Control of collective human behaviour: Social dynamics beyond modeling

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The motion of pedestrians is a paradigmatic phenomenon to study collective human behaviour. We propose a model-free approach to analyse the movement of pedestrians in experiments and get a quantitative understanding of crowd dynamics. Using concepts from control and analysis of dynamical systems we set up a scheme which allows us to identify dynamical unstable signatures in pedestrian flows. These signatures are the building blocks for crowd control and soft management of people, and thus result in a fundamental understanding of collective human behaviour. Our approach is entirely data driven and we provide a proof of concept by field and laboratory experiments. In addition, this methodology provides, based on experimental observations, quantitative benchmarks to judge the quality of mathematical models for pedestrian motion.

Keywords: non-invasive control, non-linear dynamics, bifurcation analysis of experiments, bi-stability, crowd control

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Modelling and control of collective human behaviour is one of the central themes of the 21st century, as for instance illustrated by crowd control issues at concerts or sport events or evacuation procedures for buildings. Most vividly these aspects are emphasized by extreme events such as the Hillsborough disaster [1], the Duisburg Love parade disaster [2] or the Kings Cross Station fire [3]. Studying and understanding pedestrian dynamics in a qualitative way may have a huge impact on crowds' safety (see e.g. [4–6]), individuals' comfort [7], infrastructures' design [8], and on implementing social distancing to prevent the spreading of diseases like Covid-19 [9–11].

There exist a large number of simulation programs [12–16] both based on computational fluid dynamics and discrete particle simulations impacting on governmental regulations and fire safety codes in many countries [17, 18]. In all these contexts theoretical modelling is in fact quite advanced and often in good agreement with actual data providing suitable input for a number of different standards for the design of critical infrastructure [19, 20]. However, they miss systematic experimental verification despite the work of a few experts (e.g. [21–27]), since setting up experiments in a socio technological context is a challenge.

Actual experiments in social systems pose a couple of substantial challenges. If we briefly adopt the notation predominantly used in statistics, social sciences, or medical clinical trials, experiments can be broadly grouped in three different categories, namely statistical surveys where accurate average information about the behaviour of individuals can be obtained, observational studies which give detailed information about the dynamics of groups of people, and experimental studies where one impacts on a group of individuals and monitors the dynamical response. Such a classification is not sharp, the borders between the different categories are certainly blurred, and the classification may not fit perfectly in the physics context. Nevertheless, it helps to group the available experimental studies and to clarify our aim. For instance [28, 29] provide nice and very detailed overviews of properties of pedestrian motion obtained at an aggregate level. Experiments where one records the behaviour of groups of pedestrians subjected to static constraints and where one draws fundamental conclusions about the pedestrian flow are for instance the studies [30–32] giving among others detailed insight into the structure of the fundamental diagram, [33–35] which provide a comparison of actual experiments with models and discuss the identification of parameter choices, [26] which nicely illustrates state of the art technology to extract single trajectory information from experimental observations, or [36] which discusses in detail experimental observations to uncover the impact of diversity on the behaviour of crowds. Our approach follows the third paradigm where we aim to investigate the impact of small time dependent external inputs on the dynamics of a crowd. Thus, we broadly follow the concepts of response theory or spectroscopy developed e.g. in the context of condensed matter physics (see also [23]). In more detail, we apply in an experimental setup control techniques to study and track instabilities and bifurcations, a concept which is a powerful tool for the numerical investigation of nonlinear

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model equations. A direct analysis of pedestrian experiments which uncovers changes of the qualitative dynamical behaviour, i.e. an experimental bifurcation analysis is lacking so far.

For our pedestrian experiments a sufficiently large number of individuals is crucial. Initial experimental trials with periodic boundary conditions where pedestrians entered a corridor repeatedly failed due to individuals memorizing their previous actions, adjusting their behaviour, and substantially changing the dynamics of the crowd. As a result humans in our control experiments were allowed to participate in the experiment only once. Mass events like football matches or concerts provide many pedestrians when arriving at the location. However, accompanying habits like pre-drinking alcohol creates difficult non reproducible circumstances for experiments. Several trials failed as people disturbed deliberately the measurement processes. Reasonable conditions without hiring a large crowd can be found for example at public transport hubs during rush hours. We were unable to obtain permission to conduct experiments at bigger stations in Germany (Berlin and Hamburg) or in the UK (London), see e.g. [37] for the challenges one faces when one performs large scale pedestrian experiments in the public transport sector. We finally chose to perform experiments at the Ulmen-campus of the University of Rostock with first-semester students just starting their studies, and field experiments at the pier at Warnemünde port, where passengers are disembarking cruise ships.

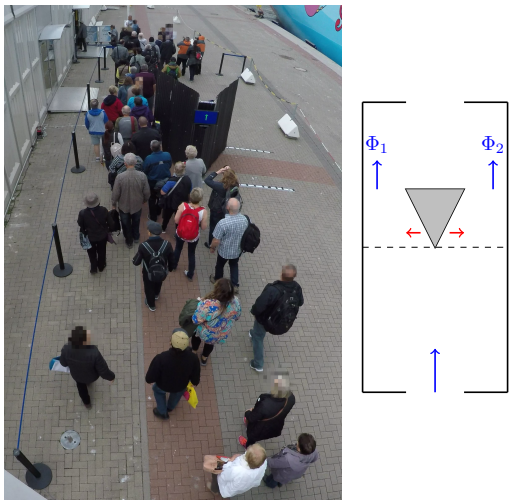

FIG. 1. Left: Route choice experiment of a pedestrian flow passing an obstacle. Right: Schematic setup of the experiment with corridor, obstacle and pedestrian flows indicated. The crucial parameter is the position of the obstacle and the relevant observable is given by the flux difference $\varphi = \Phi_1 - \Phi_2$ of pedestrians passing on the left and on the right of the obstacle.

As for the actual investigation, we analyse the route choice of individuals belonging to a crowd of people with the same target. This, for instance, could be a situation where people need to quickly move from one train platform to another or where people have to choose a route to the exit of a building. To model such situations in a well-defined setup we design experiments where individuals aim to reach an exit at the end of a corridor (see Fig. 1). A few meters in front of the exit a triangular obstacle blocks the pedestrians' direct way to the exit and gives them the option to manoeuvre around the right or left side of it. The pedestrian flux difference between passing left or right of the obstacle is the key quantity to be studied, since this basic quantity gives us information about the route choice of the pedestrians and the crowding in the corridor. Of particular interest will be the effect of the obstacle's position on the flux difference.

The novelty of the current study comes in three parts. Firstly, by varying the position of the obstacle, we succeeded in observing bistable states of the flow of human crowds. As a consequence, our findings indicate that in addition to stable flow patterns observed in experiments there are also unobservable, that means unstable, states which are crucial for understanding the overall global dynamics. Secondly, we successfully applied an adaptive feedback controller to stabilise and reveal such unstable states. Finally, we demonstrate how the features of pedestrian flows can be exploited to implement soft management strategies [38], to achieve crowd control and to minimise crowding. By this, we mean measures which are indicative and provide guidance, such as signing [39].

The impact of our approach is twofold. On the one hand, we are able to propose suitable management and design strategies which minimise crowding and optimise social distancing. On the other hand, our approach can be used as an analytic tool to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of pedestrians. While our setup is quite basic, it turns out that the experiment we propose shares many features of real life pedestrian flows. We think our demonstration of successful soft management control strategies has considerable implications for real life human behaviour.

II. HYSTERESIS IN PEDESTRIAN FLOWS

We performed our study at two events with different focus. In the first set of experiments we aimed at a well defined and reproducible setup using a crowd with lower density, with less interpersonal relationships between pedestrians and with a well defined pedestrian inflow. Hence we were emulating situations which are found in lab experiments in physics or chemistry with a well defined and reproducible environment. This series of experiments was conducted with first year students at the beginning of the autumn term at the University of Rostock. The key dynamical findings in this setup, i.e., bistability and hysteresis of the pedestrian flow was then tested in a real world setup to ensure that our findings are not triggered by artefacts of lab setups. The second type of studies was performed on a pier in Warnemünde port where a crowd of people had just disembarked from

a cruise ship.

In both experiments people had to enter and exit a rectangular corridor designated by queue barriers. There was a single entrance and a single exit where all participants were aiming for, see Fig. 1. A triangular obstacle was placed in the pedestrian's way to this single exit. The pedestrians passing the obstacle on either side were counted where, for the following of this paper, the left and right side is described from the pedestrians' point of view. The obstacle had a shape of an isosceles triangle, with the two sides being 2.2 m long and the third one being 1.8 m. The height of the obstacle was 2.4 m.

In the experiment conducted at Ulmencampus (see Fig. 2 and blurred video at the Supplementary Material [40]) our designated corridor was placed in front of the entrance of a lecture theatre. The dimensions of the corridor were 14 m long and 6 m wide. The width of the entrance and the exit was 1.2 m. There was an obstacle on the pedestrians' way, 6 m after the entrance (see Fig. 1). Students wanted to enter the lecture theatre and were asked to wait shortly at the entrance of the corridor, so that a constant inflow rate at about 0.6 persons/s could be realised. In total, about 600 students participated. In the Warnemünde port experiment the dimensions of the corridor was 16 m long and 6 m wide, while the width of the entrance and the exit was 5 m. The obstacle was placed 8 m after the entrance. Over 1000 pedestrians participated, with an average inflow rate of around 1.5 persons/s. Participants were people of different age and with no knowledge of the infrastructure but with the desire to reach quickly their target destination. During the experiments, we systematically moved the obstacle to different positions and recorded the corresponding value of the flux difference φ_t. The process of moving the obstacle slowly was barely noticeable by the pedestrians, that means, in both cases, we perform a quasi-stationary parameter change, i.e., after each small increment we allow the system to relax to a stationary state before we measure the current.

The variable of interest is a time-dependent flux difference φ_t, that means the choice people make passing left or right of the obstacle. To measure this, we define φ_t to be the mean of the last 8 pedestrians' choice with $+1$ for each one choosing the left side and -1 for the right side. We use the convention to assign positive values to people choosing the left side of the obstacle, $p_t = 1$, and negative values to the other side, $p_t = -1$, where t labels the time. Since the counter p_t is a strongly fluctuating quantity, in particular in cases with low density pedestrian flows, we take an average of the last 8 pedestrians' crossings, $\varphi_t = 1/8 \cdot (p_t + p_{t-1} + \ldots + p_{t-7})$, to measure the route choice difference. The window size of 8 results in a discrete measure φ_t which can take 9 different values with resolution ± 0.25. This quantity provides enough information for our data-based and model-free approach. Most importantly no advanced tools for measuring the speed or the distances between pedestrians were needed.

The results from the experiment at the Ulmencampus are presented in Fig. 2. With $\mu = 0$ denoting the center of the corridor, the obstacle was moved from negative to positive positions by small increments of 0.075 m and then back toward its initial positions. For each obstacle position, we allowed the flow to attain a new stationary state before we moved the obstacle again. During this procedure, we observed a sudden change in people's choice for two different positions of the obstacle. This phenomenon is reflected by the mean flux difference jumping from positive to negative values at around $\mu = 0.15$ m and then from negative to positive at about $\mu = -0.225$ m, see Fig. 2. The bottom part of Fig. 2 shows the pedestrians' walking choice throughout the obstacle sweep. From the obstacle sweep, we observed that for any position $\mu \in [-0.225\ \text{m}, 0.15\ \text{m}]$ there are two different states of the system which seem to be stable. When the obstacle position is changed, the choice

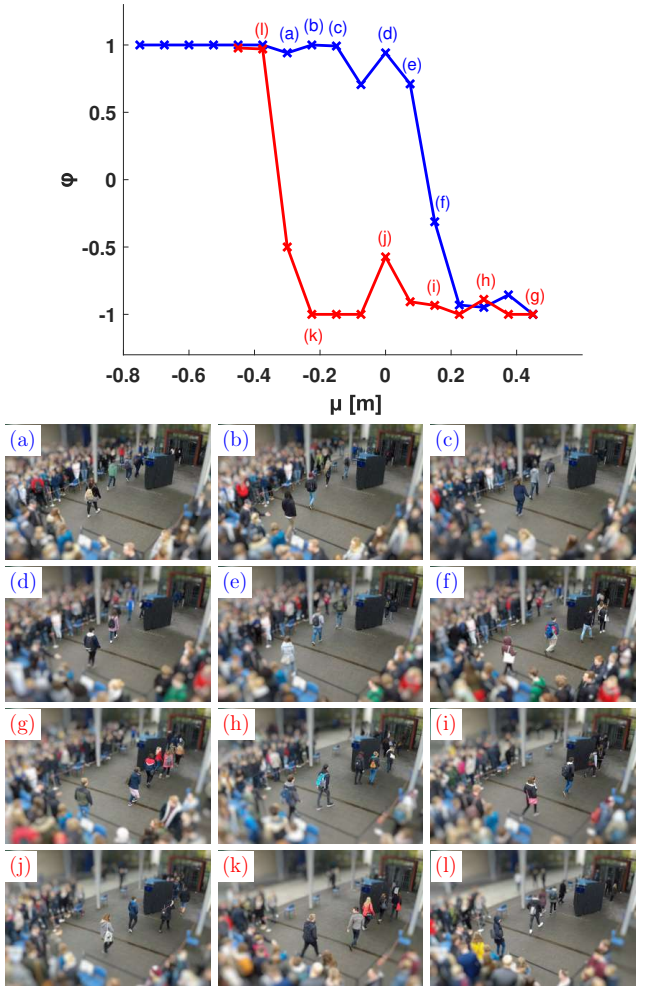

FIG. 2. Route choice experiment at Ulmencampus, University of Rostock. Top: measured mean flux difference as a function of the obstacle position, for up- (blue) and downsweep (red) of the system parameter showing hysteresis. Bottom: snapshots of the actual pedestrian configurations for different values of the obstacle position (see labels).

of the pedestrians depends on the previous state, which leads to a hysteresis phenomenon.

The results of the second series of experiment are shown in Fig. 3. Here passengers wanted to leave the pier at Warnemünde port. We had a quite diverse crowd at our disposal with individuals of a large range of ages and different nationalities, where pedestrians had no knowledge of the infrastructure they were about to cross. Passengers did not just want to leave the pier as quickly as possible, but also to stay close to their friends and families. Unlike the first type of experiments, the second setup contained elements which broke the left-right symmetry. The dependence of the flux difference on the obstacle position is summarised in the top panel of Fig. 3.

From the obstacle sweep, for any position $\mu \in [0.3\ \text{m}, 0.75\ \text{m}]$ there are two different states of the system which seem to be stable. The hysteresis is, however, not symmetric, as the interval of offsets μ for which we observe bistability is not centred around $\mu = 0$. There is a clear bias towards one side. Indeed, that was expected since the Cruise Center was to the left and parallel to our designated corridor. Hence pedestrians favoured passing on the left side of the obstacle. Nevertheless, we still observed the previously recorded hysteresis phenomenon. In particular, our findings are robust under real world conditions, where, e.g., we do not monitor the inflow of pedestrians. Furthermore, hysteresis still persists under other inhomogeneities which occur frequently in social groups. For instance, we observed small groups of passengers, like families or friends, walking together or slowing down to wait for each other. We also observed moments where the density of pedestrians was higher or lower or even moments when there was a small gap in the flow. Neither of these imperfections had impact on the occurrence of the hysteresis phenomenon, which can hence be considered as a fairly robust property of a pedestrian flow. Additionally, the phenomenon observed does not seem to be a cultural characteristic since the participants of the second series of experiment were tourists of different nationalities.

The results from both series of experiments indicate that for a range of positions of the obstacle two different states of the system coexist. The bistability observed in this system does not require a special type of geometric symmetry. It is robust against a bias, as illustrated in the results from the experiment at Warnemünde port. The hysteresis phenomenon appears also in a setup where the discrete nature of the measured flux difference is noticable. We conclude that the dynamical signature, the hysteresis caused by the route choice is a stable phenomenon which does not just occur under laboratory conditions, but reflects real-life situations of pedestrian flows.

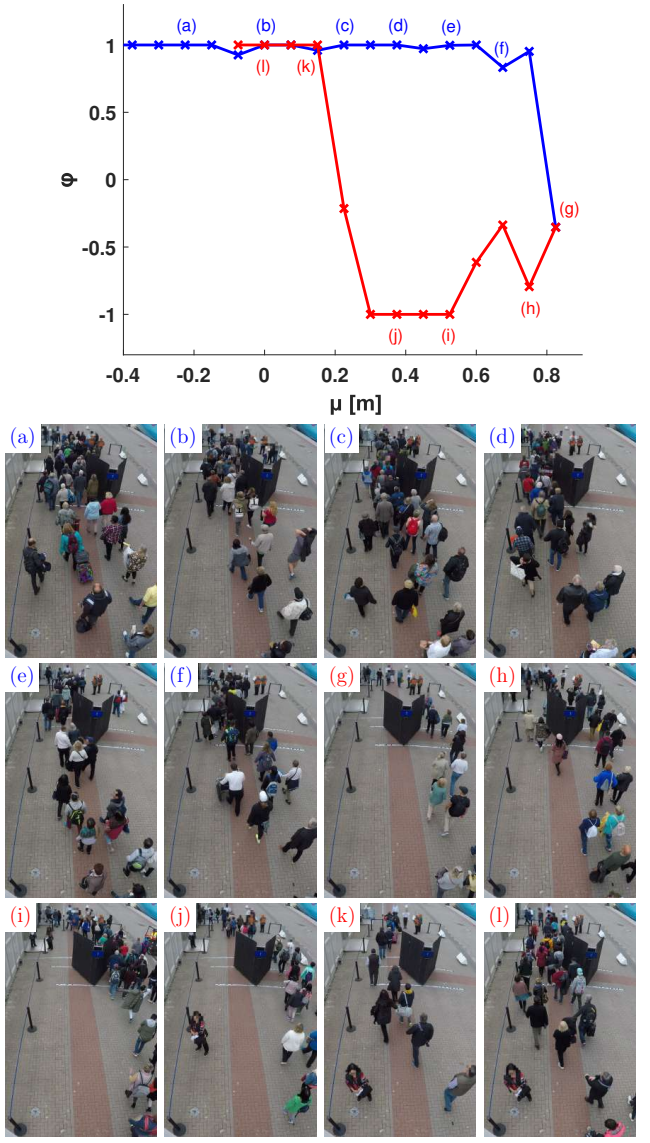

FIG. 3. Route choice experiment at the Warnemünde port. Top: measured mean flux difference as a function of the obstacle position, for up- (blue) and downsweep (red) showing hysteresis. Bottom: snapshots of the actual pedestrian configurations for different values of the obstacle position (see labels).

III. NON-INVASIVE CONTROL: SOFT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Crowd or traffic management [41–43] can be considered as a particularly challenging engineering control problem where one uses small control inputs for guiding people. Such soft strategies are actions, suggestions or guidelines that pedestrians could ignore like markings on the floor, signs, traffic indicators for different routes. Control with minimal invasion has been re-emphasised in science, in particular, in the context of controlling complex dynamical behaviour [44]. Feedback control exploits the dy-

namical features of the underlying dynamics, making a large variety of potential target states accessible. In addition, control can also be used to explore the features of a system (see e.g. [45–50]) where one mimics within an experimental setup continuation techniques used for bifurcation analysis. Hence control in this context has a second facet, namely, employing the technique for the analysis and spectroscopy of complex dynamical behaviour. Within our experimental setup we have the ideal testbed to study non-invasive control in a socio-dynamical context. The measurements presented in the previous section and the general theory of dynamical systems suggest that an additional, unstable and therefore unobservable state of the system exists in the bistability region. As we operate in the neighbourhood of a stationary state, control is possible with minimal control forces. We aim to control an unknown unstable steady state with asymptotically vanishing control force, while at the same time we have limited possibilities to act on our system. We employ here soft management strategies, i.e., by signs or traffic lights, as opposed to hard management strategies which are invasive like barriers or bouncers.

Controlling unknown states is quite well known in engineering and can be achieved by a state observer. As for the actual control algorithm we follow a suggestion of [51] which in fact is a simple realisation of feedback control with a state observer. To illustrate the basic idea recall that the flux difference measuring the pedestrians choice, φ_t, is the quantity of interest. Assume for the purpose of illustration that the time evolution can be approximately captured by an unknown differential equation of the type $\dot{\varphi}_t = G(\varphi_t)$ with unstable stationary state φ_*, which implies $G(\varphi_*) = 0$. Adding a control force results in $\dot{\varphi}_t = \tilde{G}(\varphi_t, a(y_t - \varphi_t)) = G(\varphi_t) + a(y_t - \varphi_t)$ with a being the gain of the control loop. We here consider the simple case that the dynamics of the control device is governed by a linear law $\dot{y}_t = b(y_t - \varphi_t)$ with filter parameter b. The dynamical state y_t of the controller estimates the value of this unknown unstable state and can be considered as the simplest incarnation of a so called state observer. The control signal $y_t - \varphi_t$ is then fed back to our original dynamical system resulting in the closed loop dynamics $\dot{\varphi}_t = \tilde{G}(\varphi_t, a(y_t - \varphi_t))$ with a being the gain of the control loop. The fixed point of this closed loop dynamics is clearly given by $y_* = \varphi_*$ and $G(\varphi_*) = 0$, i.e., y_* estimates the unknown fixed point which coincides with a fixed point φ_* of the original equation of motion. Furthermore the feasibility of the control algorithm can be established by a simple linear stability analysis. If φ_* is an unstable fixed point with positive eigenvalue $G'(\varphi_*) > 0$, then linear stability analysis easily shows that stability of the closed loop dynamics with the state observer is achieved if $b > 0$ and $a > G'(\varphi_*) + b$. In particular, the actual control signal becomes small and asymptotically tends to zero, so that the approach works with tiny control forces. Implementation does not need any knowledge about the stationary state or the underlying equations of motion. This, in practice, means that the external force induced by signs is in principle able to drive the system to unobservable states, and it vanishes when the system operates around an unstable fixed point.

The diagram Fig. 2 is the result of a fairly complex dynamical system with many degrees of freedom, but it resembles a structure which can also be seen in a low-dimensional effective equation of motion. Equation free analysis [52] aims at reducing the dynamics of a complex system, normally given in terms of a high-dimensional system of differential equations, to a low-dimensional effective equation of motion just based on numerical simulations. Here we take this idea a crucial step further [47, 48]. We explore, whether it is possible to use measurements and control techniques in our pedestrian flow to identify signatures of such a low-dimensional effective equation of motion. Using the analogy with bifurcation analysis the result shown in Fig. 2 suggests that there exists an additional unstable branch of states. Such unstable flow patterns correspond to an unstable fixed point in an effective low-dimensional description. Using the control algorithm described above we aim to track unstable, i.e., unobservable states, in dependence of the obstacle position μ. Unlike in numerical simulations, where initial conditions are at the disposal of the programmer, we have only very limited control, if at all, over the initial state of the system. In practice we just let pedestrians enter the corridor. We are however able to change the position of the obstacle, μ, and we can set the initial state of the observer variable, $y_{t=0}$, which estimates the unknown effective fixed point and then dynamically adjusts to the true value of the originally unstable flux difference.

The experiments with control were conducted at the Ulmencampus with the same configuration as described in the previous section. To implement a soft management strategy we displayed an arrow on a monitor mounted at the obstacle but we didn't give any further incentive to the pedestrians to follow this sign. For the control scheme the arrow was inclined and magnified giving the pedestrians an indication on which side to pass the obstacle. The inclination and size of the arrow was adjusted proportionally to the control signal $y_t - \varphi_t$, with positive or negative values corresponding to an arrow inclined towards the right or left, respectively. Successful control is indicated by the system fluctuating around a state or, equivalently, reaching a new steady state, with small control signal $y_t - \varphi_t$.

As for the protocol of the experiment with control, the following steps were performed. First, we made a prediction for an unstable state. The choice of these initial values was made based on the sweep diagram as depicted in Fig. 2. Although the diagram is not perfectly symmetric, it looks that the tipping points are around $(\mu, \varphi) = (-0.3, -1)$ and $(\mu, \varphi) = (0.3, 1)$. As a result, we expected the unknown steady states to lie in the vicinity of the line connecting these two points. Based on the sweep diagram of Fig. 2 we initialized our experiment with $\mu = 0$. For the differential equation governing

the state observer $\dot{y}_t = b(y_t - \varphi_t)$ we chose $y_{t=0} = 0$ and $b = 0.05$. The parameter a that scales the arrow accordingly was chosen to be $a = 6$. In contrast to a numerical experiment where a model for the system under investigation is available, the pedestrians' state could not be set at will. As a result, we had no way to initialize the pedestrian at a given state. Instead, pedestrians started entering the corridor, walking towards the end of it and being influenced by the arrows displayed at the front of the corridor. As explained above, reaching a new steady state is equivalent to the system fluctuating around a state with small control signal $y_t - \varphi_t$. When this happened, we recorded the value around which φ_t fluctuates as a new steady state. At this point, we were ready to move to the next parameter value. Pedestrians kept walking inside the corridor as we moved the obstacle to $\mu = 0.075$m and initialized the differential equation governing the state observer with $y_{t=0} = 0.25$. As soon as the experiment for this position of obstacle was successful, we continued with two more cases $\mu = 0.15$m, $y_{t=0} = 0.5$ and $\mu = 0.225$m, $y_{t=0} = 0.75$.

The results of the experiment with control are summarised in Fig. 4. Students were asked to walk through the corridor only once, as the memory of people going through the corridor several times would potentially alter the results. We conducted the experiment for four different positions of the obstacle and we managed to reveal additional unstable states, see the green circles in Fig. 4. The middle part of Fig. 4 shows time traces of the various relevant quantities. The state of the controller y_t (red) quickly approaches the flux difference of the unstable state and thus estimates the unobservable state successfully. The flux difference φ_t (blue) approaches the same value but shows larger fluctuations. These fluctuations are caused by the intrinsic discrete nature of the measured flow φ_t, which comes in units of 0.25. Convergence is better visible when we smoothen the data by a Cesaro average defined as $c_t = \sum_{k=1}^{t} p_k/t$ (cyan). Finally we show as well the pedestrians' choice $p_t = \pm 1$ (purple circles) which clearly demonstrates that the pedestrian flow under control is channelled along both sides of the obstacle. Above all the control signal $y_t - \varphi_t$ becomes small when successful control is achieved so that the states shown in Fig. 4 are unstable solutions of an underlying dynamical system.

In addition to the data obtained from this experiment, the top panel of Fig. 4 also contains the mean flux difference observed in the experiment without control (cf. Fig. 2). Some of the controlled states are almost outside the observed hysteresis region. The actual bistability region is certainly larger than recorded since noise, imperfections, and finite size effects render some of the observable stable states unstable, a phenomenon which is prevalent at the boundaries of the bistability region.

Unlike the uncontrolled pedestrian flow, the flow subjected to the control shows less crowding. A close inspection of the controlled states reveals that the actual pedestrian flow is split into two parts with pedestrians passing by the obstacle on the left and on the right side (see e.g. purple circles in the middle part of Fig. 4 and the photos in the bottom part). Effectively the pedestrian

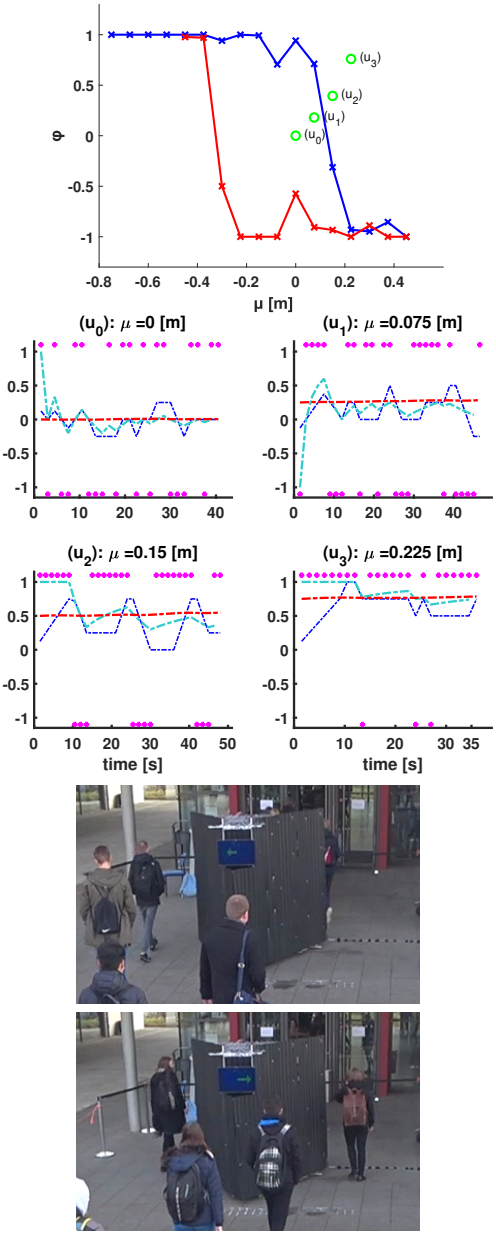

FIG. 4. Control of pedestrian flows at the Ulmencampus. Top: flux difference as a function of the obstacle position. Stabilised unstable states (green circles) for different positions of the obstacle; for comparison flux difference without control (see Fig. 2) for up- (blue) and downsweep (red) of the parameter. Middle: the measured control flux difference φ_t as a function of time t (blue: actual flux difference, cyan: Cesaro average, see text for details), the state of the controller y_t which estimates the target state (red), and the time trace of the pedestrian count passing by the obstacle, i.e., p_t (purple circles). Bottom: snapshots of actual pedestrian configurations during control for $\mu = 0$. Control is implemented by the green arrow displayed on the screen.

flow becomes less crowded and social distancing between pedestrians is enhanced. We achieved this by a minimally invasive control force which eventually becomes small. In addition, the optimal obstacle position for splitting the flow in the current symmetric set-up is certainly the position without offset, $\mu = 0$, as the controlled flow difference becomes minimal in this setup. While this feature is a consequence of the symmetries shared by our setup, the optimal obstacle position is less obvious in asymmetric situations (cf. Fig. 3).

In summary, we have implemented a soft management strategy where the control input becomes small when the target state is reached. We have achieved that success by exploiting the system dynamics. Our showcase proves that soft management strategies can give a better level of service if suitable unstable states in pedestrian flows can be identified, leading finally to a more efficient crowd management.

IV. MICROSCOPIC MODELS VS MODEL-FREE APPROACH

The phenomena observed and described through the conducted experiments provide a good test for the various models of crowd behaviour, see e.g. [5, 53–55] for a review. One popular model which has been extensively used for pedestrian simulations is the *social force model* [56]. According to this model, pedestrians are described as particles and their motion is the result of social forces acting on them. These forces reflect the impact of their psychology and surroundings. The motion for pedestrian i is given by its acceleration

$$\ddot{\mathbf{x}}_i = \mathbf{F}_i + \sum_j \mathbf{f}_{ij} + \mathbf{f}_i^B, \tag{1}$$

where $\mathbf{F}_i$ is the target force that drives an individual towards a specific target with a desired velocity, $\mathbf{f}_{ij}$ are the interaction forces between pedestrians i and j and $\mathbf{f}_i^B$ is the external repulsive force taking the effect of the walls and the obstacles into account. The target force is given by

$$\mathbf{F}_i = \frac{1}{\tau}(v_i \mathbf{e}_i - \dot{\mathbf{x}}), \tag{2}$$

where τ denotes the reaction time, v_i is the desired speed of pedestrian i and $\mathbf{e}_i$ is their normalised target direction. The latter was adjusted to include the tendency to follow people around (see [57]). Specifically, the target direction of each pedestrian is a linear combination of the direction to the exit, $\mathbf{e}_\parallel$, and a weighted mean of the velocities $\langle \dot{\mathbf{x}}_j \rangle_i$ over pedestrians j in a neighbourhood of pedestrian i

$$\mathbf{e}_i = \frac{(1-\lambda)\mathbf{e}_\parallel + \lambda \langle \dot{\mathbf{x}}_j \rangle_i}{\|(1-\lambda)\mathbf{e}_\parallel + \lambda \langle \dot{\mathbf{x}}_j \rangle_i\|}, \tag{3}$$

where λ denotes the *lemming parameter* which measures the psychological impact by pedestrians in the neighbourhood. See [57, 58] for details.

Control by signage, traffic lights, or arrows is an inherently complex process involving perception and psychology. Here we just map this complex process to an adjustment of the target direction. To implement the soft control strategy of our experiment (see Fig. 4), i.e., to feed the control input to the model, we update the target direction $\mathbf{e}_i$ of pedestrians i. This results in a target direction with control

$$\mathbf{e}_i^c = \frac{\mathbf{e}_i + a(y-\varphi)\mathbf{n}_\perp}{\|\mathbf{e}_i + a(y-\varphi)\mathbf{n}_\perp\|}, \tag{4}$$

where $\mathbf{n}_\perp$ denotes a vector perpendicular to the walls of the corridor. To take the local character of our experimental setup into account, which just relies on displaying arrows on the monitor in front of the obstacle, we update the control term $\mathbf{e}_i^c$ only for pedestrians inside a small rectangular area in front of the obstacle visualised as a red box in the bottom part of Fig. 5. In order to verify this model we have performed a series of particle simulations similar to the experiments. The entire geometric configuration, e.g., corridor, obstacle and entrance were the same as in the experiment at Ulmencampus. We also ensured to always have 8 pedestrians inside the corridor.

For the numerical integration of the model, we take a lemming parameter $\lambda = 0.45$, a pedestrian-obstacle length scale of 1.5 m, a pedestrian-pedestrian repulsion parameter of 10 $\mathrm{m}^2/\mathrm{s}^{-2}$ and a pedestrian-pedestrian interaction range of 2 m. The control area was a rectangular area of width 0.7 m and length 1.5 m placed (its closer side) 1.3 m in front of the obstacle. The control area was shifted together with the obstacle so that its center was always the tip of the triangular obstacle. The rest of the parameters of the simulation can be found in [57, 58].

While a microscopic numerical simulation allows for the application of the most subtle control algorithm we deliberately stayed with the protocol used in our experimental setup. We first emulated a parameter up- and downsweep to record the flux difference without control. In the second part of the numerical simulations we applied the control scheme described above. Fig. 5 summarises our findings. In the top panel the blue and red lines correspond to the mean value of the measure φ without control for different position of the obstacle. Clearly, the experimental hysteresis phenomenon is reproduced even at a quantitative level (see Fig. 2). The green symbols show the states subjected to control. Again a remarkable quantitative agreement between the simulation results (circles) and experimental data (crosses) is found. The middle part of the figure shows the time series of the measure φ (blue line) and the controller variable y (red line) for four states of the system. The purple circles indicate the choice of each pedestrian. Even these microscopic features of the simulations coincide remarkably well with the actual experimental time traces of Fig. 4. Similar to the results from the experiment, we can see some fluctuation around a steady state. The bottom part of the figure are density plots of trajectories of pedestrians during the control-free simulations for the parameter

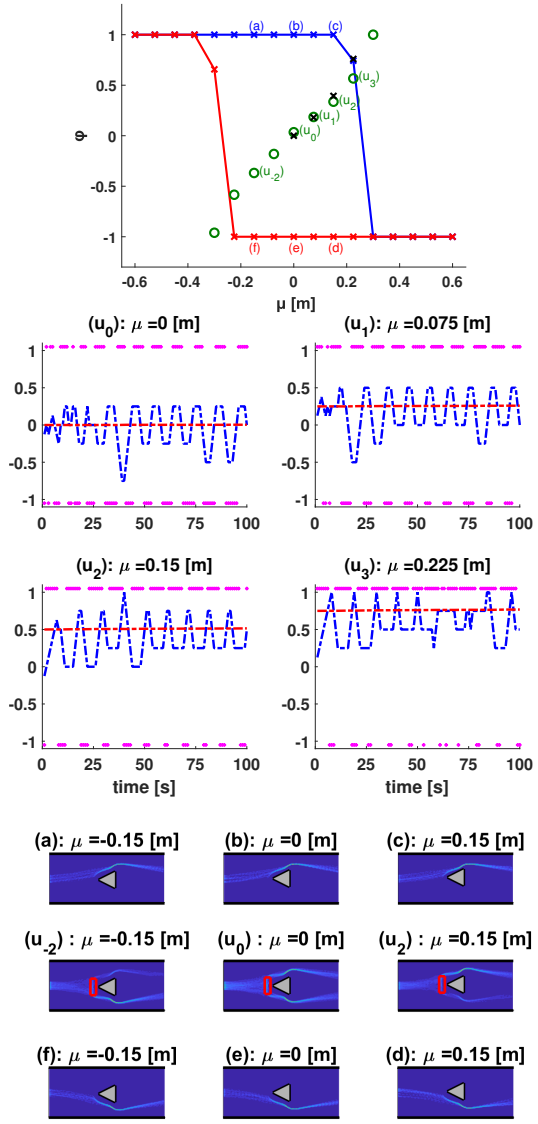

FIG. 5. Numerical simulations of control of pedestrian flows. Top: flux difference φ is plotted over the obstacle position. Stabilised target states (green circles) for different positions of the obstacle reveal the unstable branch. For comparison, experimental results are shown by black crosses (see Fig. 4). Flux difference without control for up- (blue) and downsweep (red) of the parameter (compare with Fig. 2). Middle: the measured control flux difference φ_t as a function of time (blue: actual flux difference), the state of the controller y_t which estimates the target state (red), and the time trace of the pedestrian count passing by the obstacle, p_t (purple circles). Bottom: density plots of pedestrians for different positions of the obstacle (grey triangle) without control - parameter upsweep (a-c) and parameter downsweep (d-f) - and density plots with control (u_{-2}, u_0, u_2). The red rectangle in front of the obstacle indicates the control area, only pedestrians in this area are affected by the control input.

upsweep (a-c) and downsweep (f-d) and density plots during the control procedure (u_{-2}, u_0, u_2). Comparing the density plots subjected to control, panels (u_{-2}, u_0, u_2), to those without control, panels (a-f), we clearly see that the control strategy manages to disentangle the pedestrian flow efficiently. Furthermore, if we switch off the control the system returns to the stable branches, thus giving again evidence that the stabilised patterns are unstable states of the system.

We thus have compelling evidence that the model outlined in this section is able to capture details of the experimental pedestrian flow even at a quantitative level. It is, however, important to stress that such an accurate model is by no means needed to analyse pedestrian flows within our model-free approach. The detection of suitable unstable states which can be used for a soft management strategy can be accomplished solely by a simple control tool. The outcome of the procedure is a bifurcation analysis at a macroscopic level which is sufficient to uncover the relevant dynamical features of our flow experiment. Nevertheless, accurate microscopic models have their virtue as they allow for prediction and for the implementation of sophisticated management strategies. The accuracy of such models can then still be benchmarked by a model-free analysis.

V. DISCUSSION

We have proposed an experimental testbed which is appropriate for implementing and testing soft management strategies for pedestrian flows. In particular, we succeeded in extracting the dynamic features of the walking behaviour of pedestrians without the need of a mathematical model. Above all, bifurcation scenarios were detected which can be exploited to manage crowds in a real world scenario. Since the outlined approach does not rely on any model, the findings are robust and stable as with regards to imperfections and noise. In addition, the protocol employed here allows to validate mathematical models of social behaviour in a quantitative way. In particular, our method confirms the validity of social force and related models as long as crucial ingredients like the lemming effect are properly accounted for. The latter provides an efficient way to take into account the psychology of individuals and its impact on the overall pedestrian flow. Under such conditions we obtain a quite remarkable quantitative agreement between experiment and model, which, a posteriori confirms the advanced stage of modelling of social behaviour.

The density constitutes a crucial quantity for the dynamics of pedestrian flows (cf. e.g. as well [59]). While a value for the density can be enforced in simulations and to some extent in laboratory experiments as well, its value in real world pedestrian flows is often the consequence of the dynamics of the crowd, where individuals may even evaporate from the system, if not prevented by hard constraints which may result in crowd disasters. To use an analogy from equilibrium statistical mechanics the density behaves like in a grand canonical ensemble

where the chemical potential is given.

Within our particular setup the density plays a crucial role for the occurrence of the bifurcation scenario. At high densities the pedestrians jam in front of the obstacle, the dynamics changes considerably, pedestrians pass on each side of the obstacle, and the bistable dynamical behaviour ceases to exist. Such phenomena occur if the interpersonal distance drops below one meter, i.e., below the comfortable distance people prefer, or at an inflow rate to the channel which is higher than two individuals per second. We have tested these numbers extensively in simulations and in laboratory experiments with small groups of individuals. In fact, we have observed these problems when we run laboratory experiments without a controlled inflow since all participants may enter the corridor at the same time. In our laboratory setups we regulated the inflow to 0.6 persons per second.

At very low densities, in particular if the pedestrians do not notice each other any longer, no lemming effect dominates the motion and the hysteresis disappears as well. Such features which also come with interruptions of the flow appear at interpersonal distances above 10 meters. We have confirmed those values by extensive simulations of the setup used in our experiments and with preliminary experimental studies with small groups of people. In our laboratory experiments we have avoided these flow interruptions by a controlled inflow to the corridor.

The hysteresis occurs for a fairly broad range of densities with mean interpersonal distance between one and ten meters. While in simulations and laboratory experiments such a value can be achieved by controlling the inflow, most surprisingly the hysteresis also shows up in the field experiment where the inflow has not been monitored at all. Here the density itself fluctuates and the interpersonal distance people prefer results in moderate densities which support the bistability. All aspects which come with real crowds of people such as fluctuation of the inflow, people deliberately ignoring the signs, families forming small groups within the stream of pedestrians, or asymmetries in the geometry of the corridor have not resulted in a breakdown of the hysteresis phenomenon. In particular, unlike laboratory experiments which are normally done by recruiting or even paying individuals, the people in our field experiment were not aware what to expect, and that seems to be as well a crucial factor for the hysteresis phenomenon to occur. The bistability is therefore a representative scenario for people leaving or entering a domain freely, i.e., it is a characteristic feature for a crowd of pedestrians in an environment where they are able to ensure the comfortable distance between people, resulting in an effective average density which supports the occurrence of hysteresis.

Because of the discrete nature of counting people and given the moderate densities employed in our experiments, the signal processing had to cope with substantial finite size effects, so that our set up cannot be captured by a continuum limit for the pedestrian flow. Such a challenge has impact on the setup of the control loop as the signal used to adjust the sign is initially discrete. Smoothing the signal by a simple low pass filter turned out to be sufficient so that standard time continuous linear control theory could be applied.

Careful considerations are required to set up controlled experiments successfully. Artificial boundary conditions have the potential to destroy the dynamical features of realistic pedestrian flows. In that respect any kind of periodic boundary conditions or repeated use of individuals have to be taken with a pinch of salt as the memory of individuals may induce novel dynamical properties which are otherwise absent. Hence, the two types of experiments we have conducted were important, the laboratory type experiment at the Ulmencampus (see Fig. 2) and the real-world application at the port of Warnemünde (see Fig. 3). In the former case clear signage and instructions to the participants and a constant inflow avoiding disruption of the flow have been crucial. Nevertheless, the qualitative dynamics of the flow is robust as proven by the comparison with the crowd in Warnemünde port where no particular instructions were given. However, in both cases it has turned out to be necessary to prevent a disruption of the flow as otherwise the dynamical structures would have been erased from the system. Our Ulmencampus experiment succeeded as a testbed for emulating the behaviour of real world cohorts using a laboratory set-up with less than 1000 participants. Within our setup we used a low technology approach as with regards to data recording and processing. Of course more sophisticated data recording and data processing tools like movement detection via video tracking could be used as well. However, our studies demonstrate that such advanced tools may not be required in general.

The approach we have used can be viewed as a particular instalment of control-based continuation for complex systems, where one tracks unstable, unobservable states in dependence of system parameters. Such features are crucial to understand the dynamical properties. Therefore our approach can be viewed as a particular variant of a spectroscopic tool. The unobservable dynamical features are the major lever for control with minimal impact, crowd management and soft management strategies. In return, whenever a soft strategy is successfully applied, as for instance in dynamical speed limits [41, 42], it is worth to uncover the underlying dynamical signature using a model-free approach. Furthermore, unstable states provide an important skeleton for any dynamical system and any mathematical model has to reproduce such features. In that respect our model-free and data based approach can be used as well for benchmarking the accuracy of a dynamical model.

Crowd management is one of the key issues with huge impact on people's security and well-being as vividly illustrated by the recent need to implement effective social distancing measures to prevent diseases from spreading [9–11]. Understanding the dynamical aspects of large groups of pedestrians is at the heart of implementing control measures and designing related

policies successfully. Our model-free approach can help to provide data and structures for soft management of people, e.g., understanding the effectiveness of signing systems, and underpinning the results with dynamical features of the actual pedestrian flow. For instance, it is tempting to extend our approach to evacuation scenarios. While the lemming effect has a negative impact on the time needed to evacuate a room, it looks promising to use a combination of the existing knowledge based on mathematical models and a novel data based model-free approach to find minimal invasive strategies for improving critical evacuation times of rooms and general infrastructure. We think our showcase may serve as a paradigm for future research in quantitative social science.

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