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# **Floorball as a New Sport**

**Case Study: Bulgaria as a Floorball Destination from Insider's Point of View**

University of Jyväskylä  
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## ABSTRACT

Floorball is a relatively new but quickly growing sport. Together with its development and spreading its importance grows as well. However previously conducted research on floorball from its managerial point of view is rare, especially on an international scale. The present investigation makes an attempt to fill this gap in a holistic manner. It explores the research problem of finding the potentials of floorball as a sustainably successful sport – worldwide and in the case country, Bulgaria. For this purpose the study utilizes the tasks of collecting and systematizing existing relevant data, binding floorball to theoretical frameworks of contemporary science and observing its development level and current issues globally and locally. The research uses a qualitative, ethnographic approach to obtain its goals, and includes participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Data is analysed through a combination of qualitative analysis tools – thematic analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, visual data analysis, etc. The primary data has been gathered in Finland, as well as in Bulgaria and consists of observation of key events and interaction with key informants. The secondary data on the topic is quite limited, thus the utilized literature in the research includes not only academic, but also publicist sources. The results clearly imply the strong potential of the explored sport discipline, however they also indicate the risks on the way of fulfilling this potential – both at global and local level. The outcomes reveal the huge market and social power of floorball, but also a warning for the possible conflict between both. Extremely important for floorball in the future is the building of sustainable culture, transfer of know-how and equalizing the differences between the countries. Media and scientific attention are crucial factors for the further stages of development. The case study explores the conditions for the development of floorball in Bulgaria. Besides the global risks, the national development of the sport has to deal with some local factors like bureaucracy, difficult economic conditions, different participation and spectator culture, but, nevertheless, floorball also has some locally specific potentials like no competition of similar sports, strong place of sport in the national legislation and in the education system, as well as opportunities for sport tourism.

Key Words: floorball, development, globalization, marketing, Bulgaria

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper contains a research in the field of floorball, observed from the managerial point of view, and it is driven by an interest in the socio-economic and administrative aspects of the sport.

The title defines the path of the following research. *Floorball* is chosen as a subject because of its rapid and highly dynamic development, which creates a huge interest, and because it is relatively neglected discipline of academic research by now. During its 25 years of official existence floorball has developed from spontaneous recreational activity to one of the fastest growing sports. Nowadays it is of growing interest for sport administrators, sociologists and economists, because it carries potential benefits for each and every of these fields. That is the reason for this research to have a multidisciplinary sounding.

An academic reason for floorball to be researched is that developmental analysis may contribute to adding new dimensions to some of the currently researched concepts and contemporary phenomena, like for example (but not only) those presented in this paper, namely globalization, lateral marketing and Blue Ocean Strategy. Floorball offers an interesting and fresh example for the academic research of these issues, which could show these issues in new light or confirm even more their existing concepts. However the benefit of linking floorball to academic matters does not bring one-sided benefits for the academic field. From the other side floorball benefits from being carefully observed on academic level and this makes its development controlled, rational and reasonable rather than spontaneous and chaotic.

The existing gap between the lack of theoretical materials on the topic of floorball and its wide application in practice defines also the academic importance of this paper. Especially the field of marketing is widely accused to not possess the connection between academic work and practical issues and guidelines are given for the practitioners in the field to even ignore marketing academic research (November 2004). The current study aims to prove this claim wrong, at least for the case of floorball, where the theory of marketing is not only applicable in the practice, but it is needed for the sport to be developed in a rational way.

The study has some limitations. Thematically it focuses on the emergence and development of floorball as a globalization and a marketing phenomenon. Without a doubt floorball is of importance for many fields of sociology and economics, but not all of them are in researcher's competence and interest, neither had they fit to the time and resource constraints of the research, so they are left out for the moment. Geographically the focus is on *Bulgaria*, whereby an observation on the national development is done. The paper points out to some extent also at other countries, which are however used only as potential benchmarking examples for the development of floorball.

Floorball is defined as a *new sport* and this does not apply only to the case country, Bulgaria. However there, because the national federation has been established only in the winter of 2009 and the first team dates back to the autumn of 2008, still floorball is totally unpopular as a sport discipline and even as a term for majority of the population.

The chosen point of view is this *of the insiders* – the study is ethnographic, so the observation of the culture is made from the culture's point of view. This is valid mainly for the case study, but to wide extent also for the whole research.

The main goal of the work is to find out whether floorball has the potential to be sustainably successful, in Bulgaria and worldwide – for academic and practical reasons. On the way of facilitating this goal, the research goes through defining floorball in some socio-economical contexts and tracing its global history. This is done in order to reach and systematize the existing information on the topic – an issue of crucial importance especially for Bulgaria nowadays, in any field. At the same time it defines the place of Bulgaria on the map of global trends and development of floorball, helping for the processes in the country to be understood not only from inside (from the insiders point of view and for their benefit) but also from outside (insider's point of view making the country better known and understood).

The goal and the sub-tasks are accomplished through the research structure. The concept and methodology are explained in detail. The following chapter deals with the theoretical information on floorball and goes from “globally” general to “nationally” specific. The next part is the field research, containing all the first-hand findings and analysis of them. After that conclusions have been made and there is an attempt for them to be explained as strong and weak points, opportunities and risks. Also some

marketing models are used. The study follows a spiral rather than a linear way of construction, going back and forth between most important issues of floorball nowadays.

The research as a process and product is of a great importance for the researcher's professional growth and satisfies researcher's own curiosity in the subject. However there is a strong hope that the paper would be of interest and use for the academic field as well, whereby under academic field it is meant the University of Jyväskylä as a home institution of the research, as well as the National Sport Academy "Vassil Levski" and the University of Economics – Varna, as Bulgarian educational institutions concerned in the research. Sport managers, administrators and economists as practitioners might as well find some benefits by exploring the paper.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Theoretical standpoints of methodology

As an academic writing this research has a particular design, which however is not randomly picked, but is chosen after a serious consideration in order to fit the interests, purposes, as well as the possibilities of the researcher. This chapter contains a theoretical overview of the used methods, a scientific justification of the reasons why one method is preferred over another, while in the following few chapters the concrete design and conditions of the research are revealed.

In the planning of every research the basic consideration is between *qualitative* and *quantitative approaches* (Adams & Schvaneveldt 1991). Gratton and Jones (2010) give guidelines for the choice between both. If the research problem could be solved through numerical, directly measurable or easily convertible data and statistical analysis, quantitative approach can be used. Its name suggests that big quantities of data are used to reach representativeness of the results for the whole population, which is being studied. In contrary, qualitative research uses data, which is not statistically or numerically measurable, and aims at the qualities of feelings, thoughts, experiences, etc. by interpreting them. The quantity is not important, but rare experiences are. The authors indicate that qualitative research is increasing its importance within the field of sport studies, while in the past the quantitative approach was dominating in this field.

Some of the main characteristics of qualitative research are:

- ✓ inductivity
- ✓ non-numerical data and smaller samples/cases
- ✓ description, understanding and meaning as objectives;
- ✓ assumption for the social reality as a subjective experience;
- ✓ rich and subjective data;
- ✓ natural research location and flexible data collection (Gratton & Jones 2010).



According to the authors *ethnographic* design fits well to social researches in the field of sport. It uses a variety of methods and flexible, opportunistic data collection. It studies a group from group's own perspective by researcher's own involvement and becoming a part of this group. The goal is to understand the culture of and within the studied group and by using *holistic* perspective the researcher collects "whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research".

O'Reilly (2005) and Madden (2010) reveal more of the details of ethnographic approach, making it a distinctive and understandable method.

In contrary to quantitative design, in which first a *hypothesis* is set and it is being proven right or wrong through the findings (*deductive research*), an ethnographic research uses more open mind. According to the theorist, the researcher should start with as few preconceptions as possible, allowing theory to emerge from data (*inductive research*). The author underlines, that ethnography might be flexible, but it still has a research design, which starts with the idea of researcher's interest and the existence of the research problem, extracted from the literature reviewed.

The choices in an ethnographic research are dictated by theoretical information and practical limitations. The *literature review* is used as a preparation for going deeper into the researched topic. The generally accepted sources of literature are books, peer-reviewed journals, conference papers and internet resources (Gratton & Jones 2010), however sometimes such are not easy to be found. If the chosen topic is new or under-researched and there is a lack of concrete information, O'Reilly (2005) suggests that researcher should find a way to fit the topic to wider themes.

O'Reilly (2005) reminds that ethnography does not suggest a *linear approach* and the conducting of the study as well as the writing-up of the following report usually follow the way of a spiral (*continuous design*).

The field research should begin with general gathering of data for better understanding of the topic and then more and more specific details. Ethnographers rarely use sampling and case studies, because these methods suggest generalizing for a population of interest with limited access. Ethnographers are more interested in gaining specific experiences. (O'Reilly 2005; Madden 2010)

However Gratton and Jones (2010) consider *case study* and *ethnographic sampling* as a part of an ethnographic research, but having own features and issues. The choice of case is rarely random and more likely to be “purposive”, chosen to illustrate a particular situation. There are some considerations to be made when undertaking a case study within ethnography: should a typical case be chosen in order to generalize results and how “typical” is defined; should be two or more cases be chosen for the purpose of comparison; should an extreme or important case be chosen in order to illustrate particular theory or model?

From a big variety of sampling methods ethnography uses mostly the *opportunistic* sampling. That means, samples are selected as they arise, taking advantage of unexpected opportunities. (Gratton & Jones 2010)

O’Reilly (2005) reminds that usually ethnographers choose the participants in the research, which are difficult to access, but have some unique or special knowledge on the issue (*key informants*). *Key events* are also used – happenings relevant to the research, that might trigger a discussion on the investigated topic.

Because of the specificity of ethnographic approach, some *ethical* issues arise. The researcher has to make its choice about the observation being *covert* or *overt*. The first setting would suggest that researcher’s identity is not known to all participants, while by the second everyone is aware of the researcher’s goals. Covert approach is criticized for disrespecting the privacy and the choice of the participants, however the overt approach raises the doubts if participants act naturally by the presence of the researcher. (O’Reilly 2005).

An issue connected to these features of the study is the so called “*informed consent*”. That means each participant in the research should be informed in advance about the nature of the research and the way that their data will be used afterwards. Every subject should have the right to withdraw from the research or to remain anonymous. (Gratton & Jones 2010)

By definition ethnographic research suggests learning about people from their own perspective, asking them questions (interviewing) but also observing their behaviour.

This statement contains the main methods of this approach, namely participant observation and interview. (O'Reilly 2005)

*Participant observation* means that researcher becomes a part of the observed subculture in order to look closer to it. Access, time and language are the key issues of this method. First, to become a participant, researcher needs to gain *access* to the target group. Usually it is easy to get a permission, but difficult to become a real functional part of the group. A researcher should be aware of the possibility, that he might never get access to particular places, and should find other ways to obtain information. *Time* is a crucial issue, because it is needed in order for the researcher to adapt in the situation, to notice details, to build relationships, as well as for the other participants to start acting naturally. *Language* is an issue mainly in observation of foreign groups and the researcher should not only learn to communicate in the particular language, but also to understand and interpret the differences, indicated by dialects and slangs, terminology, and to learn ways to be polite or casual according to the occasion. (O'Reilly 2005)

Key elements of the participant observation are participating and observing. Participating means learning from own experience; researcher is involved in the construction of the social world for the purpose of understanding it better. Observing suggests learning from the behaviour of the others and it is important to find out what is really happening, despite what people say. (O'Reilly 2005)

The other substantial method within the ethnographic approach is the *interview*. Interview is a powerful tool for gaining richer data from smaller sample group (Tenenbaum & Driscoll 2005).

A qualitative interview is more than questioning and answering and often reactions, emotions and reflections occurring in the time of the interview are also taken into account. Interviewing takes place all the time during a participant observation, using every good opportunity. Interview could be *one-off* or consisting in *several visits*. (O'Reilly 2005)

Depending on the structure interviews are divided into several types:

- ✓ *structured interview* – a questionnaire read out by the researcher, who also notes the responses; in advantage to a questionnaire researcher is able to ask for clarification;
- ✓ *semi-structured interview* – there is a pre-decided set of questions, however researcher might ask additional questions to find out more information or to reorder the scheduled questions depending on the situation;
- ✓ *unstructured interview* – researcher has only a general idea of the topics to be covered and the interviewee leads the direction of the interview; additional questions occur in the situation
- ✓ *focus group* – it is not a individual interview, but rather a group of respondents and interaction between the respondents is important source of data. (Gratton & Jones 2010)

Ethnography uses mostly semi-structured and unstructured interviews, which might occur in the situation and have more feature of a natural conversation.

By interviews there is a risk that the respondent does not react fully naturally, that is why the provided data should be checked for *validity*. This might be done in several ways:

- ✓ *internal triangulation* – same data is obtained from the same person using different technique;
- ✓ *external triangulation* – comparing reports of various informants;
- ✓ *comparing reports with own observations*. (O’Railly 2005)

Besides participant observation and interviewing, ethnography uses also other methods. For ethnographers everything has the potential to be data. Often ethnographic tools are also *diaries*, *content analysis* and semiotics, analyses of *visual data* and other creative techniques. (O’Railly 2005)

The current study uses most of the discussed methods. It is a quantitative research, because its question hardly could be solved by using numerical data. Ethnographic

research is used for investigating the floorball subculture, as well as Bulgarian society and nation as an environment for floorball. The literature review reveals nearly all the existing information on the chosen topic, which is relatively new, and so floorball is connected also to more general phenomena. The research uses the rare for ethnography case study in order to draw the attention to the specific conditions in a single country developing the sport, however the country is investigated in a holistic manner, keeping the rule of ethnography. Part of the sampling is opportunistic, because the contacts have not been planned but occurred in the situation, however also key informants (specialists with unique knowledge or experience) and key events are used, for example WFC2010. Both key elements of ethnography are present – overt participant observation with informed consent and semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Typical ethnographic tools for the data analysis are used - content analysis, video and image analyses, however there are more qualitative analysis tools found as appropriate and applied – thematic, discourse analyses, hermeneutics, etc. This specific design is purpose-driven and leads the research into the wished direction. Following subchapters contain more of the design details.

## **2.2. Research question and tasks**

There are many sports, which appear as strong trends, but vanish in time due to weak sustainability strategy. The present research aims at finding out if floorball is more than such a trend, revealing its advantages and potentials, as well as the need for its existence. It views floorball as a phenomenon and looks for it in the bigger picture of trends and science. The formulation of the research question is:

*What are the potentials of floorball to become a sustainably successful sport, globally and in the specific national conditions in Bulgaria?*

Surely floorball is a successful sport today and for this are indicating the figures and numbers presenting rapid growth. Growth, however, cannot be maintained forever and it is important for the impressive figures of today to remain stable tomorrow.

When a new sport is born, no one asks the question for its potential of being successful, until it gets big enough to create attention and influence. This is also the case with floorball and the evidence for this fact is found in the lack of research done previously.

However the accomplishments of floorball nowadays, as well as the sport's ambitions, indicate that the time has come for this question to arise.

Indeed the formulation of the research question is general and it allows many different interpretations. It could not be answered ultimately through this research, but this research presents some of the important points of view. The researcher has started exploring the topic with an "open mind", inductively – the way one is advised to undertake an ethnographic research. However the answer of the question is being searched and found through several different research tasks, which are more specific.

*(1) To collect and systematize relevant data about the general development of floorball, which could be utilized as a basis for the following field research, since this has not been done so far.*

Indeed, the search for floorball data could be quite harsh and tricky, at least in English. Since the leaders of this sport are Finland and Sweden, followed by Czech Republic and Switzerland, no officially English-speaking country is a "professional" on the topic of floorball or interested enough in it, so the materials are also hard to find, does not matter if they are needed for academic, practical or just curiosity-feeding purposes. This is a serious problem for the accessibility of information and the information sharing in floorball. However, if the research follows the development of floorball, it should first find its roots. This particular task finds its solution in the literature review.

*(2) To bind floorball as a sport/product/phenomenon to some theoretical frameworks (sociology - globalization; marketing - blue ocean strategy, lateral marketing).*

This task is also being implemented already in the theoretical part of the research – the literature review, and later again in the results.

Binding floorball to theoretical frameworks proves it to be more than a practical field and actually makes it academically significant, that means also eligible to be a research topic and to spend research resources. The current study suggests that floorball could be a significant new field example for some important contemporary theoretical concepts, which could particularly benefit from its well investigated development in order to be better proven, understood and further developed. The theoretical frameworks are more

than just concepts. They are concepts of the reality, a mirror to the general trends going on.

Beside the academic justification, there is another reason for this task to be implemented. To find out if floorball is a sustainably successful sport, it is very important to look at the so called “bigger picture” and answer to the questions:

- Is the emergence of floorball due to some general development trends? – floorball as a product of other phenomena;
- Is floorball going in the same direction as the global trends or it opposes to them?

*(3) To observe the current development of floorball worldwide and evaluate its potential and implementation.*

One of the directions of the research is global. As mentioned, the research has particular limitations; it cannot be realistically conducted all around the world, but particularly in Finland and Bulgaria. The global view comes from some literature materials on national development examples, chosen by convenience (that means: there is not existing data about every country, which could be explored). It also comes from an event, which is an indicator for floorball’s global development, namely the Men’s World Championship of Floorball (WFC) and its particular edition in 2010. Observations from it are discussed in the results section.

*(4) To observe the early development of floorball in Bulgaria and evaluate its potential and implementation.*

A case study is conducted to find out the potential of floorball in particular country, which is at an early stage of adopting the sport. This task enforces the collection of empirical data – generally about the country and sport atmosphere there, as well as specifically about floorball structures, and it is directly connected to a part of the results section. The data is a product of researcher’s deep knowledge of Bulgarian environment gained as an insider in the national social and sport culture. In addition a purposive journey to Bulgaria took place in order for additional first-hand information to be obtained.

According to the concrete results there is a SWOT-analysis-based conclusion on the findings of the research. Further, marketing models are developed for the emergence and possible future of floorball.

### **2.3. Research design**

Previously there was a theoretical explanation of the methodological tools used in the present research. This chapter deals with the particular design of the research, giving more light to the details of the investigation.

#### **2.3.1. Description of data**

The research is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is being collected for the purposes of the empirical research and is being reported and analysed in the results section. It consists of results from the participant observation, the interviews with key informants and different aspects of the key events, analysed with the tools of ethnography. The research is based on qualitative data, assuming that qualitative research methods would have optimal results in the concrete case.

The secondary data is facilitated mainly in the literature review and has the role of theoretical basis for the following empirical research, as well as for the general understanding of floorball as a phenomenon. The secondary data collected and analysed for the research does not consist only of academic sources, but also of publicist information. In some cases data, which has a different initial purpose, is analysed for the purpose of the present research.

#### **2.3.2. Research process, data collection and analysis**

The research is based on participant observation and both unstructured and semi-structured interviews as parts of the ethnographic approach. It has used the advantage of researcher's knowledge and good orientation in sport structure both in Bulgaria (the country – object of research) and Finland (country significant for floorball).



The core of the field research is in interviews and a participant observation. In Bulgaria the researcher is a natural “insider”, so the need for gaining access during the participant observation has been decreased to a minimum, however not eliminated. The subculture of floorball is observed through access to a floorball team from the highest Finnish league (Happee Salibandy, Jyväskylä) and WFC 2010 in Helsinki, Finland.

The interviewees are representing professionals relevant for the floorball topic – coaches, researchers, club owners, marketers, authorities, both from Finland and Bulgaria. These are expert interviews, whereby a specific design or a question frame would only lead the conversation on the surface, while the less structured interviews point out new, interesting and unique points of view. Most of the initial interviews were followed by correspondence discussions (due to the geographical limitations personal contacts have not been possible every time).

The researcher has taken field notes and produced memos in order to transcribe and save the information collected. This is an old-fashioned, however effective and secure method and it has its advantages in comparison to modern digital recording tools.

The project has started with search and collection of secondary data already in the end of 2009. The theoretical part has been completed in the period June-September 2010. However there have been more time constraints for the empirical data collection. The interviews with the Bulgarian representatives were scheduled for October 2010, and December 2010 – February 2011 for the Finnish representatives, due to the specific dates of the floorball events attended. More information about the exact schedule of every interview and the informed consent is situated in Appendices 1 and 3. The research results have been completed by the end of March 2011.

The data is analysed by using qualitative tools. Data analysis has appeared as a process, taking place from the scheduling of interviews and observed events up to the stage of results reporting and writing-up. There are many different types of qualitative data analysis and the current research has utilized several tools, which fit best to the topic, the personal preferences and competences of the researcher, as well as to the available resources. Moreover, qualitative data analysis is connected to high extent of flexibility, since it is a very personal process with only few rigid rules and procedures. The

researcher has faced the dilemma of analysing the qualitative data by giving it quantitative meanings and making it statistically measurable or by highly qualitative, reflective types of analysis, and has eventually chosen the second approach as more appropriate to the pre-set goals of the research.

The opportunistic collection of data and the spiral writing-up of the research are already results of data analysis. The researcher has reflected upon the emerging themes, adapting and changing the methods when required. Some of the participants in the observation and some of the interviewees have raised new issues to the attention of the researcher, which have been analysed, found as relevant and according to them the general plan of the research and the schedule have been changed and re-designed. One example for that is the fact that originally the research has been directed only to the topic of the case study, however the interviews made in Bulgaria showed lacking information locally, so the perspective has been broadened up. Afterwards the attendance of the researcher at WFC 2010 has raised some new issues of floorball on a global level, which caused the scheduling of more interviews and the reflection on this particular event.

Furthermore thematic analysis is used in the study. The conducted interviews have been unstructured and most of the themes have not been brought up by the researcher, but have emerged in the course of the conversation. This is valid also for some of the findings of the observation. The usage of the highly inductive method of thematic analysis has let the themes to emerge from data and according to them the researcher has structured thematically the findings, as some theorists suggest (Tere 2006). For example, the interviewees were not approached as professionals in marketing or specialists in globalization issues, but after analysing their statements the statements themselves are categorized as related to the marketing, to the globalization or to other issues of floorball nowadays.

Moreover, discourse analysis has taken place for purely practical reasons – it is used to evaluate the reliability and validity of data, the extent of awareness of the interviewee on the discussed topic. The method is not an accent of the study and analysis of concrete elements of conversational performance are not to be found in the text, however it is used for the decision whether some information may or may not be included as outcome of the research.

Since the study is ethnographic, important place in the data analysis has the typical ethnographic method of content analysis. It can vary in many ways, but the concrete kind, used in the study is open qualitative analysis. Open analysis identifies the dominant messages and subjects within the interview; qualitative analysis focuses on the intentionality of these messages (Mc Keone 1995). This means, it is important for the current research to discover the presence or absence of significant messages rather than to count the mentioning of key words and phrases or the number of topics discussed. The method of content analysis has a link to hermeneutics, which in sociological context means interpretation and understanding of social events by analysing their meanings to the human participants and their culture. This is a very important point of view in the current research, which analyses the culture from the point of view of its insiders or participants. The marketing practice has adopted the term and tool of hermeneutics from sociology and uses it in qualitative studies, in which interviews with small number of people are closely analysed and interpreted (Wikipedia 2011). This is exactly the case with the current research. The content analysis and hermeneutics is a method, which takes place after the data is already collected. The researcher has not defined a list of content categories in advance, but has let the categories emerge from the data.

Last but not least, video and image analysis is used in the research. These tools could be accepted as forms of content analysis, however in this research content analysis refers more to textual data analysis, while video and image analysis are used for the visual contents. For example, video analysis is done on the presentations of different floorball equipment companies at a trade fair and an image analysis is done in regards to the logo of WFC 2010. The content analysis of textual and visual data in the current study merges with the other forms of qualitative data analysis, thus it could not be found in a pure form.

### **2.3.3. Conceptual model of the research**

Figure 1. presents the conceptual model of the present research. It is a brief explanation of what the research captures in its scope, but also it is an attempt to make the concept of floorball development understandable through a simplified figure.

Starting from the upper side, the figure shows the global processes, in which context floorball is being discussed in the paper – sociology and marketing. The arrows have no starting point, because the processes have started long before the viewed time period and only some of their trends are adequate to the time and the topic of the research (globalization, lateral marketing, Blue Ocean Strategy). The following arrow shows the floorball in time perspective – it has a beginning (somewhere in the late 1970's) and it is discussed until the point of completion of this paper (shortly after the end of 2010), even though that is not the end of the process of floorball development.

The next part of the figure visualizes the stages of evolution of floorball – introduction, development and professionalization. Introduction is meant as establishment of the sport in particular country. Development refers to the creation of floorball structure – teams, championships, governing bodies, papers, increasing popularity and participation etc. Professionalization means the contemporary attempt of floorball interest groups (players, coaches, managers, fans etc.) to make it an elite and professional sport with all characteristics referring to that.

Different countries have adopted floorball in different periods, as shown on the figure. And the earlier they did, the more time they had to distinguish the stages. In contrary, a country like Bulgaria, which enters the floorball world nowadays, has to deal with the issues of introduction and development in the same time, and meanwhile it also has to find its way in the global competition of professionals. That makes all the processes more complicated and interconnected.

On the bottom of the picture the national development is shown, which contains national, local and grassroots level. This is how the sport is structured in most of the countries, where it exists. The focus country of this particular research is Bulgaria, however every other country developing floorball could be placed in this conceptual model.

There are several reasons why Bulgaria as a focus country is presented on the bottom of the picture and why it is a subject of a case study and not of the whole paper. Firstly, this position is determined by the amount of specific and relevant information on the topic - or its lack in some cases, which is discussed further again. Secondly, floorball does not have enough of national importance in Bulgaria in order to be a topic of a

separate research. However, as mentioned, the general information is needed to be applied “in” Bulgaria (when developing floorball) and “for” Bulgaria (to be understood and discussed as a floorball country).

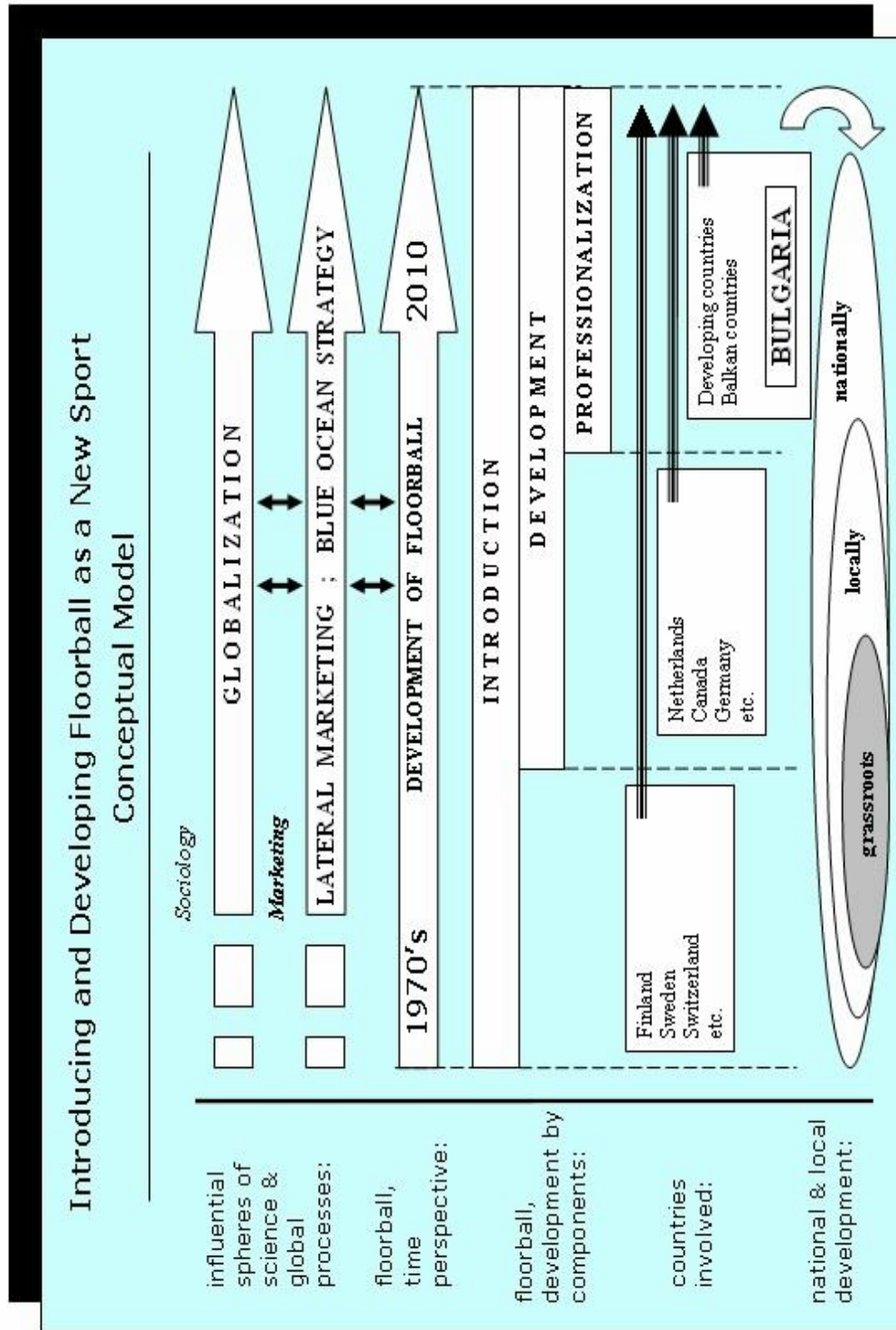


Figure 1. Introducing and developing floorball as a new sport – conceptual model (own figure)

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of floorball is relatively new and as such it has not been researched in depth. There are several articles reviewing coaching, psychological or biomechanical issues, but barely there is information published about floorball from the point of view of sport management – sport sociology, planning and marketing. However, an effort is done in this paper for collecting of relevant information, so that a standpoint for the following empirical research is being created.

Before reviewing the definition, history and current condition of floorball, this project will go through the concept of globalization in the field of sport, as well as some contemporary marketing theories, aiming at binding the idea of floorball to the existing theoretical concepts.

#### **3.1. Floorball, sport and globalization**

Floorball perfectly fits to the contemporary trend of globalization – it is born in and from this era and to some extent it could be seen as serving to its purposes. To understand this connection, there is a need for specifying the dimensions of globalization in sport.

According to leading scholars in the field of globalization in sport (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007), globalization is a main theme of contemporary times, including the academic work, but sport has long been underestimated and under-explored field. They insist on the powerful role of sports in social and cultural change nowadays and its high social scientific value.

The authors track back the globalization of sport to 1980's when it has been spreading by the routes of colonialism trade. As in many other fields, globalization in sport follows the trends of Westernization and Americanization. It is also evident in the organization of mega-events like the Olympics or different World Cups, which are often being used in favour of socio-political issues, remind the scholars. A negative example are the boycotts on Olympic games, which have happened several times, but were most significant in Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984 (Wood 2010). A positive example is

the Olympics as a tool promoting human rights and tolerance (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007).

Besides the political aspect, sport is also seen in the economical aspect of globalization. Stuart (2009) admits that sport has lost its primary playful nature and has turned to a media show and a successful business field. Eriksen (2009) looks at sport from the same perspective as at every other cultural product and identifies the most important features that it has to contain in order to be successfully marketed on global scene, namely “little culturally specific knowledge”, presence of “emotional, sensory or intellectual appeal” and transitional character in terms of borders and media. In addition, for him the offered product is successful if it is cheap and it brings immediate satisfaction; that is why he compares football to a “hamburger” and speed skating to “a Swedish fish meatball”.

And while Western countries are dominating in that game, Eastern European countries are not able to respond, when going through difficult socio-political changes. In the book “European Cultures in Sport: Examining the nations and regions” (Riordan & Cantelon 2000, 89-102) the nature of sport in post-socialist part of Europe is being discussed. The authors remind that in communism times sport was used as a tool for achieving of political goals - for opposition to the West and capitalism, for nation building inside and international prestige outside, as well as for utilitarian purposes – promotion of physical culture, hygiene and health among the workers-based nations. It was supposed to prevent anti-social behaviour as consumption of alcohol, prostitution and religious belonging and compared to the same field in Western countries it emancipated women earlier (as a form of competition to the West). Mostly discussed issue from that time is the usage of doping, especially by East German athletes. However authors argue that this is the only reason for the remarkable sport success of the Eastern Bloc by that time, introducing the fact that the sport’s program used there was a well planned one and it included systematic talent selection, high proficiency in coaching and a huge voluntary force.

Nowadays, after the fall of the communism in that region, the authors visualize sport as a hybrid of the worst features of both Eastern and Western worlds - full of bureaucracy and corruption, in need for development aid together with the third world countries, a birth place of well-trained but emigrating athletes, for which material survival is more important than national pride.

Floorball is a relatively new sport, but in the same time it is a powerful and unstoppable trend. Its features – light and cheap equipment, easy rules, spectacular enjoyment of game's high speed, low facility requirements – directly apply it to the process of globalization. Another evidence for that fact is that just in 25 years floorball has involved more than 50 countries and it is spread over all of the continents, with expectations in 10 more years to become a part of the biggest globalization factor of sport, namely the Olympics (IFF 2010).

Sociologists compare the sport to other kinds of modern leisure like digital photography and in this parallel they find its phenomenal potential for recruitment of enthusiasts. In contrast to digital photography, which involves a variety of high-tech tools to support its activities, floorball requires minimum equipment (however not less high-tech designed). Another characteristic of floorball is the need of social environment – one who wants to play needs some fellow players, whilst digital photography is rather individual activity. Thus floorball is defined as “social way of having fun” and “socially rewarding” activity. Moreover floorball integrates various levels and forms – it is a game for children and adults, played in school or at the workplace, in a relaxed or achievement-oriented mode. It focuses on gender equality, even though male participants are slightly dominating. Floorball enthusiasts usually shift from another sport – handball, football, ice hockey – once tried floorball they realize its easy but dynamic nature and get recruited. However in all the levels of floorball social network is a key factor for recruitment of enthusiasts into the game. (Shove & Pantzar & Hand 2007; Kotro & Pantzar 2005)

Floorball could be characterized by all the main aspects of globalization: socio-cultural, political and economical. In socio-cultural matters the sport could be used as a powerful tool for social inclusion and promotion of tolerance, since it has proven to be almost equally accessible to both men and women, different social classes and even handicapped people. In political aspect it could attract some development aid to less developed countries or to cause increased international know-how exchange and collaboration. Of course the political significance of floorball would drastically increase, if the sport gets included to the Olympic Program. (Huoponen 2009) In economic dimensions the floorball issue is a little bit more complicated, since as a new



sport it should be not just marketed but well marketed and it has to deal with the current harsh global economic conditions and high-level of competition.

After highlighting the features of globalization era, it would be easier to find evidence of its connection to floorball. In order to clarify the character of the game, this paper goes through the development of floorball since the very beginning and up to present time.

### **3.2. Floorball and marketing**

First perspective, that floorball can be seen from, is as a sport. More deeply there is also the perspective of floorball as a social phenomenon, for example the suggested globalization point of view. However there is also the possibility of floorball to be seen as a market product, a commodity. The general economic theory would suggest many points of view within this perspective, but this could be a topic for a separate research, so let's concentrate only on marketing. Immediately there are two questions arising: How is this product created? How was it invented?

The theories of emergence of floorball are discussed later, but for now we accept this one, which considers the market reason for emergence of floorball. In that case floorball matches exactly the current trends in marketing and more concretely it could be connected with the concept of Lateral Marketing and the Blue Ocean Strategy.

#### **3.2.1. Floorball and Lateral Marketing**

Lateral Marketing relates to the innovation in marketing and it is a concept developed by Kotler and Trias de Bes (2003).

Traditional marketing creates products for the market existing "today". Market share is being won through segmentation of the market, but in overly fragmented market everyone can get only a small share. Lateral marketing suggests innovation of some aspect of the product instead. Instead of fighting over an ever decreasing fragment of a market, by transforming a product enough to make it suitable to satisfy new or different needs, it is possible to create a new market.

As an example, when cereal bars were launched, they were a novelty, and were created by combining the idea of cereals, a healthy breakfast food, with the chocolate bar, a not so healthy snack to create a new, healthy snack. There are many examples of a product that created a new category, such as walkmans and iPods, which made music portable, or the Barbie doll, which was a doll that actually looked like a woman, rather than a baby, as most dolls had been up until that point.

In the same way floorball is a “hybrid” between hockey and football, even maybe handball. The game, as well as the equipment and the facility have some of the traditional features of each of the mentioned sports but in the same time something new and unconventional. So a new market is created and that makes floorball a sport with high potential, fast growth and high market value.

### 3.2.2. Floorball and the Blue Ocean Strategy

Blue Ocean Strategy carries the idea of lateral marketing but goes even further, suggesting more bold marketing innovations. The authors Kim and Mauborgne (2005) divide the markets on red and blue ones.

The red ocean is the market existing today. It is red because it's bloody – the competitors are seen as sharks in a cruel fight over a market share. Boundaries of the market are defined and accepted, competitive rules of the “game” are known, and market space is crowded. Consequently, prospects for profits and growth are reduced.

The blue oceans are the industries not yet existing by today. Their market space is unknown and untainted by competition. Demand is “created” rather than “fought over”. The opportunities for growth are profitable and rapid. Competition is irrelevant because rules of the game are waiting to be set.



Figure 2. From a red ocean to a blue one (The Management Guru 2010)

The main aspect of the strategy is value innovation, accomplished by the formula “create+eliminate+raise+reduce”, which refers to some of the aspects of an existing product. It is a critique to Porter’s perception of a successful business, which should be either low-cost or niche-player. Instead the value is found in between.

Table 1. Red and blue ocean strategy (Value based management 2011)

<a href="http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net">www.valuebasedmanagement.net</a>	
<b>Red Ocean and Blue Ocean Strategy</b>	
<b>Red Ocean Strategy</b>	<b>Blue Ocean Strategy</b>
<p>Compete in existing market space.</p> <p>Beat the competition.</p> <p>Exploit existing demand.</p> <p>Make the value/cost trade-off.</p> <p>Align the whole system of a company’s activities with its strategic choice of differentiation or low cost.</p>	<p>Create uncontested market space.</p> <p>Make the competition irrelevant.</p> <p>Create and capture new demand.</p> <p>Break the value/cost trade-off.</p> <p>Align the whole system of a company’s activities in pursuit of differentiation and low cost.</p>

The authors underline the fact that the strategy is based on 15 years of research, but in the same time on 150 successful moves from 120 years of business history in Europe, the United States and Asia. Various field examples are examined, extracted from “Harvard Business Review” articles as well as academic articles and drawing the patterns of the concept, which have been further tested and applied in collaboration with companies. (Kim & Mauborgne 2005)

The most famous example of Blue Ocean found is Cirque du Soleil, which is neither an opera, or ballet, or circus, but rather something in between. One example from the sport field is in the golf equipment industry, which competes to win a greater share of existing golf customers. Callaway Golf creates "Big Bertha", a golf club with a large head that attracted new customers to golf that had been frustrated by the difficulty of hitting the ball. The authors also mention snowboard industry as one of those, which haven’t existed only 30 years back in time. (Kim & Mauborgne 2005)

And the same with floorball: compared to ice hockey (and other hockey games) it has lighter equipment, easier rules, increased dynamics, etc. Many differences could be found, as well as many similarities, but as a result a new market is created, which once again has a great potential.

### **3.3. Emergence of floorball**

Floorball is a new-born sport compared to other team sports. However its emergence is not easy to be tracked back. The International Floorball Federation (IFF) promotes only its own history, beginning with its foundation in Huskvarna, Sweden in 1986, but not the history of the sport itself (IFF 2010).

Some sources point out Sweden as the country of origin of floorball (Hickok Sports 2009; Wikipedia 2010). According to them it has been developed as a school game for children during the 1960's and then was adopted in Sala, Sweden, from older age groups, which modified its parameters according to the needs of adult players – bigger field, bigger goal and presence of a goalkeeper (Hickok Sports 2009). This theory alternates to defining floorball as “something that was played for fun” and a pre-season training for bandy clubs, starting from Gothenburg, Sweden (Wikipedia 2010). Other authors (Su 2005) see too many similarities of the sport with floor hockey, which developed from the basic rules of ice hockey in the 1950's on the territory of USA and was firstly introduced to Europe as a school game in the Netherlands during the 1960's. It is being explained that the US stick manufacturer Cosom Corporation marketed lighter plastic sticks as a product for floor hockey playing children, samples of which got to a handball club in Sweden. The result was that players liked more the new game and started playing it instead of handball. Intentional or not, that was self-evident market test and its positive result drove some Swedish entrepreneurs to joint-venture with the US company and to the following promotion of the game through whole Sweden and the neighbouring countries.

While the first version views the emergence of floorball as driven by sport planning issues (school game, pre-season training), the second one gives more marketing arguments for its development (marketed product). However in both of them there is a

strong evidence for the social power of floorball and this will be discussed further in the research.

### **3.4. Development of floorball**

The game developed apace – first club was founded in 1979 (in Sala, Sweden), first Swedish national championship was held in 1980 (with 18 teams), first international match dates back to 1985 (Sweden-Finland), and eventually in 1986 the IFF was founded (Hickok Sports 2009). Finnish players recall of the first Finnish national championship in 1983 as of a “joke tournament” for university students and even admit that they were drinking beer while playing (Shove & Pantzar & Hand 2007).

To this time each country had different name of the game – “innebandy” in Sweden, “salibandy” in Finland, “unihockey” in Switzerland. It has been decided that the internationally recognized name of the game will be “floorball”. Apparently rules were also differing to some extent, so they got standardized by the IFF. (Su 2005) Some sociologists however remind that standardization and formalization of the game and the establishment of rules actually increase its complexity and might alienate some segments of previously loyal enthusiasts (Shove & Pantzar & Hand 2007).

For ten years 18 national associations became members of IFF, nowadays, in 2010, they are already 51 (ordinary and provisional members). Thirteen other national associations develop floorball, but are not yet members of IFF. Floorball exists already on all continents and attracts people from very different cultures. (IFF 2010) The Finnish Floorball Federation (FFF) reports a membership annual growth with a rate of 30-40% (Shove & Pantzar & Hand 2007).

First World Floorball Championship was held in 1996 and it already gathered more than 15 000 spectators on the final match, which witnesses for the big market potential of the game. Starting from this point, World Championship is being organized every year – Men’s World Floorball Championships every even year and Women’s World Floorball Championships every odd year. In addition to that there are The Men's under-19 World Floorball Championships (every odd year), The Women's under-19 World Floorball Championships (every even year) and World University Floorball Championships (both

for men and women; every 2 years). On European level there is EuroFloorball Cup, every two years. (IFF 2010)

Started as the school “innebandy” in Sweden (Hickok Sports 2009) and recreational activity “sähly” in Finland (Huoponen 2009), floorball already has global dimensions and professional character. There are 3983 clubs and nearly 300 000 registered players from the 51 member associations of IFF (IFF 2010). The recreational participators around the world are over a million (Huoponen 2009). There are professional leagues, such as Salibandyliiga in Finland (Salibandyliiga 2010) and Svenska Superligan in Sweden (Svenska Superligan 2010).

Floorball as it is known today is shaped by “pioneering players” through whom the game has been developed to the dimensions of an elite sport requiring advanced skills and greater commitment. However the recreational forms of floorball remain popular and according to scholars formal and informal floorball activities are interdependent, supporting the existence of each. (Shove & Pantzar & Hand 2007)

### **3.5. Recognition of the sport**

In present times floorball is not only striving for expansion, but also for recognition. IFF has a provisional membership of the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) since 2000. IFF works in close cooperation with the International University Sports Federation (FISU). Since December 2008 IFF is a provisional member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). (IFF 2010) In January 2009 IFF received recognition from Special Olympics (Wikipedia 2010).

Recognition is also crucial to be accomplished on national level – through the national floorball federations becoming members of the National Olympic Committees, especially in countries, where the OC plays an important role in defining the national sport environment and regulations, for example Italy (Borgogni 2010) or some Eastern European countries (Huoponen 2009).

Floorball is trying to establish its own and distinguishable identity. The hopes are also for gaining importance and becoming an elite sport through getting into the Olympics. That would be possible after the reform of Olympic programme, by which three rotating

sports will be added to the list of permanent sports, that means – at earliest in the 2016 games (Huoponen 2009). Realistic is to be assumed that this could happen on the games in 2020, especially if to this time IFF has over 100 active members (Huoponen 2009) and/or the Olympics are hosted by a floorball country (Dudli 2009). The Special Olympics, competitions for people with intellectual disabilities, could add floorball into its programme presumably in 2013 (Wikipedia 2010). More short-term objective for floorball is to participate in 2013 Universiade and 2015 World Games, which would attract more media attention on the sport and in that sense also potential sponsorships (Huoponen 2009).

### **3.6. National examples**

Though floorball is wide-spread game nowadays, different countries are at different stages of development of the sport and compared to most of the team sports this development stages are still very early. Even in the Nordic countries, where floorball is developed the most, there are still some uncertainties and instabilities, especially in the media and financing aspects. Following paragraphs deal with examples of floorball from different parts of the world.

#### **3.6.1. Finland**

In his article “Floorball: Aiming for the Top” Markku Huoponen makes an overview of floorball’s development in Finland (Huoponen 2009).

The author indicates floorball as the ball game taking third place in the participatory rates in Finland nowadays. He points out as most likely reasons the easy concept of the game, the light and affordable equipment, the spectacular speed and the social spirit of the sport. According to the author the huge number of players in Finland, 40 000 licensed and about 400 000 for-fun players, is based on traditions in similar disciplines, like the recreational student sport “säihly”. Floorball is preferable physical activity among students, corporate and societal clubs and statistics build an image of the average floorball player as “a man a bit over 20 from Southern Finland”. 85% of the players appear to be of male gender, but growth potential is considered in the female sector and among the lower age groups.

The author recognizes the lack of facilities as one of the biggest problems, which floorball has overcome in the line of its development. One of the obstacles has been in the banning of floorball clubs from sport halls with the assumption that sticks would damage the flooring (as it has often happened in floor hockey). The other difficulty has been in finding rinks responding to the requirements 20x40m, as the fields of more common team sports appear to be much smaller. Facility problems have been solved thanks to the otherwise destroying phenomenon of 1990's recession, when abandoned industrial halls were assimilated by clubs and private businesses on the benefits of floorball.

Huoponen points out two opposing attitudes toward floorball nowadays. The first one is the common public opinion, which still assesses floorball as recreational activity. The other one, however, is of players and other groups involved in floorball, which are willing to invest in the sport as much as it is needed to make it professional and "elite".

The objectives of floorball are for Olympics participation, financial and participatory growth. Another trend observed by the author is related to striving for media attention. Wider media coverage would bring more public awareness, better image of the sport and of the single players – as it has happened after the victory of Finland in the World Floorball Championships 2008. (Huoponen 2009)

The article is published recently and it accomplishes a good overview of Finnish floorball in time and in different aspects of interest. It could be used as an example to clarify the development of floorball in all of the countries, which have adopted the sport at earliest stage.

### **3.6.2. Australia**

A good example of internationalization of floorball is described in the article "Floorball's Penetration of Australia: Rethinking the Nexus of Globalisation and Marketing" (Lai 1999).

The research is conducted in order to make clear the process of development of floorball as a new sport in Australia, however not from the sociological point of view, but from the standpoint of marketing and the meaning of globalization. The author Fong-Yi Lai



takes the example of floorball as a penetrating product, which does not belong to the American culture, mostly seen as dominant and imperialistic.

The mix-designed research reveals commercial organizations in the face of sport equipment providers and distributors as a main force in the development of floorball in Australia, although actually first clubs have been founded by Scandinavian students there. The author explains the structure of the sport and the historical line of development, as well as he points out the participation and spectators rates, compared to the popularity of the sport in Europe. The study agrees on the fact, that floorball has had good prerequisites for development because of the outdoor hockey tradition in the country, as well as the unpopularity of the same for primary schools because of various injury possibilities. In that case floorball is seen as a good marketing modification of an already existing need. The author indicates the lack of coordination between the factors of development for floorball in Australia as a problem area, which causes irrational allocation of resources and tension.

After a short summary the author makes an overview of existing studies on globalization, brightening the definition and the key aspects. Then it has been discussed about the application of globalization in sport. After this introduction part the author makes clear the research design used, which is based on quantitative methods, which include observation and semi-structured interviews. The study reveals the cultural background and prerequisites of floorball development in Australia and the factors for development of the sport, which are mainly commercial organizations (sellers and distributors of sport equipment) on one hand and cultural exchange (Scandinavian students) on the other hand. The weak points of the developmental line of floorball have been mentioned as well.

Although the research has been conducted quite long ago, it still refers on currently important topics. Well structured and descriptive, it could be utilized as a guideline for rationalizing of the development process of floorball in other places. Despite of the need for more concrete marketing data, the study reveals the aspects of floorball development in managerial instead of pure sociological point of view.

### 3.6.3. Germany

Germany is one of the countries, which adopted floorball at quite early stage – Deutscher Unihockey Bund DUB (German Floorball Federation) has been established in 1992 and since 1994 it is a member of IFF. However floorball development in Germany does not follow the same fast pace as in the Nordic countries – after 15 years the existing teams are around 100 and the number of licensed players – a little bit over 5000. (World Floorball News 2009)

Floorball in Germany is far away from professionalization and one of the reasons is doubtlessly the lack of information. In an interview for the local newspaper “Swäbishes Tagblatt Tübingen” the floorball coach Andreas Kappler introduces the sport to the wide public and explains how he develops it in university conditions. The article is called “Floorball: A new sport trend established at the University of Tübingen”, published in the beginning of 2010, and it observes a floorball training at the university. (Kappler 2010)

The journalist makes a short introduction of the basic parameters of floorball as a game, which means that the sport is not yet so popular among the German nation. The coach clarifies the term “floorball” by pointing out that it defines the same, what “unihockey” does. He admits that old term was often leading to confusion and that is why the international one is preferable nowadays. However, in his opinion “universal” is a good description of the sport’s character, which lets everyone play anywhere due to its simple rules and light equipment. According to him floorball is often preferred to ice hockey because of the lack of body contact and rough stick strokes.

The trainer, who has experience in coaching the women’s national team of Switzerland, adds that floorball is one of the few games, which do not leave women out of the field – totally the opposite – it fully integrates them. After a successful career as a player, since 2005 he is passionately involved in organizing the sport at university level, because he sees in that his personal contribution to the successful popularization of the game. He thinks that with its light features floorball is very suitable and attractive for school’s sport class, for students and also for teachers. The article gives a very good example how the sport is being developed from individual point of view. (World Floorball News 2009)

Despite the fact that Germany is not yet a superpower in floorball, the sport is being actively developed. Figure 3. reveals the growth in member clubs for the German Floorball Federation.



Figure 3. Member development 1992-2010 (Floorball Germany 2011)

### 3.6.4. Canada

Canada is a powerful ice hockey country, but floorball is still searching for its place among the hockey-like sports practiced there. In an interview, given for World Floorball News, Blair Zimmermann, member of the National Floorball Championship committee of Canada, explains his expectations and vision for the development of the sport in his country. (Dudli 2009)

Firstly he makes clear the structure of Canadian National Championship. Unlike other countries it is not based on a club level but on provincial teams (men's and women's) with selected players. Nowadays the participating provinces are Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. He sees big benefit for Canada's floorball development in building international "floorball friendships". The professional considers a huge potential of the sport growth if the national hockey tradition is being applied – if the game is being introduced to potential hockey players and if there is enough structure created to keep their interest. At the same time floorball could be used within hockey –

as off-ice training. He hypothesizes that if this effort is being made, in a generation, or about 10 years from now, Canada would be a competitor to the most powerful Scandinavian teams.

Although floorball is still in early stage in Canada, Zimmermann reports increased interest, especially in schools, where the sport has gained already one of the top places in terms of participation. According to him exactly work with youngsters is the successful path of building up floorball tradition. Sport should be developed up from the grassroots level – where school clubs compete against each other, further communities against communities and so on to the national level. However he admits that funding in floorball is not enough to involve hired personnel and, voluntary based, the sport is growing slowly.

Canadian specialist visualizes the National Championships as a promotional tool for floorball through spectacular events and with the help of media. According to him Canadian floorball target group is mainly the youth, but big potential is also seen in organizing floorball activities for children and parents together. He denies the existence of competition of floorball with similar games, such as hockey or lacrosse, moreover he thinks it is well filling an existing need gap for similar game “with a little more sportsmanship”. (Dudli 2009)

The biggest obstacles for floorball Zimmermann finds in the lack of qualified teachers and the lack of facilities. According to his statement schools have been provided the needed equipment, but there is not enough know-how for leading floorball classes. In addition clubs have faced the same facility problem as in Finland, suffering under the bad reputation of floor hockey.

As a conclusion Zimmermann confesses his hopes for Canada soon hosting a World Floorball Championship and for the floorball’s future adoption as an Olympic discipline. The development of floorball in Canada is very important since the sport is mainly concentrated in Europe and the real intrigue, which could cause a big interest growth in terms of participation and viewing, is in creating a powerful floorball opponent outside Europe. (Dudli 2009)

### **3.6.5. Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, where games similar to floorball have been introduced in schools long before floorball has been officially established as a sport, there is a big effort being made for professionalization of the game. Instead of statistical or publicist data, a project paper from University of Amsterdam will be brought as an evidence. It is called “Floorball A new, fast and upcoming sport” and it consists of guidelines for professional development of the sport. (Hermans & Nieboer & Pouw & Worries 2008)

Although it is not directed to sport managers or researchers, but to the parties directly involved (players, coaches and physiotherapists), it is of interest for this research as an example for development material. In the introduction of the paper there is a clear statement of readiness of the Dutch national team to reach floorball’s highest competition levels, catching up with Northern and Eastern Europe. The research conducted by Hermans et al has resulted two products – the mentioned report of recommendations and a website ([www.iamfloorball.com](http://www.iamfloorball.com)) for exchange of floorball expertise. The project has been done in close collaboration with Dutch national team, coaches, physiotherapists, as well as with the help of numerous European players.

Such initiatives are of big importance for the development of the sport, on national and international level, since in its 25 years of existence floorball has remained mainly a practically directed, informal discipline. Nearly the only development papers created are those initiated by IFF (IFF 2010). Though for catching up with the big team sports floorball needs a theoretical basis to be created as well. (Hermans & Nieboer & Pouw & Worries 2008)

### **3.6.6. “Floorball for All”**

“Floorball for All” is a project for floorball development in third world countries, conducted by a club especially organized for this aim (Unihockey für Strassenkinder 2009). It has the challenging task to integrate socially children from developing countries with the means of floorball, keeping them away from the social dangers in their everyday environment and improving their quality of life.

The organization carries out projects for recruiting of the needed personnel, providing materials and equipment, as well as organizing the clubs and tournaments on place. According to the statement of the club, the funding is directed to trusted partners at grassroots level and “no room is left for bureaucracy or corruption”. The expenses are covered by donations and sponsoring and the materials are available for free thanks to the charity acts of companies, clubs and individuals. The know-how is generously provided by the Swiss Floorball Federation (SUHV). The administration of the club is also situated in Switzerland.

The target countries by now are Benin, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, China, Djibouti, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Romania and Ukraine (Figure 4). In some of them there are already several projects implemented and in some others the work has just started. Some of the countries are already members of IFF, but for those, which have not yet joined the floorball world, this kind of project would introduce the game and probably initiate further action and development. In that case floorball could turn from a tool for accomplishment of social aims to aim itself.

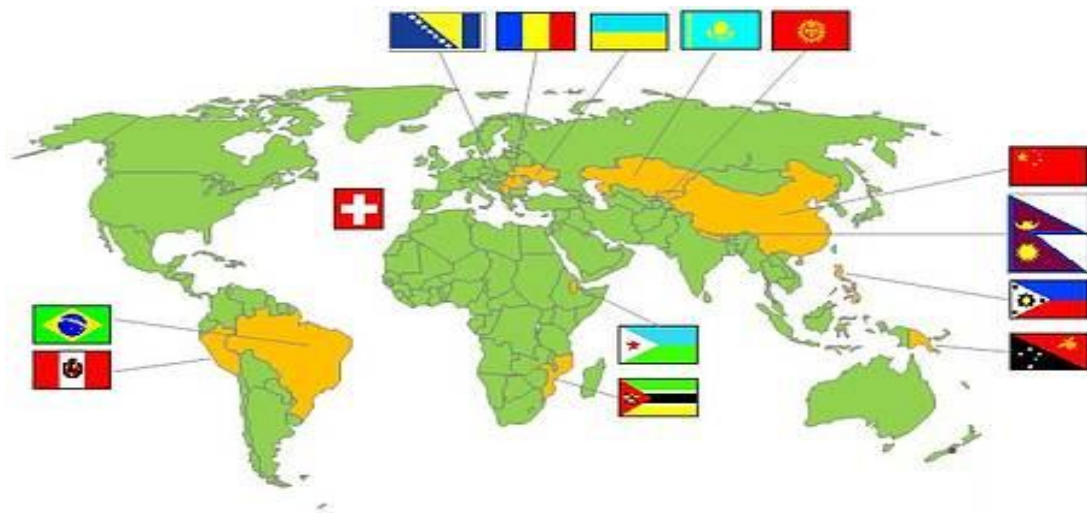


Figure 4. Countries in which “Floorball for All” operates currently (Unihockey für Strassenkinder 2011)

The discussed organization is not the only development project involving floorball. Another example is the Finnish NGO LIIKE, which conducts projects involving different sports, one of which is floorball. While “Floorball for All” focuses on the social integration through sport, LIIKE’s accent is more on the increasing of physical activeness and physical health for improvement of living standard. The current destination of the organization’s efforts is Tanzania. (LIIKE 2011)

### **3.7. Beach volleyball - an interesting development parallel**

In order to understand floorball’s development by now, as well as to predict its future directions, comparisons to other relatively new sports might be appropriate. Since sports like football have created its tradition for centuries, but did not have the opportunities given by the globalization era to spread worldwide rapidly, it would be hard in many ways to take such an example and compare it to the discussed discipline. The current research explores the parallel of floorball with beach volleyball, which appears to have interesting development similarities.

Tomova et al explore the history of beach volleyball in their research report “Beach volleyball as a part of innovations in the methodology of contemporary sport” (Tomova & Yordanov & Georgiev 2001). According to the authors one of the preconditions for the validation of a sport is its attractiveness and beach volleyball has this advantage. The sport accepted as a variety of volleyball in fact has its own parallel development and grows as a separate sport.

The historical overview of the report tracks back the roots of beach volleyball to the 1920’s and the beaches of Hawaii and Santa Monica, California. During the 1950’s beach volleyball becomes a lifestyle in California, being pleasantly associated with beach, sun and modern music.

First competitions are organized at that time on the beaches of California. In the 1980’s beach volleyball reaches an international level, spreading around Brazil, USA, Italy, Japan, etc. The International Volleyball Federation includes the game in its sport calendar and in 1987 takes place the first World Championship in beach volleyball, in Ipanema Beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the 1990’s already 95 national federations are developing beach volleyball actively.

On 27.09.1994 at a session of IOC the sport is included in the programme of the Olympics. 24 men's teams and 18 women's teams are competing for the first time for the Olympic gold in Atlanta 1996. Once become an Olympic discipline, beach volleyball develops rapidly. At the time of the report in 2001 over 150 volleyball federations are involved in organization of beach volleyball. With the growth of beach volleyball's importance also the requirements for the events' organizers grow – in terms of financing, venues, security, etc.

Floorball is even newer compared to beach volleyball, but this fact only increases the speed of all development processes, as it seems. However there are obvious similarities between the sports. Floorball as well has emerged as a spontaneous recreational activity and has grown to internationally important discipline. It is not yet an Olympic discipline, however it has the ambitions to become such. With the successful example of beach volleyball these ambitions and hopes for floorball are fully justified. Floorball is also famous with its attractiveness, as well as beach volleyball.

Floorball is a hockey-derived sport in the same manner as beach volleyball is a volleyball-derived discipline. However floorball has characteristic of being independently structured, having its own international and national federations. In most of the countries where the sport exists the term for floorball is not connected to the term "hockey", despite the functional similarities between the sports. Exception make the German speaking countries, where the term for floorball is "unihockey", however they are also in transition to using the international term.



## 4. RESULTS

The research has reached particular results and they are presented in the current chapter. It follows similar logic to this used for the literature review. The analysis goes through discussion of floorball as a globalization phenomenon and a marketing phenomenon. Further some contemporary issues of floorball development are raised, which have occurred in the research process. After that the research presents the topic about the introduction of floorball in Bulgaria and the results of the case study are presented. The results section, which includes statements from the conducted interviews and analyses of researcher's observation, answers to the research question by building a picture out of different important parts, similarly to a puzzle.

### **4.1. Evidence of the connection between floorball and globalization**

For the purposes of this research interesting observation on the specific connection between floorball and globalization are made. The term globalization could be used in narrow and wide context.

#### ***Narrow context of globalization***

The narrow context refers to the spreading of the sport globally. Floorball development could be examined through three stages, as far as globalization is concerned: emergence, internationalization and globalization of the sport.

Floorball has *emerged* in Sweden during the 1980's. Despite the facts of where the idea came from, where the first floorball sticks were produced etc., floorball as the game we know it now is born in Sweden.

The term *internationalization* refers to any "export" of the game to other than its country of origin, in the form of know-how, products, tournaments, federations etc. In this meaning floorball's internationalization started shortly after its emergence and the destinations were Finland, Czech Republic, and Switzerland etc. The internationalization is not a single event, but rather a process, continuing to happen even now.

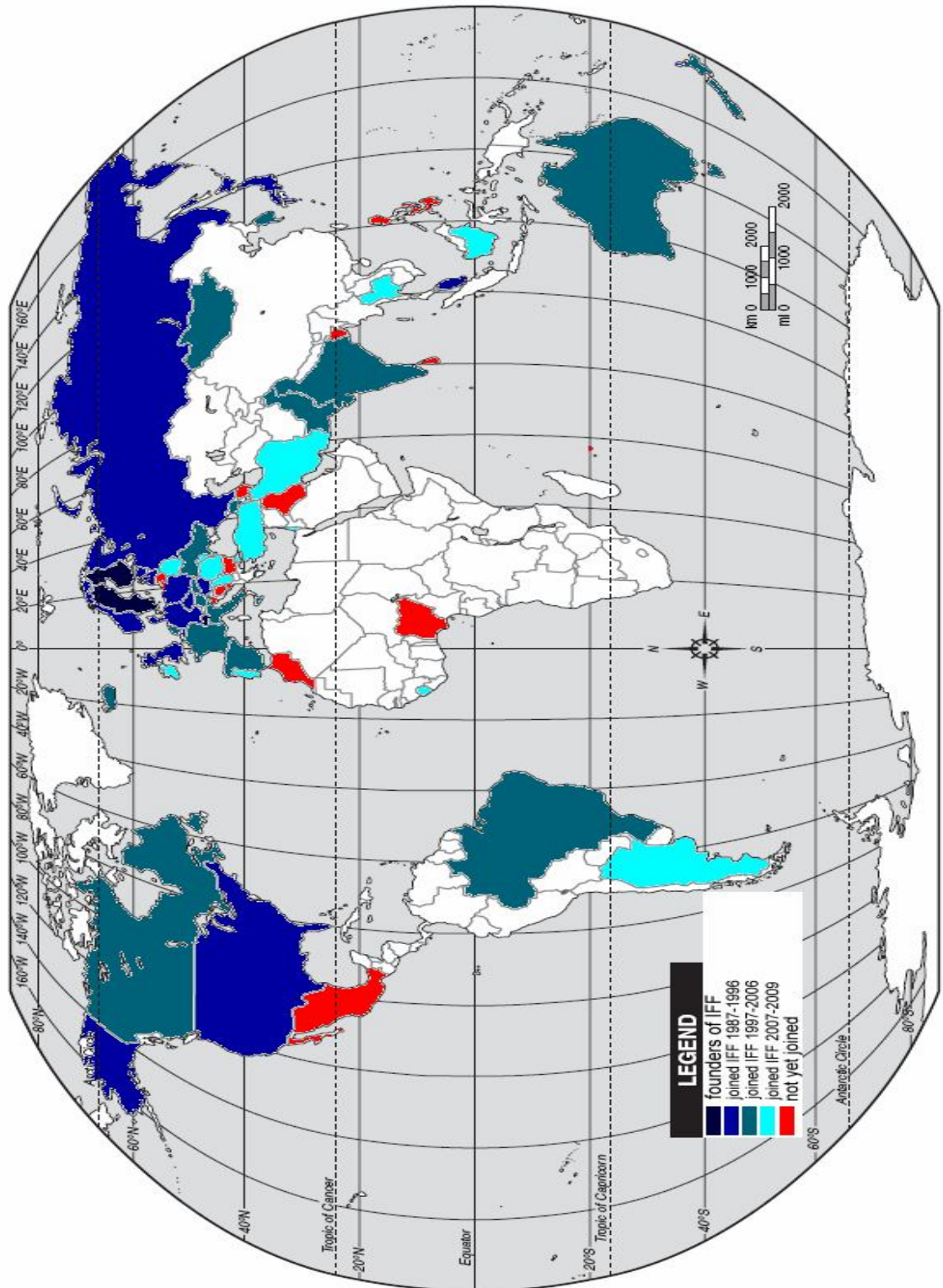


Figure 5. Development of floorball across the world (own figure, based on information from IFF 2010)

*Globalization* is a stage of development of the sport, in which it can be found already “around the globe”, on each and every continent. Nowadays we are witnessing this stage, as the rapid development of floorball has reached every continent.

Figure 5 is based on data, collected from the IFF, as well as historical evidences used in the literature review, and it shows the dispersion of floorball around the world. Surely, it is global; however regions of stronger or weaker development could be easily distinguished.

### ***Wide context of globalization***

The wide context integrates floorball to the popular trend of globalization, which influences society, sport and every other area of life nowadays. For the connection of floorball to the wider context of globalization are witnessing its ambitions to become a part of the biggest globalization factor in sport, namely the Olympics, as well as the successful implementation of global events, such as WFC. The sport has also particular features, which are obviously to connect with globalization, such as the idea of integration of everyone in the game, the cheap equipment and the easy-to-play character, the social nature. Floorball is global, because it can be played by everyone (from the top athletes to the handicapped), at every age and gender, everywhere and every time (independent from weather conditions and facility characteristics) and at an affordable price (equipment is light and cheap). Unlike other sports, which only underline the differences between people and society groups, floorball becomes an integration factor and while playing it, people start “speaking one and the same language”, as the cliché lovers might put it.

It is not necessarily needed for one to observe an organization like “Floorball for All” in order to understand the socialization power of this sport and its role as a globalization factor. Clear evidence for this fact are even the inside tournaments conducted in University of Jyväskylä for study purposes. Every academic year such a tournament is organized from and for the students as a part of a sport events organization course. In December 2009 the annual tournament had as a main discipline floorball (actually this has been primarily suggested by the researcher of the current study). Not only Finnish, but also many international students took part, whereby most of them held a floorball

stick for the first time in their life. The tournament was a huge success and immediately created a huge interest in this sport amongst the students. Floorball appeared as a discipline of inclusion, in which boys and girls, sport and non-sport students, experienced players and newcomers actually played together and got the benefits of pleasure and socialization. Inspired by last year's example in December 2010 sport students decided to organize again a floorball tournament for their school purposes.

There is an interesting difference in the direction of floorball compared to other globalization phenomena. While most sports and modern trends nowadays are characterized by Westernization and Americanization, floorball is ruled by European powers, mainly situated in Scandinavia and Northern Europe, so it can rather refer to "Northernization".

### ***Transfer of know-how***

From the wide point of view on globalization it becomes clear that floorball has the social power and many other important preconditions and potentials to be an easily transferrable cultural product. However this conflicts with the findings of the narrow context of globalization, which indicates big differences in the development of floorball in different parts of the world. Because of the asymmetry in spreading of floorball geographically only a few countries have experience, respectively know-how in the game. Especially after the WFC 2010 the issue of know-how gap between the countries has become an important topic of discussion.

Seppo Pulkkinen is a Finnish floorball coach and currently a head coach of Canadian national team. He describes himself as a "passionate coach", who has altogether 35 years of coaching experience – 25 in volleyball and the rest in floorball. He has been coaching Finnish women's national floorball team for 6 years and Happee floorball club in Finnish professional league for 5 seasons by now. He is a physical education teacher and a school principal as well. In addition, by the time of the interview he has just defended a doctoral degree. Since 2010 he has also accepted the position of head coach in Canadian team. (Seppo Pulkkinen, personal interview, 10/02/2011) All this experience gives him a holistic view over floorball in all its levels.

Pulkkinen explains that there are different ways to transfer know-how for the development of floorball. One possible path is through other sports, which have importance in the country. Canada has a significant tradition in hockey games. In Pulkkinen's opinion one possible option to build floorball there is through ice hockey, because of the structural similarities of the game. However floorball is a simpler and faster game and that gives new opportunities for the coach to implement. He also reminds that some of the best players in the Canadian team have a background in ball hockey, which is a game similar to floorball.

However other countries like Bulgaria do not have the hockey sports culture at all. There Pulkkinen sees opportunities for coaching experience and transfer of enthusiasts even from a different sport like volleyball. According to him both floorball and volleyball are focusing on speed and agility and many aspects of the volleyball training could be easily applied to floorball. The coach reminds that Bulgaria in particular is strong in ball games and this is a potential, which should be used for the benefit of floorball, because "the idea of coaching is basically the same". (Seppo Pulkkinen, personal interview, 10/02/2011)

For beginner countries the described direction might work well, however Pulkkinen doubts that for the professionalizing of floorball there is any other possibility than transfer of players and coaches from the floorball advanced countries to the less advanced. He points out that a foreign coach, like him in the Canadian team, brings much more than technical skills and purely coaching ideas; he brings the culture of floorball. Pulkkinen explains that different aspects of floorball are like "the elements of a chain" and to have the chain together one needs every single part fitting to the previous and to the next one, however the chain itself is actually the culture of floorball.

Transfer of players and coaches is only the one side of this idea, but there is also an opportunity for organization of training camps. Pulkkinen has taken part in such projects, for example a camp between Happee and a Spanish club. The coach points out that this is extremely beneficial way of gaining knowledge and experience for the country aiming at professionalization, because the players get the experience directly from the interaction with the professional partner team.

Pulkkinen admits that transfer of know-how from countries like Finland is not only important, but nowadays it is a duty of Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and Czech Republic as the only countries with professional level of floorball. In long term this benefits the sport globally. The coach underlines that with only four professional countries floorball would never reach the aimed position as an Olympic sport and that is the reason, for example, for Finland to be directly concerned about the level of Canadian floorball. Pulkkinen understands the importance of his role as a head coach of Canada, however he admits that taking the position he has been driven also by his own interests in discovering different cultures and motivation for coaching internationally. (Seppo Pulkkinen, personal interview, 10/02/2011)

The interview with Seppo Pulkkinen implies by its content two important aspects of know-how transfer in floorball. The first one refers to the possible ways of implementation of this transfer. In his statement he names directly and indirectly several ways that he has personally experienced:

- ✓ from country to country – Finnish coach in Canada, camp of Finnish and Spanish team ;
- ✓ from sport to sport – from volleyball, ball hockey and other available well developed sports to floorball;
- ✓ between different structures within floorball – from male to female floorball or the opposite around, from club level to national representation and the opposite;
- ✓ between different roles in work life – school principle, physical education teacher, academician, coach.

Surely the people with such a rich experience are not many, and Seppo Pulkkinen has the unique opportunity to combine all these ways in a holistic approach for better results. However others might accomplish good results also by using only some of the methods.

The other important aspect of the interview is of floorball as a cultural good and a sport with social power. The coach implies this not once and clearly he wants to emphasize

the importance of this feature of floorball for the building of appropriate approach and attitude towards the development of the sport. He mentions that the national culture in particular sports could be of use for the development of floorball – once in regards to Bulgarian volleyball and once in regards to Canadian experience in different hockey disciplines. Pulkkinen also explains the “chain theory” and underlines as important the building of entire culture rather than just some obvious components of the chain, for example technical skills. In the end of the interview he admits that he has accepted the position in Canada because of his personal interest in discovering new cultures, which means he discovers these cultures through the interaction in floorball.

#### **4.2. Evidence of the connection between floorball and marketing**

The issue about floorball as a marketing phenomenon has also been discussed partly in the literature review. And indeed, theoretically the emergence of floorball is easy to connect with lateral marketing and the Blue Ocean Strategy as branches of contemporary marketing. Not to repeat same information and in order to widen up the view on this issue, another point of view is presented in the following sections – WFC 2010 as a rational marketing act, innovation possibilities and marketing approach in floorball.

##### ***World Floorball Championship 2010 as a marketing act***

The world tournament is the most significant indicator of floorball’s global development and in order to be a marketing act that means for it to be realized through the framework of marketing – marketing mix, marketing strategies.

WFC 2010 was the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the global men’s championship in floorball, organized by IFF. Briefly some of its marketing parameters are discussed below.

##### ***Marketing strategies***

The general idea behind the WFC 2010 is that the event should be unique in every possible way, so that it has the competitive advantage of being easy to remember before, during and after its conduction. The budget of the championship hits the roof as the

biggest budget of a floorball event ever. However this is not the only unique feature of the happening.

One of the most criticized facts about WFC 2010 is the number of participating teams – 16. Specialists and regular visitors argued the fact that there are 16 nations on elite level in floorball nowadays and pointed out as evidence the unbelievable differences in results of the matches, for example 40:0. From one point of view, it is not interesting for anyone to watch such a pre-decided match. However the marketing mind behind the championship aimed for it to be the first one played with 16 teams including quarter finals and with qualifications played in four tournaments around the world prior to it.

### ***Trade mark***

While most of the events of this kind are just called “World Championship”, after which the year is mentioned, this one had a trademark, including a specific name, logo, colours. Instead of “8<sup>th</sup> World Floorball Championship 2010, Helsinki, Finland”, what might be too long and complicated to say, especially in the hurry of the commentators, the tournament was called “Magical Games”, which also implied the effort of the organizers to create a specific, “magical” atmosphere of the happening.

The WFC 2010 logo is a floorball ball with holes that create a human figure, as presented on Figure 6. The human figure describes the theme for the World Championships - Communality, which is an essential part of floorball on every level. The human figure inside the ball shines in many colours. This tells about floorball’s amazing attractiveness as it is a sport that is played by everyone.



Figure 6. Logo of WFC 2010 (Magical Games 2010)



## ***Marketing Mix***

### ✓ Product

The parameters of the tournament as a product were the competition itself, the side events, the merchandise, the catering, the atmosphere, the decision about venue and timing of the event.

As already mentioned, the competition consisted of 16 national teams, which was an improvement in comparison with the structure of previous editions of WFC. To the attractiveness of the event contributed the participation of the biggest floorball stars in their home teams. This effect was even stronger for Finnish players, because Finland was the host and also because Finland has one of the strongest traditions in floorball. The arena was exploding by the sight or the mentioning of the favourite players, the biggest name of which with no doubt was Mika Kohonen. Children were excited about getting some cards with the image of their idols.

There was a variety of side events going on. Part of them took place at the regular side-facilities of the venues, like catering, merchandise points etc. Other part was organized by the partners of the event – „EXEL”, WADA, Veikkaus, Elmo Bar, Circus bar etc. They had the form of parties, games, giveaway campaigns. The rest of the side events were implemented by the organization of the tournament itself.

The “Magical place” was the side-events place at the main arena, Hartwall. It included several different activities for the pauses between the games to attract and maximize the attention of the visitors. These activities were mainly free of charge and definitely added a value to the general product.

Atmosphere was an important part of the tournament, as it was implied already in the name “Magical Games”. To the atmosphere contributed not only the participants, organizers and volunteers, but the visitors of WFC themselves. Every single one of them had the chance to express their mood and unique way of cheering by having free access to the services of face painting, cheering materials creation, fan pictures, flags etc.

The timing of the competition was by tradition in December and the tournament lasted 8 days. Some of these days were regular work days and that was a reason for the audience to be limited. The period included also the Independence Day of Finland, which was another reason for many people not to visit the arena, but also a reason for Finnish team to not play and even the staff to be very limited. December's weather conditions in Finland were not really friendly and tons of snow blocked Helsinki on 6<sup>th</sup> December.

The arenas were two – Hartwall in Helsinki and Energia in Vantaa. Hartwall Arena was the main arena of WFC 2010. Conveniently, it is situated within walking distance from Pasila railway station. The spectator capacity is 13 500 and it has Gerflor flooring. The venue has excellent connections to the city centre and good connections by train to Energia Arena. Hartwall is a modern multi-functional arena, where significant events have taken place – Eurovision Song Contest 2007, WFC 2002 etc.

The second venue was Energia Arena in Vantaa. Spectator capacity is 3 000, also Gerflor flooring. The arena has excellent connections to airport and airport hotels. It has been the main arena of Euro Floorball up 2008 and it has been awarded the best sport and recreation arena in Finland for 2009.

#### ✓ Price

There are different pricing strategies, which are far from the common “costs+profit” formula. A new sport as floorball needs a strong stimulation of the audience to trigger the interest.

At “Magical Games” there were single tickets varying in price depending on the arena, the area and the sector of the seat, as well as the time of the match. Figure 7 is only one example of a ticket pricing category and packaging. (Magical Games 2010)

According to some sport management experts the future of ticketing is in the packaging. And so there was a packaging also at WFC 2010. So there was some audience also in the matches of less interest.



Figure 7. Example of ticket pricing category (Magical Games 2010)

Another pricing strategy used was the free tickets giveaway – at some special promotional events, as well as group tickets for some floorball associated youngsters. The children definitely would not be able to pay the regular price of the ticket, but from the other side the attendance of a WFC-match may be a trigger for an interest in floorball for life. The organization might work at a monetary loss, however it is in general a win-win situation because the tournament has less free seats and it invests in the future of floorball fandom, and in the same time children get the enjoyment of being a part of the big event.

#### ✓ Place

This aspect of the marketing mix of WFC 2010 can be viewed through the venues chosen, what was already discussed previously. However here can be discussed also the possible points of ticket purchase. Tickets were available at the venues, as well as online at the website [lippu.fi](http://lippu.fi).

#### ✓ Promotion

Promotion was probably the strongest developed element of the marketing mix of WFC 2010, and the most obvious one. It included TV programs and reports, newspaper publications, statements and interviews long before the happening as well as after it, but also TV coverage of the matches by YLE.

The official website of the happening is in Finnish and English and is positioned on an independent domain (unlike the previous edition of WFC in Czech Republic). It

contains useful information, for example History of WFC, match information and results, news, online shop, links to the web pages of the partners, of IFF and its news section, of lupp.fi services.

Beyond the conventional media channels the promotion of WFC 2010 utilized the new social media of digital communication. No other WFC before has had this chance to be in direct touch with its “fans”. And by fans actually it is meant all the organizers, players and floorball enthusiasts. They were brought at one and the same place at the Facebook page of the tournament, which has more than 26 000 fans and spreads news and feedback about the tournament even now, months after its end. The competition had as well a Twitter page, Flickr profile with photos and YouTube channel with videos of everything possible – from the most rememberful moments till backstage facts like the rebuilding of Hartwall from hockey-purposed to floorball-purposed.

These are all evidences of rational and intended marketing activities, whereby the marketing concepts are followed by the letter. This means the World Championship and floorball as a sport in general are tightly connected to marketing – from one side floorball already produces economic profits and market results, from other side marketing is used as a tool for further development of floorball.

### ***Innovation possibilities in floorball***

One important aspect for the marketing sustainability of every product, including sport, is its ability to evolve and modify. Lateral marketing and the Blue Ocean Strategy warn that the existing markets are becoming more and more crowded and competition in them is strong. At a point they stop offering sufficient capacity, market share and profit for an industry to continue operating on them. Besides customer needs are also changing and expectations are growing; they have to be satisfied by innovation and modification. The times when floorball emerged from such a modification are not far in the past, however nowadays it is a separate sport and it needs its own modifications – in the rules, in the equipment etc. The sustainable future of floorball from the marketing point of view is possible only through flexibility and innovation. Figure 8 is an example for an innovation effort of the Swedish equipment company Zone.



Figure 8. Example of marketing development and modification in floorball – “World’s lightest stick – 212g” (Zone 2010)

In fact floorball gives countless opportunities for innovation and modification. This proves Ispo 2011 in Munich and the existence of a floorball village at the exhibition (Ispo 2011). Even though WFC 2010 has been the key event for the current research, Ispo is a significant happening for floorball marketing as well and for this reason a brief analysis of 2011’s edition is following. The researcher has not been able to visit the exhibition personally, however contemporary interactive technologies let a big part of what is happening to be presented online. The following observations are a product of video analysis of manufacturers’ presentations on Ispo 2011.

Floorball is still accepted as a “blue ocean” on the market, as it was made clear in the literature review. However competition gets harder with every single day and an evidence for that is the floorball appearance on Ispo 2011. It is not the first time for floorball to be present at the sport trade fair, however it is probably the most indicative presentation in regards to its marketing development. Floorball equipment companies come up with various high-tech innovations in the fight for market share. (IFF 2011)



Figure 9. Wickeep Helmet Wall Vizor („Blast” 2010)

Each equipment manufacturer suggests own differentiating modifications. The viewed brands below are only a part of the exhibitors at Ispo 2011. Blast’s innovations include

stick series for professional players, which provide good balance and lightness for fast one-hand playing. In addition there is a professional line with unique sticks developed for some of the world best floorball players – Rickie Hyvärinen, Henri Johansson, Pavel Brus, according to the length and stiffness they prefer. The real competitive advantage of the company however is the new goalie helmet with Vizor, which is a technology used by no other company yet. (IFF 2011)

“Canadien” also presents sticks improving the performance, whereby some of the innovations are in the curve stick technology and the usage of stainless steel. Another highlight of the company is the design implying Canadian identity, which is visible in the colors of the sticks and clothing. „Exel” also offers double curve sticks and the innovation is the presence of index on the grip of the stick, so every player could decide the needed length personally. In addition the manufacturer provides junior series, where the accent is on the colorful design. (IFF 2011)



Figure 10. „Exel” Doublecurve stick’s index for length (IFF 2011)

“Precision” presents on Ispo 2011 its new ball concept – a high-performance ball built inside out, with a rib-system, providing same stiffness all around the ball and more straight and powerful performance of the shot. The ball has been introduced on WFC 2010 and collected a very positive feedback. The company also produces a cheap training and school ball, which is not approved from IFF for official matches, as well as the traditional dimple-technology ball. (IFF 2011)

Realstick’s highlights are in new design sticks for professional players and for juniors. The company has developed as well a stick especially for girls in cooperation with IFF. (IFF 2010) “Salming” presents indoor shoes with 14 different technologies invested for more stability without pressure and for flexibility of movement (Salming Floorball 2010). The manufacturer has also been working on the ballistic air flight of the ball, creating a ball with optimized surface texture for durability and stiffness all around. This ball adopts some technologies of golf balls producing.

X3M also works on the stiffness of the stick and the hardness of the shot with a twist technology, however the company includes also a 3 degree angle for better positioning of the ball. In addition the manufacturer's accent is on customer's needs and for that reason the company gives opportunities for individualization of the sticks, whereby the player could choose personally the shaft and blade needed. (IFF 2011)

### ***Marketing approach in floorball***

Two examples of concrete marketing activities in floorball were already viewed, WFC 2010 and Ispo 2011. The research however looks for future perspectives as well. Lasse Riitesuo, a professional floorball player in Happee Salibandy and Finnish National team, as well as a sport marketer, shares his view towards the marketing of floorball. According to him, marketing is in the nature of floorball and this sport could be qualified as "high-tech" compared to other hockey-like and stick-using games, which exist for over 1000 years and initially used just "a tiny rock and wooden stick". Even though it is doubtful if the factor for the emergence of floorball was the social one or the marketing one, there is a clear evidence for marketing effort in the development of floorball from the very beginning of its existing and it is especially visible in the equipment. (Lasse Riitesuo, personal interview, 17/01/2011)

In his opinion floorball should be marketed in a different way compared to traditional sports like ice hockey, basketball or football. Riitesuo suggests that floorball for team sports is like snowboarding for winter sports and the marketing approach should be similar – more relaxed and alternative, reaching out for the new generation, for the young people. The professional points out that this is not only a way to market floorball itself, but also to successfully and comparatively cheaply market other products through floorball, when their target group is young people.

Lasse Riitesuo admits that the lack of history of floorball could be a weak point, but this applies more to a marketing strategy, in which the population in general is targeted. If the aim is not simply to get "more" spectators, admirers, players or customers in general, but there is a carefully segmented target, the lack of history and tradition in floorball is not a weakness anymore, but even an opportunity. Floorball is utilizing by now very successfully the new media, for example the social networks, and this is exactly the place to communicate with the young generation. According to Riitesuo

every sport has an equal opportunity to enter these media, however young-target sports like floorball have more benefit from that. In contrary, traditional sport leagues like NBA or NHL, have more adult audience, big part of which prefers traditional media or is simply unable to use optimally the new media types. (Lasse Riitesuo, personal interview, 17/01/2011)

Riitesuo expresses the vision that in countries like Canada and USA is easier to introduce floorball, because the existing tradition in ice hockey could and is used as an advantage. While the lack of hockey culture in some European countries enforces the comparison between floorball and sports like basketball or handball, so it is seen as “another ball game”. According to Riitesuo this is not an appropriate association and it is an obstacle for the marketing of floorball. (Lasse Riitesuo, personal interview, 17/01/2011)

Riitesuo shares an interesting view on the marketing of floorball and whether intentionally or subconsciously he makes statements, which are important for and easy to link with the ideas of the current study.

First of all he emphasizes the social nature of floorball by proposing as appropriate its promotion through the new media channels, meaning namely the social networks. Similar to Seppo Pulkkinen he speaks about the creation of “culture” of floorball and its link to the culture of similar sports. In regards to this he often uses also words like “history” and “tradition”.

The marketer’s statement could be tightly linked with the ideas of innovation in marketing. He calls floorball “high-tech of stick sports”, categorizing it directly as an innovation and a field for innovations. He emphasizes the difference between floorball and other sports like ice hockey, basketball and football, which have existed for thousands of years and do not contain a marketing reason in their emergence. Riitesuo mentions snowboarding, which is by the way an example used by the authors of the Blue Ocean Strategy themselves, and new media channels as attraction for young people. Youngsters are known to adopt innovations easily, that is why they are also a target of a new sport like floorball. In Riitesuo’s opinion floorball should not be marketed through the cultures of basketball and handball, as “another ball game”. The word “another” implies the meaning of a red ocean market. Instead the specialist



suggests that wherever it is possible floorball should be marketed through the hockey tradition, with which it shares similar culture, but also which does not contain so many competitors.

### **4.3. Contemporary development stage and issues of floorball globally**

As it often happens, when big sport events take place, during the WFC 2010 and shortly after its end the discussion on floorball related topics was increased, many important issues were raised up and floorball community was polarized in its opinions about them. The intensity of this phenomenon was understandably at its greatest in the hosting country of the tournament, Finland. Jaska Kunelius, a professional floorball player from Happee Salibandy, Jyväskylä, shared his vision from player's perspective both about the issues and about the discussion of these issues itself.

WFC 2010 was widely criticized for the innovative decision to include 16 teams in the finals. Kunelius defends this decision with the argument that this gives opportunity for the participating teams to get unique and professional experience. According to him floorball is too young with its 25 years of existence, so no one should act surprised from the fact, that in some countries the number of licensed players is small, or, that there are big differences in the level of development on a global scale. He admits that a match result with more than 20 goals difference is not interesting for any spectator, nor such a match gives the image of the whole event as "elite" one, however there is no other way for start-up countries to catch up in their development in floorball. (Jaska Kunelius, personal interview, 13/12/2010)

Kunelius doubts that in countries like Singapore or Canada there is a strong national league or huge crowds on the matches and he points out the fact, that these countries sometimes even lack professional referees and accurate statistics for the international matches, not even mentioning players, who could be called "stars". While WFC is an event, in which everyone has the chance to play with professionals, to get experience, to feel the atmosphere of a place, where people appreciate this sport, to try some professional equipment etc. And this is the way that smaller teams are accepting their big defeat for the purpose of floorball's long-term development in their country.

Jaska Kunelius points out that the structure of WFC 2010 is not the only argument used against floorball. Another fact used to describe the sport as weak and lacking potential is the small number of spectators, even in Finland, where the sport is at its greatest. According to him however this is not evidence, that floorball is not an interesting sport. Numbers are relative and it is not the right reaction to make comparisons with other sports, but to work harder on the development of floorball for better results. The player underlines that matches of the professional Salibandyliiga in Finland are not played by empty arenas and an average of 486 spectators on a match for the league should not be undervalued. In addition he points out that some of the teams (Classic, SPV) have an audience of over 1000 spectators for the key matches. Even if the numbers are smaller compared to other sports, they are an indicator that floorball is a serious sport. For Kunelius an evidence for it is the final of WFC 2010 played by full-house at the arena (over 13 000 spectators) and more than 0,5 mill. Finns watching it on TV. (Jaska Kunelius, personal interview, 13/12/2010)

The player expresses his disagreement with one of the main arguments against floorball – that it is not a “real sport” and people involved in it just have not succeeded in any other sport kind. According to him this kind of opinions belongs to the anonymity of internet forums, however he is amazed to hear it also from well-respected and professional journalists. Kunelius reminds that times are changing and the period, when floorball has been practiced just as a hobby, is well in the past. For a player nowadays it is not so easy to reach a level, whereby he plays in Salibandyliiga or in the National team. Talent and hard work are required. The player reminds that after football and ice hockey floorball has the biggest number of licensed players in Finland.

Another argument used against floorball is that there is not enough contact in the game to make it attractive for spectators. Jaska Kunelius argues that, giving the examples of volleyball and baseball – successful spectator sports with even less contact than floorball. In player’s opinion this kind of statements could belong only to people, who have never visited a match at the arena to see how interesting and intriguing game floorball could be. From his own experience he knows that there is no match without bruises in Salibandyliiga, so there is no need for more contact in the game. In his opinion it is just hard for Finns to feel proud of their accomplishments and they tend to underestimate them. However the World title in floorball, as well as the floorball culture

itself, is accomplishment to be proud of. Another fact to be proud of is according to him the friendly attitude of floorball audience, which distinguishes it from other sports – there is no violence and no offensive remarks. (Jaska Kunelius, personal interview, 13/12/2010)

The player admits that there is a lot to be improved in floorball, however the provocative discussions, in which only the arguments “against” are revealed, are not helping anybody and they do not contribute to the development of the sport. Even if globally floorball is still too small, at least in Finland big part of the media have realized that this sport needs and deserves to be pushed upwards and supported. (Jaska Kunelius, personal interview, 13/12/2010)

The floorball aspects pointed out by Kunelius are partially to connect with the idea of globalization, partially with the marketing of the sport. However his statement makes the player’s point of view easily distinguishable by raising some typically practical issues and arguments to them. In the line of the conversation he emphasizes the contrast between the positions of players, spectators, journalists, which have different points of view on floorball due to the different level of their involvement with the sport.

#### **4.4. Bulgaria as a floorball destination (Case study)**

This chapter explores Bulgaria as a sport environment and points out the findings on floorball’s current national development and development opportunities.

Republic of Bulgaria is a country situated on the Balkans, in South-East of Europe. Its territory is about 111sq.km and its population is about 7,5 million (a number comparable to this of Finland). The climate is temperate and it offers modest natural conditions for winter sports, such as ice hockey, except of some limited mountain areas. Historically Bulgaria belonged to the Eastern Bloc and it was a socialist country, which are precondition of its ongoing transition to market economy and the difficulties of reconsidering and rebuilding all the systems of the society, includingly sport. Bulgaria is a member of EU since 1. January 2007.



Figure 11. Bulgaria on the map of Europe (European Commission 2011)

#### **4.4.1. Sport importance and traditions**

The change in lifestyle changed also the sport habits and the structure of Bulgarian sport. Nowadays sport does not seem to be a priority of the country, best known as summer holiday destination. However Bulgaria has a separate Ministry of Sport and Physical Education and still keeps its traditionally good image in some summer team sports, such as football – mainly because of the embassy of Bulgarian players in successful clubs in Europe, for example Dimitar Berbatov in Manchester United (Manchester United 2010), and volleyball – thanks to the good ranking in the International Federation of Volleyball FIVB (FIVB 2009), while in winter team sports like ice hockey the situation is not a reason of pride – lack of facilities, few existing clubs, poor international performance (Bulgarian Ice Hockey Federation 2010). Lately

Bulgaria returned its former glory in some poorly financed and long forgotten from the audience individual sports like tennis, wrestling and ski jumping, through the success of Tsvetana Pironkova (Tarandova 2010) and Stanka Zlateva (Focus IA 2010) in 2010 and Vladimir Zografski (Focus IA 2011) in 2011, however this is a result of self-financing of the athletes themselves. Due to obvious reasons this is a phenomenon, which is almost impossible to be observed in team sports.

The sport success is the main factor of fandom in Bulgarian sport – the sports with the biggest numbers of spectators are the ones, which bring international success of the country – namely football and volleyball.

The current situation of Bulgarian sport is often seen only from its negative side – not enough finances causing lack of other resources (facilities, staff, equipment, etc.) and at the end lack of success. However namely this situation might be a good opportunity for a new sport like floorball, which has minimal requirements for starting up and maintenance and could bring fast popularity and success.

#### **4.4.2. Sport governance and the place of sport in Bulgarian legislation**

The place of sport in particular country's legislation and how sport is being governed determine to certain extent its national importance and through this also its potential. For the purpose of exploring this issue, a few terms of sports law and its national framework should be introduced. These terms and concepts were brought to researcher's attention by a lecture of André Chaker, Director, Business Development and International Affairs in Veikkaus Oy, Finland.

The national framework of sport law has developed in history. Governments begin to build legislation on sport matters first in 1946-1970. Before that period sport has been developing without any governmental intervention and has been based on the work of volunteers and sport associations.

Many of the better sport developed countries do not have much of a sport regulation because at early stage they have developed autonomous sport movements and organizations. This fact gives a basis to a distinction of the countries as "interventionist" and "non-interventionist". According to the interventionist model sport is considered a

public service and for that reason the state takes responsibility for its promotion and development. The sports movement is recognized an autonomous role only for those activities characterized by a specifically competitive character. Examples of such countries are France, Spain, and Portugal. In the non-interventionist model sports activity is considered to be an expression of the free initiative of citizens and its promotion and development are entrusted to the sports movement. The role of the State is only to create the material conditions allowing sport to be practiced. The model is a fact in countries like UK, Sweden, and Finland. (Chaker 2010)

Sport is an item only in a few constitutions, mainly of “new nations” or “new democracies”. There are also recent inclusions in modern texts. It is important to understand that the absence of sport from the constitution does not mean that it is undervalued. The opposite is also true – the place of sport in a constitution does not correlate with legislative actions. Sport has been inserted in the constitutional charters of Greece, Portugal, and Spain. There are fundamental laws on sport in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Finland, and Canada. The fundamental law of sport designates the N.O.C. as public body in Italy and US. There is no mentioning of sport in the constitution, as well as there is an absence of fundamental law on sport in United Kingdom, Sweden, The Netherlands, and Norway. (Chaker 2010)

According to this differentiation Bulgaria is an interventionist country, because sport is considered a public service and is promoted by the state. It is another topic about how efficiently this is happening nowadays.

The modern state of Bulgaria is a relatively young country, which got its freedom from Ottoman Empire first in 1878 and its independence a few years after that. Before this there has been no place for sport movements, because of the hard efforts of the nation to fight for its freedom. In Ottoman times Bulgarians have used sport activities mainly as a physical preparation of men, willing to fight for their land's independence. With the freedom come the first sport legislation and the voluntary efforts of sport movements to build some sport structure, however Bulgaria had to catch up with the development of other countries.

The contemporary Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria is working since 1991 and sport is mentioned in its Article 52, Paragraph 3, however only in its health maintaining context:

“The State shall protect public health and promote the development of sport and tourism.” (Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, 13/07/2009)

In addition to this, Bulgaria has a Law on Physical Education and Sport and a Ministry of Physical Education and Sport, which are discussed later in this paper again.

The stable place of sport in Bulgarian legislation and the interventionist role of the state are to some extent a guarantee for the maintenance of sport development. For a discipline like floorball, which is already established nationally, the situation should be beneficial.

#### **4.4.3. Structure of sport**

Bulgarian sport is structured in a similar way to this in many other countries. According to Kalaykov (2005) there are a few different types of sport structures – governmental, public and structures with special status.

To the governmental sport related structures count the Parliament’s Commission on Youth, Sport and Tourism, different ministries and the local authorities. Parliament’s Commission on Youth, Sport and Tourism gives suggestions for legislative norms concerning physical activity to the Parliament. Ministry of Physical Education and Sport defines and coordinates the national strategy, financing, international collaboration, normatives, funding, research work, sport in educational system. Ministry of Health has the task of monitoring the people active in sport. Ministry of Defence organizes the compulsory physical training in the army. Ministry of Interior organizes and implements physical and applied martial training of employees in the Ministry of Interior. The local authorities maintain sport facilities, organize sport events, promote healthy lifestyle and finance some sport activities.

Non-governmental (public) organizations are: the sport clubs, which conduct the training, coaching and competing on all levels; the sport federations, which are non-

profit, self-regulating bodies, organizing and coordinating the national and international activities within every sport kind, issuing the Sport Calendar and organizing the representation of the country through national teams; organizations on national level (associations, unions etc.), which not necessarily represent one and the same sport kind; National Sport Academy “Vassil Levski” (founded in 1947) – the high education institution of sport in Bulgaria.

Organizations with special status are Bulgarian Olympic Committee, Foundation “Bulgarian Sport”, which conducts charity work, and the private sport clubs, which act according to the national legislation and the rules of the Sport Federations and participate equally with other clubs in national and international competitions.

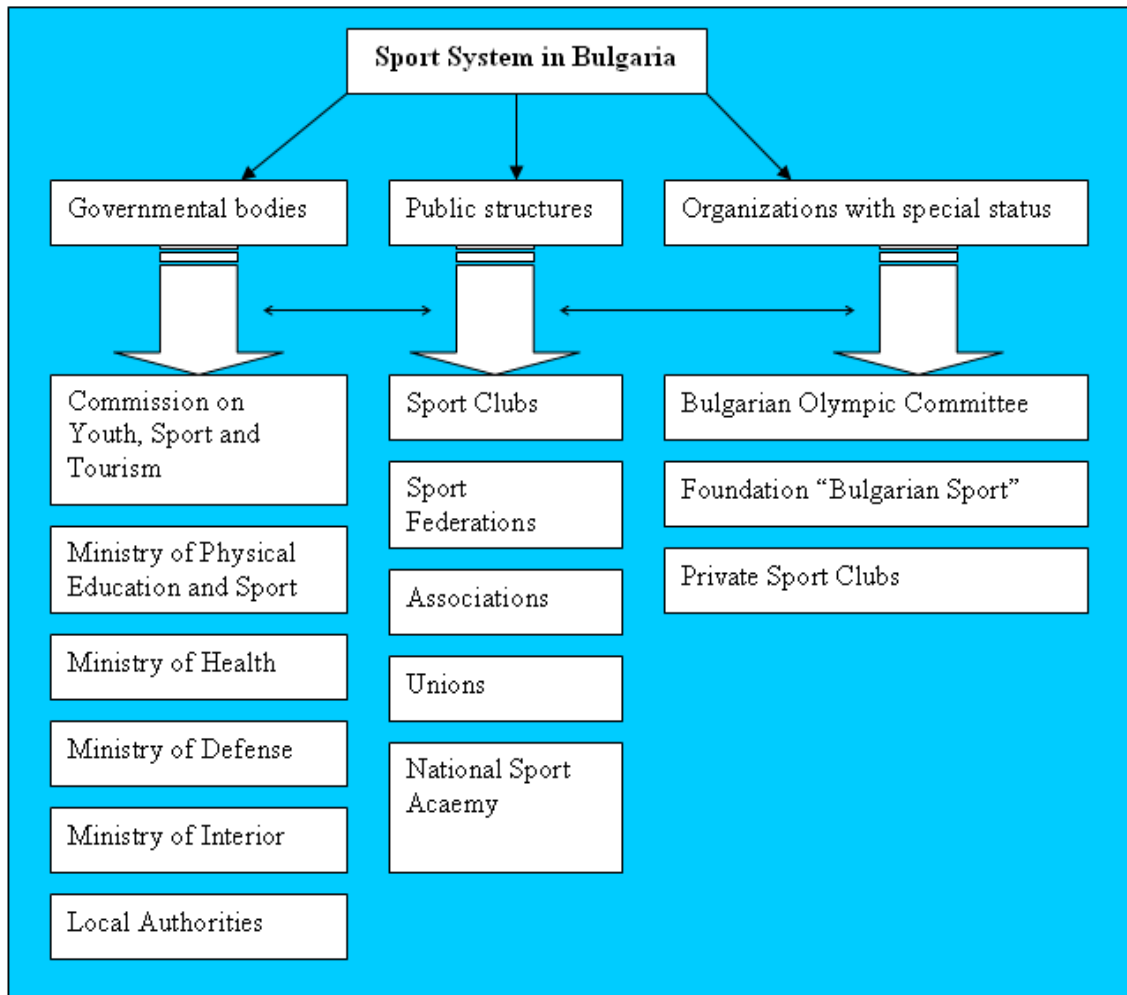


Figure 12. Sport System in Bulgaria (own figure, based on information from Kalaykov 2005)

The organization of sport in Bulgaria provides floorball with an opportunity to be included in more than one of the levels and branches of sport structure. Regulated by the governmental bodies floorball could build administrative structures in the form of



associations and unions and be included as a practice in different educational levels and as a preparation or leisure activity in the ministries of interior and defence. In addition there is a possibility for the creation of both private and public clubs.

#### **4.4.4. Sport in education**

As already mentioned, there is a Ministry of Physical Education and Sport, which organizes the sport includingly within the educational system in Bulgaria. The legal act arranging these issues is the Law on Physical Education and Sport (Bulgarian Law on Physical Education and Sport, 09/07/1996).

According to it, physical education, sport and tourism in pre-schools, general education, special and vocational schools are integral part of the educational process. The amount and character of the activities vary depending on the age group. The law does not allow hours designated for sports and hiking to be less than three hours a week or to be used for other purposes.

Sport clubs at high schools and universities are being created under the conditions and procedures established by the Ministry in consultation with the Governmental Agency of Youth and Sport. Extracurricular training and competition activities of the students are voluntary and organized by school sports clubs, school sports teams and departments, school sports courses with the support and cooperation of school boards. Schools encourage students' participation in school sports clubs and school sports teams.

School and university sports clubs are structures of school and university sports federations and associations. Physical education and sport in higher education are an integral part of student education in the form of mandatory and optional activities, with minimal duration of the mandatory 240 hours of classes for the degree "Bachelor". Curricula in physical education and sport are developed in accordance with the profile of the University and the Student Union's proposals. Training and competitive activities in universities is voluntary and is carried out by student sports clubs. Universities encourage the creation and development of student sports clubs and support their public sports activities.

Since sport is a compulsory part of every educational level in Bulgaria, the floorball development of Finland could be taken as a benchmark and floorball could be introduced as a practice in the physical education programme nationally. This is an important aspect of the actual creation of culture in the sport.

#### **4.4.5. Participation patterns**

Information about the contemporary participation patterns and physical activeness of Bulgarians is not easy-to-find information. Luckily for this research, there were two survey results published in 2010, which threw a little bit light to the situation.

The first one is BBSS Gallup International's National Survey (2010) and there are few main findings about the physical activeness in Bulgaria. According to it over 80% of our adult population does not practice any sport. Preferably Bulgarians spend their leisure time passively, mainly watching TV. Logically, the highest proportion of active people is in the group 18-25 years, where 50% give time for physical activity. Gender differences are distinctive – men are more than twice as active as women - while every fourth man is exercising, the sporting women are under 10%. Sport is inherent in modern living Bulgarians - nearly 40% of those who travel, speak foreign languages and using the Internet daily, said they exercised. People with high material status are also more active in sport; 25% of the people living above the national average have sporting habits. Explanations for sport passiveness are financial situation; lack of time; age. While 26% report no interest as a reason; 4% of Bulgarians do complain about the lack of sports facilities.

Main leisure sports according to the survey are: fitness (gym training) – leader with over 30%; football, where only men are involved; jogging – popular because does not require any specific arrangements; volleyball – motivated by success of National Team lately; swimming, martial arts, dancing.

The second survey is European Commission's Special Euro barometer on sport and physical activity (2010). It is the first Euro barometer survey on sport, which explores Bulgaria, since the previous one was issued in 2004, when Bulgaria was not yet EU's member state. It only confirms the negative picture, drawn by BBSS Gallup International's National Survey. 82% of the asked, or most compared to the other

member states, report that they don't play sport at all. By this Bulgaria fits to the general EU patterns – as a South-European country and as one of the newest member states it is in the bottom of the chart for physical activeness. In the same time the “informal” physical activity, such as gardening, walking, dancing is reportedly higher in Bulgaria than generally in EU. Only 3% of Bulgarians do not do even that physical effort.

Most popular as in many other countries is the spontaneous exercise, while sport clubs and centres are not popular due to their market orientation and commitment requirement. Only 35% of the Bulgarians are motivated for sport by possible health improvement, only 18% by fitness improvement which is a big contrast to the general European picture. Two thirds of Bulgarians do not seem to find any relaxation in sport either. Other motives like improvement of physical appearance, fun, improvement of physical performance are also not popular among Bulgarians. Almost half of the respondents mention as a reason for sport just spontaneous factors.

Significant reasons for not taking part in physical activities are lack of time (40%), dislike of competitive activities (12%) and disability/illness (13%). Bulgarians are not satisfied with the opportunities for physical activeness in the living areas, neither with the local sport clubs, being at the top of the chart by these factors. Bulgaria is totally absent from European map of voluntary activeness with its 3% volunteers. However probably the most dangerous and tragic figure is this, pointing out at 57% of Bulgarian population being totally indifferent to sport and physical activity and willing to invest their spare time in other activities instead.

Indeed floorball could not fight all powerful trends caused by a variety of factors and maintained for a long period. However the sport could use the established situation and improve it. While a lot of Bulgarians prefer spontaneous and individual sport activities and sports with fewer requirements, floorball could offer a team sport which is as affordable. Especially in the range of girl sports floorball has very low competition in Bulgaria and this could bring success. Besides many people would be attracted by a discipline, which does not require an entry level, has easy to learn and apply rules and skills and offers the opportunity that actually no one is better on a national level than those, who dare to try it for the first time.

## 1. FREQUENCY OF EXERCISE OR PLAYING SPORT

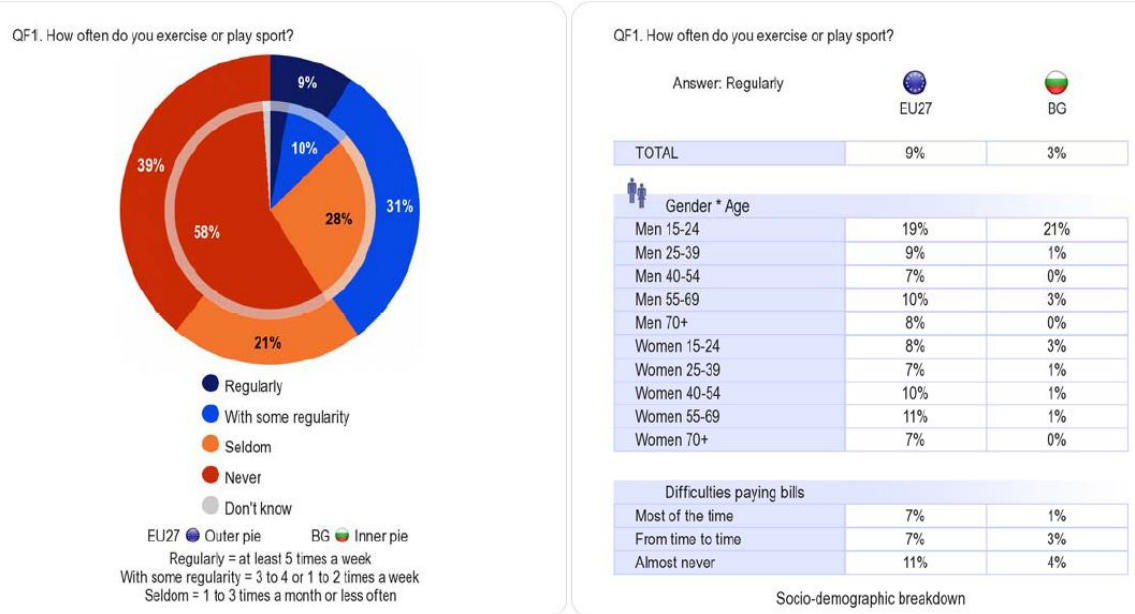


Figure 13. Frequency of exercise or playing sport – Bulgaria compared to EU (European Commission 2010)

## 2. FREQUENCY OF ENGAGING IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OUTSIDE OF SPORT

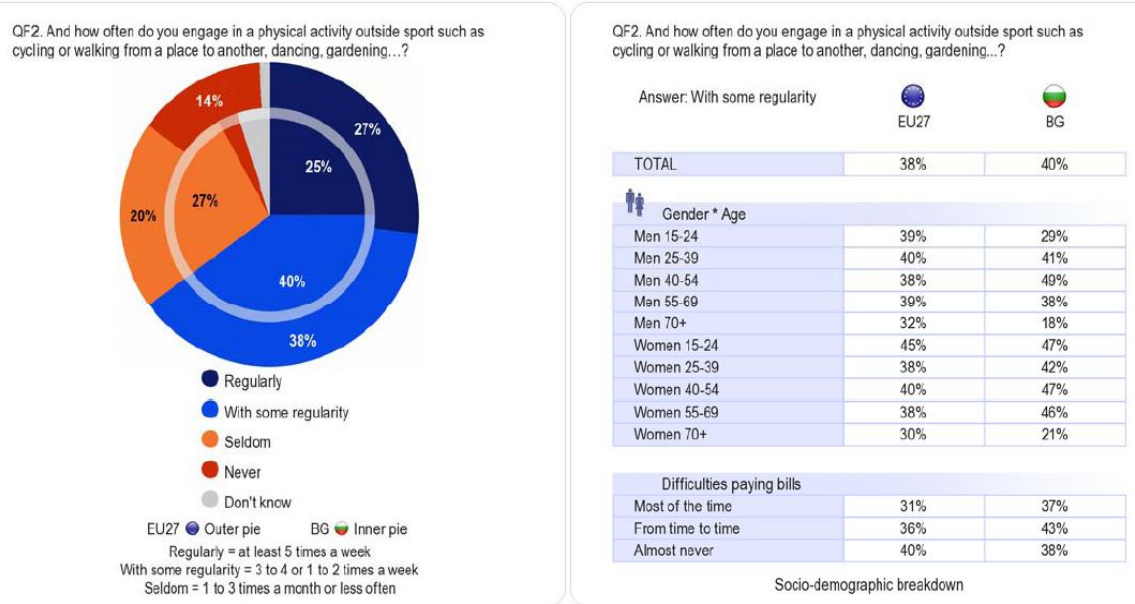
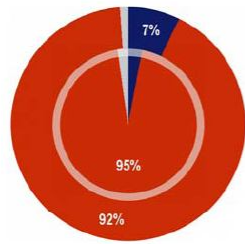


Figure 14. Frequency of engaging in physical activity outside of sport – Bulgaria compared to EU (European Commission 2010)

**5. ENGAGEMENT IN VOLUNTARY WORK THAT SUPPORTS SPORTING ACTIVITIES**

QF8. Do you engage in voluntary work that supports sporting activities?



● Yes  
● No  
● Don't know

EU27 Outer pie BG Inner pie

QF8. Do you engage in voluntary work that supports sporting activities?

Answer: Yes EU27 BG

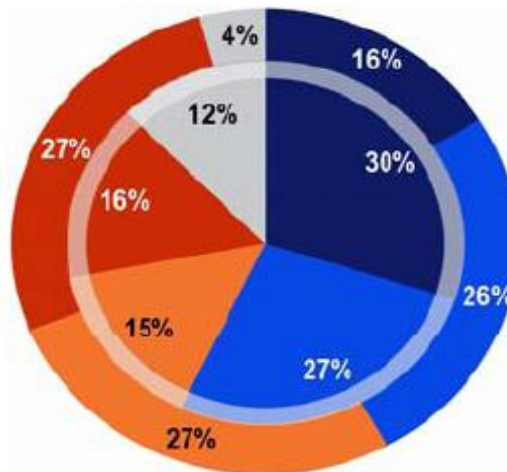
	EU27	BG
TOTAL	7%	3%
<b>Education (End of)</b>		
15-	4%	0%
16-19	6%	1%
20+	10%	7%
Still studying	10%	10%
<b>Respondent occupation scale</b>		
Self-employed	9%	4%
Managers	12%	10%
Other white collars	8%	5%
Manual workers	8%	3%
House persons	4%	0%
Unemployed	6%	1%
Retired	5%	0%
Students	10%	10%

Socio-demographic breakdown

Figure 15. Engagement in voluntary work that supports sporting activities – Bulgaria compared to EU (European Commission 2010)

QF6.4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about sport and physical activity?

Being physically active does not really interest me – I would rather do other things with my spare time



EU27 Outer pie BG Inner pie

● Strongly agree  
● Tend to agree  
● Tend to disagree  
● Strongly disagree  
● Don't know

	EU27		BG	
	EB72.3	EB72.3-EB64.3	EB72.3	EB72.3-EB64.3
Strongly agree	16%	=	30%	- 7
Tend to agree	26%	- 2	27%	- 2
Tend to disagree	27%	- 3	15%	=
Strongly disagree	27%	+ 5	16%	+ 5
Don't know	4%	=	12%	+ 4

Evolution 10/2009 - 11-12/2005 (EU25)

Figure 16. No interest in sport – Bulgaria compared to EU (European Commission 2010)

#### **4.4.6. Information and transparency**

Bulgaria has a big problem with information and transparency nowadays. The media are relatively free in their expressions, but the institutions, which have to produce and announce particular information about their activities, are rarely doing it. This applies to many fields including sport.

Websites of ministries and federations are constantly “under construction”, contact persons and their particular contact details are missing. At luckiest, there are some e-mail addresses to find, to which messages are being sent, however almost never answered. Meeting officials face-to-face often means facing their ignorance instead of getting some reasonable answers. In the following subchapters there is an answer specifically on how this situation influences floorball.

#### **4.4.7. Floorball’s first steps in Bulgaria**

Floorball has been established in Bulgaria in the autumn of 2008, when it was included in the study programme of the National Sport Academy “Vassil Levski” (National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" 2009). In December 2009 Bulgarian Floorball Federation has received an official court decision of its foundation and the BFBF office has been established in Sofia (IFF 2010). However BFBF is not yet a member of IFF (IFF 2010).

##### ***Administration in the national level***

According to the established regulations of the federation (BFBF 2009), it is a non-profit organization aiming at developing the floorball in Bulgaria and abroad as a sport, which is important for maintenance and improvement of the spiritual values and physical culture, as well as for the personal and social integration. It is highlighted that the federation develops not only men’s and children’s classes, but women’s as equally. BFBF as a national federation handles the professional and leisure floorball clubs in the country and represents Bulgaria on international management level.

During the first Board meeting in the end of November 2009 the Board members of BFBF have been elected (IFF 2010):

- ✓ Mr. Boncio Zlatev, President of BFF, a construction engineer running own business in Bulgaria;
- ✓ Ms. Tatjana Dimitrieska, the Executive Director of BFF, Master of Sports, working in the National Sports Academy as a lecturer for floorball;
- ✓ Mr. Antonio Antonov, member of the board, Associate Professor at the National Sports Academy and initiator to the formation of Floorball Federation in Bulgaria;
- ✓ Mr. Valentin Velev, board member, Associate Professor at the Minebiological Faculty.

Tatjana Dimitrieska and Antonio Antonov are members of the Bulgarian Hockey Federation, the other two members of the board are new-comers in the field of floorball, driven by their interest in the game. There is no wonder that people involved in Bulgarian hockey turn to floorball, which seems to be a straw of hope after the disappointing results and the low interest in hockey in Bulgaria recently (The Huffington Post 2008). Floorball could be a redirection from hockey, but it could also increase the interest in hockey and improve the skills of players with lower-cost trainings.

Five first established floorball clubs - FC"NSA", FC"MGU", FC"Meckite", FC"NGS" and FC"Dunav", have played in the championships and tournaments in 2010 in age groups- boys and girls U12, boys and girls U16, men and women.

The first national tournament has been organised on the 13th of February 2010 in Sofia (IFF 2010). No results or news about it are published anywhere. BFF does not even have a webpage yet, neither do the clubs.

Except of the fact, that floorball has been introduced in the National Sport Academy, there are ongoing negotiations with some schools in order to implement floorball into the sport classes (IFF 2010).



Figure 17. A Facebook customer complaining about the lack of contact information of BFBF (IFF Facebook Page 2010)

As already stated, to get information from its primary source could be a real challenge in Bulgaria. Despite the posts on the webpage of IFF, which indicate some development efforts in the field of floorball in Bulgaria, there is hardly an evidence for any organized floorball activity in the country, which was found by the investigation for the purposes of the current research. All the attempts of contacting representatives of the Bulgarian Floorball Federation for an interview, statement or at least a reference remained without any answer. The identity of the contacted officials will not be revealed within the research for ethical reasons, because they are well respected public figures. And because it is hard and incorrect to interpret the silence and lack of expression, the researcher tried to discover at least a justification of this silence by contacting the Ministry of Physical Education and Sport in Bulgaria for further information (for details see Appendix 2).

According to ministry officials the Federation is founded “lately” and it has submitted an application for a license at the Ministry, however the License Commission has not reached its decision yet and the Federation has not received a license, respectively also financing from the Ministry.

So, if one accept it as a reason for BFBF not to answer e-mails, that it has not got its governmental financing yet, instead of the doubt, that they just do not want to share information with outsiders of their organization, this should mean that the Federation is not functioning at all yet. However if the lack of financing is an obstacle for not answering to the incoming e-mails, how this organization has organized a whole national tournament? The information from the MPES at least excluded a doubt, which



comes to the mind of each Bulgarian at first in this kind of situation – the doubt for misuse of state funding as a main goal for existence of particular organization.

Even though there is hardly any floorball structure in Bulgaria and this particular sport does not receive any publicity even as a phenomenon from abroad, in the contemporary globalized world every single individual searches and finds information and develops his interests on his own, spontaneously. During the participant observation done for the current research interesting information has been discovered fairly “by chance”. In the end of 2010 Finnish Floorball Federation has received an e-mail from a Bulgarian girl, who presents herself as a floorball enthusiast and collector and actually asked for some materials of the Finnish National Team. The interesting question is how a Bulgarian girl becomes a collector and passionate fan of a sport like floorball, which simply does not exist yet in her country? There was an attempt for contacting this “phenomenal” girl and finding more information about her motives. Unfortunately while institutions in Bulgaria are simply unwilling to share information, single individuals are usually scared to share personal facts, doubting that the stated purposes of a research are the real ones. However even this small amount of information about a single individual clearly indicates that there is a customer need for floorball in Bulgaria, which establishes itself spontaneously and naturally, and for it to be satisfied there is a need for structure to be created and governed on a national level. In the next chapter there is another example of spontaneously created interest towards floorball.

### *Administration in the club level*

Despite the mentioned floorball teams, who have taken part at the first National Championship in Bulgaria, no further details of any of these teams was found. Most likely they are flexibly organized sub-structures within the National Academy of Sport rather than representatives of sport clubs.

The only information about the existence of a floorball team in a sport club was discovered at the webpage of Club for Team Sports “Spartak” – Sofia. The owner of the club was contacted for more details and he responded with understanding.

CTS “Spartak” has been founded in 2006. For the short time of its existence it manages to organize an ice hockey team, an in-line hockey team and in addition it becomes the

founder of lacross in Bulgaria with its participation in the first organized match of Bulgarian Lacross Federation. It has also attempted to develop a team in the “unknown for Bulgarians sport of floorball”. (Vladimir Vassilev, personal interview, 12/10/2010)

The club organizes its activity without any state financial aid, as well as without funding from any federation or sponsor. In the same time in the teams are playing young and perspective players, who appreciate the atmosphere in the club and aim at accomplishing high sport proficiency. Accent of the club is the ice hockey team and there is an attempt for the players to get a chance for performance in tournaments of countries with distinctively higher level of proficiency in hockey. Examples are the camps organized together with Norwegian elite league’s teams. However with the growing of the club also its costs are growing and the management applies strategies for collection of outer funding, for example through a member fee and through advertisement rights.

The owner of CTS “Spartak” Vladimir Vassilev is an ice hockey player, who lives and works in Norway, and there he has a leading managerial position in another sport club, Gamle Oslo, a member of the Norwegian Ice hockey Federation. The Norwegian experience has given to him new ideas and brighter view, includingly the idea for developing floorball.

Unfortunately the development of floorball in the club has ended up according to his statement with the unsuccessful attempt for organization of a team and regular trainings, even though there was equipment, bought with personal funding, which was enough for the training of a team or for conducting of a match. With professional involvement in more than one hockey-like sport Vassilev expresses the opinion that floorball has a huge potential for development, mainly because of its low requirements about equipment. (Vladimir Vassilev, personal interview, 12/10/2010)

He personally does not have information about other clubs developing floorball, however according to his personal resources “the boys training lacross at the National Academy’s base have noticed there the presence of floorball sticks”. From other sources he knows that “a group of enthusiasts” has been doing “an improvised floorball training” on the tartan flooring of the athletics stadium in Sofia. He evaluates these facts as an individual, spontaneous attempt of developing floorball, belonging to a very early,

preliminary stage of this sport's development in the country. (Vladimir Vassilev, personal interview, 12/10/2010)

Similarly to the Finnish coach of team Canada Seppo Pulkkinen, Vladimir Vassilev implements a transfer of know-how on several levels. He uses the experience gained abroad, in Norway, and applies it to Bulgarian sport development and has organized international camps between his Bulgarian team and a Norwegian one. He manages a multi-sport club, however he is a professional particularly in ice hockey, so there is a transfer of know-how from sport to sport in the circle of stick sports.

In addition the interview with the club owner proves the existence of a trend of self-financing in Bulgarian sport even when it comes to team sports. This trend should be paid attention to and fought by either changing the priorities of the state itself, or, what is more probable and easy to accomplish, finding sufficient and sustainable sponsors.

### ***Possibilities for further development***

To investigate the possible ways of further development of floorball in Bulgaria, an expert statement was requested from Prof. Snezhina Tomova from University of Economics – Varna, Bulgaria, who is a researcher of new sport and a specialist of adapting them in the existing frame of physical education, as well as an expert in the issues of recreation and sport animation. According to her the right place for a new sport to start its development is exactly the educational system.

As a beginning the professor reminds that physical education is compulsory by law in all educational levels in Bulgaria. Until recently university students not only had to attend sport classes as a part of their education, but they were also receiving a grade for their participation, included in their degree. Since last academic year however only attendance is required, which decreases the motivation of students, according to Tomova.

As every university in Bulgaria, University of Economics – Varna is required to offer sport for recreational and health enhancing purposes, however also enough possibilities for high accomplishment sport. Currently there are teams developing basketball, volleyball, table tennis, swimming, fitness and athletics (for both genders), football (for

boys) and modern dance and gymnastics (for girls). The activities of all teams, except of the football practices, take place at the own sport centre of the university. Football team practices at a municipality owned facility.

Professor Tomova does not exclude the possibility for development of floorball team in addition to the existing ones at the university. A main concern is the lack of facility fulfilling the requirements for size 20x40m, because the biggest sport hall at the university sport centre is 15x35m. However in her opinion this is enough for the practices, since in Varna there are enough municipality and private owned facilities with fitting size, where official matches can take place (Figure 18).

To attract the students in a floorball team, it needs a serious promotion, materials with information about the game, questionnaires about the interest in sport activities. According to Tomova however the main stimulus for participation for the students would be the curiosity in the new discipline, as well as the lack of competition and requirement for an entry level.

A good reason for development of a floorball team at the university is that the sport could contribute to the good physical and health condition of the students, as well as to improve their social activity. The existence of floorball structures might increase the interest to hockey, especially in Varna, a city on the sea coast, where hockey culture has never been strong and summer sports dominate. (Prof. Snezhina Tomova, personal interview, 25/10/2010)

Tomova points out that the transfer of know-how does not follow only one way. Organization of international camps is exciting and beneficial, however also very expensive. There are enough well-qualified Bulgarian coaches in ice hockey, who can adapt in coaching floorball as well. The Federation should also organize some training programmes.

The professor does not want to comment the lack of information provided by BFBF because “it would not be ethical”. However she expresses her strong hopes and expectations for BFBF to show initiative and to establish contacts with the educational institutions for the development of the sport in the near future. Tomova reminds however that universities do not rely only on the federations, which mainly develop

professional sport, but also on the existing Association for university sports, which might also help with development aid in the case. In general the professor thinks that “there is nothing shameful” in a request for developmental aid, does not matter if this aid comes from the National Federation, IFF or some charity organization like “Floorball for All”. Aid is needed mainly in providing know-how and start-up equipment for a team. (Prof. Snezhina Tomova, personal interview, 25/10/2010)

Prof. Tomova predicts a big success of floorball if it is being developed in Varna systematically and this would be a win-win situation. On the one hand, Varna is a tourist destination, a student centre with 5 universities and a city with countless opportunities concerning facilities. On the other hand the town might also benefit from sport’s development as social and marketing value.

A city like Varna offers one more opportunity for development of floorball, which might sound unconventional, but it has contributed to the development of other sports. The professor suggests that floorball games could be included in the programme of tourist sport animation and in that way the game would be popularized for wider audience. This has been the case with beach volleyball, but for floorball in Bulgaria it might play even a more important role, because it would contribute to the creation of floorball culture, which is otherwise hard to be established with the absence of ice hockey. And having the example of beach volleyball the professor would not be surprised to see floorball in the programme of the Olympics in 2020, because to her both sports have similar rapid development and great social and market power. (Prof. Snezhina Tomova, personal interview, 25/10/2010)

In her statement Prof. Tomova emphasizes several aspects of globalization in regards to floorball. First of all, she believes that floorball has a place in the most significant factor of globalization in contemporary sport, namely the Olympics, and compares it to a sport, which has already made it to the global stage – beach volleyball. Secondly, she mentions a few times that aid is required for Bulgarian floorball to catch up with the global level – in terms of know-how and of financial aid.

The professor admits that marketing efforts are needed for the successful implementation of a development plan. The marketing is definitely an aspect, on which has not been worked yet in Bulgaria.

In addition Tomova shares the interesting and innovative idea for application of floorball as a tool of sport tourism. Given the extreme importance of tourism for Bulgaria nowadays, this might be a good starting point of the sport and another way for Bulgarians to learn directly from the foreign experience.



Figure 18. Palace of Culture and Sport in Varna (from in- and outside) – a multipurpose sport and entertainment facility with big capacity (Palace of Culture and Sport 2011)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Indeed floorball has a potential to be a successful sport, however a scientific answer requires much more clarifications and could not be so categorical. That is the reason for the conclusions to utilize the tools of SWOT analysis and some marketing innovation analysis methods.

### **5.1. SWOT analysis – evaluation of floorball development on global and local level**

The results of the current study are clearly indicating that despite the big potential, floorball also has many issues to solve, which if neglected, might delay or stop its development. For this reason the results are being concluded in the form of SWOT analysis, which is usually a technique used for a preliminary managerial situation analysis, however it fits incredibly good to the design of the current research.

SWOT analysis (Table 2.) is a tool for investigation of the strategic environment of an organization (in this case floorball), by evaluating its internal factors – strong and weak points, and external factors – opportunities and threats. The current success and potential of the sport directly apply to the left side of the table – the strengths and opportunities, however the right side of the table opposes with them, representing the weaknesses and threats. If the positive side fights the negative one is not a matter of a simple count of numbers, because every factor or argument has a different strength. In addition, the SWOT elements of floorball are presented in global and local terms, whereby “local” means within the case study country, Bulgaria.

The first noticeable feature of this SWOT analysis is the bigger volume of opportunities and threats compared to the strengths and weaknesses, especially in the local level. This testifies for the early development stage of floorball as a sport and suggests that still it is unstable as a structure, depending mainly on outer factors.

Table 2. Research's outcomes in the form of SWOT analysis

internal features	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
globally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-new sport</li> <li>-lack of negative history</li> <li>-light and cheap equipment</li> <li>-easy to play rules</li> <li>-spectacular nature</li> <li>-already established on every continent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-new sport</li> <li>-no history</li> <li>-no tradition</li> <li>-asymmetric global development</li> <li>-mainly practiced as a hobby</li> <li>-not a strong contact sport</li> </ul>
locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-already established federation</li> <li>-individual efforts for development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-lack of initiative from the side of the federation</li> <li>-lack of transparency and promotion</li> </ul>
external features	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
globally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-young target group</li> <li>-optimal utilization of new media</li> <li>-social power, social inclusion tool</li> <li>-market power, high-tech of stick sports</li> <li>-transfer of know-how</li> <li>-becoming an Olympic discipline</li> <li>-supporting the development of ice hockey players</li> <li>-minimum bureaucracy</li> <li>-fast growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-spectators habits in traditional sports</li> <li>-lack of conventional media attention</li> <li>-lack of serious sponsorship</li> <li>-fast growth</li> <li>-possibility for too much commercialization</li> </ul>
locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-spontaneously established interest</li> <li>-possibility for development of sport tourism</li> <li>-strong presence of sport in national legislation</li> <li>-sport as a compulsory part in each educational level</li> <li>-supporting spectator's interest in ice hockey</li> <li>-development aid by private organizations and IFF</li> <li>-lack of competition in girl sports</li> <li>-no entry level required for participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-bureaucracy</li> <li>-different spectator culture</li> <li>-strong football culture</li> <li>-no tradition in similar sports</li> <li>-lack of funding in sport</li> <li>-preference towards individual sports for hobby</li> <li>-withdrawal of the population from sport lately</li> </ul>



### ***Global dimension***

Globally floorball is a new sport. This might play both positive and negative role depending on the context. On the one hand the lack of history and tradition makes it easy to be neglected – from the regular spectator, from the media, from the scientific field, etc. In the same time this factor makes floorball also difficult to be promoted. It is harder for marketers to find emotion triggering associations of the potential customers with the sport, but also there is a lack of convincing arguments to be brought up to the potential sponsors. However from another point of view it is an advantage, that floorball unlike other sports cannot be connected to negative happenings in the past, for example doping scandals, spectator violence and hooliganism, set-up results etc., which are every-day experience for football, track-and-field, skiing, swimming, cycling etc. A positive and pure image of the sport could be a strong asset for its further promotion.

It is a fact that floorball has started as a hobby and in many countries across the world it still remains a recreational sport, however this is clearly a result of its inclusive character – the light and cheap equipment and the easy-to-play rules give everyone the opportunity to participate. In the same time in Nordic countries floorball has already got phenomenal dimensions and the huge numbers of licensed players testify for an advanced level of development going from semi-professional to professional stage.

This is not the case everywhere. It is an advantage for floorball development that the sport has been already established on each of the continents, however this spreading is asymmetric – the dominating countries are situated exclusively in Europe and the development gap often makes international matches uninteresting and international events unattractive. This could be worked on, for example through transfer of know-how.

Even though floorball is blamed to have a lack of contact, this might be only relatively evaluated – through comparisons with the hardest sports in contact terms, for example ice hockey. However floorball is still extremely attractive for the spectators, mainly because of its speed and the spectacular tricks.

The outer factors are extremely influential for floorball currently. The sport does not have necessarily to fight spectators established habits in traditional sports, but rather to

target the young audience through offering alternative and exciting new experience. This is also the way to fight the lack of attention of conventional media. It is a fact that floorball is rarely broadcasted on TV; however the benefits from this kind of exposure are doubtful for this particular sport. Instead, a penetration into the new, social media might play a key role for the success of floorball. Not only that social media give by their own nature cheaper and effectively targeting way of reaching any audience, but also the exact target of floorball – young people, is particularly interested in the world of social networks and is easy to be found there any time.

Floorball is not just the next fashionable trend, which might fade away by tomorrow. It is a phenomenon with great social and market power. It is a tool of social inclusion and as such it is already applied in some third-world countries to help for the social integration of street children for example. Another example is the possibility that floorball gives to handicapped to practice sport as close as possible to its normal way of playing, without feeling different or excluded. And because it is attractive and inclusive, a sport for everyone, floorball presents a serious marketing opportunity, even in countries with small population like Finland or Bulgaria, which for most businesses are too small markets and are not considered seriously. Floorball is the “high-tech” of stick sports and this gives endless possibilities for modifications and innovations, especially in terms of equipment. And while nowadays the sport suffers from lack of financing and sponsoring, some worry that in the near future it could be over-commercialized and its market nature could kill the social one. This should be kept in mind as a serious threat and a balance between both elements should be established.

The fast growth of the sport, assisted by the minimal bureaucratic structures, is mostly an opportunity, however it can also easily go out of control. The decision of including 16 teams at the final of WFC 2010 for example was widely criticized and even if justified for some reasons in this case, by itself it is a risky undertaking.

Clearly, most of the opportunities and threats are balancing each other. However there are some opportunities, which could hardly find an opponent in the right side of the table. If floorball enters the Olympics this would surely generate serious financial results and increased spectator interest in the sport. The benefits coming from such an exposure of floorball are unpredictably much.

Another opportunity of floorball is seen in its similar character to ice hockey, whereby floorball could be used for development of ice hockey players – off the season or in early age. It is a good argument to be brought up as a reason for floorball to be developed.

Last but not least, there is an opportunity for transfer of know-how, which would clearly benefit the global development of floorball. A country like Finland has significantly more know-how in floorball than Canada for example. In that case the knowledge of a Finnish coach or the experience of a Finnish player is definitely beneficial for Canadian teams. Another way to transfer the know-how is from sport to sport, for example Canada does not have much experience in floorball, but it is a strong ice hockey country. A third way of transferring the know-how is in international events like WFC2010 and international camps, whereby teams with less experience have the opportunity to meet professionals.

### ***Local dimension***

The reason to situate the global and the local elements of SWOT in the same table is actually the fact, that global ones are general and should apply to most of the countries, where floorball is being developed. The local features are derived from the case study about Bulgaria and cannot be generalized, however it is very possible that some other countries in Eastern Europe and on the Balkans experience partly similar situation.

As strengths could be accepted the fact that there is an already established national governing body for floorball in Bulgaria, as well as the individual efforts of private club owners to develop floorball teams. However since the federation exist by now only on paper, it is an overwhelming disadvantage, that there is a lack of initiative on national level, information about floorball development is not being shared even when requested and floorball is not being promoted in any way.

In future plan the potential of floorball in Bulgaria is seen in the spontaneously established interest of single enthusiasts, which might indicate the existence of a need. Surely if sport customers insist floorball to be developed, some structure would be created. It is an understandable fact that the floorball enthusiasts in Bulgaria nowadays are mostly young people with experience abroad, especially in the Nordic countries, or

people who spend a lot of time surfing on the internet. Floorball remains totally unknown even as a term for majority of the population by not being publicly introduced or mentioned.

A new sport has a good potential for development in Bulgaria because of the strong presence of sport in national legislation and its compulsory character in every educational level. While on a global level floorball administration is bureaucracy-free, in Bulgaria there is a serious concern for the sport to be misunderstood in its nature and stopped by bureaucracy.

Generally, there is a lack of financing in Bulgarian sport nowadays – state subsidy is minimal and sponsors are hard to be found. This is a reasonable explanation why Bulgarians made break-through in several sports lately, but only in individual ones. For team sports it is not so easy to be self-financed. However developmental aid for floorball (not only of financial character) is offered by IFF and private organizations, like in the project “Floorball for all”.

Bulgaria has no traditions in hockey sports. Ice hockey exists in the country, but obstacles such as lack of facilities and financing are overwhelming for the sport. Rising up the floorball culture in Bulgaria might support the ice hockey development and bring back the interest in ice hockey. In addition Bulgaria is strongly a football culture. Many of the football fans would not switch to alternative sport, especially if the rules and duration of the game are significantly different from these in football (in football – 2x45 min without game stops, however in floorball 3x20 min with game stops). However floorball culture could be introduced through unconventional methods, for example including floorball to the programme of tourist sport animation.

This redirects the attention to the possibilities for sport tourism. Bulgaria is easily associated both with winter and summer tourism and indeed it has the resources to develop sport tourism too. One direction is the recreational tourism, where floorball could be included in the sport animation, as mentioned. Another possibility could be the organization of training camps in the country.

Despite the withdrawal of Bulgarian population from sport lately, reported in recent surveys, and the preference towards participation in individual sports as a hobby, the

lack of competition in girl sports and the lack of entry level required for participation might attract many young people into practicing floorball.

This research ends with the conclusion that floorball has a huge potential, however the potential might not be fulfilled if the risks on the path of development are being neglected. Floorball deserves more attention, especially from the scientific field, so it is made sure that no important aspects are being underestimated or not enough explored.

## **5.2. Evaluation of floorball emergence and development from marketing innovation point of view**

The current research has focused to a great extent on the aspect of marketing innovation, which has influenced and still influences floorball through every stage of its development. In this subchapter there is a summary and evaluation of floorball's typical characteristics from the marketing point of view, expressed in the literature review and rediscovered and enriched in the results.

### ***Lateral marketing***

Table 3. presents a comparison of only a few features of games, which might have influenced floorball. The perception of lateral marketing is that floorball as a new sport, a new product satisfying new needs and creating a new market, has emerged as a hybrid of other sports (other products), existing since earlier time and having an established market by the time of emergence of floorball. The features marked as bold are those, which are similar or identical with floorball. In the last column of the table there are the characteristics of floorball itself.

The table draws a very clear picture of floorball's emergence as a lateral marketing product. However the question is for the future of floorball: What will happen when the market of floorball becomes highly segmented and competition gets hard? The prediction of such situation seems very reasonable especially after the presentations in the floorball village at Ispo 2011.

It is very probable that in future floorball itself creates hybrid versions with other sports; maybe even in these same discussed features. It is a matter of management and

administration whether the new derived sports will appear to be a substitution and competition of floorball (for example if they are administered separately) or its supplements and variations (in the way that beach volleyball exists under the umbrella of conventional volleyball).

Table 3. Floorball as a hybrid between football, handball and ice hockey

Features	Football (soccer)	Handball	Ice-hockey	FLOORBALL
Facility	grass pitch, usually outdoors	sports hall, indoors	usually indoors, ice rink	sports hall, indoors, rink
Playing equipment	ball, button shoes, light textile apparel	ball, light textile apparel	stick, skates, puck, blocker (goalie), goal pants and pads (goalie)	ball, light textile apparel, stick, padded pants and jersey (goalie), gloves (goalie)
Safety equipment	gloves (goalie)	gloves (optional), protective spectacles (optional)	helmet, neck guard, chest pads, elbow pads, gloves, special protective pants, nut cup, suspenders, shin guard, mouth guard, facemask (goalie)	protective spectacles (optional), helmet and facemask (goalie), gloves (goalie)
Playing mode and time	2x45 minutes, fixed time	2x30 minutes, timeouts	3x20 minutes, with stopping, timeouts	3x20 minutes, with stopping, timeouts
Size of goals	2,44x7,32m	2x3m	1,2x1,8m	1,15x1,6m
Size of playfield	usually 105x68m	40x20m	61x30m	40x20m
Players on the field	11, restricted number of substitutions	7, substitutions at any time, unrestricted number	6, substitutions at any time, unrestricted number	6, substitutions at any time, unrestricted number

### *Blue Ocean Strategy*

As presented in the literature review, Blue Ocean Strategy is similar marketing direction to lateral marketing, however even more radical. Instead of creating a new market through hybrid products, this concept directly interferes in the concrete mix of features of an existing product and changes them. Basic rule for the creation of a blue market are the actions of eliminating, reducing, raising and creating of features within a product.

Table 4. contains a few features, which Blue Ocean Strategy might have changed in ice hockey in order to give birth to the new sport of floorball. The characteristics are some of the previously discussed ones in the research. The grid is only a model and it aims at presenting only one of the possible scenarios of emergence of floorball, however it is

not probable that there is only one “right” model or theory for the actual emergence of floorball. Similar grids could be created as a support of the connection between floorball and other sports, which have existed prior to its birth.

Table 4. Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create grid of floorball compared to ice hockey

<p><b><u>ELIMINATE</u></b>            -protective equipment            -cultural context</p>	<p><b><u>RAISE</u></b>            -target groups            -social environment</p>
<p><b><u>REDUCE</u></b>            -facility requirements            -rules            -equipment weight            -price of training            -price of equipment            -contact</p>	<p><b><u>CREATE</u></b>            -independent governing structures            -“clean” image            -fair play atmosphere</p>

And again, the presented table refers to the past of floorball, while same question exists as the one asked in regards to the lateral marketing concept: If this is the blue ocean of floorball, created from the red ocean of ice hockey, what future might bring? What is possible to happen, when the market of floorball becomes red of competitor’s blood? Floorball needs to evolve into something new, using the same, Blue Ocean Strategy, which might have created it. At the same time ways need to be found for the conventional floorball to survive and be preserved.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The conducted study raises a discussion by its existence and it has several directions. First of all, there is a need for a post-research evaluation of its accomplishments and the faced challenges. Secondly, the current research is only a standpoint for further academic efforts on exploring the field of floorball and there is much more to be studied in future.

### 6.1. Challenges of the research

The research design was challenging and the study has faced several obstacles. First of all, as an ethnographic study it has been connected with travelling and big expenses. The research has taken place in two countries, which are geographically distant from each other – Finland and Bulgaria.

As by every participant observation, the researcher has had to gain access to the observed subcultures. This has been mostly influential for the case study, because the leaders of sport in Bulgaria are not always accessible, friendly and willing to cooperate due to bureaucracy and cultural reasons.

Due to the international features of the research, different languages of obtaining the data have been used – English, German, Bulgarian and Finnish, the last one of which is not in researcher's high competence. Moreover the difference in expression by translation from one to other language should be encountered as a risk for reporting the data most correctly.

The data obtained by overt observation is always possible to have compromised validity because of unnatural behaviour of the observed and interviewed people. Often observed people express too positive vision of the situation or overreact in their work to present it in a more positive light. The current study has tried to present the collected information from a critical angle and to use data triangulation whenever it has been possible.

One of the main challenges from the very beginning up to the end of the research process has been the doubt for existing and used data to be possibly unreliable. The field of floorball is quite practically oriented and there is a lack of reliable, academic



and sophisticated data from the theoretical and managerial point of view, which enforces the usage of nearly every possible source.

## **6.2. Evaluation of the research**

The current research has clearly both strong and weak sides. Some of them are discussed in this chapter, however they represent only researcher's point of view. The discussion remains opened for outer constructive criticism.

The study has managed to build a holistic view of floorball and has raised many issues, which have not been investigated enough in the academic field – for example about floorball as a phenomenon between its social and market nature, about the need for transfer of know-how, about the asymmetric spreading of the sport around the world, etc. This is one of study's most important accomplishments. Especially significant it is for Bulgarian sport, because it is the first research on Bulgarian floorball, even only as a case study within the general topic, which actually constitutes the existence of this sport in the Balkan country.

However for the reason that the study handles a whole variety of aspects, some of them have just been discovered and did not have an opportunity to unfold completely. This might be accepted as a weak point of the research, even though clearly every research should deal with particular limitations.

Another very important contribution of the current study is seen in the fact, that it has given the opportunity for different stakeholders to express their visions, opinions and concerns – it has explored the coach's side, the marketer's side, the player's side, the developer's side and least but not last the academician's vision. The research has not attempted to frame these different visions by acquiring same kind of information or comparing the statements to each other, but rather to build a bigger picture by collecting the different expert statements and adding them to each other.

Indeed the research did not manage to gain access to all of the initially planned points. The information from Bulgarian Floorball Federation for example would have extended the view of Bulgarian efforts in floorball significantly, while without this data the research has managed only to interpret the existing signs, but not to analyse clear facts.

Despite the changes, which needed to be done in the research plan, however many new opportunities for gathering relevant data have emerged during the research process. These opportunities managed to be used optimally because of the flexibility given by the specific research design.

Surely the research could have gone better – having more significant results, more strategic informants, more accurate use of methodology. However for this purpose it should have needed more sufficient resources of each kind – time, finances, network, know-how and experience, etc.

The academic significance and the scientific basis of the study should be evaluated as well. Indeed the field of floorball is by today a very practical area and the current research has approached it by the only possible way – by using the set of practical dimensions of floorball as only existing ones. This might leave the impression that the whole research is practically oriented and has no academic importance or basis. However this is not the case. Floorball, as practical as it is, is a supportive and rarely used example for academically discussed issues like globalization in sport and innovation strategies in marketing, thus the academic attention towards floorball enriches the perspectives on these issues.

Never before has floorball been used as an example of the innovative Blue Ocean Strategy, which gives practical marketing guidance for the businesses, but is sufficiently academically based. Often the highly social nature of floorball activities is discussed, however very rarely comments are made on one of its important consequences – turning floorball into a global commodity, which is easily transferred and so it spreads rapidly around the globe. This is a sociological issue and matter of academic research and discussion.

Furthermore the research links the academic and the practical areas of marketing, which are nowadays widely criticized to maintain a huge and overwhelming gap between each other. The current study of floorball not only presents this sport into a new scientific light, but it proves that the distance between academic and practical in the marketing field is conquerable and at least in some, if not all, of the cases academic knowledge is useful for the practitioners and is indeed practically applicable.

### **6.3. Possible future research issues**

During the preparation of the present research there were a lot of obstacles of obtaining the needed information. However “the journey” was interesting and this research inspired new ideas for future investigations, arising some issues of floorball’s development nowadays:

#### *Project plan for development of particular team or federation*

This has been actually the initial idea behind the current research – creation of a floorball in university conditions in Bulgaria. The topic was left out of the actual scope due to lack of data and of existing floorball structures in Bulgaria. However there is a hope for this project plan to be developed in the near future.

#### *Study on the possibilities for equalizing the development level of floorball globally*

One of the contemporary issues of floorball nowadays, which was underlined by the current research, is the gap between the levels of floorball development in different regions of the world. In order for the sport intrigue to come back to this sport and to create a spectator interest and professional ambitions, it is needed this gap to be filled. The possibilities for this to happen could be a subject of a new research.

#### *Innovations of floorball products*

It is in researcher’s competence and interest to explore such purely marketing oriented topics. And the innovation is a part of the growing in any area, including sport.

#### *Sponsorship in floorball*

This is an issue of crucial importance nowadays, not only in floorball, but in any sport.

#### *Floorball as an opportunity for sport tourism*

As it was pointed out in the current research, floorball could be an innovative tool for sport tourism – both through integration in the programme of sport animation and through organizing international training camps. However these are only ideas, which could be extensively explored and implemented. Because of the great importance of

tourism in Bulgaria this topic is of crucial interest nationally and similar research is already being conducted in University of Economics – Varna, Bulgaria.

The researcher hopes to have the opportunity and resources for the conducting at least some of these researches. The current research or these ideas might also inspire other researchers to join the scientific effort of exploring floorball.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1. Schedule of the interviews**

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Informant</b>	<b>Type of interview</b>	<b>Initial Place</b>	<b>Initial Date</b>	<b>Repeat</b>
Interview 1	Vladimir Vassilev, sport club owner	Semi-structured expert interview	Sofia, Bulgaria	12/10/2010	Yes, through e-mail correspondence
Interview 2	Snezhina Tomova, Prof., researcher of new sports	Semi-structured expert interview	Varna, Bulgaria	25/10/2010	Yes, altogether 3 visits
Interview 3	Jaska Kunelius, professional player	Unstructured interview	Jyväskylä, Finland	13/12/2010	No
Interview 4	Lasse Riitesuo, professional player and marketer	Unstructured expert interview	Jyväskylä, Finland	17/01/2011	Yes, through e-mail correspondence
Interview 5	Seppo Pulkkinen, coach of Happee men's team and national team of Canada	Unstructured expert interview	Jyväskylä, Finland	10/02/2011	Yes, through e-mail correspondence

## **Appendix 2. Requested information of other kind**

### 1. Information inquiry from Ministry of Physical Education and Sport, Bulgaria

The request is made on 19/12/2010 and the answer by Rossina Atanasova, senior expert at the Department of Sport for High Accomplishments in MPES (in Bulgarian: МФБС), is received on 20/12/2010. The inquiry concerns the status of Bulgarian Floorball Federation.

### 2. Story of experience

The story of experience is told by Janne Bruun from Finnish Floorball Federation and concerns a request for materials of Finnish national floorball team for collector purposes, made by a Bulgarian admirer of the sport. The story is collected on 11/12/2010 face-to-face and details are discussed further by e-mail on 18-19/01/2011.

### **Appendix 3. Informed consent**

Because of some ethical issues and the overt character of the conducted study as a whole, all the respondents, directly and personally taking part in the research and being mentioned in it, have been asked for permission for revealing their identity and using their statements publicly. In addition, they have been informed about some important parameters of the current study in order of them to be aware of the nature of research they are taking part in. The information has been provided differently - in the particular language used for communication with each of the respondents and in more formal or informal setting, depending on the types of relations between the researcher and the respondent, however it has always contained following information:

- Personal information of the researcher – identity, belonging to nation and institution, involvement with sport and management;
- General information about the research – topic, theme, general purpose, importance;
- Importance of the personal involvement and contribution of the particular informant in the research and reasons for contacting exactly him/her;
- Given opportunity to remain anonymous and assurance that the data shared will be used only for the particular research.