

Experience exchange on the role of grassroots sport in personality and skills development

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Emphasising the role of grassroots sports in promoting social integration, reduction of inequality and developing skills for employability, the conference “Sport and Physical Activity for Development of the Human Capital” brought together 130 European Union (EU) leaders of sporting life, sports organisations and enthusiasts, all together from 29 European countries. Three thematic workshops – “Sport and Social Environment”, “Sport for the Quality of Life”, “Education and Learning through Sport” – were held at this conference, organised under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In her opening speech, the Latvian Minister for Education and Science, Ms Māriņa Seile, underlined the importance of both educational work with children and young people and urban development. “According to the UN estimates, the number of people living in cities will double in the next 30 years. For urban inhabitants, the main environment for physical activities will be the city, parks, bike trails, and freely available sports grounds. Therefore, the main challenge for town-planning of today is the development of an active, but also “green” city. A city that is open to all social groups, especially young people.”

When outlining the agenda of the European Commission for promoting grassroots sport, Mr Yves Le Lostecque, the Head of the Sport Unit at the European Commission, noted the opportunities offered to grassroots sport by Erasmus+ programme. On this year’s agenda, Mr Lostecque has planned the European Week of Sport in September 2015.

Mr Guntis Mačs, the Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Grassroots Sports Association, recognised the need for a small nation to assert itself more. Latvia can be proud of achievements within the professional sport in relation to the gross domestic product and population. However, it would not be possible without the tremendous work of parents, teachers, sponsors and supporters from day to day. Grassroots sports’ representatives hope for a national approach to developing this sector through provisions of a certain share in the national budget, which could be directed towards promoting grassroots sport.

At the workshops, participants discussed development of street sports and its role in the social integration, as well as importance of the urban environment in physical well-being. The importance of family in promoting physical activities and the invaluable role of volunteers, public sector, entrepreneurs and municipalities in developing sporting life was also noted. The conference recognised the grassroots sport as means of increasing social inclusion, decreasing inequality and developing skills that are important for employability. Discussions highlighted development of children and young people also through informal learning, fostering interest in physical activities also outside educational establishments.

Sports conference is a traditional presidency event, usually followed by the EU Sport Directors Meeting. Within the framework of the Latvian Presidency, the EU Sport Directors Meeting will take place tomorrow on 17 February to discuss results of the EU Sports Conference, the new World Anti-Doping Code of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the European Week of Sport.

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