

ASPECTS REGARDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF SPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Sorin BUHAȘ^{12*}

¹University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sports

²Research Centre on Human Performance, University of Oradea e-mail: sorin.buhas@gmail.com

Paul Florian DRAGOȘ¹²

¹University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sports

²Research Centre on Human Performance, University of Oradea e-mail: dpaul@uoradea.ro

Abstract: This study addresses sport in higher education in relation to its organization structure, quality and sports performance. We have studied documents, normative acts and the way in which certain decisional factors involved in higher education sports activities are organized. The lack of a concrete strategy in this respect, renders the information sources to be relatively limited. Particularly, our research was based on scientific documentation, historical method and document analysis. There is a small number of legitimated athletes related to the number of higher education students. Higher education sport is a non-functional system, it cannot generate a representative number of participants in the National University Championships, and the international representation is not a natural consequence of the internal competition. Therefore, it is imperative for higher education sports to be the foundation of performance sports. This involves changing both the approach to this phenomenon and its organizational structure. Also, the development of human resources and sports infrastructure are essential conditions for the development of sports activity.

Key words: team sport, higher education, athletic coach, sports activity, organizational structure, performance in sports

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INTRODUCTION

Sport includes a diversity of physical activities that, unconditioned by the form of organization, aim mainly to improve the physical and mental condition of those who practice them, to initiate and develop social relationships or to achieve performances in competitions at all levels (Gonçalves, Figueiredo, Rama, & Carvalho, 2013). As part of this approach, in the E.U., sport is viewed as a major component of the educational approach at all levels, including within higher education.

More and more, sport represents a social and economic phenomenon in full ascension, with a high contribution to the achievement and implementation of the European Union's strategic objectives regarding solidarity and prosperity (Buhaș, 2015). There are a number of new concepts generated by higher education, such as sports culture or sports space (Ilieș, Dumitrescu, Dragoș, &

* Corresponding Author

Buhaş, 2014). These concepts have been certified in the literature based on various research results (Bale, 1994; Maguire, 1995; Bale, & Vertinsky, 2004). The Olympic ideal of promoting sport in order to bond nations and cultures, and to promote and educate young people has materialized in Europe and has been supported by The International Olympic Committee and by The European Olympic Forum (Commission of the European Communities, 2007).

In this context, Romania has joined the European legislation on physical education and sport, compelling itself to organize and finance this system. The political measures in this direction (through legislative alignment with the European system) and increased European cooperation on sport require a broad support with a solid knowledge foundation. The quality, relevance and comparability of data need to be constantly improved in order to allow an appropriate strategic planning for taking concrete decisions in the sports field (Kozma, 2014).

Sport is an integral part of Romania's social, cultural and economic reality and also a factor for the consolidation of its image and international relations. The Romanian state must assume the mission of supporting and developing the National Physical Education and Sports System, and also, implicitly, of sport in higher education.

Sport is an attractive field for people and benefits from a positive image. However, the well-known capacity of the sports phenomenon to support physical activities in order to improve health (Lucaciu, David, Lucaciu, & Pop, 2014) is not fully used and needs to be permanently developed. The European Commission recommends the promotion of reinforced cooperation between the health, education and sports sectors in the ministries structures dealing with sport, in order to implement concrete health care strategies. In this situation, the EU recommends that Member States should know very well how to promote the idea of active life through national education and training systems, including through teacher training mechanisms. Sports organizations, including those from higher education, are encouraged to know and develop their own physical activity promotion system. Some universities have resorted to this by setting up their own clubs or sports associations (Dumitrescu, 2015). In this sense, the facilitation of information and good practice exchange is recommended and encouraged.

The result of some refractory policies, the lack of medium and long-term strategies in the field of sports (Buhaş, 2015) can directly affect the general health of the population, diminish the interest of practicing sport, and generate weak sports results at national and international level. .

In Romania, physical education is a discipline that has 2 hours allocated in the curriculum at gymnasium level, and only 1 hour at high school level. The low number of hours assigned to this discipline leads to irreversible effects among the population. The main objective of this activity (physical activity and movement education?) cannot be achieved in such a small amount of weekly hours. A superficial approach to this discipline leads to health deterioration among young people (Cristea, 2015). When higher education is considered, the picture is better but not significantly better. The structure of physical education and sport within higher education curriculum includes:

- Lesson of practical sports training: 2 hours per week
- Lesson of sports training: 1-3 training sessions per week
- Lesson of medical physical culture: 1-2 hours per week
- Internal sports competitions.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SPORTS ACTIVITY IN ROMANIA

Within the Romanian Ministry of National Education (MEN) sports activity is coordinated by the General Directorate for Pre-University Education, although it is the attribute of the Federation of School and University Sports. This Federation has a minor role in the financing and coordination of sports in higher education institutions. Organizational deficiencies cause a reduction in the number of pupils and students practicing a certain type of sports. Overall, sport in

higher education institutions is a non-functional system, gathering very few participants for the National University Championships. Sports clubs from higher education are mainly active in the championships organized by specialized Federations. There are no regular National University Championships and those that exist, are being sporadically organized, in numerically reduced disciplines, and exclusively based on universities' own option to participate. In 2016, the Federation of School and University Sports organized National Championships for 20 sports disciplines. These took place in only 10 university centers. From a total of 100 public and private universities, with or without accreditation (The Ministry of National Education, 2017), an average of only 20 universities participated in these events. In what regards sports games, the participation was extremely low, with about 5 universities participating (The Ministry of National Education, 2017). This low participation is surprising as team sports are known to contribute to the establishment and development of cooperative relationships (Orlick, 2008), a key objective for social and vocational cohesion.

Therefore, performance sport, both in the university and pre-university level, is an activity with many unknown organizational components. Unfortunately, the result of these problems is obvious and sad: a very small number of legitimated athletes take part related to the total number of pupils and students (Ilieș, Deac, Wendt, & Bulz, 2015).

The administrative disorganization is also reflected by the institutional organizational instability. Over time, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MTS) went through a series of changes, returning, at the end, to the title of Ministry. The tendency to define it as a simple department emphasizes the minimal "importance" attributed to the sport phenomenon, 'lumping' sport with the much larger remit of Youth. This could reflect a lack of interest and capacity by the political factor, as well as the lack of vision regarding this important aspect. At the level of the Ministry of Youth and Sports there are 74 funded Sports Federations (the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2017). Their poor collaboration with The Romanian Olympic and Sport Committee and the Federation of School and University Sports denotes the lack of organization and the disorientation of the sports structures at national level.

According to the Auditor's Report on Sportive Performance (Romanian Court of Accounts, 2014) there were reported to be 417 sports structures in Romania that existed as legal entities of public law, out of which 276 subordinated to the central public administration, as follows:

- 48 sports structures under the Ministry of Youth and Sports
- 220 sports structures under the Ministry of National Education (70 sports school clubs, 89 high schools with sports profile, 35 children's palaces, 29 higher education sports clubs)
- 8 sports structures under the subordination of other ministries

Table 1. The structure of the number of sports sections and sports officials

(Source: Annual report of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2016 (*percent of the total population))

Year	Sports sections	Legitimated athletes	Coach	Trainers	Referees
2012	7919	246033 *1.29%	6822	6398	10878
2014	7314	243375 *1.28%	6861	5055	8852

There is an extremely small number of legitimated athletes. It can only be the result of an inappropriate organizational structure. As a result, this inefficient system finds impossible to gather a wide mass of potential sports practitioners, resulting an inefficient expenditure of its own budgets. There is a decrease in the number of legitimated athletes from year to year, the real value

being less than 1.28% legitimated athletes from the total population. This percentage is also caused by the growing number of foreign athletes active in Romanian championships, especially in team sports. These aspects cause a deterioration of the population health state, leading to higher mortality rates. As a consequence, budgets for medical treatments are increasing, while budgets for health maintenance tend to decrease. The decrease in the number of legitimated athletes and also of young sports practitioners is also caused both by the poor quality of sports arenas and by the lack of sports show in these arenas. There are no more role-models for young people to follow. Also, the related services are quantitatively and qualitatively limited and the sport industry in Romania is almost non-existent.

To illustrate the discrepancy between the number of legitimated athletes and the sports activities in which they operate, we have presented some significant values from some sports Federations in the table below. These were chosen due to their impact and importance in Romania. It can be noticed that football is different from other sports. Thus, half of the total number of legitimated athletes (about 120 000) is represented by football players. In countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and England amongst others, the number of legitimated football players exceeds several millions. European Union countries have a different approach in this sense: 40% of the active population is practicing sport, and an average of 25% is represented by legitimated athletes. It is not accidental that the budget allocated to sport by these countries is impressive, as well as the contribution to GDP (in Germany 17% of GDP is generated by the sports industry). Through its visibility and number of practitioners, football has become an important factor for increasing social cohesion and inter-human relations (Scutti, & Wendt, 2016).

Table 2. The structure of the number of sports sections and sports officials within main Sports Federations

(Source: Annual report of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2016)

Federation	Year	Sports sections	Legitimated athletes	Coach	Trainers	Referees
Athletics	2012	252	7459	601	19	336
	2014	237	10135	601	19	336
Basket-ball	2012	243	17169	595	-	172
	2014	268	20170	504	-	144
Gymnastics	2012	45	985	165	4	67
	2014	39	1248	177	3	69
Handball	2012	227	10525	476	-	559
	2014	231	11514	481	-	601
Football	2012	3078	120520	1918	2715	5735
	2014	2535	117328	2277	1427	4419
Rugby	2012	93	4504	46	2	59
	2014	118	4879	200	-	96

The reduced number of legitimated athletes may be caused by a number of factors, among which we mention:

- lack of educational programs aiming to promote sport
- lack of sports infrastructure and its deplorable condition
- insufficient school hours allocated for physical education
- lack of sport management structures (sports associations)
- the teacher training system (coaches, instructors) is difficult and obsolete
- insufficient financing of sports activities

These factors, as well as multiple and major problems of pre-university and university sport, require an appropriate medium and long-term strategy, implemented with specialists able to radically change the approach to sport.

In 2004, the representatives of ministers from European Union countries, with responsibilities in the field of sport, adopted a chart of discussions that outlined the main themes of approaching sport within the Union. These themes are an integral part of the White Paper on Sport (Commission of the European Communities, 2007) and they should have been priorities for the specialized Committees of the Romanian Parliament. This should have resulted in the adoption of normative acts based on which sports activity can be harmonized with that of European partner countries. The European Union recommends and establishes through the European Commission White Paper on Sport collaboration between Member States, and settles also that this cooperation should take place in informal ministerial meetings, as well as in administrative meetings with executives responsible for sport.

Unfortunately, in Romania this area is treated also with indifference. The Romanian Parliament, as the specific structure empowered to issue laws, has delayed the correlation between its national legislation and the European one.

A particular importance is given to the "European sports model" by the countries with real interest in this area. Therefore, due to the fact that some sporting values and traditions generate the right and obligation to be promoted, based on the diversity and complexity of sports structures in Romania we consider that is both important and necessary to determine and present a sustainable and long-term system of sports organization. The objective of creating such a system is to highlight the organizational framework based on a common set of rules and principles that implies a good management of sports activity.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Romanian national system of physical education and sports presents an insufficient and inadequate infrastructure that does not properly reflect the needs of sports activity. It is mostly out of function because 75% of the infrastructure is at the level of the 1980s. The Government did not consider important to invest in sports infrastructure. The infrastructure is inadequate and of poor quality. Poor results in Romanian sports emerge first of all from the precarious quality and the lack of sports bases. The legislative void and governments' (both local and national) disinterest has led to real estate businesses demolishing many sports bases in order to build residential areas. Notwithstanding this reduction in sporting facilities, those sports bases that have resisted over time are below the accepted level compared to the conditions offered to athletes in other areas of European society. This has been noted at national level as a problem: "The Ministry of Youth and Sports did not compile a Sports Base Register and did not pay sufficient attention to the certification of sports bases and their registration in the Register of Certified Sports Bases" (The Romanian Court of Accounts, 2014, p. 92). However, the sport phenomenon in higher education institutions is growing, but is restricted by the poor quality of the infrastructure and the small number of sports facilities.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The sports system in Romania is conditioned by the status and quality of the physical education teacher, coach and sports instructor. Low wages, poor equipment and the lack of perspective results in less and less youngsters opting for these professions. The conditionality of the curriculum generates blase teachers, with no initiative and implicitly a dysfunctional system.

Legislation

In the Romanian sports system, the legislation is extremely obtuse and simplistic and, as a result, it does not have the capacity to regulate this activity properly. Among the legislative gaps, we mention:

- Unregulated funding and below the required level
- Lack of regulations regarding the public-private partnership in sport
- Assimilation of sports service contract with the employment contract
- The existence of a balanced sponsorship law
- Directing reasonable amounts of money from the Romanian Lottery to sport
- A clear table with sports bases listed in a unique register.

OBSTACLES IN THE EVOLUTION

In the higher education system, as elsewhere, movement and sports promotion campaigns as a means of education are almost non-existent. The Romanian education system is deficient in promoting sport and physical education as part of the general education. In a system where sports practitioner`s motivation is almost non-existent, the promotion of physical activity as a way of life is limited. Information campaigns on the negative consequences of the lack of exercise and movement in daily activity are lacking. These gaps can have negative consequences on the population health state (Sopa, & Pomohaci, 2016).

In terms of funding, compared to other EU countries, Romania has one of the lowest financial allocations for sport. This also has an impact on sports activity at higher education level. But other factors that have led to a reluctance of the population regarding practicing sports activities can also be identified. For example, the limited budget allocated for sport and the recent economic crisis have reduced the financial possibilities of those who would like to practice sport (The National Council for Higher Education Financing, 2015).

Another cause is generated by the way funding is deducted and allocated in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Eurostat, 2016). Between 2000 – 2015 Romania`s GDP had an upward trend (with some fluctuations during the economic crisis). In 2000 it was about 100 billion euros, reaching 20 billion euros in 2015. We can deduce that in Romania there has been a continuous increase in revenues and incomes during this period. Unfortunately, investments in sports infrastructure have been extremely rare. This constant increase is not reflected in the funds allocated to sports, either. In 2015 the budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sport was of 82 250 112 million Euros, representing 0.052% of GDP (the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2016). Besides, to highlight the strategical lack, the Court of Auditors' Report in 2013 emphasized that the Ministry of Youth and Sports budgets were elaborated regardless of sports concrete financial needs. With the 0.052% of GDP allocated to sports in 2015, Romania has an average allocation of 0.87 euro/capita. In other European countries the budgetary allocations for the same activity range from 27 to 67 euro per capita (Andreff & Szymanski, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Physical education and sport are an integrated component of a balanced curriculum; there is a relationship of interdependence between sports and academic performances. Sport represents both formal and non-formal education and it generates and disseminates recognized social values, leading to motivation and knowledge development which is the preparation basis for the individual effort. Positive health and education are the consequences of systematically practiced sports activities, both at pre-university and university level. As such, it is felt that they must be developed and strengthened.

Through their social character, physical education and sport provide behavioural patterns that can be applied also to everyday life. They can be used as highly effective means to increase schools and universities` attractiveness and to reduce the risk of school dropout.

In order to have a good organization and overview of sports activities at higher education level, they must be institutionally developed through University Sports Associations, partnerships with the County Sports Associations, the National Sports Federations, the Romanian Olympic and Sport Committee and with the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Local and governmental authorities, through the commitments made at the European Union level, are compelled to sustain the participation in international competitions, organized by the International School Sport Federation (ISF), the European University Sports Association (EUSA) and the International University Sports Federation (FISU).

The existence of above mentioned international sports organizations facilitates the affiliation of national sports structures and establishes a structural link in order to develop joint sports practices and culture. International cooperation is the fundamental mean for developing common practices on physical education and sport in European countries. A result of these collaborations is represented by the EU White Paper on Sport, which provides guidelines for the European Commission`s activities in this field.

Sport shows once again that it has a remarkable potential in promoting and supporting education, both in the academic environment and in peoples` everyday activities.

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