set-up new VOST?

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A well defined collaboration with emergency response organisations is the key to a successful Virtual Operations Support Team.

The VOST Europe team will present the actual footprint of VOST around the world, provide guidelines for the creation of new teams, give examples of organisation models and collaboration agreements with public authorities in different countries, and discuss some relevant activations, to finish with a list of recommendations and reference materials.

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VOST Americas: Hurricane Harvey Activation 2017

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After Hurricane Harvey devastated Texas in 2017, FEMA asked VOSG (different teams in the VOST Americas region, coordinated by Americorps for Texas VOAD) to monitor social media inquiries on donations and spontaneous volunteers being collected and arriving in Texas. FEMA also requested simultaneous English/Spanish amplification of official donations/volunteer messages on social media.

This presentation is about that mission: what went well, challenges faced and lessons learned.

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Misinformation, Disinformation and sharks in the street

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Misinformation is normal in a crisis. Deliberate disinformation is relatively new, and includes recent nation state attempts to create confusion and panic. This talk covers some of the history of misinformation in crises, and recent work on containing its effects, including VOST work during hurricane Irma.

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To be taken seriously, you need a brand

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Developing a broad and strategic approach to creating and managing your brand helps a new VOST gain trust, greater social impact and tighter organizational cohesion. Credibility is gained faster by taking a business approach, branding the VOST as part of a professional and organized group. Without leveraging the VOST brand, it would have been much harder for many new VOSTs to gain public trust, serve their missions, and stay true to their organization's values and culture. Examples can be shown.

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The E2mc Project

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The goal of the E2mC H2020 project is to demonstrate feasibility and usefulness of the integration of social media analysis and crowdsourced information within both the Rapid Mapping and Early Warning Components of Copernicus Emergency Management Service (EMS). In recent years, several operational experiences (large earthquakes such as the one in Central Italy in 2016/2017 or large hurricanes and floods such as Harvey in Texas in 2017) - have shown the high potential contribution of social media and crowdsourcing in the improvement of the overall quality and timeliness of satellite-based Rapid Mapping services. The E2mC project has accepted these challenges and designed an innovative approach.

E2mC has succeeded in implementing a prototype platform (the "Social&Crowd" platform) that implements the necessary modules to demonstrate under pre-operational conditions the added value of social media and crowdsourcing in a Rapid Mapping context. In particular, the "Social&Crowd" platform specific characteristics are: a) a multi-source social media and news crawling engine, b) a customized geocoding engine based on semantic analysis coupled with open source gazetteers, c) a deep learning engine to automatically tag media contents and filter out irrelevant contents, d) a multi-purpose crowdsourcing platform to manage simple micro-tasks to be assigned to the crowd such as keywords translation, media relevance assessment, content geolocation improvement, simple mapping tasks, etc. e) a web interface to interact with the platform, trigger ad hoc activations of the "Social&Crowd" platform, inspect and download the results, further integrate them into other generic GIS environments. In this way, the "Social&Crowd" platform demonstrates how crowdsourcing, data mining and Artificial Intelligence can be combined to deliver higher quality data-driven services (e.g. crowdsourcing data are used for feeding AI algorithm for image recognition, while AI is used for removing duplicated images automatically or for detecting false positive from images coming from previous disasters).

The E2mC project has also made significant progress in the crowdsourcing component and it is now actively managing a hybrid crowdsourcing community composed by heterogeneous groups such as general purpose ones (e.g. BOINC, through CERN) and emergency specific ones (e.g. HOT, SBTF). In particular, the E2mC project has started a process to establish links and federate with other relevant crowdsourcing initiatives active in the emergency response domain to join forces and efforts in providing effective and timely answers to Copernicus EMS Rapid Mapping needs.

This paper presents the technological achievements of the E2mC project as well as the results of the testing and demonstration of the "Social&Crowd" platform during both past events (cold cases) as well as during real and time-critical Copernicus EMS Rapid Mapping activations. In particular, the results of the demonstrations have been used for a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the

benefits and added value brought by the E2mC project to satellite-based mapping activities, alone or in combination with complementary data analysis techniques such as, for example, hydraulic modelling of large floods where the data generated by the Social&Crowd platform are integrated as ground truth for model calibration in time-critical operational conditions

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Dumfries and Galloway VOST (Scotland)

Authors: Adam Potts^{None}; Mark Thomson^{None}

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for responding organisations to share information with the public. During an emergency, it can be crucial that people in affected areas are able to obtain accurate and timely information. By the same token, responders benefit from being able to gather intelligence from the public, validate, deploy resources as required and disseminate any useful intelligence gathered.

Police Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council developed 'Dumfries and Galloway Virtual Operations Support Team'(DGVOST), the first of its kind in the UK.

During deployments staff members from the two lead agencies, Police Scotland and Local Authority, supported by the National Health Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue, HM Coastguard and volunteer agencies (Mountain Rescue, Inshore rescue) all jointly issue consistent and reliable information under the 'DGVOST' branding and benefit from the involvement and engagement of the public.

The greatest enhancement the DGVOST has brought has been an increase in situational awareness for both the general public and incident managers. The live time feeds sent into the team from both the Public and responders on the ground allow incident managers to make informed decisions about resource deployment and priorities. Recent activations have demonstrated the significant value to be had from crowdsourcing situational awareness and the VOSTs far-ranging reach in terms of warning & informing.

Additionally, emergency interventions have been successfully deployed as a result of communications received via the VOST including the rescue of a disabled grandfather and a 6 month old child from a car stranded in deep snow who were rescued and taken to safety in less than an hour from the initial communication from the child's parent. This demonstrates the potential for seamless integration of the intelligence gathering process and responder activities going forward.

In addition to providing some background context as above, the Presentation would cover five recent activations;

- Storm Desmond (Dec 2015)
- Storm Frank (Dec 2015)
- Ex Hurricane Ophelia (Oct 2017)
- Snow Event (Jan 2018)
- #beastfromtheeast (Feb / March 2018)

And will discuss the following;

- Integration with wider response structures and systems
- successes,
- challenges,
- learning,
- unexpected benefits and;
- will end by discussing our hopes for the future of the system

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Debunking rumors in Twitter to support the official communication efforts during the Barcelona 2017 Terrorist Attack: A VOST

Case Study

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Social Media has proven to be a useful Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as mass and peer-to-peer communication channel before, during and after disasters and emergencies. User generated content provides a broader coverage and more up-to-date information of crisis events than traditional media. Many emergency management agencies are embracing social media as a channel for alerts, warnings, and as part of their mass communication strategy. It empowers emergency organizations to communicate directly with citizens. However, its use is not exempt of problems. Data quality becomes a great challenge while using user-generated content specially from social media. Rumors, misinformation and malicious information disseminated through social media can endanger citizens and first respondents. One active group using social media, specially Twitter, to support communication and decision-making is VOST (Virtual Operation Support Team). Their aim is to monitor and share reliable information through social media while helping to identify fake news and supporting emergency agencies.

The objective of this study was to analyse the process followed by VOST to support the official sources to debunk rumors and misinformation during a terrorist attack. On the 16th of August 2017, an ISIS terrorist drove a van into a crowd in Las Ramblas (Barcelona) killing 13 people and injuring 130 others. The study employed a mixed method approach, where data were collected using a combination of source of evidence including tweets analysis, participant observation, newspaper articles analysis, and interviews. The case study benefits of the use of the Critical Decision Making Method as part of the interview process. Participants were presented with different probes to better understand their decision making process before debunking a piece of information using Twitter.

This paper presents the results of this case study. It showcases the importance of the role of VOST to support official sources while working as message amplifiers and debunking rumours. The findings would be important consideration for the support of emergency stakeholders during future terrorist attacks. The research reflected in this paper strives to help emergency management practitioners to develop best practices and better understand the potential support of Virtual Operation Support Team.