



INTERVIEW WITH BENCE GARAMVOLGYI FROM NSULF ABOUT GRASSROOTS SPORT DIPLOMACY

IRIS: What is the NSULF and why did you decide to get involved in Grassroots sport diplomacy?

BENCE GARAMVOLGYI (NSULF): Based on a traditional grassroot settings, NSULF is the main umbrella organization of three major national sport federations from the school, university and leisure sport sector in Hungary. All three federations have regional and local member organizations, thus the link between local and national level is provided. In this case, Grassroots sport diplomacy provides a higher level and enables the local, regional and national level sport organizations of NSULF to share and export their good practices at European and international level.

We are convinced that grassroots sport should have an important role in building cohesive societies all around the world. We believe that grassroots sport can be utilized perfectly for increasing dialogue, tolerance and trust between people from different origins. For us, grassroots sport is a sort of communication channel that can connect people and foster mutual understanding and peaceful relations.

NSULF is a relatively new organization, functioning from 1st January 2017. It was born following the reform of the Hungarian sport law in 2016 that has identified 4 major umbrella organizations responsible for the development of Hungarian sport, from grassroots to elite level. Grassroots sport diplomacy provides a good opportunity to put NSULF and its member organizations on the map of Europe and the world. Our federation has a lot to share with the rest of the world in terms of successfully delivering campaigns that contribute to higher levels of physical activity. One of these campaigns is the European School Sport Day that has already been implemented 28 European countries, but we believe the initiative shall be organized on a global scale. The proposed pilot action also contributes to the positioning of NSULF at national level and builds relationship between GSD and public diplomacy.

Can you describe your pilot action? How did you decide to work on this specific matter and why with Colombia specifically?

The main reason for implementing the pilot action is a unique opportunity to build sustainable relations with the Colombian counterpart. Before the call for pilot projects, the Colombian Ministry for External Relations has already considered Hungarian sport organizations as a possible partner for a youth exchange to be organized within the



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frameworks of its sport diplomacy strategy. We considered this opportunity as an ultimate chance to initiate a policy dialogue on grassroots sports and exchange good practices with organizations representing the Colombian grassroots sport sector. Since we had very similar goals (like promotion of grassroots-sport based mobility, strengthening people-to-people links between youngsters of the two countries and fighting prejudices, building tolerance between people of different cultures and origins) we decided to join our forces.

With our initiative, we pursued the following goals/objectives:

- Establishing relations with the Colombian Grassroots Sport Sector;
- Exchanging best practices on how to increase participation in grassroots sports and how to boost levels of physical activity;
- Providing opportunities to disadvantaged young people for personal development through engaging in sport-based cross-border mobility;
- Incentivizing high-level policy dialogue on good practices related to the grassroots sport sector.

The main target group of the pilot project were 10 young Colombian swimmer girls from Arauca region in order to provide them opportunities for personal development through engaging in sport-based cross-border mobility. Secondary target groups involved Staff of grassroots sport organizations and policy experts and decision makers in the field of grassroots sport.

The pilot project involved the following activities:

- 1) Setting up contacts with partners in Colombia and Hungary
- 2) Planning the schedule of the youth exchange, selecting participants
- 3) Realizing the youth exchange with the active contribution of all partners
- 4) Evaluating the exchange and gathering feedback from the participants
- 5) Exchange of good practices in the framework of the Peace and Sport Day (6th April)
- 6) Promotion of the European School Sport Day towards Colombia
- 7) Establishing legacy for the youth exchange and planning follow-up activities

The GSD pilot action can be perfectly aligned with the internationalization strategy of our organization and with the general goals of the Hungarian government as well (namely economic and social opening to Latin American countries). With the realization of the pilot action, our federation could start developing sustainable international relations that can lead to increased knowledge and expertise.

What are the main results?

From a more general perspective, international grassroots sport actions, like the Colombian-Hungarian sport diplomacy youth exchange can contribute to the success of



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public diplomacy. With respect to our initiative sport and youth organizations, public institutions alike all benefited from the pilot action, while the primary target group gained a life-long experience. The pilot project led to increased relations between the two countries, its institutions, organizations and people.

The pilot project was considered as a great success from all stakeholders participating in the project. The Colombian Ministry for External Relations and the recently opened Colombian Embassy perceives the initiative as an ultimate way to strengthen the ties between the two countries and to exchange good practices in the field of sport, more specifically grassroots sport. From the Hungarian side, the project has contributed to extending the international network of NSULF and it has enabled us to get in touch with different local stakeholders like the Hungarian Swimming Federation, the City Council of Budapest and several grassroots organizations. From the perspective of the participants, we have only received very positive feedbacks and most of them claimed that the life-changing experience supports them to become role models in their small communities, back home in Arauca.

Grassroots sport organizations can play important roles in nowadays multi-stakeholder diplomacy and grassroots sport as a communication platform can facilitate the transmission of diplomatic messages to the wide public. Despite the considerable geographical distance between the host country and the Colombian counterpart, similar challenges could be identified with regards to the situation of disadvantaged young people. We believe, grassroots sport can be an effective way to strengthen participants' life prospects and aspirations.

What will be the next steps? (with these girls? With this project? With Colombia?)

Although the main activity of the pilot project only lasted for over a week, the legacy of the youth exchange will shape the personal development and education of the young athletes who took part in our initiative. Participation in the youth exchange showed the youngsters that hard work can open doors for opportunities both in the field of sport and education. Following the main activity, we kept contact with the participants and realized dissemination activities both in Colombia and Hungary. Among these dissemination events, we organized a sport event on the occasion of International Day for Sport for Development and Peace (6 April).

Our pilot action has also led to stronger institutional links between Colombia and Hungary. The Colombian government has considered the pilot project highly successful, therefore they have decided to increase the funding and realize a follow-up exchange with the participation of young swimmers from Amazonia region (a region which is also highly affected by illegal armed recruitment and drug trafficking). The follow-up youth exchange was realized with the participation of the same stakeholders from Hungary and Colombia.



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The Colombian Ministry for External Relations aims to implement similar initiatives in the future.

Another example of how the project managed to reinforce institutional ties between the two countries is the cooperation in the field of higher education. During the youth exchange, the Colombian delegation managed to take part in a workshop at the Hungarian University of Physical Education. The university was interested to enlarge its international network in Colombia which took place following the project. Starting from the next academic year, the Hungarian university will also offer scholarships for Colombian students. Furthermore, a policy-based discussion was launched between the two countries on exchanging best practices in the field of elite and grassroots sport. Within the frameworks of this discussion, there was an entire session dedicated to Colombian sport in the last edition of the International Conference on Sports Innovation organized by the University of Physical Education.

How can this project inspire other ideas, project, stakeholders?

The project is a unique, multi-stakeholder approach to Grassroots sport diplomacy. It is based on an already existing, government-led initiative (the Colombian sport diplomacy program) complemented with elements of grassroots sport and sport for development and peace. In our opinion, the Colombian-Hungarian sport diplomacy youth exchange can inspire other governments, and intergovernmental organizations to launch similar grassroots-sport based initiatives favouring disadvantaged young people who do not necessarily have the means to engage in international learning and self-development projects. We believe there is a need for more initiatives like this which can open doors for international cooperation and provide opportunities for young athletes and connect them with their peers in other countries. Hopefully, the successor of the Erasmus+ program will be able to provide adequate frameworks for implementing similar initiatives focusing on the promotion of sport-based mobility, including grassroots sport.