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The Effect of Management and Marketing on the Dynamics of the Number of Legitimate Athletes from the Romanian Handball and Basketball Federations

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Abstract

The research follows the evolution of the number of legitimate athletes, of the number of coaches and of the number of departments (clubs) within two sports federations: the Romanian Basketball Federation and the Romanian Handball Federation. The statistics show a different dynamic regarding the number of legitimate athletes in the period 1992-2019, the study making a comparison between the two federations in terms of management programmes and the impact thereof on the dynamics of the number of athletes, coaches and number of departments.

The research started from the hypothesis that the type of management and marketing applied at the federation level is very important because it directly influenced the existence of the number of clubs, coaches and implicitly the number of legitimate athletes, in the context in which both federations are national structures under the control of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and funded from a single source, to a large extent. The data were collected from the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and from the website of the two Federations. The study refers to certain differences in the application of management and marketing strategies and the evolution of the 2 federations. The research also offers some explanations from a social, economic and political perspective of the dynamics of the compared parameters.

Keywords: *sports education, sports federations, legitimate athletes, sports management and marketing, social policies.*

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Preamble

The etymology of the word management comes from the Latin "manus" (hand). In English, the verb "to manage" appeared along with the noun "management" having the initial meaning of "to handle", "to maneuver" and then with the meaning of "to deal correctly with the relationships with various things or beings in order to obtain a proper result" (Mihai, 2013, p. 231). Management is the organizational function that ensures the efficient development of activities and aims to achieve the maximum level of results through the optimal use of resources. The management activity may consider groups of people (teams) or processes.

The resources that a manager manages are mainly: the equipment, technology, time, talent, financial resources and human resources (Borza, 2003, p. 29).

Management is also the name given to the team of managers within an organization. In the interwar period, the general concept of marketing appeared in the American business environment while in sports it appeared in 1971 in football where it enjoyed a real success, expanding rapidly to other sports, passing through the white sports and now reaching eSports which grows exponentially from one year to another (DeGaris, 2008, p. 17). Continuous development and continuous academic studies have led to effective concepts and principles with amazing results. In the general meaning, marketing is "the science and art of convincing customers to buy" (Conway, 2009, p. 135). Mihăilescu (2006, p. 201) defined marketing as "a social and managerial process by which individuals or groups of individuals get what they need and want by creating, offering and exchanging products and services for a certain value ". Applied in sports this concept would translate into "convincing people that the practice of sports has immediate benefits " (Smith, 2008, p. 95).

These concepts began to be applied in Romania at the end of the 1990s as a result of the political and implicitly economic transformations. During that period, the effects of transition to a market economy began to be felt in our country, as management and marketing strategies adapted to the requirements of consumption were needed (Oprișan, 2001, p. 162).

While in capitalist countries all financial entities (factories, services, sports clubs) functioned based on the same principle: supply and demand, in communist countries they were subject to national policies which, in most cases, consist in carrying out certain activities in order to support certain ideological principles (Lazăr et al., 2004, p. 162). Therefore, in the field of sports, all clubs, regardless of status (school, departmental, workers) were supported by national funds regardless of their value (Voicu, 1998, p. 285).

At the beginning of the 2000s, several publications talking about the management and marketing of clubs appeared in Romania, even if the funding remained the same (Mihăilescu, 2006, p. 182). These materials are only translations and adaptations of concepts and principles valid in a productive entity operating in a market economy to the operation of a sports club supported by state funds.

Material and method

The research is based on two hypotheses:

- the management and marketing strategies at the level of a sports association, sports club or federation influence the number of practitioners of the sports branch;
- sports activity at national level is directly influenced by the financial situation at national level.

The purpose of the paper is to emphasize the impact of several strategies for the development of sports activities in a country where practicing sports is exclusively subsidized by the state.

The aim of the study is to identify the causes leading to the results' evolution of Romanian sports in international competitions during time, in clubs where practicing sports is based on autofinancing through fees paid by the enrolled sportsmen.

The study started from the statistical analysis of the data provided by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INS, 2020) and the web pages of the two national federations, of basketball and of handball, respectively. The data presented refer to the number of legitimate athletes, to the number of existing and registered clubs in the federations, as well as to the number of coaches within the two federations in a fairly long period: 1992-2019. Also, the analysis took into account the public management and marketing strategies of the two federations, as well as considerations specific for the practice of the two sports: accessibility, popularity, diversification, involvement of other organizations. The National Institute of Statistics makes a record of several indicators (number of athletes, number of clubs, number of sections, number of coaches) in all sports in Romania, between 1992 and 2019, especially in the branches the federations of which are financed from the state budget (INS, 2020). The research focused on the two sports branches because there is a very different dynamic in terms of all the indicators presented and we tried to find some explanations.

Discussions

In 1992, two years after the change of the political regime and implicitly of the economic level, a number of 65,500 athletes were legitimized in Romania at the level of the Handball Federation, compared to only 5,015 athletes legitimated at the level of the Basketball Federation (INS, 2020). These values represent the number of athletes who were legitimated at the two federations before 1990, because from the analysis of the diagrams, we can see that there are no big differences recorded from one year to another. The overwhelming difference between the two values is given by the number of championships (school, junior II, junior I, youth, seniors, women and men) as a consequence of the fact that handball was practiced at all Sports High Schools in Romania, there were classes with sports profile (handball) starting from the middle school and a club registered several handball teams from groups of children, juniors I, juniors II to seniors (Chirazi, 2019, p. 92). At the same time, it must be mentioned that results were obtained in this sports at international level (Olympic Games, World Champions), in the '70s.

For the basketball situation, in our opinion, one of the causes was the fact that it approached a strictly performance strategy, namely it had to be practiced only to obtain results, and the selection was based on the somatic criterion. This aspect was also known in the popular environment and it was considered that only a tall individual could practice basketball. In the mid-1990s, respectively 1995-1996, when the national economy registered a dramatic decline and financing was considerably reduced and in some situations or even stopped (Eurostat, 2018), the number of practitioners decreased in all sports, implicitly in handball, reaching an even lower value than in case of basketball (Chart no. 1). So, in 1996 FRH lost 55,100 legitimate athletes reaching to 8160, while Romanian Basketball Federation (FRB) reports a total of 9825 legitimate athletes, which it has maintained since 1992 (INS, 2020). The same diagram (Chart 1) indicates a period of maintenance of the number of practitioners, with a decrease in those playing basketball in the early 2000s. Since then, with the beginning of economic growth at the national level, there had been a positive evolution of the number of basketball players, reaching a number of 32,890. During the same period, the Romanian Handball Federation (FRH) registered small fluctuations in the number of practitioners, reaching a critical level - 4,679 - in 2006 and a maximum level of 10,525 in 2012 (INS, 2020). Comparing the evolution of the number of practitioners, we can say that at FRH there is a low fluctuation while at FRB we find a constant increase from one year to another.

Legitimate athletes broken down by sports federations

Chart no. 1 Evolution of the number of athletes

(Source: author's own design based on INS 2020 data)

In Romania, the specialists (coaches, instructors) of the sports field are trained in two big institutions: the Faculties of Physical Education and Sports and the National School of Training and Improvement of Coaches within the Ministry of Sports.

Regarding the dynamics of the number of coaches, one can see a different dynamic. In 1992 there were 250 coaches within the Basketball Federation (Chart 2), a value that is maintained until the year 2000, followed by the period 2000-2004 when a decrease is observed. This decrease in the number of coaches also coincides with the decrease in the number of athletes (Chart 1), a phenomenon that is worth to be studied from a managerial perspective (INS, 2020). After this period, one can see a constant increase in the number of coaches reaching a peak of 605 in 2014 and a slight decline (540) in 2019.

An interesting evolution takes place at the level of FRH, where at the beginning of the '90s between 378 and 490 coaches were reported within the Romanian Handball Federation. This development is interesting because it must be remembered that at one time (1992-1996), FRH reported a number between 60,000 and 65,000 athletes (INS, 2020). By making an estimated calculation, between the number of athletes and the number of coaches, we would obtain approximately 173-155 athletes per coach. Practice tells us that this is almost impossible even if there are several departments on the same club with the same coach and the conclusion of these calculations is that one or more of the reports were erroneous (Stoian, 2018, p. 319). Given that the number of practitioners is variable and difficult to check, we can say that the reporting of the number of athletes was not in line with reality.

The comparative analysis of the number of coaches reported by the two federations shows that while the FRB has a constant number (265) between 1993-2000, which is hard to believe, after 2002-2003 the number of coaches is fluctuating. At FRH the situation is opposite, between 1990 and 2000 the number of coaches is variable and after 2000 it is almost constant. From our point of view, reporting the same number of coaches over a period of more than two years raises questions about the veracity of the information transmitted.

However, as a general conclusion on this indicator, we find that during the monitored period, FRB doubled its number of coaches and FRH remained at approximately the same number.

Coaches by sports federations

Figure no.2 Evolution of the number of coaches

(Source: author's own design based on INS 2020 data)

From the point of view of the dynamics of the number of clubs (Chart 3) one can see an evolution similar to the number of athletes meaning that in 1992 FRB has 146 clubs registered which it maintains almost constantly until 2001 when it records a loss of 56 clubs for the next 2 years and since 2004 it has experienced a gradual annual increase until 2017 reaching to 301 clubs (INS, 2020). In 2019 it registers 272 clubs.

On the other hand, FRH had a number of 250 clubs registered in 1992, followed by a spectacular increase in 1993 reaching to 427 clubs which will be maintained for the next 2 years after which in 1995 it lost 262 clubs reaching only to 205 clubs. A period of 7 years in which it constantly loses the number of clubs follows and in 2003 there were a number of 132 clubs

registered, a historical minimum. In the following years, FRH has a variable evolution, reaching to 256 clubs in 2019 (INS, 2020).

One of the elements that are not presented by the Ministry of Sports (2016) is the status of clubs: public or private, as well as of athletes: amateurs or professionals. It would have been useful to know this information because the presence of private clubs would also determine the existence of professional athletes.

Sports departments by federations

Chart no. 3 Evolution of the number of clubs

(Source: author's own design based on INS 2020 data)

These different evolutions have specific causes. In terms of accessibility, basketball is characterized by:

- reduced material base, in the last resort, can be represented by a single basketball hoop;
- requires a small number of players, as for recreation can even take place "one to one";
- it is a very spectacular sport and brings a large number of spectators;
- since the 2000s, it has diversified and the basketball game "3X3" appeared;
- competitions can be organized even on the street (streetball);
- several private clubs were set up;
- there is a custom that playing basketball helps you to increase in height.

A possible explanation for the increase in the number of athletes at FRB is the fact that they work and promote a multidisciplinary approach to the sports phenomenon and also carefully monitored annual marketing strategies (Mihăilescu, 2006, p. 204). Although apparently a mandatory

element, which underlies the operation of an institution that provides services, this would require some notions of management and marketing such as:

- carrying out a market study on the availability of the population to exercise;
- providing quality services through the staff employed and through the material conditions;
- developing a promotion strategy;
- judicious administration of resources, etc.;
- the location and parking spaces offered;
- training duration and weekly frequency;
- the transport that connects the location of the hall to the other neighbourhoods;
- the number of training rooms per city /neighbourhood.

From the analysis of the activities of the federations (Eurohandbal.ro, 2010) which recorded an increase in the number of athletes, concrete actions in sports management and marketing were identified. The management plans are public, they have been applied and monitored in practice, with the publication of the results. Also, where there are sports people involved in marketing strategies, we see that the number of athletes is increasing, and the best example is the Romanian Basketball Federation where in 1992 there were 5015 athletes and in 2019 they reached to have 32980 athletes.

From the monitoring of the websites of the two federations one can see the existence of annual marketing strategies monitored with objectives and results announced at FRB (Frbaschet.ro, n.d.) and at the FRH, even if they announced a 10-year strategy, corresponding to the period 2010-2020, it has not materialized and no data with annual objectives and measured results are found.

Conclusions

In the current context, the research is part, by topic and content, in a study of the effect of applying management and marketing strategies and also of the involvement of the politics in terms of spending budget allocations in order to meet the main objective of practicing sport. From the comparative analysis of the evolution of the three indicators from the two federations, some common and some specific conclusions can be drawn. Thus, at FRH, although the number of practitioners has decreased by about ten times, the number of coaches and clubs has small fluctuations. This may lead to the conclusion that the reporting in the early 1990s was not in line with reality. At

the FRB, the most important moment is the years 2002-2003 when there is a decrease in the three indicators monitored, possibly a reform in the organization and operation of the federation, followed by a constant growth until now. For handball the conditions are different, and the continuity is ensured by the departmental clubs financed from state funds.

This study has shown how important marketing is in attracting people to exercise, physical education and sports, as the evolution of 21st century technology and the internet has certainly brought with it consistent or even radical changes in the practice of exercise in any form. People's participation in physical activity is extremely important both for the physical and mental health of the individual as well as for the public and social health and the benefits of adopting an active lifestyle are innumerable ranging from physical and mental well-being to socio-economic implications. These issues have gained great importance throughout the European Union but also worldwide.

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