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ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TRAIL RUNNING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL





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INTRODUCTION

THE PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project GREEN TRAILS OF FUTURE addresses to encourage involvement of adolescents in outdoor sport and environmental education with focus on trail running.

The problem of modern days is the alienation of adolescents, and children in general, from activities in nature and sports in general especially outdoor sports, and thus alienation from nature itself. The consequences of this are reflected in an unhealthy - sedentary lifestyle and improper attitude towards nature and environmental issues.

The goal of the project is to increase a number of adolescents in sports through trail running, because we have analyzed the current situation in the project countries and concluded that the middle-aged population is mostly involved in this sport. According to available data, the participation of the population under 18 is currently at a low level – in North Macedonia cca 2%, in Serbia cca 7%, in Slovenia cca 18%.

Trail running is located in nature and in the most cases in protected areas so it is ideal place for environmental education.

ABOUT TRAIL RUNNING

Some call it trail running, others mountain running, even running in the mountains or skyrunning, or fellrunning. Whatever you call the action of running in an outdoor space in a natural surface it's not a single discipline but a complete and complex sport. For simplification we will use the term "trail running". Trail running is not a discipline of running but a sport in its hole.

Trail running is a sport that involves running or walking in an outdoor environment on a natural terrain, taking advantage of the landscape features offered by each region (usually mountains, deserts, forests...) and following a logical path that allows us to discover the region.



That said, as an old sport who was not very popular profitable until the early 2000's, the structure of the competitions has been changing constantly. New federations or private institutions have entered to be part of it and the disciplines has been blurry because of it. We often get confused because in a single year they're several world champions and sometimes in the same distance but under different umbrellas.

List of International Championships:

- WORLD MOUNTAIN & TRAIL RUNNING CHAMPIONSHIPS: (WMRA, ITRA, IAU, World Athletics) Participation by National federations.
 - o Classic Mountain Running (ca.12km-600-1000m, non-technical), categories: M, W, U20M, U20W
 - o Uphill Mountain Running (ca.4-7km, 700-1,000m, non-technical), categories: M, W
 - o Short Trail Running (ca. 40km, 2,000-3,000m), categories: M, W
 - o Long Trail Running (ca. 80km, 3,500-6,000m), categories: M, W,

- SKYRUNNING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: (ISF – UIAA) Participation by National federations.
 - o Vertical Kilometer (ca 2-4km, 1000m), categories: M, W, U23, U20, U17
 - o Skyrace (20 to 49km, >1200m, technical), categories M, W // U23, U20 and U17 in shorter distances.
 - o Sky Ultra (50 to 99km > 3,000m, technical), categories: M, W

- UTMB WORLD: (UTMB Series, Private) Participation by qualification in the series (open)
 - o 50K (OCC, 55km, 3500m), categories: M, W,
 - o 100K (CCC, 100km, 6100m), categories M, W
 - o 100M (UTMB 170km 10.000m), categories: M, W

- GOLDEN TRAIL WORLD SERIES (private)
 - o middle distance – from non-technical to technical races, categories: M, W



- SPARTAN TRAIL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP (private)
 - o 2 circuits, middle and long distance, categories: M, W

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TRAIL RUNNING IN SERBIA

INTRODUCTION

Trail races are an increasingly popular form of sports activities all over the world, including in Serbia. This type of competition, which takes place outside stadiums and paved roads, attracts an increasing number of participants and spectators. In the Republic of Serbia, competitions in trail races are organized by national branch sports associations, the Serbian Athletic Association and the Mountaineering Association of Serbia. However, in addition to the officially registered competitions, the organization of races by various associations of citizens outside the registers of sports activities, and without appropriate work permits, is increasingly present.

In the following, the existing conditions in trail competitions in Serbia, the participation of young people in these competitions and the identification of challenges will be analysed.

EXISTING TRAIL COMPETITIONS IN SERBIA

COMPETITIONS OF THE MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION OF SERBIA

The Mountaineering Association of Serbia organizes competitions in three related disciplines under the common name Mountain Running:

- o mountain trekking
- o trail
- o skyrunning



Competitions in mountaineering trekking are a set of mountaineering competitions in hiking and/or running, which are held on mountaineering and hiking terrains, on predetermined and clearly marked trails of different lengths and demands that have been prepared in accordance with the decision of the competent commission (KPT) for the preparation of trails for competitions in mountaineering trekking.

The organizer prepares three tracks for each round:

- short 10-15 km,
- medium 20-25 km
- and long 30-35 km.

Two types of mountain trekking competitions are organized: League and National Championship.

Competitions within the League are open for all. The right to participate in competitions in mountain trekking has the right to all citizens from the country and abroad, healthy, with a signed Statement on the competition at their own risk.

The right to score points in each round and in the general ranking is exclusively for PSS members, with certified competition booklets for the current year and a medical examination. All other persons have the right to recreational participation.

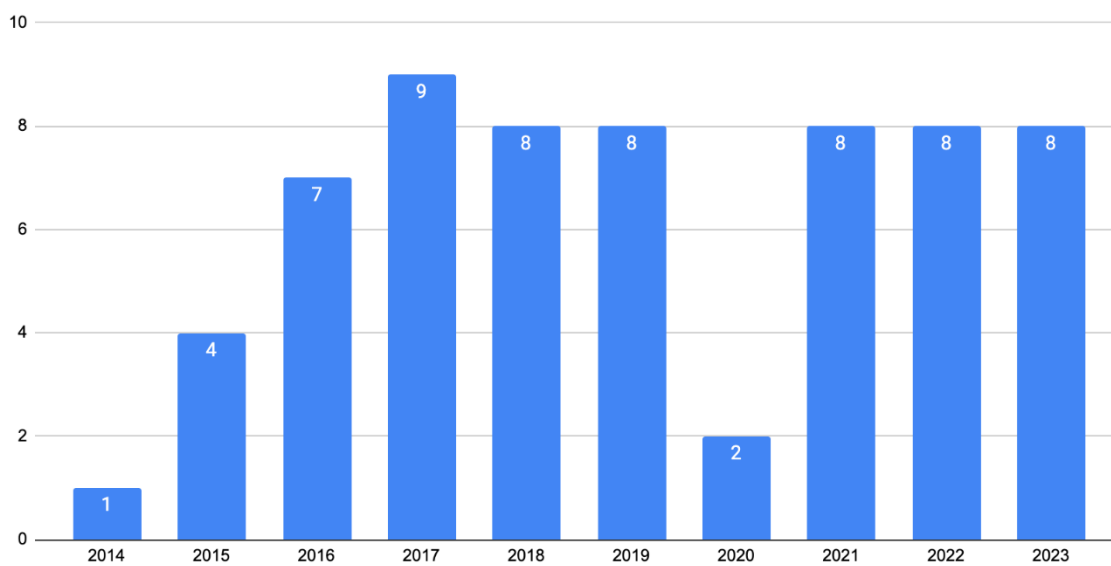
The categories for which the results are evaluated are:

- Male and female - individual (absolute)
- Male and female – team
- Men's and women's - junior (up to 18 years old)

Until 2022, juniors could compete on short and medium track, but from the 2023 season, a decision was made that they are only allowed to participate on short track.

Competitions within the Trekking League of Serbia have been organized since 2014, when one promotional round was organized. After that, the number of races within the League slowly increases each year, to settle at around 8 races per year.

Number of races – Trekking league of Serbia e

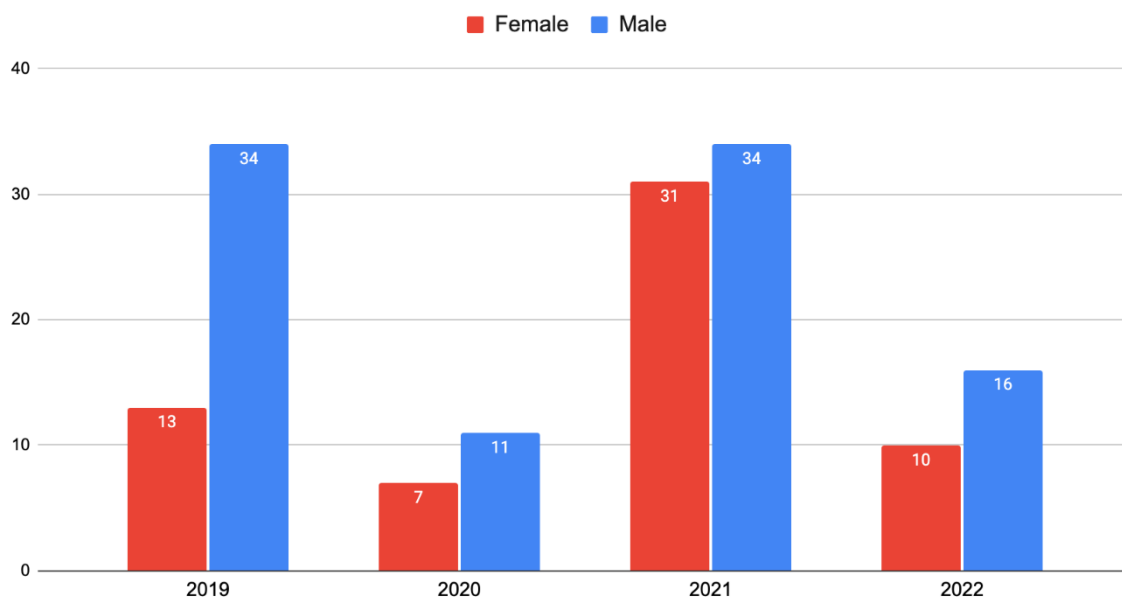


The average number of competitors in the race, on an annual level in previous years, is similar and amounts to around 250 competitors.

Considering the fact that the Mountaineering Association of Serbia has 195 clubs, over 21,000 members, of which only slightly more than 1,000 athletes compete in 7 mountaineering disciplines, the number of participants under the age of 18 in trail races, shown in the graphic below, can be considered negligible.

Trekking and trail league of Serbia

Number of participant younger than 18 years



The percentage of competitors in junior categories, in relation to the total number of competitors, was:

- 2021: 9.7%
- 2022: 5.9%

Up until now, juniors have not been allowed to participate in competitions within the Mountain running/Skyrunning discipline (managed by the Mountain Running Commission). Starting this year, the plan is to organize one or more races that will be scored for the junior championship of Serbia in mountain running.

COMPETITIONS OF THE SERBIAN ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

The Serbian Athletics Association (SAS) organizes competitions in the discipline of mountain running according to the rules of the World Mountain Running Organization (WMRA), on tracks shorter than 10 km. The lengths of the trails in this discipline are significantly shorter than those in mountaineering and are from 2 to 6 km for younger categories (juniors and pioneers).

The Serbian Athletics Federation organizes a maximum of one race per year in this discipline, which is held as a national championship. Only registered members of SAS athletic clubs, with valid competition registrations, can participate in these competitions.

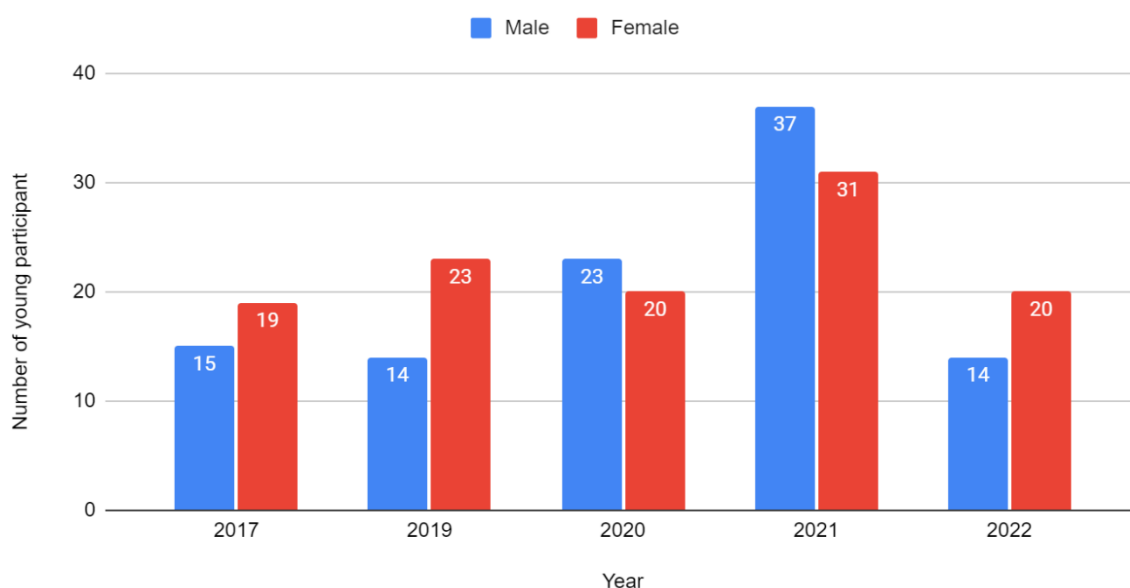
Based on the graph showing the number of participants at the national SAS mountain running championships, it can be concluded that the number of participants in younger categories is mostly constant, except for 2021, when it was on a slight increase.

A big difference compared to mountaineering is the percentage of the number of younger people in relation to the total number of competitors per race, which in the last three years amounted to:

- 68% in 2020,
- 83% in 2021,
- 65% in 2022.

Mountain running Serbian athletic federation

Number of participant younger than 18 years



COMPETITIONS OUTSIDE THE REGISTER

A certain number of races that are organized in nature, outside of organized roads and that can be classified as a trail format, are organized by citizen associations and even informal groups that do not belong to any umbrella organization or branch sports association. Most often, such races do not have authorized sports experts with valid and recognized licenses, judges, delegates and clear sports rules or propositions. Unencumbered by legal obligations, the number of informal race organizers grows



year by year, and the slowness of the state bureaucracy and the insufficient number of sports inspectors also help them.

Data on the number of participants and the participation of younger categories, for the above-mentioned reasons, is currently difficult to obtain.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the above, we can conclude that trail running as a competition format has a perspective and potential for attracting a larger number of young people than the current one. On the other hand, the lack of systemic solutions in this area, unclear responsibilities between organizations and lack of control by the state represent the biggest challenges.

Recommendations for improving the participation of young people in trail competitions could be in the direction of:

- Development of programs and events aimed at supporting young people in trail racing (workshops, camps, free trainings).
- Increasing the financial availability of competitions for young participants (reduction of registration, travel and accommodation costs).
- Increasing the visibility of the competition and promoting a healthy lifestyle through social networks and campaigns.
- Education of participants about healthy nutrition and preparation for the competition.



ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TRAIL RUNNING IN NORTH MACEDONIA

INTRODUCTION

Trail running is a relatively new sport in the Republic of N. Macedonia with its beginnings dating in 2005. As with (almost) every other sport, on one side it is practiced recreationally by the runners themselves or on some organized events and on the other side it is practiced in the sports clubs which are part of Athletics Federation of N. Macedonia.

The main body of runners in our country consists mainly of recreational runners, and very little (or none) are practicing the sport on a professional level. The reasons behind this are multilayered and sit mainly in the way in which it is organized and regulated on a national level, the low interest for practicing outdoor sports and the lack of overall awareness of the people about the benefits of being active on the mountains. Also, one of the fundamental reasons why there are no professional runners is because there is a lack of organized youth system within the Mountain Running section of the governing body of the sport - Athletics Federation of Macedonia.

EARLY BEGINNINGS OF TRAIL RUNNING IN MACEDONIA

2005-2009 National League in Mountain Running (Planinarski Sojuz) - These are the first organized events constructed in a Mountain Running League held by the Mountaineering Federation of Macedonia (then Planinarski Sojuz) and according to WMRA rules. It was held in a time span five years and races were organized on some of the higher mountain ranges in Macedonia (Solunska Glava, Vodno-Matka, Kajmakcalan, Pelister, Osogovo etc.). Altho it was organized by the Mountaineering Federation, because it was called National League in Mountain Running the most participants were combined runners from the Athletic clubs or the army of the country and from some mountaineering clubs. No youth system has been involved in these running leagues and the number of adult runners varied around 20-30 runners per race.



ASSOCIATION FOR TRAIL RUNNING - TREX

In 2011 founded by Trajce Pankovski within the annual plan of the Mountaineering club Makpetrol from Skopje was organized the race Krali Marko Trails in Prilep. Till 2013 it was organized by that mountaineering club, but from 2014 the race is organized by a separate official body - Association for trail running Trex - from Skopje. Till now this race has the longest tradition of editions from all of the trail running races in N. Macedonia and it stands as a first race for many of the runners in our community. From its beginning, the race organizers saw the need for youth involvement in this kind of event and started organizing one kids race within the event alongside the races for adults. These races were mainly for the younger kids, from age of 7-13 years, they were short 1-2 kilometers and were more revial rather than a competition.



In its tradition, Krali Marko Trails had kids race (named Markukule Trail) in every year from 2011 till 2019 and it regularly brought together around 30-50 kids, and in peak years 2016/17/18 on Markukule joined around 80-90 kids of those ages (<13 years). Most of the kids were organized by the local schools' sports teachers, and the atmosphere adding to the adult races was brilliant. Although the event Krali Marko Trails was annual, locals knew about the race well and it had kids returning to the race every year. It is interesting to note that till 2019-2020, and still even today, the city of Prilep has given one of the best trail runners from our country in male and female category respectively. The organizers are strongly convinced that Krali Marko Trails is the reason for this.



Association for trail running Trex is organizing three more races in its calendar Vodno-Matka Trails, Strumina Trail and Ohrid Ultra-Trail but alongside the main adult races there hasn't been the opportunity to organize this kind of kids race. Still, the organizers are keen to adapt and work on the promotion and growth of the youth potential in trail running in their system of events. *note - from 2021 on Vodno-Matka Trails the 10K race is open for Junior Category runners (13-18 years of age).

AFM - ATHLETIC FEDERATION OF MACEDONIA

AFM is the official sports federation and body that regulates athletics/track and field and also mountain running in N. Macedonia. From an info talk with the General Secretary of the Federation, and also from our experience till now, it is known that the input from this body and also from its clubs for development programs is poor, especially for mountain running, there is no system for youth development and grassroot programs and the interest from the parents, runners and clubs for youth involvement is also scarce.

Athletic clubs that are governed under Athletic Federation of Macedonia are mainly focused on short, middle and long distances (track and road running) for adults and a small number of juniors, and the other disciplines like cross or mountain running, especially for teenagers, are not popular or interesting for the runners at all.

On a national level the AFM has the obligation to organize (at least one) National Mountain Running Championship and it usually consists of one short race held annually in which the majority of runners are not specialized in trail running, but those are from the other athletic disciplines. Usually it is not a popular event in our community, the organization is poor and the info is scarce so that is why most of the recreational runners don't tend to get the interest and to participate through one of the nations clubs and compete on a national level. The only participants in that event are 10-15 runners from the clubs. There is no organized Mountain Running League in different locations and organized by different clubs etc. nor for adults or young.

17th European Mountain Running Championship Skopje 2018 - In the summer of 2018 on Mount Vodno organized by the Athletic Federation of Macedonia was the 17th European Mountain Running Championship. It was a successfully organized event with many participants in both Junior and Senior competition from around 50 countries. From our side in the Senior category we had 6 runners who finished the race, but the most bright moment was the 25th overall position in the Junior category



realized by the (then 17 years old) young Dejan Angeloski from Ohrid. Till then, Dejan was involved in track and field and it was his first big race. Dejan is still the most prolific runner from our country and represents us worldwide. *note - TREX Skopje was working as an consultant for AFM in the technical preparation and route placement for the 17th European Mountain Running Championship Skopje 2018.

FPSM - MOUNTAINEERING FEDERATION OF MACEDONIA

The Mountaineering Federation of N. Macedonia although was the main body that organized the League in the past from 2005-2009 (Planinarski Sojuz), nowadays has little organized and structured impact in the sport of Mountain (Trail) running. From 2019 with the lead from Aleksandar Kirkovski they are part of the International Skyrunning Federation and from then, one club - PK Makedon is organizing the skyrunning race Titov Vrv Skyrace which is in the same time National Skyrunning Championship. Some of the runners with best results have participated in the 2021 Skyrunning European Championships. There is no youth development system within this organization either.

CONCLUSION

As we can draw a conclusion, the Republic of N. Macedonia is lacking an official, organized and structured youth development programs especially in the trail/cross running section of the athletics. The activities on this level from other local associations that are working on trail running are present but it is small and inconsistent since these are annual events and those organizations need to pay more attention to developing youth races and drawing this kind of participants besides the adult ones.

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TRAIL RUNNING IN SLOVENIA

INTRODUCTION

In Slovenia, there are various running competitions for the youngest, specifically we can talk about competitions for children aged from kindergarten to junior categories. Usually these are some programs at the state level in terms of healthy and active use of free time. In general, there is a strong trend of spending time actively in nature in Slovenia.

In primary and secondary school, running is a mandatory part of physical education in different forms:

- running on the track,
- cross country,
- orientation
- mountain running.

Usually, participation in running is voluntary or is part of the training and plan of a sports club whose specialization is not necessarily running (football, cycling...).

All forms of running as a sport are under the auspices of the Athletic Association of Slovenia.



TYPES OF COMPETITIONS



In Slovenia, competitions are organized as part of some activity programs for the youngest - for example, in kindergartens where they have competitions for the Golden Sun or similar.

School competitions are organized in elementary school as part of the regular educational program. First at the level of schools, and then at the level of the municipality, region and finally the state.

During the 2022/2023 school year, the following competitions were organized under the auspices of the Athletic Association:

- Team athletics competition for primary schools (6 October 2022)
- Team athletics competition for high schools (October 5, 2022)
- Slovenian Mountain Running Championship for primary and secondary schools (September 22, 2022)
- Individual athletics competition for primary schools (6/7/2023)
- Individual athletic competition for high schools (18.5.2023)
- Slovenian Cross-Country Championship for primary and secondary schools (April 20, 2023)
- Slovenian championship in street running for primary and secondary schools (October 22, 2022)

As for the running and orienteering competition, it is under the auspices of the Slovenian Orienteering Association, where the youngest and junior teams also actively train, and the results achieved are at the world level.

Of course, there are other recreational local competitions where the youngest are also involved.

Bearing in mind that trail running is becoming more and more popular every year, there are more trail race organizers who organize categories for the youngest in their competitions, one of such organizers is UTVV and of course HUT Slovenia (Hg Ultra Trail).

ASSOCIATION FOR MOUNTAIN RUNNING - ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION OF SLOVENIA (AZS)



In Slovenia, mountain runners are organized within the Athletic Association of Slovenia - AZS, where the Association for Mountain Running is defined in the Statute.

The association is managed by the Executive Committee. Both the Association and the Executive Board operate according to the rules approved by the AZS Board of Directors.

The Executive Committee for Mountain Running at the Athletic Association of Slovenia takes care of:

- development of mountain running in Slovenia
- competition system in Slovenia
- matches at the national level (national championships, Cup of Slovenia, selection matches for the composition of the national team)
- performances of the Slovenian team at major international competitions
- connection with WMRA and other international organizations.

Every year, the Executive Committee organizes and mainly finances the appearance of the Slovenian national team at the European and World Championships, as well as the "WMRA Youth Cup" and the WC in the mountain marathon.

At the matches of the World Cup and WC for veterans, he helps in the organizational sense.





DISTANCES

There are no special norms and requirements for the youngest and school competitions, the only norm is the result achieved within individual competitions where a limited number of competitors pass to a higher level of competition.

For competitions that are under the auspices of national associations and that are organized only for clubs that are members of the national association, it is necessary for competitors to be registered and have a license with which they can compete. The same goes for coaches.

The distances are different depending on the age of the contestants, for example for children in kindergartens they are distances from 100 to 200m.

For the national school championships in mountain running, the following distances are concerned:

- junior women 1.6km and 65m+
- juniors 2.2km and 110m+.

In the case of the Hg Ultra Trail, the distance for the youngest is 2.5 km and up to a maximum of 250m+ with a 2h limit.

COACHES

In Slovenia Faculty for sport and physical education, gives general education to the teachers for working with children at school. For special education for a special sports discipline, they must complete a specialization.

There are other programs where you can get professional training to become a coach for specific sports disciplines. These programs are usually composed of several levels of education, a few years ago there were usually three degrees:

- leader,
- teacher
- and the coach.



According to the new EU directive on the registration of professional workers in sports, who must be registered in the register of sports workers at the Ministry of Labor and Sports. There are two degrees:

- Professional worker in sports 1
- and Professional worker in sports 2, independent of the sports discipline.

Special trail running for the youngest is not organized in terms of special training within a society or club. For now, trail running training for the youngest takes place within individual families where the parents themselves are active trail runners.

CONCLUSION

Although the participation of young people in trail running is relatively widespread in Slovenia, the small number of young people in official competitions under the auspices of the Slovenian Athletics Association is obvious. There are many reasons, but the fact is that the Athletic Association itself shows no interest in the affirmation of this sport. Also, a large number of popular races are not structurally linked to any organization or young people are primarily linked to some other sports.



ANALYZIS SUMMARY

Although trail running exists for a relatively long time, it has experienced expansion in the last 10 years around the world, including in Slovenia, Serbia and North Macedonia. The situation both at the global and regional level is that people mostly participate this sport recreationally, and most of them are former athletes (from different sports) aged 25 to 40. The share of young people under the age of 18 is still negligible. One of the problems is that trail running is not recognized as an attractive and popular sport among young people. Also, there is almost no organized work with children within the clubs.

Both at the global level and at the level of the project countries, the existence of a large number of different organizations and associations that deal with the organization of the competition is noticeable, which further confuses the runners themselves.

One of the key institutions for the development of this sport is World Athletics, but it is obvious that the national athletic associations in Serbia and North Macedonia, and to a lesser extent in Slovenia, do not show special interest in trail running, i.e. athletic disciplines that take place outside the stadium. This is supported by the fact that there were no representatives of the Balkans at the World Championships in mountain and trail running held at the end of 2022. The only country that actively participated in senior and junior competitions under the auspices of WMRA and achieved even notable results is Slovenia.

Skyrunning competitions organized by the ISF have become popular during the last decade and there was the participation of senior national teams from the regions in the European and World Championships. However, the problem is that the formal structure is still not the clearest, that is, who has the authority to organize the competitions and who can organize the work of the national team.

In the coming period, it is necessary to focus on the development of regional centers in cities that have a strong trail running community, which requires the development of sports experts - trainers who should work with young people.

It is necessary to standardize the competition and connect the organizers with the competent national associations. Also, the cooperation of various sports

associations, that has trail running is the focus, at the national level is necessary. In the end, regional cooperation is necessary not only at the level of Slovenia, Serbia and North Macedonia, but also of other countries from the region in order to transfer experiences and examples of good practices, develop sport experts - coaches and form regional competitions and promote trail running in general.

This analysis as well as analyzes in local languages will be available on the project website www.gtof.net.



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