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THEORETICAL STUDIES

Modernization of Sports Governance in Slovakia After the Establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports

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Abstract

The study analyzes the transformation of sports governance in Slovakia following the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic (MTSR SR) in 2024. Using qualitative and analytical approaches, the research examines organizational structure, financing, coordination, and professionalization within the Slovak sport management system. Data from legal and strategic documents, institutional reports, and expert interviews were synthesized. Results indicate that the new ministry improved strategic coherence but persistent issues remain in coordination, financing, and professional capacity. The paper proposes directions for modernization based on the principles of good governance, transparency, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

Keywords: sports governance, public policy, Slovakia, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, good governance, financing, professionalization.

Introduction

Sports governance represents a multidimensional public policy area integrating planning, organization, financing, and evaluation at all social levels. In Slovakia, sports governance has evolved alongside political decentralization and Europeanization, responding to growing expectations of transparency and effectiveness (Henry & Lee, 2004; Chappellet & Mrkonjic, 2019).

A milestone was the creation of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic (MTSR SR), which in 2024 assumed responsibility for sports policy previously managed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports. The reform aimed to enhance coordination, strengthen strategic direction, and align sports with tourism and regional development (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024).

Despite progress, challenges remain in inter-institutional coordination, financing mechanisms, and professionalization. Slovakia lacks a comprehensive long-term strategy linking national objectives to regional realities, while fragmentation among actors undermines policy efficiency (European Commission, 2023). This study evaluates the structure and effectiveness of Slovak sports governance after the reform and formulates recommendations for modernization.

Results

1. Organizational and Institutional Structure

The establishment of Ministry of Tourism and Sport has created an independent vertical for sports policy and improved strategic visibility. The ministry coordinates through its Sports Section and cooperates with 97 national sports federations and over 11,000 registered clubs (MTS SR, 2025). However, coordination gaps persist—only 43 % of municipalities report aligning local strategies with national documents. Regional staffing is insufficient; two-thirds of municipalities lack a dedicated sports manager, indicating weak administrative capacity.

2. Sports Financing

Public financing remains the dominant pillar of the sports system in the Slovak Republic. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic (MTSR SR), the total state budget allocation for sport in 2025 amounts to €219.8 million. These resources are distributed primarily to recognized sports programs (72 %), followed by investments in sports infrastructure (18 %), youth sport development (6 %), and activities related to research, analysis, and strategic planning in sport (4 %) (MTSR SR, 2025). This structure reflects a continued emphasis on the support of organized and competitive sport, while

comparatively limited funding is allocated to analytical and evidence-based policy development.

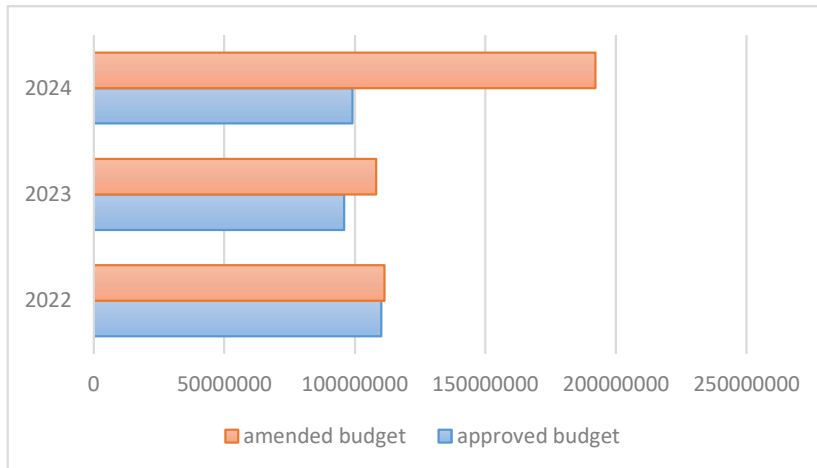
The adoption of Act No. 440/2015 Coll. on Sport introduced a transparent, formula-based mechanism for the redistribution of public funds, aimed at reducing subjectivity and political influence in funding decisions. Despite its conceptual strengths, the practical implementation of this system continues to face challenges. Delays in fund allocation, administrative burden, and inconsistencies in reporting requirements reduce the overall efficiency of the financing process. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that only approximately one-third of national sports federations systematically assess the effectiveness and outcomes of received subsidies, indicating a significant gap in performance monitoring and financial accountability.

In addition to public funding, private financial resources—including sponsorships, membership fees, donations, and commercial activities—account for an estimated 22-25 % of total sports financing in Slovakia. This proportion remains substantially below the European Union average, which ranges between 40-45 % (European Commission, 2023). The relatively low level of private investment highlights structural weaknesses in the Slovak sports economy, such as limited commercialization of sport, insufficient attractiveness for sponsors, and underdeveloped mechanisms of cooperation between the public and private sectors. In this context, the introduction of targeted tax incentives, enhanced legal frameworks for sponsorship, and the systematic development of public-private partnerships (PPP) represent key strategic opportunities for diversifying funding sources and increasing financial sustainability.

Financing is also a central component of the National Sports Development Program, which aims to ensure long-term, balanced growth of sport across performance, participation, and infrastructural dimensions. The accompanying graph illustrates the evolution of financial resources allocated to sports development in Slovakia through the state budget. The data demonstrate a gradual increase in public expenditure on sport over recent years, while simultaneously revealing fluctuations that reflect broader economic conditions and shifting governmental priorities. These trends underscore the importance of strategic financial

planning, multi-annual budgeting, and stronger links between funding allocation and clearly defined developmental objectives.

Graph 1: Allocation of funds to sport



Source: Own.

3. Professionalization

The level of professionalization within sports organizations in Slovakia remains limited and represents a significant structural constraint to the development of the sector. Empirical data indicate that 61 % of surveyed sports organizations are managed predominantly by volunteers who lack formal education in management, governance, or sports administration. Furthermore, only 27 % of organizations have established internal systems for the continuous education and professional development of their managerial staff. This reliance on voluntary management, while reflecting strong civic engagement, simultaneously limits organizational capacity, particularly in areas requiring specialized expertise.

In a comparative regional context, Slovakia falls behind neighboring countries with more advanced governance structures. For instance, in Slovenia approximately 70 % of national sports federations employ professional managers with defined competencies and contractual responsibilities (Kolar, 2022). The absence of a comparable level of professional staffing in Slovak sports organizations negatively affects long-term strategic planning, marketing and communication activities, financial management, and the ability to attract external funding, including private sponsorship and European project-based resources.

Limited managerial capacity also reduces organizational resilience and adaptability to changing policy environments and economic conditions. Without adequately trained professionals, sports organizations struggle to implement modern management practices, performance evaluation mechanisms, and innovation-driven approaches. Strengthening professionalization through targeted education programs, dual career pathways for sports managers, and financial incentives for employing qualified personnel should therefore be considered a key priority in national sports policy.

4. Governance and Transparency

Effective governance and transparency constitute fundamental prerequisites for the sustainable development of sport and for maintaining public trust in sports institutions. In Slovakia, the establishment of the Sports Information System (SIS) represents an important step toward centralized data collection and increased transparency. However, in practice, the system is characterized by incomplete datasets, irregular updates, and limited interoperability with other public databases. These shortcomings significantly reduce its usefulness for evidence-based policymaking, monitoring of public expenditures, and strategic decision-making at both national and organizational levels.

The lack of integrated digital governance tools further constrains the ability of public authorities and sports federations to evaluate performance, assess policy impacts, and identify systemic risks. As a result, decision-making processes often rely on fragmented or outdated information, which undermines the efficiency and credibility of sports governance.

Ethical standards and principles of transparency are applied unevenly across sports organizations. While some federations have implemented clear accountability structures, internal control mechanisms, and codes of ethics, others continue to operate with ambiguous lines of responsibility and insufficient oversight. According to Transparency International Slovakia (2024), persistent deficiencies in governance frameworks increase the risk of conflicts of interest, ineffective use of public resources, and reputational damage to the sports sector as a whole. Addressing these challenges requires the consistent enforcement of governance standards, enhanced digitalization, and the systematic monitoring of compliance with ethical and transparency principles (Transparency International Slovakia, 2024).

Discussion

The research confirms that establishing MTSR SR was a positive structural reform enhancing policy coherence and visibility of sport as an independent area of governance. Yet institutional integration remains incomplete. Slovakia operates within a multi-level governance framework (Hooghe & Marks, 2003), where effectiveness depends on coordination across vertical (state–region–municipality) and horizontal (sectoral) relations. Current vertical control is strong, but horizontal collaboration among ministries, federations, and local actors is weak. Better inter-sectoral coordination—especially with education, public health, and tourism—could generate synergistic benefits (OECD, 2022).

Transparency and data management represent critical weaknesses. Compared with Austria and Slovenia, where digital dashboards provide real-time monitoring, Slovakia lacks systematic evaluation of outcomes (European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021–2027, EU Council, 2021).

Sustainable development of sport also requires integrating the principles of good governance: accountability, participation, equity, and integrity (Council of Europe, 2018). These principles must guide funding allocation, human resource development, and anti-corruption measures. The future direction should move toward a “Smart Sport Governance” model using digitalization and data analytics for strategic decision-making.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic (MTSR SR) has significantly strengthened the institutional and strategic framework of national sports policy. By consolidating competencies previously dispersed across multiple governmental bodies, the creation of the ministry represents an important step toward more coherent governance and long-term planning in the sports sector. At the same time, the analysis presented in this study reveals a number of persistent systemic deficiencies that continue to limit the effectiveness and sustainability of sports development in Slovakia.

A key challenge remains the insufficient coordination among national, regional, and local levels of governance. Fragmented responsibilities and limited vertical cooperation weaken policy implementation and reduce the capacity to respond effectively to local needs. In parallel, the current model of sports financing is characterized by uneven distribution of resources and a lack of systematic evaluation of subsidy effectiveness, which undermines accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

The findings further highlight a low level of professionalization within sports organizations, particularly in managerial and administrative roles. The widespread reliance on voluntary leadership, combined with limited access to formal managerial education, constrains strategic planning, financial control, marketing activities, and the ability to attract diversified funding sources. These shortcomings are closely linked to broader governance challenges, including inconsistent application of transparency and ethical standards and limited utilization of digital tools.

Insufficient digitalization and weak interconnection of information systems, including the Sports Information System, further restrict the capacity for data-driven policy formulation and monitoring. Moreover, the limited integration of sports policy with related sectors such as public health, education, and tourism represents a missed opportunity to fully exploit the cross-sectoral potential of sport as a tool for societal development.

Building a modern, transparent, and participatory sports system in Slovakia therefore requires a comprehensive and coordinated reform approach. Aligning national sports policy with European standards of good governance, professionalization, and accountability is essential. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on leveraging sport's contribution to public health promotion, social inclusion, education, and economic development. Only through such an integrated and evidence-based strategy can sport fulfill its full potential as a public good and a driver of sustainable development in Slovak society.

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