



**SPORT
TOGETHER**



**HANDBOOK ON CROSS-COMMUNITY
YOUTH SPORT EVENTS**

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Project Partners



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1. Introduction

In today's diverse and interconnected world, promoting social inclusion and fostering meaningful engagement with young people is essential for building cohesive communities. **Cross-community sport interventions have emerged as powerful tools** for achieving these objectives. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds through shared (sporting) experiences, these interventions create opportunities for social inclusion, personal development, and positive community engagement.

Cross-community sport interventions provide inclusive spaces, where young people from various social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds can come together, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Sports activities break down barriers, facilitating social interactions that transcend differences and promote unity. Such interventions often involve **collaboration between community organisations, schools, and local sports clubs** to ensure representation and participation from diverse groups.

Through cross-community sport interventions, young people engage in shared activities and team-based experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and **social cohesion**. Collaborative efforts in sports help to bridge divides and build relationships among participants who may otherwise have had limited interaction. This shared purpose and camaraderie promote trust, empathy, and acceptance, creating a foundation for a more inclusive and cohesive society.

Engaging young people in cross-community sport interventions not only enhances their physical well-being, but also nurtures important life soft-skills. Participation in team sports fosters qualities like leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, enabling young people to develop resilience and self-confidence. These interventions empower participants to challenge stereotypes, overcome barriers, and explore their potential, thereby promoting personal growth and social mobility.

Cross-community sport interventions provide platforms for young people to express their perspectives, ideas, and

aspirations. By involving young individuals in the design, planning, and decision-making processes of such initiatives, their voices are amplified, and they become active agents of change in their communities. This empowerment helps young people develop a sense of ownership and pride, leading to increased **community engagement** and the cultivation of future leaders.

Cross-community sport interventions can serve as catalysts for addressing and challenging social issues that affect young people. By **using sports as a vehicle for dialogue, education, and awareness**, these interventions promote discussion and reflection on topics such as **diversity, inclusion, gender equality, and social justice**. Through these conversations, participants develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and a deeper understanding of societal challenges, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Successful cross-community sport interventions lay the groundwork for **sustained networks and partnerships** within and between communities. By fostering connections between individuals, organisations, and institutions, these initiatives create a support system that extends beyond the boundaries of sport. These networks can facilitate collaboration on various community development projects, further promoting social inclusion, and amplifying the impact of interventions.

Promoting social inclusion, engaging young people, and utilizing cross-community sport interventions are interconnected processes that have the potential to bring about positive social change. By leveraging the power of sport to foster inclusive spaces, enhance social cohesion, promote personal development, empower youth voices, address social issues, and build sustainable networks, these interventions contribute to the creation of more cohesive, resilient, and equitable communities. Through intentional and collaborative efforts, we can harness the transformative power of cross-community sport interventions to nurture a generation of inclusive and socially engaged young individuals.



2. Project background

„**Sport Together**” uses sport to address and tackle cross-border threats to social cohesion, in particular those caused by the ongoing ethno-political divisions in the Western Balkan and Northern Ireland as well as the continued and new challenges following the so-called EU “refugee crisis”. The Sport Together project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The **overall objective** of the project is to strengthen social inclusion in divided communities with a focus on young people and girls and to increase participation of disadvantaged groups – in particular refugees & newly-arrived migrants and minorities – in grass-roots sport through training, education, awareness-raising, capacity-building of sport stakeholders and cross-community youth sport interventions.

The “Sport Together” project started in January 2021 and lasted for 30 months until June 2023. Key events and activities include a kick-off meeting in Belfast, a European Training Session for Multipliers in Belgrade in autumn 2021, followed by National Workshops in all seven partner countries, a Girls Football Festival in July 2022 in Vienna, inclusive grassroots events in the European Week of Sport 2022, an International Conference in Sarajevo and the final cross-border Mini-Van Tour in five countries.

The project is implemented in **seven countries**, namely the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland (UK), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Greece, and Austria. The project area encompasses two European post-conflict areas. First, the Western Balkans Region with the former Yugoslav republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia. Second, the island of Ireland with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Partners in the project are the two UEFA member associations, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) (Northern Ireland / UK), the NGOs Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and Atina (Serbia), the football club NK Zagreb 041 (Croatia), the local public authority Donegal

Sports Partnership (Ireland) as well as the University of Thessaly (Greece).

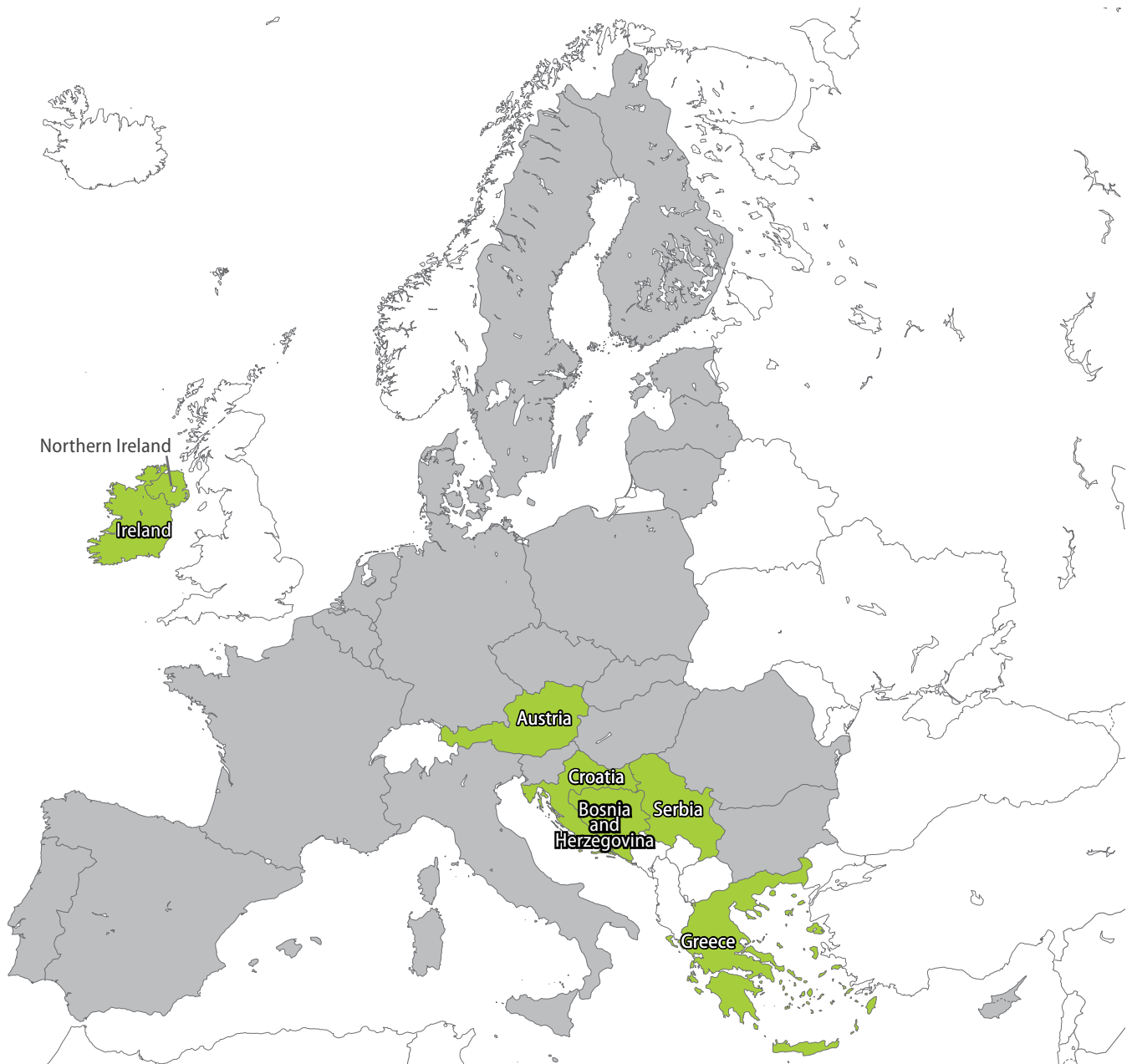
As lead organisation, the fairplay initiative at VIDC has an extended network with sport organisations in the former Yugoslavia, as well as with former Yugoslavian diaspora clubs in Austria. Following the outbreak of war in ex-Yugoslavia (1991-1995) about 90,000 people from Bosnia-Herzegovina were accepted as refugees in Austria and most of them remained. Several of the 150.000 citizens with a Bosnian background are now prominent sportsmen, including Austrian internationals in football, handball and wrestling.

While trying to **adopt new and innovative methods** and approaches, “Sport Together” represents a perfect match between the network which developed around the “Football Zajedno” project in the Western Balkans and the more Western-Europe centred SPIN network.

The project builds strongly on the experience and rich knowledge gained through a series of EU sport projects implemented by the **Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN)** since 2011. The “Sport Together” project is a unique opportunity to create a more sustainable network of actors in the field of social inclusion through sport, in particular, by involving actors and partners from South-Eastern Europe.

Through the UEFA supported “Football Zajedno” project (with the national Football Associations of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), VIDC has gained experience and expertise in the Western Balkans region and is keen to continue the work focusing on involvement of ethnically and socially marginalised groups, including refugees and newly arrived migrants.





3. Cross communities – state of affairs

(Northern) Ireland

Northern Ireland continues to grapple with the legacy of divided communities, although significant progress has been made since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Northern Ireland has historically been marked by deep ethno-religious divisions between the predominantly

Protestant unionist community, which supports continued union with the United Kingdom, and the predominantly Catholic nationalist community, which seeks a united Ireland. These divisions have been fuelled by historical grievances, political differences, and competing national identities.



One manifestation of the **divided communities in Northern Ireland is the existence of separate educational systems and segregated housing**. Protestant and Catholic children often attend separate schools, contributing to limited interaction and perpetuating sectarian divisions. Additionally, residential areas are often segregated, with separate neighbourhoods predominantly populated by either Protestant or Catholic residents.

Although the level of violence has significantly decreased since the **Good Friday Agreement**, paramilitary groups associated with both unionist and nationalist causes still exist. These groups have been responsible for sporadic incidents of violence, including punishment attacks and intimidation, which contribute to the perpetuation of fear and mistrust within divided communities.

Various peacebuilding initiatives have been implemented to bridge divides and promote understanding between communities. These include **cross-community projects**, dialogue forums, and initiatives focused on youth engagement. Efforts have also been made to address contentious issues such as parades and flags, which have historically been flashpoints for sectarian tensions.

The power-sharing government, established under the Good Friday Agreement, plays a crucial role in addressing the concerns of both unionist and nationalist communities. The government comprises representatives from both sides of the community divide, with key positions allocated based on a power-sharing formula. However, the political landscape has experienced periods of instability and breakdowns in government functioning.

Demographic changes have been occurring in Northern Ireland, with an increasing proportion of the population identifying as neither unionist nor nationalist. This trend has the potential to contribute to a **more diverse and inclusive society** but also poses challenges in terms of maintaining political stability and addressing the concerns of all communities.

It is important to note that the situation in Northern Ireland is dynamic and subject to change. Progress towards

reconciliation, community integration, and addressing divisions continues to be a significant priority for both local and national stakeholders. Ongoing efforts are required to build trust, promote dialogue, and create a shared future that transcends historical divisions in Northern Ireland.

Western Balkan Region (WBR)

Similar to Northern Ireland, the **Western Balkans Region** continues to face significant challenges related to divided communities. The **complex political structure, historical grievances, and ethno-national divisions continue** to shape the state of affairs in the country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina serves as an example here. The country is divided along ethnic lines, primarily between the Bosniak, Croat, and Serb communities. These divisions are reinforced by a decentralized political system that grants substantial powers to the entities of Republika Srpska (predominantly Serb) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (predominantly Bosniak and Croat). These divisions are reflected in separate educational systems, media outlets, and political parties, which contribute to limited interaction and perpetuate divisions.

Ethnic divisions have led to high levels of residential segregation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many cities and towns have distinct neighbourhoods predominantly populated by members of a single ethnic group. This physical separation reinforces social divisions and limits opportunities for interaction and understanding among different communities.

The **Bosnian War of the 1990s** and the subsequent ethnic cleansing campaigns have left deep scars on society. The war crimes, including the genocide in Srebrenica, continue to be a source of pain, trauma, and mistrust. The unresolved issues related to war crimes and the slow process of justice contribute to ongoing tensions and hinder the healing process.

The war resulted in the displacement of large numbers of people, particularly Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. While



some progress has been made in facilitating the return of displaced persons to their pre-war homes, significant challenges remain. Many displaced individuals have not been able to return due to obstacles related to property rights, discrimination, and a lack of economic opportunities in their original communities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's political system, based on power-sharing between ethnic groups, often leads to political stalemates and challenges in decision-making. The competing interests of different ethnic groups have hindered effective governance and slowed down the country's progress toward EU integration. The lack of meaningful political reform and a shared vision for the future, exacerbates divisions and prevents comprehensive reconciliation efforts.

The international community, including the European Union, has been actively engaged in supporting peace-building efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. International institutions and NGOs have played a **crucial role in pro-**

moting inter-ethnic dialogue, supporting civil society organisations, and fostering initiatives for transitional justice and reconciliation. However, the **process of reconciliation** remains complex and requires sustained commitment from both domestic and international actors.

It is important to note that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is subject to change and is influenced by various political, social, and economic factors. Addressing the divisions and building a more inclusive and united society requires ongoing efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and understanding among different communities.

In post-conflict areas, such as the Island of Ireland and the Western Balkans Region, the process of healing, reconciliation, and building a peaceful society is complex and challenging. In these contexts, **cross-community work plays a vital role in fostering understanding, trust, and cooperation among different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups**. By promoting dialogue, shared ex-



periences, and collaboration, cross-community initiatives have proven instrumental in overcoming divisions, addressing the legacy of conflict, and promoting sustainable peace. This article explores the importance of cross-community work in post-conflict areas, drawing on the experiences of Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Cross-community work creates opportunities for individuals and communities to come together, facilitating dialogue and reconciliation. By **engaging in joint activities**, such as shared projects, cultural exchanges, and commemorative events, people from different backgrounds can develop empathy, challenge stereotypes, and address past grievances. These initiatives provide a platform for open and honest conversations, fostering understanding and healing wounds inflicted by conflict.

In post-conflict areas, deep-seated divisions and mistrust can hinder **social cohesion and development**. Cross-community work aims to break down these barriers by promoting interaction and building relationships across ethnic, religious, and cultural lines. By encouraging cooperation and fostering inclusive spaces, such initiatives challenge the “us versus them” mentality, enabling individuals to recognize their shared humanity and find common ground.

Post-conflict societies often face **inequality and discrimination, with certain groups marginalised and excluded**. Cross-community work strives to promote inclusivity and equality by providing equal opportunities for participation, representation, and decision-making across all communities. By empowering marginalised groups and amplifying their voices, these initiatives contribute to building more inclusive and just societies.

Cross-community work plays a preventive role in post-conflict areas by addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering long-term peace. Through educational programs, youth engagement, and community-building initiatives, it seeks to address underlying tensions and build resilient societies. By promoting understanding, tolerance, and respect, these efforts aim to break the cycle of violence and prevent future conflicts.



Engaging communities in cross-community work strengthens democratic processes by promoting active citizenship, civic participation, and social engagement. By **encouraging dialogue** and collaborative decision-making, these initiatives contribute to the development of a vibrant civil society, where diverse voices are heard, and democratic values are upheld. This strengthens the foundations of peace and stability in post-conflict areas.

The experiences of cross-community work in post-conflict areas like Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina have valuable lessons to offer globally. International actors can provide support, share best practices, and facilitate knowledge exchange between different contexts. **Learning from successful cross-community initiatives can inform strategies for peacebuilding and conflict resolution** in other post-conflict societies around the world.



4. Practical examples of cross-community work

In the Sport Together project we could get to know and try out examples of cross-community work in both post-conflict regions, the Island of Ireland, and the Western Balkans. The practical methods show, how to use sport as a tool for reconciliation and foster dialogue between youth and sport stakeholders in local communities.



„Building positive clubs“

“Building positive clubs” is a resource developed by the **Donegal Sports Partnership (DSP)** with the support of local community organisations and sports clubs, around developing a positive sports club culture to support integration and inclusion with all areas of diversity. The training programme also looks at coaching philosophies and the promotion of child centred sport.

Donegal Sports Partnership (DSP) has developed this resource in partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and

is designed to develop the potential of sports clubs as settings for positive mental health promotion.

Having reviewed International Models of Good Practice including the English Football Association, Positive Coaching Scotland, The Australian Sports Commission and The Gaelic Athletic Association, DSP began working on their own Charter for Sports Clubs which promotes positive mental health through sport. The Charter encourages clubs to understand the importance of effort rather than the win-at-all-costs attitude promoting inclusion, communication and most importantly enjoyment when partaking in sport at any level.



The 'win-at-all-costs' attitude adopted by many clubs and sports leaders, has become a threat for sport – retaining young athletes and players as a result of negative sporting experiences is a challenge we are all familiar with:

- Athletes who are afraid to make mistakes because of an excessively vocal coach focused on winning at all costs;
- Intrusive parents pressurising children to 'do better' because of a desire to win;
- Athletes disrespecting referees and officials.

A Positive Coaching Culture seeks to address these issues, but we believe that a Positive Club Culture must come first; one without the other simply doesn't work. Club culture can be explained as a way on which a club characterises what is important. It is often an expression of its philosophy. Research suggests that sport can be effective in promoting positive life outcomes.

Sports participation must occur in settings where individuals are:

1. physically safe,
2. personally valued,
3. morally and
4. economically supported and
5. personally empowered.

POSITIVE MENTAL WELL-BEING THROUGH SPORT

RESPECT

Everyone in the club will treat others with respect, courtesy, and consideration, avoiding negative attitudes or behaviours. All members of the club, committee, coaches, volunteers, parents, and athletes/players will treat others as they (themselves) would like to be treated recognising and appreciating diversity in gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, ability, and skills.

Positive sporting behaviours will be encouraged at all times with decisions accepted with grace and not grudge.

ENCOURAGE

The club will ensure that everyone is treated equally, fairly and encouraged to do their best. Members of the club will support and promote positive reinforcement, ensuring learning and development of athletes/players. New members will be welcomed and afforded the opportunity of having a full and active role within the club. Players/athletes will be encouraged to make positive lifestyle choices.

SUPPORT

The club will ensure that all members are aware of and encouraged to use the support system that surrounds them. Coaches, club mates, family and friends can help, and for more serious issues we will seek help from external organisations who are available to offer supports for the club.

PARTICIPATE

Everyone is welcomed to participate within our club, and we understand that each member and player has an important role to play. Every player/athlete will be inspired to do their best, it's not all about the winning but also the taking part.

ENJOY

Everyone has the right to enjoy sport as a spectator or a player in a fun, safe environment. Enjoyment is one of the main reasons why people participate in sport and players/athletes will be encouraged to enjoy both training and playing or competing. Young players will be safeguarded within the club and helped to participate and have fun, with recognition of both effort and achievement.

COMMUNICATE

Everyone within our club will be listened to, allowed to input, and given an opportunity to express their opinions without reprisal or judgement. We know that we can speak out if our club members, athletes, or players are threatened in anyway by actions or words which are inappropriate or if we feel they need help.

TOLERATE

An element of discipline will underpin our club to ensure that our sport is controlled and that values such as honesty, equality and fair play are promoted at all times. We take pride in our club; negativity or disrespect towards others within our club or opposing teams will not be tolerated. We will be modest in victory, gracious in defeat and tolerant towards others.

IMPORTANCE OF ONE GOOD ADULT

In 2012, Headstrong and the UCD School of Psychology conducted the My World Survey, a National Study of Youth Mental Health. The survey allowed us to see how different elements and experiences of a young person are related to their mental health. 14,500 young people participated in the study and the key findings suggested that mental health difficulties emerged in early adolescence and peaked in the late teens and early 20's. A major emerging finding from the study indicated that "One good adult is important for the mental well-being of young people", the presence of one good adult has the following impacts: • One caring adult in a young person's life can buffer against stress and lead to positive psychological functioning • One good adult instils higher levels of optimism and increased self-esteem (self-esteem plays a major protective role for mental health) • The presence of one good adult enhances the ability to cope and increases likelihood of active coping (talking etc) as opposed to destructive coping (alcohol

misuse) • Low levels of support from one good adult correlate to low levels of life satisfaction • Low levels of support from one good adult correlate to significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety

POSITIVE COACHING CULTURE



The ambition of this resource and a key contributor to the DSP strategy is to assist clubs to develop a cohesive, inclusive, and valued coaching system that promotes positive mental well-being and sustains participation in sport. Only an exceedingly small number of young athletes (less than 1%) reach elite level in their chosen sport; the onus is on sports clubs and sports coaches therefore to ensure that all young people have the chance to reach their potential as people as well as athletes. Positive Coaching Scotland and the Positive Coaching Alliance call this theory The Double Goal Coach.





We have adopted this theory as a core pillar of our resource, The Double Goal Coach ethos has two main aims:

1. Teaching young people vital, character-building life skills through sport that can contribute to positive life outcomes • Resilience • Leadership • Teamwork • Commitment • Respect
2. Winning • Learning to compete fairly and honestly • Wanting to win, but not at all costs

Coaches play an incredibly influential role in the lives of athletes. Often players spend more time with their coaches than anyone else outside of the home environment. This carries a huge responsibility. As a coach you will directly determine the type of experience that a player has, be that positive or negative. We know that only a small number of players go on to become elite level athletes, so we have a responsibility to ensure that all participants develop skills that can assist them in whatever journey they find themselves on, encouraging long term participation.

THE WINNING FORMULA

The Positive Coaching Alliance and Positive Coaching Scotland explore redefining winning. The 'win-at-all-costs' culture looks for short term achievements at the expense of an athlete's long-term development. The Winning Formula requires a transformation of focus from winning and

results (out of the athlete's control) to effort, learning and an acceptance of mistakes (within an athlete's control).

SETTING EFFORT GOALS

Effort goals help athletes and performers focus on things that are under their control, this type of goal helps to motivate players. Self-confidence is also increased when athletes feel in control, and when self-confidence increases, athletes tend to work harder and increase their effort. When athletes feel in control, they have reduced level of anxiety which means they are less likely to worry about failing. In contrast, outcome goals such as (winning the game) can be influenced by a range of other factors – e.g., referees, other team, weather etc.

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK POSITIVE LANGUAGE

Research suggests that 60-80 % of initial opinion is formed in less than four minutes as athletes make judgments whether or not the coach is approachable (interpreted as easy to talk to, friendly, amicable, sociable, open) or unapproachable for that day (perceived as distant, unfriendly, grumpy, aloof, cold, and/or standoffish}. This is informed by the type of language and body language used by the coach in those first 4 minutes.



MINI-VAN Tour



BACKGROUND

The Mini-Van Tour is an innovative and inclusive cross-community activity.

Working in the Western Balkan region through the project “Football Zajedno” the first pilot Mini-Van Tour was organised in 2018. In this pilot activity places of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia could be visited. The feedback on this cross-community action was enormous and as a result the Mini-Van Tour got a crucial part of today’s work in divided communities.

CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY

The Mini-Van Tour is a unique community engagement activity that combines learning, socialisation, and fun through inclusive sports activities. It builds up on activities such as the Training for Trainers, the national Workshops and the building of networks between various stakeholders in communities.

This innovative activity is designed to visit various local communities in (post-conflict) regions and create a space for healthy communication, sports, play, learning, and entertainment while promoting the ideas of peace, reconciliation, unity, and dialogue.

A Mini-Van Tour station can include various interactive methods and activity. **The overall aim is to bring people of divided communities together** in one place. Target groups

are children, youth, coaches, youth-workers, teachers, and various further stakeholders of the community (municipality, associations, etc.). **Crucial for the success of a Mini-Van Tour station is the involvement of all kinds of stakeholders and ethnic communities and the set-up of the station on a neutral place in the city.** A Mini-Van Tour station in the Sport Together and Football Zajedno project usually consists of the so-called streetkick (inflatable football field), the microsoccer (a small wooden one to one field), interactive fairplay workshops sessions, feel-good stations (discussions, healthy snacks) as well as other accompanying educational, musical, and artistic activity (e.g. concerts, press conferences, round table discussions), all designed to create an unforgettable experience for all participants. Educated trainers and facilitators together with project coordinators are building an experienced and motivated team for the Mini-Van Tour. The Mini-Van Tour is accompanied by diverse materials and giveaways (leaflets, stickers, banners, flags, shirts, etc.) and a professional public relations work (social media, press releases).

The “Sport Together” team uses the **intersectional approach** in the Mini-Van Tour recognising that individuals face multiple and intersecting forms of structural discrimination that come from individual, family, communal, or national levels in political, economic, and social areas.

Main goals and principles of the Mini-Van Tour:

- **Education and awareness** raising on non-discrimination, equality, and fair play through interactive games, workshops, dialogue, discussions and entertainment.



- **Involvement of the community.** Positive atmosphere and diverse offers (e.g., music stations) at the location will also involve those who are not sportive in the first moment. The Mini-Van Tour will be a possibility for children, youth and coaches to get to know each other and, the project activities and to join further activities.
- Recognizing that there are multiple forms of **intersecting systemic discrimination** that stop people from having equal opportunity.
- Respecting the **voice of each individual**, especially vulnerable members of society, and providing them space to be spokespeople for their causes.
- Looking at individual perspectives and the variety of meanings of **identities** for each person.
- Deconstructing social norms, **prejudices, and stereotypes** that block creating a diverse and inclusive society.
- Considering how **discrimination** and systemic inequality contribute to limited access to resources, such as sports.
- Ensuring that data collection does not overlook the experiences of individuals with intersectional identities.

GUIDELINES FOR THE CREATION OF A MINI-VAN TOUR STATION

1) PREPARATION PHASE

Detailed preparation plan

The Mini-Van Tour and each station for itself need a careful and strategic preparation. Have in mind to plan several meetings with all involved stakeholders beforehand and at best have a meeting/round table with the involved local partners. It is crucial to visit the place of a tour station on time before the action to clarify important logistics and the program. Ensure to set-up the Mini-Van Tour station, if possible, in a public and neutral place of the town/village (e.g., main square). Involve all kind of potential stakeholders of the community (sport clubs, schools, municipality, etc.). Build up a team for the Mini-Van Tour station including the tour coordinator, coaches, facilitators, and local volunteers.

The Mini-Van Tour can be a half-day, one day or even two-days event, according to the agreement you make with local partners. The planned activities can take place simul-

taneously at different stations. The exact duration, set up and program of the tour station, as well as the setup time, will be agreed upon with local partners depending on the specific conditions of each location.

Each Mini-Van Tour station is unique and needs time and sensitivity for local circumstances in advance!

Involvement of communities / local partners

Crucial for successful Mini-Van Tour stations is good preparation and involvement of local partners. In divided communities it is particularly important to involve all ethnical groups, various sport clubs, the municipality, youth work, schools etc. It is of high importance to treat all parties/ethnic groups equally and to share responsibilities.

The local partners are an integral part of this project and is a good option to offer them the opportunity to showcase their own methods, skills and knowledge at the Mini-Van Tour station. Each station should reflect the values and mission of local partners and highlight the incredible work they do in their local communities.

Offers and benefits for local partners:

- Meetings with involved stakeholders on time (2-3 month before the event)
- Permission for the place of activity
- Involvement of all groups of a place
- Volunteers and local facilitators
- Offers for local sport clubs, schools, youth work (own stations, info stand, food corners)

2) IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The Mini-Van Tour team at best arrives one day before the action at the place. This gives you time to meet the local partners and stakeholders and to check the set-up for the next day.

For setting up the station, plan enough time before the official start of the event. A Mini-Van Tour is usually set up in public space, so it is not always possible to predict the exact number of participants. Anyhow, due to the meetings with local partners and stakeholders of the place you will have a feeling of the potential number of visitors. It is important to have enough facilitators, coaches, and vol-



unteers at the station and to have a few options of running the stations according to the age, gender, and background of participants.

Example 1

You create a Mini-Van Tour station in a public space (e.g., main square) of a town for a one-day event. Together with local partners you offer 10 activities (Streetkick, microsoccer, info and food station, feel-good station, DJ workshop, etc.). In one day around 1.000 participants are attending your station randomly, trying out new methods and sports, having conversations with the project team, meeting and getting to know new people. At a certain hour of the day, you arrange interview and picture slots for media, invite the mayor of the town, presidents of the sport clubs, etc. At the end of the Mini-Van Tour station a local band is having a concert, where the whole city can come for free.

Example 2

You are on a neutral sport field at the place and with the support of local partners you can predict already that 150-200 children will attend the Mini-Van Tour station, which is scheduled for four hours involving 10 separate activities. You can start the action with an official opening by local stakeholders, project coordinator, etc. After you can divide the participants in groups (e.g., 10 groups with approximately 15 participants) and let each group participate in each activity for a certain time (e.g., 20 minutes for each activity). After participating in each activity all children come together for a final closure (e.g., big circle together, ceremony, awards, and give-aways) or again, you can close the station with an additional event like the concert mentioned above.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES IN A MINI-VAN TOUR STATION

Streetkick Games



The so-called Streetkick is a huge inflatable football field bringing together players of all backgrounds and no matter of skills! This station is usually the big eyecatcher of the Mini-Van Tour and the children's favourite, with endless opportunities to play football and enjoy fairplay games. With dimensions of 17x15 m, the field is the perfect size for friendly matches and exciting challenges. Within the so-called "football3" method the streetkick provides more than just playing games. Educated facilitators guide the teams with special fairplay rules and discussion rounds in this station.

fairplay microsoccer



Looking for a dynamic and fun game to play with your friends? Look no further than to the microsoccer station! This one-on-one football game is a fantastic way to improve not only your technical skills and enjoy some



healthy competition, but also to get in touch with other players you most probably never met before. The founders of the microsoccer boxes (www.microsoccer.at) emphasize the educational importance of this tool. It's a method for everyone, young or old, of all genders and all skill levels. Educated facilitators bring participants to look into their eyes, get to know the names and skills of their opponents and have a lot of high-fives with persons you never thought you would meet so close.

fairplay workshop station (fairplay activities)



The fairplay workshop station is the perfect place to learn more about the importance of respect, inclusivity, and sportsmanship. Here participants get a little deeper into the content of our projects but still with fun and educational games and activities. Our trained workshop facilitators have several methods to create an inclusive and positive atmosphere.

Fun Zone (football freestyle station, photo wall, music)



Here you can show off your football skills and creativity. At the freestyle station you can participate in super fun challenges and impress your friends and the world on social media. Strike a pose with your friends at our photo wall and capture some unforgettable memories. With music to get you in the groove, this station is the ultimate spot to let loose and have some fun!

Feel-good and info zone

Take a break from all the action and unwind in our Feel-good zone. This station is the perfect place to grab a bite to eat, sit back on comfy lazy bags, and enjoy some quality time with friends and other participants. In the feel-good and info zone we provide healthy food, lazy bags, and an info stand with all our materials and publications.

Graffiti / drawing station

For the coolest and/or youngest participants, in this station a special drawing corner is provided to express creativity and create some new slogans and chants for the Mini-Van Tour. The content of the drawing should be related to our core topics of fairplay, respect and diversity.

Music and DJ station



All Mini-Van Tour stations are accompanied by good and loud music. Sometimes Karaoke sessions are obligatory. Participants can not only play their beloved songs, but also try their skills for – maybe – first time on a turntable. This station is especially attracting those children and youth, who are not so keen to the sporty stations mentioned above.



Every Mini-Van Tour station is up to some local special activities and can be adapted to the local needs and environment (e.g., Volleyball, Basketball, etc.). A Mini-Van Tour station is also a good possibility to create a bigger event out of it, like a city sport day, some additional panel discussions, exhibitions or, as mentioned before, concert as a closure of the day.

Reflection phase and follow-up

In our experience it is important to gather all stakeholders involved in the Mini-Van Tour station to have a short

reflection phase within the project team but also within all involved stakeholders. An external evaluator usually sends out a survey or asks for interviews on the field. But the reflection phase also provides a nice possibility to go for joint dinners or a drink. This gives the possibility to speak about the station and get some feedback but also to foster the network and create new ideas and plans for the future. Very often the organisations involved in a Mini-Van Tour are afterwards also highly motivated to join further project activities.

Sport Together Mini-Van Tour 2023



The so far biggest Mini-Van Tour was organised in 2023. The tour visited six different cities in five countries with around 1.500 participants.

The Mini-Van Tour 2023 was organised as part of the European “Sport Together” and the “Football Zajedno” project, both dedicated to promoting equality, human rights, and combating nationalism and segregation. The activity was co-funded through the Erasmus+ program of the European Union, as well as by the Football Associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro under the UEFA Hat-Trick V program and the Austrian Development Agency.

The Mini-Van Tour 2023 visited the following places:

- 28.05.2023 – Gornji Vakuf, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 30.05.2023 – Ljubinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 01.06.2023 – Tivat, Montenegro
- 05.06.2023 – Brodarevo, Serbia
- 08.06.2023 – Parag, Croatia
- 09.06.2023 – Graz, Austria



Synopsys of the Mini-Van Tour

Date: **28 May – 11 June 2023**

Places: **Gronji Vakuf – Uskoplje** and **Ljubinje** (BiH); **Tivat** (Montenegro); **Brodarevo** (Serbia); **Parag** (Croatia); **Graz** (Austria)

Total number of participants: **approx. 1.500**

Youth – participants of activity: **1.400** (45% girls; 55% boys); disadvantaged group: 30%

Adults: **100**

Sport Together/Football Zajedno team: **6 persons**

- Local community supporters / trainers: **16 persons**
- Participating countries: **5 – Austria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.**



A Dream Come True

“Teacher, teacher, I was not able to sleep last night because of the excitement!” stated a boy who participated in the workshop in Parag (Roma community in Croatia). For him and other children/youth, the Mini-Van Tour meant that they are important, and they matter. Parag is often associated in public media as a dangerous place, and no one should visit it. So, activities are rarely organised on this site even though it has a high number of Roma children and youth in underprivileged positions. Participants repeatedly asked where all the facilitators came from. When they would get the answer BiH, Serbia, Croatia, Austria, their immediate bodily, facial, and verbal reaction would be pride and thrill. It meant that they are part of the community as they often feel excluded.

This intervention did not just bring social inclusion to Parag, but also civic engagement. Youth (16+) saw this as an opportunity to learn more about the project and how they can be involved. Several community members supported facilitation and activities, and exchanged contacts with the Sport Together team which can lead to ongoing capacity building.

However, for some participants, this was also a dream come true. *“I am dreaming, I am dreaming, I cannot believe this is happening!”* When the evaluator asked why he is dreaming, a simple and honest answer was given *“I never thought that I would be able to play football in front of an audience and that someone from a faraway country would cheer for me!”* The activity provided something unique for each person – to feel respected, loved, supported, and part of a community, or shortly a dream that came true even for a day!

Recommendations for the future

In the last years out of a piloting action, the **Mini-Van Tour got a successful and sustainable activity** in the Western Balkans Region. Year after year, the organisers try to improve and develop the concept further. Especially in the biggest tour so far, the Sport Together Mini-Van Tour 2023, some more lessons were learned.

We need to emphasise the importance of focusing on a specific location with a troubled history for an extended period of time. By conducting ethnographic research and actively **involving all community members**, we can mitigate bias risks and adapt our strategy to address the specific needs of the community more effectively. This approach will ensure a more significant impact on the community and fosters a deeper understanding of the local context.

The Mini-Van Tour can provide a unique opportunity for children to participate in sports and activities and workshops. Their positive response often highlights the importance of organising such events especially in smaller communities and **rural areas, where opportunities for such experiences are limited**.

It is essential to be on neutral places in the town/villages and provide public access to the activity in order to reach a wider audience and effectively share the mission. However, in some specific cases it also makes sense to go on one special ground of one specific community (e.g., Roma, LGBTIQ). Like this, it is possible to bring this kind of activity to an isolated and extremely **discriminated and marginalised population**. If the station in this case would be organised on a “neutral” ground, it would prevent a lot of participants from participating in the activity.

Note, a Mini-Van Tour station can be a starting point, but **long-term change in a community is possible only with sustainable, deeper work** and cannot be made with only a one-time event.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the **divided communities in the Western Balkans Region and (Northern) Ireland** have faced the persistent challenge of bridging ethno-religious divides, but there is a growing recognition of the vital role youth-oriented initiatives, like the “Mini-Van Tour”, or the project „Building positive clubs“ can play in **promoting cross-community work and social inclusion**. In these regions, sport, particularly football, have emerged as powerful tools for fostering social cohesion among the younger generation.

For instance, consider the Mini-Van Tour uniting young sport enthusiasts from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This initiative not only brings youths together through their shared passion for sports but also serves as a platform for open dialogue and reconciliation. In a similar vein, Northern Ireland’s commitment to “building positive clubs” within its football community, a resource developed by

the Donegal Sports Partnership (DSP) with the support of local community organisations, emphasizes creating inclusive spaces for young individuals from different backgrounds to connect and collaborate.

These youth-centred efforts represent a fundamental shift towards cross-community work and underscore the transformative potential of sports as a vehicle for social inclusion. By engaging and empowering the youth, these programs offer a tangible path towards healing and rebuilding fractured communities, illustrating that even in the most divided of societies, sport can be a potent catalyst for positive changes. In focusing on the younger generation, these initiatives not only promote social cohesion **but also sow the seeds of a more unified and inclusive future for these historically divided regions.**



Links and sources

fairplay Initiative <https://www.fairplay.or.at/en/news/news/mini-van-tour-2023-285-11623>

Donegal Sports Partnership <https://activedonegal.com/programme/building-positive-clubs/>

“Supporting Reconciliation in the Western Balkans” <https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/2021-Supporting-Reconciliation-Processes-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>

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