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Re(IN)novating Marketing Strategy Across Semi-professional
Female Teams

**Report on the up-skill needs of semi-professional
female team managers in the field of Sport
Management**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
1. INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 NATIONAL SPORTS SYSTEMS AND ITS MAIN CHARACTERISTICS.	7
1.2 SPORTS MARKETING: STRATEGIES AND CONTEXTUALIZATION.	26
1.3 OBJECTIVES RINMSASFT:.....	60
2. METHOD.....	61
3. RESULTS	70
4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	129
5. REFERENCES	133
6. APPENDICES	141



ABSTRACT

Re(IN)novating Marketing Strategy Across Semi-professional Female Teams” (RINMSASFT) aims at strengthening competences of managers of semi-professional female sport teams through an up-skill process related to marketing, communication and visibility strategies. The project pursues the specific Erasmus Plus Collaborative Partnership priority related to promote and support good governance in sport with a specific focus on the major priority to foster and enhance gender equality in sport. RINMSASFT aim at tackling the challenge related to the well-known existing sponsorship and funding disparities between male and female sport teams at semi-professional level.

This paper presents Cross-country combined Research aimed at identifying the up-skill needs of semi-professional female team managers in the field of Sport Management, mapping sectoral stakeholders such as female sport clubs, national female sport federations and identified sport sponsors and existent best practices of marketing, communication and visibility strategies. Cross-country research for the identification of the existing landscape of professional profiles of Marketing Managers in the field of Sport with results from Spain, Italy, Germany, Bulgaria and Croatia. The results of the research will be submitted to a pondered assessment over the potential integration, improvements and modification to the skills, knowledge and methods in light of the peculiarities and needs of the female target teams.

Keywords: Female, management, sport, marketing.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 NATIONAL SPORTS SYSTEMS AND ITS MAIN CHARACTERISTICS.

The aim of this section is to provide an introduction to the current sports systems in the participant countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Germany and Spain) and their main characteristics.

Bulgaria

The sport sector in the Republic of Bulgaria is governed by the Ministry of Youth and Sport. There are no other organisations that would encompass the whole breath of the sector. The Bulgarian Olympic Committee however has significant influence over the high-performance sport. Main duties of the sports minister are the implementation of the government policy, development of the National Strategy for Development of the Physical Activity, Physical Education, Sport, and Sport-Tourism Activities, the respective Programme of that strategy, as well as the means to promote the priority sport activities. The structure of the ministry is divided to General Administration and Special Administration. The former includes directorates for finances, legal and administrative functions, PR and protocol. The latter includes the directorates for investments and public tenders, sport for all and student sport, high performance sport, coordination of sport preparation, youth activities, etc. The functions of the Ministry are to observe the activities of the sport organizations and their adherence to the Law for Physical Education and Sport that has been passed by the National Assembly. It issues licenses to the national sport governing bodies, and provides finances for federations and clubs. Together with the Bulgarian Olympic Committee and the National Federations it finances the preparation of the Bulgarian athletes to the Olympics. These finances are provided through the programs “Development of high-performance sport”, “Olympic preparation” and “Development of sport clubs”. The ministry provides a number of programmes that are open for project proposals by schools, sport clubs, federations and other organisations, for targeted financing, such as “Development of School for Students”, “Sport for Children in Risk”, “Learn to swim”, “Children and the sport club”,



“Development of sport for people with disabilities”, “Development of sport for all”, “Sport for children in the free time”.

In Bulgaria, as already mentioned, main legal framework for the functioning of the sport organizations is the Law for Physical Education and Sport and the corresponding Regulation for Application of the Law for Physical Education and Sport. It provides specific information on the types of sport organizations, their structure, functions and duties. It also deals with sport facilities and provides framework for the operation of publicly owned facilities by the sport organizations, as well as facilities build by other organizations on publicly owned land. Chapter six provides the framework for implementation of the High-Performance Sport Policy, including regulation on athletes – amateur and professional, by delegating to the respective national federation the development of criteria for the athlete’s statute. Similarly, the training, licensing and qualification of sport officials are also duty of the respective federation. Chapter nine of the Law deals with the Sport-Pedagogy Human Resources, where it is established that the coaches and sport-pedagogy specialists that have completed a major in the field of “Sport” or “Physical Education”, or have been qualified in the professional field of “Sport”. All such specialists have to be registered in the National Register of Sport-Pedagogy Specialists and are the only people that can be hired as coaches or provide sport services. Further regulation on the requirements for achieving coach qualification is provided by the Regulation 1/04.02.2019 of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. It regulates the occupations of “instructor”, “assistant coach”, “coach”, “senior coach”, and “head coach”. The requirements for the first two are high-school and additional professional training, while for the latter three occupations – University bachelor degree and experience requirements for senior and head coach. However, there is a possibility for alternative methods of qualification, as provided in article 11 of the regulation, stating that achieving internationally recognized qualification in the respective sport, which has been established by an international sport organization and is being used in at least 5 other countries, together with certain experience as an athlete, instructor or coach, can allow the individual to be listed in the national register of coaches. The National Classification of the Professions and Activities provides more detailed



information on the types of recognized professions and their required educational level. Besides the aforementioned, other important laws that have impact on the sport sector are the Law of Nonprofit Entities, as the law that most of the sport organizations operate; the Commercial Law for the private sport sector organizations, the Labour Code which regulates the interactions between employers and employees.

When it comes to the organisation of the sports sector in Bulgaria, it consists of three main groups of organizations: government organizations and institutions; public non-profit organizations; private commercial organizations. There are some organizations, that are considered special statute organizations because of their important role in the sector, but generally they will be registered as non-profit. On national level the government organizations include the aforementioned Ministry of Youth and Sport. Its role and activities have been examined. Other national government organizations that are dealing with the sport sector in the executive power are several other ministries, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defence, which are responsible for the applied sport preparation of police, military and firemen. They also provide support for sport participation and competitions for people, that are part of these professions. Same goes for the Ministry of Labour and the workforce sports. In the legislative power structures, there is a parliamentary commission that deals with the sport sector, together with the children and youth matters. It consists of 19 members of the parliament. Its responsibilities ESSA-Sport National Report – Bulgaria 15 are to review and suggest changes to the law of physical education and sport in order to provide clearer and more structured framework of interaction between the entities. There is no special body for dealing with sport matters in the judiciary system. There is a Bulgarian Arbitrary Court in Sports, but it is part of the structure of the Bulgarian Olympic Committee. On local level the municipalities will develop sport according to the decisions of their councils and will manage and support local clubs, sport facilities and activities for the local population. These will be implemented by their own directorate dealing with sport. Big municipalities will have more focused directorates, usually paired with tourism, integration and youth. Smaller could have just one expert



dealing with the matter. The municipalities are providing support for local non-profit clubs, as well as managing local sport facilities. Most of the organized sports is dominated by the non-profit organizations. There are currently around 5200 non-profit sport clubs, members of one of the over 100 federations in different sports, which are also registered as non-profit public bodies. Non-profit bodies require at least three members, that would govern the organization, but for the most part sports clubs in organized sport are registered as public benefit nonprofits, that require at least 7 founding members in terms of natural persons. For the most part clubs are the sport providers both for elite athletes and amateurs, and there is a tendency to shift towards youth sport and sport for children, as it provides easier access to funding from training fees, as opposed to the limited and burdened with administration public funding through the ministry and the federations. For a federation to be licensed and be eligible for public funding, it has to have at least 7 sport club members in at least 3 of the administrative provinces of the country. It also needs to be a member of the international federation, among other administration requirements. Federations are responsible mainly for administration of the registered athletes, event organization, facilities management, technical officials training and support, etc. The private sector is the hardest to be analysed. There is no official information on total number of commercial fitness clubs and sport centres. Through contacting different suppliers of nutritional products and fitness equipment we estimated a minimum amount of about 600 commercial fitness centres and clubs. This number could double if we include grey sector and other sport providers, that are registered as other business types, such as tourism and accommodation providers, that would sometimes include sport services as a secondary product. Most of those would be concentrated in the biggest cities and tourism centres of the country. There is no statistical data on registered fitness and sport club members.

About funding in Bulgaria, the main source of finances for the high-performance sport and sport for all comes from the National Budget and is distributed through the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The budget of the Ministry for 2018 has been 75 732 000 BGN (38,69 million EUR) and is largely provided by the income of the Bulgarian Sport Totalizator, which is the state-owned lottery operator. The high-



performance sport has been awarded the largest amount – 67% of the whole budget. The school sport and sport for all has been funded with 22% of the budget, or 8 361 667 EUR. There were only 1 682 048 EUR for Sport Facilities. However, these would be aimed mainly on facilities that are National government property. For many public sport organizations and facilities, the local governments are the other main source of finances. Every municipality has their own budget for development of sport and supporting the facilities, which are municipality property. However, the amounts, percentages and structure of spending are different as they are decided by the local councils. The other sources of sport funding are regulated in the Law of Physical Education and Sport, as well as listed in the Strategy. They include funds from proprietary activities, such as participation in events, transfer of athletes, provision of sport services, etc., as well as funding through the private sector by sponsorship, advertising rights, etc.

The current National Strategy for Development of the Physical Education and Sport in the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2022 has been adopted by the National Assembly in November 2011. Main strategic aim of the document is the establishment of the physical education, sport, and social tourism as means to improve the health and physical abilities of the population, maximum involvement of the population in organised sport for all from different social groups, as well as elevating the sport prestige of the nation on global level. The strategy envisions two sub-aims: modernization of the sport infrastructure and improvement of the National System for Physical Education and Sport. In terms of Finances, the strategy envisions by 2022 the sport to be 0,5% of the GDP. Together with the strategy, at the moment there is an active National Programme for Development of the Physical Education and Sport 2018-2020. Its vision is to establish and develop a functioning system for Physical Education and Sport in the Republic of Bulgaria in order to promote the physical activity and sport participation, as well as sport tourism, of the public as a factor of achieving a significant social effect, and in the meantime support the development of the high-performance sport and elevating the sport prestige of the nation.

The operational goals of the program are:



- Development of the youth sport, and physical activity and sport in the preschool, secondary and higher education system;
- Establishment of the Secondary Sport Schools as institutions for preparation of high-performance sport reserve;
- Scientific and medical provision of sports;
- Development of the high-performance sports;
- Development of the sport for all;
- Improvement of the sport facilities in the schools and the multifunctional sport facilities; Combating the use of doping.

The importance of the sport sector has been also recognized in the National Strategy of Health 2020, where sport has been cited as an important part of the healthy and wholesome upbringing of the children, its beneficial effects on rehabilitation, and its necessity for prevention of diseases and improving of the wellbeing of the population.

About the participation in sport in Bulgaria, besides the Eurostat surveys, there are no representative studies to reveal the physical activity of the Bulgarian population. According to the 2017 Special Eurobarometer 472 on Sport and Physical Activity 68% of the Bulgarians are not participating in sports or exercising. However, this is 10 pp lower than the 2013 study and there is a positive tendency of sport participation. Of those, that are active, only 2% are regularly practicing, 14% declare exercising with some regularity, and 15% are seldomly engaged in sport and physical activity. Data on other physical activities, such as biking, dancing, gardening, etc. shows regular engagement for 7% of Bulgarians, 20% with some regularity, 26% - seldom, and 45% do not engage in such activities. Again, there is a positive trend for the active population as there are 6pp drop in the last group from 51% in 2013 to 45% in 2017. In terms of regularity 9% of the active population declares practicing 4 to 7 days a week, and 22% 1 to 3 days a week.

The subjects, that have declared being vigorously active in the last week, have reported also the duration of the activity. Largest part of the respondents with



38% exercise between 31 and 60 minutes. As a whole 51% exercise less than one hour and 45% - over 60 minutes. The missing 4% are people who don't exercise (1%) or not responding. Most of the respondents from Bulgaria declare, that they prefer to exercise at home (49%). Second place with 26% is for outdoor areas, parks, etc. Another 20% are practicing on the way between home, work or shops, 15% at work, and 14% at a health or fitness center. Only 4% are engaging in sport centers, and 5% at sport clubs. Health and fitness centers are revealed as the preferred membership for Bulgarians, with 5% of the respondents. Sport clubs have 2%, same as socio-cultural clubs that have the same percentage of the subjects as members. The mass of 84% are declaring that they are not members, and exercising and sports are spontaneous. Health and fitness clubs present an increase of 3pp from the last Special Eurobarometer in 2013. In terms of motivation most of the Bulgarian respondents show health benefits with 31%. Next 24% are for relaxation, and 22% each for improvement of fitness and control of weight. Social interactions such as making new acquaintances, better social integration and meeting new people from other cultures, are at the lowest of the responds. In terms of barriers, the respondents as a whole for the EU show lack of time, which is true for 41% of the Bulgarian respondents. Another 28% have no motivation or interests, and 19% are unable due to illness or disability. In terms of access to sport, only 30% of the Bulgarian responders say that the area where they live offers many opportunities for being physically active. Similarly for the local sport clubs, only 33% of Bulgarians are considering the options that the clubs present for being active, to be sufficient. In terms of evaluating the policy 44% of the respondents are considering that the local authorities are not doing enough to promote physical activity among the population.

Related to professional sports in Bulgaria, according to the Law of Physical Education and Sport, a Professional Athlete is one that has training and competition as its main profession and receive remuneration for their activity. Such professional status should be defined by a special regulation of each federation. Currently the sports with the largest part of professional athletes are Football, Volleyball and Basketball. Athletes from other sports that have high achievements are also treated as professionals and are state supported. Such sports are Wrestling, Boxing, Artistic



Gymnastics, etc. There are also seldom cases of athletes with civil contracts or semi-professional statute in non-profit clubs from all sports.

Finally, concerning to sports facilities in Bulgaria, in the Register of Sport Facilities of the Ministry of Youth and Sport there are 1000 entries of different facilities. However, this information can only be used for approximation, as the register is not complete, and it also includes administrative buildings. There are three main types of ownership of the sport facilities in Bulgaria. National Sport Facilities are state owned and managed by two government owned commercial entities – The National Sport Base Company and the Academica 2011 Company. The majority of sport facilities are owned by municipalities and are operated through concession deals or rented to local sport clubs to manage. Some larger municipalities have established commercial entities to control some of their sport facilities, i.e. Sportna Sofia 2000 Company, which is owned by the Sofia municipality and manages the sport facilities in public parks and recreation areas of the capital city. As a heritage from the socialist government before 1989, there is a stadium in almost every city and large village in Bulgaria, but most of them are not being taken care of and many are unusable and dangerous. There are also a number of privately-owned facilities, which mainly consist of fitness halls, swimming pools, football and tennis fields, which are rented to amateur teams and athletes for recreational sport. These however are only in the large cities where they could attract customers.

Croatia

In Croatia, sport has always been a competition of physical abilities and skills among people, but today it has a much broader and more complex role than it had before becoming a way of daily life and culture, a source of positive energy, a form of economic activity of society and, after all, sport has become business. In addition, sports certainly have important implications for society as a whole, and it is inconceivable to manage a sports organization today without knowledge of the economics of sport, management and marketing. In a situation where most sports organizations in Croatia are financed from the state budget, with money that is insufficient for day-to-day functioning, it is inevitable that any sports organization that



wants prosperity must realize its business at an income level. Managers who manage sports organizations in Croatia are, as a rule, not formally trained to manage specific business processes in sports. The goal of every organization, including sports, is to operate successfully and profitably so the economic effects be greater than the investment. It is clear that without education of personnel for specific business processes in sports it is certainly not possible to achieve long-term success, as evidenced by the current state of the Croatian sport. Many clubs are illiquid, in times of recession globally and locally. When jobs are closed and people lose their jobs, it is difficult to expect greater sponsorship from the economy. In addition, public companies, as the undisputed patrons of Croatian sport, are no longer in the position of generous funding for sports organizations due to large losses in business.

In order to explain what the process of management is and what the organization of work entails, it is necessary first of all to define the system within which these processes are carried out, which we call organizations. In this sense, the term organization means "consciously associating people with the aim of using appropriate means to complete certain tasks with the least possible effort in any area of social life" (Sikavica & Novak, 1999, p.13) and then in sports in the broadest sense. Likewise, sports organizations exist to "produce products and services that cannot be produced by individuals on their own" (Covell et al., 2002, p.5). Under these organizations, within the meaning of the Law on Sports (Official Gazette of Republic of Croatia, 71/06), legal persons in the field of sports are considered, namely associations, companies and institutions.

Modern sport can be defined in different ways. Of the many definitions, the definition of the International Association for Sports Science and Physical Training (ICSSPE), which says that sport, is "any physical activity, which has the significance of play and the extent of the ability to compete with yourself or others, seems acceptable". If it is a competition with others, it should be in the knightly spirit. There is no sport without fair play" (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009, 15) However, contemporary sport has an even broader dimension, as indicated by numerous areas of sports.

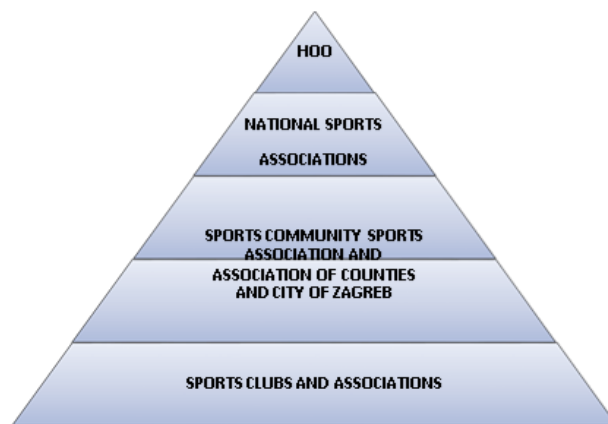


In Croatia, the classification of the sports field according to the Sports Act (Official Gazette of Republic of Croatia 60/92; 25/93; 11/94; 71/06) is accepted, which includes physical and health culture, competitive sports, sports for all, kinesitherapy and sports of persons with disabilities.

Each area of sports activity has a specific organizational structure as well as a separate management that organizes and manages a sports organization. In almost all areas of sport, the so-called line system of organization and management (Sikavica & Novak, 1999). An example of such a system of organization and management is also found in the overall organization of Croatian sport (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Organization of Croatian sport



Note. Made according to Bartoluci and Škorić (2009, p.72)

The organization's line system operates from the highest of the lowest line. At the top of the pyramid, we find the Croatian Olympic Committee (cro. Hrvatski Olimpijski Odbor - HOO) as a central organizational and governing body, which is obliged to join national sports federations, sports federations and county associations and sports associations of cities and municipalities in a vertical system. All areas of sporting activity are included in this system of sports organization, compulsorily or voluntarily, except for the areas of physical and health culture that participate in the organization of education. However, some segments in this area are also included in the organization of HOO, such as school sports societies and



student sports. The line management system of a sports organization-club is implemented according to a similar pattern. Decisions are made and enforced by a line from top managers to the organizers and decision makers of a sports organization.

Concerning the sports structure and levels of management in Croatia, first of all is well mentioning what management involves: "the process of working with others and helping others to achieve organizational goals in a changing environment with the effective and efficient use of limited resources." This actually emphasizes several important characteristics of management such as working with others and helping others, enterprise goals, efficiency versus effectiveness, limited resources, and a changing environment (Buble, 2006, pp.3-4). Depending on the type of organizational structure, but also on the degree of centralization or decentralization in the company, or on the "depth" or "height" of the organization (Sikavica & Novak, 1999), it is implemented at several levels. In general, we are talking about three levels of management: the highest level of management (Top Level Management), the middle level of management (Middle Level Management) and the first level of management (First Level Management), that is, top and middle management and management personnel (Sikavica & Bahtijarević-Siber, 2004). The management staff of each of these levels performs all the functions of management, but they are not equally represented at all levels.

Sports management means "the process of organizing or managing a sport or sports organization to achieve sports and other goals with the rational use of limited resources." (Bartoluci, 2002, cited in Bartoluci, 2003, p.154). In other words, "management brings together the resources — people, money, equipment needed to make work and workers more productive". Management creates tasks and organizes the work that must be done. It provides the skills and coordination needed to work together at the core of a sports organization. Ultimately, it directs and gives meaning that enables connecting different people into a productive whole." (Covell et al., 2002, p.6). The basis of sports management is the achievement of sport goals (results), but also business goals - income generation, coverage of all expenses, investments, procurement of players, coaches, etc. (Bartoluci, 2003). In order to be



able to carry out this process in sports organizations, we also need executives or managers who can be defined as “organizers, managers of a sports business organization aimed at achieving certain sports and business results” (Bartoluci, 2003, p.155).

Given the breadth of sport as an activity in Croatia, sports managers can be very different, and most often they appear as: general manager - director, sports director, director of different sectors of a sports organization, national team director, sports school director, secretary, business secretary, coach-manager, public employees in sport (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009). The success of sports organizations, namely the achievement of the set goals, depends on them, but also on the joint work of all other employees. The working conditions in sports we find today are vastly different from the conditions they used to govern 50 years ago. Sports organizations that have followed the development of the sports industry have increased have efficiently and positively affected all segments of the sport. The main commitment Sports organizations have to keep track of global changes and allow athletes the conditions to make could reach their full potential. In Croatia, there is funding for sports organizations it is carried out mainly by budgetary means, that is, by taxing citizens and precisely because of this type of financing, sports organizations in Croatia have a responsibility and the duty to constantly improve their business in such a way that they achieve the optimum relationship between the resources invested and the goals achieved.

When it comes to the organization of sports in Croatia, in order to better understand it, it is necessary to explain first its structure. Sport in Croatia consists of (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009, p.72):

- The physical and health cultures of children and young people;
- Competitive sports;
- Sports recreation of citizens;
- Kinesiotherapy and sports for people with disabilities.



The physical and health culture of children and young people consists of sports and recreation activities of preschool, elementary, middle and high school children ages. In the role of managers in physical and health culture are principals, teachers and professors of kinesiology. Competitive sport is the most numerous and complex system of sports activities in Croatia. It includes athletes, clubs, societies and associations at various stages of competition. In Croatia is the highest national sports body of the Croatian Olympic Committee, within which there are national sports federations, community sports associations and county associations, and city of Zagreb, as well as other associations and organizations that aim to promote sports in Croatia. There are 7,185 sports clubs operating in Croatia, including Olympic and non-Olympic clubs and clubs of the Croatian Paralympic Committee and the Croatian Sports Association of the Deaf, 164 associations of the Croatian Sports and Recreation Association and 39 associations of the Croatian Academic Sports Federation and Croatian School Sports Federation. (National Sports Program 2019 – 2026; Republic of Croatia - Central National Sports Office). The role of management is specific in certain types of sports, sports federations and associations however; there are certain common characteristics in terms of governing bodies. So is the governing body for all sports organizations of assemblies composed of elected member's representatives. The Assembly manages national and county sports federations, by the community of sports and county associations and city associations. Managing authorities, they are composed of boards of directors, supervisory boards, executive boards, etc. The organization sports are performed by special-profile managers who differ in the type of sport, rank competitions, etc. In Croatian sport, the role of managers is played by experts of all profiles in professional or volunteer relationship. Sports recreation and kinesitherapy with sports for people with disabilities are similar organizational structure as well as competitive sport. They are organized nationally, county, city and municipal level. The programs are implemented in alliances, associations and societies. Secretaries, organizers, leaders on a professional or amateur basis, play the role of managers in these organizations.



Finally, concerning managers in Croatian sport, Employees in Croatian sports organizations are “most often managers coming from policies, economic activities, and the like that are most often not qualified to run sport.” (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009, p.127). In Croatian sport, unlike in Western European countries, the coach usually plays a role of managers. The main reason why managers in Croatian sport come from other areas and profession is the lack of an adequate system of training and education for managers in sports. Managerial the function is most often performed by club presidents, federations, club directors, the president board of directors, etc. Their role is to manage a sports organization, fundraising, conducting club financial transactions, buying and selling players, coaches, etc. The biggest drawback of these manager profiles is the lack of expertise in the field the sport in which they operate. It turned out that only the educated can run a quality sport expert manager, as well as that no progress can be expected in Croatian sport if does not establish a quality education system for sports managers. In Croatia at The Faculty of Kinesiology in Zagreb has an optional module for sports management, senior school for training managers in sports in Split, and is also in private business schools in Zagreb launched this program. According to research conducted by the secretaries-general of sports communities in the Croatia (Papic, 2008), it turns out that a typical general secretary has a college degree after which he did not further educate himself. Research shows that only 18% of respondents had some kind of management education, mostly those who graduated four-year college studies, where they have been through one or two semesters of study they had management in the study program, and 90% of the respondents were educated in the system pre-1991 education. Sports organizations in Croatia are mostly financed from the state budget. The money that is obtained may not be sufficient for a sporting organization whose requirements are high, especially if it is a high-end sport. Modern sports demand more and more knowledge and skills from sports managers. Every sports organization that wants to grow must design their business on an income basis. If we define sports management as "the process of organizing and managing a sport or a sports organization to achieve sports and other goals with the rational use of limited resources" (Bartoluci 2002 cited in Bartoluci & Skorić, 2009, p.75), then it



means that we should have managers who will be able to raise funds for quality work and development of the club through various activities.

Italy

In Italy, in 2017, the total number of athletes officially accredited by the National Federations (FSN) and by Associated Sports Disciplines (DSA) arrived at 4 million and 703 thousand. It's the highest point ever. The female participation is about 28,2%, while the participation of the under 18 is about 56,7%. Over 1 million of a sport operators, 63,517 affiliated sport clubs (www.coni.it).

Those are some numbers and opinions to illustrate the current situation in Italy at the field of sport.

The sport industry is growing and changing adapting to the new social reality where web and particularly phenomenon of social media marketing, virtual communities become a very important channels for communication and instruments of marketing. Less and less people, sport people are interested in more traditional media.

In the perspective of marketing the sport is something very complex in the study and analysis of the context. The knowledge of the reference market must be transferred in the results obtained through the application of a series of experiences in the field. In an increasingly competitive environment, differentiation becomes an imperative to survive and gain competitive advantages. Today, consumers and sports funders are no longer looking for a profitable and pleasant shopping opportunity, but also for a different experience to share in the community animated by sports values.

The path of the development of the sports industry goes on with always new audiences (from infants to the fourth age), applications (in particular with the objective health), geographic areas and technologies (for example big data and social media), so as to constitute one of the most important industrial sectors in terms of contribution and employment.



The constant growth of sport, also from an economic point of view, always pushes new players (including foreigners) to face the world competitive environment, raising its difficulties. This intense competition can only be answered by proportionally increasing the managerial capacity understood to 360 degrees (from trading athletes to sponsorships, image and transmission rights, merchandising and licensing, real estate and infrastructure management, tourism, sports schools and so on). Issues such as brand and event management, customer relationship management, co-marketing, heritage marketing and other aspects become increasingly part of a true professionalism of sports management.

Germany

In Germany, non-profit sports clubs play an important role for the sports supply of the population. All in all, there are more than 90,000 sports clubs with over 27 million memberships (German Olympic Sports Confederation, 2010). This implies that about one in three Germans is a member of a sports club—the actual number is most likely lower as some people are members of multiple sports clubs. Despite this popularity, sports clubs face many financial challenges in today's economic environment.

The results from a survey of sports clubs in Germany reveal the financial situation is problematic for many clubs, with 3.6% of the clubs experiencing serious financial problems (Breuer & Wicker, 2009).

There are several reasons why German sports clubs might have financial problems. One reason is a decrease in public subsidies. Non-profit sports clubs receive different types of public subsidies, for example, direct subsidies, tax allowances, or the use of public sports facilities for little or no fees (Horch, 1992). In Germany, the voluntary sports sector (e.g., sports confederations and non-profit sports clubs) receives several million Euros annually from public lotteries. However, this public monopoly of gambling funds is uncertain. Recently, federal states and communities have reduced public subsidies for the voluntary sports sector (Federal Statistical Office, 2007). Additional challenges (e.g., demographic change, changes in sport demand, and increasing competition through for-profit sports providers such



as fitness centres) can negatively impact the financial situation of sports clubs as they can lead to decreases in memberships—this can in turn lead to decreasing revenues from membership fees. Besides decreasing revenues, increasing expenditures (e.g., increase in the value added tax in 2007 and increasing energy costs in Germany) also have to be considered. As a consequence of the challenges noted, the question arises whether declining revenues, coupled with increasing expenditures, might be compensated for by the implementation of marketing strategies using sports as the main tool.

Some decades ago, many sports clubs and associations operated on a non-professional level with voluntary staff. Gate receipts and membership fees were the main sources of income. Nowadays, sporting organisations can be compared with medium-sized companies in terms of annual turnover and number of employees. Although gate receipts from spectators and fees from members and/or participants are still a considerable revenue source for professional sporting organisations, they become less important in comparison to the other revenue streams.

Another important aspect which reflects the development of sports towards a serious business is the quality of the people working in the business. The key decision makers of sporting organisations are mostly management professionals who know their business. For example; Erwin Staudt, the president of the German Bundesliga club VfB Stuttgart, once was the chief executive officer of IBM Germany. When he came to power, he soon applied various management techniques and instruments (eg the balanced scorecard) in order to run his football club more effectively.

Spain

With regard to sports associations in Spain, these are regulated by Law 10/1990, of 15 October, on Sport. In accordance with this law, there is currently a first level of sports associationism (basic sports clubs, sports clubs of entities with legal personality and sports corporations), and a second level of associationism (Sports Federations, Groupings of Clubs at national level, Sports Promotion Bodies and Professional Leagues) (Marín-Barnuevo, 2006). The body responsible for the



national public organisation of sport is the 'Consejo Superior de Deportes' (High Sports Council), an autonomous body of the General National Administration, within the Ministry of Culture and Sport.

Within the second level of sports associations, the Sports Federations play a fundamental role in the development of sport within each of the sport disciplines recognised by the Sports Law. These are considered private entities, with their own legal personality, whose scope of action extends to the whole national territory, in the development of their own competences, integrated by regional sports Federations, sports clubs, sportsmen and women, coaches, judges and referees, professional leagues, if any, and other interested groups that promote, practice or contribute to the development of sport.

The Spanish Sports Federations, in addition to their own powers, exercise by delegation public functions of an administrative nature, including those linked to the preparation of top-level athletes, the training of sports technicians, the prevention and control of doping, the organisation of official competitions of an international nature to be held in the Spanish territory, or the performance in relation to their members of the functions of protection, control and supervision recognised by the sports legal system.

There can only be one Spanish sports federation for each sport discipline, except for the national multisport ones, which are dedicated to the development and organisation of the practice of different sports disciplines, in which athletes with physical, mental, sensory and mixed disabilities are integrated.

With regard to the size and characteristics of federated sports activity in Spain, the Annual of Sports Statistics (CSD, 2019) details that the number of sports licences in Spain in 2018 was 3,866,867, of which 2,978,250 corresponded to male licences (77%) and 888,617 to female licences (23%), which suffered an increase from the previous year, when there were 839,985 (22.3%). There are also differences between those who are currently considered top-level sportsmen and women in Spain: 3,114 men (62.8%) compared to 1,848 women (37.2%).



With regard to participation in national and international competitions, according to the latest data available, in 2018 a total of 2,999 athletes participated in national competitions and 3,111 in international ones, breaking the Spanish record 231 men and 242 women.

The federative activity could not be carried out successfully without the sports clubs. These are private associations, made up of natural or legal persons, whose purpose is to promote one or more sporting activities, to practise these activities by their members and to participate in sporting activities and competitions. All clubs must be registered in the corresponding Register of Sports Associations. In relation to the number of federated clubs, in 2018 there were 67,512 in Spain, with an average number of licences of 57.3.

Some sports clubs sometimes carry out sporting activities in sport disciplines not supported by the Spanish Sports Federations, so that they tend to group together - groups of clubs - for the sole purpose of carrying out these activities on national territory, not being limited their practice by the lack of a Federation to support and protect them.

Based on the above data, there are differences between men and women in the practice of sport, although over the last few years the gap has become smaller, progressively increasing the presence of women's sport in the lives of citizens. In this regard, a report conducted in 2018 by the company Nielsen Sports, gives prominence to the popularity and global impact that is reaching women's sport. The report focused on eight countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia and New Zealand), providing some fairly encouraging data, and is that 84% of sports consumers are interested in women's sport, 51% of them men.

According to the results of the Barlovento Report (Barlovento Comunicación, 2019), about the presence of women's sport on television, since 1992 10,086 women's sport broadcasts have been registered, both on free (85%) and subscription channels (15%). The data show that 83% of the Spanish population over 4 years old has watched, at least for one minute, some kind of female sport



broadcast, reaching an audience of 36,495,000 viewers, of which 68.1% are men, between 45 and 64 years old (37.7%). 2017 was the year with the greatest presence of women's sports on television with 1,436 broadcasts, motivated by the celebration of the European Football Championship, the World Handball Championship and the Eurobasket, among other sport events.

This situation is also reflected in Spanish women's sport, which made history on 17 March 2019 at the Wanda Metropolitano, Atletico de Madrid's stadium, with 60,739 fans in attendance, a worldwide achievement at sports club level. In basketball, the women's team won the Eurobasket and water polo won the silver medal in the World Championship.

Similarly, that same year Ona Carbonell became the woman with the largest number of medals (23) in the history of the World Swimming Championships, karateka Sandra Sánchez became European champion and Lidia Valentín won the silver medal at the World Weightlifting Championships.

These are just some examples of how Spanish women's sport is increasing its popularity and presence in the national and international context, increasing the interest of sponsors and their professionalization, and therefore having to attend to new ways of management and promotion that allow it to adapt to the new situation, enhancing its visibility and presence in sport spheres and society in general.

1.2 SPORTS MARKETING: STRATEGIES AND CONTEXTUALIZATION.

This section will present the situation of sports marketing in the participant countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Germany and Spain) as well as the main strategies being implemented.

Bulgaria

Starting with the state of sports marketing in Bulgaria, let us first look what sports means to the general public and what is its essence. Sport is a social phenomenon. It is one of the largest significant social movements that unite people, contribute to their development and peaceful coexistence. Sport is the companion of man in his pursuit of beauty - physical and spiritual - health, nobility, tolerance and



is seen as a means of expressing national identity in this highly globalized world. Considering this explanation of what sports is all about, how do we connect it with marketing. Sport is the only fun event where it doesn't matter how much return to it, you will never know how it will end. Remove the tension and drama of one sport and you will lose instantly 2/3 of the interest in him. And because of this tension, consumers don't want to be just spectators. They want to be direct participants in the process. Here is where marketing comes in handy. Marketing could be defined as the social and management process of creating, communicating and exchanging the benefits of products, services and ideas through which individuals and groups meet their needs, wants and desires on mutually beneficial way for the parties and in the conditions of specific social and competitive environment. There can be marketing of a specific sports product or service, or marketing through sport (use of sport as a base and means of selling non-sporting goods and services). Sports marketing in particular covers the specific application of marketing principles to a sport product. The classic application of the marketing concept is based on the idea of exchange. That means marketing takes place every time a social actor (individual or organization) exchanges something valuable (products, services or ideas) with another social actor. When it comes to Bulgaria, there are of course possibilities to study sports marketing but how it is applied in the sports world. For example, in Bulgarian football, there is the lack or insufficient sports marketing. Because without marketing - no money, and without money - no professional development. Over the last two decades, the layers of world football have shifted. The best teams are the ones that make the most money and with them they can afford to have the best players, coaches and other professionals. In order for a club to compete with the best on the field, it must first do so on the field of marketing. If you don't have money - you will only watch the big matches on TV. The best teams have learned to do marketing and take advantage of their huge popularity and many fans. The main goal of marketing is to sell more, more often and to as many people as possible the products / services offered by a certain company. This is the goal of sports marketing - to make money for the football club. The difference is that in the football club you can earn from products and services: T-shirts, fan products and



accessories, season tickets, tickets, sale of players, tournament income, sponsorship, advertising, image rights, TV rights and more.

We live in the age of the Internet and social networks. That's why, it all starts with the website. It is the most important element of sports marketing and the foundation on which all success is built. It is the shop window, the shop, the place for news and the place for communication with the fans. Before the Internet, fans learned the latest from the newspapers, but things have changed. Thanks to the Internet, clubs can communicate directly with their fans. The site should be rich in news, photos, stories about the club, interviews with players, management, interesting information, etc. The website must satisfy the thirst of the fans for information about their club, which fortunately never dries up.

The news must first be published on the website and then in the media. Only in this way will fans be attracted to visit the club's website. And this is extremely important for the sale of tickets, items and sponsors. The site should be very, very rich to news about the team. When a fan of a certain club wants to learn news or what is happening in the club, he or she should visit the team's website and not go to the sports media. This will reduce speculation with news. If something is not on the site, then it is not true! Social networking is the second revolution of our time in terms of marketing. It allows for a much closer relationship and communication with fans. We can see exactly who our fans are, what they look like, what they do, what else they like, etc. Marketing is more effective if we know better our fans. The team exists for them, to make them happy, for them to come to the stadium, for them to buy fan articles, etc. Social networks give us just that - to build a very close relationship with fans. Fans are the most important thing for a team, the more fans a team has, the stronger it is. Fans are a serious source of income and they are the object of marketing. Fans need to be maintained, developed and communicated with.

Borussia Dortmund is the team with the highest average attendance with almost 100% of the capacity of its stadium, which is 100,000. Interestingly, the city of Dortmund has a population of 580,000 and fans of the team are not only residents



of the city, but from all over area. The city is located in the Ruhr area and is home to the typical working class, which is not the richest. But still, this is the team with the most loyal fans in the world. The residents of the district are likened to the team, it is part of their culture, life, joy, pride, success and happiness. The club is much more than a team, it is a symbol of belonging to something big and great, they embody it, they live with it. Every club should learn from this successful model.

Bulgaria is the home of many passionate sports people not only in football but in every sport. Unfortunately, we do not do a good enough job of advertising our best athletes and we need more of that.

Croatia

To start with the situation of sports marketing in Croatia, it is important to highlight what is meant by sports marketing. Marketing in sports, or sports marketing, is a social process that also involves society as a whole, a peculiar approach and application of marketing concepts in all under the environment of sports, they get what they need and what iron is, and with the help of the set activities that exchange sports products and services through the market. (Bartoluci, 1997).

Sports marketing as a business function contains a systematic approach in function goals set, with identification and anticipation of demand, definition and satisfaction search for sports products and services. Sports marketing as scientific discipline studies the procedures and activities that make the highest possible degree possible the effectiveness of the application of marketing in given environments, with the application of scientific knowledge and elaborated methods and principles, for the purpose of preparation and development of the relevant activities (Bartoluci, 1997). Sports marketing as a business orientation rests on the conception of demand for sports products or services and satisfied those demands with respect conceptions of the sports market. In short, sports marketing links production sports goods and services with their search and consumption, including pretty much everyone under the sports field (Novak, 2006). Caring for customer relations, i.e. sports fans and good sportsmanship the result are the most important factors for success in sports. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Croatia. Low



attendance at sporting events, fraud in financing sports clubs, the lack of competitiveness of the league and other factors affect the awareness of the fans. Of course, if there are no fans in the stadiums and sponsors are not so interested in investing in sports, such as in the world, so sports marketing concepts are harder to implement. The theoretical application of sports marketing is, of course, different than in practice.

Still, sports marketing needs to work in a particular market knowledge of its web but also various conceptions of application. Clubs have difficulties finding sponsors and are therefore very difficult to fund. This is exactly one of the biggest problems of Croatian sport which is the most important promoter of Croatia in world. The Croatian Football Championship has been showing very poor results for many years when it comes to viewership. The stadiums, or rather the infrastructure is outdated, and as participants in the World Cup finals still do not have a national stadium. Funding concerns, changes in current political structures, and thus the passage of the Sports Act by any new government, make it impossible. According to the previous, sports clubs have a hard time keeping up with those in the EU and knowledge of sports marketing implementation is not at European level. Perhaps for reasons of lack of knowledge or lack of finance set aside for marketing, the overall implementation and functioning of sports marketing in Croatia are not at the level of implementation worldwide.

Italy

“Sport is an industry and needs to have strategy, marketing and resources.”
(Gianmario Verona, Rector of the Bocconi University of Milan, www.coni.it).

“Marketing is a strategy, valorize a product, realization, but for those who work in sport particularly and and have to express all this values marketing become an emotion. Emotion makes you search and create a dreams and visions of the future.”; “Today marketing is constantly evolving, people orient the basic choices, with their experiences.” (Diego Nepi Molineris, Director of marketing and development of the Italian Olympic Committee, www.coni.it).



There are different types of marketing, depending on the environment and of the subjects of reference when we talk about sports marketing.

Sports marketing is an element of sports promotion which involves a wide variety of sectors of the sports industry, including broadcasting, advertising, social media, digital platforms, ticket sales, and community relations.

The two definitions above help understand that two completely different aspects are referenced, right from the basics. On the one hand, we have the “marketing of sport”, i.e. the set of activities and competences intended for the promotion and improvement of sports enjoyment and consumption. On the other, we have “marketing with sport”, the use of sport as an efficient communication tool for businesses. This is what we define as primary sports marketing types, which form the first large category of sports marketing.

Anyone involved in initiatives aimed at bringing a sport product closer to end consumers has to do with the “marketing of sport”. This includes marketing operators of sports businesses and organisers of events, leagues, championships. When you find a promotion entitling you to go to the stadium with a friend free of charge, you are exposed to “marketing of sport”.

“Marketing through sport”, on the other hand, involves players who use sport as a booster to grow a business that is not directly connected to sports. Players who use marketing through sport include sports marketing agencies, brands resorting to testimonials, and so on.

As we can see, the differences between these two sports marketing categories, and the resulting professional profiles especially, are substantial and they represent a very important crossroads for new comers in this sector. The two types of professionals linked to these categories are different, but often they must be complimentary in order to get the greatest value from sports sponsorship and sports communication deals.

The world of sports is a growing market. Competitive and creative it lends itself to support the entire range of marketing activities: increasing brand awareness,



changing brand profile, giving visibility to the brand/product, creating global brand/product recognition, attracting new market segments, expanding distribution.

The sporting phenomenon is today one of the most important aspects of social life in both developed and emerging countries. In the face of this social importance, however, there must be adequate economic and organizational development to better manage an industry of this calibre. Sergio Cherubini in his book *Sports marketing. Analysis, strategies and tools* describes the systematic and practical approach of sports marketing through the phases of analytical, strategic and operational marketing.

The goal of this literature review is to analyze how do marketing models and practices develop in the world of sports clubs, compared to the different strategies put in place in sports clubs at different level what can be the best marketing practices to ensure their success. To study if in the reality of the world of sport in Italy experiments with innovative solutions exist.

Only 20 years ago, to speak about marketing in a sport context was a strange concept. Nowadays, sports managers and academics work on applying concepts, methodology, and instruments of marketing.

In defining sports marketing, it is necessary to consider the marketing concept. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006) the term identifies *one function aimed at establishing a relationship with the consumer, identifying his needs / desires and take specific actions aimed at satisfying them*. Another Marketing definition is one provided by Collesei (2000, p. 14) which reads as follows:

"A set of economic activities carried out in order to meet consumer needs through the sale of goods and services".

Sports marketing also aims to satisfy specific needs of consumption that have sport as their dominant market theme, providing everything a series of benefits to subjects such as spectators, athletes and sponsors (Shank, 2005).



Wakefield (2007) in this regard highlights some aspects that according to him they differentiate sports marketing from its more generalist meaning Goods/ Services:

Within the sporting scenario we can see how the existence of psychological and sociological factors that lead the sports user to identify with a particular athlete/ team, making a possible very difficult change of preference. For example, a fan of the Juventus football team will hardly change his or her favourite team over time and in the majority of cases will remain faithful to the latter for the duration of their lives. This aspect it has significant implications from the marketing point of view, since it can be understood how the brand/image of an athlete/team has a predominant role in development of market strategies. Another point of great relevance is the question he sees sport as an effective promotional tool having since businesses pay athletes/ teams as their testimonials and promote their brand or details products; on the other hand, these sports subjects also enjoy this relationship (as well as for a simple financial aspect), promoting their own image to the general public, so both sides have a benefit from the point of communicational view.

The sports market to date also has a high level of complexity structural, involving a large number of actors (as noted in the chapter previous) each of them with specific interests and linked to each other by relationships of different nature.

In light of this and in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the Sports marketing can be broken down into a number of subgroups, each related to a specific context (Cherubini, 1997):

- The marketing of sporting events;
- The marketing of sports clubs;
- Federation marketing;
- Alloy marketing;
- The marketing of individual athletes;
- Marketing of sports equipment and clothing;



- The marketing of products and services related to sports;
- The marketing of companies that use sport as a communication medium.

More specifically, the pulsating nucleus of the entire mechanism of sports marketing revolves around the event, the engine of everything the system, which in turn involves teams/athletes. So, by crossing this information can be understood as the marketing of sporting events, federations, teams and athletes are the backbone of the whole system: the sporting event is indeed a container/showcase where the results can be observed reached by the other elements of the system.

The sporting event is to be considered the focal point of the entire sports marketing system, since it is from its staging that a whole series of actions are born and interactions involving players in the sports market.

The sporting event in its simplest definition still presents similar characteristics to those of a service, since it does not have concrete output for the consumer being a form of entertainment, even if staged through the aid of tangible goods. In fact, a service to define itself as such must have a series of requirements with more or less intensity (Palmer, 1994):

- Intangibility;
- Inseparability;
- Variability;
- Perishability;
- Ownership.

When it comes to the key elements in the marketing mix of sporting events, three points must be taken into consideration. First of all, the product, intended as a type of sports activity staged, athletes involved and the atmosphere that all this creates around the event. Indeed, in Italy for example there are sports that have a catchment area, in sense of practitioners and spectators (who often have a proportional trend), have a greater attractiveness within the population. Just think of



football, which in some ways is almost like a religion, with a pool of practitioners without comparisons and strong media impact.

Second factor is the place where the event is presented to the public, which through its architectural structure can create greater a wider involvement by the audience present: capacity, accessibility, comfort of seats, proximity of stands on the pitch, acoustics, lighting and more. Also, the story of a particular building/stadium (linked in most cases to a specific team) can create particular excitement within the public, promoting the influx of public and triggering particular moods within the fans involved.

The last of the three points to be taken into consideration is that relating to public relationships, perhaps the most interesting and inspiring aspect for an event marketer.

It includes all those forms of communication that exist between the various subjects involved in a particular event, which can have different functions and purposes for a particular stakeholder. All this for the purpose of communicating, understanding and creating cooperation with its reference interlocutors. Some related mass public relations tools at a sporting event they can be (Hoyle, 2002):

- Newspaper / radio / tv / internet advertising messages;
- Radio / TV / Internet programs;
- Newspaper / TV / internet news;
- Paper material (flyers, posters).

Those just listed hit the mass, and have as their main purpose that of create awareness among the public about the event. Another part of the public relationship is that relating to the actual relationship with the viewer, namely one not mono but two-way communication, through customer relationship actions management (C.R.M.). In the field of sport, and specifically of the sporting event, being customer-driven is complicated with regards to the product in narrow sense (the simple vision of a sports competition), instead useful and interesting for the product as a whole, the one seen previously with the help of molecular system. In fact, through tools that



allow you to understand what factors influence audience satisfaction is possible for organizers / insiders make customer-driven improvements they have value for the spectator such as structural changes of a stadium or make changes to a particular service.

Related to the forms of communication and marketing in the sports sector, it's very important the choice of the way the message is transmitted and disclosed to the consumer, therefore depending on what you want to disclose and obtain the most appropriate form of communication must be chosen.

Co-marketing

Constantly growing interest to sport worldwide makes more and more attractive the idea collaborate with sport organizations for different businesses. "It becomes increasingly interesting to "do marketing with sport", whether it is a professional sports company, a manufacturer of sports equipment and clothing, printed paper publisher, radio and television, a simple producer of goods and services. In fact, new opportunities are presented for those who want to associate their image and activity with the values and attraction of sport, combining objectives and interests of companies sometimes even very different. The cooperation of companies, only in the first appearance different, becomes more and more interesting and able to bring innovation in an area such as that of marketing where sometimes it seems that by now everything has already been invented and practiced. On the contrary the opportunities still appear remarkable only that you have the courage and the ability to experiment with new formulas which is certainly sports co-marketing (Cherubini & Canigiani, 2000).

Andrea Carlucci, at Toyota Motor Italia, led for example the development of hybrid cars. Today 11 million customers worldwide drive hybrid cars and finally we have very significant shares in the Italian market. Today the partnership with the Olympic Games is a global choice, made by the president of Toyota. The sport was chosen because in the sport there is the recovery of the spirit of Toyota. In sport we see a dream and we dream big, always looking to the future, with the opportunity to make a brand feel for what it is. Marketing does not invent anything, it makes what



you are credible. Sport is a huge lever and gives us an incredible resonance. I found in the CONI some extraordinary partners because we were able to interpret and combine the concept of Italia Team with a second concept: the Toyota Team, trying to pass the sport as something that goes beyond the barriers. A brand can earn through sport in credibility and reputation. With the Tokyo 2020 accelerator thinking that hydrogen arrives in Italy is a battle of perspective. In this sense, industry and sport can go together (ww.coni.it).

Co-sports marketing strategy refers to the process where there are 2 or more public or private operators, where at least one is strictly identifiable as sport organization/club. They implement together marketing initiatives to achieve marketing targets. The experiences in this field are beginning to be quite numerous.

Digital marketing

Digital communication has a very wide range of action. Sport is one of the fields that are most involved by an exchange of information that passes through the web and social media.

The world of sport, unavoidably, has exploited the potential of the means of communication; and, while not neglecting the traditional media, however, has now joined fully to the logic of digital media – and social media in particular – both from the point of view of the professions involved, both from the point of view of the fans.

The presence in social media gives an opportunities and advantages to sport organizations/clubs. First of all, it's a direct interaction with audience. Direct communication permits to spread any kind of content, news, etc.

The social networks allow to reach a very wide audience, even on the international level.

It should be emphasized that through the social media the communication in passing in real time and in case could have a negative meaning. And that's why it is important to rely on experts in the field, avoiding the improvisation, as in any other sector, and turning to specialized professionals, such as social media manager,



social media specialist, social media analyst, in the specific case of the management of social networks.

This volume, therefore, aims to clarify what are the most suitable methodologies to reach a large sporting audience and explains how professionals who are involved in creating ad hoc content for sports fans of all disciplines should act.

The book focuses on sports journalists and team brand journalists and becomes a necessary tool to manage new digital communication techniques. The author also inserts practical exercises to be able to produce content and tools for the profession, assisted by the contribution given by some experts in the field.

Finally, the text is enriched by a part dedicated to sport photographers, a profession from which the journalist cannot be separated, and it explains in a very clear way the difference between the sports journalist and a brand journalist, both figures placed in the field of communication and digital marketing.

Sponsorship

This area is similar to that of advertising is configured as a medium able to generate in the sports audience images, feelings, emotions, which in turn favour the recognizability of companies that choose to bind to a team or an athlete, sponsoring them.

Sponsorship can be defined as a marketing technique by which a company obtains that its brand is highlighted by a person or organization, who carry out activities that are highly followed by the public, in exchange for an investment in money. This allows the company to reach a high number of contacts and above all to associate its image with the values brought by the character or the organization (Cherubini, 2015).

There are few categories of sponsorship:

- *Financial sponsorship*: it is equal to that business, and is in the form of money, because a party must pay money in exchange for the publication of the trade mark; not to be overlooked is the possibility that the company that sponsors



the access to the lists of sports and/or subscribers to refer to in a more direct way; the sponsorship will have greater success if there is reciprocity between the sponsor and the club, if both can cross their respective business activities by proposing a range of offers to consumers;

- *Sponsorship technology*: this is the one, most commonly called, technique, and occurs when a company provides its technological expertise to a team or an athlete, tying them to the supply of sports apparel through which it advertises its products; emphasizes the quality of the product, causing it to wear to an athlete just as important; affixing of the trade mark of the sponsor on the shirts (along with that of any other company) is allowed for the first time from the FIGC, since the football season 1981/1982; the target that the sponsor company wants to reach, unlike the other two types of sponsorship, is certainly narrower and more closely linked to sports practitioners and the factors that best describe the link between technical sponsor and club are imagination, quality and orientation to the global market;
- *Sponsorship in kind*: a company provides equipment, but not of a sports type, so not necessarily shoes or clothing, but different objects that can give their support with other modes (for example, drinks and supplements).

In the specific case of football, we can distinguish between:

- Sponsorship of the club, in which, by signing a contract, it, without changing the company name (as in the case of the Match Contract not covered by football), discloses an agreed advertising message, affixing writings or symbols on the athletes' clothing and authorizing the sponsor to use the images for their advertising needs. They fall into:

a) *Main Sponsor* or main sponsor, generally represented by an industrial, commercial, or service enterprise that promotes its brand by carrying out an economic transaction with the sponsor and exposing it on the clothing and technical material of the teams; the company must affix the sponsor's badge on the team's coaches, uniforms, entrance tickets to the matches, arrange advertising banners on the sidelines, distribute advertising



and promotional material of the sponsor, participate with the teams in public relations initiatives organized by the sponsor in the framework of the sporting event;

b) *Technical Sponsor* means the partner who produces equipment and sportswear necessary for the performance of the competitive activity;

c) *Supplier and/or official partner*, which acquires the right to provide its product or service to the club;

- Sponsorship of the individual athlete, which takes place either through the free supply or at special prices of the products of the sponsoring company, or with the purchase of spaces on the clothing worn by the footballer during his activity.

Therefore, the sponsorship develops through a communication plan formulated by the company the football that will allow you to gain an economic advantage and the promotion of its values on the market; when the relationship between sponsor and sponsor will be consolidated over time, both brands will enhance, and can be combined in the collective imagination.

In all cases, it seems clear that the sponsors want to be recognized and to be considered at the time of purchase by consumers of sport, and to increase the reputation and appreciation with the transfer of passions, and values related to the sponsor, and the predisposition to purchase and use. When you decide to associate your name and brand with that of a team, you always evaluate the consistency between the values of the club and the image that the company wants to convey. As you can see, we are talking about brand image, awareness, position, loyalty, which we mentioned earlier, and brand equity, a concept that we will discuss later.

More specifically, the benefits sought by sponsor companies are closely related to their goals, which can be:

- Enhance and improve the corporate image;
- Increase knowledge of products and services;



- Place or reposition a product / service in a specific market segment;
- Increase recognition in a geographical area;
- Create, maintain or improve relations with the local community and internal staff;
- Acquire new business contacts;
- Change the public perception of the company;
- Have exclusive sponsorship;
- Increase sales.

Of course, the concepts of reputation, recognition, loyalty and value have a higher weight when the sponsor performs a quantitative analysis based on the cost/benefit ratio in the light, in fact, of all the information that allow to evaluate an economic return advantage.

Sponsorship is part of a long-term planning through which the company wants to achieve certain objectives. For this, before dealing with it, the club must identify a project and a project team. It will select and search for the sponsor, negotiate with it and manage its relationships.

Sponsorship today constitutes the primary source of livelihood of sports clubs, which-especially the many amateur associations - continue to play an important role in spreading the sport from below.

In addition, tax advantages for sponsoring companies should not be overlooked; important is the deductibility of documented costs incurred for sponsorship, as they are linked to the activity of the same, therefore capable of producing revenues.

Germany

Due to an increasing saturation and fragmentation of markets, in recent years marketers are confronted with a significantly changing marketing communication landscape. Here, brands can no longer be distinguished on their



quality and functional benefits alone (Kroeber-Riel, 1984; Weinberg, 1993) and the effectiveness of classic marketing communications is decreasing steadily as a result of a stiff competition of communications (Levermann, 1998; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2005). Indeed, because classic marketing communications are solely based on a push strategy where brand messages are forced on consumers through a variety of media, consumers respond to the growing information overflow with low media involvement and engage actively in a variety of avoidance strategies (Kroeber-Riel, 1987; Rumbo, 2002; Tse & Lee, 2001). Thus, new marketing communication strategies are emerging with a communication structure that often differs strongly from those of established strategies such as advertising or sales promotions by their tendency to offer interactive dialogues between marketers and customers instead of the usual monologues (Sistenich, 1999). Subsequently, event-marketing has become a popular alternative for marketers in Continental Europe and already accounted in 2000 for 22% of German companies' total marketing communication budget (Drengner, 2003; Lasslop, 2003).

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the area of sports has become a significant economic factor worldwide. Due to the increasing commercialisation of sports, business management know-how is becoming ever more essential in this field. The economics of sports is a relatively new discipline, but one that has undergone very fast-paced development in recent years. Not the least of the reasons why sports economics and sports management are exciting research fields is that this is where diverse approaches to an appropriate method mix in terms of substance and problem come together. Some even speak of a new scientific sub-discipline or more so of an independent branch of science. Within sports management, the discipline with the strongest differentiation to date is that of sports marketing, i.e. professionalism in terms of business management is the most advanced in the area of sports marketing.

Consumers love events, corporations love consumers. In consideration of this "magic formula," it is especially companies that operate internationally who are in search of attractive sports events that have a great deal of appeal to a broader public. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is primarily international sports events



that are utilised by numerous companies to embed their target group-oriented communications in an attractive environment. There are many good reasons why marketing with sports events is of such great interest for companies. The aim is to create a positive image transfer from the sports event to the brand or the company. The message is communicated in the context of an attractive sporting environment. High (international) reach can be achieved. The multiplier effect of mass media can be fully utilised.

Sports mega-events are successful in attracting the attention of billions of people across the globe and are hence a perfect platform to showcase the hosting nation, their culture and 'image' (Potter, 2009 cited in Lin et al., 2008, p.28). This is deemed necessary, as continuing globalisation and the technologically-driven information revolution make it more important for states to differentiate themselves from others (van Ham, 2001; Nye, 2008) even if, ironically, states use increasingly similar strategies (for example, membership of international organisations and participation in, and the staging of, the Olympic Games and football World Cup) to demonstrate their distinctiveness. The resultant international prestige garnered from successfully hosting such an event or having one's national team perform well—or preferably both—can be converted into enhanced soft power that can make a state, their culture and political values more attractive to others.

Germany has played a particularly central role in the political use of sport by states as part of their public diplomacy strategies. The central role of the state in manipulating sport to achieve non-sporting goals is very apparent in the German context. In 2006 the world witnessed a spontaneous outpouring of (sport) patriotism which was in sharp contrast to how national feelings had been viewed in Germany previously (Kersting, 2007). This new reassertion of national pride drew on the tried and tested paraphernalia of old: flags and colours of the nation. Witnessed by a cumulative global TV audience of over 26 billion (FIFA, 2011), the World Cup drew in two million foreign visitors to Germany (German Tourist Board, 2007a). Aggregate attendance at matches was 98% capacity (on average some 52,500) (FIFA, 2012) and over 20 million people joined in the party-like celebrations around the unique public 'Fan Fests' with their large viewing screens set up in the 12 host cities in



Germany (Florek et al., 2008; German Tourist Board, 2007). This sport mega-event offered *the* most powerful platform to showcase German people and culture.

Given that most predictions of the benefits of sport mega events are usually overstated (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006) the identification of valid indices of success is important. Despite the difficulty in defining the concept of soft power and measuring its impact, some tangible data do exist to indicate that the German 2006 staging of the FIFA World Cup was successful. First, tourism was and continues—six years after the event—to be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the World Cup (along with the airline, food, film and media industries in 2006) (Federal Government Online, 2006). Over two million foreign visitors came to Germany for the football in 2006 (many stayed on and visited tourist attractions) and the Board recorded a bumper year of overnight stays by international visitors, which increased further by 3.5% in 2007 (up to 55 million stays), despite the fact there was no major event in Germany in that year (German Tourist Board, 2007b). Interestingly, Britain, where a negative image of Germany is most deeply entrenched, recorded the largest increase in visitors from all nations (up 5% from 2005 to 2007, totalling 4.4 million overnight stays (German Tourist Board, 2007b). A further indicator of the effect of 2006 on Germany's image is provided by the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, which measures a nation's standing among people around the world through a representative survey of non-German nationals. Germany went from seventh in 2004 to first in 2007 on this list and remained in second place in 2011. Finally, interview partners spoke of a new 'easiness' (*Leichtigkeit*) with which the Germans dealt with their identity, a sentiment not witnessed in post-war Germany (e.g. Interviews 3 and 5). The majority of the interviewees believed that the World Cup effect on the German self-image continues to this day, the significance of which is discussed in the next section.

The research revealed that what lies behind Germany's success is a range of factors only some of which can be controlled thus limiting the scope for the transfer of lessons to future sports mega-events. These factors included coordinated campaigns to raise awareness of Germany and the sports mega-event, the 'fan-centred' approach adopted by the Germans, and the uncharacteristically good



weather enjoyed throughout the four weeks of the tournament. The factors over which the hosts had more control are discussed below.

Part of the so-called 'World Cup Hosting Strategy' (Federal Government, 2006) was a long-term, carefully planned campaign to improve Germany's image abroad. If the outpouring of national sentiment among flag-waving Germans at the FIFA World Cup in 2006 was spontaneous, the strategy to enhance Germany's image was anything but. The thoroughly planned, coordinated and implemented strategy to change the national 'image' of Germany among foreign publics began well before the event itself and continued throughout and beyond. Well-orchestrated and resourced national and international campaigns were organised, funded, in the main, by the federal government, but designed in conjunction with partners from business (entitled 'Welcome to Germany: Land of Ideas'), FIFA and the German Football Association (entitled 'A time to make friends'). A number of campaigns were specifically designed to prepare Germany and the Germans to be hospitable to the crowds of foreign visitors that were expected for the competition (Brauer & Brauer, 2008; Kersting, 2007).

Taken together these campaigns added up to a concerted effort to leverage the benefits of a sports mega-event in terms of national image and economic gains: individually, however, they represent slightly different messages aimed at different audiences (FMI, 2006). For example, the service sector was targeted by 'The Nationwide Service and Hospitality Campaign' (Federal Government, 2006), which published brochures containing guidelines on how to deal with foreign visitors and which ran nationwide workshops to train and offer advice to 'service ambassadors' on intercultural relations, tolerance and foreign languages (Florek et al., 2008). The 'Welcome to Germany: Land of Ideas' campaign, designed to improve the German national image by showcasing Germany and attracting tourism and foreign investment, was so successful that it continues to this day. It brought together key actors from business, science and culture, and facilitated the promotion of Germany's image externally. Such an image is made up of a wide variety of factors, which were cleverly brought together under the simple slogan of 'Land of Ideas', a phrase made prominent by the in-coming Federal president, Horst Köhler, in 2004,



who suggested Germany should become more than the land of 'poets and thinkers' and more than just 'made in Germany' (Kohler, 2004). Part of the success of this campaign was—and is—that it is non-partisan and does not belong to a particular company; it crosses party political lines and speaks to actors in business, science and culture alike. The central aim of the campaign was to make Germany attractive to foreign publics. According to the managing director of 'Land of Ideas', Ariane Derks, the campaign has:

... a very global aim: our aim is to cater for Germany's positive domestic and international image ... so that Germany is attractive as a Standort (economic location) ... so that we position ourselves positively politically ... so that we are (hopefully) more attractive to people who may wish to work in Germany

The term 'attractive' recurs in interviews with both Ms Derks and officials at Germany's Foreign Office. It is clear that the 'language' of Joseph Nye is well known and actively used: the World Cup was looked upon as a catalyst around which to galvanise efforts and promote Germany's 'soft power.'

The main marketing, communication and visibility strategies are as follows:

Ambush marketing

Ambush marketing is defined as the method used by companies that do not actually hold marketing rights to an event, but still use their marketing activities in diverse ways to establish a connection to it. The idea of ambush marketing is to capitalize on the success of sports sponsorship without taking on the intrinsic obligations of an official sponsor. The objectives of ambush marketers are therefore largely identical to those of the sponsors but are to be attained with reduced financial expenditure (Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2007). The objectives of ambush marketing can thus be deduced from the objectives of sponsorship. Their primary function is the achievement of psychological and/or communicative aims.

Due to the high cost of official sponsorship and the assurance of industry exclusivity by the organizers, a dwindling number of companies are able to participate as official sponsors at mega sports events. Ambush marketing conforms



to the competitive notion of not letting profit and sales opportunities go untapped. The lack of a company's own performance in support of a sports event and the aim of still taking advantage of its marketing potential is not unethical per se. A sports event should not be conducted as a "private function" by the organizers and the participating sponsors.

Relationship marketing

Relation marketing is an important issue in every business. Knowing the customers and establishing, maintaining and enhancing long-term customer relationships is a key component of long-term business success. Considering that sport is such big business today, it is surprising that this crucial approach to marketing has yet to be fully recognised either in literature or in the sports business itself.

In recent years, relationship marketing has also become a key topic in the sports sector. While the concept of managing relationships with customers has long been well established in the sporting goods industry, sporting organisations (ie clubs and associations) have just started to adopt the concept of relationship marketing with their sponsors. The fact that many sporting organisations are nowadays acting like commercial enterprises has strongly influenced the adoption of relationship marketing, above all on the professional level. According to André Bühler - Head of Market Research at the world's leading sports research consultancy IFM Sports - relationship Marketing in Sports aims to fill this void by discussing and reformulating the principles of relationship marketing and by demonstrating how relationship marketing can be successfully applied in practice within a sports context.

Media

The business-to-business relationship between professional or semi-professional sporting organisations and the media is a two-way process because both need each other and both benefit from each other. Television channels, newspapers, radio stations, websites, publishers and all other types of media seek



content for their customers. Sports entities, on the other hand, need publicity in order to develop their brand and get better known.

For a comprehensive marketing strategy and to create unique experiences for spectators, it is important to know the segments of a sports audience and how to address them. Nichols (2014), states that practitioners can improve their marketing success about 10 to 30% by knowing which activities and strategies work. Knowing which activities and strategies work, again depends on the consumer being marketed. When the consumer is an athletic audience, what does that mean for practitioners? How would a segmentation approach then look like in order to allow for more successful and targeted marketing? And which groups of athletic spectators are most relevant for social media marketing?

Digital marketing (including social media marketing) is an important and effective part of modern marketing strategies (Nichols, 2014; Pedersen 2010). The use of social media as a marketing tool is expanding (Pedersen et al., 2010). Social media are an up-to-date marketing method and sports organizations and athletes turn towards it increasingly (Pedersen et al., 2010). Nichols (2014) highlights the great effect of social media marketing, partially in comparison to traditional methods. The most common types of social media used as marketing tools are Twitter, YouTube and Facebook (Witkemper, 2012). Instagram can also be a quick source of information that does not require much effort from an individual”, via YouTube videos can be shared with fans and Facebook is used to “provide information, post pictures and videos, and promote upcoming events. However, only a couple studies specifically address social media marketing in the sport industry.

Spain

Nowadays, it is difficult to find a company that does not attend to one or several marketing strategies to favour communication with its potential customers, to generate brand image, to increase its visibility or to generate income. However, on many occasions, sports club managers are frustrated because the application of the most well-known and popular marketing techniques do not produce, in their sector of activity, the expected results. In this case we must clarify the difference



between adopting and adapting. On many occasions, it is intended to adopt techniques from other sectors different from the sports one, and it is necessary to know the characteristics and particularities of each one, since sports marketing is different and specific (Fernández, 2013; Nogales-González, 2006).

From the merging of Marketing, as a tool in which decisions and activities aimed at improving and maintaining relationships between the business organization, and sport 'Sports Marketing' arises, understood as the set of strategies aimed at the marketing and distribution of products, brands and services, within the sports context. However, in this context it is necessary to differentiate between the promotion of sport events and entities and the diffusion of brands and products to achieve a suitable approach and a praiseworthy treatment (Guillén et al., 2018).

As with marketing, there are many different definitions, uses and meanings attributed to the concept of sports marketing. Rial (2007) shows the great dynamism that exists around the approach and techniques, which are part of sports marketing. From the tangible elements it has moved on to the exploitation of the intangible values associated with sport. Sports marketing has also taken on the task of managing, among other things, the emotional bonding, affinity or identification with sports entities, sportsmen and women, or the sports modalities themselves. The feelings that sport generates and the possibilities it has in the sale of products and associated services highlight the enormous potential of the sport phenomenon within the business and commercial sphere. For Schmitt (2000), the main meaning of marketing as a social discipline is "to generate sensory experiences (sensations), affective experiences (feelings), creative-cognitive experiences (thoughts), physical and lifestyle experiences (performances), and social identity experiences that are the result of interacting with a reference group or culture (relationships)" (p. 53).

Due to the above, sports institutions dedicated to marketing have become economic groups with great social influence. Highly competitive clubs are managed like any other company, following a marketing dynamic; players have become products and advertising models, while fans or supporters are preferred consumer segments of companies (Molina, 2007).



Sports marketing has gained strength in the last decades due to the growth of the sports industry worldwide and the unstoppable commercialization of sports and the organization of different sports events worldwide which are important for thousands of people around the world. Within this new trend in sports clubs, where the Sports Director is a key figure, we need to highlight one of his functions which is Marketing, its context and everything that goes with it (Cantúa et al., 2018).

The field of sports marketing is very broad and, when it comes to these issues, we talk indistinctly about both local sports halls and activities, as well as large big professional sports clubs, private clubs and gyms, the sale of sports equipment, the sponsorship of a sports entity by a certain commercial company or the organization of sports events. It is true that in all of these we can apply concepts and techniques of sports marketing, but the intervention must be done in a different way in each situation. The first thing that must be done is to verify the service nature of the sports practice developed by the clubs in order to later apply the best marketing strategies (Fernández, 2013).

In relation to the topic, Gilibets (2013) argues that there are three types of sports marketing:

- *Sports event marketing*: through this we design strategies that aim to impact, improve and build brand loyalty with consumers, is highly dependent on sponsorship or sponsors and advertising marketing itself. It should be noted that the 'sponsorship marketing' is associated with the individual or company, which with the intention of obtaining a benefit through advertising, provides resources to finance an event or part of it.
- *Marketing of sports products or services*: focuses on promoting the sale of products and/or services using the figure of sport or athlete to achieve or attract target audiences and improve engagement, assumed as a marketing experience, events, participatory in which we must necessarily talk about commitment and brand experience.



- *Marketing of entities or athletes:* in this type of marketing, the entities or the athletes' marketing teams are responsible for promoting their activities and socializing their results among the public.

As a concept, sports marketing has been strengthened by the continuous association of many companies that have used the context of the sports industry to position themselves with their products, brands and services based on the implementation of innovative strategies that seek to improve their corporate image in the market (Puentes, 2015). The corporate identity of the company is built through its history and most recognizable values. The image, on the other hand, is directly linked to the existence of the brand itself (Costa, 2003). If there is no brand, it is impossible to develop its image.

Villafañe (2004) defines corporate image as the integration in the minds of its audiences of all the inputs issued by a company in its ordinary relationship with them. When we speak about

corporate image we refer to the public's perception of an organisation as a social subject entity. The overall idea they have about their products, activities, and conduct (Capriotti, 2005).

The image, like the corporation itself and its brand, has been in continuous evolution since its birth (Costa, 2005). This dynamism means that the brand image must be planned and managed strategically, in order to control that all the elements that are part of it create a unique, coherent and recognizable meaning. All the elements (naming, logo, communication, corporate social responsibility, etc.) integrate and form a whole that we call 'brand'. Despite the fact that the brand is made up of several parts, what the consumer finally perceives (brand image) is the sum of all of them creating synergy in favour of sales and, ultimately, loyalty (Ollé & Ríu, 2009).

Along with the multiple elements that make up a brand, branding appears as the integral and multidisciplinary process that, through strategic planning and management, is responsible for building a brand image (Mayorga, 2014). Branding is not only about the ubiquity, visibility and functions of a product or brand; it is about



connecting emotionally with people in their daily lives. A product or service can only be considered a brand when it provokes an emotional dialogue with the consumer. This concept of brand is heterogeneous and has a multidisciplinary character of strategic management. Corporate identity programs based on emotions must be visionary, integrated, visceral and must reflect the authentic will of companies to share their values with consumers (Gobé, 2005).

In Spain, where professional football is considered a business, despite being such a powerful sector economically and so professionalized in some of its specific areas, it does not invest in strategic brand planning and management. In the research carried out by Mayorga (2014), it was observed that more than 25% of the clubs in the Spanish Professional Football League did not have a communication plan. Corporate websites reflect the lights and shadows of their communication areas. They are very efficient in their information work (96% of the clubs update their news in real time), but require much more corporate implementation and e-branding. The percentage of clubs that do not have specific places within their websites for direct dialogue between the brand and its public (more than 58%) is worrying (very good in press and information, very deficient in corporate and brand strategic work). The percentage of clubs that do not carry out any kind of research or analysis about their own brand is more than 30%.

However, campaigns such as the one carried out by the agency Mrs. Rushmore for Atlético de Madrid, have been very successful due to the creative treatment in the strategic area of values and

image that has been made of the club through its advertising executions. It has sought to convey the athletic identity, and does not talk about football or try to sell season tickets, but refers to a way of being and aims to gain sympathy (emotionality) (Mars, 2013).

Therefore, large industries seek through sports marketing that consumers are reflected through their actions in every sports event, taking as a reference the recognition of brands, products and services. In accordance with this, it seeks to



make consumers express their identity through products and to make them feel represented (Guillén et al., 2018).

In addition to branding, communication appears alongside marketing as two phenomena typical of the societies of our time that have developed together. Although marketing is a technique of greater scope than communication, there is no doubt that many modern marketing strategies are based on communication strategies. Therefore, marketing will take care of everything that needs to be done so that a product, an idea or a service can reach its buyer or user (Cantúa et al., 2018).

This is why every well-developed marketing plan must bring with it a communication plan in line with what we want to offer and which helps us to make known what we want about our product or service. This is how it is said that the communication strategy will mark the future of your actions. Therefore, it is very important that it is perfectly designed, allowing you to solve possible problems that may occur (Blázquez, 2012). This process can be carried out through four elements:

- Sales promotion: a way of communication that is developed through short-term incentives to encourage the purchase of a product or service.
- Sales force: verbal communication of the sales network with customers, in order to consummate the purchase or acquisition of a service.
- Direct marketing: communication of the offer of goods and services directly to the potential consumer without intermediaries.
- Public relations: set of actions designed to improve, maintain or protect the image of a company or product, in order to facilitate relations with the different groups in the environment with which the company relates, as well as to influence the opinion and attitude that these groups may form on the company.

One of the most far-reaching communication strategies today is digital marketing, understood as the application of marketing strategies carried out through digital media, which has led to the revolution in marketing work worldwide. All the



techniques of the off-line world are imitated and translated into a new world, the online world. In the digital world, new tools are appearing such as immediacy, new networks that are emerging every day, and the possibility of real measurements of each of the strategies used (Cantúa et al., 2018).

As a reference to carry out the digital marketing plan, Redondo and Rojas (2013) refer to a proposal made by Idris Mootee, who raises the theory of the "4Ps" of digital marketing:

- *Personalization*: it is basically about designing products or services according to our consumer. For this it is essential to analyse the information we obtain from our target and the behaviour that they present.
- *Participation*: this principle is based on the integration of our clients with the objective of creating communities, giving them the possibility to interact and generate content around our brand.
- *Peer to peer*: this principle is based on the interaction between users and is basically about trusting the recommendations that our users make about our product or service, using this as advertising. For this it is fundamental that the user experience with the product or service is good, since any experience where the customer is not satisfied, can also have an important impact through this same principle, so the integration of traditional marketing activities takes a lot of importance since they are the ones that finally have a direct relationship between customer/product or service.
- *Predictions*: this concept consists of using the data delivered by our clients through the different online platforms, with the objective of having an important source of information and being able to analyze the behavior that our target audience is having.

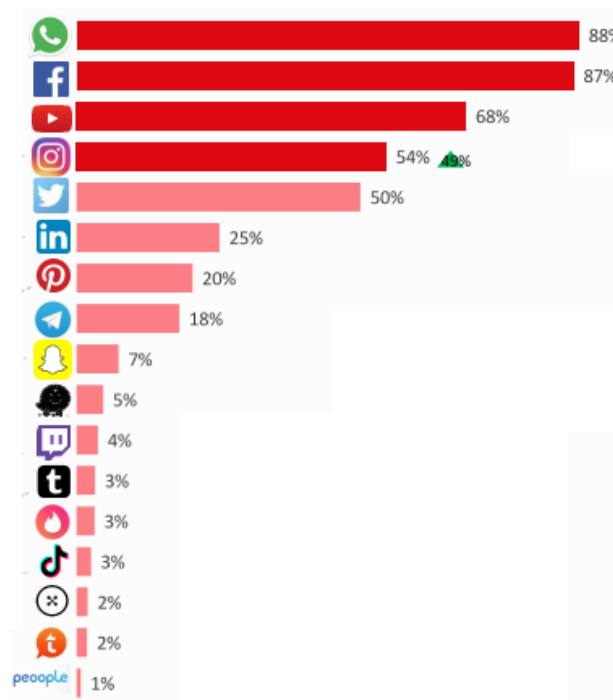
Among the main tools we have to improve our visibility through digital marketing are the website, e-mail marketing, multimedia management, the corporate blog, etc. However, in recent years, there is an online marketing tool that is being widely used and is becoming increasingly important: Social Networks.



According to the Annual Study of Social Networks (IAB Spain, 2019), social networks are stabilizing among the Spanish Internet population, thus reaching its maturity with 85% of Internet users between 16-65 years who use social networks, representing more than 25.5 million users in our country, of which 51% are women and 49% men. Regarding the most used social networks, Figure 2 details the main ones together with the percentage of users:

Figure 2

Social networks in Spain



Source: IAB Spain (2019)

Regarding the main activities that users carry out on the networks, 31% follow accounts related to the media, political parties, etc. and 23% are fans or follow a certain commercial brand. Likewise, 26% of those surveyed said that brands that have a profile on social networks inspire them more confidence. As for the use by professionals of social networks, they use them in 51% of the occasions to generate notoriety and 47% to generate branding, among other uses.

According to the above, today it is impossible to think of a communication plan that does not include elements of digital marketing, since with the influence they

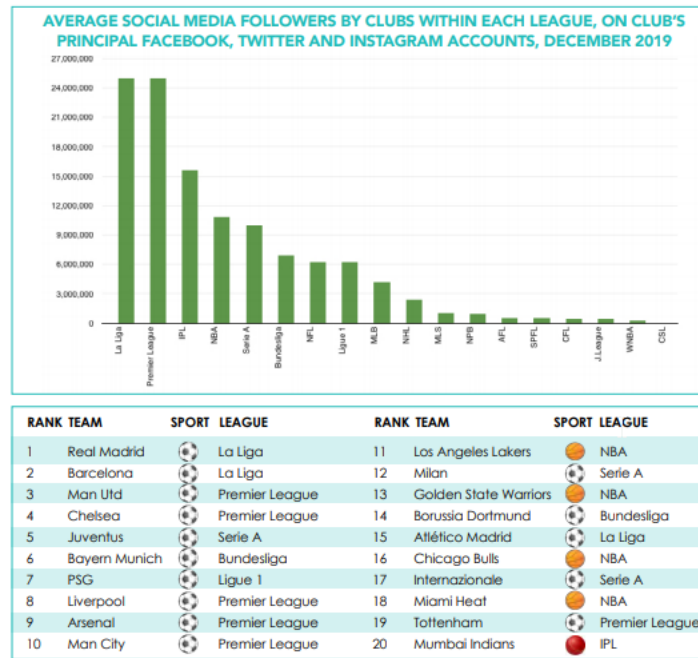


are having on society it becomes essential to be present as a brand on these online platforms. However, we must not neglect what is related to the more traditional area of marketing, but we must integrate it in such a way that it allows us to strengthen our relationship with the consumer and thus strengthen our company image, positioning ourselves in the mind of the consumer in the space that we as a company want to do (Goicoechea, 2015).

Digital marketing is also of great relevance in the field of sports, not only to promote products and services, but also as a means of improving communication and visibility of sports teams. For example, the Real Madrid Football Club stands out for having a strong positioning both on a web level and on a social network level. Real Madrid's website is configured with up to 8 different languages, half of which are from the Asian continent and the other half from the European continent. In this way, the club manages to reach the whole world digitally and thus be able to increase its followers and offer its products to possible new clients, placing itself as the club with the greatest number of followers on social networks (Figure 3):

Figure 3

Average Social Media followers by clubs



Source: Sporting Intelligence (2019)



In addition to the marketing strategies detailed above, in the field of sports sponsorship appears as one of the most important non-conventional communication techniques. In Spain, the General Law 34/1988, of 11 November, on Advertising, defines the advertising contract in Article 24 as "that by which the sponsored party, in exchange for economic support for the performance of his or her sporting, charitable, cultural, scientific or other activity, undertakes to collaborate in the sponsor's advertising".

Nogales-González (2006) details that sponsorship has become a commercial communication instrument that has acquired more value in sports marketing, in which the sponsored entity interacts within the framework of sport and the sponsoring companies use the communicative values of said entity, event or sponsored person, to promote image and satisfy interests, using indirect action technique, since the sponsoring company does not directly announce its offer to the consumer, since it uses an intermediary, who is in charge of the consumer's perception of the brand, through activities and/or people who at that moment are carriers of the message.

In this regard, Blázquez (2012) states that companies need to differentiate themselves from the competition by providing greater prestige, credibility and leadership in their sector. Sponsorship of sport allows to reinforce corporate notoriety and to share the values associated to it. In short, they try to find the emotional bond that sport manages to establish with its practitioners and followers.

The concept of assuming the sponsorship stands out if the sponsored party's environment is marked by success and good results, which preferably should be accompanied by a good, important and positive image that is compatible with the brand. At this point, it is important for the business world to assume the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility, which allows for the social sustainability of sports entities. In this environment, Responsibility is seen as the act of knowing and accepting the consequences of a free and intelligent act, as well as the relation of causality that unites the author with the act he is performing, linking in the latter the relations born from the effects of the latter (Solano Santos, 2013).



Contradictorily many of the companies that are managed by means of sport marketing strategies will preponderate as fundamental goal to gain money, and secondly to satisfy needs and desires of the people who practice sport or fans. At this point it is necessary to emphasize that its proper projection implies 'Social Responsibility' on the part of those who are in charge of deploying the strategies and actions that are planned through marketing plans or advertising campaigns; making the commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility of paramount importance, to achieve a positive impact on the social welfare of the community and the target audience (Guillén et al., 2018).

According to the results of the First Study on Sports Sponsorship in Spain (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación [DIRCOM], 2015), 53% of companies state that their main motivation for investing in sports sponsorship is because they see it as a way of strengthening their identity and corporate values, with 28% opting for sports events, 21% for sports competitions and 20% for sports clubs. Likewise, 71% of them detail that they do not preferably sponsor men's sports. Therefore, the majority seek to strengthen the company's image and associate it with a series of positive values, which is why the sponsorship of women's sports is a great option.

One of the companies at national level that is most committed to women's sport is Iberdrola, linked to the energy business, which has been characterised by having equality as an important pillar of its institutional policies. In this regard, between 2007 and 2018 they have established more than 70 measures to improve their equality and reconciliation policy (Matatoros, 2018), which has led them to focus their sponsorship strategy on women, such as through the Spanish women's football team and the women's first division, although they also carry out other programmes not focused on competitive sport such as the Women's Universe Tour, a roadshow that aims to promote and develop women's sport at the national level.

Concerning the training and skills in sports marketing, must be taken into account that the sports sector and everything around it, has undergone a great change in recent decades in Spain. This change is due to economic changes and the evolution of society. The voluntary nature of the past stands out in the face of



the current need to generate policies and projects that have a positive impact on the population (Gallardo & Jiménez, 2004).

In this sense, the increased interest in sports management was not accompanied by an evolution and consolidation in the professionalization of the sector. Important shortcomings were identified in the conceptual and terminological aspects. As Gambau (2016) explains, there is no uniformity in the identification of the professions linked to the sports sector and the concept of professional activity is confused with that of occupation.

The work performance of people who are assigned different degrees of responsibility in sports organisations - public administration units, clubs, federations, private gyms, etc. - has a significant influence on the quality of sports activities, on the service to the citizens involved in them, and on the performance of the rest of the workers and collaborators linked to them (Gimeno & Paris, 2000).

What was an activity whose teaching, training, technical direction and management and organization was almost entirely voluntary, has today become a professionalized, highly technical activity, which as such requires specific training, knowledge, experience and skills in the people who perform it (Gimeno & Paris, 2000). Currently, sport management tends to be more professionally oriented for the people in charge - managers and middle managers - with the characteristics that this professionalisation entails. One of the topics that experts consider most important, from the point of view of demand, is marketing and communication.

Organizations need workers and corporate policies that are specialized, multi-purpose, innovative, creative, committed and concerned with providing excellent service and communication to consumers (Dorado, 2005). Although the definition of competencies and skills has been widely studied in the business and corporate sphere, it has not been specifically studied for the area of sport.

Management competencies are essential to sound business practice, this is particularly so in relation to marketing issues because of the strong and sometimes adverse competitive environment the enterprises must exist within. Sports managers, because of the severe limitations and lack of resources must rely heavily



on developing suitable and appropriate competencies for marketing (Carson & Gilmore, 2000).

The competency base for marketing management decisions is the Experiential Learning (knowledge + experience + judgement + communication) (Carson & Hill, 1992) which is crucial to successful marketing management decision-making. Another skill that stands out in the literature consulted is creativity (Ramírez, 2006), due to the need to differentiate oneself from the competition and gain the loyalty of the public, which is indispensable if sports associations and clubs are to remain in this very competitive market. Likewise, reference is made to communication and public relations skills and commercial skills as some of the desirable characteristics (Ramírez, 2006).

Sport management is applied in different fields that make necessary a specialization that will force to design the adapted curricular profiles and to establish the possible ways of training. For example, the same qualification is not required to design and coordinate the development of a sport program as in the management performance of a sport corporation. To the extent that those responsible for directing and managing sport are adequately trained, it will be possible to achieve excellent sport management that will contribute to a better development of sport in all its manifestations (Blanco, 2016).

1.3 OBJECTIVES RINMSASFT:

Strengthening competences of managers of semi-professional female sport teams through marketing, communication and visibility strategies.

Tackling the challenge related to the well-known existing sponsorship and funding disparities between male and female sport teams at semi-professional level.



2. METHOD

Two tools were used to determine the training needs of sports managers of semi-professional women's sports teams in each country, one quantitative (a questionnaire) and one qualitative (focus group).

2.1. Quantitative instrument, sample and procedures (Questionnaire):

The sample consisted of 209 subjects, of which 121 were women and 88 were men. All the participants were managers of a club or sports federation, with higher education and between 30 and 60 years of age. All participants signed a consent form prior to the study.

The questionnaire is a very valid tool that will allow us to know the perception that sports managers have about the necessary skills to be a good sports manager in a female team. The questionnaire was divided into two main parts:

- A first part for the registration of demographic data (age, country, sports organization ...).

Demographic Data.

1. Gender: _____

2. Age: _____

3. Sport Organization: _____

4. Current position: _____

5. Job experience: _____

6. Educational level: _____

- A second part more extensive which dealt with the different competences of sports managers, divided into 25 sections with 4 questions in each section (100 questions in total).

1. Management thinking
2. Effective Communication
3. Leadership
4. Financial Management



5. Human Resources Management
6. Marketing
7. Governance
8. Legal Foundations
9. Event Management
10. Risk Management
11. Sport Facility Management
12. Time Management
13. Computer Skills
14. Information Technology
15. Decision Making
16. Philosophy & Ethics
17. Research
18. Sport Foundation
19. Control Management
20. Results Orientation
21. Public Relations
22. Project Management
23. Strategic Management
24. Social Skills
25. Conflict Management

- In the first part of the questionnaire the questions are open answers while in the second part answers will range from 1 (unnecessary) to 7 (extremely important) depending on the agreement/disagreement level.

Statistical analysis was performed with IBM statistics SPSS v20.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago IL, USA) and analysed using the descriptive statistics and the unpaired t-tests. The values were expressed as mean \pm SD and the significance level was considered when $p < 0,05$.



2.2. Qualitative instrument, sample and procedures (Focus group):

General information on the focus groups that have been carried out by each participant, is detailed below (Table 1):

Table 1

General information focus group

ORGANIZATION	DATE	PLACE	START TIME END TIME	ORGANIZATIONS'S STAFF
UCAM	23.07.20	Online	11 am - 1 pm	Lucía Abenza Cano M ^a José Maciá Andreu Ana M ^a Gallardo Guerrero Juan Antonio Sánchez Sáez
MV International	13.07.20	Online	5 pm - 6:30 pm	Denitsa Andonova
Sassari Torres Femminile	29.07.20	Online	5:30 pm - 7 pm	Fabrizio Contini
Bulgarian Sports Development Association	23.07.20	Sofia, Bulgaria	1:15 pm - 2:30 pm	Ivaylo Zdravkov
Rijeka's Sports Association	30.06.20	Rijeka, Croatia	9 am - 1 pm	Tara Pavić

2.3. Sociodemographic Data of the Participants

In this section, information about the main characteristics of the participants is provided.

The focus group carried out by **UCAM** was composed of 8 sports managers related to different sports disciplines (7 men, 1 woman), with an average of 17.6 years of professional experience (min. 7, max. 30).



Concerning the position they currently hold, some of them manage or run a semi-professional women's sports club (n=3) or perform treasury and secretarial functions (n=2). There are also two presidents of sports federations (n=2) and a director of university sports services (n=1) with semi-professional women's teams in several sports disciplines.

The focus group was led in Spanish language and then the whole reflections have been translated in English for the purpose of the project.

In relation to the focus group carried out by **MV International**, it was held with 6 participants aged between 25 and 60 years old. All of them hold significant experience in the sport field, either as ex athletes, either as sport coaches, but as well some of them have also experience in terms of management of sport teams. The group was formed of 2 male and 4 female members.

The focus group was led in Italian language and then the whole reflections have been translated in English for the purpose of the project.

Concerning the professional experience as well the expectations of all participants in the focus group:

- **Speaker 1:** is representing L'ORMA Milan, which is a sport association working with sport by using it as educational tool. The organization implements a wide range of European projects mainly dedicated to promoting sports among the local community in Lombardia. The participant is the President of the organization and he works in a position of manager/ sport manager. He needs more competences in terms of marketing and management in order to bring better results within his organization. This is why he decided to involve in the project.
- **Speaker 2:** works in an artistic gymnastics' sports club for many years. The club has been founded many years ago at the beginning of the 1900s and was part of the Serie A, then it has closed then then reopened ag



As for its recent history, the club has restarted its activity 20 years ago, mainly in the amateur sector. In recent years it has gone from an amateur course to 500 athletes and athletes in competition also in Serie A. So it is also part of Serie A and therefore the focus group seemed interesting to its members in order to gain more understanding and share expertise with other of their colleagues.

The participant is not part of the board of directors, but is very close to it. For the club she does training and has a very active part in. Therefore, she has been following this project activity up to now and is also interested in gaining more understanding on what happens within a focus group.

- **Speaker 3:** she collaborates with various other sports associations in the field of dance and also dance Ability – which is an activity that uses the dance for inclusion with people of different abilities. So, this group member has both experiences, either the one from the field as connecting with teachers and sport coaches, and also the practical experience in project management as coordinator of several EU projects.
- **Speaker 4:** she has significant experience in the volleyball field. In the past, she has been volleyball athlete and played in few teams. Then after various injuries, she has passed on the other side and became a coach. In addition, she helps then the management of her team, especially by managing the sponsors because her studies brought her to deepen her knowledge in sports management and marketing. At the present moment, the participant collaborates by following the part of sponsorships and relationships with companies of a volleyball team in B1.
- **Speaker 5:** the lady is part of a sports association for people with intellectual disabilities. She participates in the focus group because of her interest in understanding better some aspects of marketing and visibility because it is quite important to have some knowledge about that when involved in such activities. At the moment, she has a volunteer position in the association in which she is involved, as the structure is quite small and does not have enough budget and financial possibilities to pay staff.



- **Speaker 6:** This last participant is the most experienced of all in the current focus group. He is the founder of Sanga Milano, that is in the Serie A2 of Female Basketball in Milan, but there is no A1 series, so we can say that Sanga Milano is in Serie A.

This participant has been working with women's sport since 1999 and takes care of everything within the team, starting from recovery of sponsors or finding the players to the creation of youth sections within the team. He believes that within his more than 20 years of experience, he knows how more or less a women's sport club (basketball) shall be maintained. This is the twelfth consecutive year that the mentioned Sanga team is in Serie A2. It is apparently an Italian record because usually the women's sport clubs either go to A1 or go back to Serie C or B then fail, and then in case of finding sponsors those teams could continue back again.

Therefore, this team and its manager are very proud to stand 12 years always at the highest level. In addition, the club also takes care of the disabled people, where girls play and above all also girls in Serie A play a game called "Basketball IN" which is a very Inclusive Basket. They players or even people who have never played, play together with champions, but also involve in the game disabled people and it becomes a very interesting inclusive sport.

And speaking of inclusion, the club is born in via Padova which is the multiethnic area of Milan, so the club carries out a series of cultural concepts as well, and actions against any discrimination. For this reason, the club involves in playing especially foreign children, Arab girls and of course takes care of the disabled.

This participant is involved in the focus group because of his curiosity to see other types of approach to the female sport world because he already has found a range of issues to work on. Few of them are:



- a. The difficulty to find sponsors, especially for a female sports club, although the market is addressing mainly female target groups (60-70%). The question here is why sponsors do not value female groups when the female world is the biggest buyer, taking into consideration many products and many targets.

- b. There are also a number of prejudices and gender abuse labels for which there are men's sports and women's sports. In Italy, it happens many times that mothers direct their daughters to do dance or volleyball as those are sport of little human contact and also very pretty, and on the other hand girls hardly go to play rugby football or basketball. The idea here is to educate also the girls on such sports where values of community and overcoming difficulties are important, if one day some of them want to become managers or grow up in their career.

Thanks to this presentation round of the focus group participants, it is necessary to underline that we have quite a diverse group of people, with various experiences, in various fields and professional positions and the facilitator estimates the start of the discussion as very valuable since already several issues have been raised. The talk will be pursued thanks to the main questions for discussion which have been prepared and been asked to the group.

The focus group of **Sassari Torres Femminile** was held with 5 participants aged between 25 and 60 years old. All of them hold significant experience in the sport field, either as ex athletes, either as sport coaches, but as well some of them have also experience in terms of management of sport teams. The group was formed of 4 male and 1 female members.

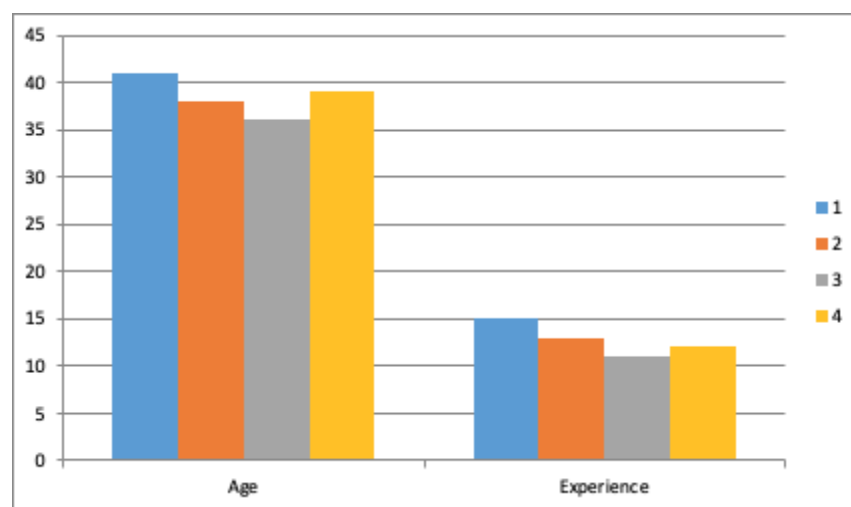
The focus group was led in Italian language and then the whole reflections have been translated in English for the purpose of the project.



The focus group carried out by **Bulgarian Sports Development Association** included 4 women aged between 36 and 40 years. Two of the participants are presidents of a sports clubs, one is a sports director and the other one is a sports manager. All of them have more than 10 years of experience in their work (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Bulgarian Sports Development Association. Age and professional experience of the participants



The focus group was implemented in Bulgarian language and for the purpose of the research the information was translated to English language.

The first stage of the focus group included the following feedback by the participants:

- **Moderator:** Hello, today I am here to conduct a focus group under the “Re(IN)novating Marketing Strategy Across Semi-professional Female Teams” project. First, would you introduce yourself and share information regarding which sports clubs or sports organizations did you represent?
- **Speaker 1:** I represent as a technical director, the National Sports Academy’s Football Club.

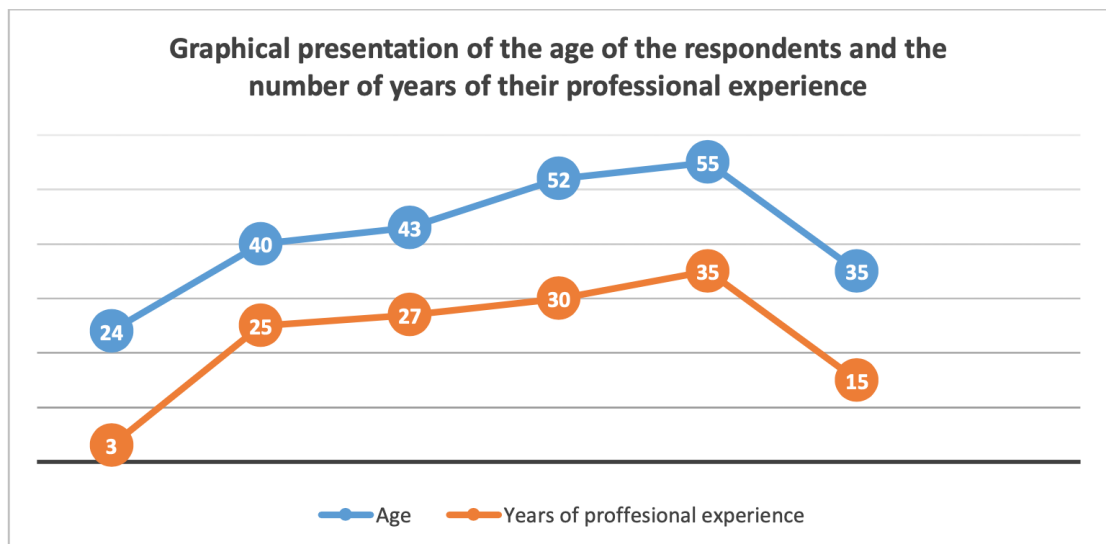


- **Speaker 2:** Good afternoon! I am manager of the "Grand Hotel Varna" Sports Club.
- **Speaker 3:** Good afternoon! I am the President of "Enko" Sports Club, Plovdiv.
- **Speaker 4:** Good afternoon! I am the chairwoman of the St. Sophia Football Club.

Finally, the focus group conducted by **Rijeka's Sports Association** consisted of six people, five women and one man. The age group of the focus group range from 24 to 56 years (Figure 2). All selected individuals have many years of generous experience in the sport - whether as athletes or club leaders. The respondents are the president of the diving club, the president of the synchronized swimming club also the president of the sports federation, the president of the judo club also the general secretary of the sports federation, the head of public needs of local sports clubs, a marketing expert and the president of the windsurfing club, a world champion in windsurfing disciplines.

Figure 2

Rijeka's Sports Association. Age and professional experience of the participants



The focus group was led in Croatian language and then the whole reflections have been translated in English for the purpose of the project.



Regarding the questions asked to the participants, they were as follow:

1. What benefits do you think can be achieved by improving your marketing, communication and visibility strategies?
2. What importance do you give to marketing, communication and visibility in your entity?
3. What strategies do you carry out?
4. What strategies do you think can be implemented to improve...?
5. What skills or competencies do you think a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?
6. What are the benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team?
7. What do you think are the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored?
8. What barriers do you usually encounter when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

The analysis of the focus group results, were done using a qualitative approach through the video transcriptions, with the aim of getting as much information as possible from the participants' discussion.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative results: Questionnaire:

After performing a descriptive statistic, it is observed that the answers average of the 25 sections included in the questionnaire is > 5, therefore, both males and females, as well as all participating countries, consider that the 25 sections of the questionnaire are extremely important to be a good sports manager.



Analysing the responses of males and females of the five included countries, it was possible to verify statistically significant differences in some of the sections (* $p < 0,05$), observing that women obtain higher scores than men, perhaps giving more importance to sports management.

Table 2.
Questionnaire Sections by country

QUESTIONNAIRE SECTIONS	SPAIN (n=44)	ITALY (n=40)	CROATIA (n=40)	BULGARIA (n=44)	GERMANY (n=41)
V1_MANAGEMENT_THINKING	5.23 ± 1.02	6.6 ± 0.52	6.05 ± 0.81	5.68 ± 1.08	6.42 ± 0.58
V2_EFFECTIVE_COMUNICATION	5.52 ± 0.69	6.53 ± 0.62	6 ± 0.75	5.89 ± 0.85	6.29 ± 0.72
V3_LEADERSHIP	5.59 ± 0.72	6.49 ± 0.55	5.73 ± 0.79	5.95 ± 0.8	6.19 ± 0.89
V4_FINANCIAL_MANAGEMENT	5.76 ± 0.77	6.07 ± 1.12	5.88 ± 0.83	6.15 ± 0.66	6.21 ± 0.72
V5_HUMAN_RESOURCES	5.23 ± 0.91	6.35 ± 0.77	5.91 ± 0.81	5.67 ± 1.08	6.28 ± 0.72
V6_MARKETING	6.21 ± 0.72	6.26 ± 0.87	6.16 ± 0.93	6.53 ± 0.49	6.25 ± 0.7
V7_GOVERNANCE	6.21 ± 0.7	6.32 ± 0.67	6.17 ± 0.79	6.64 ± 0.44	6.23 ± 0.89
V8_LEGAL_FOUNDATIONS	6.09 ± 0.84	6.26 ± 0.72	6.22 ± 0.86	6.67 ± 0.45	6.29 ± 0.9
V9_EVENT_MANAGEMENT	5.49 ± 0.79	6.52 ± 0.67	5.89 ± 0.82	5.8 ± 0.97	6.39 ± 0.71
V10_RISK_MANAGEMENT	6.23 ± 0.67	6.55 ± 0.59	6.28 ± 0.73	6.65 ± 0.45	6.38 ± 0.77
V11_FACILITY_MANAGEMENT	5.71 ± 0.66	6.24 ± 0.93	6.05 ± 0.67	6.12 ± 0.77	6.19 ± 0.91
V12_TIME_MANAGEMENT	5.92 ± 0.67	6.49 ± 0.67	6.16 ± 0.56	6.44 ± 0.48	6.18 ± 0.82
V13_COMPUTER_SKILLS	5.13 ± 1.02	6.34 ± 0.81	5.66 ± 0.93	5.47 ± 1.18	6.28 ± 0.72
V14_INFORMATION_TECHNOLOGY	5.19 ± 0.9	6.4 ± 0.79	5.74 ± 0.87	5.53 ± 1.23	6.22 ± 0.86
V15_DECISION_MAKING	5.76 ± 0.73	6.43 ± 0.79	6.2 ± 0.72	6.38 ± 0.6	6.28 ± 0.77
V16_PHYLOSOPHY_ETHICS	5.75 ± 0.72	6.55 ± 0.65	6.22 ± 0.66	6.26 ± 0.68	6.35 ± 0.72
V17_RESEARCH	5.36 ± 0.86	6.36 ± 0.82	5.85 ± 0.95	5.82 ± 0.98	6.25 ± 0.8
V18_SPORT_FOUNDATIONS	5.77 ± 1.01	6.51 ± 0.65	6.14 ± 0.75	6.43 ± 0.59	6.25 ± 0.9
V19_CONTROL_MANAGEMENT	5.48 ± 0.75	6.41 ± 0.71	5.98 ± 0.66	6.1 ± 0.8	6.23 ± 0.94
V20_RESULTS_ORIENTATION	5.6 ± 0.64	6.55 ± 0.6	5.9 ± 0.75	6.17 ± 0.79	6.24 ± 0.89
V21_PUBLIC_RELATIONS	5.88 ± 0.72	6.45 ± 0.7	5.98 ± 0.86	6.42 ± 0.6	6.36 ± 0.78
V22_PROJECT_MANAGEMENT	5.68 ± 0.64	6.43 ± 0.78	6.01 ± 0.73	6.07 ± 0.82	6.28 ± 0.75
V23_STRATEGIC_MANAGEMENT	5.67 ± 0.6	6.47 ± 0.72	5.96 ± 0.67	6.11 ± 0.79	6.28 ± 0.74
V24_SOCIAL_SKILLS	5.85 ± 0.53	6.58 ± 0.59	5.98 ± 0.65	6.36 ± 0.48	6.4 ± 0.67
V25_CONFLICT_MANAGEMENT	6.55 ± 0.64	6.65 ± 0.59	6.53 ± 0.62	6.94 ± 0.21	6.46 ± 0.67

Some of the sections that have obtained higher scores and therefore considered more important, are: marketing, governance, legal foundations, risk and conflict management.

Females give less importance to sections such as: human resources, computer and information technology skills, while male consider less important sections such as: management thinking, leadership, financial , facility and event management.



Table 3
Questionnaire Sections by gender

VARIABLES (ALL COUNTRIES)	FEMALE (n=121)	MALE (n=88)
V1_MANAGEMENT_THINKING	6.03 ± 1.01	5.91 ± 0.93
V2_EFFECTIVE_COMUNICACION	6.05 ± 0.83	6.01 ± 0.75
V3_LEADERSHIP	6.03 ± 0.84	5.92 ± 0.79
V4_FINANCIAL_MANAGEMENT	6.05 ± 0.93	5.96 ± 0.7
V5_HUMAN_RESOURCES	5.94 ± 1	5.78 ± 0.88
V6_MARKETING	6.3 ± 0.75	6.26 ± 0.77
V7_GOVERNANCE	6.28 ± 0.76	6.37 ± 0.67
V8_LEGAL_FOUNDATIONS	6.3 ± 0.83	6.32 ± 0.71
V9_EVENT_MANAGEMENT	6.09 ± 0.9	5.9 ± 0.86
V10_RISK_MANAGEMENT	6.45 ± 0.62	6.38 ± 0.72
V11_FACILITY_MANAGEMENT	6.12 ± 0.8	5.97 ± 0.82
V12_TIME_MANAGEMENT	6.27 ± 0.69	6.2 ± 0.66
V13_COMPUTER_SKILLS	5.78 ± 1.1	5.73 ± 0.99
V14_INFORMATION_TECHNOLOGY	5.84 ± 1.08	5.74 ± 0.98
V15_DECISION_MAKING	6.24 ± 0.75	6.15 ± 0.76
V16_PHYLOSOPHY_ETHICS	6.25 ± 0.75	6.17 ± 0.71
V17_RESEARCH	5.95 ± 0.99	5.87 ± 0.89
V18_SPORT_FOUNDATIONS	6.24 ± 0.83	6.18 ± 0.84
V19_CONTROL_MANAGEMENT	6.04 ± 0.85	6.02 ± 0.81
V20_RESULTS_ORIENTATION	6.11 ± 0.81	6.04 ± 0.8
V21_PUBLIC_RELATIONS	6.25 ± 0.8	6.17 ± 0.72
V22_PROJECT_MANAGEMENT	6.1 ± 0.82	6.06 ± 0.73
V23_STRATEGIC_MANAGEMENT	6.15 ± 0.78	6.02 ± 0.72
V24_SOCIAL_SKILLS	6.28 ± 0.64	6.15 ± 0.63
V25_CONFLICT_MANAGEMENT	6.69 ± 0.57	6.55 ± 0.6

3.2. Qualitative results: Focus Group:

In relation to the questions asked in the focus group, the most relevant comments and reflections during the meeting are presented below.

1. What benefits do you think can be achieved by improving your marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

UCAM

In Spain, before 2008, sports clubs were financed 80-90% by regional and municipal public grants. Later, these amounts practically disappear, which is a turning point, in which the athletes and clubs, must begin to change their strategy to look for resources after the end of the subsidies. Those who want to survive, have to start making campaigns and planning marketing, communication and visibility



strategies that were not necessary before, with the aim not only of attracting sponsors, but also to make them see that they are investing in something that has a diffusion and that will generate a return, convincing them to invest in a sports team rather than in a press advertisement or a banner (FG4, FG6, FG7).

These three pillars (marketing, communication and visibility) go together and are indivisible (FG4), if there is no visibility of your sport on social networks or television, no matter how well you communicate, your marketing tool is not valid (FG5). Carrying out these types of strategies is essential for the club to continue existing and to be competitive (FG5, FG6), allowing its growth at a sporting, economic and social level (FG3). The team can achieve very good sports results but, if it is not able to show its identity and make itself known to society and companies, it is as if it did not exist, and it must sharpen its wits to improve its positioning and visibility (FG1, FG3, FG4, FG7).

In this regard, being present in social networks is currently of great importance, since they are reducing the relevance of traditional marketing (FG2, FG8). Social networks, through the so-called *influencers*, do not seek conventional advertising, but people who attract the target audience and are product generators (FG4, FG7). Therefore, we have moved from a personal relationship between friends and acquaintances, trying to disseminate the club, activity or sports event in a broader way (FG1). However, more traditional media such as radio, local television and written or digital press should not be forgotten (FG1, FG2, FG4).

Due to the above, it is essential to create an organisational structure in this area and professionalise it little by little, as communication, marketing and visibility are currently crucial for a medium-sized club (FG2), being able to propose strategies that arouse the interest of companies both inside and outside the sports sector (FG8) and taking into account that sport is about emotions, and we therefore are different from other products (FG3).



MV International

At the beginning the persons who took part in the focus group didn't understand very well the exact meaning or sense of the question. After a few more explanations the reflections were oriented in several directions:

- **Attractiveness of the team in order to appeal the youth sector.**

Having a good marketing strategy could be an advantage for a club in order to attract the youth sector or young categories of athletes. Especially nowadays, through social networking, having a nice and appealing marketing attracts many young people for joining those clubs.

“Certainly there is also talk of attractiveness in the youth sector because marketing is usually done on the first teams on athletes who already have a certain visibility, especially in the area. So in the national context it is a bit bigger and certainly now especially in the social world to start a very nice communication and marketing very nice very appealing”

One of the points raised was whether this is augmenting the number of those who subscribe to the club, but the person who brought the idea clarifies that basically this creates a good basis for selection, because an athlete who is really talented could have various proposals from different clubs, therefore will choose the one that operates stronger marketing and communication strategies, in regards of having better visibility as athlete too.

“It is not so much to find members but to have a good basis for making the selection. Because in the end the girl is already a strong girl, it may be that she has proposals from two very strong clubs and both of them want her”

“If I do a communication strategy anyway the girl says maybe I go there because anyway then my visibility is greater as also but there would also be a part of advantage for the club”

- **Increasing the number of club members.**



Also, another point of view is that having a good marketing strategy is augmenting the number of people involved in the club generally. This brings also good benefits to the club as it is growing faster.

- **Promoting better the values of the sport itself, especially in small towns.**

Speaking about small towns or local areas, there is always a big offer of sports to be done. Therefore, the club which does good marketing for promoting the values of the practiced sport itself, making it more known, also results in people that are choosing this sport because of those values and not because of several other reasons.

“In my opinion also the typology. ...I take gymnastics because I know this, also depends on the area so in a small town there are many sports. So there is a lot of offer that can be reached in no time because people move from one street to another very easily, compared to a big city. What has been missing at times and is now getting a little better is understand what you can do with this sport. So give visibility to find a way to communicate what it means to do gymnastics what it means to do gymnastics with certain values even at a certain level in the sense that many times sports that are little known seem only for some privileged people. In reality, it results achievable with work, so to show how you can become an athlete. It can be done also by working on communication by creating strategies to make this sport better known. Yes, because if not, those who go to gym go there because they do it in school or the super fans. Otherwise, no one or few know it. So give a value and bring together a type of target that is not only that - My mother sent me because the club is down the house but I chose this sport because I like this thing this value this effort”

Basically increasing the visibility of the sport itself is making it more known around the people and mainly transmits the values which are behind. In the discussion this aspect has appeared as quite important matter, especially for sports that are not mass known and that seek to familiarize the population with the values they vehicle.



- **Economic reasons and finding sponsors.**

Finding economic resources and sponsors through the implementation of Marketing and visibility strategies is fundamental for all sport clubs, especially for those that are of big size with a lot of members. Communicating in the right way for your team ensures not only economic resources but ensures also the right club image, so that more sponsors and more members would join.

“Clearly for us to find economic resources being in Serie A we need a lot of money so it is obvious that we have to look for economic resources and we try to give what image we want to give of ourselves. The first question I would ask myself, however, each for each association is to work on the communication that can tell the sporting fact but also who we are. Storytelling is the first thing that comes to mind to hit people, there must be emotional things as well as a sports story or say how good we are how competent we are.If you notice the big clubs, for me my example is Spain in basketball the tracks. They always put in the SOS.

Family national team and this is what we are family everyone says in the end all the sports clubs as the first concept they tell you we are family, after which they say “Come here because you find friends you will have fun”. And with me as a last thing a company maybe a little more important like ours. We are talking to those people we know and maybe they want the girls to come somewhere you are telling them “Look we are also competent and good come to us”. This mix of stuff ...I say very briefly we would have to talk much longer to give an address to your communication”

Sassari Torres Femminile

The minute the question was asked, participants started to pour their suggestions based on their own experiences and it went in several paths listed below:

- **Attract a big number of new registrations.**

It is said here: from the experience of the last few days one of the objectives that we usually try to achieve is to promote women's football at a regional level and



try to attract more and more new girls who want to get to know this world that is still very little known. In fact for this reason, in addition to the various communication on social media, the press releases various cute graphics that we can use.

What is done at the marketing level is the open days for example and recently we have organized one. There has been enough influence, and this is very much important at this phase of the season because it allows you to be known.

- **Expand the team base.**

I believe that women's sport EA is facing a big decline in numbers especially in the admission phase, but then also in the maintenance of the phase. We still have numbers that are statistically decreasing. So, the goal is certainly expansion of the base. In evolved teams, the communication clearly serves to finding of resources and sponsorships because the more they see you, the more desirable they get.

- **Increase the numbers and make a continued generation.**

Unfortunately, we have this problem that 15, 16 years old decide to leave. There should be younger children to be there a continuity in the team, however, it is not as well-known as sport. What I do here is to spread the word and always to give information that we also exist and that we are ready to welcome the girls.

- **Better knowledge of the discipline.**

We must inform people that it exists, and it is a good sport and that they can practice it. Up to now there are many who do not know that it exists.

- **Convey a clear message that is to give maximum dignity to women's football.**

Conveying a clear message "to give maximum dignity to such a sport", we went to San Gimignano. We decided to do the experiment of bringing in series to a square that has no other expansion in the city and in the wide area of Valdelsa about 100,000 people, we tried to interpret the stage of the women's series A in a square that had few men. What happens to a community when the reference team of the territory is a women's football team? let's say that was the first strategic marketing operation. That led us to transfer to Florence San Gimignano. From there



consequently we have articulated a series of rooting practices that are clearly very different from those we had before Florence where the problem was to promote women's football slowly and make a speech of continuity between the generations to launch a message to work in schools. It became natural that the local girls approach football and therefore it is a different type of work, more quantitative than qualitative.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

According to the participants, a good marketing strategy can lead to greater participation in their sports clubs, greater visibility, better understanding of their goals and intentions as sports organizations, promotion of their tasks, more advertisers and sponsors.

The discussion itself resulted to the following data:

Moderator: Thank you. What benefits do you think can be achieved by improving your marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

Speaker 1: Improving the working environment in the club, through new opportunities, investments, advertising, sponsorship.

Moderator: Other opinions?

Speaker 1: Promoting the sports club and a larger number of members in it.

Speaker 3: More advertising, more visits, more public appearances.

Speaker 2: Promotion of women's sports, in general in the city of Varna and the whole region.

Moderator: And can we say that you would like to position yourself better in the market, get more visibility and more visits to your sites and your sporting events?

Speaker 2: Yes, of course.



Speaker 1: In general, the development of marketing strategies is not leading in sports, especially in women's sports, in Bulgaria. We are rather looking for popularity to get to...

Speaker 2: Popularity among girls and women.

Moderator: Your goal is to reach the maximum number of young ladies, girls and women.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Rijeka's Sports Association

On the first question on what benefits respondents think can be achieved by improving marketing, communication and visibility strategies are, respondents stated it is brand awareness increase - promotion increases awareness and helps create a positive brand image; segmentation improving - promotion helps to identify different market segments and target the right consumers; increase of the number of customers - promotion helps introduce customers to the brand and thus increases the number of consumers and sales and profits - the promotion ultimately aims to increase sales of products or brands (sports) that are promoting. One of the respondents stated that the strategy determines the marketing approach to be used, mainly based on the data collected from market research. Developing a strategy and devising a successful marketing plan is impossible without market research. Respondent stated there are several reasons why - the market is a living mass whose habits and needs are constantly changing, it is usually saturated with similar products and accustomed to constant marketing animation. It is extremely important to achieve quality market segmentation. Respondents also stated that having quality content promoted across the appropriate social media channels gets your brand in front of those who may be looking for a solution to their problem. Small businesses face the challenge of getting their brand in front of their target audience. Creating content that continually gets found when someone is looking for an answer can influence your brand reputation. Offering content that provides advice, education and useful solutions freely and without a sales pitch builds trust with your prospects and



customers. Relationships built on trust are more likely to move beyond free advice into a profitable relationship for business.

2. What importance do you give to marketing, communication and visibility in your entity?

UCAM

Marketing, communication and visibility are of great importance in sports teams to strengthen their structure, attract the grassroots and create social mass, through the dissemination of the social values of sport, what you do and who you are (FG3, FG5), since what is not known does not exist (FG6). In the same way, the economic survival depends on this department working very well, being the most important one for the club because, if there are not enough economic resources, the players, no matter how attractive we are, cannot or do not want to come and play (FG5).

Therefore, they are a fundamental piece, not only for the sponsors, but also, in the case of semi-professional clubs, for the recruitment and involvement of the players' families, who contribute with money so that their daughters can play and make the club bigger through the call effect (for example, if my sister plays, I also want to play or cheer in the matches) (FG6).

In this respect, a good visibility strategy is essential to strengthen sporting performance, which will facilitate the subsequent achievement of social and economic objectives (FG7). This binomial results-marketing, communication and visibility strategies is indivisible; if I do not implement good strategies I do not have economic resources, so it is more difficult to achieve good sports results. On the other hand, if I have good sports results and I don't disseminate them properly, I cannot benefit from them (FG8). However, sometimes the use of these strategies is primarily to make the club bigger and not so much to get sponsors, due to the great competition for players and resources of various kinds (FG2).



MV International

The participants, being involved in very diverse entities in terms of size and also in sports didn't exactly discuss this question, but rather have brought their different points of view on what is the general importance or the elements to be included in the communication strategy of a club.

An interesting point of view came out of the fact of what has been said in prior about the artistic gymnastics.

“Gymnastics are maybe not so well known, instead for dance exactly the opposite happens. It is well known and very popular as a sport especially for children and unfortunately only for girls and therefore we try a lot to focus on originality on standing out because there is a lot of competition in the communication strategies, therefore a little what we often try to show through marketing and this is either there or we are aiming to do something original that others do not make especially in small cities where there is a lot of offer. I come from Alexandria city of 90 thousand inhabitants and will have 20 dance schools. Or what in my opinion it is a bit difficult to reveal is also the quality.... Perhaps because there is not a lot of regulation on certifications for teaching and therefore it is very difficult to make a parent understand, for example or who wants to approach dance, what is the quality of teaching and what is aimed at in a school in a sports club, etc.”

In this sense, it appears that the communication strategy depends also of the concurrence within the sport offer and the clubs providing the same sport, in order to make better image and gather more members. On the other hand, the bigger is the club the better and more important strategy it operates for the reasons evoked previously such as economic needs, etc. In this sense, Sanga club Milan has an elaborated strategy, as well the volleyball club since those are the ones working with sponsors among all of the today's focus group participants.

Another interesting observation regarded the emotional side of the communication or what provokes the campaign and mainly the fact that the companies that sponsor are searching for new ways and modes of communication.



Therefore, a good manner for sport clubs to communicate is to connect together a sport club and a company in order to touch emotionally the public.

“However, the fact that the companies are talking is also a way more than anything else for the sponsors to have more visibility. So even the sponsor the companies those who then put the money to survive the sports clubs look for a new way of communicating. So, the sports vehicle becomes precisely as he said that to leverage the person's emotions and to seek an emotional engagement and to find a new way precisely to then get closer to people. So companies on the one hand are looking for are more agile in finding new ways of communication that are on social networks that are things to say that are communications of values and it is easier for a company to get directly to the person with this type communication and therefore a good way for sports clubs to look for sponsors or in any case to communicate with the sponsor and to leverage on this thing that many sponsor clubs do not lack, so they engage to sports clubs to touch the emotional side in communication and visibility. And to do this, the volleyball federation comes to mind for example, but I also believe the Basketball Federation and in any case sports that are mainly volleyball, however, what they have done at the federal level is emerging now. They tried to make sport a little more spectacular by changing the rules of the game. So once upon a time there was a ball change, now the ball change is gone. Because sport must become more beautiful, more exciting it must be followed by more people. And even if you go to see a game of volleyball live there is also very NBA - American style is therefore becoming entertainment for the public and therefore the Federation at the top level tries to work on that, then instead there is it is the companies at the closest local level that instead communication seeks it more to establish a 1: 1 ratio on more value communication and more storytelling plus creating a relationship and emotion. But they are things that go hand in hand because without one the other would be difficult. And volleyball especially the world of volleyball is going in this direction”

Basically, it seems that big sport organizations such as federations (for which the communication is obviously very important) look for spectacular ways to attract the attention of the public. On the other hand, looks like the small realities,



play much more on the values that the sport provides and as stated previously focus on the storytelling and the emotions as it is directed better to the target group and is more relevant for the values that the club itself would like to vehicle to its public.

The film “Billy Elliot” was evoked also in regards of the gender role and how it has supported the increase of male members to dance clubs as it shows the emotional side of the values that could be vehicled, regarding the gender division in sports engagement. This is how the emotional aspects of creating a marketing strategy in sports have been explained. It seems quite important to create emotional feelings in order to touch a wide range of population for provoking involvement in sports.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

All participants expressed great importance to marketing, communication and visibility. They understand that the communication and visibility are allowing them to become more competent at the market of sport products.

Moderator: I see. And what importance do you give to marketing, communication and visibility in your sports enterprise/sports club? Do you think that marketing communication is important?

Speaker1: In fact, we cannot look for popularity if we are not known on the market of sports products. These things are connected. It is normal to attach great importance to these things.

Moderator: I see. And you? Do we all give that great importance?

Everyone: Yes.

Rijeka’s Sports Association

On the second question on what importance do they give to marketing, communication and visibility in their entity respondents stated marketing in sports is an essential and indispensable part of today's sport, which requires its systematic management and study through the systematization of knowledge about marketing in sports. Although there may still not be enough space in Croatia to develop sports marketing, clubs should follow global trends, and invest their efforts in marketing as



this is the only way to survive in today's business environment. Promotion as an element of the marketing mix is a sum of different activities, efforts by which an organization or company introduces potential and actual consumers to its products that should become and remain known, and which through various media improve sales and ensure a constant demand for them.

3. What strategies do you carry out?

UCAM

With regard to the strategies they carry out, these differ according to the sports discipline to which they refer and the type of organization.

One of the participating semi-professional women's sports clubs, chose to create a specific marketing department five years ago to start planning specific strategies, learning little by little and without the help of external professional staff (only a few occasional collaborators). This department, together with the efforts in economic investments to give visibility to the sponsors, has become a fundamental pillar for the team not to disappear (FG4, FG5).

Another strategy implemented in the women's teams is the encouragement of social networks, through the dissemination of everything that is carried out (tournaments, training methods, videos on the Youtube channel, etc.). In this way, the aim is to optimize what is currently being done to attract players and increase the participation of collaborators and sponsors, with a neighbourhood social project approach. Therefore, the product is not sold, but shown and made known, with the target audience being the players, not the companies (FG2). However, social networks are also used to provide visibility to the sponsors and presentations are made in the companies so that they feel part of the project, as they see its impact, and generating news that are sent as a press note (digital or written). This direct and continuous communication with the sponsors, through continuous reporting on the actions carried out, is having very good acceptance (FG4, FG5).

Similarly, the great acceptance of televised matches on regional television is highlighted, with one of the teams achieving a 10.2% share, only surpassed by a men's football match, which also had a 10% share (FG4, FG5). Another related



strategy is to take advantage of time slots that other sports do not want, such as Sunday afternoon, to televise matches on local television, increasing their visibility in the municipality (FG2).

One of the participants states that they have strategies in two different lines; on the one hand, the direct sponsorship of players and teams by the entity and, on the other hand, the development and implementation of the Business Club, as an entity aimed at the sponsors who collaborate with the teams (more - less professional, sponsors-sponsored). Previously, it was common for the sponsor to give money and therefore put their image on a billboard, on the players' t-shirts, etc. This has changed, since the aim is for the sponsor to recover its investment in the minimum possible time, through the sale of the product directly from the club (for example by broadcasting on the team's social networks). For the sponsoring companies that are part of this Business Club, which are intended to be specific and not several of the same sector, monthly meetings are held to encourage collaboration and synergy between them. This strategy is working very well and they generally renew their commitment to the club, since each one participates with what they can and the club tries to return this contribution according to the amount disbursed (FG6).

Another line is to establish a network within the neighborhood and adjacent areas to try to change the preferences of the grassroots, so that they choose to practice that sport and not others, trying to get their leisure time spent in the club, making communication and visibility multiply, not only through the matches (FG8). In these actions they also try to involve the players themselves, detailing one of the clubs that every Thursday and Friday some of them go around the schools, class by class, handing out invitations for the students to come and watch the match at the sports hall or on television. This allows the children to see and get to know the players who appear on television at the weekend (FG5). In addition, the celebration of competitions in minor categories, presentations, visibility events in the sports facility and adapted sports activities for beginners that allow a later transition to the sport, are other relevant actions detailed in this area (FG7).



One of the important aspects to be highlighted would be the still minority participation of women in management positions. One of the strategies being implemented has been to increase their presence in decision making, in order to know first-hand their vision and perspective. The results show an increase in the number of female sports licenses (approximately 40%), also motivated by the democratization of sports practice, following a hedonistic and health-centered approach, and not so much for the purpose of sports performance. However, it is perceived that women participate mostly in sports events aimed exclusively at them and not so often in those open to mixed categories, where the percentage of women's participation is reduced to 10-15%, so stereotypes are still evident and more work needs to be done in this line (FG7).

Finally, another of the strategies implemented is the alignment with new technologies, through the use of all available management tools and applications. For example, clubs are provided with a management tool that allows them to have control of the social mass, improve communication, etc., allowing them to increase fluidity and visibility. They have also decided to install fixed video cameras in the sports facilities where the teams play and train, so that they can remotely record and/or launch by streaming any training or match through social networks or other media. These devices can or are sponsored for a reasonable cost. Likewise, the recent implementation of online training aimed at sports technicians and coaches is providing great economic resources to be able to invest in marketing, communication and visibility, by considerably increasing the number of students enrolled in these courses with respect to the face-to-face modality (FG3).

MV International

As for which strategies have been carried out, mainly the discussion concerned the basketball and volleyball sports. Basically, participants explained that the volleyball sector has developed a way better marketing than other sports which brought significant results, and on the other hand, the basketball sector wasn't able to do such (at federation level), so as to attract that many members.



“...Volleyball is ten years ahead then basketball, that once was second national sport. We have also been Olympic champions but we have not been able to maintain the level. Very self-referential basketball focuses on itself and is a really unbearable absurd stuff so volleyball is much better, brands much smarter... I am not the only one who thinks it, but all the basic basketball sports clubs think that our federation has not been able to capitalize on the victories which volleyball has capitalized on... We have missed some great opportunities from the past and volleyball has done the opposite”

Asked on how this situation could be changed and improved, participants reflected on the fact that federation of basketball, but also several others should work hand in hand with the schools in order to maintain the level and their capacity to attract good athletes. This is something that apparently Volleyball federation has done much better in Italy compared to all other sports.

In addition, a bit further in the conversation participants have shared that the elaboration of strategy (or the lack of it) depends also on the size of the entity and whenever the entity is small they even do not think about marketing, but when the entity grows up, then it is probably not a strategy but there are actions put in place in order to support the visibility through videos or use of social networks. However, the lack of properly elaborated strategies impacts the sports clubs in losing members and not discovering enough talents, or not bringing them to the competitive sector.

“...however it is becoming a large club with dynamics closer to a sports club than to an association. So it's more a company that has started to do let's call it marketing but in my opinion there is a hand there is no real strategy, that is, a grasp of awareness that if nothing is done. You go to die. Or rather, you don't get the results you want. members are lost and if they find it difficult to find the talents because the girls are missing to be able to carry them on in the competitive sector they are using social networks to mow social networks to put videos to tell what is being done”

The problem mainly evoked by all participants is constating the lack of real strategies, set up with objectives and results to be obtained at mid or long term. Basically, everyone confirms that everyday visibility is done through social networks



but such actions are not enough and not part of a real strategy. The boards of directors many times do not value the fact of creating a strategy and just “go with the flow” confirm the participants.

Participants affirmed that such aspects should be definitely changed as nowadays marketing becomes an absolute part of the life of a sports club and therefore it almost seems unprofessional or very amateur to not identify proper ways of doing it. On a long term it is considered that it affects the clubs in a negative way.

Sassari Torres Femminile

- **Free-day camps.**

I believe that it is a winning for disciplines that are not poor, but precise. Because the respect for the culture we have in Italy, I believe it will bring results. Also, in my opinion it is that sport we have to invest sociality in to get results. We were born to play sports.

- **Free promotions (activities).**
- **Social network communication.**

Let's call them free promotional activities and use of vocation tools social network sites offer. With Female Torres of the last four years we have created a line of new projects which is called an offside where every year you put me on a hot and current topic like bullying a year. So, I send bullying offside where we went for the whole year for schools here in the province and with a psychologist and for women to talk about this topic. In any case there is also a way to touch on delicate topics as does education. In addition, we bring the female Torres in schools and it is there because it manages to give visibility to such topics. I send the offside for charity matches as well. We did that with Palumbo who is the youngest of the boys in Italy with the slide. This is a good way to talk about your activities and touching these very important topics. Then social media is another tool if we want to call it an instrument.

- **Moving forward through social projects to reach the target.**

One would invest in a club with corporate social responsibility.



Bulgarian Sports Development Association

Everyone uses social media as their main source of advertising. Some of them use flyers, brochures and posters, but rarely for two reasons – weak effect and lack of advertising budget for print advertising. None of these sports clubs has paid media advertising in public / private broadcast media. They regularly send press releases to sports websites and magazines, but according to them there is no interest from the media for women's sports in Bulgaria.

Moderator: So I understand that the importance of marketing and communication is big for each one of the mentioned sports clubs? And what strategies do you pursue for marketing and communication?

Speaker 1: At the moment we are looking for free opportunities. Rather on Facebook, Instagram – social networks, personal contacts. We just don't have a set of... at the moment

Moderator: You do not have budget. And do you send regular emails for future sports events or after sports events to sports dailies, sports sites, etc.?

Speaker 1: In general, yes. Speaker 3: They publish articles. Speaker 1: The interest is weak.

Moderator: Lack of interest in women's sports or? What is your opinion?

Speaker 1: Probably not. In fact, for four days we have been waiting for an article in one of the leading sports sites for the end of the women's football championship and the announcement of the champion. It ended on Saturday, a few days ago, and there is still nothing. So, in my opinion, the media is not interested. This is not something that sells.

Moderator: It is a pity. Yes, I understand you. And do you use brochures?

Speaker 1: Yes. Brochures, flyers.

Moderator: I guess during sports events, or?

Speaker 2: At the club itself.

4. What strategies do you think can be implemented to improve...?



- **marketing,**
- **communication**
- **and visibility.**

UCAM

In addition to the strategies detailed in the previous question, the possibility of having a specific commercial to sell the sports club is proposed (FG5), although other participants highlight the complexity of carrying out this type of hiring due to the fact that, if there is hardly enough money to maintain the club and it is difficult to find directors and staff to manage it, it is difficult to be able to hire a this kind of professional, as it is still a sector in which altruism prevails (FG8).

On the other hand, there is a need to address the sportswomen's close environment (e.g. family) to ask for help and collaboration, as the involvement is usually greater. Furthermore, focusing efforts on corporate social responsibility in companies, promoting the values associated with women's sports can be a good option, although the need for professional advice on this matter is highlighted in order to implement and disseminate it correctly (FG7).

MV International

While asked about the improvement of the strategies, first of all participants reflected on a completely different manner. The main issue that has been raised concern the lack of competences of any sport managers/ coaches or figures that occupy important positions within sport clubs, organizations or teams. In the first place, it has been noticed that such a person, when entering in a position which needs to operate marketing/communication or visibility strategy, takes into consideration what others (similar teams or organizations) do or have already done. But unfortunately, the more this practice becomes popular, the more the concerned staff members of those organizations see that it is not easy to adapt strategies and they need to re-invent them but do not have the necessary competences. As for that, such training or courses in management targeting staff members of sport clubs and



organizations are definitely needed in order to improve the possibilities to undertake or create any communication strategies.

Another aspect that happens apparently in many sport clubs, especially small ones, is the fact of separating the external communications and the relationships with the sponsors. Generally, the President of the entity is the one handling the sponsors relationships, as it has been done for many years and usually it is someone very young that carries out technically the visibility in regards of the social networks etc. However, participants suggest that this probably could be managed in a different way in order to improve the results. According to the participants' points of view, both sides should be seen as part of a strategy and worked together in a common direction.

It is important to underline that it has been noticed by participants that in many sports and in many clubs, there is not any culture of communicating externally and what to communicate exactly. The value of the communication, in many cases, seems to be put only on the sponsors and doesn't go beyond that, also many times needs are not considered in order to create or adapt a particular strategy for targeting the right people and achieving fruitful results.

“The culture of building something in marketing that goes beyond just asking for sponsorship. It is yet difficult and really few clubs make it clear, that in any case the communication of the sports club can go even beyond the individual sports activity and can be truly integrated with what are then the requests of the sponsors”

Also, the problem comes out of the fact that in many clubs, besides of lacking competences for creating such strategies, there are also a lack of understanding that there is the crucial need of employing a competent person for elaborating such strategies in order to contribute for the achievement of quality results. In many clubs there is also a lack of financial resources for that. However, the biggest problem remains the lack of understanding that such actions could be highly beneficial for targeting the right target groups and sponsors, therefore achieving better results and potentially bring more financial resources too.



“In my opinion, as said before, even training and the idea that a competent person who does this is needed, while in sports clubs there is no doubt that the coach must be paid behind for that role...It is still difficult to think that he should be a person hired just to do so. To do this we only invest money for this and it is often left behind”

All participants agreed that the federations, especially those of sports with many members such as basketball should help the communication on those sports and therefore contribute on putting in place a strategy to support the clubs. In this sense, 2 very different examples, brought by the basketball and Volleyball federations were given.

It appears that the Italian Volleyball Federation have had a really strong communication strategy over the years, which consisted in integrating the schools, providing free materials etc. and such practice has helped many clubs to develop by simply attaching to (sticking to) the general strategy of the Federation. Of course, each club has used the strategy independently and according to its own needs but in fact, it seems that for many clubs this was a useful resource in order to gain visibility without the need of implying additional resources, but only by following what already has been brought from above. Also, in this case the strategy, as implemented in the same way within the sector has gained more value.

“As for volleyball they made a really really strong strategy and for each club it was convenient to hang up both the communication of the Federation to enter the schools just as I said before they took Lucchetta, who was a very famous former volleyball player there they built a cardboard-built character they changed all the rules they invented a new sport.... Practically they have given all companies the opportunity to enter schools with the projects of free kits in free material for which it was convenient for the clubs to exploit the wave by force of the communication arrived from the Federation, however, and obviously this was thanks to the fact that in any case such an important investment the sport companies would not have been unable to do so therefore it is the federation that has committed itself and it is good”



On the other hand, the Basketball federation has a completely different story, which shows how much it is important that the federation holds a conducting line at strategic level for its members.

“...indeed when the Federations move in a synergistic sense they give a very fast hand. We are free in our communication, ...except that this freedom scares me a littleletting go of things a bit so if they had inputs they would help... The Federation should help, volleyball simply gave balls... The basketball federation spent money unnecessarily so it means that the marketing department compared volleyball, they throw the money away and they don't help you...”

Participants have agreed that in case if the federation has a leading role within the marketing strategies for the sport itself, this could help, especially small entities to grow up, by using such resources.

Talking about improvements, participants have also shared some good practices they use in terms of not only communication and visibility strategies, but for finding resources in general and such information resulted very interesting for all the participants and the whole focus group.

There is the example of a good practice that has been shared by Sanga club, which comprises the involvement of the parents of young club members in some important actions, in a way to better develop the club. In this sense, volunteering is stimulated and such involvement of people with various competences contributes to the achievement of great results. The volunteers who contribute, and not only, are invited to all matches and a friendly atmosphere is created all over, so everyone feels welcome and really involved. On one hand, the club is using the competences of a wide range of people, on the other hand such approach shows the value of family and solidarity in front of the sponsors at each of the matches, and therefore the club demonstrates fully its value through such good example of volunteering involvement and solidarity. It appears that such actions (although this seem a full strategy) attract big interest and also many sponsors, since the more the club show its values such as solidarity, volunteering or help to others, the better sponsors recognize themselves in.



Such an example could be really defined as a great practice to be implemented in other clubs, especially on local level since the involvement of many people from the same community will give them the feeling of belonging and the results obtained will further motivate the volunteers to do better work, as well will bring other volunteers to be involved too. At the end of the chain more sponsors could be recruited and the club would further grow and develop more easily.

That is why, the person who shared this insisted on the results which have been obtained through for its entity and suggested to all others to try to look around them on how they could stimulate volunteering and start their visibility marketing or communication strategies from there. As soon as the volunteers appear this would mean that the communication works well. Also, this shall be connected with what has been stated previously in regards of the values which the club and the sport itself vehicle within the community and it also improves the image of the club.

For many non-formal groups or non-governmental organizations, such actions already play an important role within their development and according to many official statistics, the sport sector strongly relies on volunteers. Therefore, this idea could be taken into serious consideration by especially the small realities, in order to promote further their development and build little by little their competences for elaborating strategies more focused on corporate marketing, communication or visibility.

The last part of the conversation was more oriented on the sponsorship and the competences which the team / sport managers should have in order to put in place quality marketing and communication strategies. Actually, part of the participants have shared that their experience of searching for sponsors has never been concluded in the desired or in a positive way, so many of them wanted to learn out of some positive experiences of the participants from the group.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

The main strategies, pointed by the participants in the discussion are:



- Marketing - Social medias, flyers, brochures and posters.
- Communication - Press releases to sports websites and magazines.
- Visibility - advertising in national and local media, advertising in national and local sports websites, advertising in national and local print media.

Moderator: And what strategies do you think can be applied to improve marketing, communication or to promote the position and visibility on the market?

Speaker 1: Maybe a more aggressive one, but I don't know how possible it would be. Maybe some personal contacts.

Moderator: Or, for example, at the moment I think about – if there is an eventual financing of your sports club, with some targeted advertising on social networks or in daily newspapers and sports sites. This may also help you.

Speaker 1: The fact is that at the moment social networks help us the most in this area.

Moderator: Social networks are effective for you. And for the rest of the group?

Speaker 2: Yes, in general mostly through social media, acquaintances, personal contacts.

Moderator: And with you and your sports club? What is the situation? Do you also rely mostly on social networks?

Speaker 4: Yes, and on personal contacts. We go around the schools to talk to principals and teachers.

Speaker 3: Yes, the situation with me is the same as with the others.

Moderator: And in Plovdiv, do you rely on social media and contacts?

Speaker 3: Yes.

Rijeka's Sports Association

On the question of what strategies they carry out, and they think can be implemented to improve marketing, communication and visibility of sports entities respondents stated a few. Direct marketing was mentioned, which may include



telemarketing, direct mail, catalogues, TV and radio commercials, printed materials (various types of flyers), internet advertising - ads that pop up or appear on various websites (banner, pop up ads), webshops. Sale of tickets and registration for sports events, sale of sports or branded products, presentation of athletes, broadcasts of sports events and presentation of all this information to professors and students in lecture halls, colleges. Membership programs that allow fans and sports organizations to strengthen their bond. They are most often aimed at adult fans, but they can also be aimed at children (for example, some club products are given to children as a gift for a specific membership fee). Strategy for creating excitement and interest – use of special promotions, competitions, prize games, give prizes for specific achievements, special events, attracting media attention and thus get free publicity. Profit from other business entities - offer services of entities from other activities to their clients, joint promotional activities for entities from other activities, establish a network of contacts and cooperation which will reduce the costs of activities in the future. The strategy of increasing revenue from existing activities - it is necessary to document successful interactions with fans and share these methods with other representatives of the sports entity, develop related service packages, offer specific benefits to customers during existing points of interaction. Also, the strategy of contracting sponsorship was mentioned by most respondents. Sports sponsorships occur when a sports organization or athlete has some support from a third party company. Both sides benefit from the sponsorship relationship: the sports organization (sponsored) gets money or products, and the sponsor gets the benefits of a positive connection with a successful sports team or athletes.

5. What skills or competencies do you think a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

UCAM

Traditionally in semi-professional sports teams, the manager has been an altruistic person, so finding someone qualified for these roles has been a matter of luck. There is a tendency to look for a charismatic, involved, commercial person,



etc., who is the soul of the team and if the manager disappears, the sponsors and therefore the club usually vanish. However, at present, through the sector's associations, a number of training courses are being provided in order to offer more tools and to be able to professionalize the sector, although it is complicated as it is still altruistic. More importance must be given to this profile, providing tools and training in this respect (FG6).

Other desirable skills or competencies are proactivity, research capacity to know the situation of the sector (what works and what does not), creativity, strategic vision and capacity to adapt to the changes that are taking place in this changing industry (FG3).

MV International

This question, instead of being brought in the middle, has been raised up a bit in the end in order to reassume all what has been said in prior within the conversation.

The biggest issue on which the participants have agreed is the fact that when a person start to study sport in order to teach a sport discipline, he is thought only on that aspect, however it is not at all evoked during all studies that working in a sport club could comprise many other professional aspects. In order to prepare better the coaches that teach sport disciplines, the participants suggest that it is good that those people who study sport disciplines should absolutely have knowledge and awareness that running a sport club is not only teaching competitive sport.

“I grew up as for the course of studies that I did, I did motor sciences and therefore I come from the world of sport. Every time I have heard in recent years talking about marketing and communication and sales inside me negative mechanisms are activated because the marketing is that of the market which those who sell are the ones who call you from the Call Center to try. The telephone companies and the communication agencies, etc.....and therefore it was very distant from my daily life from my course of study and I have always given it a negative meaning, that is, things that are far away from me I want to deal with it. When in reality it is not true and also an instructor who takes a volleyball course with children



of 6 years it would be important that he knew the basics of these things because he would be able to understand what he is doing that is not only teaching sports but also do something else in this way, in my opinion even more can be achieved..... So to the effectiveness of the training activity of a sports club his instructors coaches because then the instructor understands that they are things that can interest him can serve him for his life for his career. So whatever he does a little bit before the training otherwise the compulsory training you do but you don't understand or want to understand”

“And this also in my opinion helps the coaches to realize that he contributes to the development of the team and must therefore take action even more rewarding to receive the person himself”

Therefore, the awareness of need of training is also one of the most discussed points. Also the use of all possible internal competences has been evoked as a must for the manager, to make sure he is aware of all capacities of its team and to make sure those competences are used in the right direction and in a proper way.

Very important is also that the manager shares the values of the club. Without having the same values it is difficult to adapt to someone that is just doing this work. For all clubs that promote more than the sport but also particular values behind, it is essential that all people that integrate the club also participate and become part of this community.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

According to the participants in the focus group, the sports manager must possess the following skills and qualities:

- Excellent leadership and communication skills.
- Creativity.
- Effective marketing in social networks (digital marketing).
- Ambition.
- Dedication.



- Perseverance.
- Desire and motivation to work.
- Literacy.
- The necessary education on the field of Sport.

The discussion itself highlighted the details of the answers as follows:

Moderator: And what skills and competencies do you think a sports manager of a women's sports club or even an ordinary sports club should have in order to implement strategies for marketing, communication and greater visibility?

Speaker 1: Creativity, vision, teamwork skills, financial literacy, maybe.

Speaker 2: Team work.

Moderator: And when working with social networks? Maybe digital, or?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Moderator: What will you say for Plovdiv?

Speaker 3: For me it is important to have a good education on the subject, to be competent in the sport that you are going to advertise.

Moderator: What do you think?

Speaker 2: Above all, you have to be a person who wants to achieve something and to pursue your goals, to be communicative, not to give up no matter what, to be hardworking, ambitious and to have good finances.

Moderator: Now I remember, in your opinion, does a sports director need to be a man or a woman, or does it depend on the person?

Speaker 3: As long as he/she does her job.

Moderator: What do you think?

Speaker 1: I think that in sports it is more common this person to be a man. It is difficult for a woman to be in such positions, especially in a men's club. But it is not impossible.



Moderator: As a man, it is a little uncomfortable for me to hear it and I think that it will be easier and more convenient for you to be represented by a woman sports manager. I don't know, I hope there are more and more woman managers in high positions, because I think they understand sports more, but I don't know anything about women's sports, to be honest.

Speaker 2: This is exactly what is happening in Blagoevgrad – the manager is a woman.

Moderator: Congratulations to the lady. What do you think are the benefits or reasons for sponsoring a women's sports team?

Speaker 1: Maybe the advertising in women's sports is more attractive. Assuming that sport is a male occupation, as strange as it may sound in the 21st century, it is better if a women participate in the advertising. So from that point of view maybe...

Speaker 4: After all, women's sport is an undeveloped area, everything is unknown.

Speaker 3: In my opinion, the competition in women's sports is less and it is easier to reach high achievements.

Moderator: So women's sports can create sports stars at the moment, right? Although, in Bulgarian sports women have higher success than men.

Speaker 1: For example, FIFA and UEFA have strategies for the next 5 or 10 years to develop women's football, and men's football is left in the background because they have already reached the ceiling.

Rijeka's Sports Association

On the question what skills or competencies do they think a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies respondents stated that sports managers must manage project planning processes, organize projects in sports and successfully manage the project plan of the sports entity. Managers must manage marketing paradigms in sports and develop a marketing plan. Respondents stated that sports managers must know how to identify critical features of motivation and create a team identity and develop a brand in sports, also manage finances in sports, i.e. manage the processes of financial



management in sports. Sports managers must use verbal and non-verbal communication skills with the application of elements of clear communication, have presentation and organization skills. They must manage the organization of various sporting events and manage risks.

6. What are the benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team?

UCAM

There is now a perceived shift in the reasons for sponsoring semi-professional women's sports teams, following the trend, but it is still a complicated issue. The most common thing is to present the impact and visibility that the company can have in social networks if they sponsor (FG8).

Another aspect would be the promotion of the city in which the team is located, due to the trend towards internationalization of clubs, not only playing matches in different parts of the Spanish territory or outside it, but also receiving foreign teams in events organized in the city, increasing its visibility and associating the municipality with the positive values of sport (FG2).

Furthermore, the role of women in sport is associated with a range of values such as effort, companionship and positive emotions (FG2), which are the reason for the growing trend to link the sponsorship of women's sports teams to corporate social responsibility (FG5).

MV International

Very interesting aspects have been evoked while developing this question within the discussion. The first aspect that has been evoked is that many local and especially small companies sponsor small teams not because of the values or for getting better visibility but exclusively for financial reasons, particularly for claiming tax deduction to the state. This has been developed a lot as a practice since long time and unfortunately participants constants this fact more and more.



Another example was that many times sport teams and clubs get benefits in kind from diverse companies, that get visibility and share some common values. Such is the example of the provision for multiuse water bottles from some company, so as to substitute the use of plastic.

“Another thing the continuous desire to grow and to give positive feedback therefore to be productive of the club and not to expect a sponsorship that is only and exclusively regarding the sports activity in cream for example has made many initiatives in the area and charity of Volunteering... Obviously there is also talk of visibility on the territory of company because for example I think instead of the company that does not sponsor directly but for example to the whole swimming team I think of the gymnastics team too, but is giving all the bottles in the free bottles and there is a question of visibility to ecological level touches on issues that are now hot so not to use the plastic bottle. So companies are also tied to these issues that are hot today. So from there he manages to build something and it's an advantage for both of them”

Of course, also in terms of strategy the sponsor looks for values or to contribute to solutions which are now on the table and in this way get visibility. At the end this is a win – win situation either for the team and either for the company since it can be seen as involved in provoking changes or bringing commitment to current issues now at stake.

Participants were also commenting the fact that in the recent years sport clubs are more and more losing sponsors. Analyzing all what has been discussed previously it could be concluded that sponsors might be lost because of lack of real marketing strategies within semi-professional sport teams in general, or the lack of resources or competences of the directive bodies that mainly need to grow the clubs.



Bulgarian Sports Development Association

According to the participants, the main benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team are:

- Less competition among advertisers and sponsors in women's sports in Bulgaria.
- More women sports stars in Bulgaria.
- Better conditions for advertisers.
- Easier to reach the desired target group (women and girls).

Transcript of the answers can be found below:

Moderator: And what do you think, why a sponsor should focus on the women's sports team?

Speaker 4: For the love of sports and just to promote the brand he represents.

Moderator: And what do you think are the main requirements that a sponsor is looking for in an organization?

Speaker 2: Good achievements to begin with. The higher achievements, the more popularity.

Moderator: Looking for more success in sports, right?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: And maybe, the connection of the achievements with the image of the company. The success of the club with the image of the company.

Rijeka's Sports Association

Respondents stated that the benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team are lower cost of sponsorship itself - some brands might never be able to dream of sponsoring some popular men's sports team but may have the budget to sponsor a women's team. Sponsoring women's teams also opens up opportunities to the market that might never have brands that would sponsor men's sports teams because they do not have an audience they would like



to reach - e.g., cosmetic brands that make huge profits. Organizations can create partnerships with far less investment than in men's sport, as there has been a lack of investment in women's sport in the past. Another economic advantage of sponsoring women's sports teams is the fact that women are more willing to spend their money. One of the respondents also mentioned the fact that women are the most significant source of new fans, which can be especially emphasized in football because there is no other demographic group that would create more new fans than women. One respondent stated that the same media channels could be used to promote and sponsor women's sports teams because women use the same media to be informed about their sports as men, so there is no need to invent a new approach to marketing in this field. Sponsorships are essential for women's sport in order to approach a way of funding that will only support the conduct of sports activities in order to result in increasing involvement in sports and the expansion of the impact of sport on women's lives.

7. What do you think are the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored?

UCAM

Although the requirements sought by sponsors of women's sports teams are fortunately changing, several participants report encountering uncomfortable situations, such as proposals to take pictures of players for exhibition purposes (FG8), federation regulations requiring clothing that promotes women's bodies over their comfort or sports performance issues, or suggestions about the possibility of changing their t-shirts on the field of play rather than in the dressing room (FG2). In this regard, participants consider it an offense and try to escape from those companies that seek this type of commercial actions that prioritize the sale of women's bodies over sporting aspects, placing limits on what they consider ethical or not (FG2, FG8).

Similarly, sponsors usually choose sports teams in which they have some contact or reference that acts as an intermediary, or are related in some way. It is



important to find out which door or phone to call, to go together with someone, as door to door search actions do not usually get the desired sponsorship (FG8).

Another requirement usually demanded by the sponsor is the tax benefits. This is a complex issue in Spain because there is no properly developed sponsorship law, so while it is more profitable to buy a photocopier than to sponsor a sports team, it is difficult to address this issue (FG8). On the one hand, a review and development of the current law would be necessary to facilitate the tax relief of economic contributions to sport (FG3) and, on the other hand, the search for other ways to encourage it. One of the options could be the creation of a Foundation (FG8), in which all the collaborating companies would contribute and through which all sport and all categories would be sponsored, thus allowing for tax relief and a better distribution of resources (FG3). However, on occasions attempts to implement it have been unsatisfactory, as companies have been opposed to this strategy (FG8) and, in other cases where it has been implemented, it has not had the expected effects, also due to the requirements requested from the companies to be able to join, limiting their access (FG2). Furthermore, some sports managers refuse to accept those companies that only seek these benefits, as they are not a profile that promotes the values of sport nor are they sustainable; when they are no longer interested in this tax relief, they will stop sponsoring (FG2).

The traditional model of a main sponsor supporting the team is therefore out of date (FG3). Currently, associationism (or similar entities that bring together several teams or sports modalities) is a growing option (FG8). The fact that a sports club has the support of an association is positive, not only to facilitate access to sponsors, but also to get better sports facilities and increase the social mass, compared to if it were an isolated club (FG6).

Therefore, although the businessperson still needs the immediacy of expected profits (FG8), he also seeks profitability in terms of return and attracting potential customers, linking his company image to the positive values of sport and its social benefits (FG3, FG6).



MV International

Generally, it has been also noticed by the participants that in small towns or local areas, where the offer of sport is much smaller, the companies providing sponsorship or benefits in kind are much more willing to donate or to sponsor, compared to large cities, etc.

“It's true what Sara said the first and that is that it is almost easier to play sports in the province where maybe not only can you have parents with companies so it's easier but because there is a sense of belonging in small cities”

The particular explanation of such commitments could be on one hand the fact that the companies are better known on the territory and also that companies' Boards of directors identify themselves with those sports somehow, because of feeling of belonging either to the area or even emotional one.

Another important matter that reflects a lot on this situation and which participants have evoked is that there is some sport teams that are worldwide known and therefore any company who would like to do sponsorship for its visibility, financial incomes and communication does sponsorship for those well-known teams as it is sure of the return on the investment. We are mainly talking of highly professional sport clubs which demonstrate excellent results in national and international competitions.

For this reason, the semi-professional teams of the participants from the focus group that are concerned, consider that there is no need to point on the sport results of their clubs but rather on the social part in order to bring sponsors and some of them do it very well.

A great example is given by Sanga club is gathering 150 000 – 200 000 EUR annually from various companies. The management team of Sanga do look for sponsors and although not easy, thanks to its social values and it obtains very good results through.



In this sense, first thing which Sanga shows to its potential sponsors, besides of communicating that such female team is able to perform high level basketball, is that Sanga is much more than that – a project for education, integration and social inclusion. Sanga directs its commitment to companies that are looking for some values further than the sport competition and this is why they communicate much more on the educational and educational side of this project. The organization works also with disabled youth and the team has been champion of Italy several times so on the top of the commitment shown for the sport and the competition itself and the fact of having good results in the competition, the team is communicating strongly on its inclusive and integrational values as much as on the competitive level.

In addition to this, the club involved several schools in its projects, deals with multi- ethnic values and presents to potential sponsors those achievements together with the sport results. The promise that Sanga makes to its potential sponsors is to increase their brand reputation by engaging them in important team values in terms of positioning, emotional awareness and engagement to familiarity and in this way impact their company image and CSR.

In this engagement it is extremely important to “sell” sponsors not the sport performances themselves but everything what stands behind. In addition, the club has close connections and work very well with local municipality because of its inclusive approach within the work and therefore the sponsors are brought to be visible at high administrative level thanks to that communication. Highly positioned local political figures marry the values of Sanga and therefore such aspects represents a clearly different but very committed positioning for the companies who decide to engage and connect with the team.

“Here at the end we close with the Parisian phrase be consistent REMEMBER THE CHILD THAT IS YOU and all of history is all stuff marked as to say about winning the sympathy of the viewer and also of the companies that willingly give you money for you to work in the social. This is why I wanted to show this presentation, that is to understand that the fact of being inserted or not is



completely indifferent. To say we must focus on those values that must be social. Today companies recognize themselves in that”

The idea of using CRS approach is also in order to make associate the brand image of the company to a state of art, not to increase the turnover or to get better contacts but because it is good that the company is presented as such corporate responsible with a certain range of values within the society, and this no matter of the size of the company or the activity it does.

“Because on Yamamay's push it is volleyball that took the club into B led it to win the Euroleague but Yamamay took the volleyball storytelling and get there but not because they really want to sponsor or because you buy more things is not true. They then sell the same but maybe they associate their brand to your virtuous part and this can bring well-being but that is not that of contacts, it is not sales, I don't know how to say”

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

According to the participants in the focus group, the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored are:

- Success of a sports club or athlete leads to a greater desire for sponsorship.
- Public opinion about a given athlete or sports club.
- The visibility (popularity) of the sports club or athlete in society.

Moderator: So you think that the sponsors are looking for successful sports teams.

Speaker 2: Yes, unfortunately. If there are such sponsors, they are exceptions.

Speaker 1: After all, business already runs the sport and the sport is not run by the rules of sports and Olympism anymore, so this is normal.

Moderator: Sport has become a product. And what is the situation in Plovdiv?

Speaker 3: In Plovdiv the situation is the same. The highlight is on athletes who already have achievements and the goal is advertising – they advertise the product, the brand's logo and in this way it reaches more people.



Rijeka's Sports Association

On the question what they think are the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored respondents stated that sports organizations are competing for a share of limited sponsorship budgets and sponsors who fund them expect some consideration for the money invested. Companies that invest in sports see the highest attractiveness in the possibility of better defining target groups in the most acceptable way on the cost side. Sports organizations or individuals themselves do not have to have too many motives when finding a sponsor because they know what they expect from them, financial support, which the sponsor himself knows. When a company chooses between several sports organizations, associations or individuals, it has several items in mind such as the risk of failure, level of popularity that can help it select candidates and choose the right one for them. Sport, in general, is an excellent platform for strengthening brand awareness as well as creating a positive perception about it among users. With excellent results in sports, a company and even a state can profit from it in various ways by raising its rating and credibility. Sponsors are attracted to those entities with a large number of followers on social networks who, through their influence in society, contribute to the promotion of products and services for the company. In contrast, less popular does not have the privilege of additional earnings. The situation is similar to sports clubs; only it is about more substantial amounts of sponsorship. A sports entity can damage the company's reputation by its behaviour, efforts on the field or unexpected outbursts in the media, which has significant consequences.

8. What barriers do you usually encounter when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

UCAM

With regard to the barriers to implementing marketing, communication and visibility strategies in semi-professional women's sports teams, it is highlighted that an appropriate professional profile is needed to master and develop these issues in an effective manner (FG7). However, there are professional profiles such as community managers, who exclusively manage the club's social networks, which are



developed and implemented in regions such as Catalonia, although generally with precarious salaries or as interns (FG2). Therefore, more than a barrier, the issue is based on seeking resources to have the best professionals (FG2) or seek solutions such as work for a percentage instead of having a fixed salary (FG7).

Another barrier identified is the business culture. Companies need to become more involved and participatory, as this can benefit them in the short and long term and at a reasonable cost. It is also a way of linking up with society, of making themselves known. In the lower categories, are usually the parents of the children, with their companies, who sponsor the team, but the involvement must be greater, showing the companies the benefits of sponsorship and giving them information about the status and situation of women's sport (FG6).

Finally, the reluctance of the management team and the players to change is another barrier to be taken into account. It is generally difficult to convince the management of the need to carry out and implement this type of strategy and the economic outlay that this entails. On the other hand, convincing female athletes that they should be available for interviews, photographs, events, etc. to strengthen the image of women's sport is a difficult task, as they do not usually like it because it is unrelated to their sporting performance (FG5).

MV International

The participants have highlighted several barriers which they believe it is important to task about in order to improve the strategies within their structures and continue to grow. Some of them are listed below:

1. No qualified person or lack of competences elaboration, preparation and development of marketing strategy

This is due to the fact that small associations often do not dispose of enough financial resources for ensuring such a figure. Then, following on this problem comes the one mentioned next



2. Human resources in small structures usually or very often handle several roles

Very often, people that do not have any competence or professional background to do marketing or communication strategies, find themselves in according to the position they occupy in the club. Prior we evoked some points stating that many times small sport clubs or association do not have that many neither financial neither economic resources, therefore the few employees ensure several specific tasks in a polyvalent manner. The person working inside such a structure definitely handles several different tasks a day, and also is brought to deal with tasks for which he/she does not have enough competences or professional background to do. For sure such practices result in lower results or dissatisfaction also of the people involved.

3. Lack of opportunities for training.

The lack of opportunities for training in this field has been mentioned several times as very needed, especially for small structures.

Some solutions for those problems have also been proposed, as well some best practices have been shared.

First of all, **volunteering was mentioned as very strong resource** which could be used in case if there is not enough people competent in each necessary area. The most experienced participant highlighted again the role of the parents of the youth section and the manners to involve them (similar to the promise for the sponsors with the social part of the sport project for their children). In this case, a big number of people with various competences could be gathered in help of the club.

Another solution is the continuous training within the organization and passing the skills of one to other, the non-formal approaches of learning and the learning from each other. The fact of lack of official trainings has been substituted in this case with local learning on the spot by the people who had something to offer so learning process happens all the time.



A very interesting point that came out was the fact of a barrier for the board of the directors (President) to accept that the sport entity is growing and needs a clearly elaborated strategy. The awareness of becoming an important actor in the field is somehow missing in many clubs. Participants mention that no matter of the training and competences necessary or the financial resources which could be found, in case if there is a lack of understanding that the entity needs such a strategy in order to show more social values or to show more competitive values is a big barrier within the sector.

“If whoever created the company at some point does not detach from it... I own my property, I am an all-rounder and we don't need it but it's not so much the statement because I have my moneySince then they find them it is not a problem to find a person and pay him as much as to find a person not to pay him. It is not that but it is the desire to accept that a company that my little girl is changing. So what I experienced is still part of a process of change for my reality, which is still struggling è become we aim for Serie A. we focus on social we do both we want to make a thousand children we want to make ten children we want to understand that there is still a lot especially in gymnastics where the investment in the competitive sector is a lot because few athletes and a very high cost of material. There is a mountain the choice of where I want to go. What road do I want to take”

Sassari Torres Femminile

Apart from the financial/economical barriers that might face implementing marketing strategies, some barriers might arise like:

1. The level of support that is received by media/press.

An important point is that many times we find a non-supportive media as regards women's sports. It is always very difficult to have space as well as for radios as regards local newspapers. Therefore, many times one can have great ideas of the projects which can obviously use the help through the press office and write articles about them. But they never are able to create a space indicates the importance of these projects. I give an example of this case Dinamo basketball series A, they gave it many pages on the new Sardinia, on the other side we do not



get 3, 4 pages that are absolutely deserved in this historical moment. I love you, they say but many times they leave the small space to us. This is one of the main barriers.

2. SMEs find it hard to sponsor and the large companies wait to see the final balance sheet and decide after whether or whether not to invest in promotions.

We cannot speak of the economic barriers, but it must be done regarding sponsorships. Still female sport is unattractive and probably little followed. I had a media boom after the 2019 World Cup, we thought that will bring more sponsors, but also due to this period of the covid- 19 we didn't. Small-Medium companies find it hard to sponsor you and the big ones are waiting for the final budget and how much money can they invest in promoting. Football teams become their marketing communication tool and therefore this is a problem because then they do not always start with an extra minus in front. There is no real business at the female level as regards merchandising. Instead as for those who are the spectators at the stadium, they bring in an income every week to visit a site. Therefore, the sponsors become fundamental on an economic level.

3. Find human resources to dedicate themselves to the projects.

The lack of resources and I am not just talking about financial resources. We are talking about resources for what has totally changed like the world of volunteering for which to find people who are dedicated. This overcomes the culture of many Italians and therefore also very Sardinian. Finding human resources that put the time available to carry out a project must always be accompanied by a lot of parallel sporting discipline.

4. The mentality of some players that they cannot become champions even though they have the potentials.

I had in these years a few girls and this hunting talent said they could go much further, but they do not have this idea in mind that they can become champions or that this can be their path.



Bulgarian Sports Development Association

The main barriers that we usually encounter when we try to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies are:

- Lack of financial resources.
- Lack of attention and coverage from print media and Internet sites
- Lack of attention from public and private organizations at local, regional and national level.

Moderator: So in your opinion, the sponsor is looking for a successful sports club or a successful product. And how much money do you need when you are trying to create marketing communication or visibility strategies? What are the problems you face?

Speaker 1: The problem in communication is the communication itself, in fact. It is very difficult for us to build a complete marketing strategy without having a built product, respectively if we do not have communication with the advertisers and the users of the product. This is our situation – for us sport is still sport and the business and marketing remain in the background. The colleague has just talked about “Pirin” Blagoevgrad, they are trying to incorporate an already-made English marketing model. They will show whether this model works and whether it can survive in Bulgaria.

Moderator: I keep my fingers crossed that every project succeeds, as long as it is in favor of Bulgarian sport. Would you like to add something?

Speaker 4: There is still not enough popularity of women's sports and there is a lack of interest from business and people who would eventually give some money, because nothing happens only by talking.

Moderator: Today, at regional and local level, do you think that there is the same interest in women's sports club and a men's sports club?



Speaker 1: It depends on the sport, especially in smaller towns. If we have to talk about volleyball – it can be considered a women's sport. And handball. But football? Should the girls kick a ball?

Moderator: I have no idea, that's why I'm asking you, because you are a representative sample of women's sports, because you are from four different places in Bulgaria and I was interested to know whether at the local and regional level, the municipalities or district administrators and the Ministry of Youth and Sports in some way neglect the problems of women's sports on account of men's. Or, for example, as I personally hope, everything is based on the success of the sports club and the success of the athlete. How do you think the situation is?

Speaker 4: I don't know how things are outside Sofia at municipal level.

Speaker 1: In fact, at the municipal level, the one who determines is the mayor and his worldview.

Moderator: So, in your opinion, either there is no or you have not noticed any discrimination on this topic, or I am mistaken.

Speaker 2: No, there is discrimination in women's sports, but it also depends on the sport. But quite often there is a complete neglect of the sport itself, regardless whether it is male or female.

Moderator: And what is the situation in Plovdiv?

Speaker 3: There is more attention on men's sports, because there are more willing boys and men to train than girls. Creating new clubs, especially women's, is more difficult due to the lack of applicants.

Rijeka's Sports Association

On the last question on what barriers do they usually encounter when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies respondents shared that organizations (sponsors) will pick a club that has a lot more media attention and achieves only good results - which has a counter-effect with "weaker" sports clubs which then have no chance for additional funding and consequently find it very difficult to get better results. In this way, we turn in a circle and clubs that are in a



weaker position are mostly in that position and remain in the long run. Respondents also cited high prices; it is considered that marketing practices unnecessarily increase prices due to high distribution costs, high advertising and promotion costs, and excessive increases in the basic price of a product or service. They also cited an example of poorer service to lower- income consumers; due to the focus of marketing on higher-income consumers, lower- income consumers become a neglected market segment. At the same time, multinational companies are criticized for not doing enough to improve the quality of life and living conditions of local communities on which their business depends.

General comments or considerations.

MV International

At the end of the conversation all participants shared that they are really satisfied of what they have learned as well it fully met their expectations, also in terms of learning about how a focus group should be done. Participants were also very pleased to know that this focus group interview, as part of the research process will allow the elaboration of a training format on the needs they have evoked and therefore they gladly felt they have contributed significantly to improve the situation in their sector.

All participants seemed very satisfied with their participation and their contributions to the project at that stage.

Sassari Torres Femminile

Participants think that marketing plans can be the cause and the effect of the lack of the resources. They believe it is more a reason than an effect, however, it can be considered an effect the minute that their implementation is handled by non- professionals.

At the beginning some participant thought of it as an effect since operationally there is a tense you have to do. Few marketing things like a Facebook page with an Instagram account is not enough and then one who writes the articles feels that I have to do a well-rounded project that touches all the sectors.



After that it was thought to be more a cause, a participant said: I see more as a cause in the sense that women's football is a movement that is growing only in recent years and before there was not even a need for many resources to do so. That's why we lived on make the regional contributions that allowed us to survive and get by. let's say to make the team travel and pay the pitch for the games but they were really very expensive. Football is really a lot of expenses there were not even reimbursements many times. Girls played for passion. In recent years, this pushes also for gender equality for the approach to professionalism which is now a semi- professionalism and It is obvious that there is this need for financial resources. Therefore, there is a need for professionals in the land arches and professionals in communication. It will be effective if once you find those resolve doubts and it will be effective if the management continues to be an amateur management.

When there is a semi-professional level, there is authenticity. When a speech is made by the mega expert, he wants to change situation. It can clash with the idea of the president or in any case the idea of a company brand that sometimes archaic.

Then at the end they agreed on a participant's saying: I would close that is not there is never a professional cause-effect answer or a cue that I like to give in the meantime.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

Women's sport and women's sports clubs (excluding sport at national level) are in poor condition despite the success it has had. The problems are neglected both by the state and by the local and regional people responsible for the development of sports. There is still a lot to do, but the development of sports for women in Bulgaria depends on us.

Moderator: I understand, do you have any other comments on the topic? What would you say? What is your opinion about the development of women's sports in Bulgaria?

Speaker 4: There is still a lot to be done.



Speaker 1: And not only for women's sports, but sports in general.

Speaker 3: We are still at the beginning.

Speaker 1: The results show us where the sport is in Bulgaria.

Moderator: Unfortunately, there may be a regress. I personally hope that you, as representatives of women's sports in Bulgaria, will really succeed and raise the level even more, not only locally and regionally, but also nationally and internationally. And I, as a man, would proudly say that at the moment our highest sporting successes at international level belong to the ladies. I will not list them, but it is true – at the Olympics at the moment our ladies bring medals and that's why I wish you and your sports clubs to bring more and more joy to the people at regional, national and international level. Thank you for your time. I wish you a pleasant and successful day.

Final conclusions

UCAM

Nowadays, the development and implementation of adequate marketing, communication and visibility strategies is essential to allow the survival and improvement of semi-professional women's sports teams. This is due, among other things, to the fact that the significant decrease in public subsidies that financially support clubs, as well as the change in the paradigm regarding women's sport, make it necessary to find new solutions and financing models to get resources.

For these strategies to be effective and achieve the proposed goals, they must be designed by professionals in the field and included within the organizational structure of the sports entity, through a progressive professionalization, which allows to really adapt to this changing and competitive environment. However, at present it is still an altruistic sector and the clubs have difficulties in having these professionals and a specific department, due to the lack of training of this group and business culture to provide the necessary resources for its implementation, a fact that is aggravated by the lack of adequate national legislation.



These strategies must be in line with the new trends demanded by the sector, mainly the dissemination on social networks and the use of new technologies to facilitate communication and the visibility of sports teams, without forgetting the traditional media and their adaptation to the sport in a particular way. As for the direction of these actions, although the sponsoring companies are a fundamental pillar for getting resources, the essence of sport itself should not be forgotten, and attention should also be focused on the grassroots, its environment and society in general, to guarantee the future practice of sport and the recruitment of players and coaches, improving the positioning and image of these sports teams.

Finally, with regard to the actions that are currently being carried out, a high level of interest and involvement is detected by the participants with regard to the marketing, communication and visibility of the sports teams that they manage, as well as a great predisposition to be trained and to continue improving in this area that they consider essential. The discussion among professionals about those strategies that they have successfully implemented, as well as the debate about the issues of interest in this sector, has meant a great initiative to create synergies and to know first-hand the options they have chosen and the reasons why.

MV International

The final conclusions that could be made regard mainly the considerations that have been evoked either in terms of strategies elaboration and put in place, either in terms of sponsorship and how is necessary to attract them.

First of all participants consider that thanks to the improvement of marketing strategies their teams could benefit in terms of attractiveness of members as well good image within the youth sector and that would better impact the teams as they could have larger choice of athletes etc. In addition, participants consider that the sport could be much better valued thanks to the right marketing strategy to be operated, and especially the values that will be promotes will touch larger number of populations.



Through the improvement of various aspects of performing marketing strategies, and mainly skills within the teams, the clubs would benefit of improved image of the proposed sports and the values which it vehicles through.

Of course, improving the sport semiprofessional clubs marketing strategies, would improve also the economic resources and sponsorships within the team and therefore this may influence better performances or high-quality resources too.

The importance of the strategy is highlighted by the concurrence of the offer as well by the emotional side of the practiced sport. One of the most important aspects seems to be the elaboration of strategy by the federations of each sport or however their support in the communication. So far, it has been noticed that basketball and volleyball federations have carried out strategies that have been very diverse one from another. According to the participants point of view the one of volleyball federation has been estimated as more successful. In this sense, we could again underline the need of strategy and the fact that clubs expect that it comes from above, so that federation should start the process so to help those small entities that do not have the resources for put that into practice and operate a strategy while being small.

The lack of properly elaborated strategy seems to be one of the most challenging points for the semi-professional female clubs. Basically, the lack of skills of the resources and the lack of training opportunities have resulted in that. However, participants have confirmed that this should be absolutely changed and the marketing, visibility and communication strategies shall be seen as an entire part of the sport clubs' everyday life.

In regards of the improvement of all aspects for the sport sector, participants considered training in marketing and management as absolutely necessary in order to achieve good results. Also, other considerations comprise the alignment of the sponsorship and the external communication as a way to improve the strategic actions within. The sport sector. The value of the communication is also considered with the need for improvement in order to be adjusted and that the right information is communicated to the right target groups.



At last, the focus group has shown that it is strictly needed that the sport sector employs competent people for marketing that have thorough understanding on the needs of the sport club and sector. Also, a better support of the federations in terms of putting in place a global strategy that clubs and entities could align with, as well the stimulating volunteering is highly estimated too.

The reflections out of the focus group in regards of the question of sponsorship have been oriented in 3 main directions – the benefits, the requirements of the sponsors and the barriers. It appears that among the main benefits are the tax reduction, engaging for a good cause and the increase of company visibility. Also, many times sponsorship appears under the form of benefits in kind.

Nowadays finding sponsors results quite difficult, and especially a big difference between small and big towns in the sport offer has been noticed and also in terms of sponsorship. In small areas, sponsors seem more engaged probably because of the feeling of belonging. Then it appeared that companies that look for increasing their visibility and financial incomes engage most of the time with very well known teams.

Nevertheless, the focus group analysis of the situation is showing that if companies engage in sponsorship for social values, this is producing great results. CRS being sold to companies is always a good idea.

While speaking about barriers, the limits could be summed up as follows:

- No qualified person or lack of competences elaboration, preparation and development of marketing strategy
- Human resources in small structures usually or very often handle several roles
- Lack of opportunities for training

Some solutions for those problems have also been proposed, as well some best practices have been shared.



1. First of all, volunteering was mentioned as very strong resources.
2. Continuous training within the organization and passing the skills of one to other, the non-formal approaches of learning and the learning from each other is also considered as relevant solution for providing improvement.
3. Better awareness of the club growth and development, and its needs that evolve accordingly

In this sense the most important competences of a sport manager are either being aware of the sport aspects and mastering them very well, either knowledge and know-how in marketing and sales aspects, as well all kinds of organizational and structural competences are really necessary.

As for that, all participants within the focus group consider the project as very relevant and hope that it will produce significant results, especially in terms of marketing training for sport club managers and employees. All participants are glad they could have contributed for such development and finding solutions for improvement within the sector.

Sassari Torres Femminile

During this focus group the importance of marketing female soccer was discussed, and participants believe that amongst the benefits that can be achieved by improving marketing communication and visibility strategies are:

- Attract a big number of new registrations
- Expand the team base
- Increase the numbers and make a continued generation
- Better knowledge of the discipline
- Convey clear message that is to give maximum dignity to women's football



- Bring people together being kids and adults
- Make female football seen

To achieve that they think number of strategies can be used such as:

- Free-day camps
- Free promotions (activities)
- Social network communications
- Moving forward through social projects to reach the target

However, there are barriers that stop them. Apart from financial ones, they came to name:

- The level of support that is received by media/press
- SMEs find it hard to sponsor and the large companies wait to see the final balance sheet and decide after whether or whether not to invest in promotions
- Find human resources to dedicate themselves to the projects
- The mentality of some players that they think they cannot become champions even though they have the potentials

At the end they stressed that marketing plans can be the cause and the effect of the lack of the resources. they believe it is more a reason than an effect, however, it can be considered an effect the minute that their implementation is handled by non-professionals.

Bulgarian Sports Development Association

The implemented in Bulgaria RINMSASFT focus group included presidents, sport directors and managers of sport entities, all participants were female, aged between 36 and 40 years. Held on Bulgarian language, the focus group allowed the representative of sport organizations, all of them with more than 10 years of experience in the field of sport, to share their perspectives, ideas and reflections to the project questions.



The focus group participants were highly motivated, ambitious and ready for conversation and discussion, passionate to contribute to project results as the project topic seems highly important for them.

According to the participants, a good marketing strategy can lead to greater participation in their sports clubs, greater visibility, better understanding of their goals and intentions as sports organizations, promotion of their tasks, more advertisers and sponsors. All participants expressed great importance to marketing, communication and visibility.

Everyone uses social media as their main source of advertising, including sport organizations at different levels. Some of them use flyers, brochures and posters, but rarely for two reasons - weak effect and lack of advertising budget for printing advertising. None of the gathered sports clubs has ever paid media advertising in public/private broadcast media. The sport entities analyzed are regularly sending press releases to sports websites and magazines, but according to them, there is lack of interest by the media for women's sports in Bulgaria.

During the discussion, the participants has pointed out the main strategies they are implementing:

- Marketing - Social media, flyers, brochures and posters.
- Communication - Press releases to sports websites and magazines
- Visibility - advertising in national and local media, advertising in national and local sports websites, and advertising in national and local print media.

Deepening in the topic and analyzing the skills and knowledge that sports managers should develop and further improve are mainly connected to the abilities of leadership and the different aspects of management such as:

- Excellent leadership and communication skills.
- Creativity.
- Effective marketing in social networks (digital marketing).
- Ambition.



- Dedication.
- Perseverance.
- Desire and motivation to work.
- Literacy.
- The necessary education on the field of Sport.

In the framework of the discussion, devoted to the main benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team, the participants informed that based on their experience until the moment the main points are:

- Less competition among advertisers and sponsors in women's sports in Bulgaria.
- More women sports stars in Bulgaria.
- Better conditions for advertisers.
- Easier to reach the desired target group (women and girls).

When analyzing the hot topic of how to attract advertisers and financial contributions to sport sector, the participants in the discussion provided valuable information that the possibility to attract sponsors depends significantly of the sport and society success of the sport structure. According to the participants in the focus group, the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored are:

- Success of a sports club or athlete leads to a greater desire for sponsorship.
- Public opinion about a given athlete or sports club.
- The visibility (popularity) of the sports club or athlete in society.

All sport clubs face different challenges in their performance in the field of visibility and marketing. There is also a lack of specific formal or non-formal educational opportunities in the field of management in sport, focused on sport



administrators. The main barriers that we usually encounter when we try to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies are:

- Lack of financial resources.
- Lack of attention and coverage from print media and Internet sites
- Lack of attention from public and private organizations at local, regional and national level.

Women's sport and women's sports clubs (excluding sport at national level) are in a complicated condition despite the success they sometimes have. The problems are neglected both by the state and by the local and regional responsible for the development of sports. There is still a lot to be done, but the development of sports for women in Bulgaria depends on us, stated the focus group participants.

Rijeka's Sports Association

Benefits that can be achieved by improving marketing, communication and visibility strategies are brand awareness increase - promotion increases awareness and helps create a positive brand image; segmentation improving - promotion helps to identify different market segments and target the right consumers; increasing the number of customers - promotion helps introduce customers to the brand and thus increases the number of consumers and sales and profits - the promotion ultimately aims to increase sales of products or brands (sports) that are promoting.

Creating content that continually gets found when someone is looking for an answer can influence brand reputation. Offering content that provides advice, education and useful solutions freely and without a sales pitch builds trust with prospects and customers. Importance of marketing, communication and visibility in sports entities are an essential and indispensable part of today's sport, which requires its systematic management and study through the systematization of knowledge about marketing in sports.

Although there may still not be enough space in Croatia to develop sports marketing, clubs should follow global trends, and invest their efforts in marketing as this is the only way to survive in today's business environment. Strategies that can



be implemented to improve marketing, communication and visibility of sports entities are direct marketing which may include telemarketing, direct mail, catalogues, TV and radio commercials, printed materials (various types of flyers), internet advertising - ads that pop up or appear on various websites (banner, pop up ads), webshops.

Sale of tickets and registration for sports events, sale of sports or branded products, presentation of athletes, broadcasts of sports events and presentation of all this information to professors and students in lecture halls, colleges. Membership programs that allow fans and sports organizations to strengthen their bond. Sports sponsorships occur when a sports organization or athlete has some support from a third party company. Both sides benefit from the sponsorship relationship: the sports organization (sponsored) gets money or products, and the sponsor gets the benefits of a positive connection with a successful sports team or athletes. Skills or competencies a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies - managers must manage project planning processes, organize projects in sports and successfully manage the project plan of the sports entity.

Managers must manage marketing paradigms in sports and develop a marketing plan. Sports managers must know how to identify critical features of motivation and create a team identity and develop a brand in sports, also manage finances in sports, i.e. manage the processes of financial management in sports. Benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team are lower cost of sponsorship itself. Some brands might never be able to dream of sponsoring some popular men's sports team but may have the budget to sponsor a women's team. Sponsoring women's teams also opens up opportunities to the market that might never have brands that would sponsor men's sports teams because they do not have an audience they would like to reach - e.g., cosmetic brands that make huge profits.

Organizations can create partnerships with far less investment than in men's sport, as there has been a lack of investment in women's sport in the past. The main



requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored are competing for a share of limited sponsorship budgets and sponsors who fund them expect some consideration for the money invested. Companies that invest in sports see the highest attractiveness in the possibility of better defining target groups in the most acceptable way on the cost side. Sports organizations or individuals themselves do not have to have too many motives when finding a sponsor because they know what they expect from them, financial support, which the sponsor himself knows. When a company chooses between several sports organizations, associations or individuals, it has several items in mind such as the risk of failure, level of popularity that can help it select candidates and choose the right one for them.

Barrier encountered when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies is the reason that organizations (sponsors) will pick a club that has a lot more media attention and achieves only good results - which has a counter-effect with "weaker" sports clubs which then have no chance for additional funding and consequently find it very difficult to get better results. In this way, we turn in a circle and clubs that are in a weaker position are mostly in that position and remain in the long run.



4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Sport is intensively developing in all its segments, especially in the economic. According to the development of sports, the requirements and specificities of the sport develop in its management. Today, as an independent industry, sport has adopted all the business characteristics of others industries. Only managers who have specific knowledge's in the field of sports and management can manage today's sport.

At the beginning of the work we set out to achieve two objectives, on the one hand strengthening competences of managers of semi-professional female sport teams through marketing, communication and visibility strategies and on the other hand tackling the challenge related to the well-known existing sponsorship and funding disparities between male and female sport teams at semi-professional level. After reviewing the literature and analysing the results, we can see that the adaptability of the marketing managers of women's teams is valued as one of the most important skills for improving the communication and visibility of their teams, an adaptability based on the research and analysis of market information for each team. If there is one thing that characterises the sports industry, it is its great inter- and intra-service heterogeneity. Following Fernández (2013) and Nogales (2006) this heterogeneity can also be understood between men's and women's sport in terms of which marketing strategies are more effective to achieve the proposed objectives and improve the return on investment. Only with market research will it be possible to reduce the uncertainty of decisions and adjust supply and demand as much as possible, in this way, as Fernández (2013) states, we will be able to contextualise marketing strategies as much as possible to the context of the women's sport market.

This idea clashes with the perceived lack of professionalisation of the marketing managers of these teams; marketing actions should be characterised by their multidimensionality and adaptability, which requires training in specific knowledge of sports marketing and specifically of women's sport. It is logical to think,



as Dorado (2005) states, that this is no more than a consequence of the lack of research and work that the women's sports industry suffers from, a decisive circumstance in a market as competitive as the sports industry (Carson & Gilmore, 2000).

Skills or competencies a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies - managers must manage project planning processes, organize projects in sports and successfully manage the project plan of the sports entity.

The concept of marketing and, by extension, the design of its strategy is a dynamic and changing concept, as Rial (2007) states. We have moved from a concept centred on the tangible elements of the product to another concept more centred on the intangible. As Scmitt (2000) points out, marketing today must enable the generation of multidimensional experiences, among which the affective component stands out. In fact, the interviewees consider that in order to improve marketing strategies in communication, the emotional component should be highlighted in all actions, giving prominence to all the values that women's sport represents and placing value on them, in this way, in the opinion of the interviewees, the main barriers that hinder communication strategies for women's sport can be solved.

For the majority of respondents, all marketing actions aimed at improving the communication and visibility of the club should be based on the use of new technologies, specifically social networks and a greater role for corporate social responsibility. As stated by Cantúa et al. (2018) and Rojas (2013), in the current digital era, sports marketing must evolve towards a greater implementation of new technologies and, above all, towards the use of social networks as the main channel for communication, promotion and visibility enhancement of the sports industry. This prominence of social networks, according to the respondents, allows companies to locate consumers in the segment or profile that the sports company wants, enabling greater personalisation of the product (Goicoechea, 2016; Redondo & Rojas, 2013). Sports marketing actions, as in any other industry, must be reflected in a document



or marketing plan; the design of this plan has evolved from the classic 4 ps to others where the role of the consumer has gone from being a passive agent to an active one in the whole process, including the design of the brand. In this sense, Peer to Peer interaction between users during marketing actions reaches its maximum prominence thanks to social networks, which is why respondents consider them to be one of the pillars that should support women's sports marketing (Redondo and Rojas, 2013). For the interviewees, these social networks increase the company's visibility by expanding the market from a nearby market to more distant ones.

For the respondents, the use of social networks should be imbued with a clear social orientation regarding the role of women's sport in society, and they clearly refer to corporate social responsibility as one of the main strategies on which the marketing and communication of their sports organisation should be based. This coincides with Solano (2013) who considers that one of the main promotional tools that improves the company's image is a clear commitment to the search for a fairer and more egalitarian society; as the respondent's state, one of the strengths of women's sport is that it embodies many of the values of corporate social responsibility by pursuing gender equality, among other factors, in this case through sport. Therefore, according to the respondents, it adds the socially responsible values that sport has intrinsically, such as effort or the development of positive emotions and companionship. The latter can provoke in potential consumers a greater sense of what Schmitt (2000) calls group identity or by the respondents themselves as a social mass, further enhancing the effects of communication and promotion actions. This is always bearing in mind that for these actions to be effective they must be contained in the marketing plan (Guillén et al., 2018; Solano, 2013). In fact, according to the interviewees, the presence of corporate social responsibility can serve to facilitate the entry of sponsors into the teams, such as the creation of Business Clubs. In this sense, companies can find in the sponsorship of women's sport and thanks to the values it embodies a possibility, according to Blázquez (2012), of improving their prestige, their credibility and, in short, their leadership. This is always, as the respondents point out, far from sexist stereotypes,



as has unfortunately been the case with the presence of women in the world of communication.

As for the barriers encountered when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies, apart from the obvious financial/economical barriers, the following obstacles were deemed to be particularly severe:

a) The level of support that is received by media/press (very poor in the case of small organizations)

b) Difficulty to receive support/sponsor from both SMEs and large companies

c) Difficulty to find human resources who are willing to dedicate themselves to the organization.

d) Lack of opportunities for training (No qualified person or lack of competences in the elaboration, preparation and development of marketing strategy. Also the non-formal approaches of learning and the learning from each other is missing.)

e) Overlapping human resources roles in small organizations.

We can conclude that there is still a lack of training and professionalization of marketing managers in the women's sports industry, a market characterised by its great heterogeneity and consequently with a need for continuous adaptation of marketing and communication strategies. These strategies must be based on two pillars:

- The use of social networks as the main communication channel.
- Corporate social responsibility as a tool to articulate the *raison d'être* of women's sport in society.
- Organization of specific trainings or courses for those who manage sport club/organizations.



- Employment of a competent, expert figure for elaborating marketing, communication and visibility strategies, in order to contribute for the achievement of quality results.
- Reinforcement of sport clubs/organizations presence in the schools.
- Awareness raising about the need of qualified profiles with communication/marketing skills.
- A comprehensive communication strategy that goes behind the sponsors and embrace both internal external communication.
- Promotion of the involvement of volunteers with various competences, who can contribute to the visibility strategy while not using the limited financial resources.

Based on these conclusions and given that most of the interviewees and the literature consulted point to the role that women's sport should play in achieving a fairer society, we propose as future lines of research to analyse which social networks are the most effective for delivering promotional and communication messages and, on the other hand, to analyse and describe the perception that other stakeholders have of the role of women's sport in society and how women's sport is and should be treated in society.

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6. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES SURVEY

- Gender
- Age
- Country
- Sport Organization
- Current Position
- Job Experience
- Educational Level

Competencies of sport managers

Instructions: Rank the importance of every competency choosing only one number from the following scale: 1= not important at all (Unnecessary), 2= very unimportant, 3= slightly unimportant, 4= Neutral, 5= slightly important, 6= very important, 7= extremely important (Essential).

Management thinking

1. Developing new ideas to enhance the organizational performance.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

2. Generating constructive criticism to improve key aspects.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

3. Analyzing and solving organizational issues.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

4. Understanding the functioning of the organization for implementing an efficient management.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Effective communication

5. Listening to others actively and carefully.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

6. Preparing written and oral presentations.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

7. Understanding and respecting others feelings and ideas.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

8. Speaking clearly and articulated.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Leadership

9. Promoting to work constructively under stress and pressure.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

10. Influencing people to accomplish organizational goals.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

11. Giving others authority necessary to accomplish objectives.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

12. Motivating work teams toward meeting goals aligned to organizational strategy.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Financial Marketing

13. Applying accounting principles in the organization and developing a financial plan.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

14. Preparing and defending a budget proposal.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

15. Preparing financial reports.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

16. Analyzing financial reports for decision making.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Human resources management

17. Promoting employee development towards accomplishment of goals.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

18. Evaluating employee performance.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

19. Defining and setting up quality standards for employees.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

20. Ensuring compliance of the fair labor regulations.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Marketing

21. Developing and implementing marketing plans.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

22. Utilizing sponsorships to support sport activities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

23. Preparing and defending sponsorship proposals.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

24. Implementing strategies for enhancing organizational image.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Governance

25. Developing policies to run smoothly the organization.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

26. Conducting efforts to show a good accountability.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

27. Conducting efforts to increase organizational transparency.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

28. Implementing actions to social responsibility.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Legal foundations

29. Comprehending general legal aspects relating to the organization and its functioning.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

30. Implementing a legal framework for fiscal management.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

31. Understanding national laws and acting according to them.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

32. Comprehending when asking for advice and support in legal issues.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Event Management

33. Scheduling sport activities (sport competitions, sport clinics, conferences, seminars, etc.)

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

34. Conducting and event needs assessment.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

35. Coordinating event's units such as planning, communication, booking, etc.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



36. Participating in activities related to awards and recognitions.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Risk Management

37. Anticipating obstacles and developing contingency plans.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

38. Conducting routine inspections of facilities and equipment.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

39. Implementing actions to prevent incidents and accidents.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

40. Developing strategies for minimizing the impact of potential risks.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Sport Facility Management

41. Implementing appropriate means of storing equipment and supplies.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

42. Developing actions to prevent misuse of facilities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

43. Implementing a proper plan for preserving equipment.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



44. Maintaining and repairing facilities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Time Management

45. Setting priorities in activities and tasks.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

46. Delegating duties and responsibilities for maximizing efficiency.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

47. Implementing time-analysis procedures.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

48. Following a schedule and accomplishing the tasks on time.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Computer Skills

49. Using computer technologies to simplify the main tasks.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

50. Mastering an office suite for elaborating office documents.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



51. Utilizing customized computer software for running certain activities in the organization.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

52. Managing statistical data and spreadsheets.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Information Technology

53. Making backups of information periodically.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

54. Managing communication through electronic means, internal networks and internet.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

55. Accessing updated information for enhancing organizational performance.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

56. Accessing necessary technological elements to guarantee effectiveness.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Decision Making

57. Utilizing objective criteria when making decisions.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



58. Providing creative alternatives and selecting the best option among them.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

59. Considering ethical implications prior to taking actions.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

60. Considering main stakeholders when taking decisions.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Philosophy & Ethics

61. Pursuing continual learning and development within the organization.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

62. Fostering organizational principles and values.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

63. Being a role model when applying ethics principles.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

64. Making efforts for accomplishing the organizational vision.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Research

65. Supporting research projects in the sport field.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



66. Promoting interchange of knowledge with other sport organizations and/or professionals.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

67. Establishing strategic alliances with universities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

68. Fostering data analysis for research purposes.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Sport Foundation

69. Comprehending norms and rules related to sport.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

70. Knowing scientific-technical elements of sport.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

71. Understanding the organizational structure of the sport.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

72. Understanding the particularities of the sport among other sports.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Control Management



73. Implementing an assessment system for controlling the organizational performance.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

74. Providing a feedback system to enable greater organizational agility.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

75. Controlling individual performance of staff.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

76. Ensuring that the goals, objectives and standards are met.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Results Orientation

77. Making efforts to achieve organizational objectives.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

78. Implementing actions to be more efficient in the results.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

79. Promoting a system of incentives based on results.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

80. Measuring organizational performance continuously.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Public Relations

81. Establishing and maintaining relationship with sport coaches and athletes.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

82. Creating and maintaining working relationships with the mainstream media.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

83. Forming and maintaining working relationships with the main sponsors.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

84. Establishing and maintaining relationship with the main authorities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Project Management

85. Planning, implementing and assessing projects.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

86. Developing options for financing projects.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

87. Managing the implementation and organization of project activities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

88. Managing work teams to effectively achieve the project goals.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



Strategic Management

89. Analyzing the organization considering its strengths and weaknesses.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

90. Implementing strategies to enhance organization position.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

91. Translating strategies into clear objectives and tactics.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

92. Using indicators to measure advance of strategies and helping decision making.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Social Skills

93. Expressing feelings and thoughts with the ability to actively deal with criticism.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

94. Having a network of contacts outside the organization to facilitate processing activities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

95. Managing group processes and making use of the skills of all those involved.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important



96. Promoting interaction with other managers from outside organizations in social activities.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

Conflict Management

97. Resolving conflicts in a fair and efficient way.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

98. Demonstrating negotiation skills, and acting properly in highly stressful situations.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

99. Promoting respect for diversity and individual differences.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

100. Adapting to the situation and responding efficiently in the decision making process.

Unnecessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Important

APPENDIX 2. MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES FOCUS GROUP

1. What benefits do you think can be achieved by improving your marketing, communication and visibility strategies?



2. What importance do you give to marketing, communication and visibility in your entity?

3. What strategies do you carry out?

4. What strategies do you think can be implemented to improve...?
 - marketing,
 - communication
 - and visibility.

5. What skills or competencies do you think a sports manager should have in order to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

6. What are the benefits or reasons to sponsor a semi-professional female's sports team?

7. What do you think are the main requirements that a sponsor looks for in an entity to be sponsored?

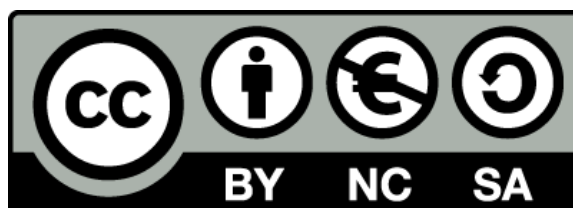
8. What barriers do you usually encounter when trying to implement marketing, communication and visibility strategies?

9. General comments or considerations.



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