



# SHARE 2.0

## Community of Practice on Innovation

*Ideas paper on digitalisation as a source of competitiveness in the sport sector*



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# **SHARE 2.0**

***Community of Practice on Innovation***

***Ideas paper on digitalisation as a source of  
competitiveness in the sport sector***

Edited by SHARE 2.0 members



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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

<b>CoPs</b>	Communities of Practice
<b>DBU</b>	The Danish Football Union
<b>VSC</b>	Voluntary sport clubs

# 1. Introduction

## **About SHARE 2.0 and this paper**

**SHARE 2.0** is a European Commission initiative to foster dialogue, build capacity and facilitates collaboration among over 400 sport stakeholders in the fields of EU funding, health, innovation and sustainability. It is based around four **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** which include public authorities, grassroots sports organisations, federations, and policy experts. Communities of Practice are based on a participatory method that allows all participants to take an active role.

Against the backdrop of the von der Leyen's political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029<sup>1</sup> and Draghi's report on competitiveness<sup>2</sup> key stakeholders gathered to discuss the ongoing and emerging challenges of the European sport sector. **The SHARE 2.0 initiative reflected on the most recent policy developments in Europe and delivered the annual SHARE 2.0 conference<sup>3</sup> which took place on 11 September 2024 in Brussels.**

During the discussions, each Community identified key topics which then formed the basis for the development of this **paper**. To ensure effective representation, the feedback was gathered through a bottom-up approach which was made possible thanks to the **contributions of SHARE members, including the active involvement of the Steering Group members**. The Steering Groups of each CoP is composed of up to 10 members selected through a Call for Expression of Interest. Their role includes steering discussions and supporting the definition of topics, capacity-building activities and papers.

Specifically, to the Community of Practice on Innovation of the SHARE 2.0 initiative, during the course of 2024, members of the Steering Group have identified that two topics deserve particular attention. "Digitalisation as a source of competitiveness in the sport industry" was thus discussed and analysed during the annual SHARE conference in September 2024. The outcome of the discussions among key stakeholders of the European sport sector, to a large extent, have informed the outline and contents of this paper.

This paper has been edited with the primary objective of being a valuable resource for sport stakeholders by sport stakeholders.

## **The context around digitalisation**

The 5<sup>th</sup> EU Work Plan for Sport (2024-2027) set out priorities and strategic objectives for sport across the European Union<sup>4</sup>. The EU Work Plan for Sport builds on the previous work and introduces new elements to the evolving challenges in the sport sector, such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Von der Leyen, U., *Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029*. European Commission, Strasbourg, 2024, [https://commission.europa.eu/about/commission-2024-2029/president-elect-ursula-von-der-leyen\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about/commission-2024-2029/president-elect-ursula-von-der-leyen_en)

<sup>2</sup> Draghi, M., *The future of European competitiveness Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe*, European Commission Directorate-General for Communication, 2024, [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, 'SHARE 2.0 initiative', European Commission Website, 26 January 2024, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/initiatives/share-20>

<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union, *Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 July 2024 – 31 December 2027)*, General Secretariat of the Council, 9771/24, 2024, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9771-2024-INIT/en/pdf>.

economic value of sport, sustainability, and the link between physical and mental health<sup>5</sup>. **The EU Work Plan for Sport emphasises the role of innovation and digitalisation as a driver for economic and sustainable development of the sport sector.**

Digitalisation in the sport sector represents **a significant opportunity to enhance competitiveness, drive innovation, and improve economic and health outcomes across Europe**. By adopting digital tools and fostering a cultural transformation within sport organisations, digitalisation can enhance the quality and accessibility of sport offerings, leading to increased participation and thereby generating physical and mental health benefits. Moreover, the integration of digital technologies can stimulate local economic activity by fostering innovation, create new business opportunities, and driving regional development in both the sport sector and related industries such as tourism and infrastructure development.

**The digital transition also comes with challenges.** Grassroots and volunteer-based organisations often face barriers related to digital skills, funding, market fragmentation, and infrastructure, which hinder the adoption of new digital tools. To address these issues, tailored support is necessary, including digital training programs, enhanced funding mechanisms, and the development of procedures that makes it easier for sport organisations to find and adapt digital tools. By fostering collaboration between stakeholders across the sport sector and by utilising existing local, regional and EU funding opportunities, the sector has the potential to gain the positive benefits of digitalisation.

**The following paper will provide some recommendations on how to approach digitalisation. The ideas proposed are largely based on the 11 September 2024 SHARE 2.0 Conference** and they are addressed to the SHARE 2.0 Community to implement and disseminate. The paper also provides background information regarding digitalisation in sport.

## **2. Recommendations for SHARE 2.0 members on how to enhance digitalisation**

### **2.1 Support the development of digital skills**

In both the research for this paper and at the 2024 SHARE 2.0 conference the challenge posed by lacking digital skills have been highlighted. Digital education is a central challenge for the successful adaptation of digital tools, and it is especially important for Voluntary Sport Clubs (hereafter, VSC), which are often run by people who are not necessarily used to using these kinds of tools in their daily life. For digitalisation to succeed locally it requires digital skills and digital tools fit for local adaptation.

- **Develop digital training programmes, workshops, or extensive guides to use digital tools aimed at grassroots clubs.** These should seek to teach less digitally savvy volunteers which digital tools they can implement in which part of their organisations.
- **Establish local collaboration between grassroots and professional clubs, associations, private, and public organisations** to tailor and implement training programs to local, regional or national conditions for each club and sport.

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission, 'Adoption of New EU Work Plan for Sport (2024 -2027)', European Commission Website, 23 May 2024, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/adoption-of-new-eu-work-plan-for-sport-2024-2027>

## 2.2 Support local digital infrastructure and create targeted sport funds

Grassroots clubs typically operate on small budgets, and the acquisition of digital infrastructure can therefore be a major barrier to the adaptation of digital solutions. If the volunteers do not have phones or computers at hand to use existing digital tools, it will be very difficult for a club to implement the necessary digital transformation. The funding that is available to support digital transition can be difficult to access for both suppliers of digital products and the organisations that need the funds to implement digital solutions. Funding applications require time and know-how to complete, and small or volunteer-based organisations are challenged in both areas. This discourages participation in applications or research projects which might improve the digital solutions they can offer or implement across the sport sector.

- **SHARE 2.0 members can advocate for the creation of regional or national funds for the sport sector to support local investments in digital infrastructure** such as computers, phones, monitors, or wearable technologies. Backend infrastructure such as servers, digital security software, or similar are also essential for a full implementation of digital solutions and should similarly be supported to run and protect the digital systems.
- **The SHARE 2.0 platform should be used form partnerships that can leverage existing EU funding sources within sport.** Sharing know-how and resources to complete larger applications can help organisations across the EU to access funds that might not be primarily targeted the sport sector, but which can support specific actions necessary for digitalisation.

### Examples of existing EU funding opportunities

A range of EU funding sources are available to support the development of sport and physical activity infrastructure, including the listed below. While most of the deadlines for funds in the Next Generation EU instrument has already passed<sup>6</sup>, it is also relevant to see if similar funding avenues will be made available in the future or in the next multiannual financial framework running after 2028:

#### Structural and Cohesion Funds

These funds can be used to renovate or construct new sport facilities, create cycling or walking lanes, and promote alternative modes of mobility. Previously funded projects can be found at Kohesio<sup>7</sup>.

#### LIFE Programme<sup>8</sup>

This programme supports the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly projects, including those that promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

<sup>6</sup> SHARE initiative, *Next Generation EU: How can the sport sector benefit?*, European Commission Website, 2022 <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-08/SHARE%20LAB%20-%20Next%20Generation%20EU%20guidance%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The SHARE 2.0 Community of Practice on EU Funding offered a Capacity Building on structural funds in June 2024. The recording is available in the Teams channel of the Community of Practice. If you are not part of SHARE 2.0 you can request access via the following link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/634173ec-039d-d46f-1dfc-aa9cd6864ad6>

Link to Koesio: <https://kohesio.ec.europa.eu/en>

<sup>8</sup> The SHARE 2.0 Community of Practice on EU Funding offered a Capacity Building on LIFE in January 2025. The recording is available in the Teams channel of the Community of Practice. If you are not part of SHARE 2.0 you can request access via the following link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/634173ec-039d-d46f-1dfc-aa9cd6864ad6>

Link to the LIFE website [LIFE - European Commission](https://ec.europa.eu/life/)

### **Erasmus+ Sport Programme<sup>910</sup>**

This programme finances capacity-building activities, partnerships, and community-based initiatives that promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

## **2.3 Address market fragmentation and regulation**

In both the research for and at the 2024 SHARE 2.0 conference it was pointed out repeatedly that sport associations are very often approached by a range of smaller start-ups to adopt their digital solutions. However, the sheer number of available products makes it very difficult for the associations to navigate in the market. Reluctance among volunteers to use the digital tools developed by private companies due to privacy or data concerns can also be difficult to address at the grassroots clubs level if there is no expertise on the subject. Here are two possible solutions:

- **Ease access to guidance** where regulation or data protection concerns are a barrier for associations and grassroots clubs to adopt digital solutions.
- **A database of digital tools aimed at both grassroot clubs and associations can be created.** This database should include the categories of digital tools which are relevant to clubs (e.g. administration, memberships, training....) to enable them to assess their needs. This database would act as a guidance easing the challenges posed by market fragmentation.

## **3. Practical applications of digital technologies**

To effectively implement digitalisation in the sport sector there is a long list of areas and possible tools available for organisations. The concrete areas that can be useful primarily depends on whether an organisation is a part of the commercial sport sector or are a grassroots sport club. Sport associations often operate partially in both areas as they organise grassroots and represent national teams commercially. Digital solutions are here presented for each of the two areas with associations potentially drawing inspiration from both areas:

### **Digitalisation in the commercial sport sector**

In the modern profit-driven and business-oriented sport sector, digitalisation has become a powerful source of competitiveness, has driven innovation and transformed how sports are played, managed, and consumed. Some examples of how digitalisation can boost competitiveness in the commercial sport industry include<sup>11</sup>:

- **Smart venues:** Sport facilities, from local gyms to international stadiums, can adopt digital solutions to transform both the practitioners' and fans' journeys at all customer touchpoints, thereby enhancing the fan experience and increasing profitability and security. AI can optimise fan engagement at a stadium through real-time updates on relevant information. Marketing automation tools help track consumer preferences and offer tailored content, which will eventually help increase revenue generation.
- **Fan engagement:** New digital platforms allow sport entities to better understand attendees' profiles, improve customer targeting, and create personalised

<sup>9</sup> The Sport Info Day is the yearly opportunity for stakeholders to discover the opportunities from Erasmus+ Sport. The recording for Sport Info Day linked to the 2025 Calls is available here [https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/info-session-erasmus-sport-2025-2024-12-16\\_en](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/info-session-erasmus-sport-2025-2024-12-16_en)

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, European Commission Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/sport>

<sup>11</sup> Global Sports Innovation Center by Microsoft, *Digital Transformation of Sports Entities by 2025. How will it look like?*, GSIC Website, 2019, <https://sport-gsic.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/GSIC-Report-Digital-Transformation-of-Sports-Entities-by-2025-VL.pdf>

experiences. Data gathering will enable anticipating needs and customising the fan experience.

- **Players' performance:** Technological innovation can provide greater insight into the performance of both casual sport practitioners and professional athletes and teams. Their performance will improve through data gathered from wearables and sensors. Player welfare can be increased by preventing injuries and facilitating recoveries. Personalised training helps optimise a player's potential, and game strategy can be analysed in real time.
- **Business insights and productivity:** Business data analysis will be key for organisations to keep pace with emerging trends and increase productivity. Digital technologies will help companies gather business intelligence and create more efficient dashboards to enable data driven decision-making. As businesses embrace digital developments, they will be able to make operational improvements throughout the value chain and improve financial results.

### **Digitalisation in grassroots clubs**

For grassroots clubs' digital solutions offers ways to reduce the workload of volunteers, develop new formats for organising sport activities, and connect with their local areas in new ways. Some examples of how grassroots clubs have used digitalisation include<sup>12</sup>:

- **Digitalisation of member administration:** Implementing digital solutions to the daily administrative work required to run a membership based local club can reduce the time commitment required for non-sport related activities. Online member portal, player exchange, web-based digital member management or similar digital solutions can all help small clubs become more efficient. This can make the volunteer experience better and help attract more to participate in club management.
- **Increase the number of digitalised or hybrid sport offers:** Local clubs can acquire technical equipment such as intelligent cameras, large screens, or computers to be able to offer either fully digital or hybrid events for members. The benefits of these kinds of offers were highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, but with the right trainers and set-up it can also have advantages in a more regular context.
- **Improvement of the training and of the game through digital tools:** Using camera set-ups it is possible to record training sessions or games that can be made available for players and help them improve performance before or after. These videos can also be used for external communication through club or personal channels to engage a wider audience.
- **Development of digital communication strategy:** Creation of a digital communication strategy can ensure engagement with local communities through non-traditional avenues and increase interest for the local sport clubs. This can both engage members and their families but also help attract new members to the clubs by being visible on more platforms.

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<sup>12</sup> DigiRoot Project, *Desk Research: Best Practices in Digitalisation of Grassroots Sport Clubs*, DigiRoot Project Website, (n.d.), <https://digiroot-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Deliverable-2-Desk-research-best-practices.pdf>

## 4. Background information on the digitalisation of the sport sector

### 4.1 Recent developments around digitalisation

Digitalisation is the broad ongoing transition of digital technologies and use of data across the economy and society in general<sup>13</sup>. Digitalisation involves adopting a thorough transformation of organisation culture and mindset to embed digital tools across the operations of any organisation. Generating and analysing vast amounts of data enables organisations to experiment, learn and adapt their products, which promotes internal innovation<sup>14</sup> and can lead to better sport products that will activate more people. If digitalisation can increase participation in sport and physical activity it can make the population in the EU healthier by providing significant physical and mental health benefits. A healthier population results in fewer sick days, lower healthcare costs and better overall productivity in the workplace<sup>15</sup>. This would have a positive impact on the European economy and on competitiveness in general.

Digitalisation also has the potential to increase the economic impact of sport by fostering business activities, stimulating innovation, boosting employment and enabling regional development<sup>16</sup>. Here, digitalisation in sport offers opportunities to stimulate innovation through the **quadruple helix approach where academia, industry, government, and civil society can be key stakeholders in the innovation process**<sup>17</sup>. Unlike other areas where it can be difficult to include civil society in the R&D process<sup>18</sup>, these stakeholders are already heavily involved in the sport sector and constitute the main users of any new digital tools at the grassroots level. This cross-sector collaboration can ease the exchange of knowledge and joint innovation processes and help foster new innovative developments in the area.

Sport activities are also an integral part of the “experience economy”. Here, digital tools have the potential to enhance the experience of the attendees and grow local economic activity by stimulating new business opportunities in sport technology. This would benefit both sport associations and the purely commercial sport sector. Advancements in digitalisation related to areas such as data analysis tools, wearable technology and remote participation can thereby create new avenues for economic growth both within the sport industry and in associated industries such as construction and maintenance of sport infrastructure, or in the tourism industry<sup>19</sup>. Promoting digitalisation in sport can thereby

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<sup>13</sup> Eurofound, *Digitalisation*, Eurofound Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/topic/digitalisation#:~:text=Digitalisation%20is%20the%20ongoing%20integration,for%20the%20future%20of%20work>.

<sup>14</sup> Vărzaru, A. A., and Bocean, C. G., *Digital Transformation and Innovation: The Influence of Digital Technologies on Turnover from Innovation Activities and Types of Innovation*, *Systems*, 12(9), 359, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems12090359>

<sup>15</sup> Tompa, E., *The Impact of Health on Productivity: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications*, *The Review of Economic Performance and Social Progress* 2002: Towards a Social Understanding of Productivity, 45, 2002, <https://www.csls.ca/repsp/2/emiletompa.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> EU Science Hub, ‘Innovation in territories’, Joint Research Centre Website, accessed 4 March 2025, [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/innovation-territories\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/innovation-territories_en)

<sup>17</sup> SHARE initiative, *Practical guidance on developing Sport and Physical Activity Projects under the Cohesion Policy Funds*, European Commission Website, 2023, <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-10/SHARE%20-%20Practical%20guidance%20on%20developing%20sport%20and%20physical%20activity%20projects%20under%20the%20Cohesion%20Policy%20Funds.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Reconfigure, *Quadruple Helix Collaborations in Practice*, Reconfigure Website, 2021, <https://reconfigure.eu/publication/quadruple-helix-collaborations-in-practice/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study on the contribution of sport to regional development through the structural funds – Final report*, Publications Office, 2016, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/940310>

have local and regional economic benefits, which ultimately improve the competitiveness of the areas, and the overall EU economy.

Four main developments have also been evident because of or related to the digitalisation of the sport sector:

- **Commercialisation:** Digitalisation has allowed for increased globalisation and commercialisation of sport as it opens new ways to reach fans and costumers outside of clubs' local areas. This has however also led to increasing financial interests centralised among few clubs or leagues which strains the traditional pyramid structure of the European Model of Sport by challenging revenue-sharing and relegation systems.
- **Volunteerism:** Decreasing volunteering and participation habits in general challenge sporting clubs and sport events as core coaching, administrative and organisational tasks have traditionally been done by volunteers<sup>20</sup>. Digitalisation offers new avenues for both professional and grassroots clubs, sport organisations and events to mobilise, retain or attract interested volunteers which has the potential to alleviate general trends in volunteerism<sup>21</sup>.
- **Digitalisation of clubs:** The sport sector is already thoroughly digitalised in many areas. Large professional sport organisations have by now integrated the use of digital tools into their regular operations<sup>22</sup>. However, the grassroots clubs which have no professional management, VSCs have only adopted digital tools to some extent, and not across all possible areas. One survey found that 94% of clubs in Austria and Germany used digital instruments for internal/external communication, and that 82% use it to report membership data to federations, while other areas are much less frequently digitalised<sup>23</sup>. This leaves substantial room for further digitalisation at the grassroots club level.
- **New digital sport and physical activity:** Digitalisation has changed the way self-organised sport or physical activity can be organised outside of associations. These activities are not bound by the structures and regulations of the sport associations and thereby have a very high degree of flexibility in how they are organised and carried out<sup>24</sup>. Digital platforms allow people to connect to others they do not know and form new communities for sport or physical activity outside of traditional associations. For associations, new digital tools can also be a means to improve their ability to adapt to changing demands for sport within their discipline, which some are already engaging in<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The House of Sport Volunteers, 'About us', The House of Sport Volunteers Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://houseofvolunteers.com/page/about-us>

<sup>21</sup> Ehnold, P., Steinbach, D., and Schlesinger, T., Categorisation of digitalisation practises in voluntary sports clubs, *Managing Sport and Leisure*, pp. 1-18, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/23750472.2023.2224343?needAccess=true>

<sup>22</sup> Dellea, D., Schmid, M. and Zahn, F., *FOOTBALL'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION Growth opportunities for football clubs in the digital age*, PWC Publications, 2014, [https://www.pwc.ch/en/publications/2016/Pwc\\_publication\\_sport\\_footbal\\_digital\\_transformation\\_aug2016.pdf](https://www.pwc.ch/en/publications/2016/Pwc_publication_sport_footbal_digital_transformation_aug2016.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Ehnold, P., Faß, E., Steinbach, D., and Schlesinger, T., *Digitalization in organized sport-usage of digital instruments in voluntary sports clubs depending on club's goals and organizational capacity*, *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 11(1), 2021, pp. 28-53, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/sbm-10-2019-0081/full/html> \*Summary not behind paywall.

<sup>24</sup> Andersson, Å., *Self-organized sports and place: a narrative review accompanied by Gilles Deleuze*, *Sport in Society*, 27(11), 2024, pp. 1856-1874, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17430437.2024.2325988?needAccess=true>

<sup>25</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Mapping of innovative practices in the EU to promote sport outside of traditional structures – Final report to the European Commission*, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/063092>

## 4.2 Current challenges and objectives for digitalisation in the sport sector

Three main challenges have been identified as obstacles to the digitalisation of the sport sector hindering further developments in both grassroots, association, and commercial parts of the sport sector.

### 4.2.1 Lack of digital and data competence, education and infrastructure locally

The volunteers that provide the main cohort of staff in VSCs are older than the population in general, and lack a combination of time, finances, and digital expertise to implement major changes to operations<sup>26</sup>. This often results in organisational changes being characterised by 'muddling through'<sup>27</sup>, without clear direction or resources to drive large-scale transitions. The digital transformation of clubs is therefore difficult to implement even in cases where professional national sport associations can assist in the process. Digital communication solutions which are often found in these grassroots clubs are often simple solutions through existing social media platforms and are often characterised as one-way communication from the clubs about general information or results<sup>28</sup>. Such lack of digital skills and infrastructure at the local level must be addressed for the further digitalisation to be successful.

### 4.2.2 Lack of digital awareness and readiness in the sport sector

The organisations that could help implement digital solutions locally, such as regional and national sport associations, may lack themselves internal expertise to evaluate the wide variety of sport products available and provide recommendations to local clubs. New developments in the market can also be very difficult to keep up with, which makes picking appropriate solutions very difficult.

Vast amount of data collected through integrated digital tools can represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Because of the limited data know-how in sport associations, it is difficult to use data proactively. The limited in-house expertise and the cost of hiring external expertise is therefore a major constraint for efficient adaptation of digital technologies. Some larger associations such as the Danish Football Association (see case study) show that investments in this area can successfully utilise the diverse data-sources which associations have access to. Through this there are opportunities to improve both commercial aspects of their operations and assist local clubs better in their digital transformations.

### 4.2.3 Lack of funding mechanisms for digitalisation

A shared theme at the 2024 SHARE 2.0 conference was also the need for funding to support digital transition across the sport sector. There are relatively few large clubs or sport associations with available capital to develop digital solutions tailored to the specific needs of each sport and association. The customer base for the many small private companies developing profitable and efficient digital tools can therefore be difficult, as it relies on few

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<sup>26</sup> The generation currently in the teenage years is also not becoming better at using digital technologies. According to the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) from 2023, 43% of students do not reach the basic level of digital skills. Key findings <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/59721dc6-a0aa-11ef-85f0-01aa75ed71a1> and full report <https://www.iea.nl/publications/icils-2023-international-report>

<sup>27</sup> Fahlén, J., and Stenling, C., (Re) conceptualizing institutional change in sport management contexts: the unintended consequences of sport organizations' everyday organizational life, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 19(2), 2019, pp. 265-285. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/16184742.2018.1516795?needAccess=true>

<sup>28</sup> Burgess, S., Parker, C. and Bingley, S., *The Digital Divide in Local Sporting Clubs*, Information Matters Website, 18 September 2021, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://informationmatters.org/2021/09/the-digital-divide-in-local-sporting-clubs/>

large organisations with funds, and many grassroots clubs with very little financial resources available. This is a barrier to further digitalisation as it reduces the effectiveness of tools available for each organisation and hinders successful implementation of digital tools.

## 5. Case study: Digitalisation in the Danish Football Union

The Danish Football Union (hereafter, DBU) is the governing body of football in Denmark which organises regional football associations and their local clubs in one pyramid structure. At the same time as they organise local grassroots football, DBU is also responsible for the sport and commercial organisation of the Danish national football teams. Thereby, the organisation needed for a variety of digital solutions which could assist the operation of the association on everything from grassroots administrative procedures and commercial marketing of the national team.

Since 2001, DBU has been working continuously to incorporate a wide variety of new digital solutions into their own and their member club organisations daily operations. This is done to meet the changing digital expectation of internal and external stakeholders in the quickly digitalising general Danish society where even the public sector is 'digital by default'<sup>29</sup>. These digital solutions can broadly be categorised into four categories where most are accessible both through website and apps<sup>30</sup>:

- **Digitalisation of club management:** To reduce time spent on administration in the clubs, DBU offers the system 'KlubOffice' to their members. It is a complete member, administration, and fee system which can help local administrators handle the daily operations of the club in one place. Thereby it centralises many regular activities in one digital place, which users can be trained in and allows for as little time being spent on administrations as possible. It is available for all DBU member clubs. To enable clubs to create websites easier DBU launched 'Klub-CMS' in 2006, and a new version in 2014. For a fee, member clubs of DBU can use the system to create and operate club websites easily. It allows the website to be automatically updated with contact persons, game plans, results, directly from the central DBU database, and create sub-pages for each team with content relevant for them available in one place<sup>31</sup>.
- **Digitalisation of game management:** The system 'KampKlar' was introduced in 2014 to organise all activities directly related to game and practice. Here the coaches can handle administrative tasks such as registering the team playing, planning of activities or communicating with players and parents. The players or parents can in turn register for activities, see contact information, receive notifications related to games, or sign up for tasks. Another similar system aimed at organising referees for games was also launched in 2016.
- **Digitalisation of commercial operation:** DBU is responsible for all matters related to the national football teams including commercialisation. From 2014, DBU implemented data analysis systems to connect the data sources from different areas of the organisation to get a full overview of all interactions which a person has with the organisation in different functions. As players in a club, costumers for the national team games, and as visitors to the DBU website. Gaining a cross-departmental understanding of their data it then allowed the organisation to focus commercial efforts

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 'Digitalisation in Denmark', Denmark Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://denmark.dk/innovation-and-design/digitalisation>

<sup>30</sup> Lüthje, H., 'Breddefodboldens digitale rejse – og hvor er vi på vej hen?', Dansk Boldspil-Union, (n.d.), <https://www.dbu.dk/media/10068/klub-og-medlemsudvikling-session-2-it-workshop.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Dansk Boldspil-Union, 'Mangler i en hjemmeside, der opdaterer sig selv?', Dansk Boldspil-Union Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://www.dbu.dk/klubservice/it-tilbud/klubcms-samler-klubben/>

in areas with potential and provide data-backed proof of return of investment to partners and sponsors<sup>32</sup>.

- **Digitalisation of player interface:** To give players more information about personal and team performance the app Driblr was launched in 2018, and from 2020 onwards incorporated into one centralised football app. In the app the players can see statistics and information about themselves, their team, and other teams they will play against. It allows for all to track performance over time and aim to emulate the data access which professional leagues have throughout grassroots football<sup>33 34</sup>.

Overall, DBU managed to adjust the digital practices of their entire organisation to meet the internal and external demands by members, partners and sponsors to keep their internal activities in line with practices experienced by stakeholders elsewhere in society. DBU currently have an all-time high membership and has seen growing commercial revenue in the last years.

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<sup>32</sup> Søgaard, J., 'Podcast: How digital engagement has grown grassroots football', Sports Geek Podcast, (n.d.), <https://twocircles.com/gb/articles/podcast-how-digital-engagement-has-grown-grassroots-football/>

<sup>33</sup> Dansk Boldspil-Union, 'Ny fodboldapp "Driblr" ind på hitlisterne', Dansk Boldspil-Union Website, 7 June 2018, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://www.dbu.dk/nyheder/2018/juni/ny-fodboldapp-driblr-ind-paa-hitlisterne/>

<sup>34</sup> Dansk Boldspil-Union, 'Stats', Klubservice DBU Website, accessed 4 March 2025, <https://klubservice.dbu.dk/fodbold-app/floating-menu/burgermenu/min-fodbold/stats/>

## **Annex 1: Contributing organisations**

The following organisations are part of the Steering Group of the Community of Practice on Innovation and actively contributed to this paper:

- European Aquatics
- European Platform for Sport Innovation (EPSI)
- Institute for Sport Governance
- Latvian Football Federation
- Sports + Vitality
- Sport Sciences School of Rio Maior - Polytechnic Institute of Santarém
- Sport Vlaanderen



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