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Building an iOS application with application programming interfaces

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| Reijo Vuohelainen Abstract | | |
| The main goal of this thesis was to study co | ommon technolo | gies using in an iOS |
| development and then to get fimiliar with ap | | |
| This work was logically split into theory and | - | |
| a look on application development issues fi | rom different poir | nts of view. |
| The theory part of this work covered core c | lasses of the LIIk | (it framework such as LIIView |
| UIViewController and UITableViewControlle | | |
| were explained in order to go deeper into m | | |
| higher abstract software-related UIKit frame | ework. In conclus | sion of the theory part, |
| application programming interfaces used in | implementation | part were covered. |
| As for implementation part, the main idea w | use to ap partly t | brouth the life cycle of a mobile |
| app development, while developing the pra | • • • | • |
| prototyping, designing UI, designing an app | | |
| based iOS application called FindSpot. The | U , | , |
| search and share places in the nature for o | utdoor activities. | |
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| As a result, the map-based iOS app prototy process, huge amount of experience in pro | | |
| design was received. | granning, user | interface design and software |
| | | |
| Keywords | | |
| iOS programming, Firebase, APIs, Google | Maps APIs | |

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1 INTRODUCTION

It is clearly seen that the development of smartphones has forced humanity to change the perception and understanding of many common things in daily life. The fact that nowadays each person can have a portative, palm-sized computer, which is thousand times more powerful than all Nasa's computers that were used in the Apollo 11 mission in 1969, has been changing our world in different fields. It is hard to believe that some things in medicine, in finance or in social life used to be done in another way in the past.

According to the The 2017 Mobile App Market: Statistics, Trends, and Analysis (2017) along with smartphones' hardware, which made this possible, software also has made a great step forward. New programming patterns were created, the user interface was significantly improved and became more user friendly. Because of the increasing investments in the mobile market segment, the market is expanding, which allows market leaders such as Apple and Samsung to invest in the development of technology and training of highly qualified specialists more and more funds. All mentioned above facts have been making mobile development more and more complex and requiring advanced knowledge in software engineering, 2D and 3D graphics.

On the other hand, a wide availability of the Internet access for smartphones and rapid development of cloud computing services led to the expansion of the application programming interfaces market and increasing of an interest of developers to it. Application programming interfaces which will be explained in details later in this work have opened boundless opportunities for the mobile app development, since heavy computing tasks affecting performance can be done using cloud services or other external technologies.

Therefore, the purpose of my thesis work is to at first understand and summarize, in my opinion, the most important elements of an iOS platform, and then to study the most suitable for me application programming interfaces related to geocoding and realtime databases. The final goal is to build an iOS application, implementing gained knowledge in practice. This work is going to be a synthesis

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of all my half-year experience in iOS development. It is important to note that due to huge amount of information which potentially could have been used in given work, I focused on things which are directly related to my practical project. That is why I consciously missed some basic information such as the description of Xcode (environment of iOS development) or the description of Swift or Objective-C and the like. Thus, this work can be interpreted as an overview on building the first real iOS application where background knowledge would be transformed into a real product.

2 THEORY PART

This chapter is a theory basis of my thesis work. It covers the most important technologies used in the practice project. A certain core classes of a UIKit framework will be explained in details first, and, then, an application programming interface concept in general and particular ones used in the implementation part.

However, before talking about UIKit classes, it is important to determine what UIKit is and its role in an iOS. According to the Apple Developer Documentation the UIKit framework is a mediator between an iOS and users. It provides the required infrastructure for handling touches and multitouches of users. The UIKit framework is responsible for displaying the result of a user's activity on the screen using the window and view architecture. It allows developers using many default classes which are interfaces between the application and an iOS. These classes are connected between each other through the inheritance concept of the Object-Oriented Programming paradigm.

Thus, each class in the hierarchy, inherits a certain methods and properties from the previous one. The base class of the UIKit class hierarchy is a NSObject class. Since UIKit was originally designed for the Objective-C language, the NSObject class is a must because it defines a certain runtime mechanisms needed for a memory managment and compiling a user interface. For now, although Swift which is a new iOS language introduced by Apple uses quite different runtime mechanisms, the NSObject class still exists because it is compatable with Swift and acts as a mediator between old-fasioned Objective-C libraries and new Swift

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ones. (Cyon 2016.) Simplified version of the UIKit class hierarchy related to this work can be seen on Figure 1.

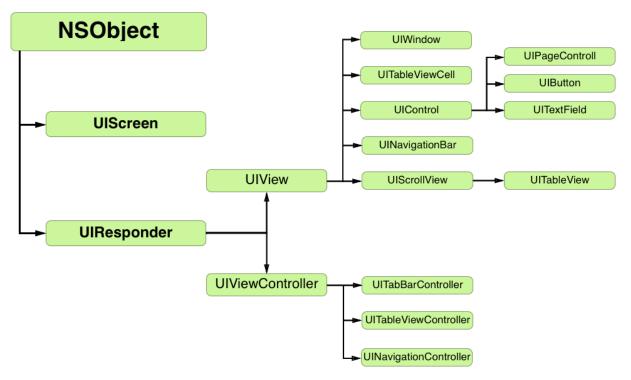


Figure 1. UIKit structure of main classes

2.1 UIView and view hierarchy

The description of the meaning of UIView objects in this chapter bases on the information on View Programming Guide for iOS View (2014). Actually, all objects that users can see on the screen or interact with are view objects known as views. Views are objects of the UIView class or its subclasses. In iOS, all user interface objects such as buttons, images, labels, sliders and others are also considered as views. By itself, view is a rectangular with certain width and height. Each view by default can react to user interaction. That makes UIView a central element of UIKit Framework, because it is responsible for interaction between users and applications.

However, the responsibilities of view are much wider than just the interaction with the user. View objects are also responsible for:

• Event response. Views are subclass of UIResponder and can respond to users' touches.

- Holding gesture recognizers. They transfer user touches to a specific gesture like tap gesture or pinch gesture and others.
- Animation. Allows creating simple animation changing some view properties.
- Drawing. Allows drawing complex views.
- Subview management. Allows views to be a part of the View hierarchy and act correspondingly to its role.
- Layout. Defines how views should be displayed on different screen sizes.

When talking about UIView, another related concept should not be overlooked – view hierarchy. In iOS environment one view object can contain another. In other words, view can act as a container for other view objects in addition to have its own content. Accordingly, a containing view object becomes a parent-view (also known as a super-view) and a view object, which is contained, becomes a child-view (also known as a subview). Thus, parent-child relationships create a hierarchy. Each view hierarchy is managed by its own view controller, which will be covered in detail later. Example of a view hierarchy can bee seen in Figure 2.

According to the Cocoa Application Competencies for iOS (2013), each parentview stores its child-view in an ordered array, and the order is the same as when child-views were added to a parent-view. In case of child-views overlapping, an user will see the view that is the last child view in a parent view array. The same principle works with the whole view hierarchy – users always see the most bottom view in the hierarchy first.

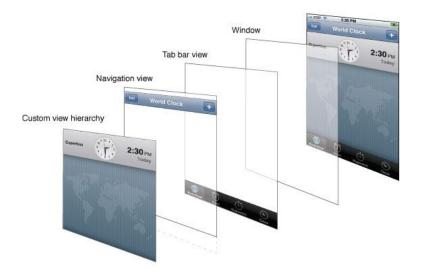


Figure 2. Exampe of a view hierarchy

Technically, going deeper into an iOS implementation of views, it is important to note that iOS has a mediator between the hardware device screen and the software representation of the screen. The UIScreen class provides such functionality. A UIScreen object acts like interface of the hardware screen and also contains information about the device display: its bounds, mode, and brightness.

Another important class, acting as a main window of app is the UIWindow class (which is also subclass of UIView). Actually, the UIWindow object, or as it is called – window, has nothing to display by itself. It works as backdrop or initial view of application. A window displays content provided by its root controller. For device screen, there is only one default window configured by UIKit. (Ostrovskiy 2017.)

Among other things, UIWindow is responsible for receiving events such as user touches from UIKit and forwarding them to its root controller. According to the UIKit tree of classes, UIView and UIViewController are subclass of UIResponder class – the abstract class defining the handling events. It means that by default, all objects of these classes are considered as responder objects or just responders. In iOS all responders are placed to a specific array called Responder chain. To simplify, Responder chain is a responder's hierarchy defining which responder will handle the event if the previous one failed. Responder chain can be customized to provide more flexibility. (Hanukaev 2014.)

Therefore, when the user has interacted with user interface and UIKit received this touch event, the process goes the following way:

- 1. UIKit sends touch event to its window, then window performs hittesting process using its root view controller view hierarchy. Hittesting is used to determine, which view in the View hierarchy is the frontmost one under the user's finger.
- Then, this view becomes the first responder. If it does not handle touch event (methods for handling are not implemented), the next responder in Responder chain will handle touch event. From view hierarchy perspective, the next responder is a super view of the current view so, responders in the chain climb up view hierarchy.
 In case if all views in view hierarchy cannot handle touch events,
 - a root view controller will do it. And if it also fails, touch event will be passed on to the window.

4. If all responders in the Responder chain fail handling, touch event will be discarded.

2.2 View geometry and coordinate system

The description of the meaning of a view coordinate system in this chapter bases on the information on Drawing and Printing Guide for iOS (2012). It is important to understand that all view objects in iOS exist in two dimensional space. Thus, each view except dimensions also has x and y coordinates. The UIKit framework provides a default application coordinate system. It is known as upper-left-origin coordinate system (ULO), in which the origin point is at the upper-left corner of the screen. Therefore, x-axis goes down and y-axis goes right. Although ULO is a common coordinate system used in iOS, there is another one called a lower-leftorigin coordinate system (LLO) used by Core Graphics framework. But it is beyond the scope of given thesis.

According to the Cocoa Drawing Guide (2012), since each view may be a superview and a subview simultaneously, UIKit provides two independent coordinate systems. So, as a subview, it is in the super-view's coordinate system where defined relative to its super-view. And as a super-view, it is in the local coordinate system where it is defined relative to itself.

Depending on which coordinate system is taking into account, the rectangular of view can be frame or bound. The frame is a rectangle, specifying the size and location of the view in its superview's coordinate system. The bound is the rectangular of bounds, specifying the size of the view in its local coordinate system. The coordinates of view in its local coordinate system is always {0, 0}. Relationship between a frame and a bound can be seen in Figure 3.

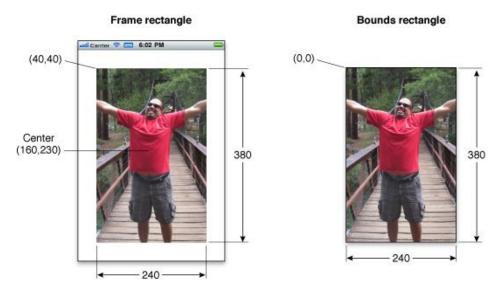


Figure 3. Frame and bound

A coordinate in iOS is a point lying in coordinate system of a view. It has certain value on the x-axis and y-axis using floating-point numbers. However, the role of points in iOS is much more complex than just coordinating. Points are abstract units to represent coordinate values and to measure distances, which makes most views vector-based drawing models where all coordinates are defined using points. Points only have sense at the mathematical point-based measuring system called user coordinate space. From software point of view, all geometry and computations of views in iOS are done in user coordinate space. The purpose of using user coordinate space while designing an user interface is to provide a resolution-independent user interface for target devices. Thus, graphical content will be properly shown both on low-resolution and high-resolution target devises.

When view is ready to appear on the device display, from hardware point of view, view must be transformed from point-based user coordinate space to pixel-based device coordinate space. This process is called rasterization and handled by the system. To perform rasterization, the system needs to know scale factor. Scale factor defines how many pixels are in one point. Scale factor depends on screen resolution of the device. For example, iPhone X has high-resolution Super Retina display, whose screen resolution is 2436 x 1125 pixels, and its scale factor is 3x.

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Whereas, iPhone 6 has high-resolution Retina display whose screen-resolution is 1136 x 640 and its scale factor is 2x. (Kearney 2015.)

The rasterization process performed for iPhone X screen would be the following way:

- 1. While designing, by default the screen size of iPhone X is 812 x 375 points. Therefore all views are user coordinate space where the maximum possible value on x-axis is 818, and on y-axis 375. Rasterization is starting.
- 2. Rasterization takes screen size and multiplies it on scale factor. In case of iPhone X with scale factor of 3x, it would be (812 x 3) x (375 x 3) pixels.
- 3. According to the device coordinate space, which is 2436 x 1125 pixels, all views are rendered accordingly. Rasterization is finishing.

Now view can be shown on the hardware screen.

2.3 View controllers

The description of the meaning of view controller in this chapter bases on the information on View Controller Programming Guide for iOS (2015). The UIViewController class is a core element of the UIKit framework. Objects of this class play a great role in each application which makes view controllers one of the most important elements in an iOS environment. They are responsible for:

- Managing its view hierarchy
- Handling user interaction events
- Memory management
- Exchanging data between data models and views
- Providing content for the main window
- Logically completed representation of some portion of UI of the application
- Adapting content for different device display sizes and orientations.

By themself, view controllers are light-weight objects. They contain heavy-weight views. Each view controller has its own root view. It might have a child-view, and child-view might have its own child-view that ultimately form the view hierarchy for the current view controller. It can bee seen in Figure 4.

Each view controller can be set as a root view controller of the window. The root view controller defines the initial content seen by the user. It allows the window to display root view controller's content and also to forward touch events to be handled. It is possible to set only one root controller at a time. When another root view controller is set, the previous one's content is replaced with the new one.

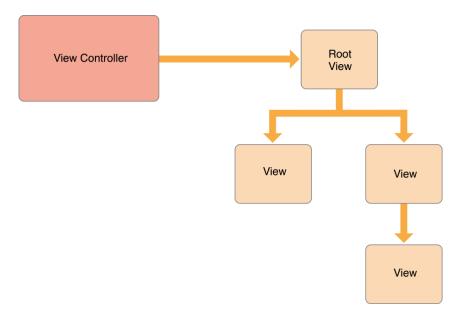


Figure 4. View controller and its view hierarchy

Every time a view controller is going to be shown on the screen, it follows a specific pattern known as lifecycle. This pattern includes the calling of methods, meaning a certain event in the lifecycle of view controller. These methods are the following:

- viewDidLoad method. It is called when the root view of a view controller is already created. This method is always called once in the lifecycle.
- viewWillAppear method. It is called each time when a root view is about to be shown on the device screen.
- viewDidAppear method. It is called each time when a root view is on the screen.
- viewWillDisappear method. It is called each time right before the transition to the next view controller.
- viewDidDisappear method. It is called after an old view controller has been removed from the screen.
- didReceiveMemoryWarning method. It is called when the device almost runs out of memory.

Methods mentioned above are methods of the UIViewController class. They are called automatically by iOS. In practice, when one view controller is replaced by another one, these methods are called in the following order:

- 1. viewDidLoad method. The new root view of view controller is created and waiting to be shown on the screen.
- 2. viewWillDisappear method. The root view of old view controller is about to be removed from the screen.
- 3. viewWillAppear method. The root view of new view controller is about to be shown on the screen.
- 4. viewDidDisappear method. The root view of old view controller was completely removed from the screen.
- 5. viewDidAppear method. The root view of new view controller was successfully shown on the screen.

It is important to note that these methods are optional. The application will work properly without their implementation. But these methods are quite useful and widely used due to their features. (Kumar 2017.)

2.3.1 Types of view controllers

According to the View Controller Programming Guide for iOS (2015) in iOS there are two types of view controllers – content view controllers and container view controllers. Despite the similar name, their functionality is quite different. Unlike content view controllers, container view controllers manage other view controllers, known as child view controllers, mixing their content in certain way to create complex UI. In UIKit these view controllers are presented by UISplitViewController, UITabBarController, UIPageViewController and UINavigationController classes. In most cases, they are often set as a root view controller of the window.

One of the examples of container view controllers mentioned above is UINavigationController which is one of the most widely used. In iOS this default class is a powerful tool for creating complex UI which requires many animated transitions between child view controllers. According to the View Controller Catalog for iOS (2014), UINavigationController object by itself manages its own content presented by a navigation bar, usually placed at the top of the interface and an optional toolbar placed at the bottom of the interface. They are used to switch between child view controllers to display their content accordingly. The navigation controller dynamically updates its navigation bar or tab bar content according to the currently shown child view controller.

Like all container view controllers do, the UINavigationController object also manages its child view controllers, which are placed into a special array called navigation stack. It can be seen on Figure 5. Only one content of child view controller can be displayed at the time on the screen.

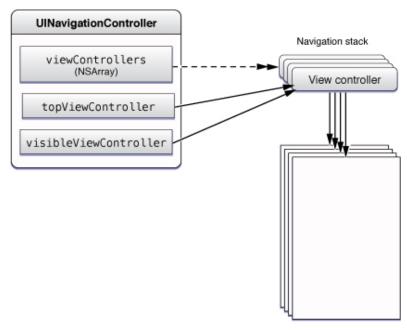


Figure 5. Navigation stack

Initially, a navigation view controller has only one view controller in the navigation stack known as a root view controller. It is an initial content of the navigation view controller which cannot be removed from the navigation stack.

Technically, it can be divided into two process. When a user goes deeper into UI hierarchy, the process is the following:

- 1. A new child view controller is added into the navigation stack. So, the current view controller is always the last one in the stack.
- 2. The added child view controller appears on the screen, when its view hierarchy is initialized and created.

When a user comes back to the previous view controller, the process is the following:

- 1. Current view controller is completely removed from navigation stack. It means that it is also deallocated from the memory and now no longer exists.
- 2. Previous view controller becomes the last in the stack and appears on the screen.

It is important to note that view controllers, currently waiting to be retrieved from the navigation stack, are ready to use objects. They do not need to be reinitialized or reallocated. (Orlov 2017.)

2.4 Table view

The description of the meaning of table view controller in this chapter bases on the information on Table View Programming Guide for iOS (2013). Table presentation of data has been used for thousands of years. In an iOS environment this concept was implemented in a UITableView class, a subclass of UIView. A UITableView object known as table view is a user interface object, presenting data in a vertically scrollable one-column table in such a way that each row contains a portion of data. Different examples of table view can be seen on Figure 6. Some rows may be united into sections. From developer's point of view, a table view can be used for:

- navigation through an application's data hierarchy.
- presenting data from an array, according to the array index.
- simple deleting, inserting and moving data in real time through installed UI features.
- designing complex UI hierarchies.

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Figure 6. Table views

In fact, a table view manages its rows content. Each row space is considered as a separate view. This view is called the cell of table view and managed by the UITableViewCell class. Cells contain visible content such as labels, images, buttons, and other views. Each cell can be selected by user touch, and when it is selected, it becomes highlighted with color.

Being placed into a table view, cells have their own matrix-like index called index path in order to work with a particular cell. Index path is a structure consisting of two integer values. The first one represents the section of the cell, and the second one represents the row of the cell in the section. Like in the arrays, the index starts with 0, not 1. For example, the first cell in first sector would have {0, 0} index path. (Knopper 2017.)

According to Table View Programming Guide for iOS (2013), UIKit defines two types of cell:

- Static cells. They are usually used in small table views, when the final number of rows is known in advance. Each static cell usually has its own layout and design.
- Dynamic cell. It is custom template of a cell, used as prototype to create all further cells in the table view. Dynamic cells have their own unique identifier known as "reuse identifier" to distinguish custom cells from each other.

It is important to note that table view can work only with one type of cells. For iOS version 11.0 and older, it is not possible to mix dynamic and static cells in one table view.

By its nature, a table view is a view, so it cannot exist without corresponding view controller. By itself a table view cannot build and maintain its content. A table view delegates its view controller to build and fill its content. The UIKit framework provides two protocols for these purposes. They are UITableViewDelegate protocol and UITableDataSource protocol. Each view controller must adopt and conform to these two protocols to manage its table view. In other words, it must be set up as a delegate of a table view. Conforming and adopting in this context means implementing all the required methods of UITableViewDelegate and UITableDataSource protocols. In iOS, there is a specific view controller of

UITableViewController class focused on working with a table view. It is set up as its table view by default.

Thus, following Nannestad (2016), the process of building a table view is the following:

- 1. The process starts right after executing of the viewDidLoad method.
- 2. The numberOfSections method is called. It lets a table view know how many sections are going to be.
- 3. The numberOfRowsInSection method is called. It lets a table view know how many rows are going to be in each section.
- 4. The cellForRow method is called. Depending on "reuse identifier", different cells are created inside this method. This method is called as many times as there are rows in the table. It returns a cell with data for each row.
- 5. A table view is ready to be shown.

Above process refers to table views with dynamic cells.

Using dynamic cells also allows taking advantages of a very useful feature known as reusing cells. A table view can display only certain number of cells without scrolling. Therefore, from the resource usage point of view, it is pointless to store more cells than this number in the memory. Thus, while scrolling, for example, in the down direction, when an old cell becomes hidden, and a new one is about to appear, the table view reuses that hidden cell, removing old content and placing new content through calling the cellForRow method. As a result, the number of cells on the screen and in the device memory is constantly the same. This feature allows dramatically reducing the usage of resources in the applications. (Gonzalez 2015.)

Usually, according to iOS Human Interface Guidelines, a view controller managing a table view is a root view controller of a navigation controller. From the design point of view, this pattern is an great tool to represent the data structure of an application. The most common data structure used in application is Tree data structure. Trees are non-linear data structures. They organize data split into portions called nodes in a hierarchical way. The topmost node is called a root. Other nodes connected with the root node but placed under it are called child nodes. The last nodes in a tree without a child are called leaf nodes. Thus, there are two optiones of using a table view. The first one is when each cell of table view represents a new portion of data contained in the corresponding new view controller. And the second one is when each cell of table view is a leaf node which goal is just to show static content of the table view without any interaction with users. (James 2017.)

2.5 Application programming interfaces (APIs)

The description of the meaning of application programming interface in this chapter bases on the information on Wikipedia. Application programming interfaces or APIs are sets of methods or functions providing access to the functionality of a certain program, module or library in software engineering. By their nature, APIs are high-level abstractions. Therefore, an object which uses a certain API knows only the abstract functionality of the used API and does not know how exactly API is implemented. Thus, APIs can be defined as separate self-contained modules. APIs can be divided into two groups according to their usage. The first group is public APIs. Their functionality can be used by any developers for free or for money. These APIs are focused on interaction with enduser. The second group is private or internal APIs. They can be only used by small groups of developers belonging to a certain company which owns these APIs. Private APIs used to be much more popular than public ones in the past. (Wikipedia.)

However, taking into account the rapid development of cloud services and wide usage of smartphones, which are becoming cheaper, it can be definitely said that most APIs are becoming public cloud service products, which are sold to companies and engineers. Nowadays, public APIs are goods in the huge software market. Today more than nine million software engineers are involved in developing all types of APIs (Murphy & Sloane 2016). Moreover, IT experts say that there will be more than one million public APIs available by the end of the decade (Dignan 2017).

On the other hand, public APIs have some disadvantages such as:

• Security vulnerabilities. Using APIs adds new attack surface to application.

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- Performance. Since using public APIs requires Internet connection, the total application performance will depend on quality of Internet connection, which is quite different around the world.
- Availability. Although APIs providers have high-availability fault-tolerant systems installed, there is always a chance of unexpected fault, which can lead to financial losses.
- Dependence on APIs. Using APIs is a double-edged tool. On the one hand, companies do not need to invest huge resources in their own software. On the other hand, they becomes dependent on these APIs.

To sum up all these facts, it is clear that each developer should pay attention on APIs and get familiar with them. Further, I will explain in detail some APIs which are planned to be used in this work. (Murphy & Sloane 2016.)

2.5.1 Google Maps APIs and Google Maps iOS SDK

The description of the meaning of Google Maps APIs in this chapter bases on the information on Google Documentation. Google Maps is a well-known geolocation service designed and maintained by Google. Google Maps APIs are cloud services based on Google Maps functionality. Depending on consumption of computing resources, they can be free or paid. In this work, I decided to use two Google Maps APIs which are Google Maps Direction API and Google Maps Geocoding API. According to the Google Maps Geocoding API provides geocoding and reverse geocoding. In other words, it allows converting geographic coordinates in a form of latitude and longitude into addresses with certain accuracy and viceverca. As for Google Maps Direction API, it builds a route from start and finish points, taking into account details such as type of transport, type of roads and the like. Also, it counts approximate time and the distance of the route.

These APIs base on the same request-response concept. A client application sends a request in HTTPS or HTTP form to the Google Maps server. The server computes request, and sends back data in HTPS or HTTP response. Each application using Google Maps APIs must have a unique API key which is created during the activation process. This key is built into a client application request URL to let Google know which application made a request and which tariff plan should be applied to this request.

Unlike the cloud-based Google Maps APIs service, Google Maps iOS SDK is mostly an offline framework for an iOS environment. It is installed inside an application. Google Maps iOS SDK allows creating map objects, adding map markers, polylines and map recognizers of gestures such as clicks and drags. SDK has a variety of functions, classes and delegates to provide such functionality.

2.5.2 Firebase database, storage and authentication API

According to the Google Documentation. Firebase is a cloud-based mobile and web app development platform backed by Google Cloud Platform. It provides many real-time functionality services, APIs and tools for software engineering. Firebase solutions require both client and server sides. The client-side is represented by the Firebase built-in SDK framework, installed and set up inside the application. The server-side is represented by Firebase cloud-services. Firebase SDK provides classes and functions to make management and configuration of its cloud-based services easier. In addition, developers can manage their projects using a Firebase console. Thus, Firebase services are outof-box solutions allowing using secure high-performance development tools without any backend knowledge. The Firebase mechanism can be seen in Figure 7. The next topics to explain are Firebase authentication, realtime database and storage in details.

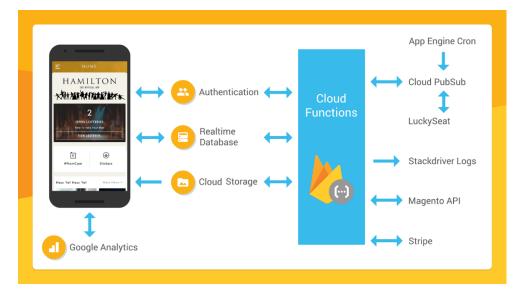


Figure 7. Firebase services

Firebase authentication is secure multi-platform cloud-based authentication, supporting email and password accounts, phone authentication, Google, Twitter and Facebook login. Developers can keep track of each login in a Firebase console. Firebase authentication also provides different templates for user notification by email. For example, it can be configured so that notification messages will be sent to user email address right after user registration or changing the password. After a successful login or registration of a user, Firebase authentication builds a unique user identifier sent back to client-side. This identifier is an authentication token to verify the identity of users. Further, it can be used to access Firebase services.

Firebase realtime database is a cloud-hosted NoSQL database allowing storing and syncing JSON-like data between client-sides in real time. It is based on Web-Sockets which is advanced client/server web technology. According to the WebSockets vs. Regular Sockets (2013), web-sockets provides bi-directional, full duplex long-term TCP connection between a client and a server. Due to little overhead of packets containing data, connection latency is very low. From the database point of view, it means that this is no concept of "querying" in the Firebase database. A user subscribes to a certain channel which is represented by a certain database entity. While subscribing to a channel, new Web-Socket TCP connection between the client and the database is created. Thus, the database is notified that a certain entity must be synced with user client-side. When this entity is updated, the database immediately pushes updated data to the client-side over the established connection. The client-side will listen to the database channel updates until it initiates the termination of established connection.

As for Firebase storage, it is a cloud storage which is an autonomous solution for downloading and uploading a user-generated content from mobile clients over Firebase SDK. It is based on a Google Cloud Storage. Firebase storage uses a user-friendly folder/file data structure. Storage may require users to be authorized in order to access the storage. Storage security rules are responsible for that. Security rules are used to determine a storage security policy, according to which users are granted access to read and write or not.

3 IMPLEMENTATION PART

Before starting this work, I have already had a concept of what I would like to implement as a thesis project. Having read many articles related to iOS development, and collected information about the most frequently used iOS technology and frameworks, I realized that the most convenient way would be to create an iOS map-based application. Thus, I could have easily presented this project as my portfolio application.

Therefore, the decision was to implement this project in cooperation with Andrew Donchenko who is a fourth-year student of South-Eastern University of Applied Science. His field is web development. Our cooperation boils down to the development of a cross platform application, using the same server-end part and partly a similar app design with amendments to the platform used. Our application is called FindSpot. (Donchenko 2018, 20-21.) Further, in this work, the meaning of the word "spot" will be the place in the nature or outdoor place. The idea of the app is to help people who love nature, outdoor activities such as picnics and outdoor parties to find a spot for doing this. Each user can also add a new spot into an application to share his/her favorite place with other users. FindSpot will provide users with the geolocation of the spot, its name, its short

description and some photos of this place. We also came up with the idea that users would have their own user accounts, containing a user name, password, user nickname and a favorites array with spots which have ever been added by users.

Therefore, this chapter covers the most important software solutions which I implemented during the development of the application. The chapter is divided into sections to explain specific software solutions. The last one explains the whole algorithm of FindSpot.

3.1 User interface design

While developing the design in general, we came up to idea that the most convenient way would be to use the design layout of the mobile version of the web application also as an iOS app design layout. The early design prototype can be seen on Figure 8.

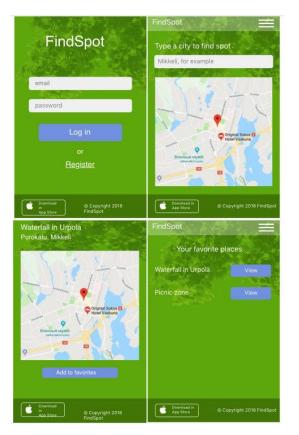


Figure 8. Early user interface prototype

However, comparing with the mobile web-app, an iOS app had some features which required changes in the prototype in order to suit iOS design patterns. The main "stumbling block" was completely different navigation through the app content used in the iOS app. According to the iOS Human Interface Guidelines, using navigation bars and tab bars in mobile design allows saving screen space, moving some important UI elements such as buttons and labels to these bars. This feature comes from the nature of navigation controllers and tab bar controllers which contain these bars. Thus, obviously this prototype did not provide the required navigation patterns, in other words this layout could be used only as a general design concept.

Then, the second finished prototype based on the previous one created. During designing the new prototype, I had been trying to implement some design concepts recommended by iOS Human Interface Guidelines. In my opinion, this allowed increasing the usability and appeal of the application. The example of second finished prototype applied in iOS application can be seen in Figure 9. Since the goals of this work are not related to the deeper understanding of UI design, the next section move on to structure of application navigation.

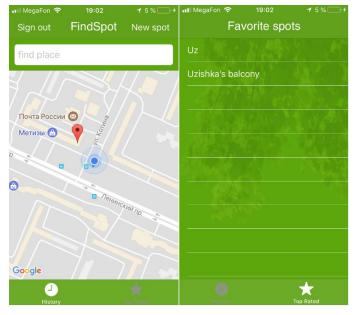


Figure 9. Second prototype

3.2 Application navigation

According iOS Human Interface Guidelines the easy and understandable navigation through content is one of the key element, which makes application user friendly. As it was mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.4, the tree data structure is usually used in iOS apps and this project is not an exception. I decided to use the UIKit tool called navigation controller which would allow users to travel through the content of the app from a root node to a leaf node and back to the root one.

However, while designing the app data hierarchy, I came up with the idea that it is reasonable to split data content of the app into two logical portions or "branches" (Map branch and Favorites branch) with the same root node, according to the Tree data structure theory. The Map portion would logically represent the current map with spots and the entire functionality related to it. The Favorites branch would do the same but with the favorite spots of the current user. As for root node, I chose tab bar controller for this role. It has two tabs, and each tab contains navigation controller with its own navigation stack with view controllers. Thus, choosing a tab, users can move from the root node to a certain branch and travel through the branch's nodes to desirable content. This can be seen in Figure 10.

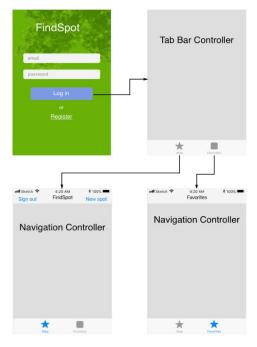


Figure 10. FindSpot navigation structure

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The further navigation through the content of the app from the perspective of each logical portion of content can be seen in Figures 11 and 12.

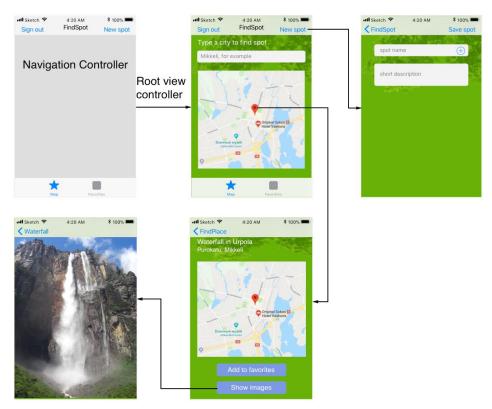


Figure 11. Content navigation of Map branch

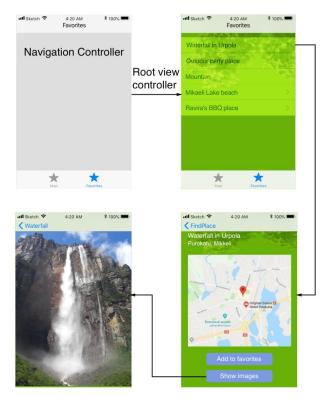


Figure 12. Content navigation of Favorites branch

3.3 MVC implementation

One of the main requirement to application design was implementation of Model-View-Controller design pattern. However, in my case I used more advanced version of MVC called MVC-N (Model-View-Controller-Network). The main goal of MVC-N is to separate all network functionality from the rest of application. Also according to that pattern, Network "layer" always executes its tasks on background thread, but View Controller and View always execute their tasks on main thread. Results of Network "layer" is returned to main thread using callbacks. So, I implemented this in the following way.

First, I created three folders, which would contain models, views and controllers of each module. Network "layer" files were placed in separate from other modules folder called "App's managers". It can be seen in Figure 13.

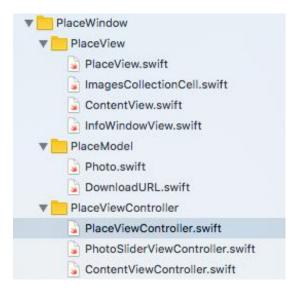


Figure 13. Example of MVC structure of Place window

In order to follow the MVC pattern, I have implemented the following design concept:

- There are view classes which are responsible for creating views, their configuration and further layout. The example of one of these classes can be seen in Figure 14.
- A view controller creates an object of the view class during the viewDidLoad() method and then assigns the view object's interface properties to its local variables in order to directly take control of the view object.

- All data is stored and computed in classes separated from views. The content of UI is updated only by view controllers. Therefore, view controllers act as mediators between data and views.
- All network operations are executed in Singleton classes in background threads, so, that data, views or controllers are separated from network "layer".

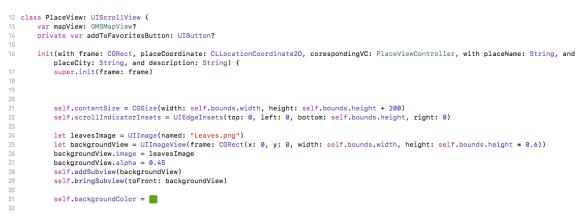


Figure 14. Code example of PlaceView class

Thus, each object is responsible for its tasks and does not "know" about other objects and what is outside. This comes from the Single Responsibility Principle whose main idea is almost the same as I have done. This design leads to releasing view controllers from non-related tasks and increase in code readability and code flexibility.

3.4 Firebase realtime database and storage

To simplify back-end part, we decided to use Firebase database and storage. Firebase database is a realtime database designed to store light-weight string objects. This is an "out of the box" solution by Google. I installed a Firebase framework using the CocoaPods dependency manager. Since maintaining two databases required paid-account, we came up with the creating realtime database containing two main directories which were "Places" and "Users". The Places directory contains all available spots, and the Users directory contains users' folders, storing users' nicknames and favorites. It can be seen in Figure 15.

| thesisproject-6959b |
|---|
| places |
| 12345678 |
| 598554466666667 |
| 6 01895911507289624930375814775402 |
| 6020099052108738424658115351008064 |
| 609744480657189422120418471074004 |
| 61072872527240228178197455084273 |
| 61491761407963272379163790754444 |
| 6 16858533333333 |
| 6 16859783333333 |
| 62240361800999882575126912516896 |
| 629187694116191227672826361334273 |
| G 64936288413653532570407656249995 |
| 651403164017914428151829664087245 |
| users |
| AxLIOeLYLoR15ZwDduLWAJCI7OS2 |
| e0tlr9X1rRN68rlBlQrwfslNqTz1 |
| h0ldTeePcmhadSfzVsgUSgScjxI3 |
| oen1CKjbGWgKL1IBF1IDnSKa6ly2 |
| 🖬 undefined |
| ypZ4aQVtNkOlcGa4xVSzLPQeSdB3 |
| |

Figure 15. Database data structure

The main "unit" of database is a place (in a meaning of spot). It has the following structure:

- City. A string containing name of the city, where spot is located.
- Coordinates. A latitude and a longitude of the spot.
- Description. A short text about the spot.
- Name. It is name of the spot given by a user.
- Photos. It is an array of URLs, containing links to download images from Firebase storage.

The structure of place can be seen in Figure 16. The FindSpot client application provides mechanism of creating unique names for each place. Name of place is a latitude of spot coordinates converted into String format with cut symbols such as minus or dot. The same mechanism is used for a unique storage folder name creation. Since latitude value is a double number with a millionth fractional part, the probability of uniqueness of the place is quite high.

| thesisproject-6959b | |
|--|--------------------------|
| places | |
| 12345678 | |
| city: "Mikkeli" | |
| coordinates: "61.689799,27.265157" | |
| description: "This is a nice hotel wit | h comfortable rooms. Ev" |
| name: "Church" | |
| photos | |
| 0: "https://firebasestorage.goog | leapis.com/v0/b/the" |
| 1: "https://firebasestorage.goog | leapis.com/v0/b/the" |
| 2: "https://firebasestorage.goog | leapis.com/v0/b/the" |
| | |

Figure 16. Place entity structure

As for Firebase Storage, it is used as an images storage in FindSpot. Images related to a certain spot are stored in the unique folder. According to the both app architecture and performance issues, each spot must have up to four images, with size of six Mb each.

Both database and storage have security policy. According to that, each access to files must be authorized by Firebase. In other words, only authorized users are eligible to access the database or storage files.

3.5 App managers

As it has been already mentioned, the App managers are elements of the Network "layer" in this application. There are four managers – GoogleApi manager, Database manager, Photo manager, Error manager. Each manager is a Singleton class, implementing certain network functionality. They are isolated from each other. Further, each manager is explained in details.

3.5.1 GoogleApi manager

It is responsible for sending requests to Google Map APIs. FindSpot uses Google Maps Directions and Geocoding APIs. It has two public functions to build and then to send requests to these APIs. The first one is the coordinateToAddressRequest() function which takes current user coordinates and send them in the HTTPS request to Geocoding API. It performs a reverse

geocoding and sends back the address in JSON. The second one is the getRouteRequest() function which takes a start coordinate and a finish coordinate and sends them in the HTTPS request to Directions API. It builds the most appropriate route between these points according to the configuration sent in the request. Then, it sends back a JSON array with route details and a path coded into the polyline string.



Figure 17. Code example of the GoogleApi manager class

These functions are executed in background thread to avoid any "frizzing" of UI. When result is received, it initiates calling the callback with parameter where actually JSON data is stored. Since parsing JSON goes beyond the functional of GoogleApi manager, the new object of corresponding model class is created. It parses a JSON data and assigns decoded data to its properties. Then, this object will be encapsulated into the completion handler of the function and sent to main thread as a callback related to the object which called this function initially.

3.5.2 Database manager

It is responsible for uploading, downloading, deleting and adding spots within Firebase database entities. This manager provides such a functionality through five functions. These functions are getPlacesWithinCity(), getUserFavorites(), saveNewPlace(), deleteDatabaseValue() and addPlaceToFavorites(). Despite of different functionality, they have the same principle of interaction with the database. It bases on database references used as a path to desired entity in the database.

The database manager needs three database references to provide connection with the database. The first one is the reference to the database directory containing all available spots. It is used by the getPlacesWithinCity() function which fetches all spots having city entity equals to string taken by this function. The second one is the reference to the unique database directory containing current user files. It is used by the getUserFavorites() function which fetches user favorites. The third one is the computed reference built especially for a certain entity in the user folder within database when users want to add new spot or delete existing one. It is used by saveNewPlace(), deleteDatabaseValue() and addPlaceToFavorites() functions.

In such a functions as getPlacesWithinCity() and getUserFavorites(), the data is returned in the JSON format after the fetching from the database. The database manager is not responsible for parsing JSON data thus, it creates the object of the Place class and passes the JSON data to it while the initialization process. Then, the object parses JSON and assigns the decoded data to its properties. If JSON is successfully decoded, the object containing database data will be encapsulated into the completion handler of the function and sent to main thread as callback related to the object which called this function initially.

In case of saving new entity in the database, like it is done in the saveNewPlace() function, the data from an original format must be converted to JSON. Since each spot in the app is encapsulated into the object of the Place class, it is a quite easy process, because the variables of the Place class logically are the same as in the database. The Place class has the convertToJSON() function which builds JSON file from the original object of the Place class.

3.5.3 Photo manager

It is responsible for downloading and uploading images used in FindSpot. All images of spots are stored in the Firebase storage. The Photo manager has two functions for interaction with the storage. The first one is the

getPhotoFromStorage() function taking the array of URLs as an argument and then downloads images asynchronously to decrease downloading time using these URLs. Since downloading is executed asynchronously, it is not possible to place each image to the array, because it might cause the data corruption due to simultaneous access to the memory of the array. In software engineering, this problem is called race condition. To solve it, I implemented the Photo class containing thread-safe array and function to append new elements in this array. This function synchronously adds new images to the array, allowing only one object to access an array's memory at the same time. When downloading is successfully completed, the object of the Photo class will be encapsulated into completion handler of the getPhotoFromStorage() function and sent to main thread as callback related to the object which called this function initially.

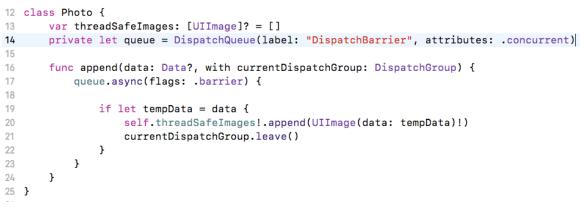


Figure 18. Code example of the Photo manager class

Another function is uploadPhotos(). It takes an array of images as parameter. Before the uploading process, the function creates a metadata object, which contains a type of uploaded images and builds a reference to the new storage folder, which will store images. Then, each image from the array is asynchronously uploaded into the storage folder specified in the storage reference. Storage will return a metadata object containing URLs in HTTPS format for further downloading of this files.

3.5.4 Error manager

It is responsible for error handling occurring in the application during the runtime. It has the showErrorMessage() function. It takes the object of the Error class and view controller, where error massage should be displayed. The Error object is usually generated by the app when the error occurred while fetching data from the database, downloading or uploading images, user authentication process and requesting to Google Maps APIs. In some cases such as authentication process, The Error object with the error description is created by server-side. In other cases, the app generates the Error object, taking into account a situation and a receiver of the error. The UIAlertController view controller displayed on the device screen can be seen in Figure 19.

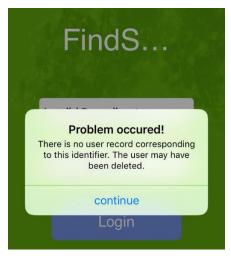


Figure 19. The Error message

3.6 Authentication process

FindSpot authentication bases on Firebase Authentication. It is one of the easiest and reliable tool to secure a user authentication process. The application starts working with an appearance of view controller called LoginViewController on the screen, where user can choose the next action. User can login with an existing account or create the new one. All these actions are managed by Firebase functions: auth.signIn() and auth.createUser() which called after pressing on buttons. These functions are executed in the Firebase back-end part and then a server response are returned. This response is received in the function's callback, thus it is most likely that the rest of the function is no longer stored in the memory except of this callback.



Figure 20. Implementation of the loginActionMethod() function

The tesponse of auth.signIn() and auth.createUser() functions stores two variables. The first one contains user which has just made login, and the second one contains the error description in case of the failed login. First, I check the error variable against nil in the callback. If it is not nil, this means that the error occurred, and the error's description will be displayed to user using the Error manager. Otherwise, the authentication process is finished and LoginViewController is dismissed, at the same time the new view controller called MapViewController will start loading.

3.7 Searching for spots and displaying results

In the iOS version of FindSpot, Google Maps SDK is responsible for map objects and interactions between maps and the rest of application. In other words, it provides interface to map objects via its delegate in order to communicate with the map objects while runtime. I installed Google Maps SDK using the CocoaPods dependency manager.

According to application design, MapViewController (later MVC) manages view containing a map, which in context of my app is called Map view. Map view is initialized during the controller's viewDidLoad method. Map view is assigned to local variable of MVC, which, in its turn, set up as delegate of Map view.

However, the main job of MVC is to activate the chain of the executions of functions leading to getting an array of available spots in the desired city from the database. Since the application has been designed according to the Model-View-Controller pattern, MVC does not directly execute any tasks related to data and APIs requests. As it has been already explained, the App managers are responsible for that. During the execution of the viewDidLoad method, MVC tries

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to retrieve the current geolocation of the device. If the geolocation is valid, MVC calls the coordinateToAddressRequest() function of the GoogleAPI manager. Then, if the returned city is not nil, MVC calls the next function in the chain that is the getPlacesWithin() function of the Database manager. If the received spot's array is not empty, which could have meant that no spots had been added yet, MVC calls the showFoundPlace() function in for-loop in order to call it for each spot in the array. This function takes the coordinates and the name of the spot as parameters. As a result of its execution, MVC creates as many markers on the Map view as there are spots in the array.

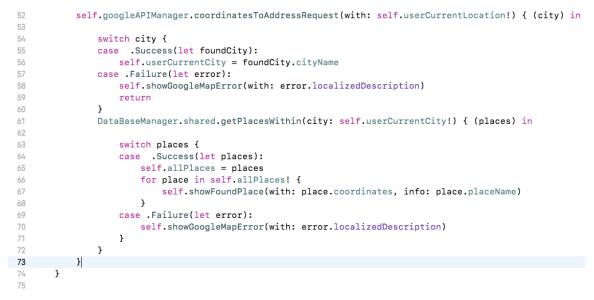


Figure 22. The order of the execution of the Network stack functions

FindSpot also provides an alternative way of finding spots. Instead of automatically defining the current city, user can enter a new city into the text field. In this case, MVC does not call the coordinateToAddressRequest() function, but calls the getPlacesWithin() function. The rest of the algorithm is the same.

Users can get more details about desired spots by tapping on the marker on the map. The tapping action causes the calling of the didTapMarker() function called via the Map view delegate. While executing this function, it is first defined which spot is corresponding to the tapped map marker, and then a new view controller called PlaceViewController (later PVC) is created. MVC transfers data to PVC.

This data contains the chosen spot, and the current user location. After that, PVC is added to the navigation stack and pushed on top of this stack.

After pushing PVC on top of the navigation stack, it starts its lifecycle methods. The goal of PVC is to manage the view displaying information about the chosen spot, such as spot name, short description, location on the map and images of the spot. Collection view, which is like table view but contains images in its cells instead of text, is responsible for displaying spot images. During the execution of the viewDidLoad function, PVC calls the getRoutRequest() function of the GoogleApi manager. The polyline route is returned in the function callback and if it is valid, PVC, then, calls the showPath() function which builds this route from the polyline on the map. Users can get route details by tapping on the route start of finish markers. This causes the calling of the markerInfoWindow() function view via the Map view delegate. It shows a window with the time and distance of the current route.

| 25 | <pre>override func viewDidLoad() {</pre> |
|-----|--|
| 26 | super.viewDidLoad() |
| 27 | |
| 28 | self.googleApiManager.getRouteRequest(with: self.userLocation!, and: self.place!.coordinates) { (route) in |
| 29 | |
| 30 | switch route { |
| 31 | case .Success(let route): |
| 32 | <pre>self.distanceForInfoWin = route.distance</pre> |
| 33 | <pre>self.timeForInfoWin = route.time</pre> |
| 34 | <pre>self.showPath(polyline: route.polylinePath)</pre> |
| 35 | <pre>case .Failure(let error):</pre> |
| 36 | ErrorManager.shared.showErrorMessage(with: error, shownAt: self) |
| 37 | return |
| 38 | } |
| 39 |) |
| 1.0 | |

Figure 23. Example of the callback of the getRouteRequest function of the GoogleApi manager

While waiting for the returning of the route, PVC also calls the getPhotoFromStorage function of the Photo manager. When images are downloaded, the function returns a callback, where a collection view is forced to update its cells with new images. Users can add chosen spots to favorites by pressing the "add to favorites" button. To avoid unnecessary interacting with the database, if users press the button by accident, I implemented this functionality in the following way: when button is pressed, the Bool local variable is set to "true" working as a flag. If users want to cancel the adding, the button should be pressed again and the flag variable will be set to "false". Right before the deallocation PVC from memory, this flag variable is checked, and if it is "true", the

current spot will be added to favorites by calling the saveNewPlace() function of the Database manager.

3.8 Creating a new spot

Since extending the FindSpot content directly depends on adding new spots by users, it is important to present the algorithm of how this works. Users can add new spots by tapping on the navigation bar button "New spot". This initiates creating a new view controller called AddNewPlaceViewController (later NPVC). It is pushed on top of the navigation stack and starts its lifecycle methods.

When NPVC appears, the user can write name of new spot and a short description in two text fields. Then, the user should choose at least one image of the new spot by tapping the clip-button. This calls the addImage() function. The goal of this function is to check if the app is eligible to access the device Photo Library. If it is not, the app asks the user to allow access to Photo Library. Then, the special view controller called UIImagePickerController is created, which is an "out of the box solution" for animated picking and customizing images from Photo Library. The process of the picking an image can be seen in Figure 24.



Picture 24. Picker controller with chosen image from Photo Library

After the appearing of this view controller, users should choose one image from Photo Library. This initiates calling the didFinishPickingMediaWithInfo() function having an info dictionary as a parameter. The info dictionary contains the chosen image and image metadata such as image location, format and size. Image and its location are retrieved from the info dictionary and assigned to local function variables.

To save a new city in the Firebase database, the name of the city where the spot is located is required. If the retrieved image location is not empty, its coordinates are passed to the coordinateToAddressRequest() function of the GoogleApi manager which is called. It returns the name of the city in the String format which is assigned to the local NPVC variable. Then, the images and location are added to the local NPVC array of images. After that, the UIImagePickerController view controller is dismissed.

At this point users can save the new spot by tapping the "Save spot" navigation bar button. This calls the savePlace() function. First, input data is checked against empty fields and the number of images. If it is not valid, the function finishes execution and sends an error message to the user. In case, input data is valid, the uploadPhotos function of the Photo manager is called, taking the local NPVC array of images as a parameter. After finishing uploading, URLs for downloading are returned as an array. Then, a new object of the Place class is created using input data and received URLs array. Finally, the saveNewPlace() function of the Database manager is called, taking this object as a parameter. As a result, a new spot is saved in the database.

4 CONCLUSION

The focus of this thesis work was the study and further implementation of application programming interfaces. However, to be able to effectively work with APIs, I first needed to study the most common iOS development technology. Thus, the theory part of this thesis is a path from the elements with the lowest abstract level such as UIKit framework to elements with the highest abstract level such as Firebase and Google Maps APIs. During the background study, I consciously invested much time in a UIKit framework basics, in order to feel more comfortable with the iOS technologies used while the implementation part and to focus more on software development issues which is a more creative and interesting process for me. As expected, having comlex basic knowledge in an iOS development and particular in the UIKit framework, I could go deeper into documentation and implementation of APIs needed for the project.

As a result, I have built the working prototype of the iOS application based on APIs which were mentioned ealier in this work. While developing the FindSpot application, my both programming and troubleshooting skills have dramatically grown up, because of the fact that I was supposed to develop the application from scratch. Solving the huge number of different bugs and problems caused by my misunderstanding of how a certain iOS elements works in practice led to extending the borders of the whole picture of how an iOS works in the reality. The implementation of the Model-View-Controller pattern in the FindSpot application also helped me to improve an understandability and a readability of my code. Without any doubt, since the FindSpot application have been designed as multiplatform application, me and my teammate Andrew Donchenko have faced with a certain specific problems, and their solutions have required our collaboration, knowledge exchange and ability to respect and listen to each other.

To sum up, I suppose that I have reached all planned goals of this thesis. Learning by doing, I have gained both theoretical and practical knowledge which is a great basis for my further development as an iOS developer.

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