



Strategy for regional development

Aimed to consolidate the efforts of the organizations and be a foundation for future cooperation not only between consortium members, but to all relevant stakeholders

Project name:	It is all about the game	
Project identificatory:	603238-EPP-1-2018-1-BG-SPO-SSCP	
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Project consortium:	Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania	
Coordinator:	Bulgarian badminton federation (BBF)	Sofia, Bulgaria
Partners:	Clubul Sportiv Siderurgistul (CSS)	Galati, Romania
	Badminton federation of North Macedonia –	Skopje, North Macedonia

ERASMUS + PROGRAMME



I. Overview

In our project idea we set out to combine efforts to oppose health hazards in every level of sports activity – professional, amateur, recreational, etc. and promote education in and through sport by implementing a set of activities that evolve from the classical scheme of “information being provided” to “evidence and knowledge based decision making” :

- Improving the ethical understanding of several sport related problems such as doping,
- Improving the awareness of the community in relation to educational needs and the use of sport as a tool,
- Contributing to informing about the risks and health hazards (regarding health, juridical and professional aspect), educating on their cause and take measures for prevention,
- Highlighting good practices and success stories,
- Improving the organizational and athlete’s capacity through skills development

One of the key points relating to the idea behind the “Strategy for regional development” (SRD) can be found the specifics of sports and working with youth.

As entities (clubs, federations, etc) which are directly working with youth athletes, high-level amateurs, coaches, expert personnel and parents on one hand and state agencies, international public and private bodies we are often found in a deadlock of events.

Often relations and events that have begun years ago and are being implemented currently mar and affect the future steps each organization has to take in order to restructure, alter methods and implement innovations in its field of work.

Developing this unification strategy, as a guideline and framework for future relations and activities aims to present to stakeholders in and outside of the sport context the direct and indirect relations which lead, have led or will lead the field of sports in the context of the three participating countries in the European Southeast.

We have put great efforts into highlighting good and poor practices, sharing success stories and presenting results in the context of interorganizational and intergovernmental relations. It is our understanding that changing, stopping or implementing innovations is a long process with no results guaranteed. However, we believe it is all about the game.



II. Overall aims

In the representation of our Strategy for regional development we are targeting several groups, all involved with sports and are putting the emphasis on badminton and racket sports. It is our belief that the issues, relations and recommendations are applicable and valid for 95% of the sport entities in the Balkan region and some parts of the European union.

The overall aims of sport can be viewed through the priorities of different target groups, however if we have to address the overall state sport is intended to:

- Attract young people to physical and mental activities in order to develop their skills, potential and portfolio
- Improve the overall health status of the population by developing motor skills, interest in active lifestyle and wellbeing
- Promote and encourage participation in mass and team activities
- Attract young people to support efforts and achievements of high-level athletes in order to promote synergy within the national and international context

Overall aims of the international entities in the field of sport (international federations, committees, etc)

- Attract more attention to the specific sport sector
- Promote professional development of the sport
- Establish the specific sport in the international field
- Communicate and relate issues between countries and members in order to develop the sport context
- Support investments in the sport and its context, directly or indirectly
- Seek media attention and recognition of the sport at an international level

Overall aims relating to the national entities in the field of sport (federations, etc):

- Attract more young people in the sport sector (link to the specific sport)
- Promote professional development of promising athletes
- Gain support for high-level athletes
- Enhance cohesion between national bodies/decision makers and athletes/young people
- Support dialogue between investors (in the field of sports) and national bodies as an overall effort to improve the sport sector in the national or international level

Overall aims of the local entities (clubs, academies, etc)

It is to be noted that local sports clubs can be active in a specific sport or in a variety of sports. Frequently, if a club is focused around a specific sport, attention is put on participation in competitions and developing athletes, as the coaches and experts have a narrow specialty, for example Badminton coach. This leads to a narrow field of work for the club (for example only in the field of badminton) and thus narrows the potential practitioners.

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- ➔ Attract more young people to sport events
- ➔ Attract young people to participate, compete or get to know the specific sport
- ➔ Develop sport-specific and overall skills and competences in practitioners
- ➔ Support dialogue between local communities, agencies, municipalities for the development of the sport and youth
- ➔ Highlight attention to investors and sponsors

Overall aims of the athletes (recreational players, devout amateurs or high-level professionals)

- ➔ Develop skills and improve performance (in competitions)
- ➔ Seek support to continue developing skills (sponsors, suitable job, etc)
- ➔ Set goals in becoming a champion, coach, expert etc. or benefit from a healthier lifestyle
- ➔ Preserve the sense of support and unity one has as being part of a specific sport movement/team/community

Note: The overall aims of the athletes were highlighted via feedback gathering in the clubs

The overall aims of each target group are general enough to be valid for almost every sport and specific enough to be related to the current project consortium. Of course, with different entities there may be an alteration in aims, however the mainframe is consistent.

The unifying strategy sets focus on:

- Presenting key information regarding the actual state of the sport and governmental sector
- Explain relations between entities in different contexts
- Highlight "key effort points" relating to various levels of entities (national, local, international)
- Present an innovative action plan

III. Context

To create the SRD, we began by drafting the information applicable for each partner/sport context and then reviewed it from the priorities of each sector:

A. National entities from the sports sector

This involves sports clubs, non-formal youth groups, training academies and other entities which set focus on organized sport participation in activities or competitions. They can be various levels and at the top we place the corresponding federation/union which has a responsibility and relation to public agencies and Ministries to support the development of this



sport. Of course, for non-specific sport activities, which cannot be segmented in the activities of one federation the corresponding Ministry / Agency of sports is the highest decision maker. This is important to understand because grassroots sport movement is linked to physical or sports activities, usually organized by an entity (for example club). However, the possibility and willingness of this club to organize events, attract youth practitioners, support grassroots sport movement strongly depends on their administrative, human or financial capacity. Therefore, if a club is not supported, doesn't receive administrative or technical assistance and even more, is pressured to participate in state competitions and develop athletes in order to receive funding, organizing activities such as grass-root sport development and youth engagement becomes even more difficult.

B. Private and public entities outside of sports in the country and,

In this category we review the main elements necessary for any sport movement to build its foundation: sponsors, media and state/municipal agencies responsible for sport/youth development. These three elements have the possibility to develop, revive or obstruct the development of the sport sector. The fundamental link between the three lies in "possibility to increase engagement". In many sport sectors, business has the ability, with a single investment project to create possibilities for development of a specific set of sports. For example, if an investor decides to build an ice rink in a city/neighbourhood this will create opportunities for developing four Olympic and other non-olympic sports (ice skating, figure skating, ice hockey, short-track and others). Same relation goes to the media (online, TV/Radio, etc) – if there is an ongoing campaign to root for certain sports, by increasing the media attention towards them, an investment project is more likely to be realised, as the possibilities for its costs to reimburse increase. On the other hand, if the state agency/Ministry is not supporting, mainly in an administrative manner, the development of sports and moreover, is locked in a semi-rational and non-reformist political dialogue, it sets the agenda and action plan for its direct beneficiaries – federations, clubs, athletes. Without the ability for them to take additional actions and depending solely on centralized funding they have little to few options ahead of them.

C. National, public and private entities from and outside of sports at international level

In this sector we place and combine a number of elements that are explained above, however in an international setting. Entities that are included can be: international sport federations (for example International badminton federation), international sport movements (International Olympic committee), international agencies active in the field of sports (for example World anti-doping agency), international institutions (for example the European commission and its agenda and sectoral policies in sport and youth), business organizations with relation to sports (for example sports equipment & supplements manufacturers), global media companies (for example CNN, BBC, etc) and others.

The structure of sport is somewhat built in a pyramid structure, with the top level being reserved for global entities which set the framework and agenda for the sectoral development.

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Often private and public entities work in a synchronised manner (for example International association of athletics federations is member of the International Olympic committee) to develop the sport context. Of course, entities such as media and business organizations have the ability to influence decision making.

This strong relation between different decision-makers shows that national and national-level organizations, unless financially, technically and administratively independent, cannot alter agenda and more or less follow into a pre-set action plan based on demands and requirements. The only issue is that the sports-business sector relies on performance of human athletes, who invest decades into developing skills, without any certainty for achievements.

Moreover, professional sports career is a path fewer and fewer young people are willing to take because of uncertainty, limited life options, lack of side-skills development and career development. Therefore, countries which cannot attain the necessary critical mass of high-level competitors are not able to perform at the highest level have limited to no possibility to secure funding and re-arrange strategies, youth engagement and development of experts. It is a somewhat vicious circle that albeit not functioning in an effective manner is still functioning, and over the course of some years, some success and improvement is made. However re arranging a structure of 100-150 clubs with 1500-5000 athletes is a very difficult task, but moreover changing and developing a different mindset is even more complicated.

From our point of view each type of relation between sport entities, target groups and stakeholders has positive and negative aspects. Positive aspects influence the possibility for this target group/sector to develop its potential and translate/evolve into another sector.

For example, if the number of amateur practitioners and grass-root sport movement is increase this will lead to an increase in members in the club and, statistically, out of 100 new practitioners 25 % may decide to devote more time to this sport and become amateur players. An increase in amateur players will lead to a new group of more dedicated and devoted competitors and some of them have a chance of becoming high-level players.

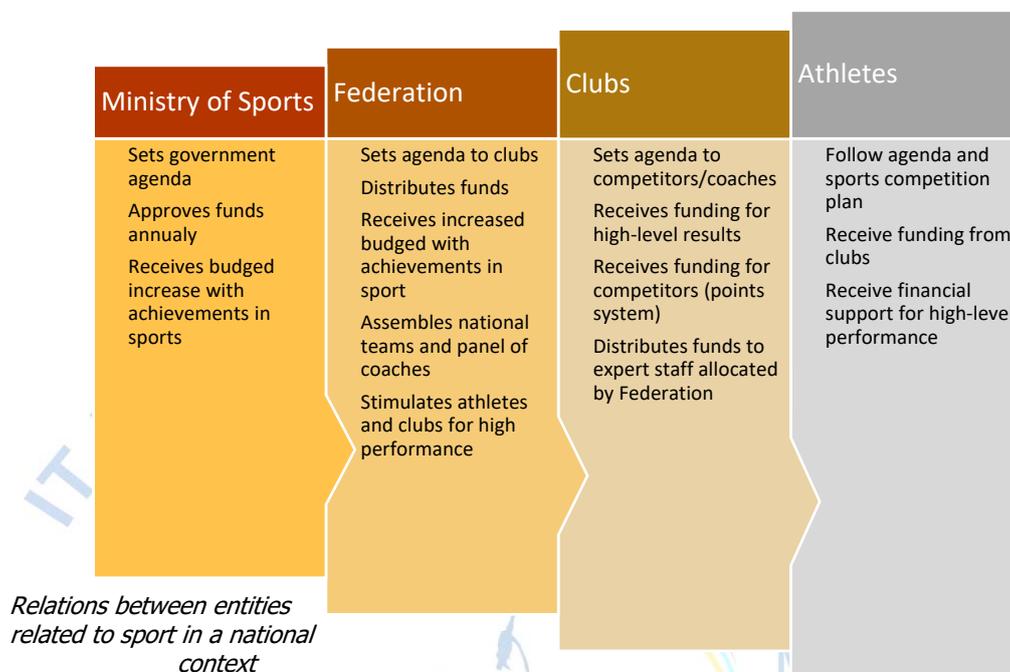
However, we seek to focus on the negative tendencies in each target group and highlight their relation to different sectors (A,B or C). Analysing the negative tendencies in sport will allow entities and stakeholders to conceive an action plan and take steps to improve their efficiency and performance. This is the main objective of this Strategy (SRD).

IV. Relations

In our SRD we take a look at relations in a variety of fields – structural, functional, economical, etc.

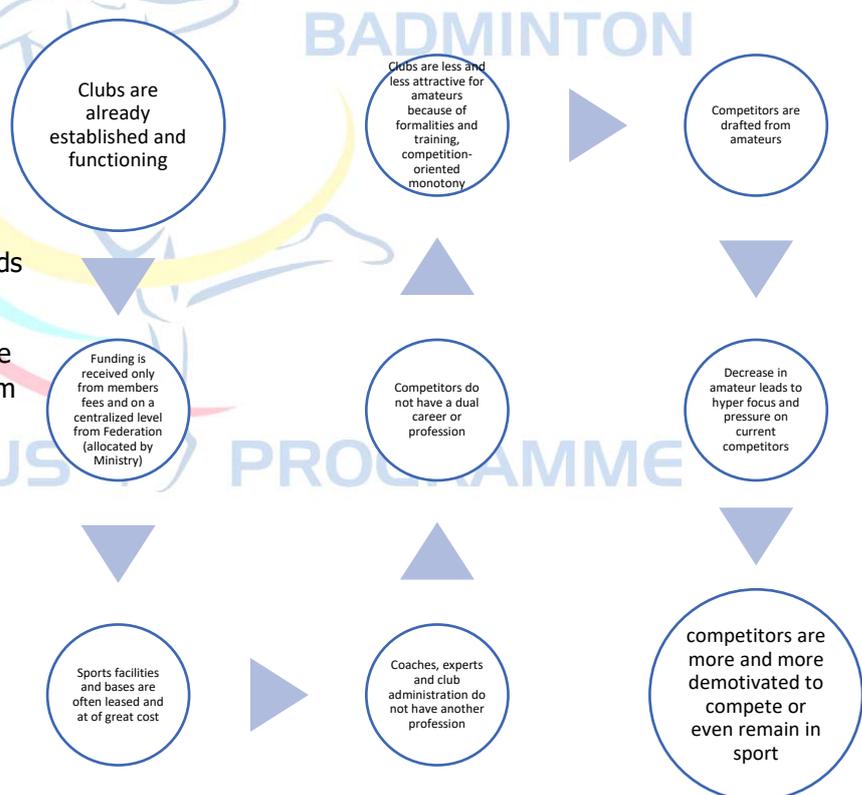


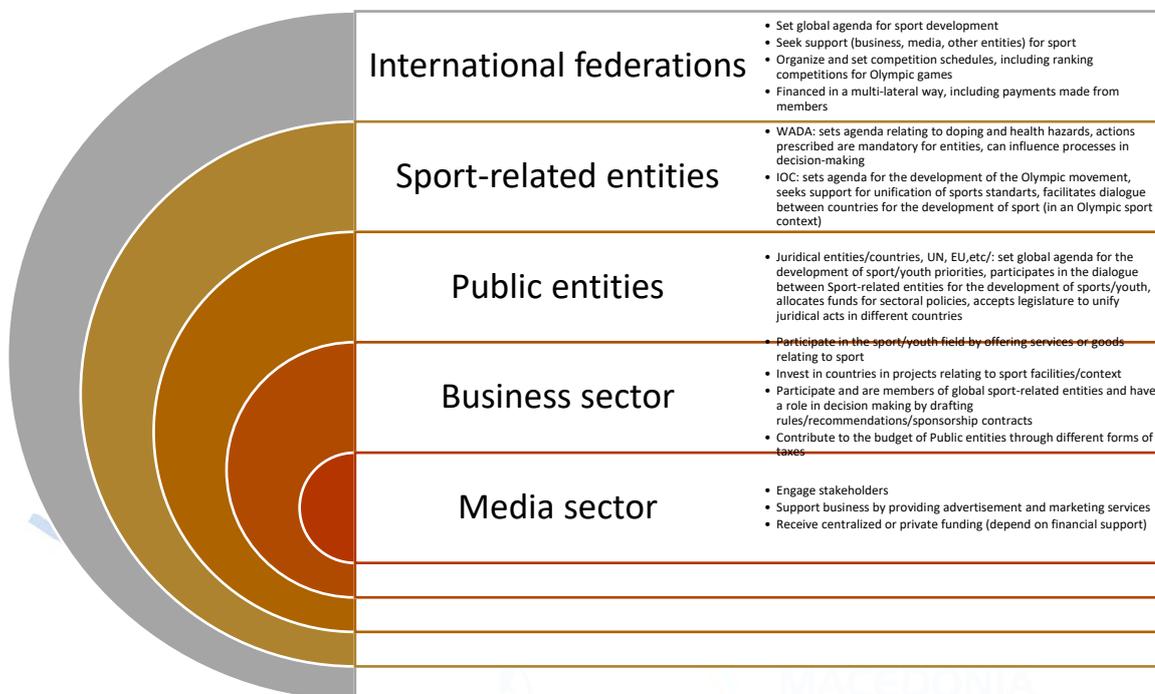
Relations between entities were mostly highlighted in the above paragraphs, however, they need further explanation, in order to understand the rationale between agenda setting and action taken:



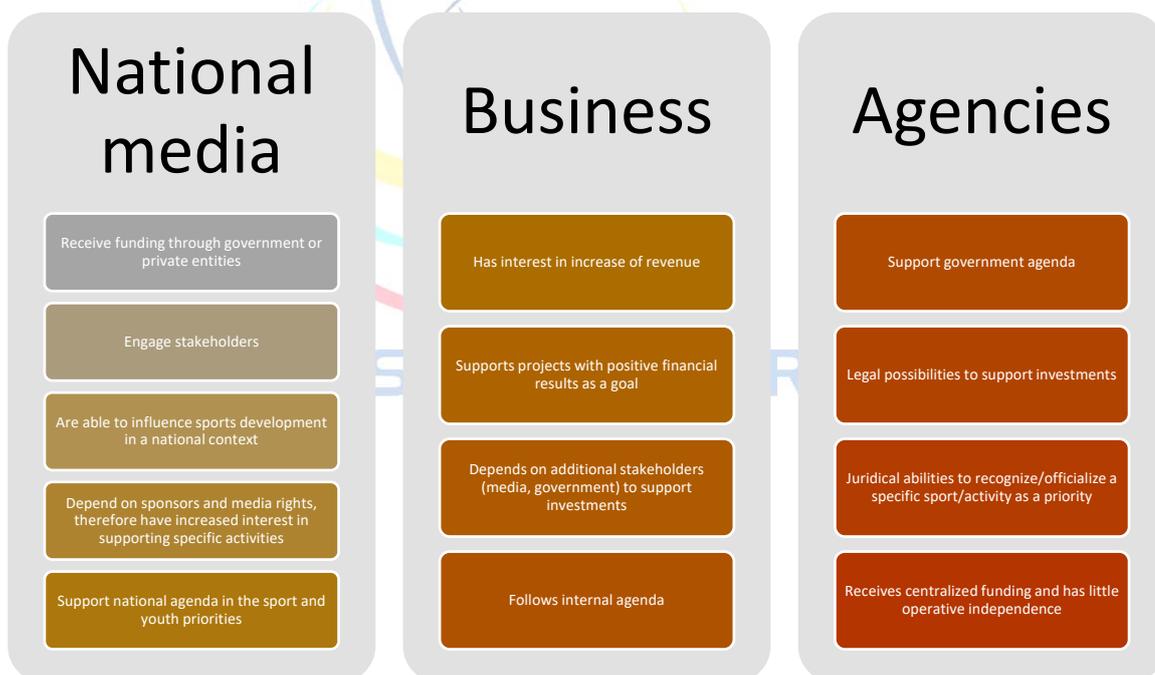
From this presentation we can easily see that local entities' independence is strongly limited as athletic/club performances and following state-ministry-federation set agenda are prerequisites for funds allocations.

Therefore, high-level athletes require support from clubs, allocated to them by the ministry on the conditions of following a specific, medal/sports-achievement oriented agenda.





International relations in public and private entities in and outside of sport



Relations and functions of private and public entities outside of sports in a national context

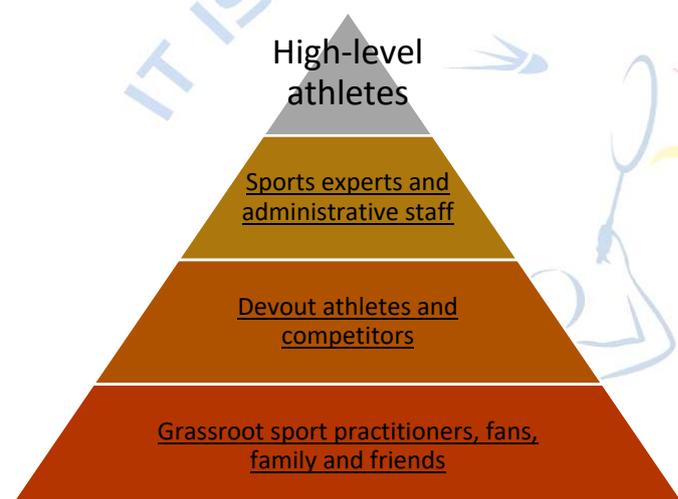
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V. Structure

In this paragraph we set to describe the current and past structure of different entities in order to highlight current status, analyse mistakes made, forecast development and how that is relevant in the regional, national and EU context. Structure in sports clubs is one of the main focuses of our SRD as the local entities work directly with young people and youth. They transfer the goals and priorities of the government set agenda, while aiming to introduce more young people in sport. The basic elements of the pyramid structure pictured below, in certain occasions, exceed the boundaries or responsibilities of a local club, however they are within the national context of the sport sector.

Basic elements:



Grassroot sport practitioners, fans, family and friends – this is the largest stakeholder group and consists of different age groups united with their desire to develop motor skills, competences and participate in physical activities. As a general characteristic, members of this group do not express desire to compete in train in a mandatory schedule, however can and often volunteer and visit sport events to support athletes, clubs and sport.

Devout athletes and competitors – this target groups consists of athletes that have emerged from grassroots sport practitioners and have expressed desire to develop in a specific sport context. They perform with the aim of achieving a sport/competition oriented goal, train in a structured manner and, depending on personal desire, devote a large proportion of their week-hours for training. Overall aim is to excel in the sport sector. This group consists of different layers of athletes that invest years and countless hours to reach a national, regional or international sport level and achievements. These athletes in 80% of the cases do not have another career option or, have chosen a profession aimed to fully support them in their desire to develop in sports. Often, athletes in this TG choose to study in a sport university/academy and develop in the professional field either as an athlete or, at a later stage, as an expert (trainer, pedagogue, etc.)



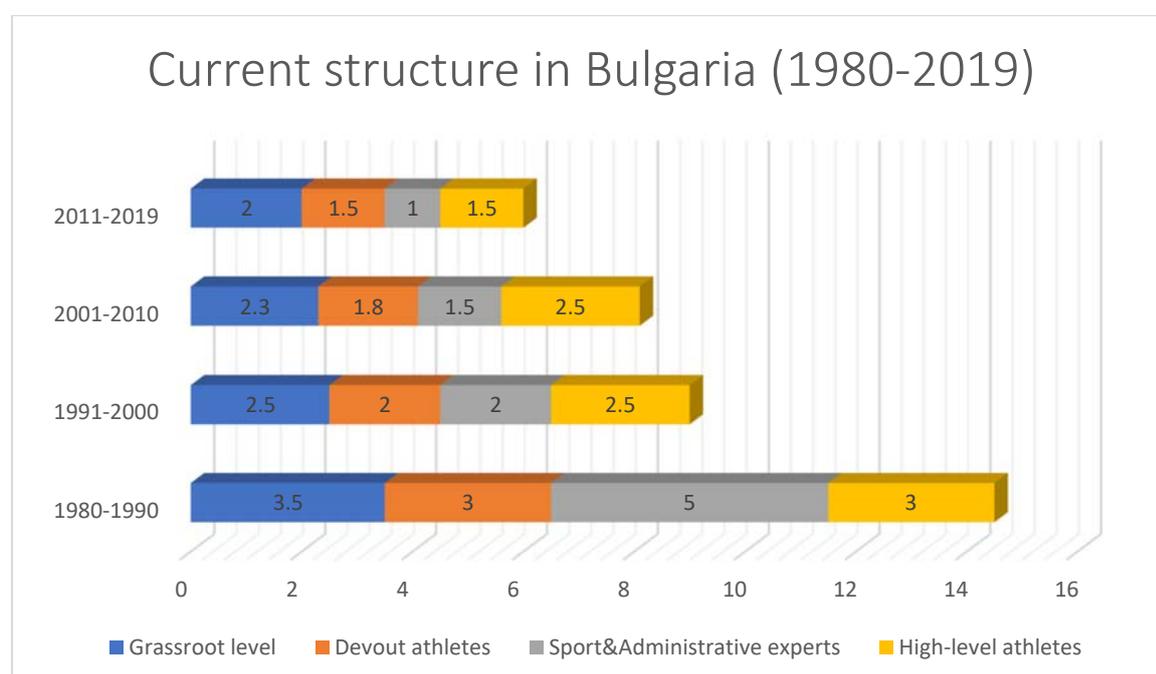
Experts relating to sports and administrative staff – this stakeholder group consists of a number of professionals that aim to develop : the administrative and technical capacity of their organization (sports club, federation, etc.) or competences relating to high-level (elite) sport performance. Administrative and technical capacity should be understood as people, most likely with previous sport experience, that want to work for the achievement of government/ministry/federation-set sports agenda. Their main focus is put on developing the capacity of organizations so they can be more efficient and achieve the objectives set. Such people are – administrative directors, presidents of clubs/federations, technical assistants, etc. Experts with competences relating to HLSP (high-level sport performance) aim to : create, implement and maintain training methodologies for excellence in sport for HLSP, overview, analyse or support athletic behaviour and performance, provide specific services exclusively for elite level athletes (such as physiotherapists, nutritionists, sports psychologists, etc). Experts in this target group often have had previous athlete/competitor experts, developed their knowledge and competences in the respected field and, usually, have devoted a number of decades for the sport. Given the specifics of each sport, these experts (mostly coaches) do not have another career or professional development path and are skilled in a specific and narrow field. While some other representatives of this group (for example therapists, etc) may have broader options for development and work (work with different teams, etc) they have limited options, because each sport has different requirements, professional hazards and methodologies do not overlap or transcend.

High-level athletes (European, world and Olympic level) – these athletes are the top of the pyramid, they a very small proportion of devout athletes on a national level and often have spend more than two decades in a specific sport, developing their skills and abilities. A statistical representation of chances for elite career in baseball (conducted by NCAA in 2013 in USA), shows that in basketball, a very popular sport in the country only a 0.03% of male and 0.02% of female athletes have a chance of reaching elite level. In baseball, again in the USA the chances are around 1% for athletes. There isn't a statistical information for elite level athletes in Europe, however experience shows that around 0.5-1% of athletes have a chance of becoming elite level. Difficulties relating to high level sports achievement can be summarized as : training and competition performance relies on a number of skills which can be developed following proper methodologies, sports injuries and trauma are a constant threat to mar or even end an athletes career, economical or administrative obstacles can disrupt an athletes focus or ability to perform at the highest level, massive amount of funding is necessary to maintain and support a professional athlete and his/her staff annually, etc. The representatives of this target group usually end their career as athletes and continue as coaches, mentors or entrepreneurs in the field of sports. Public officials and institutions, namely EU Commission have developed strategies "Dual careers of athletes" to highlight and raise awareness of the fact that, high-level athletes constitute a specific and vulnerable group which need special attention from government and public offices to support their transition from one career to another. Very often HL athletes are reviewed as a product in which funds, time and resources were invested and no matter the level of achievements, after their sport career ends they are not able to transition back to society, business or education. This leaves



a scar in their emotional, social and financial condition which often leads them discouraged, depressed and unable to adapt to new conditions.

Current structure in Bulgaria:



Structure of the sport context in Bulgaria in the period 1950-1990 and 1990-2020 differed significantly. The first period had the characteristics of centralised planning and funding, government support for the achievements of results (as per the state agenda and expectations) and a massive grass-root sport development movement. State universities and umbrella organizations (such as Levski, CSKA, Neftochimik, etc.) provided the necessary conditions for sport experts and coaches to work and develop athletes. Centralised efforts of the state authorities eased the transition from being an athlete to being a sport expert/coach. A number of athletes and coaches were supported by being provided with a state regulated job and housing, which allowed them to focus on the sport field. Sport had a central place in the state political and social agenda and that allowed for a number of athletes and coaches to sustain a living, excel and develop the sport field.

Following the years of political change and social restructuring, a number of organizations, including the large umbrella clubs were disassembled, lost funding or couldn't operate because of lack of personnel. Only the most popular sports managed to survive the restructuring, solely due to popularity, external funding and possibility to operate and manage large sport facilities.

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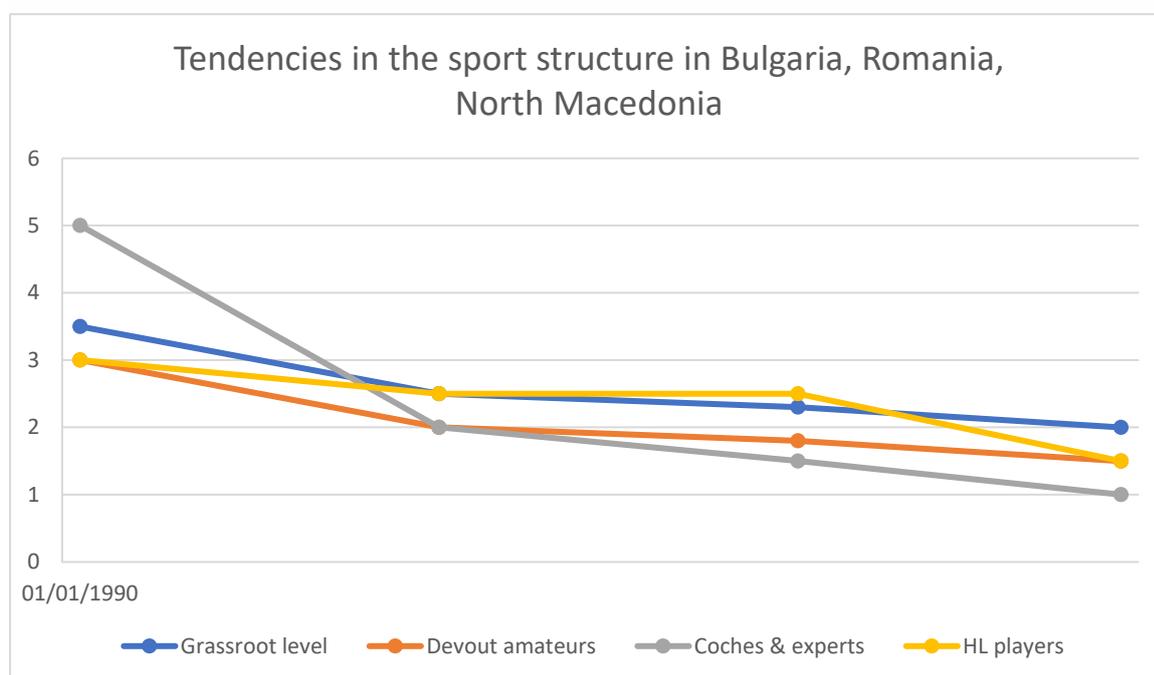
Grass-root sport development came to a halt and a large number of athletes, coaches and experts were left without a guaranteed salary, decreased attendance in sports clubs and had to survive in the years of financial uncertainty. This led to sport and social migration processes as the skilled experts and athletes relocated to other countries in order to continue their career. For a large number of athletes and experts change of career was the only possible option however, due to years invested solely in training and competing there were limited options.

Sport was no longer at the centre of the state social and political agenda and years were lost in the development and continuation of the grassroots sport movement. This led to a decline in the sport achievement sector and transfer of knowledge between generations.

Currently we see a slight increase in the level of grassroots sport development and sport attendance, however sustainable results are to be achieved and monitored. Out of the three project countries only Bulgaria has elite level achievements in the field of badminton with predominantly female athletes. Over the past years athletes have won European championships and 5th place at the Athens Olympic (2004).

Regarding the negative aspects of the current structure we can highlight a few:

- Often change and relocation of competitions due to administrative, technical and financial issues.
- Best athletes do not take part in the national team camps and they prepare individually, unfortunately knowledge transfer and expertise are not shared mutually
- Individual approach – each coach/athlete aims to secure conditions individually and that leads to poor synergy and cohesion
- Educational and training methodologies are outdated, created decades ago, not taking into account sport science development. Unfortunately there isn't a scientific approach to implementing new training curricula
- In the sport field only sport is a priority with no efforts put towards dual careers, transferability of skills and/or cohesion
- Young athletes often drop out of sport with no perspective and they choose another career, there is no link between generations
- Poor mass sport movement, there isn't an increase in the number of attendees' in the past decade



Current structure in Romania:

Regarding the structure in Romania it is to say that our research and analysis highlight a positive tendency in the sector. There is a similarity in the model of development in Romania, Bulgaria and North Macedonia in the past decades (1950-1990), as the three countries were developing under a strict and centralised planning. However, despite previous and past successes and achievements in terms of sport structure, education, expert personnel, the past three decades spanning from 1990 to present days have been marked by rapid restructuring, change in the model of planning and funding for sport organizations. As a result, a number of sport experts weren't able to continue working in the field, prominent athletes had to relocate or stop their sports career and grass-root sport development significantly slowed down.

However, out of the three project partners, sport context in Romania didn't come to a standstill and results were still observed. Smaller organizations continued to function under larger umbrella organizations and funding was still available. As a result, currently, Romania is able to further develop its youth and junior championships and in the past decade managed to prepare athletes, currently entering and scoring high in world rankings. Despite not having major successes in the field of badminton at the top men or women level, the next generations of skilled athletes are a positive result and achievements will follow.



Positive aspects in Romania can be highlighted in the aspect of:

- Good administrative organization on regional and national level
- High amateur and grass-root attendance
- Efforts are put on developing junior and youth athletes, which leads to international achievements
- Municipalities are supporting local clubs, as well as the state ministry

Current structure in North Macedonia:

North Macedonia, once part of former Yugoslavia, also had a centralised planning and state agenda regarding sports. Since Yugoslavia was a federative state, national-set agenda was in line with federative-state agenda, and also, sport was a national priority. Funding was distributed on a centralised manner and all federative states had national bodies (committees, agencies, etc.) to implement and supervise the process.

Following the disrupt in the political system ca. 1990-1992, Macedonia (now North Macedonia) has been steadily building up state and municipal bodies/agencies to implement sport and youth agenda. However, previously funding was received in a centralised manner and federal-level state agenda supported the development of sport, as prominent athletes were able to exchange knowledge, train and develop in various areas of the country.

Ministry of sport in North Macedonia is organised as the Agency for youth and sport, which has the following roles:

- Social development and social integration of the youth via qualitative formal and non-formal education;
- Economic prosperity of the youth via youth entrepreneurship;
- Improvement of quality of life;
- Active participation of the youth in the decision-making at both local and national level;
- National Youth Strategy;
- National Youth programmes;

Local authorities are responsible for:

- The development of mass sport and recreation activities for citizens, development of school sport system;
- The organisation of sports events, organisation of competition on local level for certain sports, support on traditional sport events, tournaments, etc.



- The building and maintenance of sport facilities and recreational zones; management of the sport facilities in the ownership of the Municipalities;
- Supporting local sport clubs and local sport associations;
- The adoption of Programmes for development, financing and organisation of sport on local level;
- Supporting youth information centres, and
- The adoption of the National Action Plan for implementation of the National Youth Strategy (Involvement of the Association of Local Communities in the process).

In the field of Badminton North Macedonia has to yet develop potential and achieve results. The following aspects are to be further developed:

- Mass attendance in grassroots sport
- Lack of proper training and educational methodologies
- Poor performance at international level
- Minimal funding from the State authorities
- Lack of training specialists, coaches and sport experts

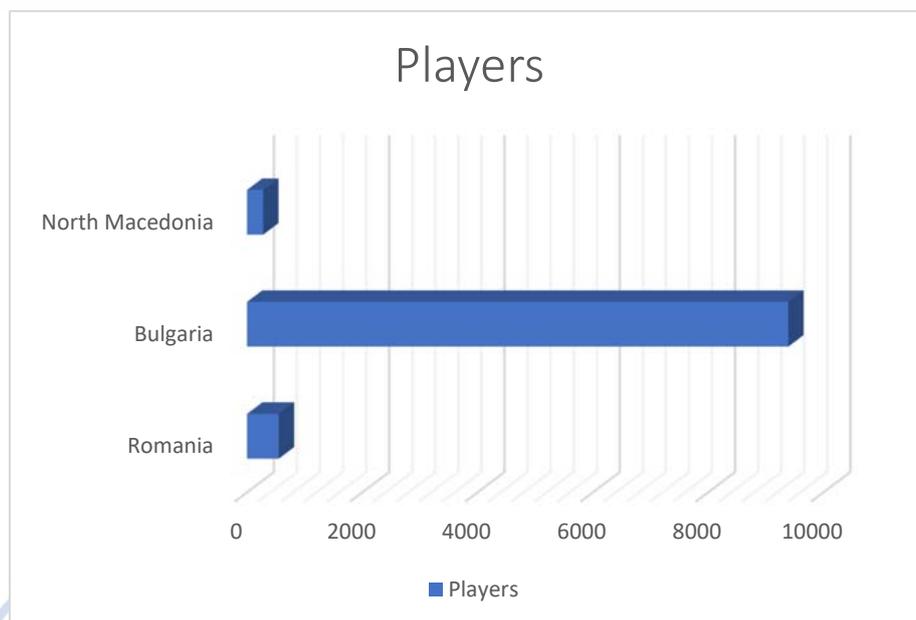
The abovementioned issues are relevant to almost all sport sectors in North Macedonia.

Comparison between number of registered players from official source :

<http://badmintoneurope.com/CMS/?cmsid=239&pageid=5717>

<http://badmintoneurope.com/CMS/?cmsid=239&pageid=5693>

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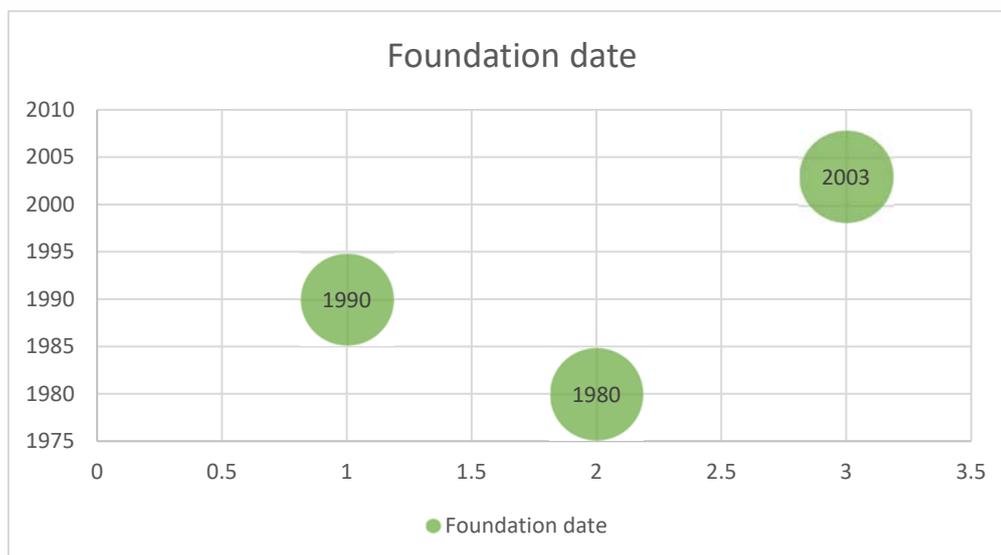


Comparison between number of registered clubs :

BULGARIA
MACEDONIA



Foundation date:



VI. Recommendations

With regard to the abovementioned analysis we are proposing the following set of recommendations.

1. Partner members should focus on exchanging expertise, transfer coaching knowledge and include members in order to gain educational and training experience
2. To support the efforts of developing the sport and youth context and reach EU average levels
3. To assist partners in developing potential of coaches, athletes and experts
4. Partnership should involve members with good and well-established good governance principles and practices in the form of seminars and educational events
5. Coaches should aim to include partners teams in order to implement and develop new methodologies on the basis of achievements in age groups
6. Administrative staff should aim to transfer knowledge and principles in the management of entities, including but not limited to structure, reach and financing
7. Engaging decision-makers should be initiated from entities and work groups with experts should be created as a source of recommendations to state actors
8. Annual reports on the cooperation should be drafted in order to monitor progress and highlight milestones



9. Funding options, including state and EU level should focus on contextual development in a transnational aspect.
10. Good practices relating youth, dual careers and transferability of skills should be compiled and implemented.
11. Networking among sponsors, media and stakeholders should focus on the transnational aspect and grass-root sport development, rather than the sport-competitive field solely.
12. Education in and through sport should be established in the style of system, methodology, given common specifics between members states.
13. Social and cultural values, relating to the sport and Olympic movement should be promoted in order to include youth and elderly people in the sport context.
14. Health-enhancing physical activity should be put in the federation and club agenda and activities should be intensified.
15. Anti-doping and rules violation should be tackled on grass-root level with emphasize on knowledge building, values promotion and understanding between stakeholders.
16. Match-fixing efforts should include transnational stakeholders on various levels.
17. Transparency of funding, national team selection and overall management should intensify and visibility of procedures should be implemented.
18. Media outreach and stakeholder's engagement should involve youth, parents, sport and social activities in order to increase chances for establishing grass-root sport as a tool.
19. Sport entities should engage other sectors (such as public and private) in order to increase transferability of skills, increase motivation of athletes and sport practitioners to remain in the sport.
20. Volunteering should be promoted with efforts put in creating a strategy in a transnational aspect with emphasize on the promotion of values and engaging stakeholders from different areas.
21. Entities should focus on the core values of sport and support the development of a sport context attractive to different stakeholders rather than focus on competition-award winning agenda.

After all, it is all about the game.

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