

## Sport development initiatives at micro-regional level – Theoretical propositions and case study analysis<sup>1</sup>

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Sport development initiatives organized at micro-regional level have gained strength in line with sports becoming increasingly embedded in the Hungarian society. Our paper provides a structural overview of the economic aspects of these initiatives touching upon sporting, social policy, and social sciences aspects. Empirical case studies illustrate selected elements of best practices in various areas. Our results provide a benchmark for other micro-regional sport development programmes which weren't covered in our research, as well as a basis for consequent scholarly efforts.

**Keywords:** micro-region, regional development, youth development, sport, strategy.

**JEL codes:** L83, L38, L50.

### Introduction

In 1951 in a small town in Baden-Württemberg there was a 25 years-old hair dresser, Emil Beck watching the skilful ability of the fencing gentlemen in the film “The Three Musketeers” overwhelmed by the beauty of swordsmanship. Impressed by the film based on Alexandre Dumas’ novel he set his mind on becoming a professional fencer, establishing a fencing club in his town of 10 000 inhabitants, Tauberbischofsheim. Three years later they arranged trainings for

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fencing in a cellar as the official section of the local sports club. The club achieved their first German championship title soon, followed by the 370 Olympic, world championship and European championship trophies. (Coyle 2009)

This story sounds like a fairy tale; however, it exemplifies how strong a driver sport may become for achieving social-economic development. The impacts may reach beyond the interests of an individual, a club or a town – it calls for the scholarly research of sport development programme's potential impact on the competitiveness of a region.

Such success stories also abound in Hungary. Our scholarly ambition was to uncover some of them, as well as to analyse the social-economic impacts of sport development programmes. The results from the first two case studies, along with the key points of the analytical generalisation are summarised in our current paper. These can form the basis of a further analysis on the topic to support the development of a theoretical model.

### **Literature review**

Sport development initiatives may have an impact, in our understanding, on the competitiveness of the micro-region or the wider region with implications much beyond the direct sports related improvements. The major findings from our related literature review are shown below with no intention to provide an exhaustive overview of the topic.

#### ***The interpretation of micro-regional development***

The plethora of related concepts like region, local region or micro-region may cause confusion at times (Pap 2004). According to Süli-Zakar (2005, 1994) a region is a functional connectedness of a social-economic geographical entity with strong internal cohesion reflecting a certain level of integration. Meanwhile, a micro-region is rather an umbrella concept of territorial nature stemming from legal terms and categories, but its practical interpretations may occasionally differ substantially (Pap 2004; Csatári 1995). Szörényiné (1997) underlines the bottom-up organisational characteristics of micro-regions that

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reflect the strong role of a shared identity and the feeling of belongingness.

Cséfalvay (2004) interprets regions and micro-regions not as legal constructs, but as entities developed through a social process affected by the intentions, actions and interactions of stakeholders.

Dusek (2006) underlines how strongly social and economic inequalities across regions have risen over the last twenty years in Hungary. This context partly explains a key general priority of regional development driving attention to the idiosyncratic characteristics of each region in their quest for improvement opportunities (Legendijk–Cornford 2000; Storper 1997; Malmberg–Maskell 1996). It is a fundamental responsibility of settlement marketing to appropriately present that content in the communication towards internal and external stakeholders (Rechnitzer 1995a).

In Rechnitzer's interpretation (1995b. 94) "a strategic approach [in regional development] supports the active management of regional processes with respect to internal resources, and the changes in the external environment. Our vision needs to be adjusted to these factors and implemented along a range of objectives, priorities and programmes." Regional development through sport development, in our view, may gain importance alike if its positive effects are to be fully exploited.

### ***Competitiveness***

Competitiveness is one of the most often used concepts in economics (Chikán 2006; Lengyel 2000a), also interpreted by business studies. There is a range of common interpretations of competitiveness, presented by Chikán–Czakó (2009). The ability to change (proactive adaptation) and the sustainability of continual operations are preconditions of competitiveness (Chikán 2006). Four levels of economic competitiveness are discussed by international literature: national, industrial, corporate and product level competitiveness (Boschma 2004; Ajitabh–Momaya 2004; Kitson et al. 2004; Buckley et al. 1988; Moon–Peery 1995; Chikán 2006; Czakó–Gáspár 2007; Némethné 2010).

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Regional competitiveness may be interpreted in several ways, for example at macro-region level, e.g. USA, EU, China, Japan or South-East Asia (Chikán 2006) and at the level of smaller geographical regions, e.g. Northern Italy, East Anglia (Porter 1998; Chikán 2006).

Lengyel (2000b) refers to three main priorities in regional development: social and economic cohesion, the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and a more balanced competitiveness within Europe. These may be interpreted as objectives also for the implementation of regional development through sport development.

### ***The regional impacts of sport development***

The availability of sports opportunities in the capital and the country-side has shown different development patterns in Hungary since the change of the political-economic system (Laki–Nyerges 2001). While international trends (András 2006, 2011; András et al. 2012; András–Jandó 2012) are reflected well in the capital, supplies in the country-side are often limited to opportunities provided by schools and the local sports clubs (Laki–Nyerges 2006).

Csapó (2011), in his analysis of the sports opportunities in a small settlement, found that a wider availability of sports services may not only satisfy the need for physical activity, but it may serve as a framework for spending leisure time together. Sport provides a forum for fostering social relations and strengthens the feeling of belongingness.

In his work reflecting international phenomena Coyle (2009) identifies “talent hotbeds” at certain locations around the world. These are centres where a larger number of successful athletes from a particular sport are concentrated. Coyle visited a dozen locations to collect data and impressions about “talent factories” ranging from the Dominican fishing village San Pedro de Macoris famous for baseball players to the Spartak Moscow tennis club. By explaining the training and socio-cultural conditions of talent hotbeds he drives attention to the positive impacts of such initiatives at the level of micro-regions and beyond.

In her research paper illustrating the wider social policy context of the issue Szabó (2012) underlines how leisure sport activities may

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restrain aggressive social behaviour by utilising excess energy reserves of youth. Furthermore, physically intensive pastime activities support the development of one's own body concept and may operate as a driver for the general improvement of younger generations (Boros–Kalmárné 2010; Neulinger 2008).

### **Methodology**

The key research objective of our research was to understand and analyse the social-economic impact of sport development programmes in selected Hungarian cities. In our exploratory effort, we aim to stimulate discussions on the topic, as well as form the basis of further analysis to support the development of a theoretical model.

For the purpose of our research we interpret micro-regions in a focused way: the integration of settlements arranged by a sport club related to specific sport development initiatives. Their geographical reach may be limited by potentially competing initiatives. We will show how these integrations bear relevance far beyond the original scope of the sport development programme they are built around.

We used the case study research methodology in our research. According to Yin (2003), the case study research methodology is applicable to examine relatively new, unexplored subject areas. Even a single case can be the basis for valuable empirical statements that could lead to analytical generalisation. Our research primarily aims to support the better understanding of the subject, rather than testing particular hypotheses. Data collection was focused on interviews with key stakeholders, including senior officials of the local municipality, sport governing bodies, sport clubs, facility management, athletes and parents. In addition, the documentation and raw statistical data received from the related organisations were also processed. The primary method we applied was content analysis, using open coding procedures (Babbie 2012).

When selecting the settlements and sport centres in our sample we followed the recommendations of Miles–Huberman (1994). First, the youth development centre of an extraordinarily successful individual

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sport was selected: the Dorog NC Wrestling Club. The wrestling centre of Dorog is organised at a micro-regional level, rather than at town level, hence a suitable subject to our investigation. Then we involved a strikingly different club into the sample: the women handball club of Székesfehérvár. Although it operates in the main town of the region, it organises the development of youth athletes at a micro-region level. In our analysis of Dorog NC Wrestling Club and the Fehérvár KC Handball Club we did not focus on sport successes but on understanding how youth development was organised and its impact on the development of the given micro-region. The analysis of the two cases, based on their similarities and differences, could form the strong basis of analytical generalisation that could support future research projects.

## **Data and results**

### ***Dorog NC Wrestling Club and its position in the micro-region***

The first pilot project of our research subjected the analysis of Dorog NC Wrestling Club (DNC). Wrestling as a traditional individual sport is focused on measuring success by Olympic Games, World Championship and European Championship medals. These measures form the basis of how sport policy makers approach wrestling and also how the wrestling association approaches the performance of clubs (with the additional aspect of their performance in the national championship).

Hungarian wrestling and DNC are in leading position at international level. Hungarian wrestlers won a silver medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and one silver and two bronze medals at the 2012 London Olympics. The president of the wrestling section at DNC, Zoltán Lévai, once noted: “the club of a small town has developed into a multinational club, both in terms of results and the size of membership” (Lévai 2014). In the ranking of the Hungarian Wrestling Federation the club occupies either the first or the second position regularly. In 2011 and 2013, DNC achieved the highest score in the competition between clubs; they won a total of 111 medals (41 gold, 27 silver and 43 bronze medals) at the national individual championships and at the national

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School Olympics. Furthermore, local talents won four medals at the Youth World Championship and the European Championship in 2013. In the 2013 European Greco-Roman Cadet Championship the wrestlers from DNC won more points than 23 of the total 34 participating nations.

The contribution of DNC to the life of the town Dorog is not limited to the exceptional sport performance at national and international level. Based on our analysis, the regionally structured and internationally well-known wrestling club also plays a role in the health and moral education of youth. Furthermore, the historical performance of the club confirms that the personality of the trainers supports the character development of children. Generations of children who arrived to the club from disadvantaged communities became globally known athletes who deserve the appreciation of people in the region and further afield. Even those who did not eventually make it to the international scene received strong educational support in terms of school results, career perspectives and social relations. Sport creates value this way to the local community. Today DNC has over 300 members. According to Zoltán Lévai “wrestling has been the most popular sport in the town and the nearby settlements” (Lévai 2014).

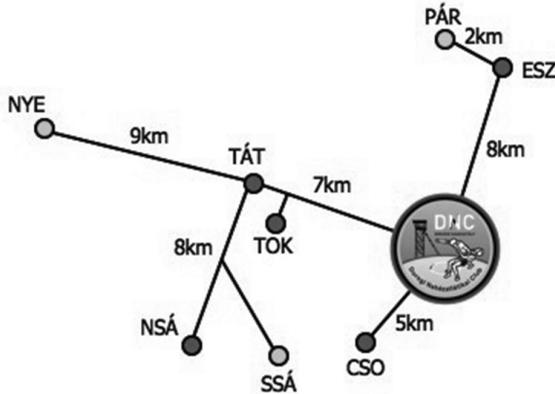
DNC is not only active in Dorog, but also in the nearby settlements. Three schools in Dorog, two in Esztergom, as well as schools in Csolnok, Nagysáp, Tát, and Tokod have teams managed by DNC, and it plans to expand its operations to Párkány (Slovakia), Nyergesújfalu and Sárissáp (see Figure 1).

In spite of this high level of activity, there is no elementary or secondary school in Dorog with a sport focused education programme. Establishing such a school would be the natural next step in the implementation of a local sport and education strategy, all the more, as local (in the town at the micro-region) elementary and secondary schools form the recruitment basis of DNC. Fostering closer cooperation between schools and DNC would support the appropriate talent development of wrestling.

While the general and equipment quality of sport facilities in the town and nearby settlements vary greatly, they can provide the

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necessary basis for continuous trainings for athletes in the micro-region. However, the wrestling hall in Dorog, and a few other training facilities are of a much lower quality than what would fit the requirements and reputation of a wrestling club of the status of DNC. This substantiates the bottleneck of further development both in terms of winning medals and increasing membership.



Note: CSO: Csolnok; ESZ: Esztergom; NSÁ: Nagysáp;

NYE: Nyergesújfalu; PÁR: Párkány; SSÁ: Sárísáp; TÁT: Tát; TOK: Tokod

*Source: data from DNC edited by the authors*

### Figure 1. Settlements in the youth development programme of DNC

The centre of excellence in Dorog involving the youth development system in the micro-region and the in-house trainer development career plan illustrates the potential of local sport initiatives. This also exemplifies the “workshop” concept defined in the sport development programme of the Hungarian Wrestling Federation, as well as the “talent hotbed” concept used by Coyle (2009).

#### ***Youth development programme at Fehérvár KC Handball Club***

Our second project was based on our research at Fehérvár KC Handball Club (FKC), a top-tier handball club located in Székesfehérvár, a regionally important city with approximately 100 000 inhabitants situated at about 60 kilometres from Budapest.

Handball enjoys unique popularity among team sports in Hungary; there are very few countries worldwide, where this game attracts so much public interest like in Hungary. That is even more conspicuous if we look at the women's side of the sport. Hungarian teams – both the National Team and at club level – belong to the world elite. The Hungarian women's league (NBI) is widely considered as the strongest domestic competition in Europe.

Being a contender in a prominent league as the women's NBI not only means fierce competition on the field, but also off-the-field, i.e. in business terms. Clubs are eager to edge out each other while securing key resources in order to remain competitive both on shorter and longer terms (Kynsburg 2011). The geographical characteristics of the country adds further pressure on the competing teams: due to the short distances between cities possessing internationally recognized women's handball teams, a high concentration of top teams has developed in Hungary. As a result, the markets of rival clubs significantly overlap geographically.

In such a knowledge intensive sector as professional sports, human resources have far-above-average importance (Kozma-Kazai Ónodi 2014; András 2003). Clubs have two main channels to obtain these crucial resources: by signing new players via transfers or by developing skilful athletes themselves via their youth development programmes (often called grass-roots development in professional sports).

In Hungary, the government started the so called "TAO Programme" (Government Decree 107/2011.(VI. 30.) and subsequent revisions), enabling companies to direct up to 70% of their corporate tax payments towards the grass-roots development programmes of five major ball sports including handball. By establishing the legal framework of this form of financing youth sports, the government incentivised handball clubs towards building grass-roots development programmes at a much wider base – lending increasing importance to not only qualitative, but also quantitative aspects of development. Young athletes in great numbers have become a strategic asset for the clubs, not only on longer, but on short term as well.

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The strong demand towards children with interest for handball, and the need of geographically densely located clubs to expand their territories led to a new trend that clubs broadened their grass-roots development bases much beyond the boundaries of their respective cities. The conscious use of this regional strategy can be witnessed, for example, at FKC.

The origins of the predecessor of FKC date back to 1947. Since 1993, the handball team has been a member of the Hungarian top division NBI. Furthermore, FKC is a regular participant at the European club competitions with considerable results: it participated nine times during the last 12 years either in EHF Trophy or in the Cup Winners Cup; the biggest success of the club came in 2005 when FKC won the EHF Trophy, but also reached the semi-finals in 2002 and 2014. The club employs a list of internationally well-known players (e.g. Szabina Mayer, Orsolya Herr), and former greats (e.g. Bea Siti, Rita Deli and Tímea Sugár).

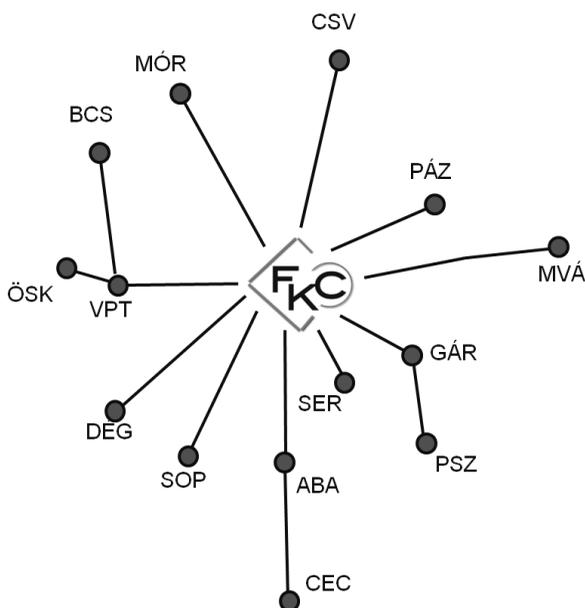
The adult team and the different younger age groups have already benefited from expanded scouting since 2000. FKC recruits among girls in nearby schools and in smaller teams of the neighbourhood who want to continue their studies in Székesfehérvár. Many of these talents – originally coming from small settlements like Csákvár, Pázmánd, Gánt and Aba – were eventually promoted to the first team of FKC and to the Hungarian youth or junior National Teams.

Early relationships with the mini-bases in the region were not in all cases formalised by written agreements before 2010. In that year, FKC established a structured system of affiliated teams by integrating them into the organisation of Kofem SC. This was called the “Regional System” within the club. The newly created farm-system consisted not only of teams from local schools and nearby cities and villages already fostering some handball activities, but the club started to build new groups in places where girls had no access to handball training.

As a unique solution, the so-called “FKC Regional League” has become the main platform and integrating force of the farm-system since its first season in 2010. That little league series runs from

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November to May every season and it is played in two or three under-14 age groups. The competition format varies by age groups. The oldest ones (U14) play a “real league” in round-robin format with two games per teams on every game day, while younger ones compete in a certain number of one-day tournaments. There is no entry fee for the participating teams. Not only FKCs own farm-teams are permitted to enter the league, teams from the neighbourhood are also invited. Many of those getting in touch with the club by entering this competition became later an affiliated farm-team.



Note: ABA: Aba; BCS: Bakonycsérnye; CEC: Cece; CSV: Csákvár;  
DÉG: Dég; MÓR: Mór; MVÁ: Martonvásár; GÁR: Gárdony;  
ÖSK: Öskü; PÁZ: Pázmánd; PSZ: Pusztaszabolcs; SER: Seregélyes;  
SOP: Soponya; VPT: Várpalota.

*Source: data from FKCs edited by the authors*

**Figure 2. Settlements participating in the regional youth championship organised by FKCs in the last four seasons**

The pool of affiliated grass-roots teams is not fixed. There are changes from time to time, due to the involvement of new groups and some teams also drop out temporarily or permanently. As of the 2014/2015 season, teams from Bakonycsérnye, Csákvár, Soponya, and Várpalota were active members of the system; Öskü participated in the FKC Regional League for the first time and was scheduled to join the system in August 2015; while Aba, Pázmánd and Seregélyes ran farm teams (teams that form part of the grassroots development structure of a club) at the time, they did not have full squads to be able to participate in the interim championship of that season.

In total, 15 cities and villages from the neighbourhood of Székesfehérvár participated in the FKC Regional League during the four years of its operation (see Figure 2). As a result, about 20% of the players of FKC's junior, youth and cadet teams came from the regional system in the 2014/2015 season.

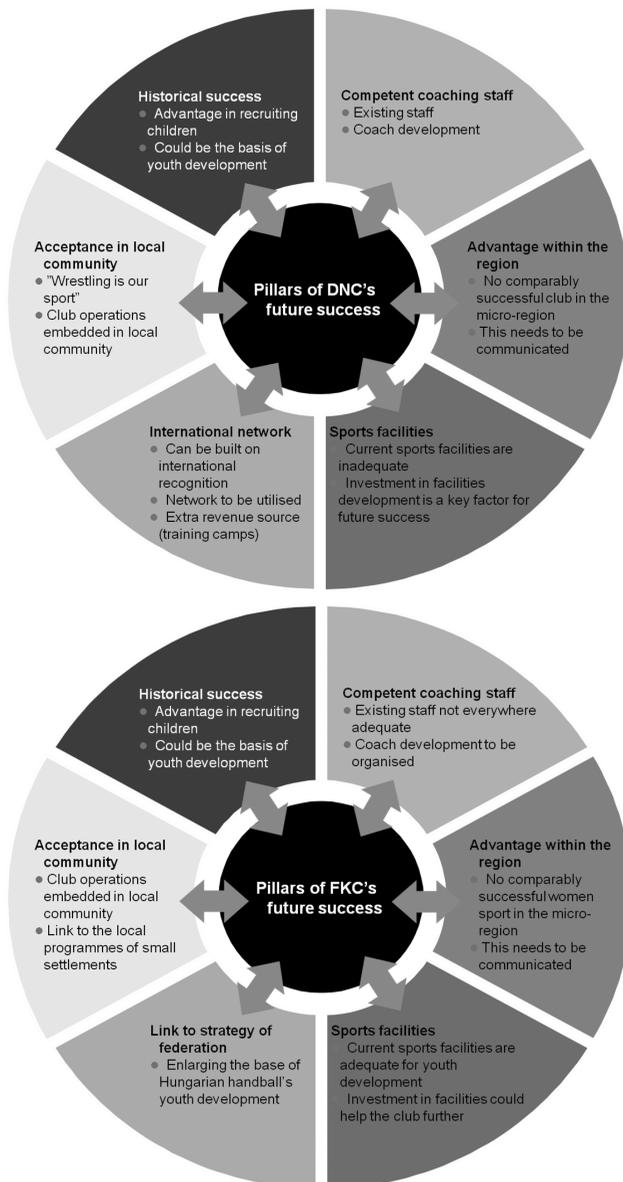
### ***The pillars of long term success at DNC and FKC***

By comparing similarities and differences observed in the two pilot case studies we aimed for further analytical findings related to the factors of long term success for the clubs. We examined the aspects of potential future success along six dimensions. In the conceptual model developed by us, we identified the following pillars of sustainable competitiveness and success: the influence of past successes on recruiting children; the competence base represented by the knowledge of coaches; the position in the competition of different sports within the micro-region; the state of facilities; international recognition and network; and acceptance in local community (see the different components of these pillars in Figure 3).

#### *Historical success*

The speciality and distinctiveness of the grass-roots development systems of DNC and FKC lie in being embedded in a regional community reaching over the boundaries of their home towns, Dorog and Székesfehérvár respectively. On one hand, it brings the opportunity of cultivating sports to children living in smaller settlements; on the other hand, it provides their clubs a much wider base to develop potential

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Source: own design based on pilot the case-studies

**Figure 3. Main pillars of future success for DNC and FKCs**

future champions. When comparing the two clubs, regional thinking is one of the main similarities. However, there are significant differences to be observed due to the incompatible characters of the two sports (wrestling and handball) and the environment surrounding the two clubs.

*Advantage within the region*

Successes of the past may be a competitive advantage when attracting the attention of children by expressing credibility towards parents. Every sport relies on grass-roots development by providing potential future champions and by creating a wide base of recreational athletes. Recruiting children may be successful if the club communicates well-defined messages, possesses past successes as sources of credibility and employs coaches with strong and charismatic personality. This pillar is considered as strength in both cases.

The sporting landscapes of Dorog and Székesfehérvár put the two clubs in a completely different competitive position. Dorog with its 12 000 inhabitants is a small town compared to Székesfehérvár with a population of 100 000. On the other hand, DNC enjoys little competition from other local sports, while FKC operates in a very competitive environment by sharing the local market with top Hungarian teams in football (Videoton FC), basketball (Alba Fehérvár) and ice-hockey (AV19), not to mention successful clubs in individual sports like athletics or modern pentathlon: all competing for the same local resources and recognition.

In relation to the different local positions, DNC and FKC communicate different messages to their community in order to meet the expectations of athletes, coaches and the community. In Dorog and its wider region, there are no sports organisations matching the success of DNC: the Hungarian Wrestling Federation awarded Dorog the title “The Town of Wrestling”. DNC’s main goal is to maintain and to increase that competitive advantage. Based on the situation described above, FKC faces more local competition: although Székesfehérvár possesses larger economic potential, more sports and more clubs share this potential market. We identified FKC’s regional advantage as being the region’s only successful team in women’s sports, and also being the only club with European cup trophy (EHF Trophy in 2005).

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*Acceptance in the local community*

In Dorog, the wrestler Ferenc Bacsa played a key role in raising the so-called “Golden Generation” of the 1980s and 1990s. The members of these generations won the national adult and youth titles consecutively and many of them finished on podium positions at the European, World and Olympic competitions. The European cadet champion László Micskei, the World Championship silver medallist János Kismoni, the Olympic 10<sup>th</sup> placed Péter Bacsa, the European and World Championship bronze medallist Otto Aubeli are just a few names of internationally successful wrestlers of DNC.

FKC also boasts stars of the recent past and current internationals both in the club and in the local community. Still, their situation is different to the one of DNC and Dorog. First, women’s handball is one of the most popular and successful team sports in Hungary; their best players are well-known sports personalities. On the other hand, the popularity of Fehérvár KC cannot be compared to Győri Audi ETO KC, Europe’s arguably best team in the last decade and to Ferencváros TC, the second best team in the country. There is an additional aspect of difference based on sports characteristics: while players in team sports switch clubs frequently, in individual sports – like wrestling in the case of Dorog – athletes have a more loyal attitude and stronger links to their clubs. Therefore, it is of great importance to FKC to keep the stars of the recent past within the club and employ them as coaches after the termination of their active career. This was actually the case with the Olympic silver medallists Bea Siti and Rita Deli, the World Championship medallists Tímea Sugár and Eszter Siti.

We observed that past and current role-models play an important role in attracting children to wrestling and handball at DNC and FKC. This effect is often backed by the positive past memories of the parents. Furthermore, role models contribute significantly to keep talented youngsters within the frames of the club and to strengthen the regional farm-system of grass-roots development.

*Competent coaching staff*

Former greats contribute considerably to the accumulated competences within the coaching staff at FKC. Beáta Siti works as

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assistant coach of the adult team, Rita Deli as head of the youth department and coach of the junior team, Tímea Sugár as the goalkeepers' coach through the whole system and Eszter Siti started coaching a younger age group when she was still playing handball. However, the affiliate teams present a rather mixed picture in terms of the composition of coaching staff. While in Várpalota, a former Hungarian international, Erzsébet Sulyok works with the youngsters, and in some places competent physical education teachers take the coaching role, there are examples – Aba and Seregélyes – where the lack of teachers with handball background led to a setback in the operation of the farm-teams.

In Dorog, the names of Ferenc Bacsa and Zoltán Lévai mark the coaching competence of the club. After developing the Golden Generation, Ferenc Bacsa worked with the Hungarian National Team and returned to DHC at the end of 2000. At that time, he convinced his former pupil, Zoltán Lévai to start working as a coach at the club. The club's regional model is a fruit of their successful co-operation. Within the frame of this model, they have established a coach development program in order to satisfy the need of the system for competent young coaches.

An outstanding coaching staff, both in terms of personality and coaching qualities, is indispensable for sustainable success. At that pillar of success, there are differences observed at the two clubs. With handball being a professional team sport exposed to substantial public interest in Hungary, due to its popularity and media presence, the club operates under constant pressure to perform well in the league, both on short term and long term. Achieving expected results by the adult team week-by-week is a primary goal for the organisation. As a consequence, there are frequent changes in the head coach position. The lasting continuity of the coaching staff observed at DNC is rare in handball. In general, constant coach development, building a competent coaching staff for long term may be one of the main priorities of clubs in order to maintain a high professional level of operations.

#### *Sports facilities*

The quality of infrastructure is an increasingly important factor in terms of attracting children and providing them an environment where

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their talent may develop. That requires facilities in a certain number, size and quality, appropriate equipment and ancillary installations. Suitable facilities are indispensable for future success and at the same time they add considerable value to the life of local communities.

The state of infrastructure shows a rather mixed picture at both clubs. While DNC's wrestlers train in recently built, high quality facilities in Csolnok, Nagysáp and Tokod, the conditions of the halls used in Dorog and Esztergom lag far behind the requirements of the professional work managed at the club. Dissolving this bottleneck of development through infrastructural investments is a congruent intention of both town and club management.

Kőfém Sports Hall is owned by the Székesfehérvár municipality, but it is operated by FKC. The sports hall is the venue of handball trainings throughout the day. Besides that, the club rents training halls in different schools to let all their grass-roots teams sufficient practice time on handball field. However, the rented halls do not match the size of a handball court (40x20 metres) meaning a difficult compromise in terms of suitability. There is an urgent need for constructing their self-owned training hall next to the current sports hall to solve the situation. The facility landscape of the teams in the farm-system shows a mixed picture: the school in Seregélyes possesses a 40x20 metres sports hall fulfilling all needs for high quality training; teams in Csákvár, Bakonycsérnye, Soponya and Várpalota train in smaller good halls; and some school teams use but basketball court sized (much smaller) halls.

#### *International network*

International relations, well-functioning networks are beneficial assets for a club: international cooperation inspires athletes (both adults and young ones), enables an exchange of knowledge and experience, and has a positive effect on settlement marketing and tourism. Due to the international recognition of Hungarian wrestling and the central geographical location of Hungary, DNC is able to generate additional revenue by organising international tournaments and hosting training camps. There is further room for improvement in this segment as the planned infrastructural projects will be completed.

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These projects will give the club a further boost by exploiting the advantages of its international network.

International relations are one of FKCs main strengths. Besides regular participation in European cup competitions, the club hosts its own sporting events each year. These involve summer tournaments for club teams and training camps for both clubs and National Teams contributing to Székesfehérvár's tourism with approximately 500-700 hotel nights per year. In the last ten years, Norwegian and Danish club teams, National Teams from Argentina, Chile, Angola and Japan were recurring guests of FKCs. The international network of the club was further enriched by employing a Norwegian head coach for two seasons. As it is common in professional team sports, the playing squad includes a number of foreign players. Two Japanese and one Serbian professionals play for FKCs this season. The encounter of different handball cultures has constructive and fruitful effects on both the coaching staff and on the development of players.

### **Conclusions**

As a result of our analysis of the two case studies, we developed a preliminary conceptual model for sports development at micro-regional level (Figure 4). Our intention was to let this model serve as a framework to be used in analysing the regional effects of other sports and clubs. In this closing section we summarise the analytical findings of our research done so far.

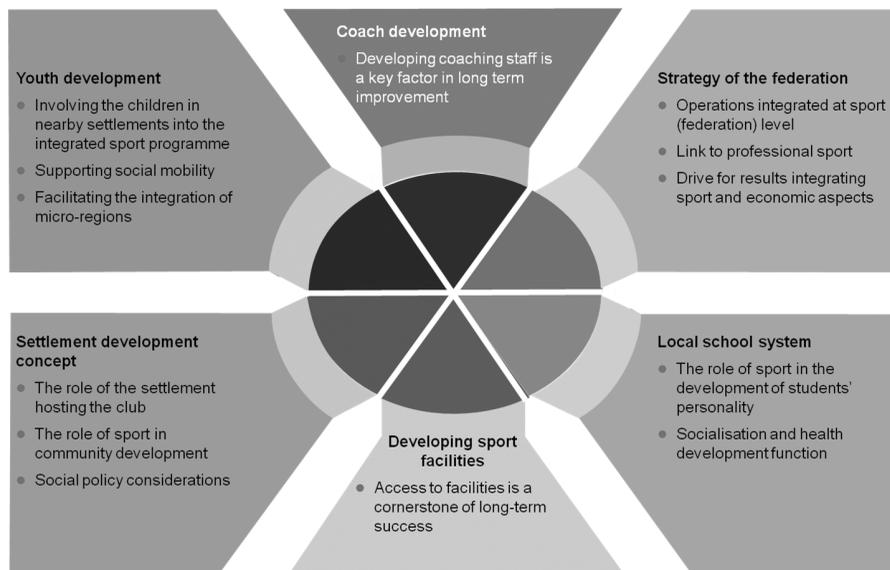
Our suggested model, reflecting the concept enabling the development of DNC and FKCs, is based on six main pillars (see Figure 4).

First, the regionally embedded structure of the grass-roots development programme at DNC and FKCs is in accordance with the sports development concepts of their respective federations (Hungarian Wrestling Federation and Hungarian Handball Federation).

Furthermore, the development of the coaching staff is a strategic priority; it is currently the strength of DNC, and a task to be accomplished at FKCs in the near future.

Infrastructure development is another key aspect; here we have observed a different pattern: the club in Székesfehérvár is in better

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*Source: own design based on pilot the case-studies*

**Figure 4. A conceptual framework for regional sports development**

position, than the one in Dorog. In both cases the strategic direction to follow is the same, but the respective scales are different.

In both cases, a key feature of the grass-roots development structure lies in being embedded in a regional community reaching over the boundaries of their settlements. This structure allows sporting opportunities to children living in small villages and at the same time it provides the clubs a wider base in developing potential top athletes. Local communities may support the clubs both morally and practically by giving them organisational help and by showing interest towards their events. If this happens, it will strengthen the perspectives of the clubs both financially and strategically in a locally embedded way. The grass-roots development models established by these two clubs could have a significant role in the general development of the relevant micro-regions. Sports may create closer interaction between the populations of settlements in the region. Even children living in villages may have access to activities that help them towards a healthy lifestyle, provide

them the opportunity to participate in sporting activities guided by competent coaches, and they face better perspectives in their further studies.

Finally, the development concepts of the local municipalities of the involved cities and villages may provide critical support for the initiatives' sustainable success. Local policies may emphasise the positive effects that reach beyond sports. These sport based systems foster relationships spanning over micro-regions, involving different cities and villages. Municipalities may communicate with and link important stakeholders, and may apply for vital funding sources.

Based on our initial model development efforts, under the given conditions, sport development concepts will not only improve local sports, but will provide strategic benefits to the educational system and the wider social-economic processes of the settlements and micro-regions involved. Additional case studies are expected to further refine the relationships defined by our preliminary conceptual model.

We aimed to build a starting point for future scholarly efforts driving attention to the subject. Our results may become a source of inspiration, orientation for actual sport development programmes in Hungary, thereby contributing to more effective and efficient operations.

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