

The Allianz Arena and the long-term organizational commitment and promotion of accessibility of FC Bayern München and their disabled fans organization (Rollwagerl93 eV.) This is an introduction how the existing situation developed with further a more in-depth information to follow in future interviews.

Most of people will recognize FC Bayern München as one of the most prestigious professional football clubs worldwide in terms of sporting performance (by the outstanding number of trophies at national and international level the 2019-2020 season), financial performance (the fourth largest club in Europe as measured by financial turnover (Deloitte, 2020), as well as national and international fan support over recent years. However, when explaining the success of Bayern München fewer people acknowledged and recognize that the implementation of a wide range of accessibility services and structures for different types of fans with disabilities at their home ground, Allianz Arena serves to exemplify one of the benchmark practices in promoting access by disabled and older fans at European football leagues not only at match, but also the rest of the year.

If one considers the operational side, the case of the planning, building and management of one of the most iconic stadiums in Europe as the Allianz Arena serves to identify three of the main principles considered vital to the promotion of policies that facilitate disabled people and older fans to attend matches and events as the same quality service and experience as able-bodied spectators: (a) much needed collaboration between different stakeholders (architects, engineers, facility managers and professional experts such as the **Behindertenfanbeauftragter** at club level) in the planning, design, building and management of a new stadium to provide a real understanding of the needs and expectations of different types of people with disabilities; b) to incorporate accessibility and disability as part of the organizational and business culture of a club like FC Bayern Munich; and c) the critical role of the **Behindertenfanbeauftragter** (Disability Liaison Officer or Disability Access Officer) to implement and enhance quality service for their large disabled fans base.

In this process, it is critical to give voice to Kim Krämer as the Behindertenfanbeauftragter (Disability Access Officer) at Bayern München, also secretary of Rollwagerl93 eV, their disabled fans organization and board member at Estadio Accesible

1. For Estadio Accesible's readers, it would be interesting to know more about yourself and how you became involved with your club as a football fan and where it came from your interest to promote accessibility at your club and your position at the club

I've been a big FC Bayern fan since 8. Following my accident in 1996, pretty much everything changed for me and I went from being a passive FCB fan to being an active one. Since then, I've only missed two Bayern home games, once when I got married and the second time, I became ill. The Olympic Stadium was a big challenge when I wanted to go to a game on my own. The problems started with the journey, the parking, view of the pitch and the way to my seat. With the construction of the Allianz Arena all the problems of accessibility were solved but my ticket situation became extremely challenging due to a change of staff at Rollwagerl 93 eV. In 2008 I offered the ticket manager responsible at Rollwagerl 93 eV to take over the ticket management which was agreed. That was my beginning. I then practically became a ticket expert and continued to develop ticketing at Rollwagerl 93 eV. Rollwagerl 93 eV has been providing its own online ticketing portal since 2017, which has been fully accessible since 2020.

2. As already mentioned, the club was playing at an iconic stadium, the Munich Olympiastadion, designed by landmark German architects Günther Behnisch and Frei Otto, (both in memoriam), built for the 1972 Olympic Games for over three decades. When the club was asked to move to a new stadium, the current Allianz Arena at the 2006 World Cup in Germany, it would interesting to know how important was the collaboration between different stakeholders in the planning, design and construction of the new stadium and your contribution to the process

The partnership between FC Bayern Munich and Rollwagerl 93 eV has grown for almost three decades. There has also been cooperation at a unique level and will hopefully last for many decades to come. When we, Rollwagerl 93 eV, were invited to a joint meeting with those responsible (FC Bayern Munich, Allianz Arena and architects) in 2002 (see photo below), this was of course another milestone which saw the stadium crowned as a success and it remains the same to this day.



Jürgen Muth - Head of the Allianz Arena and Uli Hofmann as well Peter Czogalla from Rollwagerl 93 eV

This new and now iconic stadium, designed by the Swiss architects, Herzog and DeMeuron, was officially launched in 2006 with a building cost of €340 million and a capacity of 69,901 (now 75,000) seats. As previously referred to, promoting accessibility at large venues is a complex issue and the Allianz Arena was part of a close collaboration from the initial planning phase of the Allianz Arena, incorporating the views and needs of FC Bayern München disabled fans organization (Rollwagerl93 e.V.). As Kim Krämer states ‘the experience that we gathered during the crucial negotiation period between 2002 and 2005 was clear that the only way to get things done was constructive dialog between fans with disabilities (represented by FC Bayern München disabled fans organization (Rollwagerl93 eV) and the main stakeholders, from the club itself (FC Bayern München), the operating company (Allianz Arena GmbH) and the architects (Herzog and DeMeuron)’.

I consider this close collaboration to be a fundamental principle in the current design and operation in order to ensure a good level of accessibility which is the vitally important point to ensure the best level of accessibility is attained. Because of the close cooperation, the cooperation between FC Bayern München and Rollwagerl 93 eV has gone further over the last decade and contributed to the implementation of new services and facilities in an evolving process of enhancing the level of service quality and experience to their large disabled fans base, estimated between 800 and 1.170 disabled fans.

3. As you mentioned the closed collaboration between the club and the disabled fans organization has been one of the critical factors. How do you evaluate the evolution in terms of providing all kind of facilities for fans with disabilities at your clubs over the years since your being working with the club?

In early 1993 there was a small group of wheelchair users who tried to get tickets but, for some reason, they were always sold out. That was the main reason why Rollwagerl 93 was founded. Because the founders knew that if you are a supporter association, you have a better chance being able to buy a reasonable and fair number of tickets. In 1996 Rollwagerl 93 eV organized its first away trip to Stuttgart (see photo 2). In 2005, reporting for the visually impaired nationwide was introduced. This service is currently offered very professionally up to the 3rd league - in some cases also in the 4th league. Since 2013, hearing-impaired football fans from every Bundesliga club right down to district level teams have been organizing an umbrella association of German DEAF fan clubs, which is a registered non-profit association. This umbrella association sees itself as an expert and advises the leagues, the association and the football clubs. In Germany, there are currently 22 DEAF Disability Supporters Association (DSAs) with around 1100 members.

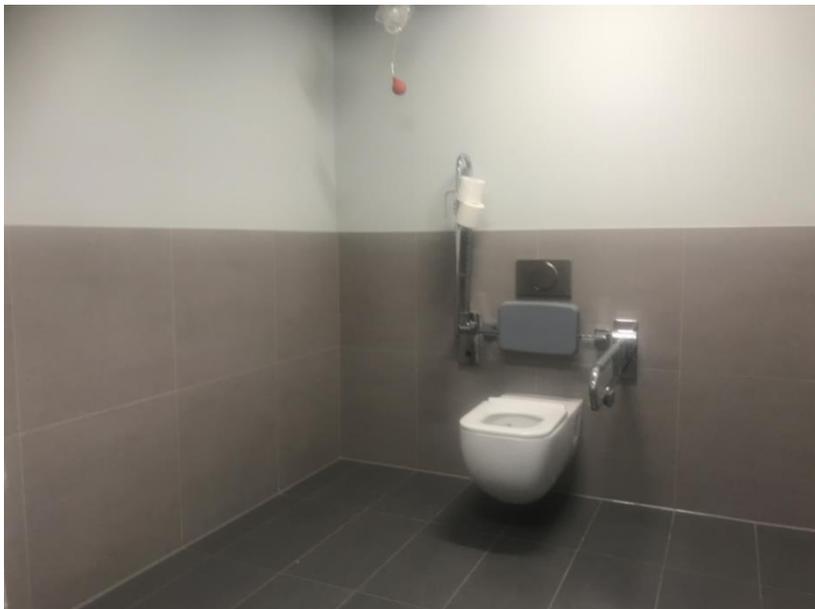


2 First away match-day in 1996

FC Bayern Munich and Rollwagerl 93 eV have gradually implemented other qualitative and quantitative services over the years such increasing the wheelchair seats from 169 to 227 in 2012 nowadays; closed area for all wheelchair blocks (2012), a shelf to place your snacks at the wheelchairs area, two new mobile hoist for toilets in 2014 (e.g. to hoist a person to the toilet).

4. Considering that there are no ‘quick fix’ solutions to the overall subject of disability and each club needs to consider advancements in this part of a strategy that is essentially ‘evolution not revolution’, can you explain the latest services that the club has incorporated to the fans with different types of disabilities?

There is always something to do, regardless of which football club we are talking about. In the Allianz Arena, for example, we have completely refurbished the toilets in the concourses used by fans with disabilities including the parking areas and increase them from two toilets to six toilets in one specific area. In summer 2020, despite Covid-19, we completely renewed all other disabled toilets on level 2 (16 toilets).



3 New accessible toilet at the parking area

More recently, and as part of the club commitment to disabled fans, since October 2018, the club has offered subtitles browser based via smartphones for deaf supporter. And not least relevant is the important role of the club Behindertenfanbeauftragter Kim Krämer, board member at Estadio Accesible, to implement all these services on a daily basis and to cover the needs and expectations of all types of fans with disabilities and older fans. In addition, there is evidence that the continuing dialogue between disabled fans and the club has been essential to propagate the best environment to find solutions that work in practice as well on paper.

5. Considering the large number of fans with disabilities at your club, can you tell more about your daily activities as DLO at you club, what are you doing now and some of the projects in mind for the near future? Also, with the current pandemic, how your club is trying to address the needs of your disabled fans and how this will affect the operation of stadia in the near future?

At the moment COVID-19 is dictating the direction of travel regarding any decisions made and no one knows how long this is likely to last. And nobody really knows how long this condition will last. We must now all see how we can make the stadiums accessible and safe again for everyone, taking into account hygiene and safety guidelines. Thanks to excellent modeling by the DFL regarding spectators and the necessary adjustments due to COVID-19, there has been a good level of cooperation between the regional governments in Germany. The Bundesliga has recently started again with partial admission to fans at football matches. The disability access officers were also involved in this process at the respective locations. Unfortunately, we have not yet received a license for fans in Munich because the incidence of COVID-19 has not been low enough to meet the local government targets for infection levels.

6. For Spanish clubs and fans with disabilities, based on your long-time experience and knowledge, how will you convince Spanish LaLiga clubs to gradually improve the level of services for their fans with disabilities.

I believe now is exactly the right time to start the dialogue between fans with disabilities, clubs, associations and LaLiga. The best results are usually achieved by talking to people and not *'discussing'* them. Spanish football is known for its offensive, beautiful and successful game. I think the current pause due to Covid is a perfect and possibly crucial opportunity to further discuss all of the emotions involved on a match day; the fantastic emotion, the gloom, the joy,

the positive and the negative experiences following victory or defeat. All of these should be accessible to all people in all Spanish stadiums including supporters with disabilities.

When talking about supporters with disabilities and making their facilities available, Spain has a tremendous opportunity of look at the way in which England and Germany have approached the problem and improved the levels of provision. All you have to do is open the debate and see what needs to be done.

Thanks Kim for all your ideas and before finishing we would like to thank you for all efforts for promoting accessibility for all fans with disabilities to football throughout the years.

Next time...

We invite Estadio Accesible' readers to follow up our next conversations with Kim which will largely cover other relevant issues such as '*Website Accessibility and Ticketing*', both of which link together following your recent work to make even more things accessible with your new Rollwagerl93 eV website and the organization of home match-days and away match-days. And also how you provide a good facility and what is a good facility, what are the ingredients!