

Safety of mass sports events

Robert Socha¹, Bernard Wiśniewski²

¹WSB University, Dąbrowa Górnicza
ul. Ciepłaka 1C, 41-300 Dąbrowa Górnicza - Poland

²The Police Academy in Szczytno
ul. Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego 111; 12-100 Szczytno - Poland

Abstract— Full assurance of safety during mass events is a complex process, subject to provisions of generally applicable law. These provisions regulate in detail all basic obligations and requirements provided for this particular kind of events. However, in the course of time some of the regulations provided for in the Polish legal system gave rise to doubts about their specificity. In this paper the authors discuss and clarify the areas which are necessary to ensure the highest level of safety of sports events i.e. the circulation of information during the preparation, organization and execution phase of the event, organization of evacuation as well as cooperation of organizers with entities designated for protection. The study is of utilitarian character and it encourages extensive discussion related to the field of provision of safety during sports events.

Index Terms— safety, threats, risk, law, organization, a mass event, the Police

I. INTRODUCTION

Provision of professional safety management during an event, installation of CCTV systems in sports facilities, employment of highly qualified security staff and maintenance of sport facilities, are aspects that cost organisers considerable sums of money. Insufficient funding may translate in insufficient levels of safety during a sports event and inappropriate technical conditions of sport premises.

In Poland, ensuring a satisfactory level of safety during mass events, in particular during football matches, has been a huge challenge for decades. The remedy to this challenge has not been found to the present moment (Socha, 2010). It can be said that the level of safety during mass events in recent times has fluctuated. The situation has been influenced by various factors such as underestimating the scale of the phenomenon and even a total negation of the existence of the problem. At the end of the last century, stadium hooliganism was hidden from the public. Therefore, at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, skinheads, who promote extreme nationalism and racism, joined the stadium audiences. In the 1990s hooligans formed informal groups and those groups often turned into criminal

organizations. Over the years, their position has grown strong and, unfortunately, still remains at a disturbingly high level. Such groups often dominate sport audiences to such extent that clubs and football organisations must acknowledge them. At numerous occasions stadium hooligans have been capable of terrorizing football fans, activists and even footballers (Wisniewski, Socha, Player, 2010).

When analyzing data from recent years, it should be noted that the number of mass sports events is decreasing year by year. For years the greatest threat for such events have been groups of supporters often referred to as pseudo-fans (Socha, 2010). The most aggressive are fans of football but motorcycle speedway supporters are also considered high-risk groups. As for other participants of the events, it should be stated that they do not cause real threats to public safety and order (Wiśniewski, Zalewski, 2006). Due to frequent unrests and breaches of law and order committed during football matches, significant amounts of police forces, including specialised police subunits, are required to enforce public order not only during games but also outside the stadium along paths of pseudo-fans' movements.

II. RELEVANT LEGISLATION IN POLAND

The tragic events that took place in Poland in the 1990s such as a fire during a concert in 1994 and a few hundred rowdy hooligan riots during football matches between 1995 and 1997, speeded up passing of the Act on the safety of mass events. The Act was passed on 22nd August 1997 as a matter of urgency. It was the first legal act that comprehensively regulated the issues related to the safe course of events in which large numbers of participants are expected (Socha, 2011). The purpose of this regulation was to define the basic conditions that should be met by organizers of mass events to ensure the safety of those who participate. First of all, the Act set out safety conditions for mass events and the procedures for issuing permits. The Act also regulated principles of processing information regarding the safety of mass sports events, as well as obligations and responsibilities of participants of these events. Due to the



transformation of the Polish legal system, especially in the area of broadly understood security, the Act had to be amended. On 20th March 2009, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland passed a new Act on the safety of mass events, which in subsequent years was also subject to changes aimed at perfecting its provisions (Wiśniewski, Socha, Gracz, 2010). The Act of 2009 is now an important instrument not only ensuring a safe course of mass events but also protecting public safety and order. The Act contains many solutions to combat stadium and perimeter crime e.g. a new type of stadium ban. Whether the Act should be a subject to further amendments would be discussed in the further part of this paper.

III. BASIC CONCEPTS

In the beginning of these considerations, it is vital to clarify the most basic concepts related to mass sports events because their proper understanding will enable better interpretation of the above mentioned provisions governing the safety of mass events. Let's start with the contemporary meaning of the term 'safety'? In *the Modern Dictionary of the Polish Language* the term is defined as 'a psychological or legal state in which the individual has a sense of confidence, support in another person or in an efficient legal system - the opposite of threat'. It should be noted that 'in today's world, safety understood only as the absence of threats and meant only to guarantee physical survival is not sufficient, it should also ensure satisfaction of the minimum of other social needs. That is the reason why broad understanding of safety seems so important' (Wisniewski, 2006).

'Threat' is an antonym of 'safety' which in the above mentioned dictionary is referred to as a state of non-threat, peace and certainty. 'Threat' is also determined by any situation that may lead to the occurrence of damage (Wiśniewski, Kogut, 2016). 'Usually, damage is understood first and foremost as the loss of life, health or property, but in reality these are not the only damages that may occur in connection with a threat' (Socha, 2011).

The law stipulates that a 'mass event' is an artistic and entertainment mass gathering or a sport occasion, including a football match. It should be observed that the legislator excluded from the definition events taking place in theatres, operas, operettas, philharmonics, cinemas, museums, libraries, cultural centres and art galleries, as well as events organized in educational establishments. Other events also excluded from the definition are: competitions organized exclusively for disabled athletes, sports competition for children and youth, and all public recreational activities (Wiśniewski, Socha, Player, 2010).

A 'mass sporting event', in turn, is defined as a mass gathering aimed at competing in sport or popularizing physical education which is organized at: a stadium or other non-building site, where the number of places available specified by the organizer, in accordance with the provisions of the construction law and regulations regarding fire protection, is not less than 1000, and in the case of a sports hall or other

building enabling organizing the mass event - not less than 300, or an area enabling a mass event, where the number of places available is not less than 1000.

A 'football match' should be understood as a mass sporting event aimed at competing in the football discipline, organized at a stadium or other sports facility, where the number of places available to the public, determined in accordance with the provisions of the construction law and regulations regarding fire protection, is not less than 1000 (Wisniewski, Socha, Player, 2010).

The legislator provided for yet another category of mass events which, according to the organizers, carry a greater risk of threat to security. This type is referred to as 'a high-risk event' and it may be a sport competition or a concert during which, as is evident from the available information and previous experience with respect to the behaviour of their participants, there is fear of acts of violence or aggression. In such cases, the Act is applicable when the number of seats for participants in the stadium or other facility is not less than 300, and in the case of a sports hall or other building – at least 200. In this context, special attention should be paid to the significance of information whose importance is often underestimated not in terms of its acquisition, but rather in the context of information flow i.e. collection, processing and transmission.

Another term that requires explanation is the term 'participants of a mass sporting event'. The 'actors of the spectacle' are footballers, referees as well as spectators - fans and pseudo-fans. When it comes to the security of mass sports events, more attention is being paid to the category of 'pseudo-fans' because they, according to the ubiquitous opinion, pose the greatest threat to the safety of the organized event. The main purpose and desire of pseudo-fans is to manifest their existence by causing riots and confronting other participants of the event including law enforcement officers (Wiśniewski and Socha, 2011). In this context, it is important to specify legal obligations of state and non-state entities with respect to obtaining information about the above mentioned participants.

IV. INFORMATION AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR SAFETY

An important element closely related to the safety of mass sports events is information. The role of information in assurance of safety in case of mass events is constantly growing. Pursuant to the provisions of the Act on safety of mass events, information is understood as specific data on individuals, legal persons, and entities without legal personality, sports facilities and events occurring in connection with the organization of a mass sports event. Although, the significance of information is enormous nowadays, providing an unambiguous and simple definition in accordance with the latest state of knowledge is actually impossible. 'Etymologically the word information comes from the Latin *informatio* meaning imagination, concept. Such a broad understanding of the term poses serious definition problems. In many sciences information is assumed as a primary concept that

escapes definition. Other sciences narrow down the meaning of this concept to their respective needs' (Guła et al., 2015).

Generally, information can be defined as any message recorded by living organisms or automatic devices regarding a particular system which can be used for more efficient and targeted actions (Stawnicka, Wiśniewski, and Socha, 2011). 'These definitions make information the basic cause of all actions and functioning of living organisms, automatic devices, as well as their groups (communities). Approaching the issue more philosophically, it can be said that only through the information do we become aware of our own being and of existence of the surrounding reality. Thanks to information we can acquire knowledge about the reality and direct our activities in such a direction to make the world around us a more friendly environment' (Guła et al., 2015) also thanks to information it becomes possible to ensure people's safety during mass sports events.

V. ORGANISATION OF MASS SPORTS EVENTS AND THE ROLE OF ORGANISERS

Organization of mass sports events is conditioned by the fulfilment of many administrative and legal procedures resulting from applicable legal acts which regulate the obligations imposed on event organizers. Therefore, in the further part of this paper, the authors provide a list of entities who, in accordance with the Act on the safety of mass events, are responsible for ensuring safety. In the classification of the entities the authors assumed a criterion related to the nature of tasks they perform which affect the scope of liability. Therefore, the organizers and public administration bodies were separated from uniformed formations as they constitute a separate task group.

The organizer of a mass event, who is a natural or legal person or an organizational unit without legal personality, plays a significant role in the process of ensuring safety of the event. Any entity regardless of their legal status or organizational form may become an organiser of a mass event. These may be entities representing public authorities, such as government administration bodies, local government units or private entities e.g. natural persons, commercial law companies, associations, cooperatives, foundations or organizational units without legal personality (civil partnerships). Formally, the organizer of an event is any entity that has applied for a permit to organise a mass sporting event, who has obtained such a permit and who, as a consequence, is obliged to meet a series of requirements stipulated by law. Some of these requirements refer to the organizer's obligations to cooperate with law enforcement services and security agencies and in the opinion of the authors this issue needs to be clarified.

It should be highlighted that organizers of mass events operate either on the basis of the Act on physical culture or on the basis of the Act on organizing and conducting cultural activities. The organizers are obliged to apply the provisions of the Act on the safety of mass events which stipulate that safety of a mass event can be defined as all coordinated activities

undertaken by the event organizer, a head of the commune, the mayor, the president of the city, the starost, the voivode, the Police, the state fire brigade, and other entities involved in providing safety to participants of the mass event and to third parties (Wisniewski, Socha, Player, 2010). The Act on the safety of mass events also clarifies that the duration of a mass event is the period from the time the facility is made available to the public until the moment it is vacated by all participants of the event.

Another important aspect are rules and regulations of a sport facility and a separate set of regulations for the mass event. The regulations must be prepared by the owner, the holder, the user managing the facility or the organizer of the event and must contain rules for conduct of persons present at the mass event and specify the scope of use of the facility, the equipment and the entire premises. The regulations under discussion do not constitute local enactments. Their content is not subject to publication and it is only made available to the participants of the event, which is understandable especially as far as an unauthorized access to knowledge contained therein is concerned (Wisniewski, Socha, 2011).

The area of the mass event can be open or closed. A closed area is a site within the meaning of construction law or an area under permanent management of subordinate units that come under the authority of the Minister of Justice or units supervised by the Ministry and relevant ministers: the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and the Minister of Physical Education and Sport. The organizer provides security for event participants by: designating evacuation routes and roads, enabling access for rescue and police vehicles; providing sanitary and hygienic back-up facilities, providing rescue and fire-fighting equipment and fire-extinguishing appliances necessary to secure the event in case of rescue and fire-fighting operations. Furthermore, the organizer is obliged to develop relevant regulations for the facility (terrain) and event regulations which define the rules of participation and expected patterns of behaviour. The organiser also develops instructions for conduct in the event of fire or in any other local hazard in the venue occurring in the course of the event. These rules must be made available to the participants of a given event.

During the event the organizer is responsible for: ensuring permanent supervision over the course of the event by designated services or persons, making sure the participants are familiar with the rules of conduct in the event of fire; enforcing the ban on using open fire and smoking in places not intended for this purpose; keeping escape routes unobstructed and ready to be opened immediately; ensuring accessibility of fire roads and access to the facility for rescue units; providing efficiency of sound and lighting devices, enforcing the ban on the use of pyrotechnic articles which are one of the main threats to mass sports events.

The organizer ensures protection of public order by: employment of security services, information services and a security manager whose task is to supervise these services; assuring proper conditions for communication between entities taking part in the security system. The organiser must designate

a special room for security services. At this point, special attention should be paid to the statutory requirements related to the number of security workers involved and the number of required information staff.

The organizer is also entitled to record the mass sports event, and in particular the behaviour of participants. The recording can be made using video recording equipment and sound recording devices. It is worth noting that the visual and aural material collected during recording of the event may provide evidence for criminal proceedings in progress or proceedings in cases of misdemeanours or evidence that may be relevant to such proceedings. Any material which could constitute evidence should be promptly forwarded to the district prosecutor competent for the place of the event or to the territorially relevant chief of Police with a request for initiation of criminal proceedings. The organizer may also report a crime or demand punishment for an offense committed during the event.

Securing a mass sports event also requires provision of medical assistance. According to *The Lexicon of military knowledge*, 'medical coverage is the entirety of activities and actions taken to prevent the occurrence of sanitary losses, providing medical assistance, keeping alive as many injured and wounded as possible, it is also a complicity in eliminating the consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction and preventing the occurrence of illnesses'.

An important requirement imposed on the organizer in the field of safety during a mass sports event is the provision of appropriate technical conditions of construction works together with installations and technical facilities serving them, in particular fire and sanitary facilities. This statutory obligation is fulfilled by meeting the requirements specified in provisions of construction law and in sanitary and fire protection regulations.

The last aspect to be considered here is the assurance of safety to the highest officials of the state who participate in an event as members of the audience. VIP protection is not limited to the protective tasks performed within the facility or in a given area, it extends to places of temporary stay of patrons and to periods of their movement between various venues.

VI. PROBLEMS RELATED TO ORGANISATION OF MASS EVENTS

Organization of a sports mass event carries many threats related to large concentration of people in one place. These threats include: terrorist attacks; construction disasters; natural disasters e.g. fire; pyrotechnic incidents; street riots and fights. A separate issue carrying a serious threat is organization of events on public roads. Well-planned evacuation scheme and proper placement of participants during the event can eliminate this threat.

Organization of a mass sports event is a serious logistics undertaking. Each facility, either a football stadium or a sports hall has a limited capacity - an acceptable number of people who can be seated in a facility. This is an important issue as far as the safety of the participants is concerned. The presence of more people than is allowed by the capacity, or a gathering of

too many participants in one place can lead to a tragedy. In addition, the organizer of the event should supervise the sales of tickets to be consistent with the number of seats on the site. In case of football matches, separate sectors should be provided for fans of the opposing teams.

In large sports establishments thousands of people may be gathered, so in the event of fire, construction disaster, terrorist attack or explosion speedy and well-organised evacuation is vital (Socha, 2011). Providing clear evacuation paths is an extremely important issue. Appropriate evacuation instructions and procedures in case of an emergency should be developed for each facility individually. Security services should undergo appropriate training in the event of evacuation. The owner, the manager or the user of the facility are obliged to comply with fire protection rules contained in the *Fire Safety Manual* relevant to the facility. The manual must be updated, at least every two years. An important thing is to draw up an evacuation plan, which should include the date of development, the availability of placed equipment and a detailed instruction for efficient evacuation from different spots of the facility. Emergency evacuation should be ordered each time even at a slightest risk to life or health of persons attending the event. It should be conducted in a way that is smooth, calm and not inducing a panic attack. People should leave the object at risk following fixed and properly marked escape routes, which should be unobstructed, and all exits should be openable. Fires are especially dangerous because fire and smoke are a serious threat to human life and health. Proper functioning of fire ventilation equipment is the basic condition for carrying out an efficient emergency evacuation of people participating in a sports mass event in a closed facility during a fire. Escape routes must remain clear and smoke-free to ensure that people can leave the premises safely during a fire. In the light of the applicable law, it would be advisable to impose obligations on the organizers of mass sports events to conduct a practice evacuation drill.

In recent years, a significant improvement in the quality of design of fire protection system can be observed. This fact combined with new legal regulations as well as guidelines for architects, may in the near future significantly improve security in sports facilities. Although investors and facility managements are still reluctant to invest money in safety issues and the awareness of civil liability for safety-related accidents is low, it is to be hoped that such attitudes will change (Wiśniewski, Kozioł and Falecki, 2017) and important safety decisions will not be postponed until the first major catastrophe (Wiśniewski et al., 2018).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Law provides the framework and directions of all human activities. This includes the obligation to guarantee safety during mass sports events. Regulations pertinent to provision of safety of mass events help to systemize and to define thresholds and upper limits of activities which are the manifestation of the will to guarantee safe participation in an event. Thanks to the

regulations it is known who is responsible for efficient and safe conduct of a mass sports event. The institutions and entities involved in the system of safety provision are as follows: the organizer, the vojt, the mayor, the city president or starost as well as law enforcement agencies, institutions created within public administration structures and, of course, entities organizing such events. Due to the high level of threats related to the safety of participants of mass sports events, the problem still needs to be discussed thoroughly. Poland has already organised huge events on international scale e.g. Euro 2012. Experiences acquired during such events should provide fuel for continuous discussion. Time will tell whether issues put forward in this paper are fully solved or maybe there is still room for improvement.

VIII. REFERENCES

- Guła, P., Koziół, J., Prońko, J. and Wiśniewski, B. (2015). *Zarządzanie informacją w sytuacjach kryzysowych. Wydanie II uzupełnione*. 2nd ed. Bielsko-Biała: WSA.
- Socha R. (2011). Dowodzenie w Policji w perspektywie EURO 2012. Zarys problemu. *Kwartalnika Policynjny CSP*, 2.
- Socha, R. (2010). Ocena zagrożeń oraz zjawisk mogących być źródłem sytuacji kryzysowej. In: Kiselnicki, Letkiewicz, Rajchel and Ura, ed., *Zarządzanie kryzysowe w administracji publicznej*. Warszawa: WSZLiA I WSPol.
- Socha, R. (2010). Policja, w tym wojskowa, w doktrynie prawa administracyjnego. In: Wiśniewski and Płonka, ed., *Żandarmeria Wojskowa w systemie bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego państwa*. Mińsk Mazowiecki: CSŻW.
- Socha, R. (2010). Zwarte oddziały policji w działaniach na rzecz bezpieczeństwa województwa śląskiego. In: Trombski and Kosowski, ed., *Współczesny wymiar bezpieczeństwa w aspekcie zmienności zagrożeń*. Katowice: WSZOP.
- Socha, R. (2011). Bezpieczeństwo masowych imprez sportowych. Organizacja działań policji. *Kwartalnik Policynjny CSP*, 3.
- Socha, R. (2011). Podstawowe zagadnienia działań prewencyjnych policji w zakresie bezpieczeństwa masowych imprez sportowych. Kibic nie może być symbolem chuligaństwa, cz. I. *Informator Obrony Cywilnej i zarządzania kryzysowego*, 1.
- Socha, R. (2011). Podstawowe zagadnienia działań prewencyjnych policji w zakresie bezpieczeństwa masowych imprez sportowych. Kibic nie może być symbolem chuligaństwa, cz. II. *Informator Obrony Cywilnej i zarządzania kryzysowego*, 2.
- Socha, R. (2011). Współczesne postrzeganie zagrożeń. In: Stawnicka, Wiśniewski and Socha, ed., *Zarządzanie kryzysowe. Teoria, praktyka, konteksty, badania*. Szczytno: 2011.
- Stawnicka, J., Wiśniewski, B. and Socha, R., ed. (2011). *Zarządzanie kryzysowe. Teoria, praktyka, konteksty, badania*. Szczytno: WSPol.
- Wiśniewski, B. (2013). *System bezpieczeństwa państwa. Konteksty teoretyczne i praktyczne*. Szczytno: WSPol.
- Wiśniewski, B., Babiński, A., Osierda, A. and Kobes, P., ed. (2017). *Administracja bezpieczeństwa. Wybrane problemy, Tom IV*. Bielsko-Biała: WSA.
- Wiśniewski, B., Kogut, B. (2016). Zagrożenie. In: Jakubczak and Wiśniewski, ed., *Wyzwania, szanse, zagrożenia i ryzyko dla bezpieczeństwa narodowego RP o charakterze wewnętrznym*. Szczytno: WSPol.
- Wiśniewski, B., Kowalski, R., Koziół, J. and Szyłkowska, M. (2018). *Bezpieczeństwo procesów decyzyjnych*. Wrocław: Obserwatorium Społeczne.
- Wiśniewski, B., Koziół, J., Falecki, J. (2017). *Podejmowanie decyzji w sytuacjach kryzysowych*. Szczytno: WSPol.
- Wiśniewski, B., Socha, R. (2011). Administracyjne aspekty bezpieczeństwa masowych imprez sportowych. In: Liedel, Piasecka and Aleksandrowicz, ed., *Bezpieczeństwo w XXI wieku. Asymetryczny świat*. Warszawa: Difin.
- Wiśniewski, B., Socha, R., Gracz, M. (2010). *Zasadnicze problemy prawno-organizacyjne bezpieczeństwa masowych imprez sportowych*. Bielsko-Biała: WSA.
- Wiśniewski, B., Zalewski, S. (2006). *Bezpieczeństwo wewnątrz RP w ujęciu systemowym i zadań administracji publicznej*. Bielsko-Biała: WSA.