Strategies of optimizing the elements of Romanian university sports

Strategii de optimizare a elementelor componente ale sportului universitar românesc

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Abstract

Backround. The reason behind this paper is the content of the public policies and the general strategy in the field of physical education and sports at national level, which also include the organization and functioning of university sports with several components: the determination of the fields, the definition of the organizational and functional framework, the strategies of optimization, the targets and their assessment as well as the human component.

Aims. a) The identification of the support elements needed in defining the strategies of optimization of the Romanian university sports b) processing the data and information by means of a SWOT analysis; c) The elaboration of the optimization strategies for the elements of Romanian university sports.

Methods. In our investigation, we used the SWOT analysis in order to identify the opportunities that allow the best matching of the external components of the organization with its internal situation. The SWOT analysis allows the elaboration, the assessment and the choice of the most efficient strategies.

Results. The research was aimed at defining the strengths and weaknesses of the internal organizational milieu of Romanian university sports, as well as those of the external organizational milieu, followed by the identification of opportunities and threats and finalized by the elaboration of an optimization strategy.

Conclusions. The elaboration of the optimization strategies for the elements that make up Romanian university sports can have a positive effect in triggering the self-development potential of this segment, expressed in the improvement of the results in national and international competitions.

Key words: university sports, optimization strategies, organizational milieu, organizational culture.

Rezumat

Premize. Argumentul pentru elaborarea lucrării îl constituie conținutul politicilor publice și a strategiei generale în domeniul educației fizice și sportului pe plan național, care includ organizarea și funcționarea segmentului sportului universitar, cu implicarea mai multor categorii de componente: determinarea conținuturilor, delimitarea cadrului organizatoric și funcțional, strategiile de optimizare, finalitățile, evaluarea realizării finalităților și componenta umană.

Obiective. a) identificarea elementelor de suport necesare conturării strategiilor de optimizare a elementelor componente ale sportului universitar românesc, b) prelucrarea datelor și informațiilor prin intermediul metodei specific manageriale analiza SWOT, c) elaborarea strategiilor de optimizare a elementelor componente ale sportului universitar românesc.

Metode. Pe parcursul demersului investigativ s-a utilizat metoda analizei SWOT, cu scopul de a identifica oportunitățile care asigură cea mai bună aliniere între mediul extern al organizației și situația internă a acesteia. Analiza SWOT facilitează crearea, evaluarea și alegerea celor mai eficiente strategii.

Rezultate. Cercetarea a vizat delimitarea aspectelor din mediul organizațional intern al sportului universitar românesc, conturate sub forma punctelor forte și a punctelor slabe – precum și pe cele ale mediului organizațional extern, finalizate prin identificarea oportunităților și amenințărilor, urmată de elaborarea unor strategii de optimizare.

Concluzii. Elaborarea strategiilor de optimizare a elementelor componente ale sportului universitar românesc poate avea un efect pozitiv în declanșarea potențialităților de autodezvoltare ale acestui segment, reliefate prin îmbunătățirea rezultatelor în competițiile naționale și internaționale.

Cuvinte cheie: sport universitar, strategii de optimizare, mediu organizațional, cultură organizațională.

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Introduction

"The educational ideal of Romanian schooling consists in the free, complete and harmonious development of the individuals, in shaping an autonomous personality and in assuming a system of values needed by personal fulfillment and development, by the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, by an active participation of the citizens to social life and by the integration into the work market" (***, 2011).

Within the context of modern life, the increase of the organizational efficiency and the reconsideration of the role held by persons with managerial and executive attributions makes it necessary and appropriate to implement essential alterations in the management of Romanian university sports as well. In this sense, a systemic approach of management, analyzed from the structural, functional and operational point of view, has the following advantages: it shapes a global view of the constituting elements in view of applying innovative strategies, which grants extra coherence and efficiency, avoids malfunctions by their perception within the organizational and social reality in which university sports exists; it also allows the management of the chain-triggered transformations and the identification of their effects, while self-adjustment is done by means of system restructuring as a result of its own internal and external dynamic interactions (Popa, 2012).

Over the past years, several reference works have approached directly or indirectly the issue of the milieu of the sports organization as an open system. The approaches are significantly different from one author to another (Cole, 2004; Cristea, 2000; Lador & Mihăilescu, 2008; Maroti, 2004; Mihăilescu, 2008 a; Radoslav, 2000; Vlăsceanu, 2002; Voicu, 2002). Synthesizing the above, the concept of university sports organizational milieu includes the judicial landmarks and the ethical dimensions of the organization, which determine the level and characteristics of the specific technology, where the appropriate managerial resources are to be found and the organizational products are promoted. Therefore, in order to establish the organizational targets and grant the supply with the resources needed by the adoption and application of the decisions meant to lead to the specific targets, the exogenous elements of the milieu are of the following nature: organizational, economic, political, demographic, cultural, legal, scientific, technical, educational, psychosocial and ecological. The analysis of the elements making up the Romanian university sports milieu reveals the aspects shown in Fig. 1.

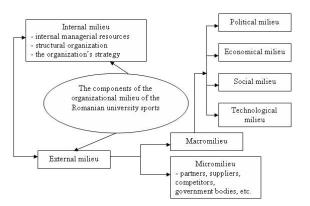


Fig. 1 – The elements of the Romanian university sports organizational milieu.

The internal milieu, influenced and modified by direct managerial action, includes the elements that are fundamental for the potential of the issue in question, such as: the internal managerial resources, the structural organization and the strategy of the organization.

The external milieu is made of two components: the macro-milieu – constituting a source of political, economic, social and technological factors, insignificantly influenced by the organization and the macro-milieu – that can be partially influenced by managerial action. This includes the elements from the external milieu with which Romanian university sports comes into direct contact, in order to reach its targets: partners, suppliers, competitors, public bodies, etc. The elements of the macro-milieu to be used in assessing the various conditions, tendencies or contexts of the external milieu are: "the political, economic, social and technological milieu" (Wood, 1990). The application of the PEST model in the identification of the external milieu of Romanian university sports consists in:

- imposing a certain order in the "chaos" of the external milieu, by structuring the milieu conditions in a suggestive way, i.e. social factors involve people, economic factors refer to finances or production, political factors refer to governing, and technological factors to instruments;
- the possibility of minutely analyzing the external milieu, considering not only the complexity of each sector, but also the inter-conditioning of the sectors;
- providing the decisional variants pertaining to the most adequate techniques, strategies and actions, which a manager can use in order to adapt the components of the Romanian university sports to the conditions of the external milieu.

As a result of the above, the investigation required a *SWOT analysis*, which is a typical managerial method, as a condition of promoting high performance management, starting from *premises* such as:

- meeting the functioning necessities of the organization by turning into account the opportunities of the organizational milieu, which can be the outcome of decisions favored by the design of the management subsystems: organizational, informational, decisional and methodological-managerial;
- the knowledge and turning into account of the milieu factors, and of their interaction can make for a scientific background for the elaboration, implementation and assessment of the optimizing strategies pertaining to the issues under investigation;
- the factors of the organizational milieu can influence the fulfillment of the organization functions, the granting of managerial resources and the meeting of specific needs, considering that Romanian university sports exists, functions and develops only within micro and macrosystems: *local*, *regional*, *national* and *international*.

Another support element to be considered is the concept of organizational culture. Androniceanu broadly defines it as "the ensemble of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and affective traits, resulting from the way of thinking, feeling and the personality of the individuals, manifested in the work processes, which significantly determine the mission of the organizations

and their fundamental targets" (1). Nicolescu and Verboncu associate the term of "culture" with "the ensemble of values, beliefs, aspirations, expectations and behaviors arising in the course of time in each organization, which prevail there and directly or indirectly condition its functionality and performances" (2). The issue of organizational culture in Romanian university sports has to be perceived first and foremost as the dominant pattern of beliefs and values characterizing the organization, as it represents a factor that influences its structure (Fig. 2).

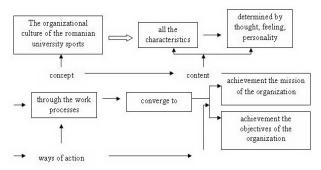


Fig. 2 – The diagram of the organizational culture concept of Romanian university sports.

The cultural approach of the Romanian university sports functionality has a series of advantages (according to Lador & Mihăilescu, 2008):

- it makes it easy to identify the human elements involved in this activity;
- "it determines a concrete human-managerial approach in the actions involving organizational individuals" (Puiu, 2003);
- it allows the identification and promotion of appropriate organizational behaviors, with positive influences on organizational management;
- it underlies the comparison of organizational managements promoted in various contexts and cultures, analyzing the connections between the elements of the organizational system, between the organization and the economic and social macro-system, as well as the efficient managerial *know-how* transfer.

One of the content elements of the organizational culture - collective value - involves the selection and hierarchization of the organizational individual values in order to set up a value system determined by the needs of the organization and based on: the singling out of the hereditary components imposed by society within Romanian university sports, the social norms, which grant the stability and are at the basis of the organization and functioning of the aspect in question, the analysis of the external milieu factors determining the appearance of social norms, the level of scientific research, natural and human forces that influence the milieu factors and the social norms, and the alterations of the organizational culture by successive additions of values, which modify the dynamics of the organizational management of Romanian university sports.

The research on the organizational milieu of Romanian university sports by means of a SWOT analysis is considered to be *advantageous* and the arguments are the

following:

- it favors the awareness of the management with respect to the dynamics of the milieu, including its influences upon the organization;
- it represents the support of the strategic planning of the organization activity;
- the orientation of the organizational activities, products and services is done according to the social order;
- the internal efficiency of the decision making activities is reflected by the better results in the external activity of the organization;
- it determines the identification, obtaining and more reasonable distribution of all organizational resources;
- it makes for the development of a functional planning of the Romanian university sports activity, reflected in the rationalization of consumption: equipment, materials, energy;
- it leads to partnerships and strategic alliances with a positive effect on the qualitative improvement of some organizational products, such as: performance, sports events.

Mihăilescu (2006) places the SWOT analysis within the framework of strategic planning, between the "Management audit" and "The elaboration of the strategic directions and targets by domains of activity".

Objectives

The paper aims at:

- a) identifying the support elements needed to shape the strategies of optimizing the elements of Romanian university sports;
- b) data and information processing by means of the typical managerial method represented by the SWOT analysis;
- c) the elaboration of the strategies of optimizing the elements of Romanian university sports.

Operational research refers to processing the data and information pertaining to the assessment of the organizational milieu of Romanian university sports, finalized by the elaboration of optimizing strategies for the topic under investigation.

Hypothesis

The elaboration and implementation of managerial strategies will lead to the improvement of the Romanian university sports image, with positive effects on resources and development of the practice bases.

Materials and methods

a) The development protocol

In order to apply the SWOT analysis to the elements of Romanian university sports, we considered the data and information pertaining to the following aspects under analysis:

- sports as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon;
- the particularities of the organizational milieu specific to university sports at national level;
- the participation of Romanian sportsmen and women in the Summer Universiad in the period 1959-

- 2011, focused on four sport branches, characterized by continuity in participation: athletics, judo, fencing and swimming:
- the characteristics of university sports in other countries with tradition in this field, i.e. France, England, Canada a francophone country, an anglophone one and a country with mixed characteristics.

b) The subjects

The research subjects were the university sports systems of Romania, England, Canada and France, from the point of view of their structure, process and competition system and the sports phenomenon as an image vector for performance university sports nationwide and worldwide.

c) The methods

The operations of the SWOT analysis and the order of their development were the following:

- 1. Grouping the characteristics of the organizational milieus under study.
- 2. Defining the 20 aspects of the internal milieu specific to Romanian university sports, and pointing out their importance and intensity, expressed as strengths/weaknesses.
- 3. Defining the 21 aspects of the external milieu specific to Romanian university sports, with the difference that here we determined the probability of manifestation and their impact on the university sports system, on a scale from 1 to 9, where 1 represents the lowest impact and 9 the highest one, expressed as opportunities/threats.
- 4. Adding up the internal and external milieu aspects of Romanian university sports, by listing them.
- 5. The last stage before turning the SWOT analysis operational and before the elaboration of the strategic directions of optimizing Romanian university sports consisted in centralizing the four categories of problems.
 - d) Statistical processing

The data from the tables and diagrams were processed with the Word vector variant.

Results

After having processed the list with the aspects of the internal milieu of Romanian university sports and after having defined the importance and intensity of each aspect, we drew up *the graph of strengths/weaknesses* that points out to three categories of aspects (Fig. 3):

- aspects of high intensity and importance, mentioned in the top left square grouped under *strengths*;
- aspects of low intensity and importance, mentioned in the bottom right square, grouped under *weaknesses*;
- the aspects in the bottom left and top right squares have either a low intensity, but with the possibility of turning into strengths by managerial intervention, or can become weaknesses in the absence of managerial intervention.

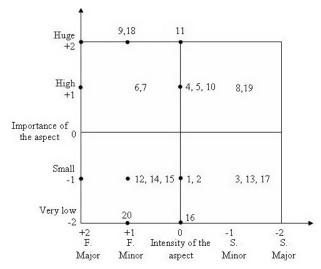


Fig. 3 – The graph of strengths - weaknesses.

The systematization of the list pertaining to the external milieu of Romanian university sports generated the *graph of opportunities/threats*, in which the aspects were grouped in four squares, according to the values and probabilities of manifestation, as well as the impact on Romanian university sports, on a scale from 1 to 9, where 1 represents a low impact and 9 a high one, with the following significance (Fig. 4):

- the top left square contains the number of aspects to be considered as *opportunities*;
- the bottom right square includes the number of aspects included in the list of *threats*;
- the last two squares contain aspects that have either a high probability and a low impact, or a high impact, but a low probability. This group of aspects has to be taken into consideration by the management, as they can become, under the impact of the organizational milieu, opportunities or threats.

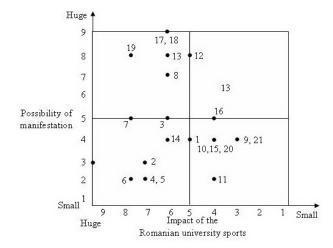


Fig. 4 – The graph of opportunities - threats.

The centralization of the four categories of aspects is shown in Table I.

Sum-up of the milieu aspects of Romanian university sports as brought forth by SWOT analysis.

Internal milieu

Strengths

- The general level of technical endowment of sports bases.
- The quality of the sports product offered by university sports structures.
- The quality of the human resources involved in the production of performance university sports.
- The appreciation of the quality of the organizational sports product in
- The organizational strategy of the central administration with welldefined directions and strategies.

Weaknesses

- The level of structural and process organization of university sports structures
- The organization of the activity on the basis of a medium/long term written strategy in university sports structures.
- The quality of the content and effects of the implementation of a strategic management in university sports structures.
- Appreciation of the quality of organizational sports product performance in non-profile universities.
- The financial component organized in order to grant in due time the financial means needed by university sports structures.
- The organizational changes at system level.
- The organizational changes at institutional level

External milieu

Threats

- The perception of experts with respect to the recognition of university Opportunities sports as a real component of the national system of physical education - The degree of geographical distribution of university sports structures and sports.
 - The degree of budget collection from extra-budgetary resources in university sports structures
 - The quantum of investments for sports bases administered by the universities.
 - University budgets for specific university sports activities.
 - The local policies for the support and development of university sports activities.
 - The relation with the national federations by branches of university
 - The relation with the European and international bodies of university sports
- that can be resorted to.
- The perception of experts with respect to the subordination of university sports clubs.
- The categories of students endowed for performance in sports.
- The legal and normative framework provided by the Law of physical education and sports no. 69/2000 with the application regulations.
- The possibility of initiating and promoting strategic alliances with various sports organizations.
- The relation with the sport central administration body.
- The relation with pre-university institutions.

Discussion

From the perspective of achieving the mission of Romanian university sports, it is necessary to promote the concept of strategy, consisting in "an integrating, unitary and all-inclusive managerial plan, aiming at reaching the targets by stipulating: the way the organization is to be managed, the actions to be performed within the organization in order to ensure the fulfillment of its mission" (Russu, 1999). In order to elaborate various types of strategies pertaining to the aspect under discussion, one has to take into account that the content elements should include the aspects previously mentioned and materialized in: reaching the scope and objectives as a result of negotiation and achieving an efficient synergy, the future period of organization and functioning of the organizational structure, the ensemble inclusion into a characteristic form of the essential elements, according to interests, the functional correlative approach of the internal and external organizational milieu, the implementation of an organizational process of instruction by applying competitive behavior.

The conceptual evolution pertaining to modern management starting exclusively from the assessment of the internal organizational situation and gradually including the interrelation with the external milieu has led to the definition of other concepts transferrable to Romanian university sports: "the long-term planning, the strategic planning and the planning specific to strategic management" (Mihăilescu, 2008b).

The concept of long-term planning, most of the times difficult to achieve, refers to the future trend of improving the performance of sports students participating in internal or external university competitions, depending on the previous results.

The concept of strategic planning involves the premises underlying the future strategy, combined with a methodology based on the investigation of the dynamics of the internal and external organizational milieu under research.

The concept of strategic management specific planning requires the addition of new elements, namely: the functional level forecasting, which pertains to the functions of the organization, the general management competence and the means of overcoming resistance to change, present in most organizations. From the managerial perspective, "planning is the instrument used in strategic management for the definition of the future results of Romanian university sports, respectively for bringing forth the future implications of the present decisions" (Russu, 1999).

Policies, as a first instrument of strategy operationalization, represent "an ensemble of major directions underlying the general directions of action and the functioning rules of organization functioning" (Căprărescu, 2005). The procedures and regulations are the complementary elements of policies.

The concept of strategic segmentation in Romanian university sports.

Within the general strategy of Romanian university sports, the separation of some relatively independent domains of activity in view of elaborating particularized strategies can be achieved by means of strategic segmentation. This involves the systemic method to be

applied by separating the activities into sets of homogeneous activities, either grouped by individual/collective sports or separately, by sports branches.

The concept of strategic groups and alliances in Romanian university sports.

The consequence of strategic segmentation is to be found in the establishment of strategic groups and alliances. By extrapolation, in Romanian university sports, establishing strategic groups and/or alliances represents a means of reaching strategic objectives, as none of the parties involved can achieve them on its own.

Conclusions

- 1. The Federation of School and University Sports should be the independent instrument of implementing optimization strategies for Romanian university sports, having a decisive role in decision making, action, control, assessment and support.
- 2. The management activity of the Federation of School and University Sports for the segment of university sports can be focused on two directions. One of them involves the improvement of the specific components of university sports activities, the other one pertains to the administration of sports bases and involves the action of an induced management.
- 3. The concept of strategic management in Romanian university sports represents the synergistic process along which the top management, anticipating the changes in the internal and external organizational milieu, makes decisions about actions in the long, medium and short term, which converge to the achievement of the organizational objectives.

Proposals

We started from the premise that the role of university sports in society is to promote policies and activities meant to facilitate the participation of all students in sports, so that they can attain excellence in performance sports as well as in their professional activity, by supporting the moral bases of sports without discrimination. At the end of this minute study, we elaborated a series of directions of optimization, included in strategies, which are likely to be implemented in the management of university sports. These strategies are of four types: development strategies, resulting from the combination of strengths with opportunities, *strategies* of development under risk conditions, which combine strengths with threats and weaknesses with opportunities, strategies of restriction/reorientation, resulting from the merging of weaknesses and threats, and strategies of difficulty overcoming, which involve weaknesses and opportunities.

a) The development strategy.

In elaborating the development strategy, the optimal variant of action consists in using strengths for the development of the opportunities offered by the external milieu of the organization (Table II).

b) The strategy of development under risk conditions.

The strategic option resulting from the combination of strengths and threats can be achieved by avoiding threats, using strengths (Table III).

c) The strategy of restriction / reorientation.

The strategic option results from the combination of weaknesses and threats and can be achieved by minimizing weaknesses in order to avoid threats (Table IV).

Table II
The development strategy.

Strategic directions/Objectives

- 1. Carrying on the reform process in Romanian university sports by applying democratic organization and management principles in view of adjusting the management to the systems existing in member countries of the European Union and Council.
- 2. Improving the quality of the sport product, as reflected by thehonors list of sports students at national and international level.
- 3. Developing the material sports basis, considering the fact that university sports has a good selection basis and is therefore able to develop its own values by performance activities.
- 4. Improving the legal and normative framework by alteration, completion and/or promotion of laws and normative acts.

- Actions
- Support for founding university sports associations within nonprofile higher education institutions.
- Subordination of university sports clubs to the profile/non-profile higher education institutions.
- Diversification of the sports branches in order to attract and motivate students for performance sports activity.
- Alteration, completion and adaptation of financial and other normative acts pertaining to Romanian university sports.
- Promotion of strategic alliances with school sports.
- Improvement of the relation with the central bodies for sport.

Table III
The strategy of development under risk conditions.

Strategic directions/Objectives

- 1. Development of activities according to the structure of actions within the internal and international competition calendar.
- 2. Streamlining of human resources as part of the managerial component.
- Information and education of students by promotional marketing activities in view of making them aware of the opportunities and benefits of practicing university sports.
- Improvement of collaboration relationships with the national federations by branches of sports, in order to improve the sport product

Actions

- Promotion of university sports by marketing activities.
- Stimulation of local policy application in support of university sports by releasing competitional programs through the media.
- Increase of the investment quantum for the sports bases of higher education institutions by encouraging associability and volunteering.

Table IV

The strategy of restriction / reorientation.

Strategic directions/Objectives

- Promotion of a strategic management in university sports structures, the implementation and assessment of development strategies.
- Development of programs meant to motivate students and stimulate them to practice performance sports, irrespective of the program of studies chosen.
- Actions of organizational change at system level, due to the unstable political-economical context.
- Creation of a marketing database, by collection of information on the students' needs and wishes and minimizing the negative reactions and perceptions of the establishment.
- The use of mass media for the promotion of the image of university sports in higher education institutions with low financial resources.
- Orientation of the marketing function towards sports products that are attractive for students.

Table V

The strategy of difficulty overcoming.

Strategic directions/Objectives

- 1. The organization of activity based on a medium/long-term written strategy is dimmed by the relation with the sport central public administration body.
- $2.\ A$ change of the organization at system / institutional level is envisaged.
- 3. The quality of the content and effects of management implementation can be improved by the relation with the pre-university education component.
- Upgrading the organizational university sport product performance to the rank of assessment criterion in the non-profile higher education institutions.

Actions

- Streamlining of the financial component within the existent legal and normative framework.
- Organizational change at institutional level by promoting strategic alliances with various sports organizations.

d) The strategy of difficulty overcoming.

The elaboration of a strategy meant to overcome difficulties results from the merging of weaknesses and opportunities, based on the idea of minimizing weaknesses by using opportunities (Table V).

Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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