

## **Communication Strategy and Sport Promotion in the Department of Korhogo (Ivory Coast)**

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**Abstract:** This quantitative and qualitative analysis considers “communication strategy” as a principal sport promotion platform for Korhogo in Ivory Coast, a West Africa Country. In fact, the Sports Law in Ivory Coast is clear about the role of local Authorities in the Sport promotion for a decentralized development of their circumscriptions. Despite this legal framework, all green light indicators show the low consideration of sport promotion in the municipalities for a local development. Then, the findings of this study indicate the lack of regular sport practice promotion in Korhogo, the most important Department in the North of Ivory Coast. It seems that there are a symbiotic relationship between sport and communication: communication helps to promote sport and sport provides reliable mirror of communication in society. This statement holds true specifically in local regions in Côte d’Ivoire. The case of Korhogo is a brilliant illustration of this interdependence. Furthermore, this study delivers a theoretical intervention in the study of local sport - territorial communication link by demonstrating the importance of “communication strategy” for sport promotion.

**Keywords:** Communication strategy, Territorial communication, Sport, Promotion, Korhogo Department.

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### **1. Introduction**

Sport is defined as a physical activity involving play and effort, the practice of which requires methodical training and respect for the rules. Beyond this definition, it should be added that sport encompasses a set of moral values, education, unification, pleasure and self-fulfilment. While sport is a very old activity (the ancient Olympic Games originated in the Centre of the Greek world), modern sport have its origins in 19<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain in the context of the development of industrial society and the urban world (football, athletics, rugby). Sporting activities were then presented as an important component of education, with reference to the terms effort, self-discipline and competition [1].

Sport is integrative and image building elements for individuals, segments of societies, and entire societies. It acts as unifying forces and strong factors of socialization, improving the social acceptance of athletes and their fans [2]. Social phenomenon, Sport became an important communication tool. Communication has played a major role in the growth of sport and sporting events.

Indeed, the worlds of sport and the media have grown ever closer in recent years, to the point of mutual dependence. In this way, [3] said: “*Sports and the mass media enjoy a very symbiotic relationship in American society*”. Generally speaking, the media have increased the visibility of sport, improved its image and helped to promote it. In Côte d’Ivoire, the promotion of sport through the media is almost systematic in the major urban towns. But for some time now, the legislative framework has emphasized the need to decentralize the policy of promoting sport. This is how Act 2014-856 of 22 January 2014 on sport came to put on the baptismal font the responsibility for local authorities to develop local sport. Several years after it came into force, the overall observation is that this provision aimed at promoting sport at local level is not applied by the authorities in some localities. This is the case of Korhogo Department, where the promotion of sporting activities is relegated to second place.

The aim of this article is to analyse the communication policy of the Department of Korhogo with a view to promoting sport in the main City in the North of Ivory Coast. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis, this paper seeks to understand how local authorities use communication as promotion tool of sport activities in the Department of Korhogo. By situating this work within the new sportive communication, and using territorial communication [4] as a theoretical framework, this study aims to evaluate communication strategy for sport promotion in Korhogo Department.

The development of this study has four big parts. First of all, it’s about the paradigm of *territorial communication* as theoretical framework. In the second hand, the Methodology is fully detailed for a better understanding. The third part shows the findings of the study. Finally, the fourth and ultimate part underscored discussions.

### **2. Theoretical Framework : Public territorial communication**

As far as the theoretical paradigm of “*territorial communication*” is concerned, we can say that it corresponds, beyond adherence to the official lexicon, to a real theoretical position. Indeed, this notion refers,

above all, to a certain evolution in the relationship with local space. This observation has already been made by [5]: “*Municipal communication is becoming local or territorial communication in the sense that it is no longer confined to the transcription of municipal life, and to the fields of action of local politics. As the evolution of the municipal newspaper shows, the decline of politics is coupled with the invasion and visibility of the municipality in all aspects of daily life*”. In other words, in a specific way, territorial communication is that which no longer focuses solely on the local public institution (the town hall, the regional council), but rather on local daily life as a whole.

In fact, it is communication about the 'territory' as a human group in a given space. Thus, taken as an object of study, territorial communication can be defined as all communications produced in and about a territory. It is therefore a broad understanding of this field of communication, which highlights two main aspects: on the one hand, the identity relationship (individual and collective) of the various local actors to a territory [6]; on the other hand, a communicational approach to the territory which bases it on the discourses and the production of meaning by the actors [7]; [8].

Territorial public communication includes all institutional information - of general interest - disseminated at the initiative of local authorities and territorial public establishments. Recognised as a public service in its own right, it fosters the expression of citizenship and participation in democratic debate, and promotes the use of public services. It provides information about public decisions and policies. It has a strategic mission, essential to the functioning of public action.

Since communication is a strategic dimension of public action, it lies at the boundary between the administrative and the political. As it is linked to the institution and its elected representatives, territorial public communication undeniably includes a political dimension. However, it differs from political communication, which is linked to the elective mandate of a person or group of people, to political debate and to elections. It is non-partisan and must respect the principles of equality and neutrality of the public service.

The main characteristic - one could almost say the main character, or even temperament, of territorial public communication actions - is the concern to serve the general interest. This is why, according to [9], local authority public communication pursues the following objectives:

- To publicise the policies implemented: to report on public action and the decisions taken by local authorities and public establishments;
- To inform the public about public services and how they operate, and to ensure equal access to them;
- To promote collective issues through awareness-raising/prevention/education initiatives in the fields of health and hygiene, the environment, civic-mindedness, public transport, etc.;
- To provide information to elected representatives and employees of the local authority/bodies responsible for public services on policies, organisational and managerial processes, and collective and individual procedures;
- To promote the region's assets and identity in order to encourage economic development and tourism;
- Animating the relationship with the area: supporting and publicising the expression of citizens, promoting sporting, cultural, associative, economic and social activities.

[10] Refers instead to six (6) public service missions assigned to territorial public communication:

- A citizen mission;
- A public information mission;
- A societal mission;
- An internal mission;
- A promotional mission;
- A local development mission.

The last mission mentioned relates to the promotion of activities taking place in local authorities. The promotion of sporting activities is therefore a key task of local public communication. This study therefore uses territorial public communication to spearhead the sport promotion in Korhogo and poses the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does local sports policy contribute to the promotion of sport in Korhogo?
- RQ 2: Is the local communication strategy effective in promoting sport in Korhogo?

### **3. Methodology**

The field study was carried out in Korhogo, the fourth largest city in Ivory Coast in terms of population and economy. It is the largest city in the North of the Country, 635 km from Abidjan, and is the capital of the Savanes district and the Poro region. Korhogo has a population of around 286,071.

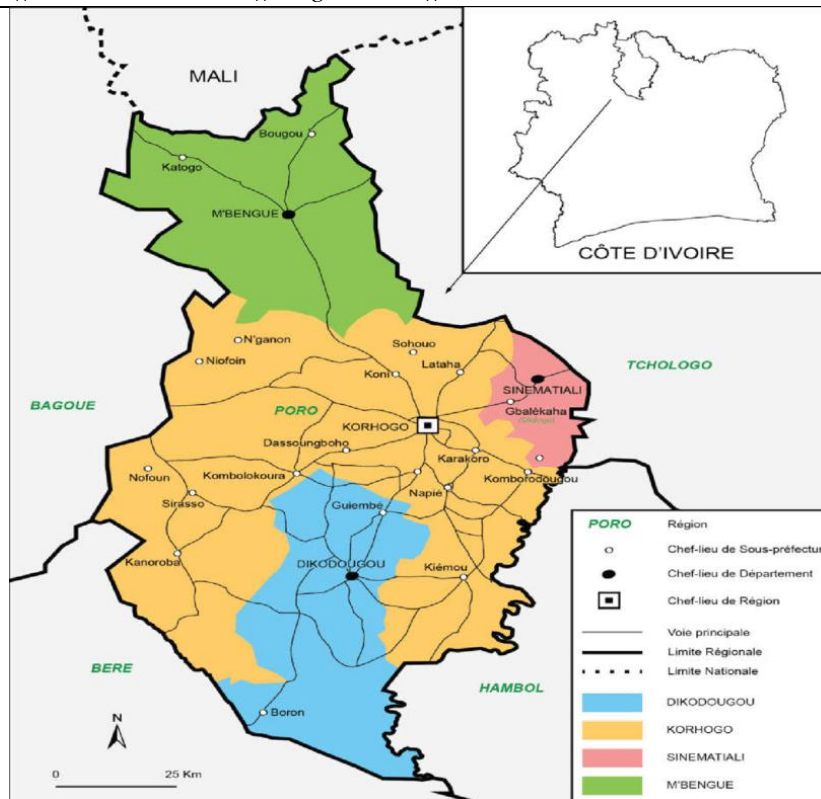


Figure 1 Geographical Map of Korhogo Department in Ivory Coast (Source: BNETD, 2016)

### 3.1. Scope of the study

At the institutional level, the study targeted players from different professional backgrounds. Thus, the presidents of sports associations and the local elected representatives of the Korhogo community are the main targets of this study with a view to assessing the role of sports competitions in promoting sport in the locality. Similarly, the population of the Korhogo commune, and more particularly those who practise a regular sporting activity on a daily basis, is a target that falls within the scope of the study. The overall population of the study is therefore made up of:

- Korhogo's local councillors
- Presidents of sports associations in Korhogo
- Sports practitioners of the Department of Korhogo

### 3.2. Sample

We used the accidental sampling technique because it is impossible to put an exact figure on the sports and non-sports population in Korhogo. In total, the study sample consisted of around 300 respondents (people who regularly practise sport, local elected representatives and sport professionals).

### 3.3. Observation and interviews as data collection techniques

[11] Defines observation as: “An information-gathering technique that involves a researcher watching behaviours or events unfold over a given period of time and recording them.” In other words, the implementation of this technique requires the researcher to be present in the field in order to take note of and memorise everything he perceives about the object of his study. Especially concerning this study, we opted for non-participant observation. An interview is an oral face to face, a direct contact, between two people or a group of people enabling one to pass on to the other information about a specific problem. The interviews conducted as part of this study enabled us to question Managers of Korhogo sports associations and the Department's local councillors in order to gain a better understanding of local sports policy.

In the next section, the findings of the study are showed off on two different ways:

- Results from Qualitative Analysis ;
- Results from Quantitative Analysis.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Interviews results (Qualitative Analysis)**

This section reports on the local authority's sports policy and its involvement in promoting sport. Within local authorities, tasks are divided into committees. For example, the Sports Commission implements a sports policy that takes into account sporting events and works on future sports projects. "Here at the town hall, we have a number of committees, one of which is the sports committee, which works on and draws up programmes of sporting activities, and it's these activities that are generally carried out. The sports commission therefore works on everything to do with sporting events to promote sport in Korhogo".

The aim of the local authorities was perhaps to have football pitches, basketball courts, handball courts and petanque bowls courts, and I think that we are already on the right track with the new stadium that is being built to host the African Football Cup (AFCON) games. We think we'll have different types of pitches around the football pitch, to create a real all-round sports centre. At the moment, there are more than 6 pitches already in use here in Korhogo: one at the Modern High School, one at the Modern Secondary School, one at the Houphouët-Boigny High School, one at the Peleforo Gon University, one in District 14, near the Ouinzin School, and finally one in the Ahoussabougou District".

We really think that local people are spoilt for choice when it comes to the many different kinds of sport on offer in the commune. These include karate, football, Maracaña, handball, basketball and athletics. The athletes and the basketball team take part in national and international competitions. Sometimes, people are faced a dilemma when it comes to choosing which sport to play, given the diversity of sports practised in the community.

"Today, when we talk about sport, football comes first". Ivorian people who don't even live in Korhogo heard about C.O. Korhogo or Gbintana Club, who are fighting to move up to the first professional league. As far as the media are concerned, C.O. Korhogo, which plays in the national championship, is very well known to most people, as its matches are broadcast on the national television channel". Football is the number one sport in Korhogo, and one of the most popular and promoted in the community. It is thanks to football that certain outside populations identify the town of Korhogo.

In terms of its flagship sport (football), the Department of Korhogo is increasingly visible on a national and even international scale. However, we would like to see the same level of enthusiasm and development in athletics and other sports. We need to stay the course - and go even further if possible - and make a positive difference. To develop sport within the Korhogo community, the sports associations need to be at the top of their game, and the communication strategy put in place by the community to promote sport needs to ensure that the objectives set are often achieved.

It's important to remember that the Department has a communications unit. Better still, every time there is a tournament, the local authorities organise a launch ceremony on the first day and a closing ceremony at the final game. During these ceremonies, the local authorities take the opportunity to pass on general information and convey a message of peace and social cohesion. Sport is therefore a channel for territorial communication. There is a communications network within the Department. To put it plainly, it's the Sports Commission that manages the information transmission channels. In addition to these channels of communication, the Mayor also relies on local radio stations and carnivals to raise awareness in the neighbourhoods. The various communication channels used by the Korhogo local authority are generally local radio stations, social networks and billboards advertising on the main roads, and so on. Media coverage of sporting events is provided by local radio stations and, on rare occasions, by the National Channel Television (during major events).

We can conclude from these discursive fragments that sport is used in the Korhogo local Department as a powerful tool for territorial communication, particularly through the dissemination of public information concerning the institutional life of the Department.

### **4.2. Questions sheets Results (Quantitative Analysis)**

The survey, using a questionnaire (quantitative research tool) on a sample of 300 people, produced the results set out in this subsection. Overall, we found that the sports policy put in place by the local authority contributes to some extent to the promotion of sport in Korhogo. This local sports policy enables a predominantly young population to practise sport to a certain extent, with 93.3% of respondents practising a sporting activity, which represents a large proportion of our sample. Barely 6.7% of respondents do not take part in any sporting activity. This young population is between 25 and 45 years of age and represents 96.7% of those surveyed, as opposed to 3.3% between 46 and 60 years of age. Given that this young population practises sport very frequently, in particular 45.6% of respondents practise sport 1 or 2 times a week, which corresponds to the fact that they like to practise sport in the morning and in the afternoon: 90 people practise sport in the morning, i.e. 34.1% of respondents, and 66 people like to practise sport in the afternoon, i.e. 25% of respondents. Nearly

half of this young and sporty population, around 48.9%, practise sport in dedicated sports facilities, since sports facilities are fairly accessible (free access coupled with geographical proximity).

We have more people practising sport to maintain good health because the majority of respondents are young people and they are thinking primarily of their health and also for pleasure. In fact, 61.4% of respondents practise sport to maintain their health, while 15.9% do so purely for pleasure. This statistic is very important because it indicates that the majority of respondents do not practise sport for competitive purposes, but rather to maintain their health.

As far as communication about sport is concerned, advertising and word of mouth are the main ways in which people find out about sport. Thus, 21.6% of respondents receive information about sporting activities through advertising (posters, flyers) and 21.6% through word of mouth. 14.8% of respondents received information at association forums, while 12.6% received it via the local website. A minority of 6.8% of respondents received information via the local authority's website, and a similar proportion (6.8% of respondents) received information on sports offers in public places (agora). A further 8% of respondents use their mobile phone as their preferred channel for collect information on sport events.

Football and fitness are the most popular sports, with 48.9% and 46.7% of respondents respectively. Maracaña, basketball and handball follow. Combat sports are barely represented in the sports practised by respondents. Some 58.1% of respondents felt that the information media used by the local authority to inform the population about the range of sports on offer helped to promote sport in Korhogo. Nonetheless, no less than 41.9% of respondents felt that the technical equipment used by the Korhogo Department to inform people about the range of sports on offer didn't help to promote sport in the community. The main means of information are word of mouth and graphic advertising (posters and flyers).

The survey revealed that there are a total of seven (7) legally constituted and recognised sports associations in Korhogo. 6 out of 7 associations take part regularly in sports competitions organised by the local authority, a rate of 85.7%. These associations take part in competitions to keep their members in shape. Associations with fewer than thirty (30) members in their sports association are the most numerous. Indeed, 4 of the 7 existing sports associations had fewer than 30 members in their sports association, which corresponds to 57.1% of respondents. In addition, sports associations don't find the communication strategy arrayed by the local authority around sport in general to be very effective, with all the 7 associations dissatisfied with the communication strategy. In the same vein, 4 of the 7 sports associations surveyed had a unit or micro-structure responsible for ensuring communication around their sport, a rate of 57.1%; while 3 don't possess a communication unit (42.9%).

#### **4.3. Partial conclusion**

This section presented the detailed results of the survey conducted during this study. It is easy to see the relatively low involvement of territorial communication in the promotion of sport in Korhogo. Indeed, the communication strategy deployed by the local Authorities of the aforementioned Department isn't sufficiently effective and adapted to achieve the ultimate objective of promoting sport among the general public in the Department of Korhogo. The last part of our scientific demonstration focuses on the discussion of the results.

### **5. Discussion**

Throughout this discussion, it's important to clarify that territorial communication is a new paradigm in communications science field and its epistemic building [12] is still in process [13]. Otherwise, we can afford to argue that this approach is properly interesting to evaluate the contribution of communication strategy for sport promotion in Korhogo Department.

Sport is used as a strategic means of public communication, to a lesser extent, by the Korhogo local authority, as elected representatives take advantage of sporting events to pass on information and raise awareness among the population. As [10] points out, "*Public communication differs from other types of industrial or commercial communication not in the techniques and languages it uses, but in its objectives and issues. Those of the general interest, public service and governance*". In fact, its objectives and challenges are and remain non-profit. Rather, they relate to sustainable development, the development of a region or city, public health or regional planning, social action, urban transformation, and of course the promotion of sport and civic values within a local region. As a result, it requires rigour, ethics and a sense of service on the part of those who create and run it (i.e. local elected representatives and government officials).

To go much further in our interpretation, we agree with [10] when he adds that "*Public communication today has a duty to be a citizen, not to be reduced to sending out messages, even if they are in the service of great causes. But like governance itself, it must be attentive to what citizens have to say*." The results of our survey show, however, that the Korhogo Department's communication doesn't take into account the expectations of citizens with a view to getting them to integrate the practice of competitive sports into their

habits. [14] corroborate our results when they show that sport and sports policies deserve a great deal of attention from scientists because sport now plays an important role in local life.

Sport helps to enhance the activity of local authorities and contributes to the construction of their identity. As a result, local sports policy plays a substantial role in promoting sport. [15] confirms this position by demonstrating in his study that public sports policies play a very important role in the unbridled and encouraged spread of local sporting practices. Today, the advent of ICTs provide easy access to the internet (through smart phones). Korhogo's predominantly young population, the Department council's communication unit and sports associations should be giving priority to digital technology of communication (social networks, websites, blogs, etc.) to explore the advantages of digital sports marketing. The young people surveyed spend almost all of their day talking about sport in classrooms and school playgrounds. These exchanges around sport is continuing via the technological platforms offered by the new connected objects.

In another aspect of our analysis, the results concerning the contribution of communication in the promotion of sport are highly significant. This significance makes it possible to demonstrate/stipulate that territorial communication doesn't contribute sufficiently/effectively to the promotion of sport within the community of Korhogo. In fact, its contribution is measurable and relatively solid for the promotion of a single sport: football. Despite the effective participation of the majority of associations in the various competitions organised, only one association out of the seven surveyed has more than one hundred and fifty (150) members, which indicates the population's lack of interest in competitive sport. This result proves that territorial communication hadn't yet achieved the objective of fully integrating sport into the customs and/or habits of the inhabitants of Korhogo.

As evidenced by the findings, football is the most popular sport in Korhogo. It's why Department's identity is built around football. Nevertheless, Maracaña, Basket-ball and Hand-ball are also practiced by populations. It's appear clearly the necessity to improve territorial communication strategy in order to ensure that all sports are the same importance in Korhogo. The findings of this project suggest that a better territorial communication strategy based on a mix-media (numeric media, traditional media and new technology) focused on public messages about sports will increasingly promote sports values and advantages in Korhogo Department.

## 6. Conclusion

Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study attempted to evaluate with objectivity the contribution of communication strategy in the sport promotion in Korhogo Department. The main advantage of this scientific research is the large sample, the availability of local authorities and subsequently a rich survey. Then, it will be very interesting to extend the study scope to all different regions of Ivory Coast, for a more accurate national results and conclusions/recommendations.

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