

**Professor Dragan Milanović, PhD**

University of Zagreb Faculty of Kinesiology

Horvaćanski zavoj 15, 10000 Zagreb

Phone: 01/3658 666, Fax: 01 / 3634146

E-mail: dragan.milanovic@kif.hr

**Zrinko Čustonja, PE teacher**

University of Zagreb Faculty of Kinesiology

Horvaćanski zavoj 15, 10000 Zagreb

Phone: 01/3658 666, Fax: 01 / 3634146

E-mail: zrinko@kif.hr

**Dario Škegro, PE teacher**

University of Zagreb Faculty of Kinesiology

Horvaćanski zavoj 15, 10000 Zagreb

Phone: 01/3658 666, Fax: 01 / 3634146

E-mail: dskegro@kif.hr

## **SCHOOL SPORT IN EASTERN CROATIAN COUNTIES**

## **ŠKOLSKI SPORT U ŽUPANIJAMA ISTOČNE HRVATSKE**

### ***ABSTRACT***

*The aim of this paper is to assess and explain the situation in school sport in eastern Croatian counties. Due to the fact that more than 120,000 children participate in school sport we can conclude that this is the largest sport system in the Republic of Croatia. In 2009 a survey was conducted in primary and secondary schools to collect data for this analysis. Using the collected data a document entitled "The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014" was published. This paper presents several aspects of school sport in five eastern Croatian counties (Vukovar-Srijem, Osijek-Baranja, Požega-Slavonija, Brod-Posavina and Virovitica-Podravina counties): school sport facilities, the level of participation of pupils in school sport, and a comparison with these aspects of school sport in the Republic of Croatia in general. The analysis findings show that the situation regarding school sport facilities in eastern Croatia is similar to the Croatian average, with several exceptions. The level of participation of pupils in school sport also varies in some of the analysed counties. On the basis of the obtained results guidelines for improvement of school sport in eastern Croatia are provided.*

**Key words:** School sport, eastern Croatia, school sport facilities, school sport associations, competitions and training, financing

### ***SAŽETAK***

*Cilj ovoga rada je ocijeniti i objasniti stanje školskoga sporta u Istočnoj Hrvatskoj. Sukladno činjenici kako je preko 120.000 djece uključeno u školski sport možemo zaključiti kako se radi o najmasovnijem sustavu sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj. Osnovne i srednje škole anketirane su 2009. godine kako bi se prikupili podaci za ovu analizu. Korištenjem podataka koji su*

*prikupljeni u navedenoj anketi objavljen je dokument pod nazivom „Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009-2014“. U ovom radu prikazano je stanje školskog sporta u pet županija Istočne Hrvatske (Vukovarsko-srijemska, Osječko-baranjska, Požeško-slavonska, Brodsko-posavska i Virovitičko-podravska) I to kroz nekoliko aspekata. Stanje izgrađenosti objekata za školski sport, uključenost učenika u školski sport kao i usporedba sa stanjem školskog sporta u navedenim segmentima u Republici Hrvatskoj. Rezultati analize pokazuju kako je situacija po pitanju izgrađenosti sportskih objekata slična prosjeku na državnoj razini uz određena odstupanja. Uključenost učenika u školski sport također pokazuje odstupanja u nekim analiziranim županijama. Temeljem navedenih pokazatelja date su sugestije za unaprjeđenje sustava školskoga sporta u Istočnoj Hrvatskoj.*

**Ključne riječi:** Školski sport, Istočna Hrvatska, objekti za školski sport, školska športska društva, natjecanje i trening, financiranje

## 1. Introduction

Large volume of research indicates that participation in sport has positive impact on the overall psychosomatic development of children and youth. It is therefore very important to ensure their participation in systematic physical and sports activities from an early age. In the Republic of Croatia there are two systems involving participation of children and youth in sports activities. The first one is the school sport system, which frequently corresponds to the competitions held at the local, city, county or national level, and the second one is the sports system in sports clubs. Through these systems children participate in organised sports activities and benefit from sport.

In the Republic of Croatia school sport is present in primary and secondary schools within extracurricular school sport activities organised within the system of School Sport Associations (SSAs). Also, competitions held at the municipal, city, county and national levels represent an integral part of the school sport system. High quality sports preparation system for children and youth at the local, regional and national levels comprises a well-defined procedure for the selection of pupil-athletes and a sufficient volume of training. The core comprises several mandatory sports activities in primary and secondary schools (3-4 hours per week) with high-quality programmes of school sport training and an elaborated competition system.

Sports activities of primary and secondary school pupils as well as the organisation and activities of sports clubs in the Republic of Croatia, including the eastern Croatian counties need to be significantly improved. School sport should include the highest possible number of children that show high interest in the participation in the training process and well organised competitions. School sport clubs should become the points of high concentration of children and youth motivated for sport. Within the extracurricular school sport activities they would be able to develop their abilities, characteristics and motor skills and to accomplish sports results with the support of highly-qualified coaches in adequate organisational, material, financial and technical conditions.

Considering the fact that school sport in the Republic of Croatia (with approximately 120,000 pupils participating in primary and secondary schools) is the largest sports system in the country (Milanović et al., 2009:13), it should be stressed that this very interesting field of research is still fairly unexplored. An important contribution in establishing the present situation and analysing the school sport system has been provided by the document titled

“The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014” published in 2009 (Publishers: MSES and CSSF, 2009). In this document, the situation in school sport in the Republic of Croatia has been analysed in several segments important for the operation of the school sport system as a whole. The segments of school sport in the Republic of Croatia analysed in this document include:

- facilities and equipment used for the purpose of school sport
- staff involved in the school sport system
- level of participation of children in school sport
- competition and training system in school sport
- school sport financing
- school sport associations
- healthcare in the school sport associations system
- universal sports school
- school sport and pupils with disabilities
- Croatian School Sport Federation

This paper will present the current situation in school sport in eastern Croatian counties, which comprises the following five counties: Vukovar-Srijem, Osijek-Baranja, Požega-Slavonija, Brod-Posavina and Virovitica-Podravina counties. Since participation in sport is one of the fundamental rights of children and youth, it is of the utmost importance to give this area more prominence.

The aim is to present the data for each segment of schools sport in the listed counties. The focus of the analysis will be the collected data on facilities and equipment used for the purpose of school sport and the level of participation of children in school sport.

## **2. Facilities and equipment used for the purpose of school sport in eastern Croatian counties**

Pursuant to the Sports Act (Official Gazette No. 71/6, 150/08), primary and secondary schools establish school sport associations (SSAs). School sports halls and outdoor facilities are used for the implementation of SSA programmes. Table 1 shows that, out of the total of 188 primary schools in eastern Croatia, 142 (75.54% ) have a sports hall and 46 (26.46%) do not. 164 schools (87,23%) have outdoor school sports facilities, while 24 (12.77%) do not. Table 2 shows the data on sports halls in the eastern Croatian counties in secondary schools. Of the total of 70 secondary schools, 31 (44.28%) have a school sports hall and 39 (55.72% ) do not. In the eastern Croatian counties 30 schools (42.85%) have an outdoor sports facility, while 40 (57.15%) do not. In the past few years 179 sports halls have been built in primary and secondary schools. This led to a significant improvement in the status of the school sports facilities and equipment in the Republic of Croatia, but it has still not reached an acceptable level.

Table 1. School sports facilities in primary schools of the eastern Croatian counties

County	Number of schools	School sports hall		Outdoor school sports facility	
		YES (%)	NO (%)	YES (%)	NO (%)
Vukovar-Srijem	54	38 (70%)	16 (30%)	45 (83%)	9 (17%)
Osijek-Baranja	70	59 (84%)	11 (16%)	60 (86%)	10 (14%)
Požega-Slavonija	14	6 (43%)	8 (57%)	13 (93%)	1 (7%)
Brod-Posavina	33	27 (82%)	6 (18%)	31 (94%)	2 (6%)
Virovitica-Podravina	17	12 (71%)	5 (29%)	15 (88%)	2 (12%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>142 (75.54%)</b>	<b>46 (24.46%)</b>	<b>164 (87.23%)</b>	<b>24 (12.77%)</b>

Source: Milanović et al. (2009). *Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009.-2014. [The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014. In Croatian.]*, Zagreb: Croatian School Sport Federation and Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

Table 2. School sports facilities in secondary schools of the eastern Croatian counties

County	Number of schools	School sports hall		Outdoor school sports facility	
		YES (%)	NO (%)	YES (%)	NO (%)
Vukovar-Srijem	15	7 (47%)	8 (53%)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
Osijek-Baranja	29	12 (41%)	17 (59%)	11 (38%)	18 (62%)
Požega-Slavonija	7	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	5 (71%)
Brod-Posavina	11	6 (55%)	5 (45%)	4 (36%)	7 (64%)
Virovitica-Podravina	8	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	4 (50%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>31 (44.28%)</b>	<b>39 (55.72%)</b>	<b>30 (42.85%)</b>	<b>40 (57.15%)</b>

Source: Milanović et al. (2009). *Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009.-2014. [The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014. In Croatian.]*, Zagreb: Croatian School Sport Federation and Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

The presented data clearly show that the number of sports halls and facilities in primary schools is much higher than in secondary schools. It should also be underlined that there are many secondary schools which share a sports hall with another school. This presents only a partial solution to the problem of the sports hall or outdoor sports facility shortage. Furthermore, the question of adequate infrastructure and the equipment of the existing school sports halls and outdoor sports facilities needs to be addressed. In this respect, it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis and obtain a better insight in the actual condition of the existing facilities and to define clear guidelines for the construction of new ones.

### 3. Level of participation of children in school sport

The document "The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014" identifies the level of children participation in school sport as one of the most significant indicators of the school sport status. According to the data presented in this document, in the Republic of Croatia 80,000 primary school pupils (22% ) and 40,000 secondary school students (21% ) participate in school sport (Milanović et al., 2009:43). It is interesting to note that an equal number of primary school pupils participate in the system of sports clubs and in the school sport system (80,000 or 22%). This indicates that it is very likely that the pupils participating in the school sport system are also active in the sports clubs. The situation with secondary school students is somewhat different. There are 30,000 secondary school students

participating in the system of sport clubs, or 17% of the total number of secondary school students.

Table 3. The level of participation of primary school pupils in school sport associations in the eastern Croatian counties

County	Level of participation of pupils in SSAs
Vukovar-Srijem	30.72%
Osijek-Baranja	22.13%
Požega-Slavonija	14.47%
Brod-Posavina	22.65%
Virovitica-Podravina	15.75%

Source: Milanović et al. (2009). *Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009.-2014. [The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014. In Croatian.]*, Zagreb: Croatian School Sport Federation and Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

Table 3 presents the data on the level of participation of pupils in the school sport system in five eastern Croatian counties. If we compare the data with the level of participation of pupils in school sport at the national level we can see that Požega-Slavonija county with 14.47% level of participation and Virovitica-Podravina county with 15.75% level of participation significantly fall behind the national average. On the other hand, Vukovar-Srijem county with 30.72% level of participation of primary school pupils in the school sport is the second ranked county in the Republic of Croatia.

Table 4. The level of participation of secondary school students in school sport associations in eastern Croatian counties

County	Level of participation of pupils in SSAs
Vukovar-Srijem	22.04%
Osijek-Baranja	22.94%
Požega-Slavonija	22.19%
Brod-Posavina	10.51%
Virovitica-Podravina	18.63%

Source: Milanović et al. (2009). *Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009.-2014. [The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014. In Croatian.]*, Zagreb: Croatian School Sport Federation and Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

Vukovar-Srijem, Osijek-Baranja and Požega-Slavonija counties are somewhat above the national average with respect to the level of participation of secondary school students in school sport. The 18.63% level of secondary school student participation in school sport in Virovitica-Podravina county falls below the average by almost 4 percentage points, while Brod-Posavina county with 10.51% has the lowest level of secondary school student participation in school sport in Croatia. While Požega-Slavonija and Virovitica-Podravina counties have seen an increase in the number of secondary school student participation in sports activities of school sports associations and the number has been maintained at the approximately same level as in primary schools in Osijek-Baranja county, the figures for two eastern Croatian counties are concerning, one of which is Brod-Posavina county, where the number of secondary school students in school sport associations has decreased by almost 12%. Vukovar-Srijem county has also seen a decrease from 30.72%, which ranked the county second at the national level, to an average level of 22.04%.

#### 4. Directions for the development of school sport in eastern Croatian counties

The research conducted in this field suggests that there is an urgent need for structuring of the school sport system. In research on the population of fourth and eighth graders Findak (1999)

found that pupils alongside 4 - 6 sedentary hours in classes sit in front of the TV for additional 1 - 3 hours. He also found that fourth graders spend up to 65 and eight graders up to 135 additional minutes on other sedentary activities. The same research showed that pupils spend insufficient amount of time playing (fourth graders 58 and eight graders 34 minutes). Such lifestyle includes various health hazards, potentially leading to diseases and malfunction of body systems. (Findak and Neljak, 2008, after Findak and Prskalo, 2005). It is interesting to compare the data on the level of participation of children in the school sport system in Croatia (22% in primary schools and 21% in secondary schools) with the percentage of the children participating in sports activities in Finland where, according to the research conducted by Nieminen in 2003, 80% of pupils participate in sports activities.

These indicators call for the guidelines for the development and improvement of school sport in eastern Croatia. Primarily, considering the poor indicators regarding the number of school sports facilities it is necessary to start systematic development of school sports facilities. It is very important for the development of facilities to be carried out in accordance with the norms and standards which should be put into place in order to ensure adequate conditions for the implementation of sport in the education system. Also, it is necessary for the existing and new sports halls to have the equipment for the implementation of extracurricular sports activities at the highest level. Finally, it is necessary to develop a plan for the adaptation and reconstruction of the existing school sport facilities.

The number of the pupils participating in the school sport system should be increased to 35% (conclusions of the document "The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014"). Accordingly, additional effort should be put into achieving this goal in the eastern Croatian counties. One of important measures to be taken is to introduce a system for registration of members of school sport associations, since the majority of pupils that participate in school sport also participate in the activities of sports clubs.

In addition to the above mentioned guidelines, it is important to address the system of financing, which could be significantly improved. One of major problems related to financing is the fact that school sport associations are not legal entities, so the funds for their operation are transferred to the accounts of their respective schools. Frequently the funds allocated for the SSAs are used for other, "more important" purposes.

## **5. Conclusion**

The data presented in this paper clearly suggest that there is a lot of room for improvement in the domain of school sport in eastern Croatian counties. First and foremost, these improvements concern the level of participation of children in school sport, where the key role of PE teachers should be emphasised. From the first grade of primary school to the fourth grade of secondary school pupils must be familiarised with the benefits of the participation in sport at Physical Education classes and extracurricular sports activities. It is also necessary to underline the educational component of all physical activity and sports programmes. This is conducive to the accomplishment of the goal of increasing the number of children participating in school sport activities. Also, a structured system for the reconstruction of the existing and the construction of new sports facilities can increase their utilisation for the purpose of the development and improvement of school sport in eastern Croatian counties.

## 6. References

Findak, V. Važnost bavljenja športom djece, mladeži i odraslih (izlaganje na skupu) [Importance of participation in sport for children, youth and adults (presentation at the assembly). In Croatian.], 1st Croatian Sport Assembly, 14 and 15 May 1999

Findak, V., Neljak, B. (2007). Tjelesno vježbanje u funkciji unapređenja kvalitete života mladih. [Physical activity in the function of improvement of the youth lifestyle quality. In Croatian.] In M. Andrijašević (Ed.), *Proceedings of the international conference "Sport for All in the function of the improvement of the life quality"*, Zagreb, 2007 (pp. 221-225). Zagreb: Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb.

Milanović, D., Čustonja, Z., Neljak, B., Harasin, D., Halamek, Z., Čustonja, H. i Škegro, D. (2009). Strategija razvoja školskog sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj 2009.-2014. [The Strategy for the Development of School Sport in Croatia 2009-2014. In Croatian.], Zagreb: Croatian School Sport Federation and Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

Nieminen, L. Sports and physical exercise in Finland (2003). Downloaded from the Internet on 13 April 2012 at: <http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/sportexe.html>