

Project:

*“Bird’s Perspective
from Balkan Clean
Sky”*

*Policy brief and
recommendations*

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Introduction

Sport, culture and love for nature are common for sportive people, young people especially and can bring them closer to a common goal and objective. Youth cooperation and exchange through sports are one of the key aspects in improving knowledge and experience of the people. This is proved to be relevant in the regional context, too. The United Nations recognize sport internationally 'as a means to promote education, health, development and peace'.¹

Regional cooperation between the Western Balkans countries is crucial for development, identification, promotion and exchange of best practices through sport. It also contributes to reconciliation, better mutual understanding and cultural exchange.

Raising awareness of the added value of sport and physical activity is the first step of the strategy for bigger involvement of the young people in sporting activities.



Gliding as a sport is still insufficiently developed in the Balkan countries as compared with the other countries worldwide. Current situation indicates that the number of aero clubs in the three countries (North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia) is very small, but the interest for this kind of sport among young people is increasing. It should be mentioned that the facilities and airfields, which are essential assets for this sport, in most of the towns in North Macedonia, but also in Serbia and Kosovo, are in bad condition. This is due to the fact that the financing of this sport, and sports in general, has been neglected in recent times. Hence, although inheriting significant capital from the past, today the situation in gliding sport in the region is poor.



¹<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2030-agenda-sdgs.html>



Main findings

The young people and sportsmen are aware about the **benefits of the sports and the importance of the sports events** for the social life and education of local people. However, the wider awareness is still lacking and it requires gradual change of mentality and additional promotion.

Youth are less burdened by the past, and more open for **cooperation**. They have the view faced forward. Hence, they are open for cooperation and exchange of experiences.

All the stakeholders agreed that sports are an excellent **platform for cooperation** and exchange of experiences. Hence, having all the aspects involved, should enable stimulus for productive collaboration and action.



Sports (sports clubs, sportsman and sport events) in peripheral towns in the three countries involved receive **little financial support from central bodies and local governments**; hence, governments' involvement (central and local) is crucial for future support and promotion of sports in general. This is especially true for the gliding and local sports initiatives. The local bodies shall provide the wider context of cooperation. The activities related to sports usually take place in the core cities of the three countries: Skopje, Prishtina and Belgrad. The number of sports events that are organized in the other cities is negligible.



Tour operators are interested in the **gliding as a new window of business opportunity** and including the Tandem Glider flights in their touristic offer and promoting the adventure tourism in the region. Travel agents are aware that people's needs are changing constantly and they need to find new ways to increase customer retention as well as to attract new clients. They stressed that there has been increased demand for this kind of tourism in recent years and agreed that including gliding in their adventure tourist offers is a good method to stand out from the competition and to boost their business and sector in general.

The **development of the local strategy and the promotional plan** is still centralized and needs to be developed in cooperation with all stakeholders, when it comes to development of sports or local tourism. Still the main stakeholders are not completely involved in the process of defining the main strategic documents, nor in defining the main financial support system.



Policy recommendations

- **Intensifying the promotion of benefits of sports for healthy living** among young people and in schools. Young people are the next generation that needs to develop the culture of healthy living, and this can be done through systematic action through schools, but also through involvement of children and introduction into various sports. Hence, the clubs decided to promote the clubs among the children in their respective towns.
- **Enhancing the central and even more so local governments' support** for developing further regional cooperation in the sphere of sports (gliding, paragliding and parachuting). This could be done through intensifying the process of lobbying and putting pressure.
- **Enhancing touristic attractiveness** of the periphery regions in the three countries by placing them on a touristic map of extreme sports. This has already been started in

Krushevo through intensifying the cooperation with the paragliding clubs.

- **Including adventure tourism and action sports** and enrich the current offers of the tourist agencies which would attract more domestic and international tourists, increase their revenues and contribute to employment in the industry.

- **Branding of the region** as an attractive tourist destination. This joint regional action is crucial because aero sport clubs from the Balkans do not have marketing expertise to effectively promote their sports events, surrounding natural touring and to attract new members or tourists. Only with regional action can the small clubs from the Balkans can achieve economies of scales and further their cooperation. Otherwise, they are very small and financially not capable of development.

- **Enhancing regional cooperation and cultural understanding** and development.

Conclusions

Today, young people are more and more adventurous, they want new challenges and are interested in new adrenaline sports. Bringing the sports in general, and in his case the gliding closer to them gives them the opportunity to have a unique experience that can be a good basis for their proactive involvement in the health issues and policies on local but also

national level. In addition, it can also provoke them for possible professional involvement in sports.

The support of the local and national institutions is crucial in the development of sport and adventure tourism in the region. The clubs do not have the sufficient help at this moment. This is especially evident in the regions that are on the periphery in the three countries (North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia) since most of the sport events and activities are held in the core cities.

Touristic agencies and boards shall benefit in the long run by the possibility to expand and diversify their offer in the region. In the long run, possible development of the sports activities also can open new employment and possibility for international exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Gliding as a sport can contribute to the development of **sustainable adventure tourism in the countries involved**, through enhancement of the action sport and tourism adventure offers. The development and increased promotion of the regional adventure tourism offers will attract more international tourists thus contributing to **creation of new business opportunities and increasing the employment** in local businesses, tourist operators and aero clubs that directly will contribute to the **development of the countries' economies**.