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NextGen

Digitalization in sport organisations



GOOD PRACTICE
E-BOOK

NextGEN - 101090977
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INTRODUCTION

In response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, the NextGen - Digitalization in Sports Organizations project was conceived to address the urgent need for innovation within the sports sector. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of traditional operational models and underscored the critical importance of digital transformation in ensuring the resilience and sustainability of sports organizations.

This project has brought together four forward-thinking sports organizations from three different European countries: *Gymnastics Federation of ŠIBENIK-KNIN County* and *sport-recreation organization DSR SUPERKID* from Croatia, *Women's Football club SLOGA, Zemun* from Serbia and sport organization *ŠD PARTIZAN SEVNICA* from Slovenia - with a shared mission - to harness the power of digital technology to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. As the world of sports continues to evolve in the digital age, the integration of technology has become essential not only for maintaining business continuity but also for driving growth and innovation.

The primary objective of the NextGen project was to promote digitalization within these organizations by partnering with specialized IT companies. Each participating organization was tasked with identifying a technology partner that could guide them through the digital transformation process, helping them to integrate cutting-edge tools and strategies into their daily operations. Over the course of the project, these organizations successfully collaborated with their chosen IT firms to implement innovative digital solutions tailored to their unique needs.

This digital handbook of good practice is one of the results of **NextGen – digitalization in sports organization**, project conducted from January 2022 to September 2024.

The goal of this E-book is to share examples of digital solutions that were invented during the past two years in all four project partner countries as a new necessary tool in today's technology era. Also, the value of this document comes from the fact that sport and technology do not go together at all – as was previously thought. With this project, we have shown how much a combination of

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digital knowledge and competencies is needed for the growth and development of sports associations as well as all other organizations.

The purpose of digital handbook is to serve as a comprehensive guide to the good practices and successful strategies that emerged from the NextGen project. It showcases concrete examples of the digital solutions adopted by the four sports organizations, illustrating how these innovations have not only improved the quality and efficiency of their clubs and associations but also strengthened their ability to navigate the challenges of the modern world.

Following a comprehensive SWOT analysis done by each organization at the beginning of the project, key areas for digitalization were identified individually for each partner organization and specific IT companies were selected by sports organizations based on their needed area of development. Here is a Swot analysis which was used as a basic information for development of key areas of each partner sports organizations.

SWOT analysis of all four organizations together	
SWOT – Category	Details
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fast and easy communication with users through communication channels such as WhatsApp, E-mails...etc. ● A lot of online and real-life exposure through social media IG, FB, quality of service. ● Considering organizations specialized for children - parents can track their children’s activities through frequent posts of our program activities on social media.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Online communication, coach log hours online, articles about events online, easy access, online payments. ● Large base of children, application with centralization of database of members. ● Great interest and popularization of this kind of sports activity (gymnastics, football, school of sport for children). ● Positive presentation online - a larger network of potential users ● Members that are professional athletes and competitive recreation athletes have fast and direct communication with their coaches. ● Matches are organized by club staff and communicated directly to players.
WEEKNESES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of online forms for the application for activities and missing online inscription because of easier data analysis, paper free and ready for fund reports. ● Some organizations don't have official websites, so they have been using just social media channels which aren't

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	<p>sufficient for bigger organizations projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion on social media is insufficient or inadequate - it should be more often and frequently and its missing diversities of content that attracts the public (needs for easy online collection of the feedback from the public). ● Low financial income – due to non-profit kind of organizations, small sports clubs depending just on membership payments.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Main use of digitalization so far is social media channels FB, IG but not using all the possibilities these digitalization’s products are offering. ● Development of digital applications for online payments, online inscription of important (or all) documents. ● All the sports activities that organizations are offering are growing in popularity in all age groups which can be used as an advantage to promote efficient organizations projects, programs and its benefits considering that today the best marketing and

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	<p>promotion is through frequent online activity and presence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wider population for finding sponsorships – increase financial stability by donation
<p>TREATS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sport organizations do not have enough digital skills to be capable of coping with different challenges and crises - sport, in this globalization time, is always presented as the activity that is used to reset from digital world and activate human brain in the different way ● Most of the jobs today are connected to IT technologies and people live sedentary lives more than before - it's hard to find good ways for implementing digitization in a sports organization. ● Internal human resource threats for some organizations – constant need to find new coaches and other staff to meet the demand of clients for a lot of coaches are non-professional. ● There is also a problem with finding staff for implementing digital technologies as there aren't enough digitally educated sports staff.

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By sharing these experiences, we aim to highlight the vital role that digital technology plays in the future of sports. We hope to inspire and empower other sports organizations to embrace digital transformation, leading to a more modern, resilient, and effective sports industry.

Importance of digitalization in sports organizations

The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread disruptions in the sports industry, with competitions, events, and training sessions being postponed or canceled across the globe. European countries imposed various restrictions on gatherings, resulting in the closure of stadiums, gyms, and sports facilities. As a result, sports organizations had to find alternative ways to engage with fans, athletes, and stakeholders.

During the lockdowns, digital platforms became the primary means of communication and engagement. Live-streaming, virtual training sessions, and e-sports gained popularity, as both professional and amateur sports organizations turned to digital tools to stay connected with their audiences. In this context, digitalization in sports organizations was no longer a luxury but essential for the functioning of organizations.

Like in most of the sports organizations during the pandemic, our associations encountered the same key categories in which digital development was required.

- ***Virtual Training and Coaching*** - coaches conducted training sessions via video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, allowing athletes to maintain their fitness and skills while staying at home. These virtual solutions also enabled sports organizations to continue offering youth development programs and fitness classes to members.
- ***Digital Fan Engagement*** - in the absence of live events, sports organizations invested in digital marketing to keep their fan base active. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube were used to provide behind-the-scenes content.

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- **Data-Driven Decision Making** – the pandemic also accelerated the adoption of data analytics in sports organizations. Digital tools that track athlete performance, monitor fan engagement, and predict outcomes became critical in optimizing operations. Data-driven approaches allowed sports clubs to analyze fan behavior, resulting in more targeted marketing and improved fan experience.

Post-pandemic, the digital momentum built during the COVID-19 lockdowns has continued to shape the landscape of sports organizations in the EU. According to a 2022 study conducted by the European Union Agency for Digital Transformation in Sport, over 60% of EU sports organizations adopted at least one new digital tool during the pandemic, with many continuing to invest in digitalization after the restrictions were lifted.

One of the most significant shifts was in the sustained use of live-streaming platforms and virtual coaching. Even after restrictions eased, many sports organizations found value in maintaining hybrid models, offering both in-person and online training or broadcasting. This approach proved especially beneficial for smaller, grassroots clubs that were able to reach a wider audience and enhance their visibility through digital platforms.

While the digital shift presented numerous opportunities, sports organizations in the EU also faced several challenges:

- **Digital Literacy and Training** - lack of digital literacy among staff, athletes, and coaches was a major barrier. Many smaller organizations struggled to adapt to digital tools, and there was a clear need for digital training programs.
- **Funding and Infrastructure** - another key challenge was the financial strain caused by the pandemic. Many sports organizations, particularly smaller clubs, faced reduced revenues due to the absence of ticket sales and sponsorships. While larger clubs were able to invest in digital tools, smaller organizations often lacked the necessary infrastructure. The EU and national governments provided financial support in the form of grants and subsidies for digital transformation, though this support varied across member states.
- **Cybersecurity and Data Privacy** - with increased digitalization came the risk of cybersecurity threats and data privacy concerns. Sports organizations collecting and processing vast amounts of personal data had to ensure compliance with the EU's General

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Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The increase in online transactions and interactions exposed organizations to cyber risks, which necessitated the adoption of robust security measures.

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COLLECTION OF GOOD PRACTICE

DSR SUPERKID



DSR SUPERKID is a non-profit local sports organization from Zagreb, Croatia. Its main activity is the implementation of organized physical activities for children aged 3-10 years. The organization offers different sports programs.

Year-round programs:

- **Universal sport school** – organized in collaboration with public kindergartens in Zagreb. The program of the universal sports school is led by kinesiologists and its focus is on introducing children from a very young age to the different kinds of sports. We are guided by the idea that children from an early age need a quality stimulus in order to primarily love sports and encourage cognitive growth and development through motor development.

In addition to the year-round program, there are also **seasonal sports (5-day) courses**:

- swimming school – during springtime,
- ice skating and skiing school – winters season,
- rollerblading school – spring season and
- sports summer camps – summertime.

The programs are also implemented in Zagreb, and the organization cooperates with many kindergartens and elementary schools on sports programs. Around 2,000 children (3-10 years old)

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participate in our program throughout the year. Sport programs are verified by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Agency for Education.

Our mission and vision are to provide every child with what is most important when entering the world of sports - safety, trust and lots of happy moments when playing sports, and this is the most important thing for the child to continue his lifelong sports journey.

Given the events in the sports sector during the pandemic and the fact that over 2,000 children around the city of Zagreb participate in our programs every year, the pandemic crisis had a great impact on the financing of the organization. In the meantime, this same pandemic marked accelerated growth in the IT sector as the whole world moved “online”, and for the organization to maintain its quality, it was necessary to devise innovative solutions and use digital development for progress in our sport organization.

Here are our most important digital innovations that improved the work of the organization with which we were able to improve the organization of program implementation and thereby increase the number of users of our services and ultimately the financial stability itself.

DIGITAL INOVATIONS INCLUDED:

1. MOBILE/WEB APPLICATION – Itsport

SuperKid offers multiple sports programs, so one of the biggest problems was documentation of the applicants for different programs. The organization connected with an IT company that has developed the application www.itsport.hr (available in mobile and laptop versions), which is used by sports organizations to create their sports program accounts. After registering in the application, organizations (coaches) can register multiple programs that they offer.



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Once an organization has created an account, the application enables nearly all administrative options: registration of members, tracking attendance at training sessions, and sending payment slips via email to program users. It also allows monitoring of user payments, which is visible to program users, making it easier for them to track events of the sports program in which they are enrolled, as well as their own payments. This system has greatly helped streamline administrative work for enrollment in sports programs and provides more transparent monitoring of important notifications and tasks necessary for smooth program operation.

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1. Registration



2. Choose a program



3. Add a new member



4. Edit members or choose other Actions - payments, e-mails

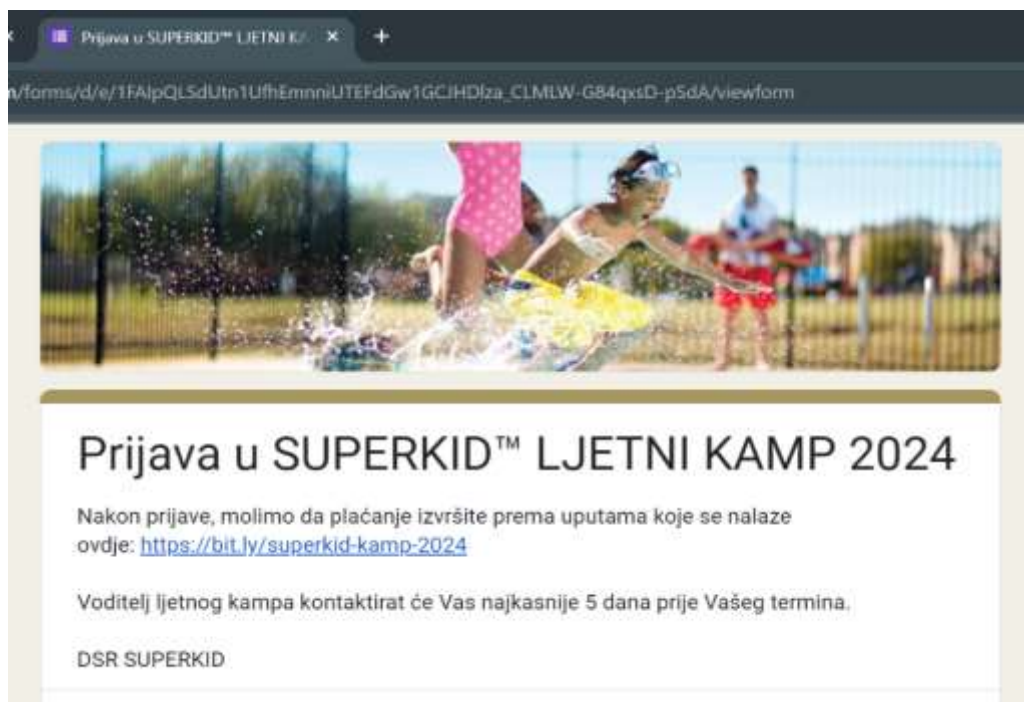


5. Attendance sheet



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2. GOOGLE FORMS - applications for programs



Considering that every year, DSR Superkid enrolls over 2000 children in their multiple programs, efficient monitoring of registration has been a great challenge using just human resources (registration via email and phone calls). In collaboration with an IT organization, the organization started using Google Forms as a way of collecting registrations, which turned out to be extremely useful. The systematized and transparent list of registered participants for each sports program specifically enabled more accurate and easier communication with users.

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GYMNASTICS FEDERATION OF ŠIBENIK- KNIN COUNTY



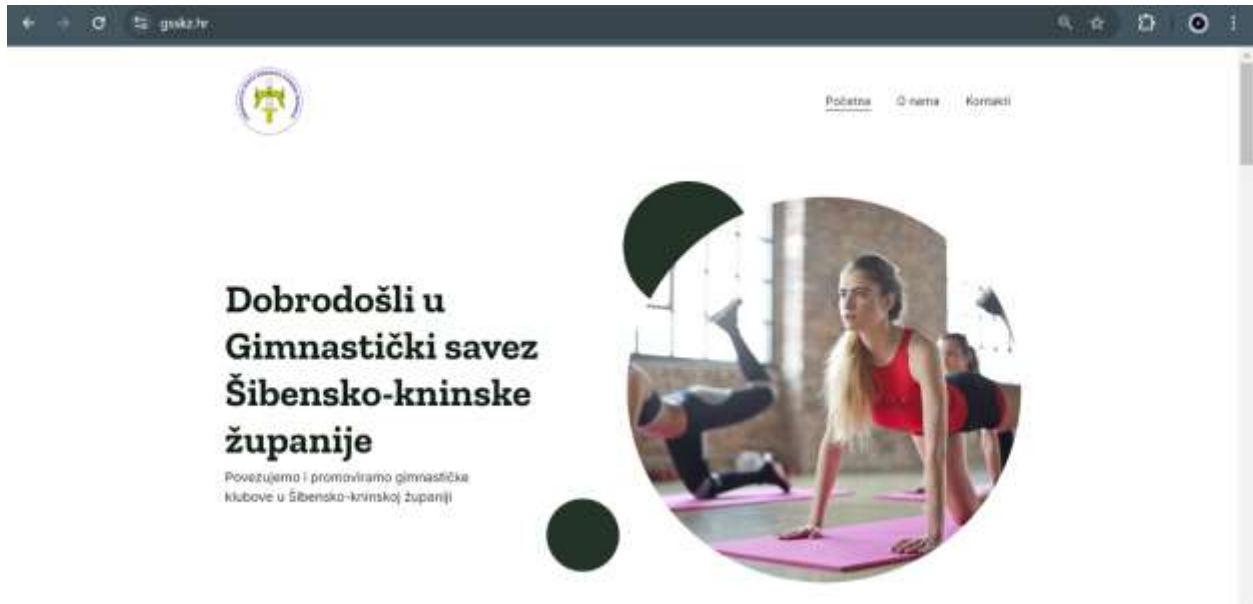
The Gymnastics Federation of Šibenik-Knin County is an association of gymnastics clubs from the area of Šibenik-Knin county. The federation currently includes four gymnastics clubs in which it trains over 400 children. The main goals of the Federation are the promotion of gymnastics in the Šibenik-Knin County, the improvement of conditions for gymnastics, which are currently quite poor, and the improvement of the competition system in the county. The Federation currently includes two sports gymnastics clubs and two rhythmic gymnastics clubs.

The NextGEN project is the first Erasmus project that federation has been part of. The main reason for the partnership on this kind of project was improvement of the service delivery and operational efficiency of the federation. The initiatives included the development of a modern website, the implementation of a digital invoicing system, and the optimization of the office space to reduce carbon emissions. The implementation of the new website was successful, marked by increased user engagement and streamlined access to federation resources. Initial challenges included addressing cross-browser compatibility and optimizing mobile responsiveness, which were resolved within the first quarter after launch.

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DIGITAL INOVATIONS

1. NEW WEBSITE (www.gsskz.hr) - serving as the central hub for information about the federation. The implementation of the new website was successful, marked by increased user engagement and streamlined access to federation resources. Initial challenges included addressing cross-browser compatibility and optimizing mobile responsiveness, which were resolved within the first quarter after launch.



2. DIGITAL PAYMENT INVOICING SYSTEM - that uses barcode technology, eliminating the need for printed invoices.

This system has streamlined our billing processes, enhanced the speed of transactions, and reduced paper waste. The digital invoicing system has been effectively implemented, leading to a notable reduction in paper use and processing times.

3. VIRTUAL TRAINING SESSIONS AND ONLINE WORKSHOPS

It allowed organization coaches and athletes to maintain their training schedules and continue learning, irrespective of their physical location. This digital leap ensured commitment to training

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excellence, even during challenging times. Virtual training sessions and online workshops have been pivotal in maintaining training continuity.

3. THE DIGITAL MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - has revolutionized the way the organization handles administrative tasks.

The digital membership management system has significantly improved administrative efficiency and member satisfaction. Although data migration and system training initially posed challenges, they were effectively addressed through detailed planning and ongoing support.

The implementation of these digital practices has substantially improved operational efficiency and has been positively received by community. The new website has successfully attracted more visitors, thereby increasing engagement. The digital payment system has enhanced the accuracy and efficiency of our financial operations while supporting our ecological commitments. The optimized office space has fostered a collaborative environment, leading to cost savings and a smaller carbon footprint. Feedback from stakeholders underscores the success of these initiatives, particularly praising the accessibility of information and the streamlined billing process.

The digital innovations undertaken through this project made a significant step forward in project mission to embrace technology for sustainable and improved service delivery.

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ŠD PARTIZAN SEVNICA



ŠD Partizan Sevnica is a non-profit sports club with over 530 members. The club's origin date back to 1912. Today the club provides quality workouts for people from age 1 to 90+. ŠD Sevnica has 18 different groups: preschoolers in 3 groups, school children- gymnastics (6 groups), children with disabilities, women functional training (2 groups), men's cross-fit, yoga for men and women and seniors in 4 groups. Led by 19 coaches and 7 volunteer helpers. Organization of all these workouts, meetings for coaches and day-to-day communication is sometimes a big problem. With NextGen project some of these problems were solved.

DIGITAL INNOVATIOS

1. ONLINE APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP - Google form application, distribution through a QR code.

The club had been facing ongoing challenges in collecting data on attendees of their sports programs. With 13 different groups and 19 coaches, data such as names, surnames, dates of birth, addresses, and contact information were previously collected through paper applications. These

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applications were submitted to the head of the club either at the end of the month or individually, leading to issues such as lost or forgotten papers. Additionally, in the event of a workout cancellation, having accurate contact information was crucial to notify all attendees.

Luckily with this project the club has been able to connect with a local computer company who helped search for a suitable solution. The aim was to find an application or program that would be friendly for users (attendees) and for coaches who could operate with the gathered information. The company suggested a Google form application and then distribute it through a QR code.

This has proven to be very quick and easy to use. It took approximately two to three minutes for attendees to finish filling in the application, the QR code was printed out and hung on the wall at the gym. The application has also been distributed via link and sent to social media pages, web pages and messages sent to attendees' mobile phones. Anyone who was interested in joining the club programs could first contact the club through mobile phone and was informed of the application by the link that took them to the application (google form). Once done, the coach or the person who is in charge to protect private information (obligated by the European law of private information protection) could simply visit the Google form that was created for the application, click on the responses and open a Google sheet that was created automatically by Google forms and so the coach could access all the information on Google sheet at any time from a computer or mobile phone.

HOW DID IT CHANGE WORK OF THE ORGANISATION?

This has proven very useful because once you have all the information in Google Sheets you can simply divide or copy the attendees according to the group, they work out in. In this manner the person in charge of private contact information could transmit contact information to the coach who is responsible for that particular group. In this way not all coaches had access to all contact information. To access these contacts the mobile phone has also proven useful in emergency situations, for example when a person most likely a child is injured or has any other problem, accessing a parent's mobile phone of a parent is easy and quick. To have all the contact information in one place has also proven extremely useful when applying for different national grants for which the head of the club needed exact number or names the people in one workout group.

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Following the example of gathering information from attendees the club has extended the use of Google for four other purposes. For receive a report from the coaches on how many hours they have logged at the gym monthly so that their hours can be logged quickly, and their pay is on time. Also to gather information about club members going to events, competitions or trips organized by the club.

This method of collecting data has proven extremely efficient, saving time, paper (eco-friendly) and the application can be distributed in a quick manner.

At the beginning of the project the club had some doubts about how elder members will be able to use this form of application. However, they turn out to be familiar with QR codes, they scanned the code and then the Google form was very easy and short enough for them to fill it in without any problems.

2. GOOGEL DOCS AND GOOGLE SHEETS

For organizational purposes the organization often use **Google Docs and Google Sheets** to include all coaches in the organization. Everyone can contribute to the plan of the event, and everyone has access and thus can see what is going on.

Next, the messenger group has been used for writing about daily needs- who covers the practice in case a regular coach is ill or absent, when and where we should have a meeting, information about specifics of the club, cancellations, educations, competitions etc. Day to day information is fast and efficient. Also, the organization uses official webpage and social media accounts **Facebook page and Instagram page** for ads, posts about practices, informing parents about events, trips, practices and posting photos for their memories.

Here is the example of the application in Google Form:

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WOMEN' S FOOTBALL CLUB SLOGA, ZEMUN



ŽFK Sloga Zemun, established in 1969, is the oldest registered women's football club in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia. With a rich history that includes five championships and five cup victories, the club has consistently been a trailblazer in the promotion of women's sports. Currently competing in the Serbian Women's Premier League and ranked among the top four clubs for the past four years, ŽFK Sloga Zemun is committed not only to excellence on the field but also to driving innovation in the realm of digitalization within sports organizations.

As the world increasingly embraces digital transformation, ŽFK Sloga Zemun is using technology to enhance operational efficiency, community engagement, and visibility in the digital age. The club's commitment to empowering girls and women in sports extends into the digital space, reflecting its mission to provide better opportunities and educational pathways through football.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY:

In recent years, through the Erasmus Next Gen project and in collaboration with its partners, ŽFK Sloga Zemun has embraced a forward-thinking digital transformation strategy. Recognizing the need to modernize its operations and enhance engagement with both members and the broader community, the club worked alongside a local IT institution to implement advanced technology solutions. The focus areas of this transformation included building a robust digital presence, enhancing internal digital education, and fostering stronger connections with younger, tech-savvy

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audiences. Following a comprehensive SWOT analysis, key areas for digitalization were identified. These include the development of a robust digital presence and the enhancement of digital education initiatives within the organization. The primary objective of these efforts is twofold: firstly, to augment online visibility through a modernized digital presence, and secondly, to educate organization members on leveraging digital platforms and communication tools effectively for improved organizational cohesion.

DIGITAL INOVATIONS

1. **USER FRIENDLY WEBSITE** (<https://zfklogazemun.rs/>), which serves as a central hub for club information.



The website provides real-time updates on events, results, and federation news, significantly enhancing communication with both members and the public. The website was created to enhance online visibility. A key component of the club's strategy was to build a comprehensive digital presence that would make the club's activities, updates, and successes more accessible to the public.

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2. STAFF EDUCATION IN DIGITAL SKILLS:

Internal communication processes were overhauled to ensure that club members and staff could fully leverage digital platforms. This included educating members on the effective use of online tools, ensuring better organizational cohesion and streamlined operations. The education was organized through workshops which are still ongoing. The workshop included youth involvement through interesting topics such as digital marketing on social media. Recognizing the increasing digital inclination among younger demographics, the aim of this was to connect more effectively with this audience through social media and digital channels. This approach ensures that the club remains relevant and accessible to a diverse audience, fostering greater engagement and participation.

The implementation of these digital strategies has had a profound impact on ŽFK Sloga Zemun, enhancing not only its operational capabilities but also its visibility and reach.

Digital Milestones:

- **Website Launch:** The new website serves as a centralized hub for all club-related information, offering real-time updates on matches, standings, and events. This platform has improved transparency and communication with fans, stakeholders, and the broader football community.
- **Increased Digital Engagement:** The club's enhanced social media presence has helped it engage with a younger audience, attract new talent, and generate greater community interest. Through platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, ŽFK Sloga Zemun shares inspiring stories of women in football, match highlights, and updates on youth development programs.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Digital tools have enabled smoother day-to-day operations, allowing the club to focus more on its core mission—providing opportunities for girls and women in sports.

Community Reception and Feedback: The reception to ŽFK Sloga Zemun's digital transformation has been overwhelmingly positive. The website has seen increased traffic, and the

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club's social media platforms have experienced higher levels of engagement, reflecting the broader community's enthusiasm for the club's innovative approach.

Fostering a Digitally Inclusive Sports Environment

ŽFK Sloga Zemun's digital strategy goes beyond operational improvements. It is closely aligned with the club's mission of inclusivity and empowerment, ensuring that girls and women of all backgrounds can access the benefits of sports. By adopting digital tools, the club has made it easier for individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged communities to stay connected and informed about opportunities in women's football. Additionally, digital platforms have opened up new pathways for education and travel, aligning with the club's vision of providing greater career development opportunities for women in sports.

Sustaining Innovation in a Digital Future

As part of its ongoing digital evolution, ŽFK Sloga Zemun remains committed to further developing its technological capabilities. Future initiatives include:

- **Continuous Enhancement of Digital Platforms:** Ongoing improvements to the website and digital tools will ensure that the club remains at the forefront of innovation in women's sports.
- **Ongoing Digital Education:** Staff and members will continue to receive training in digital skills to stay up to date with the latest tools and technologies.
- **Expanding Digital Engagement Strategies:** The club plans to increase its digital presence even further, leveraging new platforms to reach broader audiences and continue fostering a dynamic, inclusive community.

ŽFK Sloga Zemun's digital transformation journey exemplifies how sports organizations can successfully integrate technology to enhance their operations, promote inclusivity, and stay relevant in an increasingly digital world. As the oldest women's football club in Serbia, ŽFK Sloga Zemun is not only preserving its legacy but also paving the way for future generations of women in sports through innovative digital strategies. By embracing technology, the club is ensuring that

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it remains a driving force in women's football while creating new opportunities for girls and women to succeed on and off the field.

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BENEFICIARIES

- *DSR SUPERKID (Croatia)*
- *WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CLUB SLOGA, ZEMUN (Serbia)*
- *ŠD PARTIZAN SEVNICA (Slovenia)*
- *GYMNASTICS FEDERATION OF ŠIBENIK-KNIN COUNTY (Croatia)*



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NextGEN

Digitalization in the sports organizations

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Erasmus+ Sport Small Collaborative Partnerships



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