

*Increasing Education for Sustainable Practices to Improve
the Management Sports Organizations*

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The Barcelona Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The article aims to present results oriented towards increasing education for sustainable practices for improving the management of sports organizations. The results are aimed at implementing the lifelong learning program from the point of view of sustainability and increasing the development of sports organizations. Part of the results will highlight the benefits of the conference "Conference Sports Management in Central & Eastern Europe 2024". The meeting will focus on key aspects of strategic sports management in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The results are based on the research carried out in 2023 focused on the sustainability of sports organizations in Slovakia as part of the project solution, Sustainability Strategy of a Sports Organization in the Conditions of the Slovak Republic (2021-2024). The survey was used by 177 managers from sports organizations in Slovakia. The benefit of the article is the expansion of the portfolio of forms of training managers in sports organizations not only in Slovakia but also in the world. The article's authors want to participate in developing an interest in acquiring knowledge of sustainable procedures in connection with prevention and risk management in the management of sports organizations.

Keywords: Learning Program, Sports Organizations, Management Improvement, Prevention, Sustainability

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Introduction

The development of the sports industry is progressing at a tremendous pace. Nevertheless, owners and managers of sports organizations are constantly considering their current business models to be more sustainable and resilient in the diverse current environmental changes. Many global companies, institutions (e.g. Deloitte, 2024; PwC, 2024; Nielsen Sports, 2022), experts (e.g. Portus, 2021; Kees Mons, 2022), and scientists (e.g. Delarestaqi et al., 2024; Baker et al., 2022; Abeza, Sanderson, 2023; Westerbeek et al., 2022; Frevel et al., 2022; Varmus et al., 2022; Furiak, Buganová, 2023) examine the current state, future challenges, opportunities, and growth of the sports market to provide insights into how business in sports will evolve from a management perspective. The general conclusion from the survey data is highly positive and the sports industry is characterized by optimism. According to Deloitte (2024), and PwC (2024), this opinion is shared by several countries of the world, especially the countries of North America, and the Middle East, and several of them agreed that the demand for sports will continue to develop due to the main trends of the current time. Despite the positive trends, sports organizations face various problems, e.g. the changing roles of government, the public sector, the private sector, funding sources, policy development, infrastructure provision, sports governing bodies and federations, and ensuring the integrity of sports. From these stated requirements follows the need to train managers in sports organizations to set up sustainable processes for continuous management improvement (Sports Strategy 2030, 2021).

The article aims to present the results-oriented towards increasing education for sustainable practices for improving the management of sports organizations. The results are focused on implementing a lifelong learning program from the perspective of sustainability and increasing the development of sports organizations. The results highlight the benefits of the conference "Conference Sports Management in Central & Eastern Europe" held on April 22-24, 2024. The conference focused on key aspects of strategic sports management in Central and Eastern European countries. The conference aimed to increase awareness and education in the field of sports management as well as to develop cooperation between important institutions of the sports industry and universities.

To achieve the set aim, methods were used, e.g. analysis of relevant sources, studies, surveys, authors' own experiences, examination and assessment of current approaches, synthesis, modeling of the proposed educational program solution and discussion with experts from the sports industry and academia. The processed results are the output of solving partial tasks of the project implemented in Slovakia.

1. Results From the Assessment of the Education of Managers in Sports Organizations in Slovakia

The results are based on the research carried out in 2023 focused on the sustainability of sports organizations in Slovakia as part of the project solution, Sustainability Strategy of a Sports Organization in the Conditions of the Slovak Republic (2021-2024).

A questionnaire survey was carried out as part of the research, in which 177 managers from sports organizations in Slovakia participated. The questionnaire was created by a scientific team dealing with sports management at the Department of Management Theories and the Department of Crisis Management of the University of Žilina in Žilina, Slovakia. The

questionnaire addressed areas from the perspective of financial aspects of club functioning, stakeholders, risks, and their management in sports organizations in Slovakia.

The questionnaire was delivered to all Slovak registered sports clubs via email in Google Forms, with the help of the Slovak Tennis Association and the Slovak Olympic Committee. The population contains approximately 4.7 thousand entities. The target group was the sports managers of these clubs. The questionnaire survey was carried out from February 2024 to March 2024. The number of responses received was 177, which corresponds to a statistical error of 6.06% at a 90% confidence interval. The Cronbach's alpha test was used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire data, the values of which range between 0 and 1. The test result was 0.71, which means that the questionnaire data have high reliability (Boško, 2024).

The questionnaire survey yielded the following findings:

The respondents' highest level of education, Figure 1:

- 37.9 % secondary education,
- 37.9 % university education of the second degree,
- 11.9 % university education of the first degree,
- 11.9 % university education of the third degree,
- 0.5% basic education.

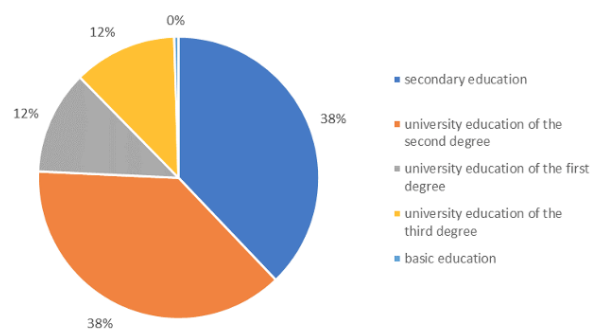


Figure 1: The Respondents' Highest Level of Education

Graduated study field in the field of economics and management of the respondents, Figure 2:

- 72.88 % have not completed a field of study within secondary and higher education,
- 24.86 % have completed a field of study within secondary and higher education,
- 2.26% have completed only basic education.

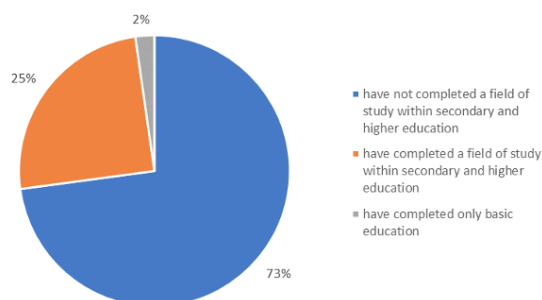


Figure 2: Graduated Study Field in the Field of Economics and Management of the Respondents

Graduated from any field of study at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports of the respondents, Figure 3:

- 85.88% have not completed a field of study,
- 14.12% have a completed field of study.

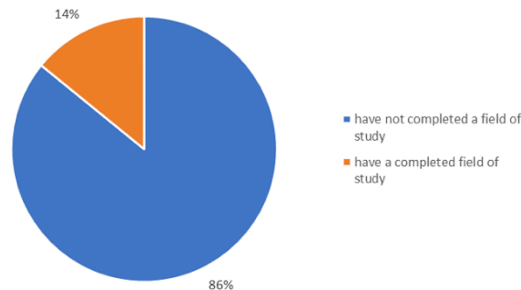


Figure 3: Graduated From Any Field of Study at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports the Respondents

The activity of the respondents in the current sports club, Figure 4:

- 74.01% have been working in a sports club for 10 years or more,
- 20.34% work in a sports club for 6-10 years,
- 5.65% work in a sports club for 1-5 years.

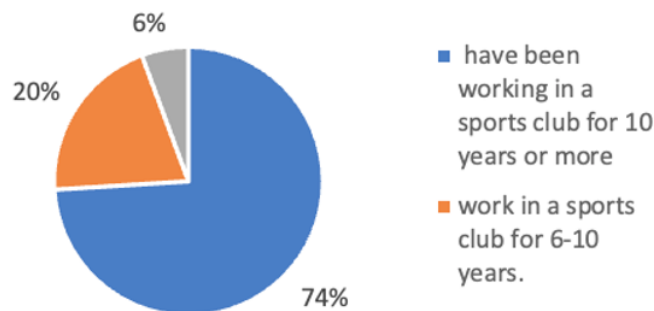


Figure 4: Activity of the Respondents in the Current Sports Club

The majority of respondents indicated that the roles of manager and coach are not differentiated in their sports club, approximately 59.32% of respondents. This can be explained by the fact that the sample is likely to be small and medium-sized sports clubs, where there may not be a sufficient budget available to pay a separate sports manager and sports coach.

The questionnaire survey reveals other important findings (Boško, 2024; Varmus et al., 2023):

- Sports managers perceive a strong influence of fans on the daily activities of the club. The influence is higher in the case of a football sports manager.
- Sports managers spend high financial expenses on club marketing, which may mean that sports managers have negative experiences with the concept or that these expenses are not used correctly.
- Sports managers attach greater importance to concepts related to members in higher age categories.

- Sports managers do not trust the media, they think that the media do not communicate objectively enough, or do not pay enough attention to their sport, therefore the likelihood of cooperation is reduced.
- Cooperation of a sports club with the media is significantly positively influenced by the amount of income of the sports club. The greater the income, the greater the likelihood of cooperation with the media.
- Sports managers consider athletes and the city/municipality to be the most important stakeholders. Fans, media, or the state are considered unimportant rather than important.
- Sports managers consider the factor of their assumptions to be the most important when deciding on the inclusion of an individual in the group of athletes of a given club.
- Sports managers have an age category of 60 and over.

2. Results From the Realized International Conference

On April 22-24. In 2024, the first year of the SMICEE – Sports Management in Central & Eastern Europe conference took place in Rajec Teplice (Slovakia). The conference was organized by the Department of Management Theories of FRI UNIZA in cooperation with the president of EASM (European Association for Sport Management). The meeting focused on key aspects of strategic sports management in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The conference brought an opportunity to connect research results from Slovakia and colleagues from other parts of Europe, for example: Brunel University London, Leipzig University, University of South-Eastern Norway, and the University of Haag-Helia.

The conference was opened by Assoc. Prof. Ing. Michal Varmus, PhD., presented the main results of more than a decade of research and educational efforts of the team from the Department of Management Theories in this area. Another enriching component was an interactive workshop on the topic of sustainability in sports led by Prof. Vassil Girginov. The connection with the practice of sports management in Slovakia was achieved through the participation of representatives of the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee and the largest Slovak sports associations (Slovak Football Association, Slovak Ice Hockey Association, Slovak Tennis Association), as well as other important sports organizations. The presented contributions focused on several aspects of sports management, including sustainability, gender equality, the use of ICT, financing, club development, and connections with the smart city concept. For the doctoral students present, it was a unique opportunity to discuss with experts from science and practice, but also to verify their scientific results (Conference SMICEE, 2024).



Figure 5: Participants of the SMICEE – Sports Management in Central & Eastern Europe Conference in Rajecke Teplice, Slovakia on April 22-24, 2024 (Conference SMICEE, 2024)

The whole event was marked by a pleasant and inspiring atmosphere, where participants shared their opinions and perspectives on the topic of sports management, Figure 5. Two social evenings provided an opportunity to establish relationships and future collaborations. The participants themselves expressed positive views during the conference regarding the entire process, as well as the benefits in the form of current research and practically oriented findings. The organizers plan to continue the tradition in the future and make the conference a regular event.

3. Design of the Lifelong Learning Program for Sports Managers

The proposed lifelong learning program is based on the results of scientific and research projects, as well as the results of various current trends, analyses, surveys, both from the perspective of sports management or education issues in Slovakia and around the world. First of all, the profile of a sports manager was defined in terms of his/her competencies, knowledge, skills, and their application in practice.

Profile: A sports manager should be a qualified expert in the field of procedural, material, and personnel management of sports entities. A sports manager should effectively plan and organize sports events at home and abroad, prepare and coordinate marketing and educational activities, develop strategies and projects, monitor and supervise the application of rules and regulations, participate in the management of technical and administrative personnel. A sports manager should ensure activities related to data collection, statistical processing, and administration of sports and economic documentation. He should be able to work in sports clubs, sports associations, regeneration and fitness centers, and other organizations in the field of sports (Sports Manager, 2024; MBA, 2024).

The created lifelong learning program is designed as a one-day workshop, implemented in cooperation between two faculties at the University of Žilina. The main parts of the lifelong learning program from a knowledge perspective include Figure 6:

1. Sports management and risk management.
2. Facility management and project management.
3. Financial management and business in sports.
4. Sports marketing and public relations.

5. Teamwork and sports ethics.
6. Legal aspects of sports.

The main parts of the lifelong learning program from a skills perspective include Figure 7:

1. Conceptual skills.
2. Technical skills.
3. Human skills.
4. Social skills.

The lifelong learning program offers sports managers a comprehensive overview of important information for increasing the sustainability and development of sports organizations.

The goal of the proposed learning program is to increase the qualifications of sports managers by increasing their knowledge base in the field of sports management and acquiring skills for their successful application.

The form of a learning program is implemented through presentations, case studies, interactive workshops, teamwork, etc. lasting one day and will provide ample opportunities to learn from the experience of qualified lecturers.



Figure 6: Design of the Lifelong Learning Program for Sports Managers
– The Main Parts of the Knowledge Perspective

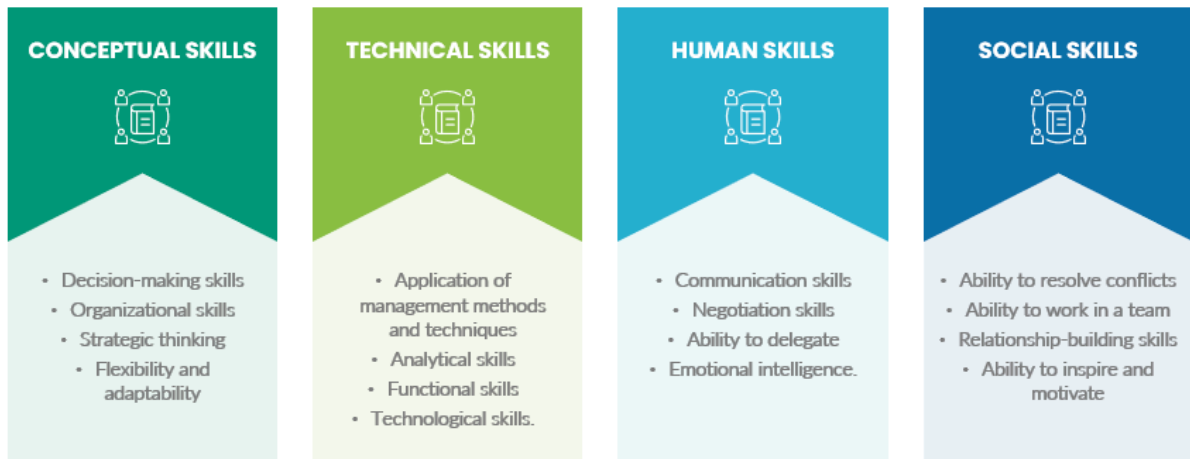


Figure 7: Design of the Lifelong Learning Program for Sports Managers
- The Main Parts of the Skills Perspective

Target group - The lifelong learning program is intended for middle and top managers of sports clubs, sports facilities, sports coaches, employees of non-profit organizations, civil servants, but also other experts whose working career is connected with sports. The education will be used by all applicants who wish to gain new knowledge, familiarize themselves with the latest innovations, and thus stay ahead of others.

The benefit of the program - Successful graduates of the learning program will gain a significant advantage over others. Graduates will expand their knowledge of the field of sports management and gain new impulses for business, as well as the opportunity to improve their management skills.

Conclusion

Sport is a global phenomenon today and sports management education plays a key role in implementing sustainable practices to improve the management of sports organizations. These practices enable organizations to respond more effectively to current challenges and trends in the sports industry. Managers need to understand the international environment, cultural differences, and different regulatory frameworks to be successful, attract audiences, and create international partnerships. Modern tools such as data analysis, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms are significantly changing the way sports clubs are managed. Managers need to know how to use these technologies to improve marketing and fan base. Educated sports managers can develop initiatives that support the sustainability of a sports club, and implement modern business models to maximize profits. With increasing competition between clubs, it is necessary to strategically build a brand, ensure a high level of talent management, and provide an unforgettable experience for fans. Managers must understand how to engage fans through social media, events, and experiences that go beyond the traditional confines of the stadium. Sports organizations have the opportunity to build strong ties with local communities, educational institutions, and partners. Educated managers understand the importance of such collaborations, which strengthen community responsibility and increase long-term support for the club.

The contribution of the paper is to expand the portfolio of forms of education for managers in sports organizations not only in Slovakia but also in the world. The authors of the paper want to contribute to raising awareness of the effective management of sports organizations and

their impact on society as a whole. They also want to participate in developing an interest in acquiring knowledge of sustainable practices in connection with the prevention and management of risks in the management of sports organizations.

Investing in the education of sports managers is a way to ensure that sports organizations will not only achieve sporting success but will also be socially responsible and long-term sustainable entities. Managers who understand the principles of sustainability can transform sports clubs into model organizations that inspire other sectors to similar initiatives. This significantly contributes not only to the development of sports but also to building a better future for society.

Acknowledgements

The paper was prepared with the support of the project APVV-20-0481 - Sustainability Strategy of a sport organization in the conditions of the Slovak Republic.

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