



How can you transfer Skills from Sports to the Labour Market?

Report on the impact Evaluation of the Pilot Actions implemented within the framework of IO4 of the ERASMUS + Sport project:

'Sport as a vehicle for developing skills for the labor market and promoting employability and entrepreneurship'



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How can you transfer Skills from Sports to the Labour Market? Intellectual Output 4 | Work-package 4

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INTRODUCTION

We developed a toolkit based on the specific training model developed within the project “SKILLS by SPORT 4 MED: Sport as a vehicle for developing skills for the labor market and promoting employability and entrepreneurship”, to promote greater awareness about using sport as a tool for the development of employability skills. The training programme is based on an Open Educational Resources Platform, which is already described in the previous report of the project, that refers to Intellectual Output (IO) 3: “Report of Evaluation and Guidelines on the Use of Sport as a Vehicle for Skills Development for the Labour Market”.

This report focuses on the following phase of the project (IO4) with the implementation of the pilot action which consists of a “trial” phase of the training, implemented directly in the field, within the daily activities of the coaches and their athletes/students. This document aims to support trainers in the implementation of the training activities and identify points of strengths and ongoing difficulties, and there is an additional document with guidelines about the implementation of the whole process – the Handbook of SbS4Med.

The methodological assumptions of the training include the involvement of coaches and sport instructors directly in the training process with their own athletes/students, to avoid defensive resistance and promote active involvement, sharing knowledge both bottom-up and top-down, endorsing this pilot as a source of education/knowledge, and using group sharing as a source of learning and improvement. The first phase of the training with sport coaches and instructors was delivered in-presence or digital mode, with the support of the web platform. From this training course one to three sport coaches per country were invited to integrate the pilot action in: Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The pilot action took place between April 2022 and March 2023, with each pilot per country being implemented between approximately two- and six-months periods:

Table 1: Summary of the pilot actions implemented per country

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF COACHES	SPORTS' MODALITY
CROATIA	3	Field Hockey, Female Water polo, Fencing
CYPRUS	3	Football
GREECE	1	Street Football
ITALY	3	Football and Volley
PORTUGAL	2	Swimming, Modern Pentathlon
SPAIN	2	Physical Education

Each coach had a diary per training with an evaluation of the pre- and post- training. The first concerns the general objectives of training that would be implemented in the session of the pilot action, the description of the proposed exercises, and a reflection on the skills developed by them; the second part refers to self-evaluation, including the personal investment of coaches and athletes, the means that coaches used to facilitate the acquisition of employability skills, the difficulties faced and, finally, the coaches' recommendations for future actions.

We present the results of this activity through a brief systematic description and a summary table of the two parts under evaluation – before/during and after the training - followed by some final remarks.

MAIN RESULTS

Implementing the tool: objectives, effectiveness of exercises and skills developed

The main objectives listed by the coaches can be summarized in the following ideas:

- › Aligned with the general objective of the project showing remarkable consensus in the implementation of learning methods and in regular training sessions that make it possible to raise awareness of the skills obtained through sport, transferable to the job market.
- › Aligned with more specific objectives to improve technical and tactical ways to train and form a successful multicultural team, overcoming individual differences. The technical and tactical objectives mentioned by the participants are translated into the description of exercises and strategies that the coaches consider useful to reach the proposed objectives and differ between sports' categories.

To enhance pro-employability abilities, the coaches used:

- › Cooperative tasks increased inter-team communication skills, introduced creative practices and conducted more in-depth debriefings.
- › Improved and applied specific techniques and tactics to promote the competencies outlined in the previous point. Some examples are:
 - in swimming - water balance and breathing technique, swim relays, swimmer dryland work (fitness);
 - in the pentathlon - laser run training and competition simulation, relay races;
 - in football and volley - practice transitioning to defence and attacking phase, like switching flanks;

were promoted as tactics for dealing with high-pressure situations.

- › Group sessions were mainly used to transmit these notions that athletes were not aware of or did not previously pay attention to. Even in individual sports this awareness was used in both group and individual sessions to address and detail

conventions and concepts. In some sports, such as field hockey and water polo, in the tactical-specific part, the introduction of new elements was considered difficult.

The skills for employability that the instructors considered to have developed with the application of the exercises were:

- › The most considered: 1) interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate and collaborate; 2) followed by intrapersonal skills such as creativity, self-awareness and cognitive/contextual ones like problem-solving.
- › The least considered: 1) management of conflict, stress and frustration was poorly indicated [The exception was noted for the case of the group of athletes/students that came from conflict zones and had to face severe psychological trauma, where the management of conflict, stress and frustration through sport activities were mentioned with a major weight]; 2) skills linked to practical/functional aspects (individual techniques and tactics), but it should be noted that they were mainly pointed out by some of the participants as the main exercises to achieve the objectives, regardless being an individual or collective sport.

The following table summarizes the general trends and specificities obtained by coaches considering the training period:

Table II: Summary of general trends and specificities during training implementation

	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Common answers / commonly stated feedback</i>	<i>Specific answers / not as commons assessment</i>
<i>During training</i>	<p>Main objectives</p> <p><i>During the training, the main sports' objectives enumerated as trained by the coaches were:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The most remarkable consensus lies in implementing learning methods in regular training sessions to raise awareness of the skills obtained through sport, transferable to the job market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating new approaches to technical and tactical ways to train - Implementing the methods with the aim of gathering multicultural teams, bringing them together to achieve a goal
	Exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The exercises especially stressed teamwork. - Cooperative and creative tasks - The game itself/ physical skills specific to a particular sport or activity/ strategic decisions and plans are made during the game. - Good debriefings after practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In the tactical-specific parts of the train it was considered difficult to introduce new elements -Specific games are provided to the athletes to decide the best strategy to succeed.
	Skills developed by the implementation of the exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relational/interpersonal skills: communication and collaboration were the choices of all coaches. - Next are intrapersonal skills such as independence & autonomy, creativity and self-awareness followed by cognitive ones, like problem solving. -Functional skills were strictly pointed out by a few participants (individual techniques and tactics). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Between the cognitive & contextual skills, management of conflict, stress and frustration was poorly indicated. - Functional skills are less mentioned.

Self-Evaluation: personal investment, development of employability skills, challenges faced and recommendations for future actions

The way to **enable the development of employability skills** did not prove to be easy for the coaches. They consider that, when preparing their sessions, examples could be useful to promote sports practices that may be enhanced with pro-employability skills. Despite these challenges, the pilot action has been considered to provide valuable insights into the practical application, highlighting the following points:

- › Need adequate preparation, following, and controlling to make coaches aware of soft skills.
- › Coaches facilitate the development of employability skills, increasing skills such as communication, problem-solving, autonomy and creativity, but above all asking questions to athletes presenting different game situations that allow communication between athletes while providing them corrective feedback (showing the tactics and discussing their weaknesses and strengths) and reinforcing concepts during the training.
- › Coaches promote teamwork, encouraging players' abilities to make decisions and solve problems independently, thereby creating an environment that fosters mutual reliance.
- › The cognitive dimension skills, and even the more functional ones, are the least chosen to be developed with the implementation of the exercises.
- › One of the points raised (although within the least frequent) was the suitability of the target audience, which could be done by promoting different age and training groups.

The level of agreement on **coaches' personal investment** during training was closer to the position of **'totally fulfilled'**. This is a consistent position for coaches, which is also reflected in the analysis of **their feelings**. They showed:

- › Interest in the program, happiness, joy, motivation, security, and confidence, and were surprised by its effectiveness which allowed a new awareness of the skills acquired through sport
- › Coaches appreciated the possibility of cementing and operationalising the group concept.

The **reaction of the team** to coaches' training was also based on positive aspects:

- › Appreciation, enthusiasm, and motivation by awareness of the work to be done;
- › The desire to participate in more programmes is evident;

The results showed a single less positive reaction:

- › Some frustration and disappointment in performing specific exercises, maybe due to the young age of the athletes that could not absorb the idea so well, as the process is better understood at older ages.

The **challenges faced** in implementing the program were uniform and consistent across coaches.

- › The common points that the coaches identified were:
 - Examples could be useful to lead the actions to be carried out, through a practical guide that could contain systematized information, since this would allow a uniform understanding by the coaches and would have the advantage of reducing the coaches' preparation time and achieving greater control over the implementation of the program.
 - The short time hampered coaches' ability to prepare for and oversee program implementation, resulting in some cases in a sense of less control over the direction.
 - Not consistent among the participants the coaches stated that in some cases it was difficult to obtain collaboration, motivation, concentration capacity and decision-making skills.
- › Least pointed out, but significant, were the following points:
 - The lack of adequate facilities and human resources allocated to the program implementation;
 - The difficulty of increasing the technical qualities of the athletes;
 - Difficulties in implementing exercises to deal with frustration and stress.

The **coach's recommendations** showed objectives related to the program were identified, aiming to improve its effectiveness and more specific objectives related to the training, promoting other action strategies. The recommendations were towards: Greater clarity in the information transmitted by the program by the creation of a guideline on a practical basis written in simple language and with examples, using examples of everyday life and situations that occurred in the sports context with success in labour.

- › All participants considered that time was short for this implementation highlighting the importance of a longer pilot period for adjustment, preparation, follow-up, and control in making athletes/students aware of soft skills.
- › Coaches identified complementary ways of making the implementation of the programme more effective: promoting an initial debate, before the start of the activity and giving players breaks during and after train, which would allow the team and the coaches to define their strategy, discuss possible solutions to faced problems, and have a deeper reflection and dialogue after training.
- › Athletes' efforts can be incremented: they can be encouraged to use their communication skills to discuss any problems they encounter and attempt to solve them independently without assistance from the coach; increasing the difficulty level of exercises would enhance the development of decision-making skills, as athletes would be required to make quick decisions in challenging situations.

More particularly, the results reveal that it would be beneficial:

- › To combine the efforts of a coach and a physical education teacher or an assistant coach, especially in the case of young athletes/students, with the aim of developing skills that may not be easily developed through participation in a specific sport alone.
- › In case of older athletes, it could be previously identified which competencies the athletes consider less developed, proceeding with a prior diagnosis, and having those competencies as a target of a specific development in training.
- › Transmit the importance of strategy to achieve success, instead of relying only on individual skills or talents, was another point mentioned.

Project's team reflection on **how to overcome the challenges**:

- › The balance was indeed very positive as we can check by the coaches' investment scale and the feelings that they have identified.
- › We acknowledge that in order to overcome the difficulties faced, the programme would ideally run for a complete sport season/academic year. Due to the restrictions and timings of the project, the pilot action was developed between two and six months, depending on the availability of the coaches per country, which means that in some cases the coaches did not have the time to overcome the difficulties.
- › Additionally, the diversity of sports (group or individual) did not allow the trainers and mentors of the programme to have concrete guidelines for each sports' activity. Nonetheless, with a longer period of implementation, it would be important to collect more examples of implemented exercises per sport action, to be shared with the sport's community. From the feedback gathered, there are coaches that will keep implementing these strategies in their sport training, and thus the communication between coaches will allow to better local dissemination of these strategies.
- › Regarding the difficulties related to human resources, infrastructure, or engagement with athletes, we understand that those are not directly related with the methodology of the project, and that in some more challenging environments, where there are other base challenges to tackle, this can be an additional concern. This was confirmed as well by the coaches that raised this topic.

The following table summarizes the general trends and specificities obtained by coaches considering the after-training period:

Table III: Summary of general trends and specificities after training implementation

	Questions	Common answers / commonly stated feedback	Specific answers / not as commons assessment
After training	Personal investment	The level of agreement on coaches' personal investment during training was closer to the position of 'totally fulfilled' .	Only in one case, the position on the scale got closer to the midpoint, even so, surpassing it.
	How coaches facilitate the development of the employability skills mentioned in the planning	<p>Main facilitation methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking questions to the team; presenting diverse game simulation situations; give them helpful feedbacks - Discuss situations like training structuring and organization, showing tactics and discussing individual strengths and weaknesses. - Give verbal reinforcement of the concepts during the training - By creating an environment in the training where players are forced to communicate, trust each other, take decisions independently and have problem-solving skills. 	-Adequacy of the target audience (with different training groups and ages)
	Major challenges faced by coaches during the training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coaches pointed out the need of development of practical exercises/guidelines and more time to achieve a sustainable effect on training methodology with their athletes/students. This perspective is reflected as the most mentioned challenge faced by the coaches. - Clarity - Lack of visible/measurable objectives and evidences. - Short time/ need for preparation to accomplish and sustain the objectives - Obtain collaboration, motivation, concentration, and decision-making skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employability skills are yet poorly recognized by the students/athletes - Increase the technical quality of the players / dealing with frustration and pressure in competitive sports. - Finding the right facilities; Limited human resources

Table III: Summary of general trends and specificities after training implementation (cont.)

After training (cont.)	<p>Coaches' Feelings during the training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coaches expressed interest, happiness, security, motivation and trust; surprised with the effectiveness of the programme. - Feeling more aware about the practice of sport and link to employability skills - The group concept and its improvement were valued. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern about the real effect on the kids/Disappointment (some athletes had difficulties in to follow orders and understanding the key factors of a sport modality).
	<p>Reaction of the team to coaches' training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General positive appreciation: the team was motivated, passionate, acquiring more awareness and high energy. - Desire to repeat the programme and motivation by the younger athletes/students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age was a distinguishing factor: programme better understood at older ages - In few cases, the athletes showed some frustration in performing specific exercises - Enthusiasm in outdoor activities
	<p>Coaches' Recommendations for future actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a clearly written guideline (graphical, written in simple language and with examples); clarifying situations that occurred in the sports context with success in the labour /giving examples of everyday life - More opportunities/time to raise awareness: - Promote an initial debate or/and give players breaks to go into their teams and discuss possible solutions to the different problems they face - Plan small moments of reflection and dialogue after training / discuss possible solutions to the different problems - Increasing communication & problem-solving skills through exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the skills that athletes consider less developed (diagnosis) - Combine the efforts of a coach and a physical education teacher or an assistant coach, especially for young athletes - Ask athletes' feedback/ about employability skills - Convey the importance of strategy in achieving success, rather than solely relying on individual skills or talent.

FINAL REMARKS

The coaches aimed to align their training sessions with the general objectives of the project and the specific technical and tactical objectives for each sport. They used exercises based on teamwork, cooperative and creative tasks, and had good debriefings to enhance pro-employability abilities.

The skills most developed were interpersonal skills (mainly communication and collaboration), followed by intrapersonal skills (independence & autonomy, creativity, and self-awareness) and cognitive/contextual skills like problem-solving. Generally, they poorly indicated the management of conflict, stress and frustration. Nonetheless, when addressing athletes from conflict zones, there is a significant increase in previous skills due to severe psychological trauma. Functional skills were not so considered but easier to identify and work with. However, the way for coaches to enable the development of employability skills proved to be challenging. The results also show that the effectiveness of sports training in developing employability skills is significant but may be influenced, in some cases, by factors such as the athlete's circumstances, their young age, facilities, and human resources available.

Mainly, the coaches identified challenges in implementing the program, including the need for a more evident practical system to guide coaches and more time to achieve a sustainable effect on training methodology, highlighting the importance of adequate preparation, follow-up, and control in making coaches aware of soft skills. They also reveal some difficulty in obtaining skills such as collaboration, motivation, concentration, and decision-making, and in a few cases, needed help recognizing employability skills. Despite the challenges faced, the coaches managed to develop strategies that facilitated the development of skills for employability. These strategies include asking questions, presenting various game simulations, giving corrective feedback, discussing training structure and organization, showing tactics and discussing individual strengths and weaknesses, providing verbal reinforcement during training, and creating an environment that promotes communication, trust, independent decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

The level of agreement on coaches' investment during training was closer to the position of 'totally fulfilled', and coaches' feelings during the activity were very positive, prevailing happiness, security, motivation and trust. Coaches developed new awareness about the practice of sport. The team's reaction to coaches' training was also a positive appreciation: the team was motivated, passionate, acquiring more awareness and high energy.

The main common recommendations include:

- creating a clear guideline with examples that provide more opportunities for awareness-raising,
- promoting initial debates and team discussions,
- planning moments of reflection and dialogue after training, and
- increasing communication and problem-solving skills through exercises.

The less common include:

- identifying athletes' less developed skills,
- combining efforts of coaches and physical education teachers,
- gathering athletes' feedback on employability skills,
- emphasizing the importance of strategy in achieving success beyond individual skills or talent.

There was a consensus on the effectiveness of raising awareness of skills acquired through sport, transferable to the labour market. Thus, the significance of sports training in developing soft skills that can be transferred to the job market was considered accomplished. By incorporating these recommendations, athletes can improve their performance and develop employability skills that could benefit them both on and off the field. Although coaches already knew they were transferring skills to athletes, they needed more awareness about its impact on their future careers.

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