

## Response to the Consultation on the European Sport Model

### “Include the other half of European sports”

The current debate on the European Sport Model focuses primarily on sport as a goal in itself: competition, leagues, winning and losing. These elements are valuable and should be safeguarded — but they reflect only half of the picture. Across Europe, the understanding of sport as a means of achieving major societal outcomes is rapidly growing. This dimension is still insufficiently recognised in the current model, even though it addresses some of Europe’s most pressing challenges.

#### *1. Sport as a Means: Essential for a Future-Proof Europe*

Europe is heading towards a health and care crisis: an ageing, increasingly vulnerable population combined with declining labour productivity and growing pressure on health systems. Prevention is no longer optional — it is a strategic necessity. In this context, sport is one of the most effective and efficient tools we have.

Sport as a means:

- strengthens the resilience of our population, physically and mentally;
- reduces healthcare demand and improves quality of life;
- fosters social cohesion;
- supports a healthy and productive workforce.

In short: sport is not merely recreational — it is a cornerstone of societal wellbeing. Or, as many health professionals now underscore: sport comes without a package insert, but with enormous therapeutic impact.

#### *2. The Growing Role of the Professional Sport Sector*

Where the traditional model mainly emphasises club-based and federation-governed sport, much of today’s societal impact is created by the professional sport sector: fitness centres, yoga and dance studios, swimming schools, martial arts facilities, physiotherapy-based exercise concepts and other professional providers.

This sector:

- activates more people in countries like the Netherlands than the club-based sport system;
- reaches groups that traditionally struggle to participate in sport, including
  - low-income households,
  - people with chronic conditions,
  - older adults who generally exercise too little;
- provides flexible, accessible and tailored offerings;
- innovates quickly and collaborates closely with healthcare, social services and municipalities.

For millions of Europeans, this is where sport actually happens.

### *3. Sport as Medicine: From Concept to Practice*

The use of sport as medicine is expanding rapidly. Examples now widely implemented include Parkinson's boxing, dancing & climbing, as well as targeted interventions for diabetes, COPD, depression, cancer rehabilitation and more.

International organisations such as WONCA (the global organisation of family doctors) actively promote this development because of the overwhelming evidence of its effectiveness. It would be a missed opportunity if the European Sport Model did not recognise this transformative shift.

### *4. The Current Model Overlooks a Crucial Dimension*

While the European Sport Model acknowledges the value of sport, it does not yet structurally embed the societal role of sport as a means. This omission is significant — and increasingly untenable.

The societal relevance of sport:

- is larger than ever,
- will continue to grow in the decades ahead,
- and therefore deserves explicit and permanent recognition in the model.

A model designed to serve Europe's citizens must embrace the full ecosystem of sport: club-based and professional, competitive and recreational, traditional and innovative.

### *5. Recommendation*

We call on the European institutions to explicitly incorporate the following elements into the European Sport Model:

1. Recognition of sport as a means to achieve health, prevention, social cohesion and societal resilience.
2. Inclusion of the professional sport sector as a key partner alongside traditional sport organisations.
3. Invest in structural integration between sport and healthcare, including recognition of sport as medicine.
4. A broad and inclusive sport ecosystem that values all forms of participation and all types of providers.

If Europe aims to strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of its population, sport must be recognised for what it truly is: vital public infrastructure for a healthy, active and sustainable society. Or in sporting terms: we risk going into the second half a goal behind — but there is still every chance to turn the match around.

Kind regards,  
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