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Original article

RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HANDBALL AS AN ELITE SPORT AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY

TEODOR DRAGOS FLORIN¹, GEORGESCU ADRIAN¹, CAROLI MARCO², SONEGO DANIELE³, BRIVIO SARA⁴, TSILIGKIRI CHRISTINA⁵, BARDAKAS DIMITRIOS⁵, PAPAGEORGIOU PANOS⁶, MELENCO IONEL¹

Abstract:

Aim. To investigate opinions and points of view about the importance and development of the handball game at the regional level.

Method. To achieve the proposed goal, we organized a focus group consisting of handball coaches, players, and sports specialists. They received an online questionnaire, which aims to investigate opinions and points of view regarding the importance and development of the handball game at the regional level. The questionnaire was composed of 10 questions with multiple answers. 102 focus group participants responded to this questionnaire

Results. The results of the questionnaire indicate that 40 percent of participants agree that motor skills are most important for identifying and developing young handball players. Handball has a strong educational and cultural role in developing skills such as collaboration, respect, team spirit, fair play, education, or emulation. Handball within schools, seen from a co-educational angle, should be approached with an eye to its predisposition for the development of social and civic skills. In order to develop and improve the athletes' performance, it is necessary to organise excellent handball centres where the centralised training of the best handball players and coaches can be carried out.

Conclusions. Handball is a sport whose presence in the school curriculum, along with other team sports such as football, basketball, or volleyball, is very important. The results of the questionnaire confirm this: all participants answered affirmatively. The game of handball is based on a harmonious combination of motor and cognitive skills at the same time, the game takes place on a background of intense mental demands, which have a pronounced formative-educational role. The existing gap between the different countries in handball is mainly due to a gap in the training level of the coaches, which consequently determines a low level of local development.

Key words: handball, youth, education, inclusion, development.

Introduction

„Handball grassroots is for everyone”, that was one of the most important messages of the first EHF Grassroots Convention, which was held on Sunday on the fringe of the Men's EHF EURO 2024 in Munich (<https://activities.eurohandball.com/activities-news/en/grassroots-is-for-everyone/>). In accord with this message, the "Handball International Education Project" aims to promote handball among children and young people and, at the same time, develop coaches and instructors in this field at all levels. Another goal is to solve a current social problem and increase young people's passion for physical activity for a healthy life, in accord with the World Health Organization (WHO). Despite its popularity, handball has a non-uniform following in Europe. According to the research conducted by the International Handball Federation (IHF) and team handball news website, the spread of this sport in Europe is as follows:

- second most popular team sport: Iceland, Norway, Germany, Romania;
- second or third most popular team sport: Sweden, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Portugal, Croatia;
- sports with a good presence: France, Spain, Austria, Czech Republic;
- minor sport with some participants: Italy, Belgium, Holland, Greece, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia;
- minor sport with few participants: Great Britain and Ireland (<https://www.ihf.info/>).

Therefore, despite the evident potential of sport, historical and social reasons have prevented its spread, especially in southern Europe. This situation leads to an imbalance in the training skills of the coaches. The technical level achieved from clubs and national teams has allowed European nations to be on the top of the world. On the other hand, for example, the discipline in Italy is well spread on the whole territory but the technical level, both of clubs and national teams, is not comparable with all near countries.

¹ Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania E-mail:dragosteodor@yahoo.com

² MGS, caroli@smartsport.marketing

³ FIGH, d.sonego@figh.it

⁴ L'Orma, europe@ormasite.it

⁵ Olympiacos SFP/CJT, ctsiligkiri.erasmus@olympiacos.org

⁶ EPSI, panos.papageorgiou@epsi.eu



The benefits of handball are numerous: it provides a full body workout, develops hand-eye coordination, teaches you to be balanced and agile on both sides of the body, unlike many sports, handball can be played and for a lifetime, is a cheap team sport. By practicing handball, you can achieve the WHO recommendations regarding physical activity for an optimal state of health. As a sports discipline, handball has undergone a special evolution and development from children and juniors to the highest level of performance. The qualitative and spectacular level has increased and every national and international level competition comes and makes great improvements, which means that more resources are available for improvement.

Method.

To achieve the proposed goal, we organized a focus group consisting of handball coaches, players, and sports specialists. They received an online questionnaire, which aims to investigate opinions and points of view regarding the importance and development of the handball game at the regional level. The questionnaire was composed of 10 questions with multiple answers. 102 focus group participants responded to this questionnaire.

Questionnaire:

1. Which sports activities do you prefer in physical education classes?

- Football;
- Handball;
- Basketball;
- Volleyball;
- Other.

2. Do you consider important the presence of handball in the schools curriculum?

- Yes;
- No;

3. What are the most relevant skills for identifying and developing young handball players?

- Technical skills (handling the ball, the intention of the passes, skills for the attack phase, skills for the defense phase);
- Tactical skills (game sense and awareness, speed of thought, game sense, positioning);
- Motor skills (speed, agility, strength, flexibility);
- Mental and personality skills (winner mentality, motivation, personality, perseverance, playing happiness)

4. What are the most important values of handball?

- Respect;
- Education;
- Collaboration;
- Fair play;

5. The Excellence Handball Centers are important for international performance?

- Yes, very important for international results;
- No, they are not important, preparation for international results can only be done at club level;

6. What are the objectives of the Excellence Handball Centers?

- Developing and improving athletes performances;
- Training and development of handball coaches;
- School education;

7. What are the solutions for increasing, developing handball game and the selection area?

- Promoting the selection and organizing competitions at the local level;
- Promoting the establishment of sports clubs - handball sections;
- The organization of events to promote performance sports by handball personalities / sports influencers;
- Promoting handball in school, as physical activity for health but also as a performance sport;

8. How can we promote handball at the national level?

- Periodic public events, projects, competitions, organized in schools, parks, and other suitable spaces;
- Distribution of promotional materials (posters, flags, banners, leaflets, brochures, pens) in educational institutions;
- Creating web pages with handball activities and the educational values of this sport;

9. Is it necessary to establish in each area/county an Handball Association?

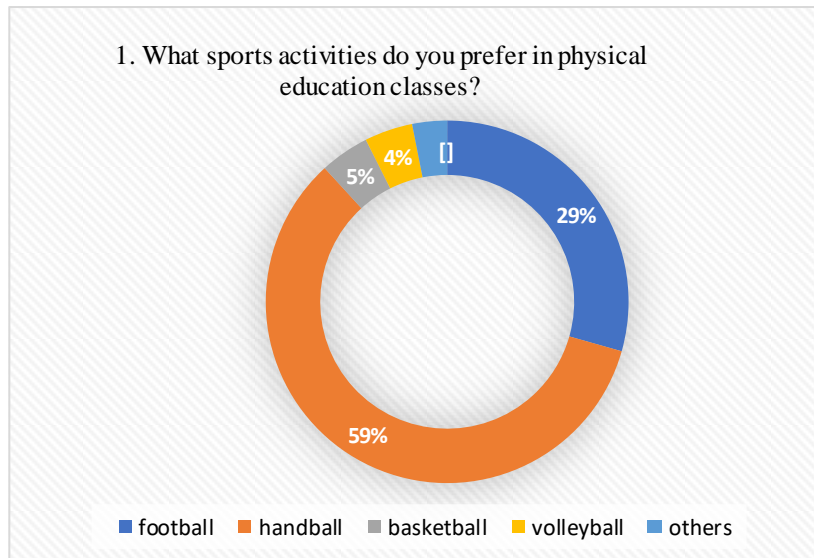
- Yes;
- No;

10. What would be the role of these regional Handball Associations?

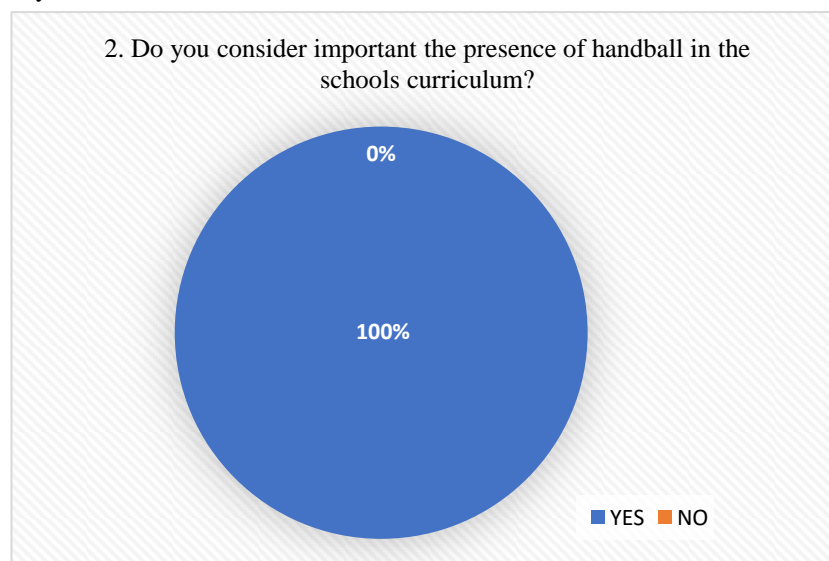
- Organizing competitions for children and juniors in schools and the regional level;
- Logistics insurance (for the establishment of handball clubs);
- Organizing technical and methodical courses for coaches and referees;

Results

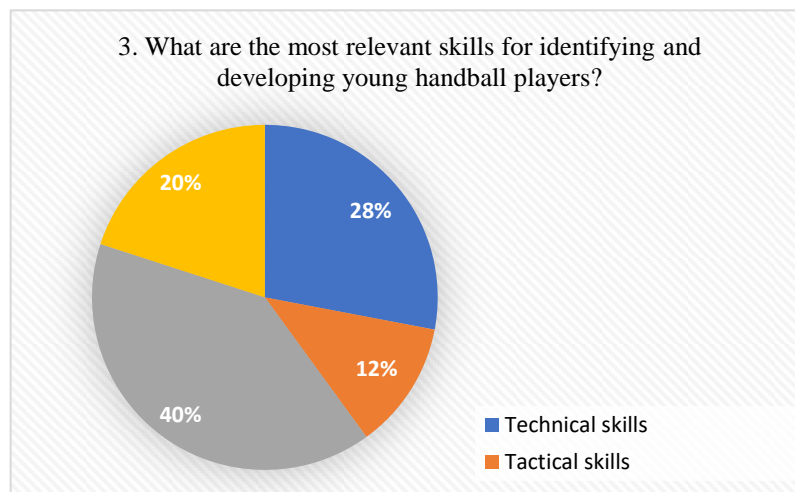
A total of 102 participants, including handball players and handball coaches, answered the online questionnaire as follows: To the first question „*What sports activities do you prefer in physical education classes?*” 29 percent answered football, 59 percent prefer handball, 5 percent have chosen basketball, 4 percent volleyball and 3 percent other sports activities.



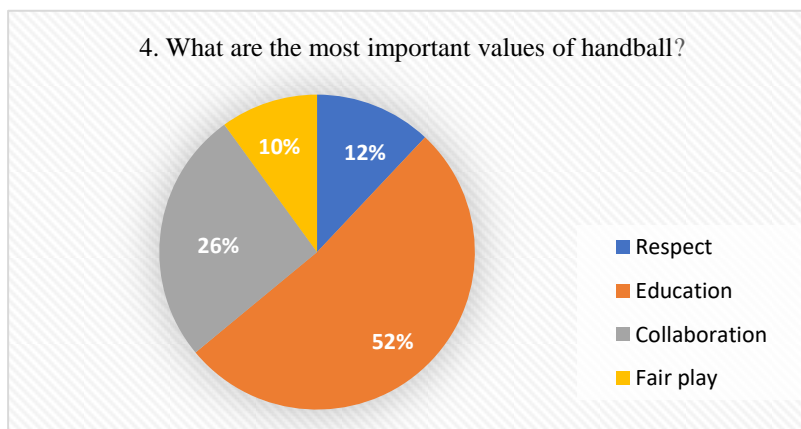
To the second question „*Do you consider important the presence of handball in the schools curriculum?*” all participants answered yes.



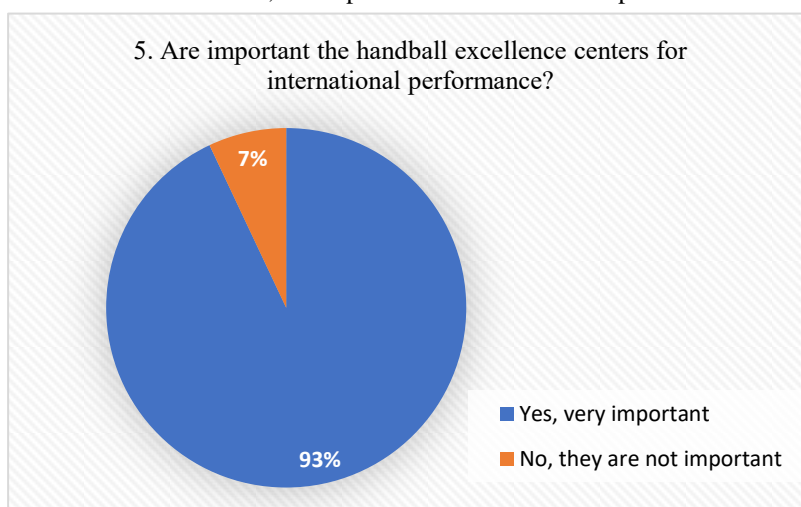
Regarding the *most relevant skills for young handball players* 28 percent answered technical skills (handling the ball, the intention of the passes, skills for the attack phase, skills for the defense phase), 12 percent considered tactical skills important (game sense and awareness, speed of thought, game sense, positioning), 40 percent think that motor skills (speed, agility, strength, flexibility) are most relevant, and 20 percent mental and personality skills (winner mentality, motivation, personality, perseverance, playing happiness).



At question „What are the most important values of handball game ?” 52 percent believes that education is the most important, 26 percent collaboration, 12 percent have chosen respect, and 10 percent fair play.

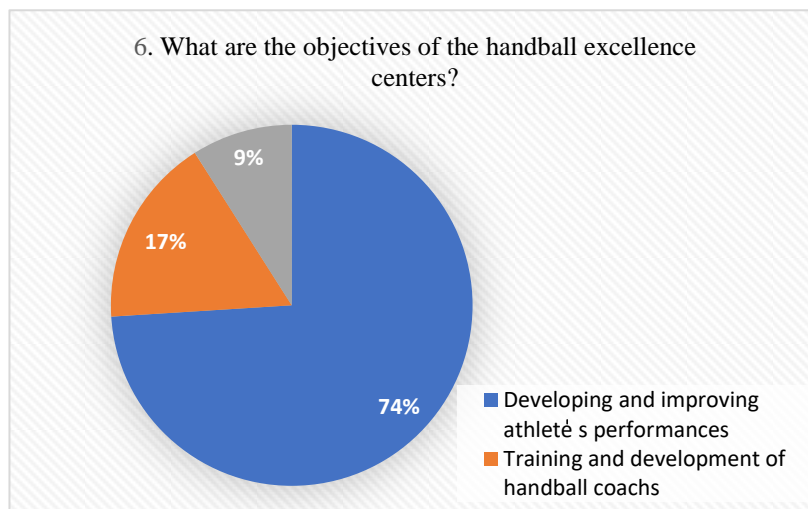


To question 5: "Are the handball excellence centres important for international performance?" 93 percent answered yes, it is very important for international results, and 7 percent consider it not important.



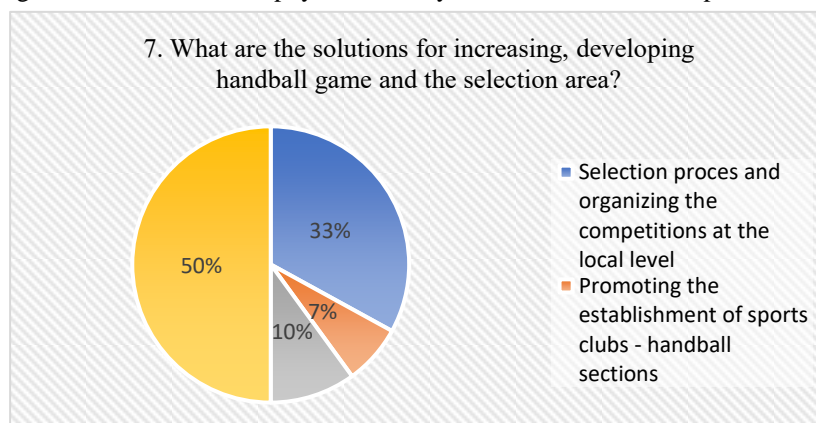
The answers to the question 6 „What are the objectives of the handball excellence centers?” they varied as follows:

- Developing and improving athletes performances - 74 percent;
- Training and development of handball coaches -17 percent;
- School education - 9 percent.



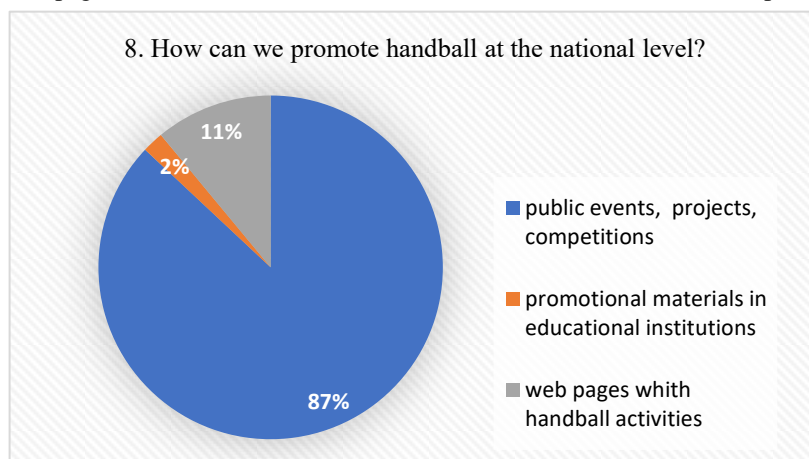
In terms of solutions for increasing and developing handball as a sport and the selection area, the answers were:

- Selection proces and organizing the competitions at the local level - 33 percent;
- Promoting the establishment of sports clubs - handball sections - 7 percent;
- The organization of events to promote performance sports by handball personalities / sports influencers - 10 percent;
- Promoting handball in school, as physical activity for health but also as a performance sport - 50 percent;

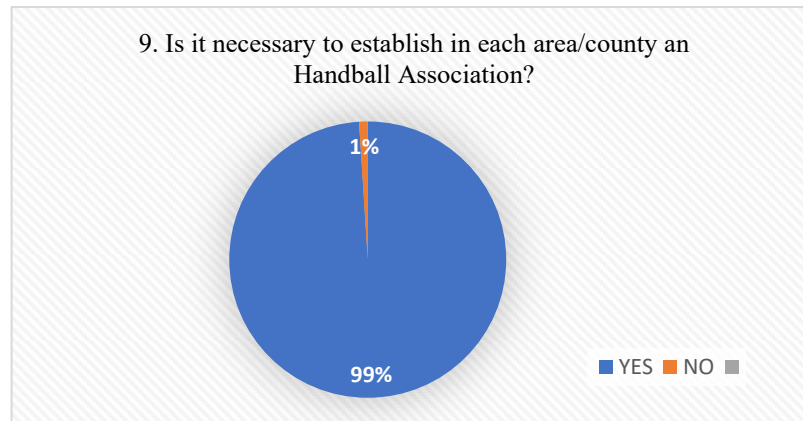


To the question 8 regarding „How can we promote handball at the national level?” the participants answered:

- Periodic public events, projects, competitions, organized in schools, parks, and other suitable spaces - 87 percent;
- Distribution of promotional materials (posters, flags, banners, leaflets, brochures, pens) in educational institutions - 2 percent;
- Creating web pages which handball activities and the educational values of this sport - 11 percent;

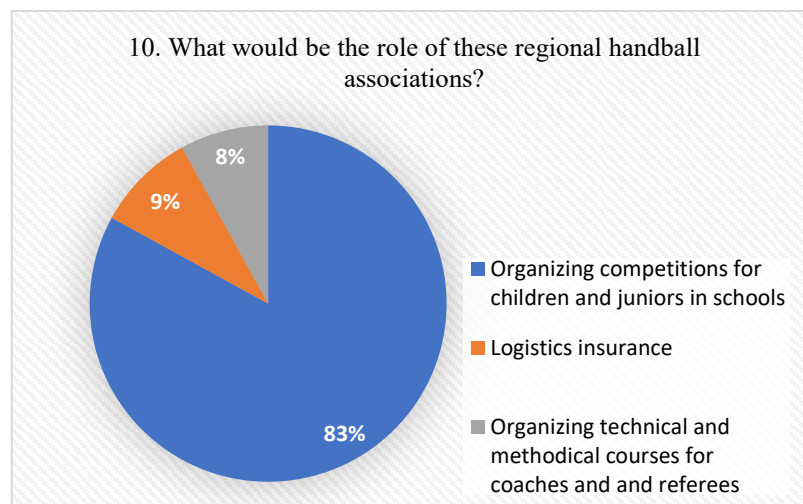


As to the importance of the County Handball Association, 99 percent consider them necessary, while only 1 percent consider them not important.



The answers to the last question, „What would be the role of these regional Handball Associations?” were:

- Organizing competitions for children and juniors in schools and the regional level;
- Logistics insurance (for the establishment of handball clubs);
- Organizing technical and methodical courses for coaches and referees;



Conclusions.

The existing gap between the different countries in handball is mainly due to a gap in the training level of the coaches, which consequently determines a low level of local development. Handball is a sport whose presence in the school curriculum, along with other team sports such as football, basketball, or volleyball, is very important. The results of the questionnaire confirm this: all participants answered affirmatively. The game of handball is based on a harmonious combination of motor and cognitive skills at the same time, the game takes place on a background of intense mental demands, which have a pronounced formative-educational role. The results of the questionnaire indicate that 40 percent of participants agree that motor skills are most important for identifying and developing young handball players. Handball has a strong educational and cultural role in developing skills such as collaboration, respect, team spirit, fair play, education, or emulation. Handball within schools, seen from a co-educational angle, should be approached with an eye to its predisposition for the development of social and civic skills. In order to develop and improve the athletes' performance, it is necessary to organise excellent handball centres where the centralised training of the best handball players and coaches can be carried out.

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