



Guidelines to improve cooperation between EU Sport Universities and Grassroots sport organizations in Europe





Contents

Introduction	3
Why cooperation?.....	5
Partnerships between sport clubs and local schools.....	7
Is grassroots sport ready for the future?.....	12
Conclusions and guidelines	14
References.....	17



Introduction

Replay 2.0 is an Erasmus+ Sport project (622356-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-SPO-SCP), that has the following partners: Associazione Sportiva Dilettantistica Margherita Sport e Vita Basket (MSV) – coordinator (Italy); GEA Coop Sociale (Italy); Big Bang Ballers (BBB) (France); Fare network (Fare) (Netherlands); Maieutica (University of Maia and Polytechnique Institute of Maia) (Portugal); University of Umea (Sweden), University of Belgared (Serbia); Unió de Federacions Esportives de Catalunya (Spain).

This project aims to promote a high-quality mentoring programme between sport universities students and young volunteer coaches of grassroots sport organizations that work with young people and children coming from disadvantaged and less active groups, enhancing their capacity to promote social inclusion through grassroots sport.

This main objective sums up 5 connected **Specific objectives**:

1. Strengthening high quality skills of young volunteer coaches of grassroots sports organizations to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities through sport for young people and children from disadvantaged groups;
2. Transfer the high-quality approach of dual career and the methodology of mentoring to increase capabilities of youth in sport education and engagement in promoting sport as a tool of social inclusion;
3. Increase capacity of grassroots sport to promote values, inclusion and engagement of young people and children from disadvantaged and less active groups, that otherwise would be excluded from the sport practice and opportunities of wellbeing and education through sport;
4. Promoting and encouraging a stronger European cooperation among grassroots sport organizations and sport universities to further enhance the role of sport and physical activity as a tool of inclusion and wellbeing for all kids and youngsters in Europe, whatever their social, cultural, physical background;
5. Enhance sustainability and further valorisation of effective Erasmus+ Sport actions and outputs, promoting innovative synergies and wider their impacts and transferability beyond



The main group target that the project will address is young volunteers' coaches (under 30) from grassroots sports clubs. Also, sport universities students will be involved acting as mentors for the main target group.



Why cooperation?

Each sport organization needs partners to be able to exist. It is no secret that is big competition between sport clubs and not only in same sport. On the other hand, all sport clubs and organizations have the same aim and it is to increase interest in sport.

Many sport clubs and associations fight with bad economic situation and as well with decrease of interest spectators, sponsors and mainly new young sportsmen who want to invest their time to active play some sport. Very often barrier to join young children to any sport club is money and will of their parents invest their money and time to sport. Sports association have been looking for any possibilities how to motivate young children to play some sport and then join them to their clubs.

Figure below shows that there are captured basic steps essential to create a cooperative organization. Organizations exist in a mutually competitive environment. If it has a problem in the environment essential nature, is a potential incentive for mutual cooperation. Mutual agreement directs towards cooperation. The common organization exists in a dynamic environment that makes change. Changes create a need for further negotiation (planning and decision-making). The result may be a continuation of the cooperation, the modification or termination and return to competitive relationship.

During creation is very important communication with stakeholders. There is needed to select correct segment and take utmost account of their specifications. It is obviously that social media are very popular nowadays, but people do not trust them very much. More important is directly contact with experienced people who had contact with the organizations. That can be very ease met through the internet forums. The other option is using videos that can bring closer the atmosphere of the organizations.

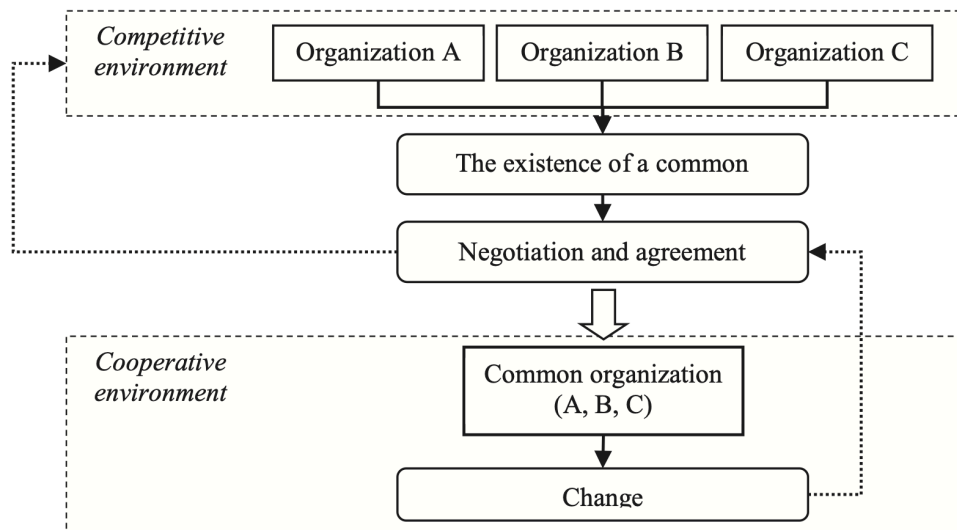


Fig. 1. The process of creating the cooperative organization according (Soviar and Lendel, 2013).

Some of challenges, what could be solved by creating common organizations, are identified in the “Commission's Communication Developing the European Dimension in Sport”:

1. Sport's health enhancing, social and educational functions:

- Health concerns due to a lack of physical activity
- Social exclusion of disadvantaged groups and unused potential of sport
- Inadequate systems to combine sport and education

2. Sustainable sport structures:

- Insufficient support for voluntary activity
- Current and future challenges to the sustainable funding of sport including regulatory changes in the gambling sector in Member States
- Inadequate protection of intellectual property rights

4. Doping as a threat to the physical and moral integrity of sports people

5. Discrimination in sport on the grounds of nationality

6. Unused scope for improving EU-level dialogue on sport

7. Perceived lack of legal clarity regarding the application of EU law to sport

8. Insufficient information on sport for Member States



Partnerships between sport clubs and local schools

There are several countries across Europe where the development of partnerships between sport clubs and schools has a strong historical record either since the 1920s after World War I or since the 1950s after World War II (de Knop et. al, 1996; Heinemann, 1999; Breuer et al., 2015). In former times, particularly between the 1960s and the 1980s, many physical education (PE) teachers also offered their expertise at sport clubs in training and coaching young people when there was a children and youth sport department established at the sport club. This has been one of the early bridges of school partnerships with sport clubs when also active and engaged pupils followed their PE teachers and became regular sport club members. After the velvet revolutions in Eastern European countries, new sport clubs were founded in the 1990s and became attractive with new kinds of physical activity and sports when at the same time former school-based PE became much dismantled in real school life in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (Földesi & Egressy, 2005; Novotny, 2015; Zysko, 2013). Often, PE courses at schools were transformed into extra-curricular activities. Pupils who wanted to attend these courses had to pay for them, but many parents did not have the money for it. However, this was only one special item of the so called “crisis of PE” at the end of the 1990s in Eastern Europe when this term was launched globally by Kenneth Hardman and Joe Marshall (2000) in their 1st. “World-Wide Survey of the State and Status of PE”. Particularly, in central, western and northern European countries, a decline of PE was visible in the last decade of the 20th century and later. It was linked with some items of new developments (Naul & te Uhle, 2001): educational de- centralization policy with increase of local school autonomy; flexibility in time tables for school subjects with reduced lessons plans for PE, state supported reduce and hidden curriculum time allocation for teaching PE, employment of more “generalist” teacher instead of “specialist” teachers in PE, new enrolment of sport club and community coaches and trained volunteers for extra-curricular offers at school, ignored re- construction of old PE facilities or budget cuts to facilitate, and, finally, the increased focus by parents and school principals on so called “core subjects” in schooling for academic marks. However, after the year 2000 the raising problem of physical inactivity and overweight of children and adolescents became evident combined with a more



sedentary lifestyle that was supported by new electronic media in many EU-countries (e.g., United Kingdom (UK), France, Italy, Greece, Spain, Germany). In this context of decline in quantitative and qualitative PE at school and emerging high prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents, some campaigns started in EU-countries like the UK, France, Denmark and the Netherlands (Bergsgrad et al., 2007; Ibsen et al, 2016) to foster school links to out-of-school partners in physical activity. Across Europe, one of the most prominent and ambivalently discussed national campaign was in the UK: the so-called “physical education school sport club link policy” (PESSCL) which started in 2002/2003 to enhance the participation of 5-16-year-old pupils into PE lessons from 25% up to 75% and 85% in 2008 as one of eight goals. In 2008, this strategy of linking schools and sport clubs was converted into the “physical education and school sport strategy for young people” (PESSYP) by the UK government. Beside many similarities between both strategies, handicapped pupils and young athletes were included in the PESSYP and PE, school sport and physical activities in extra-curricular time at sport clubs for 5- 16-year-old children and adolescents now should have increased up to five hours weekly. The pro and cons of school-sport club linked cooperations with schools to extend physical activity beyond PE was discussed ambivalently from the very beginning up today (Houlihan & Green, 2006; Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Phillpots, 2013; Phillpots & Grix, 2014). After the London Olympic Games, which served as a supportive background for this new strategy since 2008, further financial support declined and a roll-back started.

More orientation to school sports either as a curricular part of PE lessons or as an extra-curricular supplement of PE started in the early 2000s also in other EU-countries with school reforms of elementary schools (e.g., Germany with the introduction of the all-day-school; bredeschool in the Netherlands). A turning point on European level to re-shape the role of physical education was set up in 2004, the Year of Education through Sport (EYES). Beside many school-based and sport club projects in 24 EU member states (Janssens et al., 2004) the General Directorate of Education and Culture (EAC) of the EC launched a research review entitled “Study on young people’s lifestyle and sedentariness and the role of sport in the context of education and as a means of restoring the balance” (Brettschneider & Naul, 2004). The analysis whether PE will be able to support an active, healthy lifestyle to counteract



physical inactivity and obesity in the school context although losses of its status and lower acknowledgment as a school subject across Europe were present were discussed in detail (Brettschneider & Naul, 2004, pp. 141-160). Finally, the recommendation published that PE can only

counteract sedentariness and restore the balance by the idea of “initiating and progressively expecting new `networks` going beyond the institution `school` and incorporating the home, sport clubs, public health authorities and the social community at large” (Brettschneider & Naul, 2004, p. 156). This recommendation to establish a comprehensive network for PE with some other cross-sectoral stakeholders for physical activities in local (sport) communities was taken by the EAC for further EU-based policy activities in 2005 and onwards (Kornbeck, 2013, 2018). The cross-sectoral network idea to support PE at school was finally incorporated into the chapter of education of the “European Physical Activity Guidelines” (EC, 2008; Naul, 2018). Later, many other authors and institutions are recommending the school partnership model to improve items of PE through bi-lateral agreements (e.g., Hardman, 2007; van Acker et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2015; EU-Expert Group, 2015) with local sport organizations or even better and more effective on multi-lateral level with other partners representing more sectors (public health, welfare, social work) of a community (Ehlen, Dreiskämper, Utesch & Rehaag, 2018; Naul, 2012; Wang et al., 2013).

Currently, the idea to establish partner links between schools and sport organizations on local level becomes more and more relevant and is applied across EU- countries for various reasons: in Germany because of the introduction of the all-day- school with physical activity in afterschool programmes; in Hungary because of the target of five hours PE a week at school by the national education law, a capacity that is only realistic to achieve by offers of sport clubs and sport organizations; or the example of the Danish education law of 2014, which demands to offer a minimum of 45 minutes of physical activity per day at school, a goal that cannot be covered by regular PE teachers and regular PE lessons and needs support from sport club partners outside the school system. Therefore, the question how local sport clubs with their coaches and volunteers approach schools could help and be connected with local schools developing sound ties for partnerships and, more general, how physical activities at school in curricular or extra-curricular time could be supported and extended? Consequently,



the Erasmus+ “Active School Community” Project (2016-2017) sought to develop tools for guiding personnel of local sport organizations to build partnerships with schools.

The main purpose of the ASC project was to act as a starting point for more active school communities throughout Europe by strengthening the links between community sport organizations and local schools and to provide a low-cost solution to improve physical education and physical activity times in schools. New partnerships between stakeholders that already work separately at the community level are needed (and existing ones should be continued) to encourage children to move more (ASC, 2018) in order to develop motor competence (e.g., Bardid, Rudd, Lenoir, Polman, & Barnett, 2015) and, accordingly, positive, accurate physical self-concepts in order to be physically active and counteract overweight and obesity (e.g., Utesch, Dreiskämper, Naul, & Geukes, 2018). These positive aspects of active school communities can be summarized by the EU’s ambitions to counteract growing physical inactivity tendencies already in childhood, because already about 81% of the 11-17-year-olds fail to meet their physical activity recommendations (WHO, 2017). Therefore, it is important to promote collaborations between the field of education together with grassroots sport sectors and sport clubs. Thus, the aim of the project was to develop, to implement and to evaluate three parts of the so-called “ASC Toolkit” for local sport organizations. The aim was to prepare local sport organizations to approach partner schools with their youth coaches and volunteers in order to implement different sport offerings at school after mutual negotiations and agreements with school representatives. ASC Toolkit No. 1 is a “Self-Assessment Toolkit” for sport organizations to evaluate their possibilities and supply capacities for school offerings; Toolkit No. 2 is an “Action Planning Toolkit” to prepare sport offerings of local sport organizations in accordance with given school priorities in education and active school life in the school frame; Toolkit No. 3 is a “Sport Organization Toolkit”, a guideline (i.e., a step by step strategy) of single actions to initiate a sport project with special tasks and to plan adequate school offerings.

The three toolkits were developed by the Youth Sport Trust after a scientific literature review of comparable local community-based PE and sport projects, released by WGRI, and included a collection of best practice examples contributed by ISCA, WGRI and some other national partners of the project (ASC, 2018). The final versions of the Toolkits were implemented and

distributed to local sport organizations in mainly urban areas of small and big cities in Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, England and Scotland (UK) by national coordinators of the different national partner organizations involved in the ASC project. Between March 2017 and July 2017, sport courses were organized by youth sport coaches and volunteers of local sport organizations at their local partner schools according the toolkit guidelines and after negotiations with head teachers or school liaisons.

As a part of the Erasmus+ project, upon the completion of the school-based projects by sport organizations, the aim of the present study was to evaluate the processes and outcomes of the delivery and implementation of the ASC Toolkits in spring to summer 2017.



Is grassroots sport ready for the future?

“At a conference a few years ago, I heard a colleague describing organized sport, or more specifically the grassroots sports movement, as a dinosaur. Dinosaurs are no doubt big and interesting, but not very modern, creatures. Mainly young boys seem to be interested in them during a certain period in life. How could we then understand and develop the European grassroots sports movement in order to be up to date and relevant in the future?” – Karin Book, Malmö University

What challenges are grassroots sport facing today?

- There are extensive similarities, and only a few contextual/national differences between the sports and countries.
- Many of the challenges were discussed either based on the gap between the big, societal challenges and the practical, everyday reality of the sport federations and clubs, or based on the central/national strategies and visions versus the practical reality of the sport federations and clubs. Those gaps formed a common thread through the day.
- The role of the umbrella organizations to bridge the gap between the grand challenges and ambitions, and the strategies, implementations and operations in the grassroots sport clubs was emphasized.
- The fact that the grassroots sports movement is based on voluntary work was another theme that returned in the discussions during the whole day.
- Finally, a lack of readiness, and even resistance, to change in the grassroots sports organizations was expressed by numerous participants.

Based on prioritization, a list of “top challenges” could be established:

- Recruitment of leaders; competence development; the voluntary, non-profit structure of the movement.
- Information and knowledge about the (potential) members.
- Courage to change and develop; relevance.
- Visibility and communication.
- Modernization and digitalization.
- Facilities.



- Inclusion.

Obstacles standing in the way for tackling the challenges. These were the identified obstacles:

- Lack of time and competence (with a reference mainly to the voluntary structure of the sports movement).
- Lack of courage and resistance to change.
- Lack of trust.
- Lack of cooperation and exchange of knowledge between federation and club
- Lack of resources.

Obviously, sport organizations have several shortcomings in a world that requires adoptions, changes and creativity. Thankfully, they also have a number of strengths and opportunities.

Therefore, further are pointed out super powers of the sports movement:

- Opportunity to influence and reach out globally.
- The size of the movement.
- Sport as a unifying force.
- Pool of skills and experience.
- Opportunity to reach out to young people/leaders.
- Experience of innovative solutions from the pandemic.
- The solution!

So, there are strong powers to build and capitalize on. Used properly, sport was considered to have the advantage of being the solution to a lot of the grand challenges. That led us to the last theme of the day: to look ahead and think big. These are their visions and ideas on future grassroots sports:

- Inclusive, accessible sport for all.
- That sport is valued more and gets a clearer voice in, for example, planning.
- Sharing: that clubs and even federations can exchange experiences and share resources, such as administrative staff.



Conclusions and guidelines

1. For many clubs in different EU countries, collaboration is not a central part of their activities and goals. The extent of sports clubs' collaboration with municipal institutions depends primarily on two factors: the size of the club and its community orientation.
2. Two partner selection factors – shared vision and pre-existing relationships – are related to collaboration effectiveness.
3. Increasing cooperation and strengthening relationships between sport universities and sport clubs throughout Europe would create a mutually beneficial relationship, thus increasing resources for all those involved.
4. In order to achieve this, one possible step is to encourage the sharing of resources among the groups. These resources could include practice space, gyms, equipment, etc. For many people who participate in sports, there is a constant fight for more time and resources. If clubs and universities were able and willing to share these, it would improve their quality of practice immensely.
5. If clubs and universities shared time playing, by practicing with each other or playing practice matches, this would too be incredibly beneficial. Being able to play with and against a diverse population of people is valuable because it allows people to improve in such ways that they would not have had they repeatedly played the same people. If they also share other resources such as gyms, this would encourage them to spend more time together outside of playing which could improve personal relationships.
6. Strong interpersonal relationships both between teammates and in life in general have been found to improve quality of life and performance.
7. Stronger connections and more time spent playing with or against each other will also breed healthy rivalry between the two groups. This encourages all parties to work harder to improve in comparison to their rivals.
8. Another way to encourage cooperation between the two parties is to host events outside of their respective sports where all groups come together. These could be dinners, fundraisers, or even having them play a sport which is different than their



- usual. This will also help to create and improve interpersonal relationships thus increasing cooperation between the two groups.
9. There could be arranged events for sharing recent research and practical knowledge. For example, Sport universities can arrange a conference day where the latest research are presented for invited participants from grassroots sport clubs.
 10. Sport university students could be connected to grassroots sport organization when doing their practicum, in their own country or other European country.
 11. Grassroot sport club could actively contact sport universities to describe challenges encountered in sport clubs in which researcher or sport university education and students can be part of the solutions.
 12. There could be established legal agreements between Sport Universities and Grassroots sport organizations to promote exchange experiences and knowledge between sport students and those working in sport organizations.
 13. Jointly promotion of open training courses for volunteer coaches increase their specific skills in the training area and encourage them to take higher education courses in sports training.
 14. Jointly promotion of sport workshops, seminars and round tables allow discussion and share of experiences and new ideas with the attendance of athletes, students, coaches, and researchers.
 15. The University of Padua, one of the oldest universities in Italy, has been promoting the Mentor Up project for the past 3 years, which supports university students as well as minors in compulsory education who are having difficulties in proceeding with their school/university career. Therefore, the University of Padua could promote sports Mentor Up, thus assigning students from the Department of Psychology, Pedagogy and Sociology to grassroots sports clubs.
 16. Universities could allocate small grants for grassroots clubs that implement good practices and are committed to social values in addition to sports results.
 17. Universities could also promote interchange trips to European countries for mentors who support sports clubs in Padua and make them travel to other sports clubs as internship/stage experiences.



18. Universities could award scholarships for research in the field of sport with a focus on psychology, pedagogy and sociology.
19. Some courses (psychology, sociology, sports science, education) might invite representatives of local sports clubs to conduct sessions but also present their club's best practices in class, like a university lecture



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