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**MANAGEMENT, CONDITION AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF BASKETBALL IN BULGARIA**

**GESTIÓN, CONDICIÓN Y PERSPECTIVAS PARA EL DESARROLLO  
DE BALONCESTO EN BULGARIA**

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**Abstract**

Management not only as running an organization but also as a factor changing the environment makes the management of the development of sport a socially responsible activity. The present study aims at analysing some important premises for the development of basketball in Bulgaria, and also at making a comparative analysis between the social-economical premises for development of basketball and other sports and outlining the major directions for overcoming the weak sides and applying the possibilities so that basketball in Bulgaria can be developed.

**Keywords**

Basketball – Management – Condition and development prospects – Strategic position  
Market potential – Organization capacity

**Resumen**

La gestión, no es solo una organización, sino también es un factor que cambia el entorno, hace que la gestión del desarrollo del deporte sea una actividad socialmente responsable. El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar algunas premisas importantes para el desarrollo del baloncesto en Bulgaria, y también hacer un análisis comparativo entre las premisas socioeconómicas para el desarrollo del baloncesto y otros deportes y delinear las principales direcciones, superando los lados débiles y aplicar posibilidades, para un desarrollo del baloncesto en el país.

**Palabras Claves**

Baloncesto – Gestión – Condiciones y perspectivas de desarrollo – Posición estratégica  
Potencial de mercado – Capacidad de organización

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## Introduction

Contemporary basketball and its development are greatly dependent on the constant changes encompassing the dynamic processes in the social, political and economical environment in modern society. The changes and the development of the contemporary sport is related to a great extent with the growing technological possibilities. The development of sport and its place in social life should not be viewed as a process undergoing in a different sphere. It has its significant place in the social-economic system.

The prevailing opinion in the contemporary sports science is that the achievement of high and lasting sports results can be done only through scientifically grounded sports preparation of many years. However, we should not ignore the fact that the factors for the development of sport are preconditioned by the interactions between the system of sport and the social system where sport uses resources and provides usefulness which is a resource for the social system. That is why the management of the development requires attention not only to the different participants but also to the system conditions these interactions are taking place in and the conditions meaningful for the participants<sup>1</sup>. In a state of generally limited resources, the society tends to provide resources to those who reflect its values<sup>2</sup>. The efficiency of the management of the development is to be assessed along a number of social-economic criteria for social usefulness, adequacy and sensibility of the activities of the different sports organizations. Understanding management not only as running an organization but also as a factor for a change in the environment makes the management of the development of sport a socially responsible activity. In this sense, it should be viewed as a management of a complex change of the social-economic conditions through providing services which meet various needs and are beneficial. Combining the vision, processes and practices, the management of sport should be considered “a kind of management directed at development, not a kind of management within the process of development”<sup>3</sup>.

While in Western societies sport is supported mostly by the social-economic relations, in Bulgaria the ideological base of the development of sport has led to deformities in its interaction with the other components of the social system. We believe that “the ideology of the elite sport” should be replaced with a socially oriented approach for the development of a system where: 1) sport for all is a source of talents and a field of sports performance throughout life; 2) sports organizations, having social-economic resources, build sports mastery according to the abilities and needs of those engaged in sport; 3) ranking is a natural evolution in the system of sport. In this concept the strategic priorities for the development of sport should consider the condition of the social-economic prospects of the different kinds of sports along the vertical (high performance sport) and the horizontal (recreation sport, sport for all). The aim of the present study is to analyze some major prerequisites for the development of basketball in Bulgaria. We set the following tasks: 1) To make a comparative analysis between the social-economic preconditions for the development of basketball and other sports; 2) To outline main directions for overcoming the weaknesses and taking advantage of the possibilities so as to develop basketball in Bulgaria.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Girginov, Bulgarian sports policy in the 20th century: a strategic relations respective - Doctoral Thesis. University of Loughborough. 2000, 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> S. Kapralov, Teoretichen model za strategichesko planirane razvitiето na sporta v Republika Bulgaria. 2017. 64-66.

<sup>3</sup> I. Sandanski, “Strategicheska izbiratelnost na darjavata v sportnite politiki”, Sport I nayka, br. 4, (2010): 118-136.

## Research methods

The comparative analysis used an expert study among 30 sports specialists conducted as a personal structured interview. A stratified sample of 10 Olympic sports was examined (basketball, wrestling, golf, rowing, athletics, swimming, skiing, tennis, football, rhythmic gymnastics) along 24 social-economic indexes about the state the sports are in and the prospects for their development. The answers were rated along 5-point Likert type scale. The quantitative data were processed and analyzed with math-statistical methods: mean arithmetic and average weigh value, relative shares, correlation analysis with the method of rang correlations of Spearman, etc. The expert study is part of a more exhaustive and detailed research in the development of sport<sup>4</sup>.

## Problem definition

In the field of high-performance sport, Bulgarian basketball does not have any significant international success. According to FIBA, for 2012 Bulgarian basketball is ranked 54<sup>th</sup> among 118 countries participants in the world. According to Euro League Basketball, Bulgaria ranks 17<sup>th</sup> among 54 countries for the period 1957-2007. According to the classification of the European Basketball League, the Bulgarian National Championship is ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among 17 for the three-year period 2009-2012<sup>5</sup>. In 2012 Euro League Basketball decided to update the ranking every year and take into consideration the results from the previous seasons. The ranking is formed in the following way: 70% according to indexes for the competition in basketball matches and 30% based on rating and incomes from TV rights, data about the spectators during a competition, capacity of the hall, etc. Thus, Bulgarian basketball will suffer from both sports-technical criteria and organization-economic criteria.

In order to improve the ranking of basketball and create a better competitiveness among the basketball clubs, National Basketball League was established in 2014. The incomes in the budget of NBL come from several sources according to the official documents of the League: incomes from the general sponsor of NBL; incomes from TV rights; additional incomes from advertising; sponsorship and donations; incomes from imposed punishments and property sanctions in NBL; incomes from "Star Matches"; property installments according to the disciplinary code of rules. The TV coverage of the matches of the National Basketball League and the coverage of the participations of the male and female teams in European and World qualifications should be a priority of the Bulgarian Basketball Federation.

A good premise for that is the number of long coverages which varies between 20 and 44% of all sports broadcasts, but there was a reduction of their duration with approximately 34% in the period 2002-2006 to an average of 18% for the period 2007-2011. The most sports (42 kinds) were covered in 2008 – the year of the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing. Of an average of 28 kinds of sport covered in the period 2002-2011, 58% of all TV broadcasts were dedicated to football with 63% of their duration. The peak was reached in 2009 when weekly there were 50 football matches (a total of 30 at the weekends) on 8 TV channels. The fact that 38% of the Olympic sports are not broadcasted is alarming (with the exception of the coverages from the Olympic Games). 32% of the sports enjoy a sporadic coverage.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Chausheva, Upravlenie na razvitiето na sporta v Bulgaria, Nais-AN (Sofia, 2013), 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> [www.fiba.com](http://www.fiba.com) - [http://www.fiba.basketball/rankingmen#|tab=fiba\\_europe](http://www.fiba.basketball/rankingmen#|tab=fiba_europe)

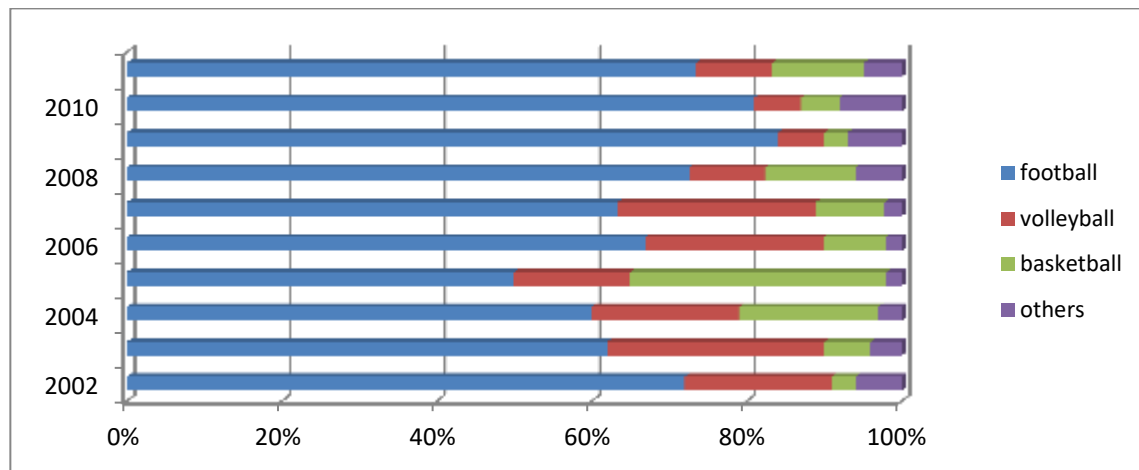


Fig.1

Distribution of the duration of the Bulgarian TV programs along a kind of sport

Only 7% of the sports programs (8% of the duration) are dedicated to the Bulgarian sport (except for the coverage of the participation in international championships and tournaments)<sup>6</sup>. The TV channels broadcast approximately 9 kinds of Bulgarian sports and the greatest number of programs with the longest duration are dedicated to football, volleyball and basketball (figure 1). In the meantime, in the sports reserve, namely in the participation of the national teams in European Championships for junior boys and girls aged 16-18-20 there is lower ranking. Our country took 17<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> place in the period 2009-2016. These rank lists show that Bulgarian basketball does not possess a very high potential for realization in international events in the field of high-performance sport. This is, to a great extent, a reflection of the poor organization and selection of children who want to play basketball in the sports clubs. According to different studies of the recreation budget<sup>7</sup>, the time spent doing sports decreases with age to such an extent that 70% of the young people aged between 20 and 35 years did not practice any sport last year. It turns out that the increased possibilities for access to sports facilities have not particularly influenced the participation in sports activities and that doing sports is more of a matter of culture than of lack of finance, facilities, equipment or sports services. The penetration of some kinds of sports demographically shows that an average of 75% of those who practice basketball are pupils and 14% are university students (aged between 19 and 24 years), i.e. 89% take part in the organized forms of curriculum and extra-curriculum activities. For comparison – those who practice volleyball (the same two age groups) are 80%, football – 73%, and other sports – 65%. Among the older population basketball has a significantly smaller share than the other kinds of sports. Comparing the slight development prospect along the vertical (high-performance sport) and the limited scope of basketball in a social and demographic aspect (recreation sport), we should pose the question about the long-term development of basketball.

The prerequisites for the development of sport arise from the analysis of the outer and inner environment of the system. The major factors determining sports organizations' activities are: the strategy and structure of the organization, the social-demographic

<sup>6</sup> S. Kapralov, Teoretichen model za strategicheskoto planirane razvitiето na sporta v Republika Bulgaria. 2017. 64-66.

<sup>7</sup> I. Sandanski, "Strategicheska izbiratelnost na darjavata v sportnite politiki", Sport I nauka, br.4, (2010): 118-136.

structure of the population, the specifics of the services offered, the condition of the resources provision, the influence of the outer and inner environment<sup>8</sup>. If an organization is to be able to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the environment, it should be able to accomplish its goals in the outer environment. The profile of its resources shows the state the sports organization is in and serves as a base of analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. While the strengths determine the specific areas where the sports organization is competitive, its weaknesses show the limitations it faces when dealing with the outer environment. The comparison between an organization's interactions with the outer environment and the organizational abilities defines its strategic position<sup>9</sup>. The profound analysis enables determining the critical elements as regards both other organizations and the profile of the ideal position. On this basis, the long-term objectives can be set and the strategies for achieving the desired position are outlined. The strategies for a simultaneous and balanced improvement of the market potential and the organization capacity are the strategies for the development of sport as a whole<sup>10</sup>. The factors for the development of sport can be viewed in several large groups: 1) natural environment and nature of sport; 2) popularity, reputation and social-economic influence; 3) attractiveness of sport for the target groups; 4) functioning, resources provision and results from the activity. The expert study outlined as the most important factors for the development of sport: the scope of sport in Bulgaria, the social significance and the necessary investment in sports facilities.

The analysis of the researched criteria shows that the scope of sport in Bulgaria is determined to the greatest extent by its attractiveness for those who practice sports. The two indexes depend on the natural conditions, age limitations, social support on behalf of media and their viewers, richness of sports calendar, human resources in the system, and the popularity of the sport worldwide. The social reputation is formed mostly by the media coverage, the attractiveness of the sport for the audience and sponsors and the economic influence related to them. The comparative analysis of the evaluations along these criteria outlines favorable prospects for the development of basketball compared to the other kinds of sport. Natural conditions are beneficial for the development of basketball because this sport can be practiced both indoors all the year round and outdoors in almost all seasons. Basketball has a good social reputation in the country and enjoys a great popularity all over the world. Age restrictions for practicing a certain kind of sport are a major factor for the development of sport. According to 40% of the experts there are no age restrictions for practicing basketball in the spare time but for 55% of the researched individuals playing basketball is possible until the age of 40. As for high-performance sport, 85% set 40 years as an age limit. This explains why basketball is considered mostly a sport for all (67% of the experts). The social-economic contribution of basketball is estimated to be above the average level, and the social significance is considerably more highly evaluated than its economic influence. As regards social significance, the experts evaluate better the individual and social influence (manifestation of human possibilities, group affiliation, status) than cultural influence (ideas, role models, etc.). As regards the economic influence, 40% of the experts think that basketball has the potential to turn into an industry. The assessment of the attractiveness of sport for the target groups is relatively good but significantly lower than that of the most popular sport in Bulgaria – football. Since the

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<sup>8</sup> P. Bankov, "Dobrovolchestvoto v upravlenieto na sporta v svobodnoto vreme – sashtnost, politika, tendencii na razvitie", Sport i nauka, num 6 (2004): 120-128.

<sup>9</sup> T. A. McLaughlin, Nonprofit strategic positioning (Canadá: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 2006), 11.

<sup>10</sup> P. Bankov and R. Chausheva, "Strategicheskoto pozicionirane kato diagnostichen model za sastoiqniето I razvitiето na sistemata na sporta", Sport i nauka NUM 5 (2012): 130-139.

reliability in sponsorship is directly related to the group of spectators and supporters (with qualitative and quantitative characteristics), basketball organizations should invest their efforts in increasing the attractiveness of this sport for the target groups. The oversights in this respect are most prominent as regards the creation and development of fan groups and the use of media. Although basketball, like football and unlike the other researched sports, is practiced by a large proportion of the population, if we are to increase its attractiveness for those engaged in sports, we should direct its development towards the more mature age groups and different social groups. Thus, we will rise its attractiveness for the sponsors investing in sports events (besides the high-performance sport events). The functioning of the sport is determined by the indexes for the scope of the system and the indexes for prime cost and investments. The experts define the scope of the system as the most significant factor for its development: the territorial and organizational coverage of the country, including excellent facilities, qualified human resources, technical provision, rich sports calendar, etc. High-performance sport facilities are relatively more highly evaluated than those in the sports for all. According to the experts the general evaluation of the human resources is good. The presence of card-indexed competitors is more highly evaluated than the presence of sports talents. The ratio of the grades given about the quality and number of those engaged in basketball is negative only as regards referees. Basketball funding is evaluated significantly lower than that of football. Poorly used sources are the target groups of those engaged in sports and spectators and they are the generic (direct and indirect as regards sponsors and media) factors for the improvement of financial provision. The prime cost of sports-competitive activities in the field of high-performance sport shows that in order to be more remunerative, the Bulgarian Basketball Federation should work toward increasing the attractiveness of sport for the target groups and towards building strategic relations with them. The experts assess the competition in the country as an important factor for the development of sport. There is a more favourable assessment of the quantitative parameter number of participants than of the quality of the national tournaments and this affects the results at international competitions. The experts give a better assessment to the achievements in the children-adolescent teams than to those in the senior groups. This makes us hope that by developing sports talents, the Bulgarian basketball would achieve wins on an international level over time.

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis shows that the position of basketball among the other sports practised in Bulgaria, is characterized with a high market potential and a good organizational capacity. The main guidelines for development are related more with broadening the scope in a social-demographic respect than with narrow specialization in the field of high-performance sport. The key prerequisites for the improvement of the state of basketball include: increasing its attractiveness for the target groups and organizing activities aimed at widening the economic influence of the sport. Thus, the funding will be improved through attracting money from the target groups of those engaged in sport, spectators, media, sponsors, and advertisers. We believe the newly established by FIBA format Basketball 3x3 is an expedient possibility for the development of basketball. It is expected to be included in the Olympic program. We have the following reasons for this claim: the silver medals for the Bulgarian team at the first World Youth Tournament in September 2011 in Rimini, Italy and at the World Championship in Jakarta in 2014 for both of our teams – boys and girls aged below 18 years. This format is considered to be a propeller for the development of basketball because it is based on streetball, can be compared to beach volleyball, and has favourable prospects in the future. These are the accessibility by the different social-demographic groups, the low prime cost, the

attractiveness of the game for the target groups of those engaged in sport, spectators, media, sponsors, etc. Since Basketball 3x3 is able to and will promote key educative and social values, especially among young generation, we expect it will gain support for its development.

In conclusion, in our opinion, this possibility has to be used and developed by the Bulgarian basketball organizations through a pro-active attraction of players of all ages, regular organization of demonstrative matches, accessible tournaments and other promotive events. Since media play an important role in the formation of the cultural environment and lifestyles, we should create strategic partnerships aimed at popularization of basketball. The efforts of the government body of Basketball Federation and basketball clubs should be directed towards a better marketing behavior to extend the range and penetration of Basketball 3x3 among the target groups and a wider broadcasting of both national and international basketball events, as well as broadcasting on a club level.

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