

Time Is Running Out

Assessing Temporal Privacy of Privacy Zones in Fitness Tracking Social Networks

Deleu, Wout

KU Leuven, Campus Rabot

Ghent, Belgium

Abstract—In a society where social media is so ubiquitous, the privacy concerns around them are more relevant than ever. During this article, the main focus will be on the privacy policies of fitness trackers. Fitness trackers are platforms which store and display data related to sport activities. These can be shared with other users. This data may include heart rate, GPS-locations, etc. This type of data sharing can however cause unintentionally sharing of sensitive information, like home addresses.

Most fitness tracking networks are aware of this danger and implement a series of countermeasures to prevent this. One of these countermeasures is the use of Endpoint Privacy Zones (EPZs) which is a zone around a sensitive location, which hides the part of the trajectory which ends or begins in this zone. Previous research has shown that it is possible to retrieve the sensitive location using the available data from the activity. Dhondt et al. showed that based on the total distance travelled, the sensitive location can be retrieved using an ‘inference attack’ [1]. This study will investigate the possibilities of such inference attacks using other data than the distance. We want to recreate the results as good as possible using the speed and tempo of the activity, together with GPS-locations. This can result in an attack model with a success rate up to 75%. This is lower than the previous implementation of Dhondt et al., but this shows that the attack is still possible under circumstances where the distance is rendered unusable. This also includes some countermeasure described by Dhondt et al. But countermeasures like enlarging the EPZ or shifting endpoints still have effect.

Keywords—fitness-trackers, privacy, GPS-locations, endpoint privacy zone, inference attack

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become virtually indispensable in today’s modern life and branches out into a lot of facets, including social networking, media sharing networks, etc, but also the branch of fitness trackers. This rise of these new media, however, also brings unintended but significant privacy concerns.

The focus of this thesis is on privacy within these fitness trackers, more specific platforms that use GPS locations, such as Strava¹, Nike Run Club, etc. These are platforms where individuals can share sports activities such as running, cycling, hiking, ... with each other. The general concept is here that when you perform a sports activity, you make it available to your followers and friends. The sports activities will naturally release certain data to those other users, which could possibly have negative effects on the users privacy. For example leaking the home address of the user, which can lead to stalking and

burglary [2, 3]. There are even some reports about military bases being discovered using the Strava heatmap [4].

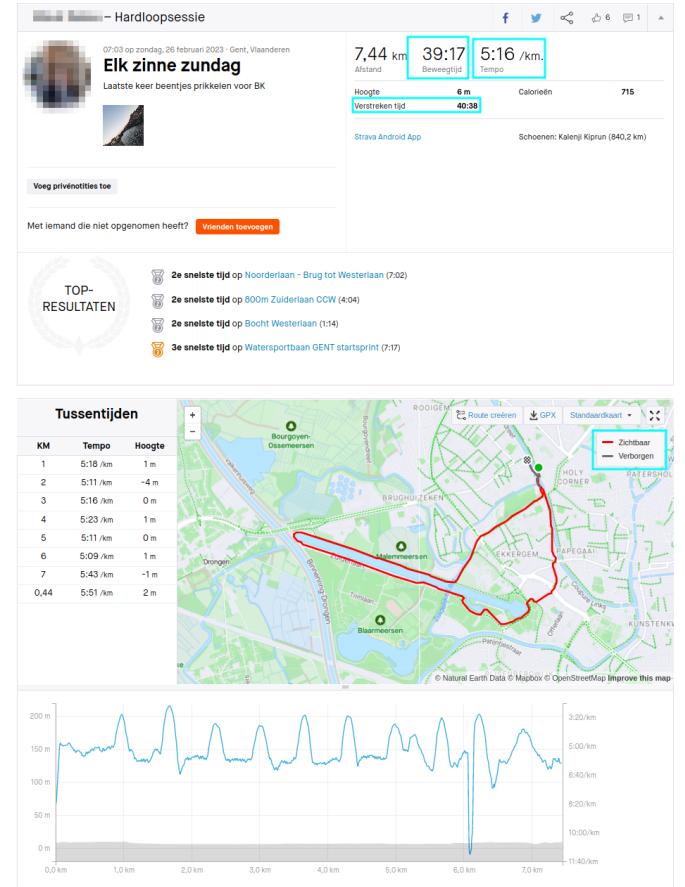


Fig. 1: Example of a Strava activity

Fitness trackers each implement ways to improve user privacy. Perhaps the most easy way to think of is perhaps the ability to hide activities from a selection of people (e.g., anyone who is not a follower). Thus, only the people whom the user explicitly allows to view activities. A more complex alternative is to use EPZs. Hereby will a portion of the displayed route be hidden for external viewers. Part of the route is cut off, so to speak. The real starting and ending points will lie inside the truncated part. New points will be generated, on the edge of the circle, which for the external observer will represent the beginning and end. The beginning and end part

¹<https://www.strava.com/>

of the route will thus become invisible to the other users. Due to the presence of all these attempts at privacy enhancements, it is noticeable that the developers of the platforms are very aware of the potential dangers. However, there is a trade-off to be made when implementing between the usability of the platform, and the privacy of the end user. The more data is released, the greater the chance of potentially sensitive info being passed along. On the other hand, when omitting information, the usability and presence of useful data of the platform is greatly diminished.

In this study, we consider whether there is a possibility to retrieve hidden locations of an activity, despite the use of an EPZ as privacy security mechanism. Some ways to bypass the EPZ using other metadata such as elevation data and distances have been described in the past [1, 5, 6]. This thesis goes into more detail on the use of velocity data. As a base for this attack, we use the inference attack, which was described by Dhondt et al. We investigate whether this attack is still possible when omitting certain data, and thus by the use of alternative data. The focus of this study is mainly on velocity-based data.

To achieve this objective, we must first examine the attack model according to Dhondt et al. Then we can describe different possible alternative attack scenarios, and for each work out the calculations necessary in order for this scenario to be possible. Before we can test and analyze the attack, we must consider the possible errors in the used dataset. We also perform an analysis on the difference between the calculated distances, and the values derived according to the calculations of Dhondt et al. So can we estimate the effectiveness of the attack a priori to some extent. Only then do we execute the attack, evaluate the attacks and form meaningful conclusions.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Fitness Trackers

The data used to test the effectiveness the attack and perform experiments comes from the popular fitness tracker Strava¹. This is a social network where all types of athletes can share their activities. This includes running, walking, cycling, swimming, ... The collected data is filtered according to the perspective of a possible attacker. Not all data turns out to be useful. Only data that could reveal sensitive information regarding residence is retained. This will therefore mean that only activities that contain relevant GPS information will be considered, so only *runs*, *hikes*, *walks*, and *bike rides*.



Fig. 2: Strava logo [7]

B. GPS faults

Some visible data on an activity, which can also be found on Figure 1, are the distance, the duration, the average speed, etc. The average speed forms the core to the attack which we will describe in this article. This will be calculated as

the total distance divided by the moving time of the athlete. Fitness trackers receive raw data from the devices. This data must therefore be processed before it is useful to the users. Especially GPS-data, which is can be exposed to a lot of faults and noise. There are three types of GPS faults, namely *GPS drift*, *GPS signal loss* and *GPS bounce*. GPS-drift is a phenomenon where a user's GPS location deviates from the effective location. This may be caused by densely built environments, and natural factors such as tall trees. GPS bouncing is a phenomenon caused mainly by tall buildings. In this situation, the GPS signal will bounce in between buildings on its way to the device from the satellite. The extra delay that the bounces bring along causes the device to mistakenly think it has traveled some additional distance. The outcome of the trajectory is then unpredictable, leading to a 'cluster' of GPS points. A last phenomenon that can occur is GPS signal loss. This occurs when the user's signal is lost, and a new signal is only received at a later time stamp, causing a jump. A second cause that can lead to signal loss, which especially applies to fitness trackers, is the ability to pause an activity. When the activity is resumed again, there will be a jump in GPS locations, which may lead to miscalculation of distance.

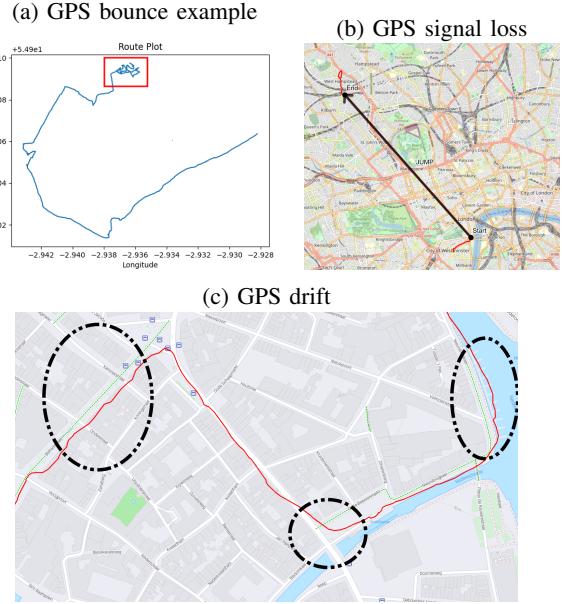


Fig. 3: Possible GPS-faults

Some techniques can be used to improve the overall accuracy of the GPS data, and so improve the effectiveness of the attack. The main technique used in this thesis is *smoothing*, and the hypothesis is that fitnessplatformen use this technique as well. This is a technique to enhance the accuracy and reliability of GPS data. There are different implementations of GPS smoothing, but the one used in this context is moving average filtering. This method calculates an average position by considering a sliding window of the most recent GPS measurements. By averaging multiple measurements over a certain time period, the effects of noise and temporary inaccuracies

can be mitigated, resulting in a smoother and more reliable trajectory. The size of the window can be chosen. The larger the window, the less accurate the trajectory will be, but the more noise will be countered. This technique is especially useful to counter GPS bouncing and GPS drift.

C. Endpoint Privacy Zones

An important privacy-enhancing mechanism is the use of an *Endpoint Privacy Zone* (EPZs). An EPZ is a circular zone with a certain radius around a GPS point, which represents a sensitive location. The radius of this circle can be chosen by the user. In the case of Strava, users have the option to select values ranging from 0 to 1600m, in increments of 200m. When a user starts or finishes their activity within this zone, that specific part of the route within the EPZ will not be visible to others. From another user's perspective, the activity will appear to start and/or end at the edge of this circle (which, of course, is not visible). It's important to note that if a user passes through the EPZ without stopping within it, that segment of the route remains unmodified.



Fig. 4: Example EPZ filtering mechanism [1]

D. Related work

There has been previous research conducted on the effectiveness of EPZs in fitness trackers. Hassan et al. (2018) presented an implementation of EPZs where the sensitive location serves as the center of the zone [6]. This means that in this scenario by identifying this zone, one can determine the sensitive location. However, in contrast to most real world implementations of EPZs, it is assumed that the center does not undergo any translation, and therefore no spatial cloaking is applied. Dhondt et al. (2022) also conducted a study on potential vulnerabilities in the concept of EPZs [1]. The paper places particular emphasis on the translation of the EPZ and its impact on user privacy. It introduces an inference attack that exploits the total distance covered in an activity. In brief, the attack operates as follows: by leveraging the total distance traveled and combining it with the road network in the given environment, an attempt is made to reconstruct all possible routes that the athlete could have taken. This analysis is performed for each activity. By comparing these reconstructed routes, it becomes possible to predict a location that is deemed most likely to be the sensitive location.

III. SETTING OF THE ATTACK

A. Threat model

This thesis focuses the feasibility of bypassing EPZs from the perspective of an attacker, who is a user of the platform without ownership of the activity data. Given that activities are cloaked using EPZs, the attacker lacks visibility into the actual start and/or end locations. Consequently, their objective is to determine the sensitive location despite the presence of cloaking. It is important to note that the attacker in this thesis does not have access to assistance data or state data. However, they do have access to raw GPS data, as well as additional information such as speed and pace.

The research aims to explore the extent to which an attack is still possible when the distance data is rendered unusable. Therefore, an alternative approach to the inference attack is investigated to determine its potential success. The thesis presents a theoretical framework to describe the attacker and examines the circumstances under which the attack remains feasible, as well as effective countermeasures. The overall scenario assumed is: what if fitness trackers were to obfuscate or make the distance data unusable through techniques like rounding or adding uncertainty? In such a case, would the attack still be possible? If so, what would be its effectiveness and how would it impact the previously discussed protective measures?

To enable the attack, certain assumptions need to be made. The first assumption is that the visible start and end points must lie on the edge of the EPZ circle [1]. Secondly, the protected location, which is the sensitive location, must be located on the road graph. It cannot be outside the mapped area, such as in a forest where there are no paths. The user is expected to follow the shortest route within the EPZ. Additionally, this thesis relies on average speeds and paces, leading to the proposal of an additional assumption: the user should not remain stationary within the EPZ. Lastly, it is assumed that activities that involve two concealed locations, such as both start and endpoints being hidden, are not usable for the purposes of this thesis.

B. Inference Attack

The actual attack can be broken down in seven steps.

- 1) The first step is to identify the EPZ, which, although not mandatory, significantly narrows down the search space. In this process, all the activities made available by a user are considered. The visible start and end points of these activities are extracted and then grouped together using the k-means algorithm. This grouping helps to form a circle that represents the EPZ.
- 2) Then we can move on to the identification of Entry Gates (E.G.). Entry gates refer to the zones where users can enter or exit the EPZ. These gates are typically located around roads that lead into the EPZ. Identifying these entry gates is crucial for filtering out anomalous activities. The detection of entry gates is accomplished using the

Density-Based Spatial Clustering of Applications with Noise (DBSCAN) algorithm.

- 3) For each identified EPZ, it is necessary to create a graph representation of the surrounding area. The graph representation consists of a series of nodes, all located on a known street. The edges connecting the nodes follow the street layout, representing possible routes [8]. Based on the nodes in this graph, the Distance Matrix can be constructed. This matrix contains the theoretical distances from all starting nodes (on the boundary of the EPZ) to all nodes present in the graph. By utilizing the Dijkstra algorithm, it becomes possible to determine the shortest theoretical distance from each point to all other points in the graph. These distances are stored and are crucial in the later stages of the attack.
- 4) To make an effective prediction, it is crucial to know the distance traveled within the EPZ. This is referred to as the inner distance. Two possible scenarios apply in this thesis: one where the cumulative distance is known, from which we can infer the distance traveled outside the EPZ, and another where this distance is unknown. In the first scenario, the conversion is performed using the following equation: $\text{inner distance} = \text{total time} \times \text{average speed} - \text{outer distance}$. However, if the distance is unknown, the outer distance needs to be calculated externally using visible GPS locations. The outer distance utilizes the Haversine formula to calculate distances between two points on a spherical surface [9].
- 5) Prior to predicting the location, it is important to filter out activities that cannot yield useful predictions. We aim to exclude all other activities as much as possible. In cases where a user does not follow the shortest route from the EPZ boundary to the sensitive location, we can partially address this by considering an activity only if the remaining distance within the EPZ is smaller than the maximum possible distance to be covered. Similarly, filtering can be applied for distances traveled that are lower than the minimum possible distance. Furthermore, the visible start and end points of activities are checked for compatibility with the road graph. If the difference in distance between the original location and the snapped location is too large, the activity is filtered out. Lastly, deviations in the E.G. are examined. If there is a deviation between the visible start and end points and the E.G. that exceeds three times the standard deviation, the activity is filtered out.
- 6) The next step is to predict the sensitive location. To make a prediction for each activity, the calculated inner distance is used. This inner distance is then matched with the street network. The idea behind this is to traverse all possible routes (forming the shortest path to the nodes on the path) within the EPZ and stop when the traveled distance matches the calculated inner distance.
- 7) To transform the routes determined in the previous step into a final prediction, regression analysis is applied using the Least Absolute Deviations (LAD) method.

The outcome of this regression analysis will be a GPS location, which will form our final prediction.

Note that this attack is very similar to the attack proposed by Dhondt et al. and Verdonck T. [1, 5].

IV. USED DATA

It is crucial to use a representative dataset in order to draw meaningful conclusions and identify potential deviations or irregularities. By examining the characteristics of the data, we can form well-grounded conclusions that take into account certain properties of the data. Since this thesis builds upon the research of Dhondt et al., it is convenient to continue working with their dataset. In total, a dataset of 4000 users was collected. However, this thesis only experiments with a subset of 131 users, with 101 users used for analyses and conclusions, and 30 users reserved for testing the attack.

A. Geographical distribution

A geographical distribution is visible in Figure ?? It clearly shows that most activities are located in Central Europe. Additionally, there is a noticeable concentration in the United States. To a lesser extent, there are also activities in Australia and South America. The dataset exhibits a relatively broad spread of activities worldwide, providing a solid foundation for testing the attack. However, it is important to note that the fraction of the dataset we have access to, with 101 users, is relatively small, which may result in a distorted representation of reality.

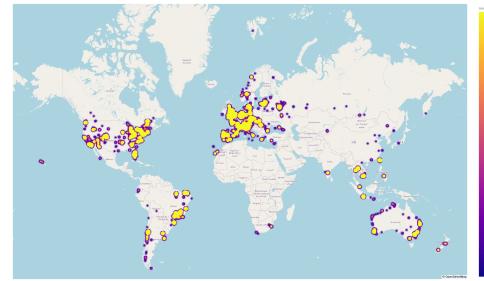


Fig. 5: Geo-heatmap of the users in the dataset

B. Users and activities

Table I displays several global statistics regarding users and their associated activities in the dataset. Figure 6 shows the CDF plot, illustrating the number of activities per user. It is notable that there is a significant number of activities available per user in the dataset. However, it's important to note that the dataset, with an average of 411 activities per user, is not entirely representative of reality. When comparing these figures with data from a study conducted by Strava itself in 2020, there is a mismatch apparent.

	Aantal
Totaal # gebruikers	101
Totaal aantal activiteiten	41 554
Gemiddeld # activiteiten per gebruiker	411
Mediaan van het # activiteiten per gebruiker	296
Maximaal # activities voor een enkele gebruiker	2946
Minimaal # activities voor een enkele gebruiker	31

TABLE I: Overview of users and activities

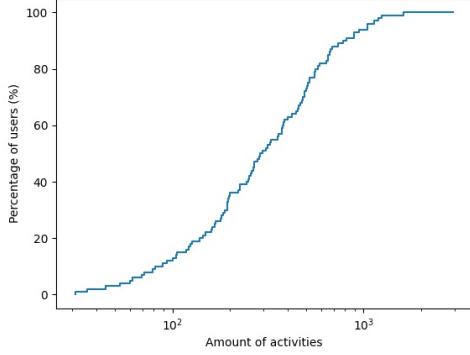


Fig. 6: CDF plot of the amount of activities per user

C. GPS anomalies

Given the importance of GPS data in this study, which has a high chance of containing errors, it is crucial to analyze the dataset for potential deviations. First, we examine the presence of GPS errors in the form of signal losses or pauses. This is done by studying the distance between consecutive GPS points. Figure 7 depicts the distribution of these distances. The average distance between consecutive locations is 6.41 meters, with a standard deviation of 42.53 meters. The average value is relatively low, indicating potentially accurate data. However, the high standard deviation suggests significant fluctuations. On the graph and in the table, it can be observed that most distances fall below 20 meters, which again indicates decent precision. However, there is a small portion of GPS points that exhibit large inter-point distances. Given the magnitude of the number of GPS points and an average number of points per activity of 2574.90, this cannot be overlooked.

To determine the number of GPS deviations in the dataset, we also examine the difference between the calculated distance traveled within the EPZ (obtained by subtracting the visible trajectory from the total distance) and the theoretically traveled distance within the EPZ, which can be read from the dataset through the cumulative distance. An initial visualization is shown in Figure 8. The figure illustrates the fluctuations between the manually calculated distance and the theoretical distance for one user. The peaks indicate significant deviating calculated distances, indicating large GPS errors. Additionally, the less noticeable fluctuations also indicate significant inaccuracies between the calculated and theoretical distances. The differences in calculations for the entire dataset are presented in Figure 9. The graphs reveal that there are indeed many

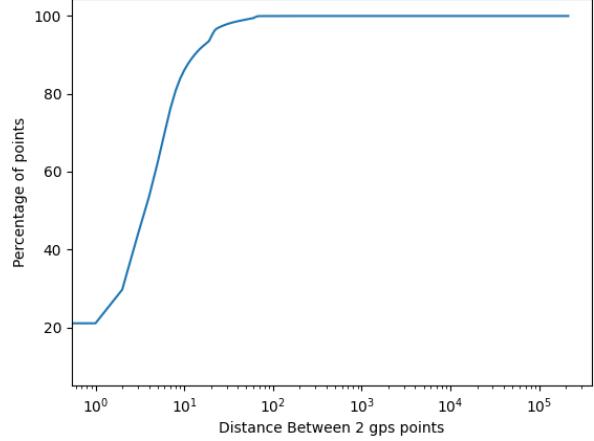


Fig. 7: Distribution of distances between two consecutive GPS points

significant differences present.

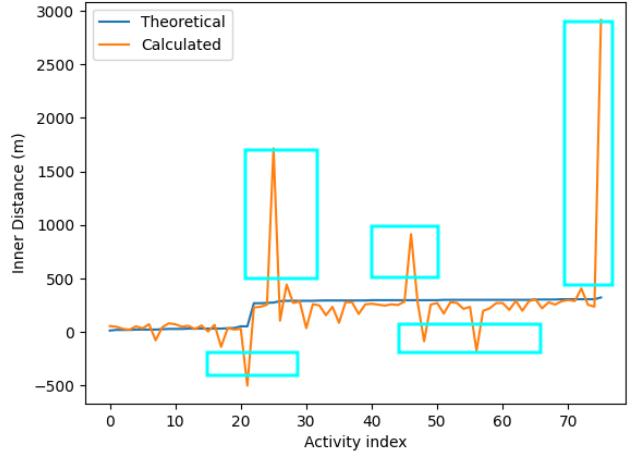


Fig. 8: Difference between the calculated distance and the theoretical distance for a single user

V. EVALUATION MECHANISM

We will test and evaluate the attack on public activities that do not contain an EPZ, but will manually provide them with an EPZ. This way, we can compare the obtained results with a reference, namely the ground truth (GT).

A. ground truth

The ground truth of a user is their actual place of residence or the location they typically depart from or arrive at. This is the location we consider as the center around which the EPZ is applied and the one we ultimately aim to determine. We determine this location by examining all activities of a user and adding the starting or ending points that are within a radius of 50 meters to the same cluster using the DBSCAN

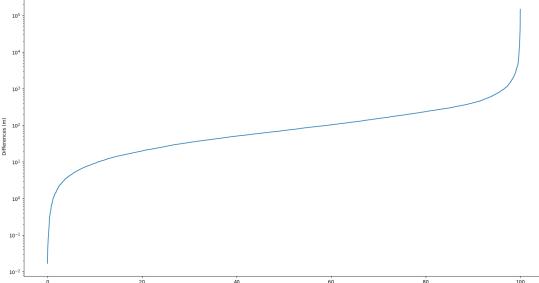


Fig. 9: Distribution of the difference between the calculated distance and the theoretical distance outside the EPZ

algorithm. Please note that it is possible for a user to have multiple ground truths.

A second caveat we need to mention is that the actual starting and ending locations may not always align perfectly with the road network. We subsequently map them to the street network, but during the upload process, the platform in question calculates the total distance traveled to the actual starting point. This can introduce deviations in the predictions. Dhondt et al. conducted a study to determine the average deviation and obtained a threshold of 22.95 meters to classify a successful attack [1].

B. Manually adding EPZs

As mentioned earlier, we are working with public activities that do not contain an EPZ in order to simplify the evaluation process. However, in order to perform the attack, we still need to manually introduce an EPZ. An EPZ is determined by a central point (the sensitive location), which will undergo a random translation, and a chosen radius. From the translated point, a circle is drawn with the corresponding radius. We start from the ground truth location, which then undergoes a random translation. The shift of the point can occur in any direction and is chosen randomly. The distance of the translation can, in principle, be chosen arbitrarily, but it must fall within certain limits, namely between 0 and 70% of the radius of the EPZ. The circle is then constructed with the translated point as the center and the associated radius. All points within this zone will be removed from the activity.

C. Bootstrapping

During the testing procedure of the attack, it is not simply performed once for all activities per user. For each user, a confidence interval is calculated using bootstrapping. The set of manually obfuscated activities is considered. The bootstrap algorithm randomly selects one activity at a time from this set and places it in a new group until this new group of activities is the same size as the original set of activities. It's important to note that the algorithm may choose the same activity multiple times, so the newly created group may contain duplicates and may not include other activities at all. This process is repeated

1000 times, resulting in 1000 different sets. For each set, a prediction is made, yielding a number of predicted locations, some of which may be predicted multiple times.

D. Evaluation metrics

To provide meaningful insights into the effectiveness of the attack, eight metrics are defined to evaluate the attack. These metrics are chosen to align with the metrics used in the studies by Dhondt et al. and Verdonck, enabling clear comparisons with their results [1, 5].

The *Success Rate* is defined as the percentage of performed attacks in which the sensitive location is successfully determined. Taking into account the overshoots that may occur when snapping locations to the road network, a correct location is considered to be within a radius of 22.95 meters from the ground truth. A higher percentage indicates a more successful attack.

The *Correctness* of an attack is calculated as the sum of the Euclidean distances between the ground truth and the predicted location, divided by the number of times that location was predicted. This metric provides an indication of the average deviation in distance of the predicted locations from the ground truth. A lower value indicates a more precise attack.

The *Accuracy* in this context is defined as the width of the confidence interval. It refers to the number of unique predictions, which represents the number of nodes that are predicted exactly once. A higher number of unique nodes indicates higher accuracy, but this also implies less certainty in our predictions.

The *Reduction of the k-anonymity set* quantifies the decrease in the set of all possible end locations before and after the actual predictions of an attack. The possible end locations before the attack are simply all nodes in the graph representation, potentially limited by the EPZ. The ones after the attack are the nodes that are effectively predicted. The reduction is therefore a percentage that indicates the difference between the two sets. A higher reduction percentage implies a more significant reduction in the set of possible end locations, indicating a higher precision of the attack.

The *Uncertainty Region* (m^2) is the sum of the areas of the union of the uncertainty regions around the predicted nodes. In this context, the uncertainty regions are caused by the chaining distance, which is assumed to be three meters. Since nodes exist only at intervals of three meters, each predicted node has a chance of representing a point that lies somewhere within a three-meter zone around that node. The Uncertainty Region metric quantifies the combined uncertainty associated with these predicted nodes by calculating the total area of their uncertainty regions.

The *Certainty metric* quantifies the concentration of the probability distribution. A higher Certainty value indicates that the nodes in the probability distribution are spread farther apart, indicating a greater level of certainty or confidence in the predictions. Essentially, it measures the degree of dispersion or concentration of the predicted locations in the probability distribution.

Spatial Certainty is a metric that considers the density or concentration of neighboring nodes in the vicinity of each predicted node, instead of focusing solely on the probability of each individual node. It takes into account the density or clustering of predicted locations in the neighborhood of each node. A higher Spatial Certainty value indicates a higher density or concentration of predicted nodes in the local vicinity, suggesting a higher level of certainty in the predicted locations within their respective neighborhoods.

The *Degree of Anonymity* is a metric that quantifies the level of anonymity achieved by the attack. It is calculated as the normalized entropy of the expected distribution, where the entropy represents the amount of uncertainty or randomness in the distribution of predicted locations. By normalizing it based on the maximum possible entropy, the Degree of Anonymity provides a measure of how much information is leaked or preserved by the attack.

VI. RESULTS

Each of the four described scenarios will be discussed separately and compared to each other. The difference in results is visible on Figure 10. The individual results are given by the tables in Appendix A. In general, a similar trend is observed across the models when changing the EPZs. As the radius increases, the success rate decreases due to the inclusion of more nodes. More nodes lead to increased potential confusion in the LAD regression. This also results in a greater degree of anonymity and uncertainty region. The number of predictions does not increase proportionally with the number of nodes in the graph as the size expands, leading to an increased reduction. Lastly, it is noticeable that the correctness also improves with a larger radius. This is attributed to a higher probability of violating one of the specified assumptions.

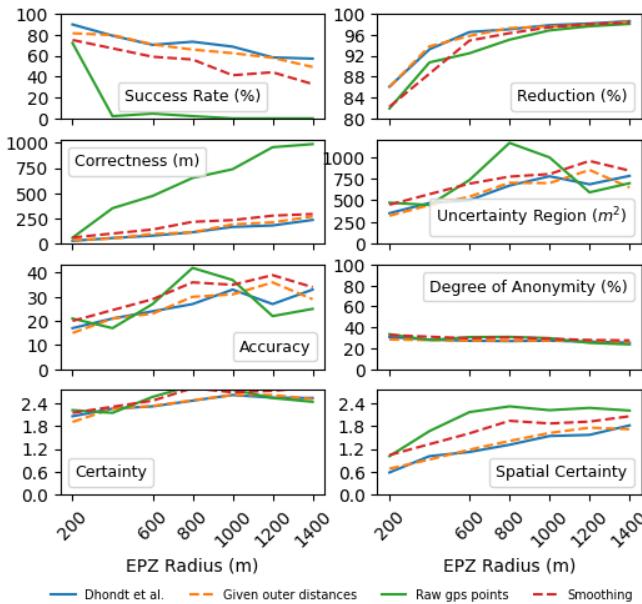


Fig. 10: Comparison of different attack models

A. Model according to Dhondt et al.

The first model we test is the model by Dhondt et al. [1]. We use these results as a reference for the rest of the findings. The model by Dhondt et al. does not have any restrictions regarding the available data, so it can utilize all the data. It is therefore expected that this leads to good scores.

B. Given outer distance

This model is based on the availability of cumulative distances. One advantage of this model is that it does not require GPS data. We observe a similar trend as in the model by Dhondt et al., with slight declines in most scores compared to their results. There is only one additional step necessary compared to the model by Dhondt et al., which involves converting speed and time to total distance. This conversion accounts for the minor decreases and increases in the results. The conversion process may introduce small deviations, likely due to rounding errors and additional calculations performed by Strava in determining the speed.

C. Raw GPS data

The next attack scenario is performed without using cumulative distance and without smoothing. This means that the attacker directly utilizes the raw GPS data for calculating the outer distance. In this case, both the deviation resulting from the speed conversion discussed in the previous model (where the outer distance is given) and the deviations originating from the GPS data itself are incorporated in the results.

As expected, these deviations have a relatively strong impact. Especially for larger radii, they significantly affect the results. From a radius of 1000 meters onwards, the success rate drops to 0%. We also observe a substantial decline in the scores of other metrics for higher EPZ radii. This can be attributed to the significant deviations introduced by the raw GPS data, which have a particularly noticeable effect at larger radii. The longer the distance to be traveled, in this case the inner distance, the greater the error.

D. Smoothing

The final model is similar to the previous one, with the difference that smoothing is now applied to the routes in an attempt to reduce the deviations caused by GPS data. Smoothing helps to flatten out the extremes and should reduce errors to a lower order. This is reflected in the results. The success rate shows a relatively small improvement compared to the model using raw GPS data for smaller EPZs, but for larger EPZs, the metrics exhibit much less deterioration. The other metrics also demonstrate a similar pattern, with the attenuation being much less pronounced than when using raw GPS points. This indicates that the use of smoothing provides a significant added value. However, it's important to note that the optimal smoothing window size was determined empirically and tailored specifically to this dataset. For a different dataset, the optimal window size may vary.

VII. CONCLUSION

This thesis demonstrates that inference attacks are possible based on speeds and GPS data, albeit with a lower success rate and increased uncertainty. If cumulative distance is available, a simple conversion (*inner distance = total time × average speed – outer distance*) allows the attack to be performed with a success rate of up to 81.43%, which is deemed acceptable. If cumulative distance data is not available, an additional conversion can be performed using GPS locations to still achieve a successful attack. By incorporating smoothing algorithms, the attack can also gain precision, resulting in a success rate of up to 75.0% for the respective radii and a smoothing window of 100. While this success rate is acceptable, it is lower than the success rate achieved by Dhondt et al. Hence, certain distance data, specifically cumulative distance and total distance, are not crucial for the successful execution of this attack model.

Dhondt et al. proposed several measures to ensure user privacy, such as rounding distance data or adding noise to make it unusable [1]. However, our attack model can bypass all the *Distance Focused Countermeasures* described by Dhondt et al., except for the Shifting distances countermeasure. The four distance focused countermeasures are:

- *Generalization* involves rounding the distance to a certain precision. Dhondt et al. suggests a precision of 500 meters.
- *Noisy Distances* is a technique where a random value is added or subtracted from the total distance.
- *Shifting Distances* shifts the visible start or end points of an activity by a random distance in a random direction, making the starting point uncertain.
- *Truncation* states that the hidden segment is not taken into account in the total distance. This effectively removes the hidden segment entirely from the activity.

The attacker can theoretically recompute the distance data and ultimately still succeed in the attack. In principle, we could expand these countermeasures by incorporating speed and/or time. For example, in generalization, which involves rounding a visible distance, the speed can undergo a similar manipulation. By considering additional factors beyond distance, we can enhance the effectiveness of privacy countermeasures.

In the case of the other category of countermeasures, namely *EPZ-Focused Countermeasures*, it is expected that these still remain effective countermeasures. These countermeasures include:

- *Increasing EPZ radii*, as the name suggests, involves enlarging the EPZ. We observe that the attack performs significantly less effectively with larger EPZ radii.
- *Complex EPZ shapes* implements an EPZ that is no longer a simple circle but takes on a more intricate form. This can include shapes such as polygons.

VIII. FUTURE WORK

Some interesting future studies could be conducted to further improve the attack.

Implementing road snapping as a first possibility could enhance the accuracy of location data by snapping GPS points to the nearest road or path. This can help eliminate outliers and improve the overall quality of the data used in the attack model.

Using a dynamic window for smoothing is also a valuable addition. By adjusting the window size based on factors such as the density of GPS points or the speed of movement, the smoothing algorithm can better adapt to different scenarios and reduce the impact of outliers or irregularities in the data.

Furthermore, conducting an additional analysis to identify the external circumstances under which the attack is most successful is a proactive approach. This analysis can help identify patterns or vulnerabilities that contribute to the effectiveness of the attack model. By understanding these factors, appropriate measures can be taken to mitigate the risk and enhance user privacy in specific contexts or situations.

REFERENCES

- [1] K. Dhondt, V. Le Pochat, A. Voulimeneas, W. Joosen, and S. Volckaert, “A run a day won’t keep the hacker away: Inference attacks on endpoint privacy zones in fitness tracking social networks,” osf.io/3m5ut, Nov 2022.
- [2] D. Vanmeldert, “Sportapp strava laat fietsdiefen of stalkers nog altijd meekijken — vrt nws: nieuws,” <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2022/10/28/strava-kul/>, October 2022, (Accessed on 02/20/2023).
- [3] A. Bowden, “Cyclist who had five bikes stolen says thieves are looking for quick times on strava to try and find high-end bikes — warns other users to check their privacy settings — road.cc,” <https://road.cc/content/news/248798-cyclist-who-had-five-bikes-stolen-says-thieves-are-looking-quick-times-strava>, September 2018, (Accessed on 02/20/2023).
- [4] A. Hern, “Fitness tracking app strava gives away location of secret us army bases — gps — the guardian,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/28/fitness-tracking-app-gives-away-location-of-secret-us-army-bases>, January 2018, (Accessed on 02/20/2023).
- [5] T. Verdonck, “Inferentie-aanvallen met hoogteprofielen tegen (endpoint) privacy zones in fitness tracking sociale netwerken,” Master’s thesis, KU Leuven. Faculteit Industriële Ingenieurswetenschappen, Leuven, 2022, book Title: Inferentie-aanvallen met hoogteprofielen tegen (endpoint) privacy zones in fitness tracking sociale netwerken.
- [6] A. B. Wajih Ul Hassan, Saad Hussain, “Analysis of privacy protections in fitness tracking social networks -or- you can run, but can you hide?” August 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://osf.io/3m5ut/>
- [7] “Strava logo,” Strava. [Online]. Available: <https://www.strava.com>
- [8] M. Neira and R. Murcio, “Graph representation learning for street networks,” 2022.
- [9] W. Sheppard and C. Soule, *Practical Navigation*. World Technical Institute, 1922. [Online]. Available: <https://books.google.be/books?id=8S0wAAAAYAAJ>

APPENDIX

A. Individual attack results

Radius (m)	Success Rate (%)	Correctness (m)	Accuracy	Reduction (%)	Uncertainty Region (m^2)	Certainty	Spatial Certainty	Degree of Anonymity (%)
200	89.86	28.61	17	86.06	352.08	2.06	0.58	30.69
400	79.1	56.82	21	93.21	469.76	2.26	1.01	28.31
600	70.37	79.94	24	96.52	502.42	2.32	1.12	27.15
800	73.33	113.68	27	97.05	670.53	2.47	1.31	26.86
1000	68.64	166.74	33	97.84	777.57	2.62	1.54	27.25
1200	58.33	180.97	27	98.15	684.71	2.55	1.57	26.25
1400	57.14	235.76	33	98.61	782.30	2.54	1.82	25.31

TABLE II: Attack according to the model by Dhondt et al. [1]

Radius (m)	Success Rate (%)	Correctness (m)	Accuracy	Reduction (%)	Uncertainty Region (m^2)	Certainty	Spatial Certainty	Degree of Anonymity (%)
200	81.43	35.96	15	86.01	322.32	1.91	0.68	28.33
400	79.71	51.38	21	93.78	445.30	2.26	0.92	27.80
600	70.77	96.94	23	95.78	542.48	2.33	1.18	27.34
800	65.83	113.18	30	97.28	703.00	2.48	1.41	27.38
1000	62.39	191.47	31	97.60	698.69	2.62	1.62	27.31
1200	57.98	212.06	36	97.86	850.01	2.62	1.76	27.13
1400	49.15	270.35	29	98.54	648.70	2.51	1.72	24.90

TABLE III: Attack based on given *outer distance*, and speed

Radius (m)	Success Rate (%)	Correctness (m)	Accuracy	Reduction (%)	Uncertainty Region (m^2)	Certainty	Spatial Certainty	Degree of Anonymity (%)
200	72.06	59.92	21	81.89	473.05	2.22	1.01	33.43
400	2.08	351.85	17	90.71	446.35	2.15	1.67	27.80
600	4.55	473.15	27	92.46	734.62	2.57	2.17	30.67
800	2.13	651.38	42	95.06	1161.95	2.87	2.32	30.84
1000	0.00	737.93	37	96.84	994.80	2.76	2.22	29.69
1200	0.00	955.79	22	97.63	592.09	2.54	2.28	25.16
1400	0.00	986.46	25	98.08	697.50	2.44	2.21	23.70

TABLE IV: Attack based on raw GPS locations (no smoothing) and speed

Radius (m)	Smoothing Window (n)	Success Rate (%)	Correctness (m)	Accuracy	Reduction (%)	Uncertainty Region (m^2)	Certainty	Spatial Certainty	Degree of Anonymity (%)
200	100	75.0	61.37	20	82.22	450.15	2.15	1.04	32.57
600	100	58.97	141.04	29	94.89	692.52	2.47	1.61	29.51
800	100	56.34	217.13	36	96.30	773.61	2.80	1.94	30.30
1000	100	41.27	234.27	35	97.43	802.93	2.69	1.87	29.13
1200	100	44.12	278.00	39	98.06	953.93	2.73	1.92	27.86
1400	100	32.81	294.24	34	98.28	841.94	2.82	2.06	27.51

TABLE V: Attack based on smoothed GPS data and velocity, with an empirically determined optimal smoothing window
 $n = 100$