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# EXCHANGE REPORT



What do women expect from municipalities in order to increase women's motivation to practice regular physical activity outdoor?

Insights from the exchanges among the SWUP project community

## WHAT IS THE REPORT ABOUT?

This report is a synthesis of the issues regarding women's expectations with respect to local government's actions to increase the practice of regular physical activity. This debate emerged in the framework of SWUP project, taking place between January 2018 and December 2019. SWUP (Sport for Women in Urban Places)<sup>1</sup> is a project funded by the Erasmus+ fund of the European Union to enhance women participation in outdoor physical activities. The project's activities are meant to shed light on how to design women friendly urban environments for outdoor physical activity and why such actions are needed.

In addition, five more topics have been identified and discussed by the project's partners: the role of women in executive sport positions, the desirability of only-for-women activities and infrastructures, child-friendly approach, local impact generated by outdoor sport activities, activities and infrastructures for disabled women.

Information was collected through ad hoc oral exchanges during the SWUP project and through the contributions that the project partners and other stakeholders exchanged in the online forum<sup>2</sup> hosted in the project website.

This report is organized in 3 sections. The first section will present the topic. The second section will gather and analyze the contributions that the partners and other stakeholders exchanged during the project. Finally, the last section is an expanded biography that gathers suggested readings and links on the topic.

### 1. THE TOPIC: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The engagement of governments and administrations in supporting mass sport involvement through adequate public policies is an important step in bridging women communities and public administration. In fact, sport represents an activity which triggers social integration and inclusion of women in our society and communities. In order to reach these goals, suitable sport facilities and infrastructures are needed.

The lack of facilities and of public subsidies addressed to sport activities is negatively affecting the general involvement of citizens. Despite of the awareness, Romanian citizens hesitate to take initiatives locally, which could represent a starting point in order to prompt a change of direction.

The municipal governance still plays a very important role in the local directions. First, municipalities have the possibility of investing in the health of its citizens by promoting sport activities. By doing so, they also promote good practices to be shared.

On the other hand, education, in a time in which the school is not enough to solve and to achieve all the expectations and needs of the young generation. For that, the municipalities should understand they can assume an active role in supporting the local educational system, first through professional infrastructure – supporting performance, and secondly, through basic or specific conditions – supporting mass sports.

Another important issue is the inclusion at local level, a huge phenomenon which can decide the direction of an entire community, in a period in which if we tolerate and accept, if we involve and not discriminate, we are for sure more prepared to do the next step, to understand and be aware of all the pluses existing. In most of the cities, we have minorities, people disadvantaged by culture, geographic conditions, social conditions, educational conditions, financial ones or disability. For all of them sport can be the framework to include, and Municipalities can be the main initiator and beneficiary of the results.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.swup-project.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.swup-project.eu/forum-swup/>

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Another important issue that can be considered in our discussion is the local general prerogative of the public administration and local governance to create and generate together with the local community strategies and programming documents in order to ensure the equal participation in local sport's life, using sport, for its benefits and on the other hand as a tool to unify visions and thoughts. The municipality has to take care and to ensure the framework to be involved, both for men and women, and if the situation today is different, in those communities, it has to be changed.

The human resource is still one of the most important arguments. Motivating people and offering them the chance to surpass their limits by supporting them by the municipalities, is one of the most powerful starts we can admit. For that, the debate is huge, but if at its end, all the entities will understand better their role not only for a small amount of people for a general view, the situation will be improved. Teachers, trainers, mentors, facilitators, project managers, leaders, youth workers, youth coordinators, NGO presidents, club coordinators, volunteers, all of them should be connected in order to do a strong update in local sports field.

In this way, the topic is totally adaptive and opened to be discussed but moreover started and implemented. It follows the desired results on education, awareness, building a strong and trustful community, investing in Social Inclusion, rebuilding the image and status of Women from another perspective, generating added value and proving the evolution through a complex process.

## 2. PROJECT EXCHANGES: MAIN HIGHLIGHTS ON THE TOPIC

As coordinator of the topic, Ramnicu Sarat municipality had a presentation starting from the role of women in the society, and continuing with the active role which can become in order to develop and to rebuild the trust of the community and the administration through the cooperation of the two sectors. We presented the proper situation at local level and the interventions were made to give added value but in the same time cohesion, as in European Union, and especially in some project partner countries we can see examples general applicable all over the world. Starting with the funding of the mass sport sector through a specialized association as is Tempo Livre from Portugal or connecting the local administration with specialized NGOs, as partners, as it is the Italian partner, Polisportiva Corbetta, all are models of cooperation through which we could rebuild the future of cooperation between the administration and those entities and people who want to play an important role in promoting mass sports at local level, especially focus on women. For that, as we mentioned in our presentation, focused on Romanian situation, the municipality in Ramnicu Sarat is the essential entity which could help for the development of the community and also the sport community. Even if, comparing with other communities, the municipality invests much in professional sports and less in mass sport, the situation has to be changed. The Romanian legislation offers to the municipalities the only way to finance mass sports, indoor and outdoor by a law – 350, which supports the NGOs and the local initiative groups with juridical personality. Still, their intervention is not a big deal, as the needs of the majority of the population are not solved and the impact of the municipality in the mass sports is less, both for women and men. For that, the desired support for the next period in order to increase the involvement in mass sports can be generated through:

- The creation of a local action plan, which can be generated by SWUP SUSRAMNICUL women group.
- Public meetings, debates and consultations to involve women from the community, models and interested women to practice a sport, together with women which are already practicing in a free way a mass sport.
- The identification of an agenda of formal and non-formal activities.

Our municipality has a specialized department called: Monitoring and implementation of sport and educational programs and every year generates an agenda of more than 10 activities. There are sport competitions as: football, handball, beach volley, running, and the majority of the action are happening during the Days of the city in August. Still, there is a lot of space to do new activities, one of the first actions being to increase the number of people working on the field, in the office, in order to generate a bigger number of activities and also to ensure a strong evaluation for the needs of the community. Regarding women, the municipality now doesn't have a specific program to implement actions only for women in a city in which men are naturally

motivated, women being more directed to the traditional ways of spending the free time. Still in the last year, in the city appeared different opportunities and more than 300 women started to do: Pilates, Zumba, kangoo jumps, aerobics, or specific programs in specialized gyms. In this way, the municipality can implement local projects to follow these models and in the same to promote models of women practicing mass sports in the community.

Here we can connect the situation at European level, as countries as Portugal or Spain already have a very well organized infrastructure, and the attention stays 100% on finding measures and tools to aware women regarding the importance of sport for a healthy lifestyle. In this discussion, in Ramnicu Sarat and in many cities, it does not exist a proper infrastructure, so, before coming with an awareness campaign or in the same time with it, we have to focus on building fields, places, sport halls or offering facilities in order to practice outdoor sports.

Another measure can be to elaborate strategies regarding the mass sports following the distribution of actions on gender: activities for men, for women and combined. In this way, the municipality could apply for a European project or could create a local team of initiative. In the last months, the mayor of the city already started an important campaign with more than 200 teachers in order to motivate them first of all to practice mass sports and on the second time to motivate youngsters to follow sport activities.

Different campaigns for informing and making people aware about the importance of mass sports on the health, education, inclusion, changing mentalities should be taken. In the Youth Strategy elaborated at local level, the mentality of people was touched as being the most important problem at local level. In the same time, the uninterested of people was the second important problem of the community, both of them having important effects on the practicing of mass sports at local level.

Another measure can be to offer different facilities to people or offering free access to different sport areas. This can be done by financing more activities or by generating and implementing local, regional and European projects in order to increase the participation and the specific of the activities.

For Ramnicu Sarat it is no doubt that the most important infrastructure update is to build mass sport fields in all the areas of the city. Now, Ramnicu Sarat is divided in 6 areas, which now any of them doesn't have a field. So, for running everyone is going to the local stadium, with no strong facilities. For that, the municipality already applied and won 3 European projects which will consist in creating 6 integrated fields, in all the places of the city, offering to people, men and women the chance to practice in a free way a mass sport.

Another important investment as a priority for the municipality is to invest in schools and in the sport fields from inside of them. This is already a project designed on three years.

As in the city there are not very big events and it is not a "culture" to practice sports, there are two directions to be followed. First of all the city, as every city who want to be known for its investment in sport, has to have a BIG EVENT in order to attract people from all over the around places. In the second time, in order to attract people from different backgrounds, with different needs, there should be organized activities on every category, including women, elders, youngsters, lovers of football, running, cycling, fitness, etc. For that return to the need to have a local mass sport strategy, consulted by an important number of women and men, in which to be designed, with their specific contributions, the future activities, projects and directions on mass sport in the community.

Other important activities are:

- Sport competitions
- Mass sport events
- Consultations and debates on different topics.

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Regarding the human resources we need trainers and facilitator together with volunteers and youth workers. Right now, the majority of the activities, locals and European projects are designed and implemented by the NGOs, following the need of youngsters to be involved and to develop competences. In this way, NGOs are very important together with sport institutions as Local Municipal Club though trainers.

Another important activity to be organized has to involve schools, for that sport teachers can have a centered place. In the same time the group of mothers and Femina Elders club can generate and implement sport activities, having more than 500 members. Regarding the European projects which can be attracted, the coordinators, project managers, technicians and specialized mentors and youth workers are very important. Our community, being a medium one is passing a very big problem, considering that the majority of the youngsters, after the end of the high-schools goes to Bucharest and other bigger cities, and the specialists too.

Our aim for the next period is to develop a strategy for youth to access mass sport as there is for other sectors (as youth, health, etc.). This idea was challenged by another partner that suggests that it is also important to invest in activities like walks that are not necessarily sport, but equally beneficial for health. The strategy should define the collaborations to be established with the local community. We highlighted the need of rebuilding the trust of the community in the administration and collaborate with the citizens. We shared the case of Ramnicu Sarat mothers' community: following their complaint about the lack of playground for children, the municipality invited them to make suggestions and they developed a proposal that has been implemented. Other partners agreed and made the example of participatory budget in Guimaraes and Granollers. Granollers highlighted the challenge of making the result of the participatory budget be accepted from all the citizens. In the same time, regarding the Romanian example, the participatory budget was firstly applied in Cluj Napoca in 2013 considering the fact that the most attractive and supported ideas of project must become reality, together with trying to offer a better opportunity and transparence of local funds for non-profit activities. For Ramnicu Sarat this is a desire which could be touched in a period of 3-5 years, as the administrative process is getting deeper in a local reform, together with the Romanian administration.

Corbetta suggests to invest in actions that reconcile the time of care of the family and of self-care like baby sitter. To help in this, municipalities could encourage sport clubs to organize activities for adults synchronized with the activities for the children and cheaper or no fees for women that wants to take these courses. In terms of human resources, trainers, NGOs and the private actors are considered the most important resources. A debate opens about whether people should be pushed, or be gently taken by hands. Partners agree that it is necessary to develop different motivation strategies according to the different typology of people.

Returning to Ramnicu Sarat, first of all the most important would be to continue the effects of SWUP project in the community as this is the most important one, developed at local level until now and to continue SWUP WOMEN CLUB effects by implementing the agenda of activities which will be generated in the next period. In the same time, having a strategy for mass sport for involving in the same time, women and men, is very important as it can design a strategic plan in which the municipality, as coordinator, can generate a sustainable action plan to be implemented together with schools, NGOs, different gyms and professional associations, and why not with local public institutions which can offer a model and a good example. In the same time, regarding the women involvement, we need to give power and perspective to SWUP WOMEN CLUB and to generate new clubs at local level.

Following this, business companies have to be one of the first partners together with:

- Schools
- NGOs
- Citizens
- Regional and national entities
- Sport clubs
- Business companies that can invest a percentage of their tax in NGOs
- Schools: as they are “generator of mentalities”, they are key to raise awareness and plan activities together

- Local, regional and government authorities to change the law of sport
- Neighborhood and associations.

The examples that can be applied by the local municipality are:

- Onix women football team
- More than 500 youngsters playing a sport in Municipal Club
- Mass sport events generated in August during the Days of the City
- NGOs implementing European exchanges and trainings on different topics, involving partners from all over the Europe.

In the last 3 years, as a representative of the municipality and also as a sport player, together with the mayor which is a former teacher and football coach, we succeeded to attract partners for the local development of sport phenomenon. In this way, more than 20 business companies co-financed the football team until the point when we promoted in the third league. Right now, more than 15 companies are co-financing the activities of the local sport club on different branches ensuring equipment, transportation costs, camps, fees for participation to different events, accommodation. On very big success at local level in this way is the fact that ONIX Athletic Club is the only women team in Buzau region playing in the second women league, with very important chances to promote this year in the first league. This happens by a 70% contribution of 2 business companies and 30 % contributions of the Regional Council, by applying with irrecoverable project, every year.

Regarding the partner contributions, they mentioned other examples as:

- Health practitioners having a weekly walk
- Table tennis in the park in Sofia
- Launching messages promoting sport
- Engaging youth
- Walking can be good and easy activity, but people don't see it as an option. So it is necessary to make people know why walking is useful and organise activity so that you can make them started together, then they'll do it alone.
- Browsing best practices on the Internet and through applications

Looking to the forum of SWUP online platform we can see a contribution coming from Caterina Dada which says that Gyms, women's employer and women's partners.

As a conclusion, connected also with the contributions from the online platform, the support of the administration given to the involvement of women in mass sports through infrastructure and awareness is 100% important for the general evolution of the community as the subjects are connected with very relevant and practically the most powerful fields as: Health, Education, Inclusion, Strategies, the connection between men and women, so practically the those creating synergy at local level, the important facilitators, trainers, partners and stakeholders. Looking from outside, talking about sport for women seems to be misunderstood, but as we are getting closer and closer for the topic, as we connect the community needs and the administration possibilities we can follow the idea that both are very inter-connected and very determined to produce the evolution and why not the change: of mentalities, of infrastructure, of rules. By giving an economical support in 2019, all over the Europe it is not enough from the municipality side, but going inside the needs, problems and community and supporting in an effective way the process through people and active participation, this can be the way for a complete Awareness. Another important contribution added by Caterina Dada is that "policies that raise awareness on the bigger load that women usually experience in house activities besides their main profession, or policies increasing the working flexibility of women with children would help women to have more free time to devote to sport activities.

We also wish a policy that encourages sport practices that are fair and help to develop the critical thinking and independence of women. This means sports played with high ethical standards and with a holistic view on

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the physical as much as intellectual/psychological development of the sport practitioner. In this way sport could express its best potentialities also in term of inclusion of women in the social and political life.”

Moreover, following the results of ACTIVE WOMEN AND GIRLS Strategy 2018 (link: [http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/media/4455763/2018\\_active\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/media/4455763/2018_active_women_and_girls_strategy.pdf)), the activities which could produce an added value are:

- Conduct and monitor research on structured and unstructured physical activity and participation rates for women and girls across the region, particularly activities likely to be popular with women such as walking, netball, aerobics/ group fitness/gym activities, cycling, swimming, running, yoga, dance, tennis and soccer
- Work with universities and sports associations to explore possible opportunities and actions required to improve sport pathways for women and girls
- Support women’s and girls’ sport participation initiatives
- Support local competitions and physical activity events targeting women and girls.
- Identify opportunities to partner with organizations that delivery female physical activity programs or initiatives
- Explore opportunities to work with community groups and other relevant service providers or agencies to facilitate opportunities for low cost, social physical activity options these may include running or walking groups, football, basketball etc
- Develop a series of walking, running and cycling maps of the Municipality to promote opportunities for local participation
- Develop a strategy around family-friendly activities. This will include promoting general play spaces as free family-friendly exercise and active participation opportunities.

Tempo Livre from Portugal is undoubtedly an excellent example that Guimarães has for the implementation of sports policies. Examples such as “Vida Feliz”, “Jogos das Comunidades”, and “Sports Belly” projects have community involvement, not only women but also men and in many cases, families.

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