

**Contemporary Sport Policy in Bulgaria – Priorities,
Problems and Future Prospects for Tackling Inactivity:
focus on sport participation**

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ABSTRACT

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Participation in sport and physical activity is considered as an important part of a healthy life and different countries have utilized it with varying success not just to achieve sport-specific objectives but also to improve public health. A key factor for having a physically active nation is the sport policies that a country has developed. In Europe, the differences in sport participation vary immensely with southern- and south-eastern European countries appearing as least active. This study has analysed contemporary sport policy in Bulgaria, which has gone through numerous socioeconomic transformations which have had their impact on the low participation levels and the subsequent public health problems.

Sport development strategies, legislation and public announcements have been reviewed to determine the orientation of national sport policy. The primary research adopted a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design. Six semi-structured interviews have been conducted in order to get up-to-date information on current developments, challenges and future prospects in sport policy. Interviewees consisted of three municipality representatives, one central government official, and two non-government sport-for-all organisations (NGOs) officers. The concept of Bourdieu's *Habitus* and the Multiple Streams framework have been utilized as theoretical frameworks to analyse sport participation and sport policy, respectively, with the focus being on the latter.

The key priority in Bulgarian sport policy appeared to be youth competitive sport. A variety of issues were pointed out by municipalities but a common feature was the limited resources. Some gave a critical self-reflection on the need to give more attention to certain age groups such as the elderly. All three municipalities had their own policy activities implemented which signalled for good level of autonomy. A commonality was the provision of heavily discounted or free municipal sports facilities to clubs and citizens. Differences included emphasis on promoting elite sport within one municipality and enhancing sport for all in another. Cooperation with the ministry was described as good although, surprisingly, this was not the case in Sofia, where the ministry is based. Two municipalities appeared heavily involved in cooperating with NGOs and other institutions such as schools.

To optimise sport policy in Bulgaria, cross-sectoral work should be enhanced, communication between the national and local authorities and between the ministry and the third sector should be improved. Stronger voice should be given to NGOs in the policy-making process as they have close contact with citizens and fresh ideas. The country's limited resources need to be taken into account and a more strategic and realistic goals need to be put in place in the context of hugely expensive elite sport globally and high rates of non-communicable diseases nationally, which can be reduced through higher sport participation rates.

Keywords: Sport participation, Sport policy, Bulgaria, Physical activity, Public health.

ABSTRACT in Bulgarian

Практикуването на спорт и физическа активност се счита за важна част от здравословния начин на живот и различни държави, макар и с променлив успех, работят в тази посока не само за постигане на цели пряко свързани със спорта, но и за подобряване на общественото здраве. Ключов фактор за физически активна нация е спортната политика, която една страна развива. В различните страни в Европа процентът от населението на участващите в спорт и физическа активност варира значително, като най-малко активни са гражданите на страните от южна и югоизточна Европа. Настоящото изследване анализира съвременната спортна политика в България, която премина през многобройни социално-икономически промени, които оказаха своето влияние върху ниския брой спортуващи българи и последващите проблеми, свързани с общественото здраве.

В това изследване, стратегии за развитие на спорта, законодателството и прес-съобщения бяха разгледани, за да се определи посоката на националната спортна политика. В дисертацията е използван качествен подход (qualitative approach) за събиране на информация, използвайки дизайнът на сбор от случаи (multiple case study). Бяха проведени полуструктурирани интервюта с трима служители на три български общини - Стара Загора, Пловдив и София и с един представител на Министерството на Младежта и Спорта за да се получи актуална информация за текущите тенденции, предизвикателства и бъдещи перспективи в спортната политика. Бяха включени и позициите на две неправителствени организации (НПО). Теоретичната рамка на проучването е съставена от Хабитус на Пиер Бордюо и Multiple Streams с цел анализиране на социалния феномен участие в спорта и спортната политика, като фокусът е върху второто.

Основният приоритет в българската спортна политика е младежкият спорт с фокус спортни постижения. Различни предизвикателства бяха посочени от местните власти, но общ проблем е ограниченият им ресурс. Някои от тях бяха по-самокритични от други относно необходимостта да се обърне повече внимание на отделни демографски групи като възрастните хора например. И трите общини осъществяват свои местни политики, което сигнализира за добра автономност. Друга обща черта се оказа предоставянето на общински спортни съоръжения на клубове и граждани на силно намалени цени или безплатно. Някои разлики включват акцент върху насърчаването на елитния спорт в една община и подобряването на спорта за всички в друга. Сътрудничеството с министерството беше описано като добро, макар че, изненадващо, това не беше изцяло така в София, където се намира самото министерство. Две от общините са силно ангажирани в сътрудничеството с НПО-та и други институции като училища и детски градини.

За да се оптимизира спортната политика в България, трябва да се насърчи междусекторната работа, да се подобри комуникацията между националните и местните власти и между министерството и гражданския сектор. НПО-тата трябва да имат по-сериозен глас в процеса на вземане на решения, тъй като те имат близък контакт с гражданите, гъвкавост и свежи идеи. Необходимо е също така да се вземат предвид ограничените ресурси на страната и да се въведат по-стратегически и реалистични цели в националната спортна политика в контекста на изключително скъпия елитен спорт в световен мащаб днес и високите нива на незаразни заболявания в България (сърдечни заболявания, инсулт и пр.), които могат да бъдат намалени или предотвратени чрез увеличаване на процентът на редовно спортуващите и физически активни българи.

Ключови думи: Практикуване на спорт и физическа активност, Спортна политика, България, Обществено здраве.

*'After many years during which I saw many things, what I know most surely about morality
and the duty of man I owe to sport'*

Albert Camus

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1. INTRODUCTION

For the past five decades sport has become recognised internationally as an instrument with a social significance that, apart from attaining sporting excellence, can help achieve non-sport policy goals related to public health, education, socialisation, equality and integration (Österlind, 2016). Public policies have been created to develop opportunities for the general population to participate in sporting activities and benefit from the positive effects physical activity has on one's welfare (Hylton et al., 2001).

For numerous reasons of historical, political, cultural and economic nature the support for Sport-for-All policies has been highly inconsistent in the different European countries consequently participation levels in the 28 member states of the European Union vary significantly. The fact that some countries like, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, are performing comparatively well, with the majority of their populations regularly participating in sport and physical activity (European Commission, 2009; 2013; 2017) creates the need for those interested in the fields of sport development, sport and exercise participation, and public health to explore the issues hindering the task of attaining high participation rates in other countries, especially in southern- and south-eastern Europe. Historically, Eastern Europe has been following a different trajectory in political and economic life to that of its western counterpart and the consequences of these differences are still evident today, almost three decades after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in the former Eastern Bloc. One such illustration is the contrast in participation rates in sport and physical activity.

Physical inactivity in Bulgaria is particularly worrying and is one of the highest in the European Union while the percentage of deaths due to cardiovascular diseases of 65%, which can be prevented or mitigated through regular exercise, is much higher than the EU average of 37% (Wilkins et al., 2017). One of the key factors for having a physically active nation that has been identified by scholars is the sport policies that a given country has developed and it has been proven that there is a relationship between policy orientation, physical environment and physical activity participation (Stah et al., 2002).

Despite an increasing interest by national governments in recent decades in promoting sport participation, there has been a lack of studies in the field of sport and its relationship to politics (Girginov, 2000) or sport policy (Bloyce, 2010). Furthermore, a mismatch has been found between governmental involvement in sport and academic research in sport policy of small states, in particular, as they are often seen as passive objects rather than active subjects in the

policy process (Houlihan and Zheng, 2015: 341). On a global scale, Bulgaria can be considered as a small state and the claim that small states are often subjected to foreign influences holds true in the case of Bulgarian sport policy for much of the twentieth century. As a result of the close political connections with the Soviet Union, sport in Bulgaria was utilised as a tool to demonstrate superiority of the socialist system to the Western world so there was little room for genuine grass-roots Bulgarian sport development. Thirty years after the demise of the socialism, the sport movement in Bulgaria is no longer carrying the heavy political burden but this higher level of freedom is accompanied by a lack of material and financial resources to sustain the provision of sport services. Ideologically, there is also a conflict between pursuing sporting success against promoting participation. These events have made sport ‘no man’s land’ (Girginov and Sandanski, 2011), especially at the beginning of the political and economic transition in the 1990s from state-domination to democratic order.

Although the public health benefits of sport and physical activity have been receiving wider support in recent years, and Bulgaria’s accession in the European Union in 2007 has provided further support for sport-for-all development through EU funding and partnerships work, there is still a lot to be done for the percentage of people exercising regularly (5 times a week or more) or with some regularity (1-4 times a week) to become similar to or higher than the EU average of 40%. Currently, only 16% of Bulgarians take part in sport regularly or with some regularity (European Commission, 2017).

1.1 Aims and purpose of the study

The purpose of the paper is: (1) to examine contemporary sport policy in Bulgaria by reviewing and analysing strategic policy documents, legislation on sport, public announcements and press releases by current officials from the Ministry of Youth and Sport; (2) to evaluate the role of the state versus that of local authorities (municipalities) in the promotion of mass sport participation through review of the literature available and through conducting interviews with officials from the sports system in Bulgaria; (3) to collect the views of non-government sport organisations representatives on their involvement in and opinions of the sport policy processes in the country; (4) to provide recommendations for optimising sport participation policy on a local and national level in order to enhance sport for all.

In brief, the paper will examine from an administrative perspective what mass sport in Bulgaria looks like, how it can be further improved and what the prospects for this improvement are. The study is an attempt to assist the promotion of participation in sport and physical activity as a public health tool in Bulgaria.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

Before specifically focusing on the topics of sport and exercise participation and sport policy a review of the key developments in Bulgarian history since the late 1800s will be provided to allow the reader to place concrete sport-specific events and processes into context and to identify the relationship between politics and sport. This will be followed by current sport participation landscape based on national and European research conducted in the last ten years. Subsequently an outline of the contemporary policy in sport will be provided taking a closer look at the National Strategy for the Development of Sport 2012-2022, and the Sports Act [1996]. Chapter 2 will conclude with a description of the theoretical framework selected for analysing sport participation and sport policy, namely Bourdieu's Habitus and the Multiple Streams framework, respectively.

After the review of literature chapter, the study will proceed with an explanation of the methods used in implementing the primary research of collecting qualitative data from the selected participants from sport administration and sport and exercise promotion. The methodology content will constitute chapter Three of the current study.

Subsequently, in chapter Four, a presentation of the results accompanied by comparisons of the findings from the interviews to previous research and the arguments presented in the review of literature chapter. The data will be analysed with the help of the theoretical framework selected while referring to findings from past studies on Bulgarian sport policy to establish the progress made and the fields for improvement.

Having analysed the results, the Discussion chapter will provide a summary of the key findings and a list of recommendations for developing sport for all to aid the effectiveness of sport participation policy. The closing chapter will also present a conclusion of the thesis followed by an outline of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

2. HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN BULGARIA'S SPORT MOVEMENT, POLICY, AND PARTICIPATION.

In this chapter a review of the literature will be presented starting with a historical background of sport development through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries leading to the contemporary policies and the current state of sport and physical activity participation determined by national and international empirical research conducted in the last decade. The chapter will also outline the frameworks used to situate sport participation in social life and analyse sport policy.

Before looking more specifically at today's levels of sport participation, the national sport policy and the factors and developments affecting them, the study will provide a brief review of the major historical events that have shaped public life in general and the sport movement in particular in Bulgaria. The objective of this research is by no means to provide complete description of the history around modern sport development in the country but to present a brief overview so that current events and processes can be put into context and understood in a more comprehensive way.

2.1 Brief historical background of the modern Bulgarian state and the sport development forces (1878-1989)

Three main periods can be distinguished in modern Bulgarian history – the Monarchic capitalist years starting from the year of Liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878 lasting until the end of World War Two when the Soviet-influenced socialist order was established. The collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 marked the beginning of the third historical period – the democratic state. Several key historical events took place in those three eras, namely Liberation (1878), the new socialist order (1944), and the democratic revolution (1989). All three historical periods, sport has had a specific role to play according to the respective political and economic order as has been shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The main historical periods of the modern* Bulgarian state since 1878 (Modified from Girginov, 2000 and Girginov and Sandanski, 2011).

	Historical Period	Key Historical events (Year)	Associated events in this era (Year)	Functions of sport (Priorities)
1	Revival of the Bulgarian state /monarchic years / capitalism /fascist influence since 1920s (1878-1944)	Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878); Liberty (1878).	Struggle for and achievement of Unification (1885), Proclamation of Independence (1908), First Balkan War (1912-1913), Second Balkan War (1913), WWI (1914-1918), WWII (1939-1945).	Militaristic (Gymnastics and Shooting; military sport training for building the nation state)
2	The Socialist order (1944-1989)	End of WWII; Zones of influence deal; Communist rule in Bulgaria (since 1944).	Nationalisation of private property, Cold War, heavy government involvement in all areas of public life.	Political (Elite sport to support international recognition and mass participation for internal support)
3	The Democratic state (1989 – current)	Fall of the Berlin wall, Democratic revolutions in Bulgaria (1989); European Union accession (2007).	Transition to market economy, European Union accession; current economic, political and social struggles.	Youth sport; health (Sport as a citizen's choice; sport as a way of life; private sport sector)

*the term 'modern' refers to the re-emergence of the Bulgarian state in 1878.

2.1.1 The Monarchic years (1878-1944)

The modern Bulgarian state was re-established in 1878 after almost a five-century rule of the Ottoman Empire over the lands of the Balkan Peninsula. It was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 as a result of which the country regained its liberty. However, only parts of the Bulgarian-populated lands have officially been recognised by the then Great Powers in the subsequent congress in Berlin in July 1878 post the preliminary Peace Treaty of San Stefano signed three months earlier. As a result of the Congress of Berlin, the provisional Bulgarian territory has been split into five parts with three of them distributed among Romania, Serbia and the Ottoman Empire and the other two with nominal autonomy under the Ottoman Empire (Dimitrov et al., 2018). Figure 1 provides a clear visualisation of the territories of the Bulgarian state determined at the Treaty of San Stefano (marked in full red and red stripes) and their split decided at the Congress of Berlin.



Figure 1. Separation of Bulgaria into five territories (Bozhinov, 2010).

Unification of two of these five territories, namely, the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was achieved seven years later, which was followed by the Proclamation of Independence in 1908. Appearances of sport development can be traced back to these very first years of the modern state when in the lands left outside the formally recognised Bulgaria *'mysterious Gymnastic societies appeared in which the main sports discipline practised by the thousands of young people there was shooting with a rifle'* (Tsanev, 2008: 9). The end objective of this military training through the sport clubs was the unification of all Bulgarian people in one country, an objective which, arguably, never materialised to the fullest. The very first traces of physical activity promotion date back to the 1820s when recommendations for *'walking around the villages, and across the fields, hunting and playing'* have been made in the first Bulgarian primary textbook of 1824 as a means of preserving human health.

Articles about Gymnastics have been published in the first periodicals in the 1860s where the sport of Gymnastics has been termed *'the mother of health and bravery'* (Tsonkov and Petrova, 1964). Gymnastics and physical education slowly started to find its way in schools and was being introduced on a voluntary basis since the 1840s (Dorosiev, 1925 cited in Tsonkov and Petrova, 1964). The leaders of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Movement have been emphasising the role of physical culture in the military preparation of the army of volunteers that had been trained for executing a national uprising in order to free the country from Ottoman rule. Bulgaria's most distinguished revolutionary figures have been termed *'our first instructors in military-physical preparation'*. The proliferation of sport development has accelerated after the country's liberation and two main streams of the sport movement have appeared – the proletarian and the bourgeois-nationalistic-militaristic, with the latter being strongly supported by the first governments. (Tsonkov and Petrova, 1964).

In the first decades of the modern Bulgarian state, formal physical education was introduced as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum in 1894. Physical education's introduction occurred as part of a major government-initiated education reform when 10 Swiss Physical Education teachers were appointed to assist the establishment of the formally organised Bulgarian Sports Movement, introducing pupils to various sports such as athletics, football, boxing, wrestling, weightlifting and gymnastics (Girginov and Mitev, 2004).

The driving force of the organised Bulgarian sport movement at its very beginning was an energetic, well-educated visionary named Todor Yonchev who established the first sports society in 1894, which would soon grow to the largest network of voluntary sport clubs in the

country called 'Yunak' meaning a strong, brave man, or a folk version of 'hero'. The word was epitomising the resistance, might and virtue of the Bulgarian character, particularly in the context of the recently liberated country after centuries of foreign oppression. 'Yunak' clubs were voluntary sport societies with the main purpose of strengthening the national identity of the youth and building mentally and physically strong and morally responsible citizens. Activities organised by 'Yunak' sports societies included Gymnastics training, folk games, pre-military training, international relations, as well as educational seminars on physical culture and patriotic values (Girginov and Mitev, 2004). A number of scholars have pointed out the importance of sport for emphasising national identity in countries like Finland (Koski and Lämsä, 2015), the Czech Republic (Crampton, 2004), Poland (Girginov, 2004), and Ireland (Houlihan and Zheng, 2015) and Bulgarian sport development in the 19th and early 20th century is not an exception from this trend.

'Yunak' was established as a civic gymnastic movement by Todor Yonchev who was inspired by the voluntary sport organisations he witnessed Germany, Switzerland, Czech Republic, France and Sweden. Since its very beginning the gymnastic activities triggered unprecedented interest among the Bulgarian youth and by 1898, fifteen more 'Yunak' societies have been established in the country, which was followed by the founding of the Union of Bulgarian Gymnastic Societies 'Yunak'. The organisation was already operating on a national level with a underpinning ideology of a non-political public entity with a responsibility for patriotic education of the youth similar to the Czech 'Sokol', the German 'Turnverein', and the English 'Scout' movements. The core values were integrated the universal values of harmonious youth development with Bulgarian traditions and the patriotic mood in recently liberated Bulgaria. The main ideas of 'Yunak' have been grouped in five categories: 1-Corporal and health development, 2-Moral education and character building in the youth generation, 3-Pre-military training for achieving the national ideal (unification of all Bulgarians in one state), 4-Encouragement of social interaction among the social classes based on the idea of patriotism, 5-Spiritual and cultural education of the youth, and inclusion of the European values and ideas (Mitev, 2010.)

Those core ideas were clearly demonstrated by Todor Yonchev's words at the first 'Yunak' Union Congress in 1898:

'Gentlemen, here are the principles that have guided me when I made the first step for the establishment of the first Bulgarian gymnastic society 'Yunak'. My goal with these gymnastic societies has been to give our youth the opportunity to strengthen and enhance their physical capabilities, instead of giving in to lavish lifestyle. For only the strong and healthy can freely express their will, only they can be the rulers of their destiny and be able to bravely defend themselves. A fortunate country is the one which consists of such citizens. In such country no treachery and fear can survive. And this is the greatest guarantee for the permanence of a people and its economic and cultural flourishing...Gymnastic societies are the only 'school' which can awaken and raise the heroic (yunak) spirit, as soon as they are created and run appropriately' (Mitev, 2010.)



Figure 2. Todor Yonchev (top left) and 'Yunak' activities in 1910s (Mitev, 2010).

The first period of the modern Bulgarian state (1878-1944) – the monarchic years and capitalist economic order was also marked by a strong fascist influence, which started in the 1920s and continued up to the end of The Second World War. Girginov and Bankov (1999) have pointed

out crucially that Bulgaria’s version of Fascism was not as total as in Germany or Italy but the domination of the ideological doctrine was evident in every field of social life including sport. Their examination of the transformations in the country’s sport system during this period has outlined a number of interventions presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Fascist influence on Bulgarian sport system (Modified from Girginov and Bankov, 1999).

Priorities	To improve public health, promote military education, control sport movements, and advance the cause of the state against Communism.
Autonomy of sport	<p>The general shift of society from bourgeois democracy to Fascist monarchy transformed the concept of sport for the first time in Bulgaria's modern history, from being a fashionable endeavour of civilized Europe into a state institution.</p> <p>In 1923 the military Fascist government set up the Bulgarian National Sports Federation (BNSF) as a voluntary umbrella governing body, in order to co-ordinate all sports matters and suppress workers' sport clubs.</p> <p>The country’s first national sports organisation Unak, for example, was deprived of the right to run staff training courses, a practice it had pioneered and successfully undertaken for more than 30 years.</p>
Policy and Legislation	<p>A joint secret decree of the Ministries of Education and War in 1935 entitled 'For the total (corporeal, moral and public) education of Bulgarian youth, and for the organizations for corporal education and sport' envisaged stricter control over the education of young people, and more specifically, their pre-military training in accordance with the plans of the Ministry of War. The idea for the creation of a state youth organization was proposed, heavily supported by Germany, and in due course realized.</p> <p>In 1937, the Physical Education of Bulgarian Youth Act was amended giving the Minister of Education greater powers, enabling him to intervene directly and demand full accountability of all sport governing bodies. The minister also had unrestricted rights to appoint a delegate to the executive boards of sports organizations, to dismiss these boards, and to appoint a new leadership at his discretion.</p> <p>The pinnacle of the Fascist body politic — The law for the Organization of Bulgarian Youth (1941), and the establishment of the Brannik [defender] state organization with compulsory membership (individual or collective) of all young people between the ages of ten and twenty-one. The aims of the organization summed up the Fascist doctrine of the state - 'Believe, Obey, Work, Fight'.</p>

Table 2. continued:

	<p>Olympic sports turned from a poorly subsidised activity in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics to a field given ideological importance for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin also known as the Nazi Olympics which Bulgaria supported.</p>
Political field	<p>Tsar Boris III attending 1936 Nazi Olympics Opening Ceremony</p> <p>A grant of 200,000 Reich Marks personally presented by Hitler to the sport representative of Bulgaria's region of Varna for the construction of a new stadium.</p> <p>The early 1898 theoretical foundations of Bulgaria's sport, laid by 'Yunak' Sport Society, which subscribed to the concept of holism, that is, the balanced development of human physical and intellectual education, was gradually replaced by 'athleticism,' symbolized by the strong male body and its utilitarian purposes.</p>

Despite the close ties with Nazi Germany and the strong influence of fascism onto Bulgarian political life, there were some significant differences illustrated by the lack of a fascist party as such in the Parliament, the public dissonance with fascist totalitarianism, the pro-Soviet manifestation in Sofia during a visit of the Spartak Moscow football team in 1940, and most notably Bulgaria's refusal to submit its Jewish population to the Holocaust (Girginov and Bankov, 1999).

2.1.2 Bulgarian sport policy in the Socialist period (1944-1989)

After several dynamic decades of economic development accompanied by political instability and social struggles, a number of wars including World War One and two Balkan wars, it was the outcome of World War Two which determined the strategic orientation for the Bulgarian state when a percentage deal over the Balkans was struck by Churchill and Stalin according to which Bulgaria fell under the Soviet zone of influence. Subsequently, especially with the rise of the Cold War, the Soviet intervention permanently established its influence over the state's economic, military and foreign-affair policies. Sport policies were no exemption. (Girginov, 2009: 521.) The demise of the 'Yunak' movement as a symbol of the voluntary sport sector was inevitable as sport was now allocated a strong political meaning. In his analysis of Bulgarian Sport Policy in the 1945-1989 period Girginov (2009) has come up with the following findings presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Developments in Bulgarian sport policy between 1945-1989 (Girginov, 2009).

Autonomy of sport	<p>Sport was assigned an essential role in the processes of gaining political support for the [Communist] party, industrialisation, and social stratification. (2009: 521)</p> <p>Highly centralised approach to state activities weakened the voluntary sector; associations were merged and started to operate in return for state subsidies. (2009: 522)</p> <p>The state system never allowed voluntary sport organisations to unify in a collective body. (2009: 533)</p>
Policy development	<p>The sport policy community was dominated by key state or individual actors and interests of large groups were excluded. (2009: 533)</p> <p>Virtually, no strategic sports policy document was based on a comprehensive analysis of society, hence policies failed to address the needs of those who were subject to interventions. (2009: 533)</p>
Prioritisation	<p>Both mass and elite sport could not be pursued equally and top-level sport was the strand that got more attention as a result of the increasing pressure from the Communist party for better results in international competitions. (2009: 528)</p>
Interaction with global sport	<p>Despite ideological differences with countries behind the iron curtain, international cooperation was evident and Bulgarian sport had an impact on and was being influenced by global sport developments. (2009: 527)</p>

As it can be seen, sport was heavily politicised which, arguably, ruined the pillars for an autonomous development of the sport movement in general and of Sport for All in particular. Efforts to cater for the mass sport participation have been made during this period but the successful outcomes of those have been rather sporadic and largely overshadowed by the supremacy granted to top-level sport. Probably the largest-in-scale Sport for All project in the socialist years was an international cooperation event among the Eastern bloc countries, which

was launched in 1977 with the purpose of devising policies to promote Sport for All (Bankov, 2004). It is important at this stage to note that, unless otherwise stated, the terms Sport for All, mass sport, recreational sport, and sport and physical activity will be used interchangeably in the study.

For a decade, from 1979 to 1989, sport officials and academics from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (formally the German Democratic Republic), Hungary, Poland, Romania and the founder of the idea - the Soviet Union have been working closely together to create concepts, strategies and programmes. In contrast to Girginov's (2009) claim, it has been argued that despite the ideological framework, there were policies, which had been informed by research and aimed to address actual population needs. A case in point is the pre-school children fitness test in Bulgaria, which was a seven-year research project (1983-89) aiming to establish a system of monitoring and assessing the physical condition of young people. Policies had been developed based on the results of the test which examined 59 000 children in 1986 and 120 560 in 1987. The outcome of the study served as the basis for devising a national children's physical activity programme the implementation of which has been claimed to have delivered very encouraging changes in children's overall fitness and in acquiring sport-specific skills. (Bankov, 2004: 788.)

In terms of mass-sport participation, a common policy for large-scale events has been devised in the 1970s resulting in the organization of the Spartakiades which were multi-sport competitions, initially originating from as early as the 1920s in Germany, promoting active living, national revolutionary figures, socialist revolutions, historic dates, and the project of building socialism (Bankov, 2004: 791). Spartakiades have been held in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Romania (under the name Daciades), Bulgaria, and the then East Germany (GDR), and Czechoslovakia (Costa and Miragaya, 2002).

2.2 Contemporary Sport Policy in Bulgaria (2000s – 2017)

Sport as an area of public policy has enjoyed an ever increasing interest by governments of both developing (Riordan, 1986) and welfare (Bergsgard and Rommetvedt, 2006) states. Yet this increase has not been matched by an equivalent increase in academic interest in the analysis

of public policy for sport (Houlihan, 2005:164). Claims have been made about the lack of studies not only in sport policy (Bloyce and Smith, 2010) but also in the field of sport and its relationship to politics (Girginov, 2000:9). There has also been established a lack of research in sport policy of small states, in particular, as they are often seen as passive objects rather than active subjects in the policy process (Houlihan and Zheng, 2015). This Master's thesis will be a modest attempt to contribute to reducing this gap between academic research and government involvement particularly in developing Sport for All in the case of one of these small states like Bulgaria.

Acknowledging the role of policy in sport participation, Girginov (2000) has argued that people take part in sport due to numerous intrinsic and extrinsic motivations but the actual form of participation is predetermined to a large extent by the policy of sport provision, prescribed by some credible agency – a sport governing body, an expert, or an entrepreneur, a claim that coincides with Hallman et al's (2015) notion on the importance of sport supply factors in sport participation. Having provided some contextual background in which sport policy occurs, this section examines in more detail what the features of Bulgarian sport policy are with a particular emphasis on those aspects related to sport participation.

Firstly, it will be useful to define what sport policy actually is. Bloyce and Smith (2010) have described it as having a rather ambiguous and contested nature making it problematic to clearly conceptualise the term 'policy'; nevertheless, they have suggested that policies can be regarded as human actions aimed at: achieving certain objectives, resolving an identified problem, and maintaining relationships within an organisation or between existing organisations. According to Girginov (2000) it can be interpreted as a framework of principles, objectives and planned (or unplanned) actions (or inactions) developed by a credible local, national or international agency aiming to achieve common ends concerning specific communities within given range of resources, time and space. In his analysis of Bulgarian sport policy in the 20th Century Girginov (2000) defines national sport policies as concerned with the planning, provision, and distribution of sport services, facilities and equipment. It has also been noted in his study that particular policies within the sport's domain include the provision of physical activity programmes for different age groups, setting standards for training and performance, providing sporting infrastructure and resource allocations, establishing codes of practice for athletes and officials, staff training and certification, and the regulation of sports structures. Not differing too much from Bloyce and Smith's (2010) and Girginov's (2000) definitions, this study defines

sport policy as the collection of practices, principles, strategies and legislation that recognise priorities, establish goals and concentrate efforts to achieve them.

2.2.1 Underpinning legislation

The fundamental legislation principles related to sport and physical activity in Bulgaria are established in The Constitution and The Sports Act.

The Constitution of The Republic of Bulgaria states in Chapter Two, Section Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens, Article 52. (3) that:

‘The State shall protect the health of all citizens and shall promote the development of sports and tourism.’ (Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1991).

In line with the egalitarian statement in the Constitution, **The Sports Act [1996]** in Article 2, Section 1 [2014] defines the health of all people as the primary goal. It states that ‘the aim of physical education and sport is the betterment of the nation’s health and physical activity through systematic engagements with physical exercises and sport for people of all ages’ (Law on Physical Education and Sport, 1996).

The Sports Act recognises the creation of the necessary conditions for regular practice of sport and physical exercises and the raising of the nation’s sporting prestige as a priority field in the state’s and municipalities’ social policy. Two notions can be made here; first, similarly to the main objective assertion in the National Strategy for Sport, both sport participation and elite sport are considered priorities, which on the one hand signals for synchronised content in the two most important documents arranging the relations in and the development of sport but on the other it raises the question of how realistic the achievement of those is, when it comes to policy implementation. Secondly, recognition of both the state’s and municipalities’ role in the sports system is evident. The state is responsible for the provision of opportunities for sport for all, youth sport, school and university sport as well as elite performance. The building and maintenance of state-owned sports facilities, anti-doping control, support for and regulation on national sports organisations also fall within the powers of the state through the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Municipalities look after the maintenance of municipal sports facilities which comprise some 90% of all sports facilities in the country, which according to the public registrar are 2012 in total (National Strategy for Sport, 2011). Additional duties, among other things,

include the provision of assistance for organising sports events on their territories, funding initiatives that support local sports development, and providing support (through funding and sports facilities) to non-profit sports organisations that deliver free-of-charge sports activities for children, school-students, university-students, and disadvantaged individuals (National Strategy for Sport, 2011).

Although the majority of sports facilities belong to municipalities, it can be argued that the national-level authorities possess stronger powers in the sport policy domain considering that the Ministry of Youth and Sport is the main funding provider for sports federations, sports associations, sport clubs, and initiatives promoting youth sport and sport for all. This claim is further supported by Girginov and Sandanski's (2011) observation on local authorities being largely dependent on the state financially. It should be pointed out, however, that despite the relatively strong level of centralisation both the Sports Act 1996 and the National Strategy for Sport make provision for cooperation among national and local authorities, sport organisations and the private sector in the management of sport in Bulgaria. This is in line with Hallman et al.'s (2015) assertion that in order to foster sport participation, optimally, provisions from all three sectors of the economy (public, private, and voluntary) should be made for sport for all since a single provider is seen insufficient to satisfy public demands.

It is of course a different matter how these written stipulations are being interpreted by the interested parties and to what extent each of them is able or ready to exercise their powers in the sport-policy making and implementation processes. In the context of the transformations the country has gone through in the last 25 years or so, it can be said that changes in the political and economic order may occur within a few years or even months but it can take decades or generations for mind-set transitions to take place. This can be referred to Green and Collins's (2008) concept of path dependency which relates to the reluctance to break with initially established values and practices, in Bulgaria's case – the highly centralised mode of delivery of public services from the mid-1940s until 1989. As a result, policy trajectories remain 'locked onto a set course' or at least constrained by the previously applied policy principles.

A new Sports Act proposal has been developed in recent years, which has been approved in the first reading in the Parliament in the autumn of 2017. According to the Minister of Youth and Sport the new Sports Act will regulate investments in sports infrastructure in Bulgaria by allowing long-term investments to be made in public sports facilities by sports clubs, associations or unions of sports clubs registered as non-for profit organisation through the

extended lease period (of up to 30 years) provided that a thorough investment plan has been provided. The lease period in the current Sports Act is 10 years (Ivanov, 2017).

Another amendment is the permission of sports clubs to be registered as business entities while only those registered as non-for-profit organisations will be eligible to receive funding from the ministry. Sports leagues will also be allowed to be registered as private business organisations. Meanwhile, regulation on newly emerging sport federations will be increased. A license will only be given to those federations with at least fifteen member clubs. Currently, the minimum requirement is for seven. Meanwhile, public funding will be available to those federations with at least twenty clubs or to federations who have a registered athlete with a medal from Olympic Games. In addition, sports clubs will be required to only employ qualified coaches (Sports Act Proposal, 2016).

While changes to the current Sports Act are needed to respond to the current developments in sport and society, it has been argued that the new Sports Act proposal is far from achieving this task. Former Vice-chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on Children, Youth and Sport (October 2014 – January 2017) Vili Lilkov has expressed concerns in a recent opinion piece that a new Sports Act is needed but not the current proposal version. The rest of section 2.2.1 will provide his point of view outlining what the necessary solutions are to the challenges for the Bulgarian sport system. According to him, the newly proposed legislation will not resolve the major issues in the sport system in Bulgaria which are not only related to insufficient funding or weaknesses within the Ministry of Youth and Sport's work (Lilkov, 2017). As he has pointed out:

Firstly, there is no national investment program for sports infrastructure. There has been a rapid increase in sports facilities (mainly football stadia) built with EU funding in very small towns and villages in which there is nobody playing sport. Meanwhile, in Sofia and other cities there is a lack of appropriate sports facilities. A lot of the schools do not have sports halls and use classrooms for physical education classes. Secondly, there is no staff to implement national sport policy on a regional level as a result of which there is insufficient coordination between municipalities, schools and the sport organisations regionally.

Thirdly, there is no envisaged links between education and sport but an imbalance between funding allocations for elite sport and for sport for all. The new proposal make no reference to the high-level sport development in universities in which there are over 200 000 students. The University Sport Association is not even mentioned in the new sports act proposal. Funding for

school sport is at the 2006 levels. The Child Protection Agency does not have a single project aiming to tackle crime, violence, and addiction through sport while the proposal does not acknowledge the Agency's role. In the Ministry of Education's 2017 urgent measures against aggression, sport is missing as a prevention tool. Most municipalities do not employ sports experts, there is no regional sport promotion programs and spare no more than 1 to 3 leva (€0,5 - €1,5) per citizen for sport for all.

Last but not least, there is no stimuli attracting human resource and investment in sport. The status of the coaching and sport manager profession has not been arranged which along with the low incomes gives no social security to young personnel. The scientific provision is conducted with no national program – it focuses on a few elite athletes and is occurring thanks to individual efforts by some federations and coaching teams. Still, no legislation on volunteering has been approved which deprives elite sport and sport for all from vital indirect financial support. There is also a lack of tangible economic stimuli for businesses to support sport. The work of the Ministry of Youth and Sport is not supported by other ministries with clear responsibilities to physical education and sport such as The Ministry of Health care, The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Transport, etc.

What needs to be done according to Lilkov (2017) is urgent reforms and new policies with specific compulsory (not wishful) measures. To do that, municipalities need to be placed at the centre of the national system for physical education and sport.

Each municipality needs to adopt sport programs according to criteria determined by the state and funded by the municipal budget for the development of sport locally. Regional sport councils need to be established implementing the national sport policy in cooperation with municipalities, sport federations and associations, universities and other national bodies. Sport coordinators need to be employed in every municipality based on the size of population whose responsibility is to organise and coordinate sport development for all age groups.

According to his view, Bulgaria should define ten to twelve priority sports with particular social significance to which significant resources should be directed in the long run with the focus being sport infrastructure, supporting qualified personnel, youth and school sport, and sport for all. The strategic selection of several sports to be more intensively developed is also supported by the majority of the Bulgarian population. It has been found that the majority of Bulgarians – 57% think that no more fifteen sports should be given priority status and within those, almost

40% support the view that there should be between six and ten priority sports (Tsenov and Pavlov, 2013).

A national program is needed for the reconstruction of sports infrastructure in Bulgarian schools. Having a modern sports infrastructure to be made a compulsory requirement for the accreditation of every university. In cooperation with the Ministry of Sport, other ministries (Health, Education, Defence, Internal affairs, etc.) should be obliged to develop programs for the different subsystems in sport – sport for all and social tourism, military and police sport, sport for people with disabilities, school and university sport.

In addition, tax reliefs need to be in place for businesses supporting sport development. The gambling sector should be charged additional fees to fund sport and tackle gambling addiction among the youth (Lilkov, 2017).

2.2.2 Strategic documents defining Bulgaria's sport policy orientation

The National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sport in Bulgaria 2012-2022 (later referred to as the National Strategy for Sport), is a founding document recognising the role and social functions of physical education and sport in the country, reflecting the need for qualitative reconstruction of the sports system as a compulsory step in the context of the political, economic and social changes since 1989. It outlines the strategic objective and the main direction for the national sport and physical education system, the basic principles on which it is based, its main structures and activities, the priority and subordinate functions of state and other public institutions, the different types of funding as well as the criteria for effectiveness of the system in the current socio-economic conditions. (National Strategy for Sport, 2011.)

The strategic goal of the National Strategy for Sport (2011: 7) is: *'the affirmation of physical education, sport and social recreational tourism as a means for the betterment of the health and physical capabilities of the population, maximum increase of the proportion of the population from various socio-economic groups participating in organised sport for all, as well as elevating the nation's sporting prestige to a world level'*.

Although there are three objectives mentioned, the successful accomplishment of which seems, arguably, rather unrealistic for all three simultaneously, it has recently been made clear by

current government executives that sport for all is the main priority for the Ministry of Youth and Sport (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2016). In a launching event of the ‘Sofia – European capital of sport 2018’ initiative the current sports minister has expressed the Ministry’s recognition of mass sport as the most important priority by the suggested amendments in the Law on Sport allocating every municipality a set sports budget, 70% of which to be dedicated to mass sport and 30% to elite sport (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2016). The main problems that have been identified by the National Strategy for Sport (2011), particularly in relation to Sport for All have been summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Issues identified by the National Strategy for Sport 2012-2022 (National Strategy for Sport, 2011).

<p>Organisational and structural Problems</p>	<p>“-as a result of ineffective organisational structure of Bulgarian sport in the last 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of sports clubs and federations but no increase in the number of people participating in sport”(2011:2)</p> <p>“-at the current stage, there are no local structures existing within the national system for physical education and sport who are specifically responsible for the development and coordination of sport for all at a regional and municipal level.” (2011:2)</p> <p>“-in their prevailing part, municipal bodies perform only formal supervision over the activities of sports organisations on their territories; there is no calendar of sports competitions at a municipal and regional level that is specifically related to sport for the youth.” (2011:2)</p>
<p>Infrastructure issues</p>	<p>“-the sports infrastructure is characterised with old facilities, poor maintenance and rather sporadic attempts for building new sports halls and playgrounds; insufficient number of playing fields within residential areas, cycling roads and other sports facilities allowing for sport participation on individual or organised basis.” (2011:3)</p> <p>“-the sports infrastructure is inaccessible for people with disabilities; there is a lack of enough specialists in adapted physical activity,</p>

Table 4. continued:

	<p>which is further hindering the development of disability sport.” (2011:3)</p>
<p>Funding and affordability</p>	<p>“- the funding from the Ministry of Youth and Sport is going mainly to sport federations and sport clubs which is determined by a system of indicators that tolerate competitive results rather than the social significance of, interest to or the reach of a certain sport.” (2011:3)</p> <p>“-incomes from private sponsorship are mostly supporting top-level athletes; it is common for municipal budgets to fund professional teams who have no youth sport divisions; income from sports events, TV rights, and player transfers are fairly marginal.” (2011:3)</p> <p>“-sport for children and youth is increasingly becoming an elitist activity only accessible to children from well-off families” (2011:3)</p>
<p>Workforce & quality of service insufficiency</p>	<p>“-the lack of coaching qualification levels of progression and inadequate social security has forced many well-qualified coaches to leave the country or to switch to other occupations resulting in poorly prepared coaches conducting sports activities for children and adolescents, often leading to injuries and premature drop out from sport” (2011:3)</p>
<p>Local authorities’ role</p>	<p>“-despite rising levels of inactivity, some municipal and state authorities have demonstrated quite a disinterested attitude; there is a lack of sport-for-all promotional campaigns and insufficient awareness among the general population regarding the opportunities for practicing sport and physical activity.” (2011:4)</p>
<p>Sport in the education sector</p>	<p>“-physical education in school is often overlooked; university sport is suffering from organisational and facilities-provision issues” (2011:5)</p>

The specific measurable goals in the National Strategy for Sport 2012-2022 include the following:

To ensure the achievement of the strategic goal, several measurable goals serving as performance indicators have been identified, namely:

- reducing the percentage of 'never active' population from 58% to 39%
- increasing the percentage of those exercising or playing sport at least once a week from 3% to 5%
- increasing the number of those participating in activities and projects organised by sport organisations from 100 000 to 150 000
- reducing the proportion of the overweight population from 49.5% to 40%

One issue identified here is that the document does not make it clear what source has been used for the provision of these statistics. The programs that are in place for the achievement of the goals of the National Strategy for Sport are four-year programs whose timings coincide with the Olympic cycles; these 4-year national programs, in turn, consist of annual sport programs that are focused on the provision of sport activities in specific sports, workforce development, and sport opportunities for specific target groups. These annual programs are directly funded by the Ministry for which national sport federations apply before they start the program delivery. Some examples of such programs include: Learn to Ski, Learn to Swim, Tennis, and Golf.

2.3 Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in Bulgaria (2000s – 2017)

In their study on the factors affecting sport participation and the impact that different types of sports services providers (municipal, commercial, and clubs) have on participation, Hallmann, Feiler and Breuer (2015) have suggested two types of factors: individual and sport supply factors. Those have been devised as an elaboration on Becker's (1965) model which has previously been used for examining sport participation. According to Becker's (1965) Economic theory of behaviour, participation in physical activity is conducted by an individual through the allocation of time and market goods. Consequently, an individual's decision to take part in sports is restricted by time and income. Human capital (education), and demographic

factors are also part of the model. Sport participation has been considered as non- or sub-market-oriented voluntary activity so it is affected by monetary and time restrictions (Breurer, Hallmann and Wicker, 2011).

As it will be shown later, time restrictions has been claimed to be the major obstacle for Bulgarians to do exercise or sport. As far as financial restrictions for Bulgarian citizens are concerned, over 23% of the population have been found to live below the poverty line of € 2 154 per year in 2016 while as many as 39% live in a risk of poverty or social exclusion (National Statistics Institute, 2017). Looking at these two determinants separately, it can be assumed that people with lower incomes would generally refrain from taking part in sports that are associated with expensive equipment, high fees for facility use or coaching supervision. The same argument applies to time constraints; for those spending many hours working it would be unlikely to be involved in time-consuming sports. In addition, it needs to be mentioned that the organised mode of practicing sport can serve as another factor influencing participation, i.e. for those lacking the monetary and time resources, being bound to a set time for a sports activity can become an obstacle for participation.

Age, gender and nationality have also been regarded as determinants for participation. As physical abilities tend to decline with age, age can have an impact, which according to recent studies (Breuer et al., 2011) can relate to the choice of sport, rather than to the choice whether to be active or not. Different nationality or foreign background also play a role in participation as well as in the type of sports individuals may choose (team versus individual). Depending on the country of examination, gender does appear to have an impact on one's involvement. Breuer et al. (2011) have drawn a relationship between gender, sport participation, and ethnic/religious variables claiming that it is socially unacceptable or unpopular for women of some religions to participate in sport and physical activity, which is still regarded as predominantly a Western practice. Human capital (education and knowledge about sports, which has been explained as the more time spent in education the bigger the chances to develop competencies and to take part in different sports) has consistently appeared as a positive predictor of sport participation (Farell and Shields, 2002; Berger et al., 2008; Hallmann et al., 2015). Also, those with higher educational level tend to have higher incomes hence subjected to fewer restrictions in monetary terms, at least (Breurer et al., 2011).

Summary of the factors associated with sports participation according to Hallman et al. (2015):

1. **Individual level** (socio-demographic factors): income, working time, time devoted to caring for children/relatives, human capital (educational attainment), age (health capital), Gender, ethnic background/nationality, marital status/ (parent), disability.
2. **Context level** (sport supply factors): availability of sport programmes, provision of sport infrastructure, proximity of and access to sport infrastructure.

To put sport participation into specific context, the following brief description in relation to Bulgaria's economic welfare is provided; Bulgaria is a rather insignificant factor in the global economy with a GDP PPP per capita of \$ 21 500 for 2017 which places it on 62nd place out of the 187 countries for which data has been collected (International Monetary Fund, 2017). The nominal GDP per capita for 2016 was around \$ 7 500 i.e. 75th of the 182 states according to this metric (World Bank, 2018). In comparison, the mean nominal GDP per capita for the European Union, which Bulgaria joined in 2007, is over \$ 32 000. On an EU scale, in relation to the same indicator, the country is 28th out of 28 current members of the European Union. At the same time the Eurobarometer research on physical activity from 2009, 2013 and 2017 has consistently concluded that Bulgaria is one of the countries with the largest proportion of its population who never exercise or play sport (European Commission, 2009; 2013; 2017).

National research on participation in sport and its key drivers has been rather limited although recently, there has been growing concern about the low levels of participation and general interest in sport. In a report on the youth trends in the country in 2008, sport was the fifth most common free-time activity after the ones mentioned above plus listening to music and surfing on the internet (Mediana, 2008). In an identical study a year later, it has been established that doing some sports was the third most common leisure pursuit for young people (aged between 15-35 years) after resting at home and going out with friends (Mediana, 2009). A national research initiated by the Ministry of Sport, which at the time was The Ministry of Physical Education and Sport, on the awareness levels among the population of the benefits of sport and physical activity discovered that the main obstacles for people to play sport were: lack of free time (41%), lack of an established habit to be active (21%), and lack of appropriate environment (17%).

In terms of the conditions for and access to mass sport, only 9% of the population claimed that there was a coherent national policy on the development of sport, and the majority (89%) said that the state should help the development of mass sport (National Research on the Awareness

of the Population on Physical Activity [NRAPPA], 2011). According to the same study, the proportion of physically inactive citizens (aged 18-65) is 55% which is significantly different to the 2013 Eurobarometer results but is fairly consistent with the 2009 Eurobarometer research in which 58% have been found to never exercise or play sport. In the most recent study conducted in 2017 the percentage of the 'never exercising' is 68% (European Commission, 2017). Whichever figure is taken as reflecting the true picture on physical inactivity levels, it can be argued that both are concerning numbers. What is also alarming is that 62% of those not exercising or not playing sport are also physically inactive in their job; also, some 44% of those aged 18-25 and 51% of those aged 26-45 are smoking at least once a week (NRAPPA, 2011).

Those who are participating in sport and physical exercises daily make up 6% of the population; around 19% play sport several days a week. In terms of once-a-week participation, it has been found that 21% do some physical exercises at home, 12% do cycling, 9% do team sports (Football, Basketball, Volleyball, etc.), some 8% go to the gym and around 6% prefer outdoor trips in the nature. (NRAPPA, 2011).

According to the 2009 Special Eurobarometer survey on participation in sport and physical activity conducted on behalf of the European Commission as part of a EU-wide research, it was found that in Bulgaria 3% exercise or play sport 5 times a week or more, 2% - 3-4 times a week, 8% - 1-2 times a week, 5% - 1-3 times a month, 23% less often and as mentioned above 58% - never doing physical activity or sport (European Commission, 2009). In the 2013 study, those exercising or playing sport 5 times a week or more were 2%, 1-4 times a week – 9%, 3 times a month or less – 9%, and 78% reported that they were never exercising or playing sport. Looking at other physical activity (cycling from one place to another, gardening, dancing) 51% of the Bulgarian population is never doing any of those mentioned. In contrast, 77% walk at least 4 days a week for at least 10 minutes making the country the most regularly active walking nation in the EU (Special Eurobarometer, 2013). This obvious discrepancy between highest level of inactivity in sport and physical activity in the EU and highest prevalence in walking for at least 10 minutes will be discussed in more detail later on but it is certainly worth paying attention to as it may indicate some cultural differences in how different nations interpret the terms sport, exercise, and physical activity.

What is more important at this stage is that a few clarifications are necessary to be made to avoid confusion and misunderstanding of the data, which can be a common problem when interpreting large quantitative studies that use varying approaches to reporting results, apply different methodologies, and involve extensive amounts of statistical data. Firstly, the frequency of participation in the two Eurobarometer surveys has been presented in two different ways. In the 2009 study respondents were put in 6 categories (5 times a week or more, 3-4 times a week, 1-2 times a week, 1-3 times a months, less often and ‘never’). In contrast, the 2013 survey has categorized the participants in only 4 groups: 5 times a week or more, 1-4 times a week, 3 times a months or less, and ‘never’. The merging of 6 of the categories into 4 in this more recent study may also be the reason for the substantial increase of those reported as ‘never active’ from 58% to 78% considering that the ‘1-3 times a month’ and the ‘less often’ categories have been merged to ‘3 times a month or less’. Table 5 provides a visual description of what has been mentioned above.

Table 5. Frequency of participation in sport and exercise according to Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2009; 2013; 2017).

	2009		2013		2017
<i>5 times a week or more</i>	3%		2%		2%
<i>3-4 times a week</i>	2%	10% *	<i>1-4 times a week</i>	9%	14%
<i>1-2 times a week</i>	8%				
<i>1-3 times a month</i>	5%	28% *	<i>3 times a month or less</i>	9%	15%
<i>Less often</i>	23%				
<i>Never</i>	58%		78%		68%
<i>Don't know</i>	1%		2%		1%

** (the purple sections under the 2009 study show what the results look like after merging the 4 categories into 2 as in the 2013 and 2017 surveys).*

As it can be seen in Table 5, the reason for the 20% increase in the ‘never active’ category can largely be explained by a move of those who are active ‘less often’ to the ‘never active’ category although it is worth mentioning that from the perspective of regular sport participation the difference between these two categories is minor. Also, classifying participants who are active 1-2 times a week and those active 3-4 times a week in a single group creates inaccuracies when interpreting the data, i.e. according to the 2013 survey, a person who is exercising once a week is put in the same category with another individual who exercises 4 times a week.

Differences have also been found among the national study mentioned earlier (NRAPPA, 2011), and the 2009, 2013 and 2017 Eurobarometer studies.

While it is useful to point out such kind of discrepancies, what is more important, in this particular case, is that despite the variations in how results are reported, the number of people who are regularly playing sport or exercising is disturbingly low. At the same time it can be claimed with a high level of confidence that the majority of the population are inactive in relation to sport and physical activity. To summarise, a common finding in all research studies on sport participation levels presented above is that at least half of the population is never exercising or playing sport and the majority of those who are inactive are also having sedentary occupations. Less than 20% exercise several days a week and no more than 6% exercise or play sport regularly i.e. 5 times a week or more (NRAPA, 2011). At the same time the proportion of smokers is very high with 42% of men and 28% of women smoking daily (Tobacco Atlas, 2018); a positive trend, however, has been evident since 2005 when the smoking population has been reduced by 9% for the 2005-2015 period (Tobacco Atlas, 2018).

2.4 Framework for analysis of sport participation policy

Two frameworks have been selected helping to interpret and analyse sport participation and sport policy, respectively. As sport policy is only a one aspect that can affect one's participation it has been seen in this study as a field within the over social activity of sport participation. To illustrate this, Figure 3. provides a visual representation of the relationship between sport participation and sport policy and the frameworks adopted by the current research. Habitus is the structure-agency setting within which sport participation occurs while Multiple Streams determines the conditions and likelihood for sport policy to be realised. As the focus in this thesis is on the role of sport policy, the focus will be given to the Multiple Streams framework, which will also be used for analysing the empirical data.

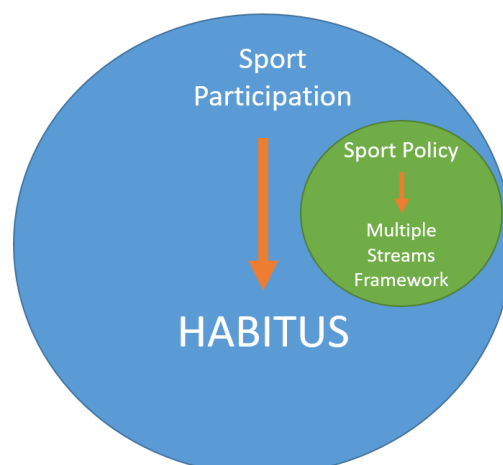


Figure 3. Framework for analysis used.

2.4.1 Habitus and sport participation

The framework used in this study for examining sport participation will be informed by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* which along with other thinking tools such as Capital, Field, Doxa, and Symbolic violence, aims to explain social phenomena. Bourdieu's *Habitus* is a reflection of his attempt to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency whilst acknowledging the external and historical factors that condition, restrict and/or promote change. Habitus provides unlimited scope for the production of new ideas, views and approaches based on the socio-historical, political, economic, cultural and technological context in which they are generated. (Costa and Murphy, 2015.) The concept of habitus has been described as widely applicable in various fields of social science research including but not limited to: education, social and economic mobility, migration, and youth crime.

Habitus can broadly be explained as the evolving process through which individuals act, think, perceive and approach the world and their role in it. As a socially embodied system of individual and collective dispositions made visible through social agents' practices, habitus is personal history that generates more history (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus consists of structured structures predisposed to function as a structuring structures (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Another definition describes habitus as the system of schemes of perception, thought, appreciation and action which are durable and transposable (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, cited in Fowler, 1997: 18). It should be noted that Bourdieu placed a strong emphasis on class division and the role of the dominating classes in determining the practices of the dominated ones. As stated by Fowler (1997), the repressive controls over the body must be understood historically as internalised forms of compliance to the influential classes or nations which are the bearers of social rules. In Bourdieu's words, the habitus 'expresses first the result of an organising action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination' (1984, cited in Tomlinson, 2004: 166). In brief, habitus contains the ingredients of both structure and agency or as described by some it is a form of socialised subjectivity (Giulianotti, 2005: 157).

Relating the definition to the field of sport participation, the sport habitus encompasses the choices one makes as an individual and the influence of societal and ecological factors on whether to take up a sport activity or not, what that activity will be, where it will be practiced

and for what purposes it will be done. Utilising Bourdieu's habitus, the study will seek to examine the reasons for the low participation levels in sport and physical activity among the Bulgarian population. As a social practice, sport participation can be explained as dependent on one's habitus supplying a regulated set of perceptions and actions within which it is typical for improvisation to take place (Fowler, 1997). Low sport participation rates evident from the national and EU-level research findings indicates that these 'regulated set of perceptions and actions' related to sport and physical activity are not present in the habitus of much of the Bulgarian population.

2.4.2 Multiple Streams framework and sport policy

Sport policy can be considered as comprising the following categories: field of activity, specific proposal, output, and outcome (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). Girginov (2000: 92) has identified the stages in the policy cycle as: problem recognition, opinion generation, placing the problem on the agenda, taking actions (committing resources), events and scenarios, and authoritative decisions.

For the purposes of this study, the analysis will not focus strictly on how sport policy is formed but rather on what it constitutes i.e. what problems and priorities have been recognised, what actions have been taken, what results have been (or are envisaged to be) achieved and what developments can be made. As the focus of this study is on sport participation, the evaluation of and recommendations for those will be made from the perspective of sport participation although the elite sport strand will also be a subject for discussion as it will be naïve to completely isolate the two from one another as they are in constant interplay (whether complementing or competing with each other) in the policy formation and implementation processes, in the public domain as well as in sporting practice. While Bourdieu's habitus has been adopted as the thinking tool with which sport participation is interpreted in this study, Multiple Streams has been selected as the theoretical framework explaining the development of Bulgarian sport policy and more importantly, the prospect for future optimisation of the public policy in the field of mass sport participation.

Developed by political scientist John W. Kingdon in the 1980s Multiple Streams is a framework concerned primarily with the process of agenda setting that is formed by three key streams, namely, the problem stream, the policy stream and the political stream, which need to be in place for an issue to appear on the agenda (Houlihan, 2005).

Multiple Streams attempts to examine the political system as a whole while embracing the importance of individual agents, ideas, institutions and processes external to the policy making process itself such as elections and the influence of media and other opinion formers. In contrast to more rational models of policy making the Multiple Streams framework highlights the messiness, ambiguity and complexity of policy making. While it acknowledges the rational decision making aspect in the policy making process it is based upon the concept that policy making and policy change is often a random and opportunistic process (Collins, 2008: 33.)

As summarised by Houlihan (2005) Kingdon's three streams consist of the following;

****the problem stream*** refers to the issues that have been identified by government policy-makers as requiring action as opposed to those that they have decided to ignore. These issues may have been prompted by specific events (e.g. crises), feedback on current policies or societal trends (e.g. rising levels of obesity).

****the policy stream*** is the area where particular policy groups suggest ideas that float around and occasionally rise to the top of the agenda, or are adopted by policy entrepreneurs. Examples of such ideas may include that youth sports clubs should be guaranteed national or municipal funding if they cover certain criteria or that every town with a given number of citizens should have a public swimming pool.

****the political stream*** is related to the national mood, the political parties, pressure groups and the government (primarily represented by administrative and legislative changes).

In Collins's (2008) analysis of public policy toward adult lifelong sport participation in Australia, Finland and New Zealand, it was the political stream, and more specifically, the administrative and legislative change that were found to have had particular resonance with regards to the development of sport policy in all three countries. While the current study will test the Multiple Streams framework in the case of Bulgarian sport policy, it will also try to discover if any of the three streams is seen as possessing a stronger influence. In Kingdon's words '*the chance of an issue getting on the policy agenda is not a simple function of the power of affected interests but is rather the result of the coincidence of the three streams to provide a 'launch window' where a problem is recognised, a solution is available and developed, a political change makes the time right for policy change, and potential constraints are not severe*' (Houlihan, 2005: 172).

The framework's focus on agenda setting makes it very suitable for that part of the analysis concerned with the future prospects for development of Bulgarian sport policy; however, a potential weakness of Multiple Streams is its preoccupation with the very agenda setting and neglect of other stages of the policy process such as implementation. It has also been argued that the framework may be less easily transferable across more centralised political systems; another weakness is that it is less suitable for the review of sport participation policy's current content and its main principles, for which other frameworks such as the Stages model and the Institutional analysis with their rather descriptive nature are in a stronger position for capturing processes and examining the behaviour of current actors and the structures within which they operate. Despite these strengths, the Stages model and Institutional analysis lack the ability to explain the dynamic nature of policy-making and as Houlihan (2005: 171) has argued, they tend to prioritise structure (institutions) over agency (policy makers, campaigners) while failing to acknowledge the 'messiness' of policy making and its ambiguous character. As this research is an attempt to assist the development of the contemporary sport policy it has been decided that the future of Bulgarian sport policy has a higher priority over the description of the current sport policy; for this reason Multiple Streams has been regarded as the more appropriate tool for analysing sport participation policy in Bulgaria. As Collins (2008) has suggested, Multiple Streams recognises the importance of individual agents, ideas, institutions, and processes external to the policy making process thus highlighting the complexity of policy making.

3. METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter will explain how the primary research was conducted, the methods used, the research design that was selected and the rationale behind it as well how the data was analysed.

3.1 Research task

The main research task of this study is to find out how sport policy can be improved, i.e. what recommendations can be made to assist in the task of increasing participation in sport and physical activity. To do that several research questions have been developed including:

- 1) What are the current features of Bulgarian sport policy (orientation, how realistic and how specific)?
- 2) What is the role of the state and that of local authorities in the promotion of sport participation (identified problems, current solutions, future developments)?
- 3) What are the views of non-governmental sport organisations on the sport policy process and their role in it?

3.2 Research Design

The study has adopted a qualitative research method in order to get a deeper understanding of the current state of implementation of sport policy in Bulgaria and the future direction for its development to increase sport participation. The research design selected for acquiring such deeper understanding is case study, which put simply by Sparkes and Smith (2014) is the choice of studying *the case* of something. Edwards and Skinner (2009) suggest that the case study approach can be characterised as the presentation and analysis of detailed information about one or more subjects helping the sport management researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of cases in order to generate new insights. Yin's (1994) brief definition describes it as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (cited in Edwards and Skinner, 2009: 202). Together with Ethnography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Narrative Inquiry, and Openly Ideological Research, the Case Study is one of the well-established communities in the camp of qualitative research and is one of the popular study approaches in sport, exercise, and health, particularly useful in seeking answers to the 'why' and 'how' questions (Sparkes and Smith,

2014). The rationale behind selecting this approach for the current study is twofold: firstly, it has allowed the researcher to grasp a closer look into the complex environment in which sport policy occurs, and secondly, it provided the flexibility of selecting a time frame suitable for the study. Unlike grounded theory, for example, in which a duration of several years, or even decades can be required to conduct the research, the case study method has no such restrictions, hence assisting the practicality aspect.

There has been three types of case studies identified by Stake (2005: 443), namely: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. While intrinsic cases are those studied due to the researcher's primary interest in them, the instrumental and collective types represent case studies that are of rather secondary importance, playing a supportive role, helping to understand a larger phenomenon or condition. The current research has used collective case study as it investigated the multiple cases of two non-governmental sports organisations, three local authorities' sports departments, and the national governmental sports body – the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Placing the explanation into the context of the research, the aforementioned organisations [case studies] serve as platforms to illuminate insights into the larger area of the sport policy in the country, which is the field of primary interest to the research.

3.3 Implementation of the thesis

The study has employed qualitative data collection methods, which as suggested by Patton (1990) consist of in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documentation. Two out of these three elements were utilised in the current study. As mentioned earlier, official documents including strategies documents and national legislation constitute a significant part of the material for analysis. These have been supplemented by semi-structured interviews with local and national government officials as well as representatives of the non-government sport sector.

In his analysis of Bulgarian sport policy in the 20th Century, Girginov (2000) has identified four key aspects as the essence of the structure in a focused interview provided by the interviewer. The researcher should ensure that: (1) the people interviewed must have been involved in particular events in sport-policy making on a central or local level during the period of investigation, (2) the events subject to study must have been previously analysed by the researcher through content or situational analysis, (3) interview guide is developed setting for

each major area of inquiry, and (4) the interview focus on the subjective experiences of persons exposed to the pre-analysed situation in order to ascertain their definitions of the situation. While Girginov's work has examined sport policy focusing on the policy-making process i.e. how sport policy is made, the current study portrays the content of the contemporary sport policy so placing a higher importance on content analysis rather than key figures' influence and experiences. For this reason, only the first 3 aspects will be considered as forming the structure of the interviews in this research.

3.4 Data collection

The purposeful selection of three local authorities, two NGOs and the national governmental sports body in Bulgaria has been made in an attempt to get a wider perspective on the sport policy issues, priorities and developments from a sport-for-all perspective. Sparkes and Smith (2014) have suggested several sampling types of cases for guiding the selection process, including extreme or deviant cases, particularly typical cases, maximum variation cases, critical cases, and convenience/opportunistic cases. The six organisations selected represent elements of several of these categories: they are a convenience sample and have features of a particularly typical sample. Considering their mode of operation, and level of responsibility, they can also be viewed to an extent as a maximum variation cases – governmental vs. non-governmental, and local vs. national, respectively. The ultimate goal of this selection strategy is to deliver a panoramic perspective to the studied phenomenon hence contributing to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the problem.

It has to be pointed out, however, that it would be inaccurate to draw generalisations applicable to all the actors in the sport policy domain based on the studied cases. Rather, the sample represents only a proportion of the administrative units of the sport system in Bulgaria, which does not include, for example the more executional bodies such as sport federations, sport clubs or schools and the reader should be mindful of this limitation. In addition, the three cities from which municipalities' representatives were interviewed were relatively better off economically in comparison to other municipalities. Consequently, the sports provisions that have been made in Stara Zagora, Plovdiv and Sofia may not be in place in other parts of the country, especially in the north-western region of Bulgaria, which is the most economically deprived part of the country. The differences in socio-economic development can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Study participants and socio-economic profiles of Bulgaria's regions (modified from Institute for Market Economy, Tsvetkov, 2016).

The following participants have been chosen to be interviewed: The municipalities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora (representing the local authorities), The Ministry of Youth and Sport (the national-level authority), and two non-governmental organisations, namely, BG BeActive and Functional Fi7 Army both of which are based in the city of Plovdiv. BG Be Active, however, has been expanding to a nation-wide organisation while its headquarters are still in Plovdiv.

3.4.1 The Local Sport Authorities:

The three municipalities' sport officials were from the cities of Stara Zagora, Plovdiv and Sofia.

Stara Zagora is a middle-size city in Bulgaria with a population of 157 000. As Figure 4 shows, it is one of the cities with better socio-economic landscape with the unemployment rate in 2017 having been 3% in comparison to a national unemployment level of 6.2%. (National Statistical Institute, 2018). More information can be obtained through the municipality's web page: <https://www.starazagora.bg/>

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria with 345 000 inhabitants living in a city in the middle of the country with good socio-economic conditions, and convenient geographical location to main national and international transport corridors. It has long traditions in Olympic sport with many of Bulgaria's champions coming from Plovdiv. Web page: <http://www.plovdiv.bg/en/>

Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, is also the country's biggest city with a population of 1 345 000. It is the main economic and cultural centre in the country and in 2018 Sofia is 'The European Capital of Sport'. Web page: <https://www.sofia.bg/en/web/sofia-municipality/>

3.4.2 The Ministry of Youth and Sport

The Ministry of Youth and Sport is the governmental department responsible for developing sport on a national level through devising legislation, policies and programmes and distributing funding from the national lottery to federations and sport clubs. Both elite sport and sport for all are under the administrative remit of the ministry, as stated in The Sports Act [1997]. The

three main categories of responsibilities of the Ministry of Youth and Sport include High Performance Sport, Physical Education and Sport in People's Free Time, and Physical Education and Sport among the Student Population (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2018). Looking at the Ministry's structure there are eight units of specialised administration responsible for (1) Investment policy and Public Procurement, (2) Sport for All, (3) Sport for Students and Sports Schools, (4) High Performance Sport, (5) Coordination and Control of Sports Preparation, (6) Youth Policies, (7) European Programs, Projects and International Cooperation, and (8) Regional Coordination and Monitoring. The interviewee of this study is an official from the Sport for All unit whose key duties include:

*supporting the Minister in the execution of the state policy in the field of sport for all and sport for people with disabilities

*developing, coordinating and monitoring the delivery of sport-for-all programs

*collating information on sport participation levels and evaluating sport enhancing physical activity

More information can be found on the ministry's web page: <http://mpes.government.bg/>.

3.4.3 The Non-governmental organisations:

Founded in 2010 by Laska Nenova, **BG Be Active** Association is a Bulgarian non-governmental organisation promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyle for all by developing awareness-raising campaigns, promotional events, educational activities and partnership-building projects, in order to create a wide variety of opportunities for the people to be physically active. The organisation works at local, national and international level, being a national coordinator of the international initiative MOVE Week, part of the NowWeMOVE Campaign. The development of the organisation is based on the work of experts and partners from various sectors including the key long-term partnerships with and International Sports and Culture Association (ISCA) of which Nenova has been appointed as Campaign Manager-Europe in 2014 (BG Be Active, 2018). Web page: <http://www.bgbeactive.org/>

Unlike BG Be Active, **Functional Fi7 Army** is a much more informal organisation delivering free-of-charge outdoor fitness training activities for Plovdiv citizens since 2015. As a voluntary group of physical activity enthusiasts, their training sessions take place mainly on weekends within the urban environment and in the nature. Having started less than three years ago, FF7A

has become popular among more and more local citizens and is a good representation of a civic organisation operating out of a pure passion for promoting physically active lifestyle. Apart from a Facebook page, FF7A does not have a designated web page so several photos have been provided in Figure 5 to help the reader visualise their core activities.



Figure 5. Outdoor activities organised by Functional Fi7 Army (Functional Fit Army, 2017).

3.4.4 Research procedure

Interviewees were contacted in spring 2016 and regular email and telephone communication has been maintained until the autumn of 2016 when the interviews were held. Introduction to the research was provided via email and phone conversations which was accompanied by further information on the day of the interview. The researcher ensured that interviewees' responses were audio recorded only if a consent for that has been provided. Participants were informed that their anonymity will be preserved if they wished not to disclose their names.

The representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sport did not agree to record the interview and their request was respected so only written notes have been taken. Although the rest of the participants did not have any objections against audio recording and using their names, it was decided by the researcher to keep all of them anonymous so that there is consistency in the reporting and anonymity. Transcript of the recorded interviews is available upon request. Average length of the interviews was 45 minutes with a transcription of an average of 6 pages. The following codes have been made representing each of the interviewees:

- M_StZ – for the Municipality of Stara Zagora
- M_Pld – for the Municipality of Plovdiv
- M_Sof – for the Municipality of Sofia
- MoYS – for the Ministry of Youth and Sport
- NGO_BBA – for the BG Be Active non-governmental organisation
- NGO_FFA – for the Functional Fit Army non-governmental organisation

To conduct the data analysis, the results from the interviews have been grouped into three major themes based on the Multiple Streams framework and the research questions, namely: problem recognition, policy solutions, and political factors.

As the focus of the study is the development of sport policy, the Multiple Streams framework, as a tool for policy analysis, will be given more attention in comparison to Habitus, which is considered in this research as the overarching factor determining sport participation. In other words, sport policy or the structure aspect of sport participation is only one of the many elements that comprise the Habitus. Consequently, policy should be understood within the large field of Habitus.

3.4.5 Researcher's role

The selected participants had no previous contact with the researcher prior to the current study hence his position has been of an external observer. It should be noted, however, that one of the municipalities – Stara Zagora is the researcher's home town so additional points have been made in the Results and Discussion chapters based on previous personal experience in the city of Stara Zagora. Like the interviewees, the researcher's home country is also Bulgaria and this has assisted the research process. One such facilitation was that the interviews were conducted in the participants' native language. The audio recordings were transcribed in English while language support has been given by the researcher's class mates. Also, the researcher has used closer-insight information in the study that had been accumulating over the years spent in his home country, which added further depth to the research. One particular field in which the researcher has closer insight is cycling, both the sport of road and track cycling and the activity of cycling as leisure and transport in the urban environment.

4. RESULTS

The Multiple Streams framework will guide the presentation of the findings accompanied by a discussion and two summary tables outlining the current issues and developments in sport policy locally, nationally and in the third sector. The whole policy domain is considered as one element forming the much wider area of Habitus as Figure 3 illustrated.

The results from the municipalities' representatives will be presented in the following order: Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, and Sofia. The problem recognition section will outline what issues have been perceived as requiring action by the municipalities' units responsible for sport and what priorities have been identified on a municipal level forming the local sport policy landscape. After discussing the problem stream, attention will be given to the implemented policies to tackle those identified issues. Lastly, the political factors will be discussed including the levels of perceived autonomy, importance of partnerships and key figures for realising policy solutions. The findings will be summarised in a table allowing the reader to look at the differences and similarities among the three local authorities. A decision for a separate table only for the local authorities has been made as it was considered by the researcher that differences were distinctive enough to simply unite all of the municipalities in one category, i.e. the local authorities.

These will be followed by results presentation of the interviews with the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the non-governmental sector. The current policy developments will be linked to previous studies to determine where progress has been made and where no significant improvements were evident. The chapter will conclude with a summary table including the three type of organisations that participated in the study – the municipalities, the national authority, and the non-governmental organisations.

4.1 Municipality of Stara Zagora

4.1.1 Problem Stream

The key priority that appeared during the interview with the Senior Expert at the Sport, Tourism and Youth Activities Department at the City of Stara Zagora was youth sports. Numerous references to children and youth sports clubs support were made including grouping youth sport and mass sport in a single category:

”When we say mass sport, I can not set it apart from youth sport because where does mass sport take place? It’s in schools, in kindergartens, in the numerous sports facilities we have built.”

and

“I wouldn’t want to distinguish youth sport from mass sport, they both go hand in hand. At the end of the day, the youth includes people from ages 2 to 20 so to say. So children as young as 5 years of age are all welcome to use the municipal sports facilities.”

Drawing an equal sign between the two, rather than youth sport being one piece of the mass sport complex is an indication of excluding all other non-youth groups. Active efforts have been proven in promoting sport and physical activity within the youth population but the rest of the general public appeared to have been left out. The researcher has conducted additional probing to find out more about the municipality’s work specifically targeting adult population, for example, and the main finding was that such work is illustrated by providing public sports facilities, however, it was difficult to find an explicitly expressed focus on encouraging mass participation across all age groups through specific club activities or municipal actions.

A distinct statement that *‘The policy in our municipality, during the current mayor’s mandate and previous mayors’ mandates, has always been to support mass sport.’* (M_StZ, 2016) was expressed but as mentioned above, evening mass sport to youth sport would make the researcher inaccurate to claim that adult population or the elderly are as equal priority as the youth. An example of sports opportunities for the elderly included the city’s swimming clubs’ veterans sections who take part in tournaments run by the federation. It has to be noted, however, that in the Bulgarian context the term ‘veteran’ is related to retired athletes or elderly individuals who are very physically active taking part in competitive sport, and such group is a quite a small minority in the country.

The health of the population has been recognized as a problem but the solution through sport and physical activity has been perceived more as a personal choice rather than an active

municipal policy. Statements of the importance of sport participation were quite generic and mainly included the infrastructure developments:

”All the sports facilities belonging to the Municipality of Stara Zagora is available to use, in many of the cases for free, even for citizens from the general public. In a few cases there are facilities for which people need to pay. Opportunities include tennis, volleyball, badminton, basketball in several locations, here in the town centre, in the newly opened park as well as in the ‘Ayazmo’ Park [a natural park in the north part of the city where many of the recreational facilities and the city football stadium are located]. They are free to be used by everyone. There are many locations and opportunities. I am happy when I see the people running on the athletics track in the ‘Ayazmo’ Park because when you invest your time in physical activity you won’t need to invest in medication later on.”

and also:

”As we have mentioned earlier, by investing in sport we will minimise investing in healthcare and we stick to that. As trivial as it may sound, this is the absolute truth and there is no way we can have a healthy nation without investment. Whether it is students or citizens when the sports facility environment is provided, then it is matter of personal conduct, or the role of the school or personal motivation to be physically active” (M_StZ, 2016).

Such ‘hands-off’ approach perceiving sport participation as an individual choice has been pointed out in previous research on the orientation of sport policy in Bulgaria since the democratic changes. The afore-mentioned statements confirm Girginov and Sandanski’s (2011) conclusions of authorities’ weak involvement in actively promoting participation in sport, at least in relation to the studied municipality.

4.1.2 Policy Stream

A distinguishable feature of the sport policy in the city of Stara Zagora is the free provision and maintenance of its facilities to sport clubs, which also includes covering the utility bills by the municipality. In terms of investment in sporting infrastructure there has been several new sport and recreation places built including a multi-sports hall in 2012, an astroturf football pitch in the eastern part of the city in 2015, a new urban park in 2016 with outdoor courts for volleyball, tennis, and basketball and a football pitch. A project for another multi-purpose sports hall in the western part of the city is under way while the municipality swimming pool has recently been renovated although the work was completed with a delay of about one year due to unexpectedly large damages to the roof.

”...we left many children with no swimming facility but good-quality things take time to realise” (M_StZ, 2016).

The pool is open to all citizen but the reference to the children highlights again the emphasis at least on a perception level that is put on developing predominantly youth sports. Finance-wise, the municipality's annual budget for its sports calendar has increased from the equivalent of €7 000 in 'year 2000 when I started working at the municipality to around €350 000 currently' (M_StZ, 2016). For accuracy purposes, €7 000 in year 2000 have the value of €13 580 as of 2016 considering the cumulative inflation rate for the 16-year period of 94,3% (National Statistics Institute, 2018). This is comparatively higher than the 33,9% cumulative inflation for the Eurozone for the same period. Nevertheless, after having taken inflation rate into account, the increase of the budget for sport in the city is still very strong. In 2016, the city was selected by ACES Europe [European Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation] as a European city of sport for 2017, which according to the interviewed sports official '*shows that Stara Zagora deserves to be called a sporting city. It is not just good press, it is a responsibility throughout the whole year to create a sports calendar with additional events that we have to deliver*'(M_StZ, 2016).

It has to be noted that such recognitions are given to some 15 European cities each year (ACES Europe, 2018) and the legacy of these are not necessarily guaranteeing increased sports participation rates. A case in point is Ruse, a Bulgarian town in the northern part of the country who was given the same award for 2016 and some of its events were attended by local citizens. Looking critically at the award for city of Stara Zagora, two examples serve as a note of caution, namely, the city's unsatisfactory cycling infrastructure, and the outdoor velodrome, which has been unusable for the last decade due to lack of maintenance and construction works of a football pitch in the inside of the track.

As far as sports events are concerned, the city is regularly hosting numerous tournaments with some recent ones including Youth European Football Championships, European Athletics Championships 2nd League, and European Wushu Championships. The city is also organising the Stara Zagora Marathon, which is one of the few annual marathons in the country. The European Week of Sport is also part of the sports calendar of the municipality and is a positive illustration of promoting sport and physical activity among the citizens as part of a European-wide initiative.

In relation to policy proposals for tackling the issue of limited resources, it was suggested that more proactive efforts in tax-relief policy for the private sector are necessary to encourage business to support sports activities.

”There needs to be significant reliefs provided by the state to those supporting sport clubs or athletes. Currently there are 5% tax relief which sounds like almost wishful thinking and am not sure whether it still exists or not. But I think that if we find a solid organization from the private sector in one way or another they will provide investment for sport in the municipality. We will be able to make a good dialogue between us just like many other cities who have this practice.”

In practice, this could mean that businesses investing in sport can be given a tax relief on the money they have allocated to sport sponsorship or that they pay lower income tax. Although the tax-relief tool, which as mentioned earlier was also suggested by Lilkov (2017), has been long discussed in Bulgarian public life, its implementation seems unlikely under the current government with the Minister of Youth and Sport claiming that the flat-rate 10% income taxes in Bulgaria are low enough anyway and there was no need for further reductions (KraleV, 2017).

4.1.3 Political Stream

The role of the mayor has been highlighted during the interview giving credibility to the political stream of the Multiple Streams framework. As mentioned earlier, the municipality takes care of covering utilities costs of sport clubs such as heating and cleaning which the sports official described as happening ‘*due to all previous mayors but most significantly to the current one because at the end of the day it is the mayor and the municipal council who decide on the resource allocation*’ (M_StZ, 2016). Statements such as ‘Every city mayor decides on what fields will be developed’, ‘*...our mayor is very heavily involved in developing sport and I can see how dedicated he is to this task*’ (M_StZ, 2016) demonstrate the importance of decision-making at a political level and on the other – the relative autonomy of local authorities from national government. The autonomy at local level has been confirmed by the interviewee: ‘*We are rather autonomous. This is my firm position*’ (M_StZ, 2016) but interestingly enough the statement was followed by ‘*Unfortunately, in most cases the key issue is money*’ (M_StZ, 2016). The municipality decides independently of the state what sports events will be organised throughout the year but financial limitations mean a rather restricted autonomy. Considering Girginov and Sandanski’s (2011) conclusion of Bulgarian municipalities as being given the responsibilities to promote sport for all but not the resources, the current study brings in a contemporary insight of increasing autonomy, which is, however, accompanied by the burden of limited resources. Still, the fact that the local budget for sport has been consistently on the increase is a positive sign.

Cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sport has been described as successful.

”Every year for the last 3 years, we have been marking the European Week of Sport together with the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The sports minister recently stated that he spends more time in Stara Zagora than in the Ministry, which shows that our city is attractive and that there is something that keeps him coming back.”

One can argue that close interaction with the national-level authorities is a good sign of cooperation but a more objective approach of demonstrating cooperation would hold a stronger argument, for example, number of participants involved in jointly-run initiatives or agreeing on sport participation targets in the municipality and pursuing these targets. Referring back to the findings that the majority of the Bulgarians do not do any exercise or sport (NRAPPA, 2011; Special Eurobarometer, 2009; Special Eurobarometer, 2013) while at the same time being among the nations suffering the most from cardiovascular diseases in Europe (Nichols et al, 2012; Wilkins et al, 2017) the need for comprehensive and coordinated action is urgent, to say the least. Such coordinated approach is still missing and the following statement was indicative of that when a question on the realistic participation targets was asked:

”We will work towards improving the conditions but I do not want to give specific participation numbers because I do not want to sound pessimistic but I believe that more and more people will adopt sport and physical activity into their lives.”

4.2 Municipality of Plovdiv

4.2.1 Problem Stream

Youth sport was found to be the key priority area for the sports administration unit in the Municipality of Plovdiv. There was, however, explicitly stated need to support for performance sport development and throughout the discussion it was evident that youth sport was seen as a building block of the sports development pyramid and elite sport perceived as an assisting tool to promote youth and school sport.

”Yes, certainly, in relation to mass sport this [prioritizing participation as opposed to performance] is right to do but we should not completely forget about elite athletes. There should be a development route established to allow them to excel because successful athletes are excellent examples to children.”

”Yes, I think we can benefit from Sport for All practices from abroad but I also think we need to pay attention to performance sport because our elite athletes are too few anyway.”

Although youth and elite sport clearly marked a leading position in the sport policy making at the municipality of Plovdiv, they were not dominating exclusively to the detriment of the other population groups. As it will be outlined in the Policy Stream section, the elderly and people with disabilities have also been identified as important target groups albeit to a weaker extent compared to young people and promising athletes. One statement for a holistic approach demonstrated the recognition of sport as beneficial to the whole of society:

”... we need to acknowledge that we can not put a sharp distinction between mass sport, youth sport, sport for the elderly... in other words, the whole population should be seen as a target group that needs to be encouraged to have an active and healthy lifestyle, which is also economically beneficial for the state in terms of savings in health care expenditure.”

A unison can be seen with the priorities recognized by the National Strategy for Sport for: (1) enhancing public health, (2) increasing sport participation and (3) restoring elite sport success, which is a positive sign for working in the same direction but the question of how realistic such a goal might be today still holds strong. When this issue was brought up in the interview, the municipality’s sports development officer agreed on the challenging nature of pursuing several goals at once but in her view there was a solution through cooperation with the private sector:

”There should probably be a specific scheme devised for elite athlete development in which private sponsors to be encouraged to support them, not the state; this way private sector can benefit from advertising opportunities while the state will benefit from their achievements without taking the whole financial burden.”

This view was confirmed when the advances in global top-level sport have been discussed considering the enormous resources that large states such as China, USA or Russia are ready to invest in elite performance.

”Absolutely. From that point of view I agree that we shouldn’t invest in the so-called ‘tourists’ [supposedly good athletes who are only good enough to win quotas to take part but not to achieve]. This year [2016 at the time of interviewing] there was 10 athletes from Plovdiv [out of 51 athletes in total] at the Rio Olympics who didn’t quite perform successfully

....

... It is quite a long list of athletes who have received some 60 000 leva [ca 30 000 euro] from the municipality and some substantial amount from the Ministry of Youth and Sport, so resources have been invested for 4 years for preparation for the Olympic Games but it seems that they couldn’t reach the pinnacle of world sport performance. That’s why I think that investments in elite athletes probably should not be made with public money. ”

The problems identified were related to lack of financial resources, difficulty to support existing infrastructure and build new facilities, and regional sports administration staff shortage from the Ministry to provide equal support to sports clubs.

”Resources are never enough hence, we rely on sponsorship contributions, on the non-governmental organisations, the sports clubs themselves are helping as well as the volunteers.”

”...the lack of enough funding for the sports clubs results in a poorer quality of the pedagogical and coaching services they provide, they struggle with maintaining the facilities, they are unable to pay to qualified personnel. Consequently, some sports clubs cease to exist soon after they are established. For us as a municipality, we have difficulty in maintaining the facilities that belong to us and there are challenges when it comes to the renovation of the sports infrastructure...”

For example Plovdiv City Stadium, which is also the biggest in the country with capacity of 55 000, has been almost unused due to delayed reconstruction and renovation work. Examples of other football stadiums in the city, the lack of winter sports facilities added to the facilities insufficiency problem. What deserves particular attention is poor availability of public swimming pools – arguably, the most representative facilities of the sport-for-all movement. With a population of 340 000, more than twice as much as that of Stara Zagora:

”We only have one public indoor swimming pool in the city which is 25m-pool and this is a problem for our municipality because there are 3 sports clubs in Plovdiv – 1 triathlon and 2 swimming clubs which only have this swimming pool available. One of the swimming clubs by the way has been winning the National Swimming Championships for 25 years. So there are a lot of children swimming but the 6 lanes in the only swimming pool here are by no means sufficient, especially after 7pm, the pool is packed. Apart from the 3 sports clubs, there are also kindergartens using it, The Youth Centre, The Orphanage Centres, so it turns out to be extremely busy, which is a serious problem” (M_Pld, 2016).

From an administration perspective, levels of centralization have been decreasing although it was pointed out that clubs are facing challenges with writing project applications to apply for funding from the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

”...we help them through consultations and assistance with writing the project application because otherwise they just turn into bureaucrats or they feel they have to pay some professionals to write a successful project application for some funding albeit it minimal. So there is margin for improvement on this topic.”

As it was admitted, ‘sports coaches are at their best when they are in the sports hall or out on the pitch’ and the burden of bureaucracy is understandable but resentment moods to constantly

apply for temporary funding signals the resistance to change from the previous socialist system of guaranteed state funding. Which of the two approaches better caters for the needs of the sports club is a topic for long discussion as both have advantages and disadvantages but the current model of project-based funding is the dominant one on a European level and sports officials need to adjust to the transformed funding model. The difficulty in dealing with the new administration realities is substantiated by a lack of regional staff from the Ministry of Youth and Sport to assist sports clubs:

”The regional representative from the Ministry for Plovdiv region is now covering the regions of Smolian and Pazardzhik. Considering that there are about 100 clubs in Plovdiv and another 30 or so in Smolian and in Pazardjik, that makes it unrealistic for all of sport clubs to be served appropriately by a single person. This then leads to a vicious circle of having a small number of sport clubs keeping close contact with that representative as a result of which only they benefit.”

The much more wider public health problems were also put forth as problems that the municipality sports services are up against, demonstrating the recognition of the sports administration’s responsibilities on health of the youth population as opposed to taking care of strictly sport-specific matters.

”It may be an overstatement but the overall health status and the physical activity development of the youth generation are worsening while there is an increase in alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, spinal cord deformations, overweight and social deviations to which immediate reaction is required.”

4.2.2 Policy Stream

The municipal sports policies were oriented in the following areas: sporting infrastructure, support for youth sports clubs, school sports extracurricular activities, provision of facilities for people with disabilities and sports talents support.

Replacing the collapsed stand of one of the football stadiums, and building a multi-purpose sports hall underneath the stand, construction ‘*which is expected to start soon*’ (M_Pld, 2016) of a highly needed 50-metre indoor swimming pool and a plan to build a city sports museum are the current projects forming the facility development strand of the local sport policy. Such facilities are all suitable for the promotion of sport participation although their ‘to be made’ status is currently not in favour of increasing participation rates. However, the recently built Youth Centre is a good illustration of the potential of sports facilities that are open to all:

”We have a Youth Centre built recently just around the corner which you can look at. The multi-sport playing fields have been supported by our municipality with 1.7 million leva [850 000 euro] which allowed for creating 3 football pitches, 2 courts for basketball and volleyball, 1 for tennis, outdoor gym, indoor gym, which is used by elderly people. In the morning, the Youth Centre is actually used predominantly by elderly people while children are in school. We tried to create such conditions that attract people to use the facility. All these facilities can be used for free by the general public 8:30am until 5:30pm after which they are paid for so that the facility can be self-sustainable.”

The support for youth sports clubs consisted of providing municipal sports facilities at minimal fees and a funding stream:

”For youth sport, the municipality dedicates 90 000 leva [ca 45 000 euro] to the 40 sports clubs in the city who have youth sport division. Each club gets between 1000 - 3500 leva [ca 500-1750 euro] through a points system depending on the age and number of children in the club, and on the qualification of the coaches. So clubs get funding for developing youth sport which is the foundation of the sport development pyramid for creating elite athletes.”

This confirmed the municipality’s orientation towards developing youth sport but the explicit statement of ‘creating elite athletes’ keeps the emphasis on performance as opposed to participation. Therefore, to obtain subsidies, sports clubs would be more inclined to pursue results instead of maintaining or increasing membership, which is reminiscent of the sports system that prevailed in previous decades until the 1990s. The association between the well-known pyramid model and sport performance has been made clear by Scheerder et al. (2015: 19) and an alternative one called the church model, illustrated in Figure 6 has been proposed to serve the mission of increasing participation.

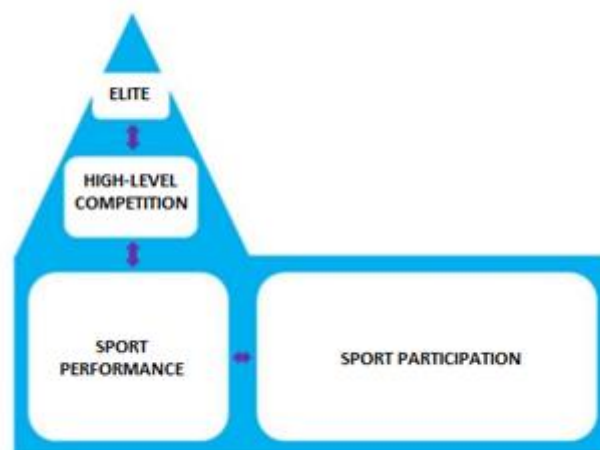


Figure 6. The church model of sport (Scheerder et al., 2015: 19).

The additional school sports calendar consisting of volleyball, basketball, and handball leagues, as well as swimming tournaments and cycling initiatives further substantiated the youth sport policy in an attempt to *'create a modern sports environment and provide for favourable conditions for future development'* (M_Pld, 2016).

The provision of municipal sports facilities free of charge to disability sports clubs contributed to a more holistic character of Plovdiv's sport policy i.e. trying to cater for different groups of society.

"...these people are a socially vulnerable group in society and many municipalities do not provide much support for them while in municipality of Plovdiv all sports facilities are with free access for disabled people. Most of the disability-sport clubs are developing multi-sport activities so whether it is wrestling, athletics, chess, swimming - they can enter the facilities anytime based on their training schedule. Through sport we encourage them to develop their abilities, to integrate, to attract more people and to feel useful part of society..."

Additional activities included hosting international sporting events but what was important to note was the strong relationship that was reported with non-governmental organisations and volunteers.

"...we rely on sponsorship contributions, on the non-governmental organisations, the sports clubs themselves are helping as well as the volunteers. Sports volunteering is developed quite well in Plovdiv. We work together with the National Volunteer Workforce Alliance. When we host a European or World Championship in Fencing, Rowing or Canoeing we receive a lot of help from the volunteers from the Alliance."

"They [the BG Be Active NGO] are very active and full of ideas. Although they are not sport-specific organization, they get support from us to assist them with organizing some of their events such as the European School Sport Day, European No Elevators Day, which are quite entertaining initiatives making people more physically active through fun activities."

The important role of sport volunteers helps to bring back the foundational voluntary roots of the organised sport movement in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century - a voluntary base that was quickly conquered by political interests as early as the 1920s and ultimately eliminated during the socialist years period of 1945-1989. The example from Plovdiv of a revived volunteering workforce is a positive sign marking the change from what Girginov (2009: 522) termed 'the end' of the third sector's autonomy and voluntary identity in 1951 as a result of the then legislation making associations operate in return for state subsidies.

It is evident that the policy developments in the municipality of Plovdiv reflect quite accurately the established priorities and try to tackle the recognised problems of maintaining

infrastructure, creating new facilities, enhancing youth and elite sport and providing wider opportunities for the elderly and people with disabilities. On a more critical note, however, similar to the city of Stara Zagora, there has not been strong efforts specifically targeting the vast group of 18-65 year olds.

4.2.3 Political stream

The discussion with the Plovdiv municipality sports official placed a less substantial importance of the political stream. References to key political figures such as mayor, or the sport minister were not made which signalled a stronger [at least perceived] autonomy of the municipality as well as of the sports services unit. The explicit statement *'it is developing towards the better, decentralization and the autonomy is increasing'* (M_Pld, 2016) confirmed this finding.

The role of the state has nevertheless been recognised, particularly its function to create and amend the legislative framework:

"We are expecting a new Sport Act, I am not sure to what extent it will make our life easier or not. We still do not know if it will be enacted in the Parliament or not. As of now, we work in good cooperation."

While the interview with the Stara Zagora representative did not uncover support or opposition to the suggested new legislation on sport, Plovdiv municipality's sports official spared some space for doubt, which despite not being outspoken criticism, gives an indication that the new Law on sport does not have unanimous support. The hesitation over the Act's foolproof image is in line with the critique mentioned earlier by the former Vice-chairman of the Parliamentary commission Vili Lilkov (Mediapool, 2017). In spring 2018(at the time of writing), the bill has been adopted at the first reading with a second reading at the National Assembly and approval by the President remaining to be done for the bill to become law.

Partnerships with national-level institutions have been described as successful:

"The examples of good cooperation between Plovdiv Municipality and the Ministry are quite positive. We receive support from them, we recently accomplished a project worth 130 000 leva [ca 65 000 euro] for the renovation of a multi-sports hall for weightlifting, boxing and judo, the second project is worth 70 000 leva [ca 35 000 euro] to make the facility energy-efficient. Next year we envisage to dedicate 380 000 [ca 190 000 euro] from the municipality budget and another 380 000 from the Ministry for the renovation of the Athletics Hall so we

have projects we have submitted to the Ministry and the majority of them have been approved by them which helps us. ”

”We have equally good communication with the Ministry of Education in relation to our young sports talents studying in various schools in Plovdiv. These students apply for national scholarships for winning the National Championships in their sport so through the Municipality Council, who administers the scholarships, students receive this scholarship support from the Ministry of Education. I can say we work well with national institutions. ”

The inter-sectoral partnership is a key requirement for a holistic sport policy as it has been demonstrated by Melkas (2013) and Vuori et al. (2004) in their analysis of the Finnish experience in developing Health-in-All policy and physical activity policy development, respectively. As mentioned in the Policy stream section, cooperation with volunteers has been described as strong, which further enhances the multiple engagement in the local sports landscape supporting the inter-sectorial dimension of sport policy making.

4.3 Municipality of Sofia

4.3.1 Problem Stream

The priority area of the municipal sport policy in Sofia was sport for all with an emphasis on establishing effective links between schools, sport clubs, parents and coaches as well as increasing the number of free-access facilities such as outdoor gyms and sports and recreation fields in residential areas. In 2018, Sofia has been recognized as a European Capital of Sport by the ACES Europe, which was described as a catalyst for increasing participation in sport and physical activity. Throughout the interview, the Director of the Department for Prevention, Integration, Sport and Tourism at Municipality of Sofia has given numerous references to promoting physically active lifestyle among the whole population in the city as a way of enhancing people’s well-being:

”...our focus in the [Sofia 2018] bid is creating sport and physical activity spaces allowing free access to citizens and we have devised a programme plan for implementation. In today’s rather commercialized world, doing sport is an expensive undertaking and it is not supposed to be a pleasure for the rich. ”

” In 2018 there should be an even stronger emphasis on this, i.e. we expand the idea of building sports facilities, which are not so much about high-performance sport but oriented towards citizens and families – places where mom, dad and the child can find something for themselves – street fitness,

outdoor gymnastics or another sport, in other words, our approach is towards openness and accessibility for the citizens.”

”...we have not won this recognition based on what we are going to provide, but I, as one of the application form authors, take it as a recognition for what we already have, what we currently do, and as we have mentioned in the bid: if somebody shows appreciation for our work, this will further improve the quality of life of the citizens of Sofia, be it children, parents, pensioners. They may not become part of the national team in a given sport but they will change their way of life, their health status, their attitude towards the urban environment. ”

”...the focus really is sports infrastructure with free access and is meant to be used by people from 3 to 60+ years of age.”

As it can be seen, the orientation towards an inclusive strategy has been vividly demonstrated and we can argue that out of the three local authorities examined, Sofia appeared as the most sport-for-all oriented municipality. The active work on strengthening partnerships with sports clubs, schools, kindergartens and universities puts some emphasis on children and youth but the adult population has been recognized as a field of responsibility, too. When discussing areas for improvement, the interviewee claimed:

”I admit that, while we have concentrated more on working with educational institutions and young people, there is one demographic group of society for which we have not done all that is needed and that is the 60+ age group and we are catching up in recent years on the work in this niche. These people perceive sports activities as a means of social interaction and as I said, we have more work to do in this direction. ”

”We are very active with the schools, kindergartens and the sports clubs but with the elderly people and the working population we have made rather humble attempts. The way of organization and the promotional work on sport and physical activity for these groups seems to be more underdeveloped in our department. ”

From the perspective of the Multiple Streams Framework, the problem of underdeveloped sport and physical activity participation work among the elderly has clearly been identified, which leaves us to follow the issue in the policy and political streams to find out the prospects of resolving it. Nevertheless, the self-criticism indicates a readiness to face this underdeveloped field, devise solutions and implement them.

In relation to the problem stream, numerous other challenges have been outlined but as some of them are not within the remit of the municipality, they will be discussed as part of the political stream subsection. The biggest challenge at the municipality has been claimed to be the link between the sectors of education, sport and also health care.

”These are two different blood systems. The Ministry of Youth and Sport with the national federations and the sport clubs – the blood stream go through one set of veins. The Ministry of Education has its own blood stream consisting of local authorities, schools, regional inspectorates, public schools, private schools, state schools, municipality schools. In addition, both of these systems have their problems: in education, there is the problem of teachers’ qualification and what is said about the quality of education and then you have the sports system. The connection or the collision between these two systems takes place on our terrain at the municipality.”

The proactive approach that has been demonstrated illustrates the motivation of the municipality for cooperation with different institutions who can contribute to enhancing participation in sport and physical activity.

4.3.2 Policy stream

The policies that have been developed support the strategic orientation of the municipality towards better sport-for-all opportunities with somewhat stronger emphasis on the youth. The following policy activities have been pointed out during the interview:

**Organising summit climbing treks of Vitosha Mountain [located in close proximity to the city] for schools.*

**Project-based funding for schools and kindergartens to run sport, physical activity and health initiatives*

**Project-based funding for sport clubs who are interested in working with schools and kindergartens, meeting teachers and parents doing training and education, open days, campaigns and free activities.*

**Funding available to professional or licensed sports clubs that have youth divisions to cover costs for equipment, competitions, travel, and coaches’ upskilling.*

**Scholarship for young talented athletes*

**Prize incentives to motivate PE teachers who contribute to developing school sport*

**Mayor’s Program Fund for landmark sports events in Sofia such as European or World Championships*

**Partnership with three sport federations: football, basketball, and volleyball for organising introductory, free-to-attend, no-commitment sports activities for kindergarten and primary-school students*

**30 recently built outdoor gyms and 53 free-access residential recreational sports grounds*

**Strategy for the Development of Physical education and Sport 2012-2020*

**Sofia – European Capital of Sport 2018*

It was highlighted by the Director of the department that the afore-mentioned initiatives, particularly the funding streams, allow for monitoring to be performed, therefore giving a more objective measurement of what has been done.

4.3.3 Political Stream

The political stream proved a strong determinant in the sport policy domain at the municipality, particularly in relation to cooperation with the national-level policy maker – the Ministry of Youth and Sport. As far as autonomy is concerned, the municipality was described as quite independent: *‘They [the national authorities] do not interfere’* (M_Sof, 2016). However, this autonomy was associated with a lack of support:

”In Bulgarian legislation there is a phrase ‘creating the conditions’. This can also mean that nobody interferes or nobody makes obstacles for you but who is helping you, if we decide to interpret the meaning? Yes, the municipality creates the conditions for mass sport, supports the clubs, maintains the infrastructure, okay that is fine but how?”

”Every municipality chooses their line [of conduct] in their own way. As for ourselves, we start with the educational institutions, which are the most ‘municipal’ structures because schools and kindergarten are the municipality’s responsibility, the link between them and the sports clubs, free access infrastructure and not expensive elite sport infrastructure, which we support when we can. If there is a good vision in place, every municipality can develop their strategy. Who is there to help is another question.”

In terms of cooperating with the citizens’ sector, the municipality appeared quite open to dialogue and what was of particular interest to the researcher was the Director’s openness to critique, which is a sign of a democratic decision-making process in place:

”As far as our department is concerned, it has consistently been chased, pursued and flattered because they know they receive understanding and a different attitude. I can not say that the whole municipal administration is open to this, every manager has their own way, but I am proud of the forms of cooperation we have with the non-governmental sector. To me they are significant because surrounding yourself with people depending on you and benefiting from working for you is one thing; in this case, you only hear praise and ‘Hosanna’. It is a different thing when you meet the citizens’ sector and a wider group of people who can say ‘Crucify Him’. This ‘crucifixion’ to me is quite helpful. I am talking from a personal point of view because this is how I work. As a result of these remarks and feedback, I produce the initiatives I mentioned, as a result of some criticism.”

The interviewee expressed a concern for the need of active cooperation among institutions to devise cross-sectoral policies with the participation of the education, sports and healthcare

ministries. Identifying the importance of such holistic approach confirms the municipality of Sofia's position on developing sport for all while relying on diverse expertise, therefore tackling the problem of inactivity from numerous angles. Cross-sectoral sport participation policies is one of the characteristic features of the sport policy in Finland (Vuori et al.,2004) where high participation rates are evident, supporting the argument that Sofia municipality's recognition of inter-sector work is a step in the right direction.

Another problem beyond the remits of the local authority was the lack of set standards for public sports services provision in the country. As it can be seen below, a number of references have been given to the absence of these minimum standards, indicating the interviewee's emphasis on the issue, which, however, depends on factors closer to the political stream be it, the sport for all department at the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the sports minister, or sport and health policy advisors to the government.

"If in relation to mass sport, taking into account different target groups, I mean programs for kindergartens, school programs, university programs, programs for people with disabilities, for people from different age groups....if there are set standards for municipalities, then it will be very easy based on the population census for the municipality to dedicate let us say 3 leva [1.5 euro] per citizen or per child to deliver sport activities for. Do you understand? There is such a standard in education, for example. "

"The easy thing here is that there is clarity on what needs to be provided as a minimum. If more is provided, even better but the standard is there. This is different from 'creating the conditions' quoting a big part of the formal documents and programs. If these standards are there for workers sport, for professional sport, for amateur sport, then it is extremely easy to do planning, monitoring, and controlling by the citizens because it is important for the citizens not just to demand but to know what is being invested. "

"There are such standards for kindergartens, related to the areas for play, for craft works, for the eating conditions. It would be right if such standards can be developed in relation to mass sport at the municipalities. This way the Ministry will be able to methodologically exercise control saying 'You haven't provided 2 leva for sport..."

"Just like it is in healthcare with the health card or the health path scheme. So you have a minimum of health care guaranteed by the health path. Why not introducing sport path scheme? A sport path scheme making provision for people up to 3, up to 33, up to 66 years of age. Having this minimum defines specific rules. "

"The idea that I have about these suggested sport path schemes will not leave the local decision maker to think whether to give this money for culture or for healthcare. So there will be a guaranteed provided minimum for sport and health – that's the first thing. The second – depending on this standard, it is very easy for monitoring the process. "

It is important to note that according to the municipality representative, adhering to standards for sport services provision will not take away the autonomy of the local authority. Rather it will serve its citizens in a more tailored manner depending on demographics and needs:

”If a place is largely populated by elderly people, resources will be directed in one way. If it has increasing youth population then the policy and resources will be in another direction.”

During the interview with the representative of Stara Zagora municipality, the mayor’s role in developing sports activities in the city was made clear. While this proved the importance of political interest in sport and physical activity development, Sofia municipality’s the interviewee brought a different point also illustrating the above-mentioned but with a reference to the potential threats to sport participation promotion when there are no set standards and everything is happening solely as a result of political decisions:

”You understand, it means that you will not simply rely on the mayor’s good will and the municipal council, let’s not forget its role in Bulgaria, too. So you can once rely on political will, competence, and genuine passion; what happens if those elements are not there, in relation to sport?”

The strongest concern regarding the national sports administration body – the Ministry of Youth and Sports was claimed to be the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy also reflecting the municipality’s work. What had to be developed according to the representative of Sofia municipality was communication with citizens as well as communication with institutions - national and local:

”My big criticism is for the lack of a communication strategy in the Ministry [of Youth and Sport] [between them, the local authorities and the citizens]. There is a complete lack of communication. Yes, on a Parliament level there is good dialogue, there is probably good dialogue with 10 or so municipalities and some 20 sports federations or 150 but if the minister wants to develop mass sport it is good to ask the citizens on a mass scale. There has not been a new national good-quality, representative study for a long time” (M_Sof, 2016).

On the question of where improvements can be made regarding the cooperation between local and national authorities, it was said:

”As I mentioned, in relation to legislation and the sector policies. This is my biggest criticism to the Ministry of Youth and Sport – a lack of good communication, also with other structures, which reflects on our work. Most importantly, with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. We need adequate sectoral policies because sport for all is not just a responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. It depends on good communication not only with the mayor but with the minister of Education, the minister of Healthcare and so on.”

The significant factor for making successful sport-for-all policy according to the interviewee was the scientific approach to policy making, or more precisely in the case of Bulgarian sport policy – the lack of – a problem related to the need for improved communication between the sports ministry, citizens and institutions:

”For me, when we do something for the citizens,, I will probably mention something that you did not point out and something that I have not talked about, which I think here in Bulgaria is a problem, a problem of our civil society and of part of the administrative policies: when we want something to be of mass-scale, something that is practiced, used, utilized or stimulated, we have to ask the people – but we do not ask them! We do not ask them. Do they want a football ground, basketball or volleyball court? Can you tell me if someone has asked them? No. We dedicate [resources] to this, we dedicate to that....”

”When I want something for all, it is good to ask all, and not what I suggest for all.”

”We will have real mass sport once when we have clear information on what citizens want – for the minister it is the athletes, for me it is the citizens, for the education ministry it is the students and parents. One of the main problems in sport, in my opinion is the sports system’s closed character. ”

The conclusions made on the scarcity of regular nationally representative research on people’s needs as a tool to inform policy making supports Girginov’s (2009) findings on the failure of strategic programmes and policies for sport participation to devise interventions based on population demands. National research on sport and physical activity continues to be a rather sporadic phenomenon with the last one conducted in 2011. In comparison, the England’s grass-roots sports agency has been executing sport and physical activity participation surveys annually since 2005. (Sport England, 2018).

”Similarly, municipalities get more responsibilities and freedom, more autonomy. The subsidiary principle is a working one. But for the development of sport for all we need developed inter-sectoral policies, i.e. the link, the communication strategy between the sectors is crucial” (M_Sof, 2016).

Similar to the results from the city of Stara Zagora and Plovdiv, municipal autonomy was reported by Sofia’s representative, which marks the progress made in this direction but the emphasis on the lack of cooperation between different sectors illuminates a precondition in the political stream for partial success, at best, for effective sport participation policies. This finding is in line with Christiansen et al.’s (2012) summary of numerous research concluding that the successful outcome of policies promoting sport and physical activity depends on inter-sector collaboration among ministries as well as on the involvement of national and local authorities, the civil society and the private sector.

The close proximity of Vitosha mountain was mentioned earlier as one of the advantages of Sofia for promoting healthy lifestyle, love for the natural environment and active citizenship

among the youth. At the time of writing of the current study, however, Bulgaria's civil society is actively protesting against the potential destruction of another mountain in the country – Pirin in which one of the popular winter resorts – Bansko town - is located. The controversial entrepreneurial interests for infrastructural developments in the resort on territories with a status of 'Natural Park' (hence protected from construction of buildings) has sparked public disapproval. Interestingly enough, the entrepreneurs from 'Yulen' company operating the winter sports facilities in Bansko were found by a team of investigative journalists to be the same people owning the [Vitosha Ski] company responsible for the ski tracks and lifts in Vitosha (Bivol, 2014; 2015). Despite the closeness of Vitosha to Sofia and the number of winter sports opportunities there, half of the fourteen ski lifts are not working, and ten of the fifteen ski tracks not maintained, making the majority of the skiing facilities unusable (see Appendix 5). In addition, public transport is very limited, which is ultimately closing the Vitosha mountain for the people of Sofia making them go to Bansko.

The decision for the new construction plans in Pirin has been made on a national level, which illustrates the importance of the political stream, in this case – the lack of desire for creating accessible sporting opportunities while approving project plans that serve large businesses and endanger the natural environment. An amended project proposal was offered by one of the most renowned Bulgarian mountaineers, Boyan Petrov, for a permission to build nothing more than just another ski lift (hence eliminating the risk of creating the opportunity for overbuilding in the national park and destroying the natural environment) but this proposal was rejected by the state. As he has pointed out, 'The monopolistic taking up of the mountain by the concessioner company of the current ski zone is strongly limiting fair business competition and is by no means beneficial to tourism development' (Petrov, 2018).

As far Vitosha mountain is concerned, the fact that the authorities, among which the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Municipality of Sofia, do not intervene to ensure that the [Vitosha Ski] company is putting the infrastructure in Vitosha into working order confirms Girginov and Sandanski's (2011) claim of clientelism within the sport system in Bulgaria and yet again, the absence of political willingness to promote sport participation for the general public. The example above also demonstrates the limits of singular efforts when the work of municipal sports departments does not get the support from other units of local and state administration.

Table 6 has summarized the research findings from the interviews with the local authorities with the Multiple Streams framework serving as the template for policy analysis.

Table 6. Summary of the three local authorities' sport policy based on the multiple streams framework.

	Stara Zagora	Plovdiv	Sofia
Problem stream			
Issues recognition	Limited resources, uncertainty, tax reliefs needed for private sector to support sports activities	Limited resources, maintaining and renovating existing infrastructure, lack of enough facilities (only 1 swimming pool, no winter sports facilities), shortage of admin personnel, worsening youth health status	Limited resources, better support for the adults and elderly age groups
Priorities	Youth sport	Youth sport & elite athletes	Accessible facilities for all citizens; children and youth's needs currently served most intensively
Policy stream			
Implemented policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Free use and maintenance of most sports facilities for sports clubs * Developing sports facilities and infrastructure * Annual sports calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Minimal rent fees for sport clubs *Reconstruction of current facilities *City sports leagues & cycling initiatives *Free access for people with disabilities *Sports talents & Olympic athletes bursaries *Elite athletes school visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Emphasis on free-access public sports facilities *Enhanced cooperation between schools & sports clubs *Sofia-European Capital of Sport – Sport for All – key motive
Political stream	Reported Autonomy: Yes	Reported Autonomy: Increasing	Reported Autonomy: Yes but weak support
	Cooperation with: Ministry of Sport: good NGOs: not reported	Cooperation with: Ministry of Sport: good NGOs and volunteers: strong	Cooperation with: Ministry of Sport: insufficient NGOs and citizens: good
	Key factors: Mayor's involvement	Key factors: Cooperation with national institutions (sport and education ministries), NGOs and volunteers.	Key factors and issues: Lack of inter-sectoral cooperation, no research-informed policy, need for national sport provision minimum standards

4.4 Ministry of Youth and Sport

4.4.1 Problem recognition

From the Ministry's perspective, in the current circumstances of limited financial resources, the priority target groups were young people, students and people with disabilities. During the interview, it was also declared that elite sport is dominating while sport for all's importance is increasing highlighting the imbalance between performance and participation. It was shared that attention-wise and resource-allocation-wise, elite sport and sport for all are in a 90% to 10% relationship and it was claimed impossible for both strands to be placed on an equal (50/50) position. What was more realistic was for sport for all to be in a stronger position than its current one. This finding has opened an important topic for discussion, namely, the clarification of priorities on a national level. As mentioned in the review of literature chapter, unanimous statements by the current Minister of Youth and Sport have made it clear that sport for all is the most important task for the Ministry, which is in a significant contrast to the assertions made in the interview. Looking at the Ministry's budget allocation, however, it is quite clear that elite sport is the main beneficiary receiving 50 million leva [€25 million] out of the 75 million leva [€37.5 million] total budget for 2018 (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2018). In contrast, school sport and leisure activities have been allocated altogether 16 million leva [€8 million].

As far as the main problems are concerned, personnel shortages, blurred responsibilities between the state and municipalities, and limited financial resources were pointed out as key. Firstly, it was indicated that the Ministry's regional staff was decreasing. One officer was responsible for two or three regions. This was confirmed during the interview with the representative of Municipality of Plovdiv who noted that the regional Ministry representative for Plovdiv is also responsible for the regions of Smolian and Pazardzhik. On the one hand the problem of staff shortage may hinder the consistent application of national policy evenly across the whole country but on the other, it can serve as an opportunity to ask the question of how essential the need is for big national administration. It was stated that there should be one person per region to provide consultancy support to local sport clubs (MoYS, 2016).

Secondly, the allocation of responsibilities between the Ministry and municipalities in relation to sport for all was reported as rather unclear. Meanwhile, the role of local authorities has been

recognised as crucial due to the fact that they are the ones with a direct contact with citizens hence they should be the key actors in supporting sport for all. According to the interviewee, there was a need for stronger municipalities. This is in line with Girginov and Sandanski's (2011) claim that local authorities are still not empowered enough being in a position with many responsibilities but without sufficient resources. Similar was the view of the representative of Municipality of Sofia.

Lastly, the difficulty with the insufficient funding has also been brought forward, which has been an omnipresent problem in the local authorities interviewed.

4.4.2 Policy Stream

One of the proposed solutions to the aforementioned problems has been the new Sports Act, which if it becomes a Law should clarify who is responsible for what, i.e municipalities taking care of sport for all, while the Ministry is mainly responsible for performance sport through the sport federations. The new Sports Act makes provision for guaranteeing financial support for sport for all on a local level by making it compulsory for each municipality to allocate a budget specifically for sport with an emphasis on sport for all. Municipalities are not supposed to fund professional clubs as it often happens (MoYS, 2016).

Despite providing 75% of its budget for sport performance, the Ministry itself has devised a number of programs promoting sport among the youth and people with disabilities. Some of the programs for which annual funding is provided include: Sport for children at risk, Sport development for people with disabilities, Sport development for those in education, Children and the sport club, Learn to Swim, Sport for children's free time. These programs allow people to practice 48 different sports in total in the whole country (MoYS, 2016). As can be seen from the names of the programs, however, the majority of them are aimed at children and young people leaving other demographic groups largely outside of any policy interventions.

With regards to partnerships with other institutions, the cross-sectoral work in 2015 with the Ministry of Health care was given as an example when both Ministries developed a proposal for charging additional 10% tax manufacturers producing unhealthy food and drink and investing the collected money in developing local sports facilities infrastructure. The measure has not materialised yet, proving the difficulty in implementing reforms, especially when private-sector interests are affected. Moreover, such cooperation is still happening sporadically

rather than on a regular basis. The complexities of today's problems require diverse expertise and as has been mentioned earlier a more holistic approach is needed involving various actors as argued by representative of Sofia Municipality (2016) and Melkas, 2013.

4.4.3 Political Stream

Centralisation has been reported as decreasing which coincides with the findings from the local authorities. It was pointed out that municipalities are the ones with a direct contact with citizens and they are the administration units, thanks to their closer interaction with citizens, can produce much quicker results in relation to sport for all (MoYS, 2016). The need for clear rules and regulation for municipalities' responsibilities was also mentioned in light of the trends in some local authorities in which municipal budgets are used for financing professional teams. Girginov and Sandanski (2011) have also critiqued this practice, which seems to still be present in some parts of the country. From the political perspective, support for elite local teams gives good publicity to local leaders/mayors which is arguably the main reason for this type of resource allocation.

The most significant factor for successful sport policy according to the Ministry representative was the economic factor allowing for the provision of facilities and their maintenance (MoYS, 2016). While the economy is surely an essential precondition for delivering public sport services, it can be argued that the actual content and application of existing policy is also very important. The current programs administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport and run nationally have been described as well working and examples with the grass-roots activities with sport federations were used to support this argument. Some of those included the Bulgarian Ski Federation, Bulgarian Football Union, the Bulgarian Tennis Federation and the Bulgarian Golf Associations (MoYS, 2016). The influence of the political factors can be noticed also here as one of these organisations – the ski federation is chaired by the same person who has been found to be among the owners of the company 'Yulen' company contracted to manage the ski resort of Bansko (Bivol, 2014), which as mentioned earlier is the main winter resort where people, including Sofia citizens, are visiting and also the resort is seen as a victim of business interests, destruction of the natural environment and disregard for natural protection law. This brings back the term introduced by Girginov and Sandanski (2011) of 'clientelistic relations' describing the privileged positions of some sport federations as opposed to others when it comes to accessing funding for sport programs. Recent controversies over the

questionable use of public budgeted money by the ski federation (Focus News Agency, 2018) confirms this mode of operation making the ‘clientelistic relations’ still characteristic of Bulgarian sport policy.

In terms of the international influence and using foreign experience in developing sport for all, it was agreed that this is a rather positive trend while in relation to elite sport the Ministry representative (2016) noted that there is nothing we can learn from abroad considering that western countries are copying the Bulgarian elite sport development model.

The Non-governmental sector

The findings from the interviews with the two NGOs will be presented with a discussion on the problems for developing sport participation, policy proposals and political influences.

4.5 BG Be Active

4.5.1 Problem recognition

As a third-sector organisation, the problems for increasing sport participation that were highlighted differed from the ones put forward by sports authorities. As it will be seen below, the expressed views indicated a much more results-oriented, evidence-based, democratic approach to tackling the problem of low levels of sport and physical activity.

Firstly, it was pointed out that sport for all is somewhat receiving more attention by the citizens but the outcomes were nevertheless inconclusive as it was down to the people responsible for leading physical activity campaigns who have been described as ‘the main determinant’ [for delivering an effective campaign or not].

”...physical activity and sport for health is increasingly becoming a topic on a European level, and this is becoming popular in Bulgaria in the last few years, too, however, there are campaigns that are just like ‘status quo’ thing. Something is being announced to be happening but no one is taking care of this to actually reach the people in terms of information and opportunities for them to be physically active...”

It can be argued that a more critical standpoint such as this can be expected from a NGO organisation while authorities being the official representatives of the policy body would be

more likely to display success stories and reluctant to admit policy failure. The undisputed fact, however, that the majority of the Bulgarian population does not take part in exercise or sport (be it 58%, 78% or 68%) strongly supports the argument of BG Be Active for effective sport for all. Looking at the authorities interviewed in this study, it needs to be mentioned that Sofia Municipality did acknowledge areas for improvement in their own work when they talked about opportunities for the elderly age group.

The more hands-on attitude of BG Be Active was illustrated by their response to the ‘status-quo’ type of campaigns:

”...we are trying (as much as our limited resources allow us to as we are a team of 5-10 people) firstly, to promote intensively what is happening so that it reaches as many Bulgarians as possible, and secondly, to give opportunities for the people to be active, and not just to communicate the need for being active. So overall, it is a matter of doing the work.”

When asked about progress in the non-governmental sector in sport for all, it was claimed that there are developments on local level where organisations work with local communities but this is not the case on a national level.

”We are one of the organisations trying to act on a national level and we work according to our capabilities. The other organization is the Bulgarian Sport for All Association but they work under a very structured calendar in which I personally see no development, no changes in the work base and practices.”

Another problem that has been recognised was the need for cooperation between the national-level authorities and the non-governmental sector when it comes to sport participation:

”In terms of sport for all, there should definitely be more heeding by the ministries and the administration in what NGOs have to say because NGOs in Bulgaria are the flexible ones. They are the carriers of newness, they are the ones who follow the current issues, trends and so on. Of course, it depends on the non-governmental organization and the experts in there but they should certainly be listened to better.”

Looking back into the historical developments of the sport movement in Bulgaria, the weakening of the voluntary sport organisations was evident in as early as the 1920s followed by their practical elimination in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Girginov and Bankov, 1999), which then continued all the way through the socialist years until 1989 (Girginov, 2009). The current weak position of the third sector can be seen as a heritage with implications on the mindset of public management today.

A problem related to the eligibility for funding was also pointed out:

”We have no right to receive funding from the Ministry of Youth and Sport because we are not a federation, not a member of a federation and we have no status of a sports club and despite all the work [we do], the support we get is an administrative letter of encouragement. Similarly, it is very hard to receive funding from the municipalities’ sports budget, especially in the beginning.”

The lack of access to funding from the Ministry of Youth and Sport can be considered as indirect restriction contributing to the undermining of the role of NGOs. In relation to this problem, the local authority appeared as a potential helping agent:

”Today, we have established our name and we have a good cooperation with the Municipality of Plovdiv and we can receive some financial support but it is minimal if we compare it to the available resources of the municipality or to the amount of support other initiatives receive, whether they are made by another NGO or a business organisation.”

”Overall, from a financial perspective, organisations like ours can not be supported, we rely on European projects, charities, and sponsorships. Also from a communication point of view, it is good to have a more open environment for communication so to say.”

A lack of institutional structure with specific responsibilities for sport for all was also mentioned in the interview:

”Well, institutionally, there is no department in the Ministry or in the municipalities responsible for sport for all. There is a Sport for All department in the Ministry but sport for all is used as a tool for recruiting young talents for elite sport. It is not sport for health and sport opportunities for all, which is what sport for all should be. Again, it is based on the principle of exclusiveness.”

It may be argued whether the work of the Sport for All department in the Ministry is solely used as a tool for sports talents recruitment but considering the target groups of most of the programs they have developed, it can be said that the sport participation of the adult population (18-65) is not strongly supported. As it was mentioned by the interviewee:

”Programs like ‘Learn to Swim’, ‘Sport in Free Time’ really are for students and youth only. But the institution itself - Ministry of Youth and Sport suggests that sport is aimed at young people, not all people; even the name says it – it is not for all.”

”There should be an institution with a clear direction towards sport for all.”

This argument is supported by the fact that the afore mentioned programs are conducted by sport federations most of which are certainly more interested in developing talents and competitive sport rather than making provisions for large populations only to take part. As was pointed out earlier in Chapter 2, the current minister of sport has explicitly stated that sport for all is the first priority for the ministry, which is illustrated by the newly proposed bill for a

Sports Act. While a statement from such a high-level figure is significant, the current practices still demonstrate dominant support of competitive sport as opposed to sport for all. Moreover, considering the political instability in the last 10 years (4 governments and 3 interim governments since 2009) there is a lot of insecurity around the bill becoming an act.

4.5.2 Policy Stream

Although not an official policy, BG Be Active's activities are strictly aiming at raising the physical activity levels of the Bulgarian population, which is one of the goals outlined in the National Strategy for Sport 2012-2022. The question of where the main efforts should be focused on a local and national level, and in the non-governmental sector for a more developed sport for all allowed to identify prioritization of either facilities, mass sport initiatives and events, or research work on sport and physical activity. It was confirmed by the interviewee that all these elements were important, however:

"Facilities are important but they are important only when you have everything else. According to us it has always been more important to have well-trained people and motivated people to work with the citizens, to take the children for a hiking walk in the mountain, or to run a simple exercise session during the school lesson, or to encourage office workers to move by asking them to do 10 stand ups. Simple things like this rather than facilities in which major investments are going to. There is plenty of information on the ratio between funds for facilities and funds for activities. Activities are certainly important, so is the training of the people developing these activities; overall, we need a holistic system which services these existing facilities because we have facilities, the question is about managing them well. There are suggestions that such facilities should be run by non-governmental sport for all organisations."

Subsequently, the following policy suggestions were made:

"One solution to this is cleverly managing these facilities be it by non-governmental organisations or together with local authorities. Another solutions is to increase efforts in training and education, and raising citizens awareness. Just to add, we need facilities but not ones like multifunctional sports hall costing billions and its maintenance costing millions while it stays empty. We rather need facilities like outdoors sports grounds with free access, like in the Scandinavian countries, be it skate parks, or outdoor places for young people encouraging physical activity. Facilities of this type, not stadiums and arenas and things like that."

The reference to big sports facilities is related to the recently built multi-purpose venues in Sofia (Armeec Arena), Plovdiv (The Velodrome), and Ruse (Bulstrad Arena) which all have seating capacities of over 5 000 and renting fees starting from €2 500 per day making it impossible for local sports clubs to use them. From the perspective of youth sport or sport for all in general, the development of local, smaller and affordable sports facilities is much more

needed than grand projects requiring tens of millions which are barely used for sport in the first place. As one sports journalist has reported, of the three sports arenas only the one in Ruse was built with the help of a private investor and some 35% of the events taking place are sports related, which is the most positive example of the three. In the autumn of 2018 the venue is hosting some of the Volleyball World Championships matches and local sports clubs are using the subordinate training halls all year round. In contrast, The Velodrome sports hall in Plovdiv, which like the arena in Ruse was opened in 2015, was entirely built with public money totaling €24.5 million (€21 million state funding and €3.5 million from the municipality). At the same time, almost none of the events are related to sport let alone track cycling as its primary purpose is supposed to be. It receives an annual subsidy from the municipality of €500 000, it is working at a loss and the sports clubs are not using it for training purposes because of the high renting costs (Tasev, 2017). In light of these, the interviewee's statement of 'clever facility management' has a strong point in the discussion of what facilities are need and how they should be run.

In terms of focusing the resources towards sport for all as opposed to elite sport was recognized as unpopular policy decision but has the potential to tackle the problem of inactivity.

"It will be unpopular but this a good direction because it allows achieving many things with the least amount of resources and efforts. Especially with some slight changes in the education process and we do not mean adding extra physical education classes or a complete change of the curriculum but rather simply dedicating more time on the significance of physical activity, children moving even during lessons so that they know from an early age that this is important basic thing, in a way like hygiene. So, yes, resources should be directed but what the political will is...."

It can be noticed in this response that it is not just a matter of finding money or diverting funding from one field to another but also a matter of promoting an idea. Hence, the more intangible element of policy – the ideological principles of developing sport for all also need to be in place. As it was mentioned earlier, explicit statements from the current Minister of Sport have been made on the pivotal importance of promoting sport as a way to improve the health of the nation, which is important, but the more important question is whether public statements have been matched by concrete actions. The answer to the latter is unsatisfactory as it has been discussed.

In relation to adopting sports models or practices from abroad where higher participation rates are evident it was pointed out that there is a difference between elite sport and participation sport.

”... I can not comment on sport as a whole. I suppose that one influences the other i.e. if funds are redirected to sport for all, elite sport may suffer but our work is about the common good and we do think that adopting foreign models is one way, however, it is to be conducted carefully, up to a certain extent and with a consideration of our reality but there are many things can be used, many things that do not require that much effort to be realized. We do need such small changes.”

A lot of the work conducted by the non-governmental organisation is running physical activity awareness campaigns such as ‘No Elevators Day’ and ‘MOVE Week’ and it was recognised that national-level authorities and the private sector were also participating in the promotion of sport and physical activity.

”There are many campaigns and they become more and more these days, including the ones by the Ministry of Youth and Sport, by private sector organisations such as the Nestle Live Actively and so on.”

What the interviewee was critical about, however, was the ‘status quo’ character of much of this promotional work. Lastly, a sign for readiness for cooperation and concrete contribution was given when at the end of the interview it was stated that:

”When we say that there is a problem, we always try to present a possible solution or solutions. We do not approach problems for which we have nothing to suggest.”

4.5.3 Political stream

While centralisation was seen as outdated by the interviewed local authorities, this was not the case according to the NGO sector. The representative of BG Be Active considered Girginov’s (2011) conclusion of high level of centralisation and bureaucracy in the sport policy making process still valid:

”Yes, I agree. One example from my personal experience is about the way The European Week of Sport happens. The Ministry of Youth and Sport distributes letters to the regional cities saying that they should organise events for the European Week of Sport, that’s it. The municipalities should respectively fill up the existing sports calendar for the duration of the week. Basically, it is a top-down approach which is different from what we do.”

In contrast to the perceived centralisation, the participatory approach adopted by the non-governmental organisation was highlighted:

”We try to work from the bottom up, we look for grass-roots sport people, people who are actually working on the field in both small towns and bigger cities but directly with the people, the users of physical activity. We invite them to participate, to feel involved in what is going on. We do not put frames for them – physical activity for health in the widest meaning. ”

While the recognition of the problem of low levels of physical activity (Problem stream) and the proposition of solutions to resolving this problem (Policy stream) were claimed to be

present within BG Be Active, this was not the case when it came to public and political support for putting the suggested solutions into practice (Political stream). As a Non-governmental organisation, it is not a policy maker although it can be a policy-influencing agent. This, however, did not appear to be the case hence making less likely for their ideas to reach the official policy agenda. The difficulty in securing political support was partly due to the mutual dependence on other sectors which have much more pressing issues. An example was provided from healthcare.

”In a time when there is a healthcare reform, from which everyone is unhappy, when people have no access to basic healthcare services, talking of prevention and sport and exercise is perceived as posh by people. Politicians don’t find it interesting enough as a solution. I mean they will not be very popular if they say to people ‘Move more regularly because this way you won’t need healthcare services.’ ”

The Multiple Streams framework proves highly useful in illustrating the complexity of the policy process and the need for numerous factors to be in place in order to allow for the so-called policy window to occur. An earlier statement for *‘more open environment for communication [with national authorities]’* supports further the argument for needed improvements in political support. Considering that BG Be Active is currently one of the largest NGOs in Bulgaria with the core activity of promoting sport and physical activity, it can be argued that the low likelihood of their ideas (demonstrated by the weak Policy stream) to become part of national-level policy is not a positive sign for the cause of raising participation levels. Sport participation staying inferior to elite sport makes Girginov and Sandanski’s (2011: 105) characteristic of Bulgarian sport policy as prioritising competition to participation still valid. Therefore, one step towards the solution of the physical inactivity problem suggested by this study is giving third-sector organisations voice by national authorities in order to exchange ideas, share experience and benefit from specific expertise in sport and physical activity promotion. In terms of the key partnerships for BG Be Active, it was acknowledged that cooperation with all sectors was considered important, not just cooperation with authorities responsible for sport, for example.

”The whole approach on which we have based our development in the Now We Move campaign [for which BG Be Active is national coordinator] is cross-sectoral cooperation. Because the idea is that the problem of physical inactivity is serious, especially in Bulgaria it is quite serious, so one sector can not deal with it. We look for help from anybody at any level. Eventually, it comes down to individual people, to the personalities. If there is no single person feeling motivated and concerned about this idea to push it forward in a given organization or municipality, then it is tough to make things happen. This can be a person in the Ministry, a person in a municipality, or in a school. It is simply the personalities who get the work done and we are trying to find these people.”

The latter part of the statement above reiterates the significance of the political stream for the successful delivery of policy work. At the same time it outlines the limitations of policy as a tool to achieve desired outcomes. In other words, what is essential apart from the officially stated goals and solutions is the right personalities to execute those. The importance of the personality factor was further highlighted by the interviewee in a later statement:

”The presence of a strong figure, a leader is certainly a very important factor. In our organization one such personality is Laska Nenova – the person who founded the organisation. She was invited by ISCA [International Sport and Culture Association] in the beginning to become the coordinator for South-eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, then for the whole of Europe, and then to a management position. She is certainly pushing the team forward when we are discouraged from lack of support or lack of funds. So the strong figure is key.”

From a national sport policy perspective, the question of who the personalities will be (ministers, regional officials, municipality officers) is beyond the narrow field of sport, which is where politics comes into play. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of availability of skiing facilities near Sofia, it was demonstrated how economic and political interests limited the opportunities for citizens from the capital and nearby to ski in the closely located Vitosha mountain. Meanwhile the development of one of additional privately-run ski lift in the winter resort of Bansko was also supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sport despite the fact that one of the out-of-operation lifts in Vitosha belongs to the Ministry (Mediapool, 2017). If the only motivation in the Ministry was providing opportunities for people to ski, the Vitosha ski lift that belongs to the Ministry would have been repaired after it went out of order in 2010. Instead, they were lobbying for the development of private ski facilities quite far from Sofia where only better-off citizens and international tourists can afford to go. Therefore, another recommendation for making sport policy more effective is related to ensuring authorities personnel is free from what Girginov and Sandanski (2011: 98) named ‘clientelistic relations’ and this is arguably the most difficult to achieve as it is highly dependent on the overall political system, which as it was also made clear by the interviewee is quite unstable. On a question regarding the potential improvements in participation levels and the influence of ‘outside’ factors such as socio-economic environment it was noted that significant results are achievable when there is a political decision

”...which is consistently followed, not replaced by every government. When we have that, we may even achieve 30% regularly active people or more in the next 10 years but there are many other influencing factors.”

Last but not least, the multi-sector cooperation (NGO-Public-Private) also appeared robust principle in the work of BG Be Active with an emphasis placed on finding the right people:

”When we say that there is a problem, we always try to present a possible solution or solutions. We do not approach problems for which we have nothing to suggest. The question is finding the right support in different institutions, even in business sector to make things happen. We are also looking for people, as I mentioned personalities are really important – people who have the desire and the capabilities to do something.”

4.6 Functional Fi7 Army

4.6.1 Problem Recognition

The major issue according to the representative of the Functional Fi7 Army non-governmental organisation hindering the increase of participation in sport and physical activity was reported to be people’s mentality or as he put it: *‘the rigid, stiffened way of thinking of Bulgarians’* (NGO_FFA, 2016).

The socio-economic development has also been put forward with its connection to people’s mindset and behaviour:

”...there is also a perception that in order to do sport and exercise, you need fancy sports equipment, which many people cannot afford. So in the non-governmental sector we face the problem of economic status of Bulgarians and we come back to the mindset again. It seems that nobody has suggested a different approach, a different mindset that can be spread so that it can be understood that everyone can do sport and physical activity in all conditions only if they have the willingness. ”

The acknowledgement of the cultural factors illustrates the importance of what Bourdieu called Habitus – the socially embodied system of individual and collective dispositions (1990) designating the way of being, the habitual state, especially that of the body (1984: 562, cited in Tomlinson, 2004: 166). As this study is using the theory of Habitus as an overarching framework for sport participation within which the sport policy is one element, (and the focus of the research) the following findings that will be discussed will focus on the administrative aspects of sport participation from Functional Fi7 Army’s point of view.

Before the introduction of the free outdoor workout sessions by Functional Fi7 Army, it was mentioned that the interviewee has been insistent towards the mayor [of Plovdiv], the municipality and local council members but they were not interested. Making a reference again to the mentality of Bulgarian people, he pointed out:

”They are not interested in supporting such things. They can do it, they know how to do it but only if there is benefit for them. They may say ‘Well done, it is great you are doing these things’ but that’s all.

”

It should be noted, however, that the interviewee admitted that there has not been consistent efforts on their side in establishing contacts specifically with the sports development department at Plovdiv Municipality, which as has already been discovered by this study works quite well with the other NGO used in the research – BG Be Active.

Another problem that has been recognized by the organisation was the difficulty with finding a sponsor from the private sector.

”We have looked for sponsors who refused us for a variety of reasons but even if we get sponsorship we are not interested in being sponsored once or twice but having a permanent partnership.”

This brings back a point made by the official from the Municipality of Stara Zagora who has advocated the need for encouraging private companies to support sports activities with tax reliefs being one such policy measure.

On the question of choosing a priority area on a national level, the interviewee supported a view that sport for all should be prioritized in comparison to elite sport. It was stated that:

”...it is humanity that is important, not sports records. We are 7 billion people or so and we do not need 1 billion athletes but 7 billion healthy people.”

A difference here can be seen between such a statement and the position of local and national authorities who have made it clear that competitive sport is also a core element of their work, which also shows the difficult position they can be in having to balance between serving citizens’ sports needs and supporting the elite sport system. This is where the need for a decision on a top-managerial level even beyond the sport domain itself is most evident, which once again proves the essential role of the political factors, which have been explained in the current study through the political stream of the Multiple streams framework.

4.6.2 Policy Stream

Similar to BG Be Active, Functional Fi7 Army is conducting its activities independently from the Ministry’s National Strategy for Sport 2012-2022 or any other official policy. Their activities, however, do contribute to one of the goals of the national strategy, namely, increasing the rates of participation in sport and physical activity, in this case in the city of Plovdiv.

”We wanted to create a small group or small society with a common goal to promote sport as well as active lifestyle, not competitive sport but active lifestyle. The activities we do are called Functional Fit

Army and our objective is to make as many people as possible to move in the city of Plovdiv and in the future our idea is to expand beyond Plovdiv. ”

With regards to policy recommendations, the interviewee made it clear that changing people’s perceptions was the first priority. Recognising the psychological aspect needed more attention than the (physical) environment one. Seminars, workshops, and promotional activities making ‘Bulgarians understand that the main reason to do sport is not financial benefits but an essential need that everyone has today - to enter into a state of physical activeness and health enhancement’ (FFA). It was emphasised that such educational work had to be delivered by the NGO sector but also with the support from the Ministry of Youth and Sport and local authorities. What has also been noted in the interview was the positive approach that should be used when promoting sport and physical activity or as it was stated, the work should be ‘*focusing not on the negative effects of not doing sport but on the positive effects of doing it*’ (NGO_FFA, 2016).

”You should not tell someone that they must do something but you should show them the benefits, and not scare them with the negative consequences of not doing it.”

The need for appropriate facilities was also discussed in the interview and another similarity was found in the views of Functional Fi7 Army representative and those of BG Be Active.

”... it is necessary for accessible sports grounds and facilities to be made, outdoor facilities, close to nature with free access. In Plovdiv there are quite a few but there is a lot to be done around the country. There needs to be appropriate places for sport and physical activity, which are tidy, pleasant, European-looking if you wish. Then comes the good awareness by the citizens and organizing activities which are engaging people’s everyday lives, not events for elite athletes but ones that capture people’s attention and make them feel the need to get involved. ”

The corresponding views of the two non-governmental organisations for accessible places (not large arenas) were also congruent to what the Sofia municipality representative claimed to be number one priority for them. This is a positive indication of agreement on the vision of how to develop sport participation and although this agreement may not be complete (within national authorities, municipalities, and NGOs) it is nevertheless a good starting point.

Another recommendation was related to the delivery of activities taking into account target groups differences:

”...promoting mass sport through a variety of events suiting different personalities, events which are interesting, interactive, free and politically independent. They should be natural and modern or in line with current times. ”

The emphasis on responding to current needs with a tailored approach in mind once again signaled the ‘fresh’ perspective of NGOs, a point also made during the interview with BG Be

Active. This is another argument why they can be highly useful in advising what programs should be developed and how they should be delivered.

4.6.3 Political Stream

In relation to partnerships, weak links between the NGO and the municipality have been reported and it was admitted that there was a need for strengthening the cooperation with the municipality.

”Municipality of Plovdiv is helping through allowing us to organise our sessions on public territory and through doing some promotion on their facebook page but again, it is minimal. With other non-governmental sector organisations, we have worked with BG Be Active. Their support is also very tiny but nevertheless a bit more than the municipality’s. They have paid a bit more attention to us and we have run activities together and we promote each other’s events. Overall, cooperation is weak but BG Be Active is an organisation in which we find support. We need improvements in the link between us and the municipality.”

According to the interviewee, the most significant factor for the creation of successful sport and exercise programs was the presence of a leader who ‘*can unite others and give the impetus to a cause*’ (FFA). This view is in line with that of the BG Be Active representative as well as of the sports official from one of the local authorities interviewed – Stara Zagora.

As far as the role of the NGO sector in devising national policies in sport is concerned, the interviewee affirmatively stated that there is a need for a stronger voice to be given to non-governmental organisations in the policy-making process. This finding indicated signs for improvement in the democratising of policy-making and ultimately, creating policies which serve the needs of the citizens. Considering the similar viewpoint expressed by BG Be Active, the current study argues that the issue of having to democratise the sport policy domain and be more inclusive to citizens’ organisations is still present in Bulgarian sport policy since Girginov and Sandanski’s (2011) findings on interventions in the 1992-2008 period failing to serve those for whom they have been devised.

5. DISCUSSION

In the last chapter, the key findings will be summarised to indicate what the current state of sport policy in Bulgaria is. As a result of the review of literature and the findings from the interviews, a list of policy recommendations will be provided to assist sport participation policy and ultimately, increase sport and physical activity rates in Bulgaria. Conclusion, limitations remarks and recommendations for further research will close the Discussion chapter.

5.1 Summary of Contemporary Sport Policy

As a result of the interviews conducted it can be concluded that there is both common ground and differences in the policy priorities and the way municipalities and the national authority execute sport policy. A common feature was that children and youth sport was the most actively supported locally and nationally as opposed to elite performance, sport for all or disability sport. Although not in the official sport policy-making domain, the non-governmental sector appeared very active in the promotion of sport and physical activity for all, which is one of the core goals of national sport policy. Local authorities' autonomy has increased and decentralisation has been confirmed by all three municipalities. Gaps have been found in the communication between the national authority and the non-governmental sector and the national authority and Sofia municipality. Table 7 outlines the results found in the six interviews with the municipal, ministerial, NGO representatives.

Table 7. Summary of the findings from the local and national authorities, and the third sector.

	Municipalities	Ministry of Youth & Sport	Non-governmental sector
Problem stream Issues recognition Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited resources; need for private sector to support sports activities; maintaining infrastructure, Better support for the adults and the elderly age groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient regional staff Need for clarity on responsibilities on the Ministry's and municipalities' role in sport for all 	Problems according to NGOs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities often imperative NGOs not eligible for national funding no structure dedicated to Sport for All disregard for adult population No ideological emphasis on sport and PA
	Youth sport; Accessible opportunities	Youth sport/School sport and Disability sport	Sport participation (sport for all)
Policy stream Implemented policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free or discounted use of sports facilities for sports clubs Developing sports facilities and infrastructure School and students bursaries City sports events calendar Free-access outdoor facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Strategy for Development of Sport 2012-2022 Federations-run programs: 'Learn to Swim', 'Learn to Ski', 'Sport for People with disabilities', 'National Sport for All Program' 	Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport and PA campaigns (Now We Move, School to Move, European Youth Health Champions) Sport planning initiatives Free condition fitness sessions
Political stream	Reported Autonomy: Yes	Cooperation with: Local Authorities: some NGOs and volunteers: some	Cooperation with: Ministry of Sport: insufficient Local authority: fair
	Cooperation with: Ministry of Sport: varied NGOs: mostly good		
	Key factors: Local leaders (mayors), Cooperation with NGOs, and citizens, cross-sectoral work	Key factors: Economy, Role of the Sports Minister	Key factors: Role of leading figures

5.2 Sport Policy Recommendations for Increasing Participation

Following the results presentation, a collection of recommendation has been devised, which was the main research task of this study. These recommendations were compiled considering the arguments made in the review of literature chapter and the primary research findings. Ultimately, they are aimed to assist the work of sport policy officials on a local and national level with an explicit emphasis on bringing the non-governmental sector expertise in the policy domain.

Table 8. Sport Policy Recommendations

Type and Level of Action	Policy Recommendation	Practical Example
Political (national level)	Recognise the potential of sport and physical activity as a prevention method against non-communicable diseases, particularly cardiovascular diseases (CVDs).	Use political influence to raise awareness among Members of Parliament on current rates of CVDs and show the benefits of regular physical activity through contemporary research.
	Emphasise the importance of Sport for All on an ideological level and make the funding allocations for elite sport and sport participation accordingly.	
	Review priorities in the national strategy for sport taking into account socio-economic conditions, global developments in sport, national public health, availability of infrastructure and cultural factors.	Collect the views of experts from academia, public administration, the private and NGO sectors from different fields (e.g. economics, sociology, public health, finance) on a ‘round table’ discussion to establish realistic goals in elite sport and sport for health.
	Reconsider the sport-pyramid development model with the introduction of new philosophies from contemporary research such as Scheerder’s (2015) ‘church’ model emphasising participation.	
Make a strategic selection of several priority sports that the nation’s elite sport and public health can benefit from the most.		

Table 8. continued:

<p>Legislative (national level)</p>	<p>Clarify responsibilities for national and local authorities in relation to sport for all (SfA).</p>	<p>Replace the practice of Ministry of Youth and Sport allocating funding directly to sport federations for sport-for-all programs with municipalities having guaranteed SfA budgets that they distribute to the most effective NGOs and sport clubs.</p>
<p>Financial (national and local level)</p>	<p>Introduce standards guaranteeing funding to municipalities for provision of sport services.</p>	<p>Each municipality to be given a fixed amount of money per citizen for sport services.</p>
	<p>Channel resources towards sport for all as opposed to elite sport.</p>	
	<p>Provide tax reliefs or other benefits for private sector supporting sport for all, youth sport, and community sport.</p>	<p>Every company sponsoring a sports club or sport-for-all activity not to be taxed on the money it dedicates to that sport sponsorship activity.</p>
<p>Capacity Building and Efficiency (national and local level)</p>	<p>Improve communication between national and local institutions (Ministry & Municipalities) especially when such need has been reported (e.g. Municipality of Sofia).</p>	<p>Hold annual meeting/conference to hear from municipalities on local issues and suggestions for policy improvement.</p>
	<p>Enhance evidence-based policy making.</p>	<p>Conduct regular nationally representative research on sport participation levels, obstacles, and citizens' preferences on type of facilities and activities to practise.</p>
	<p>Use sport-for-all practices that were proven as working in Bulgarian cities or abroad.</p>	<p>Encourage popular outdoor activities (e.g. 5 km free run) to be organised in every town on weekends.</p>
	<p>Select the right management staff with appropriate leadership qualities and competencies.</p>	<p>Hire personnel with proven expertise and sufficient experience in running projects, sport development and physical activity promotion and research.</p>

Table 8. continued:

Partnerships (national and local level)	Create cross-sectoral policies ensuring a holistic approach.	Devise policies with Ministries of Health, Education, Transport, and Finance on promotion of urban cycling, and creating safe infrastructure.
	Hear the voice of NGOs, especially those with regular activities for citizens and international recognition.	Ensure that NGOs and local authorities have a regular communication channel (annual meeting, open-doors days).
	Promote cooperation with the non-governmental sector and encourage NGOs to ask for help.	Make it visible on the Ministry of Youth and Sport's website that everyone supporting sport and physical activity can contact their local authority or the Ministry for assistance.
Educational (national level)	Work on cultural perceptions/ change attitudes especially of those who are never physically active.	Organise seminars, workshops, and educational activities in schools, local sports clubs, town centres giving positive examples of practising sport and exercise.
	Recognise the psychological aspect of sport participation. Promote the benefits of sport and exercise / use positive approach.	
Infrastructure (national and local level)	Focus on functional, appropriate-size facilities, as opposed to large stadia and arenas.	Use local NGOs expertise and introduce public-private partnerships if a sport-facility is working at a loss.
	Adopt clever facility management (joint cooperation; NGO - Local Authority).	

5.3 Conclusion

Participation in sport and physical activity is a complex social phenomenon and even the most comprehensive and most carefully designed sport policy will be unable to achieve desired activity rates and public health benefits if other socioeconomic factors are not in place. This complexity is clearly demonstrated by Sir Michael Marmot's statement that what causes the health-damaging experiences is 'the toxic combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements and bad politics' (Marmot, 2014).

The results from the thesis aimed to assist the development of more effective and efficient sport policy in the field of promoting sport participation. Overall, developments towards increasing sport participation are evident and the results from the most recent Eurobarometer research of

10% decrease of those who are never physically active (European Commission, 2017) is an example of the efforts made. The active work of non-government organisations which have been growing in size and numbers in the last decade, the international support for sport for all, mainly through EU institutions, and the recognition by Bulgarian national and local authorities of the importance of sport for all are supporting the positive developments in the promotion of sport and physical activity.

Historical heritage related to centralised administration, ideological dominance of elite sport, economic uncertainties, political instability and strong dependence on ties with influential corporate powers, however, are hindering the process of delivering high-quality sport participation services to all citizens. Despite the major role of external factors such as the cultural perceptions, social norms, and the economy all of which make up one's Habitus, there are improvements in administration that can be made within the sport-specific field for a successful application of a more comprehensive and inclusive sport participation policy. As the Multiple Streams framework showed, the execution of policy is a complicated, often vague and even opportunistic process and depends largely on what problems have been identified, what solutions have been proposed, and to what extent favourable conditions exist for the implementation of those. Therefore, it is important for sport administrators, especially on a national level to be aware of these factors to maximise the chances for putting written statements into practice.

The conducted research outlined several recommendations to aid the process of enhancing participation in sport and physical activity in order to contribute to a healthier population in Bulgaria. These recommendations include: (1) clarifying national sport policy priorities considering current socioeconomic realities, which suggests putting sport for all in a stronger position in relation to elite sport; (2) making evidence-based policy a common practice; (3) enhancing cross-sectoral policies to achieve holistic implementation as shown by Finland's Health-in-All Policies principle evident in the 2002 Government Resolution on health-enhancing physical activity promotion and the numerous policy measures by the education, health, and transport sectors. (Vuori et al., 2004); (4) giving stronger voice to non-governmental organisations who are actively promoting sport participation; (5) focusing on smaller and functional sport facilities construction as opposed to large stadia and arenas; (6) bringing clarity on responsibilities on a national and local level, especially in relation to sport for all.

What is also worth noting is the relatively recent re-birth of voluntary sport organisations after almost five-decade state domination in the sports domain in the second half of the twentieth century. Sport for all is well-developed in countries with strong voluntary sport traditions such as Sweden and Finland, while Bulgaria's voluntary sport sector ceased to exist in the 1940s marked by the demist of the 'Yunak' sport societies. As sport historian and curator of the National Museum of Sport - Katia Ivanova has remarked, *'sport in Bulgaria will be heave again; maybe we just need time for a strong civic society to be built, which would be the major moving power for sport's popularisation among the population as it once was in the first decades post the re-emergence of the Bulgarian state'* (personal communication, 2016).

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The research was an attempt to bring up-to-date knowledge on the contemporary features, problems and prospects in Bulgarian sport policy with focus on sport participation as a way of tackling the issue of high inactivity rates in the country. However, a number of limitations are also evident namely, examining the topic from an administrative point of view, and collecting the data from relatively small sample of participants on which complete nationally-representative conclusions are hard to be drawn particularly in terms of local authorities.

Firstly, the study collected the views of sport officials from the national and local authorities and representatives of non-governmental organisations, which placed the focus on the administration side of sport participation. The more executional part of sport policy will also be useful to examine so a further research including the views of federations representatives, coaches or event athletes and citizens will add a more panoramic view to the current sport policy landscape. In addition, a more psychological approach trying to find out the cultural factors behind the low levels of participation in sport and physical activity will be an important contribution to tackling barriers to participation. Adopting a quantitative research design will assist the production of the large-scale picture.

As this study was a qualitative research, the results cannot be considered as fully representative of the whole country. As mentioned earlier in the Methodology chapter, only three of the local authorities have been studied representing three out of twenty eight provinces in total. These twenty eight provinces are made up of 265 municipalities and the officials interviewed were from three of the biggest municipalities – Sofia (largest), Plovdiv (2nd largest) and Stara Zagora

(5th largest). Moreover, these three municipalities are in three of the most economically developed areas of Bulgaria, as Figure 4 has shown. A more representative picture will be made if smaller and less well-off municipalities are also included in a future research.

Last but not least, a comparison analysis between the developments in Bulgaria and another country for the purposes of policy transfer can contribute to the development of more policy recommendations for successful sport policy implementation. Experiences from other European countries who have previously struggled with high rates of non-communicable diseases or countries who currently enjoy high rates of participation can serve as best-practice examples. States with similar historical development such as Slovenia or Czech Republic can be suitable choice for a comparative analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Information paper distributed to interviewees:

Contemporary Sport Policy in Bulgaria: Priorities, Problems and Future Prospects for Tackling Inactivity: *focus on sport participation*

1. Information about the researcher
2. Introducing the research
 - 2.1 Aim of the research: To contribute to the development of Sport-for-All as a tool for improving public health in Bulgaria.

The research will be an attempt to:

- present up-to-date knowledge on the contemporary policy developments in the country in relation to Sport-for-All
- put forth the different points of view of the local and national authorities, respectively and of the non-governmental sector on the current state and future development of Sport-for-All
- determine the role of the local and national authorities in developing mass sport
- to shed light on the key factors influencing the sport policy developments of Sport-for-All in Bulgaria today
- highlight also the key principles forming the Sport-for-All policies in Finland with the aim to discover the common ground as well as the differences between the two systems to allow for devising recommendations for applying proven practises for a more physically active population

In brief, the research examines from an administrative perspective what the current Sport-for-All landscape in Bulgaria looks like, how it can be developed further, and what the prospects for optimising the policy making process are.

3. The Interview
 - 3.1. Format – semi-structured interview; participants are allowed to decide on the level of detail to their answers and can at any time ask additional questions or make additions to previous answers.
 - 3.2. Privacy

The interviewee can decide if they prefer to keep the information regarding their name and place of work anonymous.

Audio recording will only be conducted if a consent by the interviewee has been given.

It is the duty of the researcher to keep the collected information secure and only use it for the purposes of the research.

Appendix 2. Interview questions for Local Authorities:

1. How long have you been involved in the sports development field and what are the key duties at your current position?
2. If we make a provisional distinction between youth sport, elite sport, and Sport-for-All, can we claim that in your local authority there is a rather clear orientation towards one of the three categories?
3. Based on your experience, would you say that in recent years mass sport has received more attention or the opposite?
 - 3.1 Are there specific reasons for this e.g. events/processes?
4. Do you think that local authorities possess enough autonomy to create effective policies and programmes that encourage mass sport for the citizens?
5. In previous academic research on Sports Policy in Bulgaria for the 1992-2008 period published around 5 years ago, one of the conclusions made is that there is still a high level of centralization and bureaucracy in the sport policy making process, where municipalities get the obligation of developing Sport-for-All but financially they are still dependent on the government which puts them in a position with a lot of responsibilities but with no sufficient resources. Do you agree?
 - 5.1 If yes, are there signs of change since then?
6. Based on your experience, which are the factors proving to be most significant for the successful policy making and policy application of programmes and initiatives for a more developed Sport for All?

(e.g. institutional support, presence of a strong leader, favourable conditions outside the sports sector which still influence it or the conjunction of all of them in the right moment thus ensuring a positive and secure environment)
7. What do you think are the main current challenges/problems at a local authority level when it comes to delivering the task of increasing the number of citizens exercising through sport or physical activity?
 - 7.1 How are they being tackled?
8. In relation to prioritising and financing sport at a local authority level, which can we say is more accurate: preserving established practices without many opportunities for new proposals or a rather open environment with realistic chances for changing a given trajectory of development?
 - 8.1 Do you have particular criticism towards the respective approach? (highly restricted opportunities for new ideas to be applied or too dynamic environment not allowing for consistency in realising a specific goal)
9. What do you think local authorities should focus their efforts in for a more developed Sport for All?

(e.g specific sports activities, maintaining and increasing the number of sports facilities, better awareness among the citizens on the benefits of physically active lifestyle, more sports events, etc.)

10. Based on your experience, what examples can be given for good cooperation between local and national authorities and where would you say improvements are needed?

11. Academics in public policy and sport policy in particular have suggested the following method for analysis:

1. Acknowledging a problem; 2. Solutions suggested by interested groups; 3. Presence of public and political support to apply these solutions.

If we look at the development of Sport for All in Bulgaria, can we say that these 3 conditions are present?

12. Do you agree that a country with a small economy like that of Bulgaria is better off channeling its resources towards youth sport and Sport for All (as opposed to elite sport) in order to improve public health or that would be very unpopular decision among the general public and within the sports sector?

13. Do you think that it could be useful to apply sports system models or individual practices from countries like Finland, which enjoy highly developed Sport for All?

14. According to European comparative studies, Bulgaria is among the countries with least physically active population with 70% never playing sport and 9% no more than once a week. What do you think would be a realistic goal for the next 5-10 years in terms increasing the percentage of regularly physically active (3 times a week)?

15. Questions. Anything to add.

Appendix 3. Interview questions for the NGOs:

1. How long have you been involved in the sports development field and what are the key duties at your current position in BG Be Active?
2. Based on your experience, would you say that in recent years mass sport has received more attention by the citizens or the opposite?
 - 2.1 Are there specific reasons for this e.g. events/processes?
3. Do you think that there is progress within the non-governmental sector in the sports for all field?
4. I understand. BG Be Active Association works with entities from varied sectors such as healthcare, sport, and education as well as national and municipal institutions. Which of them do you think can be considered as key partners of your association?
5. We mentioned this already so you think the personality is a key factor. I have included some other examples such as institutional support, favourable conditions with socio-economic significance outside the sports sector, which can lead to improved material welfare, more free time...
6. In previous academic research on Sports Policy in Bulgaria for the 1992-2008 period published around 5 years ago, one of the conclusions made is that there is still a high level of centralization and bureaucracy in the sport policy making process. Do you agree?
 - 6.1 Do you think that it is necessary for the role of the non-governmental sector organisations in how sport is managed to be increased, particularly sport for all (with more intensive engagement by associations that the Ministry can cooperate with)?
7. What do you think are the main challenges/problems in the non-governmental sector in performing the task of increasing the number of citizens doing sport and physical activity?
8. In your opinion, what do you think the main efforts should be focused on a local level, on a national level, and in the non-governmental sector for more developed mass sport?
9. One framework for analysing sport policies suggests the following steps: 1. Recognising the problem; 2. Solutions proposed by interested groups; 3. Presence of public and political support for putting these solutions into practice.
10. Do you agree that a country with a small economy like that of Bulgaria is better off channeling its resources towards youth sport and Sport for All (as opposed to elite sport) in order to improve public health or that would be very unpopular decision among the general public and within the sports sector? You mentioned it already but do you think that it will be unpopular in society and among people in the sports system on an administrative level?
11. Do you think that it could be useful to apply sports system models or individual practices from countries like Finland, which enjoy highly developed Sport for All? As someone who has spent some time in Finland I may be biased to an extent but from mass sport perspective, do you think it would be useful to adopt practices bearing in mind that compared to Norway or Sweden, Finland has more modest current achievements in elite sport?

12. According to European comparative studies, Bulgaria is among the countries with least physically active population with some 70% never playing sport and 9% no more than once a week. The 2013 Eurobarometer found 78% inactive, the 2009 – 58% and I tried to understand where that difference comes from.

13. Do you have any questions or anything to add?

Appendix 4. Interview questions for the Ministry of Youth and Sport:

1. How long have you been involved in the sports development field and what are the key duties at your current position?

2. According to the National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sport 2012 – 2022, the main strategic goals are the betterment of public health through sport and physical activity, increasing the rates of those practicing sport for all as well as the raise of the country's sporting prestige to a world level. If we make a provisional distinction between youth sport, elite sport, and sport for all, is there an orientation in the national-level sport policy toward one of the three domains?

3. Based on your experience, which are the factors proving to be most significant for the successful policy making and policy application of programmes and initiatives for a more developed Sport for All?

(e.g. institutional support, presence of a strong leader, favourable conditions outside the sports sector which still influence it or the conjunction of all of them in the right moment thus ensuring a positive and secure environment)

4. One of the problems mentioned in the Strategy 2012-2022 is the lack of regional staff of the national sport system who are responsible for sport development and coordinating sport for all. What is the progress on this issue at the current moment?

5. What do you think are the main current challenges/problems at a local authority level when it comes to delivering the task of increasing the number of citizens exercising through sport or physical activity?

5.1 How are they being tackled?

6. In relation to prioritising and financing sport at a local authority level, which can we say is more accurate: preserving established practices without many opportunities for new proposals or a rather open environment with realistic chances for changing a given trajectory of development?

6.1 Do you have particular criticism towards the respective approach? (highly restricted opportunities for new ideas to be applied or too dynamic environment not allowing for consistency in realising a specific goal)

7. In relation to the role of the national and local authorities in the promotion of sport for all, which do you think is the more effective approach: rather coordinating and advisory role of the Ministry and strong municipal autonomy or stronger centralization?

8. Based on your experience, what examples can be given for good cooperation between local and national authorities and where would you say improvements are needed?

9. Again, on the cooperation theme, do you get understanding from other ministries (health, education, transport, finance, etc.) when their participation is needed?

10. In an academic research from recent years the following claims have been made: *'it is evident that most of the measures written down in strategic documents and programs for the development of sport for the 1997-2012 period do not become reality due to their too general description, lack of public*

Appendix 4 continued:

debate and lack of will to achieve agreement among key institutions, which reduced the practical value of those strategies. Are there reasons for this statement to be denounced as of today?

11. Considering European institutions', particularly the European Commission's stronger commitment in the last two decades to be involved in the management of sport, by highlighting the social significance of sport, how does this influence affect the Bulgarian sport system and sport for all, in particular?

(It is easing the process for active development of mass sport or, as some scholars argue, hinders the system putting in a challenging position of having to adapt quickly to the principles of the European Model of Sport?)

12. The rate of those never physically active in Bulgaria according to the 2009 Eurobarometer study is 58%. This is also the percentage pointed out by the National Strategy for Sport 2012-2022. One of the expected results is to reduce this number to 39%. In the 2013 Eurobarometer, it has increased to 78%. We need to mention that there are changes in the way this data is presented but nevertheless, the trend seems to be showing increasing rates of physically inactive people. How can we interpret this? Insufficient execution of the recommendations of the Strategy, a need for new suggestions to solve the problem or something else?

13. What do you think the national authority should focus its efforts for a more developed mass sport? (e.g. national-level research, increased sporting infrastructure and better maintenance, raising citizens' awareness on the benefits of an active lifestyle, more mass sport events, etc.)

14. In previous academic research on Sports Policy in Bulgaria for the 1992-2008 period published around 5 years ago, one of the conclusions made is that there is still a high level of centralization and bureaucracy in the sport policy making process, where municipalities get the obligation of developing Sport-for-All but financially they are still dependent on the government which puts them in a position with a lot of responsibilities but with no sufficient resources. Do you agree?















14.1 If yes, are there signs of change since then?

15. Do you agree that a country with a small economy like that of Bulgaria is better off channeling its resources towards youth sport and Sport for All (as opposed to elite sport) in order to improve public health or that would be very unpopular decision among the general public and within the sports sector?

16. Do you think that it could be useful to apply sports system models or individual practices from countries like Finland, which enjoy highly developed Sport for All?


17. Questions for me? Anything to add.

Appendix 5. Condition of Ski lifts and Ski track in Vitosha as of March 2018 (Vitosha Ski, 2018).

ПИСТИ И СЪОРЪЖЕНИЯ - Tracks and Facilities				
Състояние на съоръженията - Condition of the Lift Facilities				Status
вид	име	капацитет ч/час	дължина m	статус
	А Кабинков лифт	1200	6270	✓
	в Лалето 1	1500	1345	✓
	с Лалето 2	900	1281	✗
	р Романски	400	1930	✗
	е Черни връх	800	870	✗
	ф Помагалски	800	860	✓
	о Заека	750	860	✗
	н Алеко	600	740	✗
	г Платото	700	880	✗
	д Учебна	500	120	✓
	к Меча поляна	500	100	✓
	л Драгалевски	400	3475	✗
	Ветровала	380	600	✓
	Ветровала Бейби влек	500	150	✓



Състояние на пистите - Condition of the Ski tracks				Status
номер	име	ниво на трудност		статус
1	Лалето 1	■		✓
2	Лалето 2	■		✗
3	Лалето 3	■		✗
4	Черни връх	■		✗
5	Синя писта	■		✗
6	Стената	■		✗
7	Диагонала 1	■		✗
8	Диагонала 2	■		✗
9	Козирката на Боби	■		✗
10	Зелена писта	■		✗
11	Ски път Лалето	■		✓
12	Синя писта - учебна	■		✓
13	Меча поляна	■		✓
14	Писта за ски бягане - 3 км.	■		✗
15	Ветровала	■		✓

Черни връх

 -6°C

Усеща се : -15°

Алеко	Витошко лале
1.5°C	5.2°C

 7 / 14  5 / 15

Актуална информация за лавинната опасност може да намерите на страницата на [Планинска спасителна служба](#).