



1. Introduction

The GreenMascot project - “*Strengthening BSB Local Capacities for Environmental Awareness in and through Sport*” - is implemented under the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme and aims to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to use sport as a tool for environmental awareness, sustainable behaviour, and community engagement across the Black Sea Basin region.

Within this framework, Activity 1.2 focuses on assessing the existing administrative, organisational, and operational capacities of municipalities and local public actors to design, implement, support, and promote more environmentally sustainable sports activities and events.

The assessment was carried out through interviews and focus group discussions with representatives of municipalities, sports departments, sports clubs, public institutions, and local stakeholders in Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Türkiye. The activity aimed to identify:

- existing environmental practices linked to sport;
- institutional strengths and weaknesses;
- administrative and operational barriers;
- stakeholder cooperation mechanisms;
- current monitoring and evaluation practices;
- capacity gaps and training needs;
- expectations towards the future GreenMascot Toolkit.

The assessment demonstrates that municipalities across the Black Sea Basin region already recognise the growing importance of integrating sustainability principles into sports activities. However, the level of institutional preparedness, available resources, and implementation capacity varies significantly depending on municipality size, geographical context, administrative structure, and available funding.

At the same time, the findings reveal several common regional trends:





- sustainability in sport is still largely implemented through isolated operational practices rather than formal strategic frameworks;
- municipalities frequently lack practical methodologies and measurable indicators;
- human and financial resources remain limited, especially in small municipalities;
- behavioural change among participants and citizens remains one of the most difficult dimensions;
- local administrations demonstrate strong openness towards practical guidance, training, and cooperation tools.

The assessment also highlights important positive examples already emerging across the participating countries, including:

- waste reduction and recycling practices;
- renewable energy integration in sports infrastructure;
- digital communication replacing printed materials;
- volunteer-based environmental initiatives;
- public awareness campaigns connected to sport;
- sustainable mobility and accessibility approaches;
- community-based environmental engagement models.

These findings provide the foundation for the development of the GreenMascot Toolkit and future pilot activities, ensuring that the project outputs respond directly to the real operational needs of local authorities across the Black Sea Basin region.

Awareness Circularity Community Sustainable Sport Environmental protection
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2. Methodology

The transnational capacity assessment was conducted between project partner countries through a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving representatives of local authorities and relevant stakeholders





connected to sports management, environmental activities, and community engagement.

The assessment process followed a common discussion framework developed within the GreenMascot project in order to ensure comparability between countries and municipalities. Discussions focused on several core thematic areas:

- sports activities and event organisation;
- environmental practices in sports events;
- institutional coordination and governance;
- stakeholder cooperation;
- administrative and financial capacity;
- monitoring and evaluation systems;
- behavioural change and public awareness;
- existing barriers and future needs.

The assessment included municipalities with highly diverse profiles, including:

- large urban municipalities;
- medium-sized regional centres;
- small municipalities;
- coastal municipalities;
- rural and mountain municipalities;
- municipalities with developed sports infrastructure;
- municipalities with limited institutional capacity.

This diversity allowed the project to capture a broad regional perspective on the sustainability challenges and opportunities related to sport across the Black Sea Basin area.





The participating municipalities included:

Bulgaria:

- Varna
- Burgas
- Dobrich
- Byala

Romania:

- Constanța
- Corbu
- Mangalia
- Limanu

Türkiye:

- Çorlu
- Ahmetbey
- Evrensekiz

Greece:

- Argitheia
- Halki
- Naoussa
- Oreokastro
- Thessaloniki

The collected information was analysed comparatively in order to identify:

- common regional patterns;





- recurring institutional challenges;
- examples of good practices;
- municipality-specific needs;
- differences between municipality types and territorial contexts.

The methodology intentionally combined qualitative institutional perspectives with practical operational experience. Rather than focusing only on formal policies, the assessment aimed to understand the real day-to-day capacity of municipalities to organise environmentally responsible sports activities and to influence environmental awareness through sport.

The findings of this assessment directly support the development of:

- the GreenMascot Toolkit;
- future training activities;
- pilot implementation actions;
- awareness campaigns;
- long-term transnational cooperation between municipalities and sports stakeholders in the Black Sea Basin region.

3. Overview of Participating Municipalities

The GreenMascot transnational capacity assessment involved municipalities and local stakeholders from Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Türkiye, representing a highly diverse range of territorial, administrative, demographic, and environmental contexts across the Black Sea Basin region.

The participating municipalities differ significantly in:

- population size;
- institutional structure;
- available human and financial resources;





- geographical characteristics;
- tourism intensity;
- sports infrastructure;
- environmental priorities;
- organisational experience in sports event management.

This diversity provided valuable comparative insights into how municipalities of different scales and contexts approach sustainability in and through sport.

The assessment included:

- large urban municipalities with intensive sports calendars and developed infrastructure;
- medium-sized municipalities with active local sports ecosystems;
- small municipalities with limited administrative capacity;
- coastal municipalities affected by tourism pressure and marine environmental concerns;
- mountain and rural municipalities closely connected to protected natural environments and eco-tourism activities.

Despite these differences, all participating municipalities recognised sport as an important tool for:

- community engagement;
- youth participation;
- local identity and visibility;
- tourism development;
- environmental awareness and behavioural change.

At the same time, the assessment revealed that the operational realities and sustainability capacities differ substantially depending on municipality type.





Large Urban Municipalities

Larger municipalities such as Varna, Burgas, Thessaloniki, and Naoussa generally demonstrate:

- more developed sports infrastructure;
- structured sports calendars;
- stronger institutional organisation;
- broader stakeholder networks;
- greater event management experience.

These municipalities regularly organise:

- mass participation events;
- national and international competitions;
- school sports initiatives;
- federation-level sports activities;
- tourism-related sports events.

However, larger municipalities also face considerable challenges related to:

- heavy administrative workload;
- limited human resources relative to event volume;
- bureaucratic coordination;
- insufficient integration of sustainability into strategic planning;
- difficulties in monitoring environmental impact systematically.

In several cases, sustainability measures are implemented operationally rather than through formal long-term policies.





Small and Rural Municipalities

Smaller municipalities such as Byala, Limanu, Halki, Argithea, Corbu, and Evrensekiz operate in significantly different conditions.

Their sports activities are typically:

- smaller in scale;
- community-oriented;
- volunteer-dependent;
- strongly connected to local identity and seasonal tourism;
- implemented with limited staffing and financial capacity.

These municipalities often rely heavily on:

- informal cooperation;
- local volunteers;
- schools and community organisations;
- temporary partnerships;
- personal communication networks.

At the same time, smaller municipalities often demonstrate:

- stronger direct community engagement;
- closer connection between sport and nature;
- greater flexibility in local initiatives;
- stronger awareness of local environmental sensitivities.

However, they face major structural limitations including:

- lack of specialised personnel;
- limited funding opportunities;





- absence of monitoring systems;
- lack of formal sustainability methodologies;
- dependence on a small number of active stakeholders.

Coastal Municipalities

Many participating municipalities are located in coastal areas where environmental sustainability is directly linked to tourism, marine ecosystems, and seasonal population growth.

Municipalities such as Varna, Burgas, Mangalia, Limanu, Halki, and Corbu highlighted concerns related to:

- waste generation during events;
- pressure on coastal ecosystems;
- plastic pollution;
- seasonal overcrowding;
- water consumption;
- visitor behaviour.

These municipalities increasingly recognise the importance of integrating environmental awareness into sports and tourism-related activities.

Several coastal municipalities already apply practical measures such as:

- additional waste collection systems;
- beach cleaning initiatives;
- reduction of single-use plastics;
- reusable water solutions;
- awareness campaigns targeting participants and tourists.





Nevertheless, these practices are often implemented on an ad hoc basis and are rarely supported by formal monitoring frameworks or sustainability indicators.

Mountain and Nature-Oriented Municipalities

Municipalities such as Argitheia and Naoussa demonstrate a particularly strong connection between sport and natural environments.

Sports activities in these areas are closely linked to:

- mountain tourism;
- hiking;
- cycling;
- skiing;
- trail running;
- outdoor recreation.

Environmental protection is often perceived not only as an operational necessity, but also as a core element of local identity and tourism attractiveness.

These municipalities demonstrated stronger awareness regarding:

- biodiversity protection;
- forest preservation;
- protected natural areas;
- responsible visitor behaviour;
- low-impact sports activities.

At the same time, they also highlighted challenges related to:

- geographic isolation;
- limited accessibility;
- insufficient accommodation capacity;





- seasonal infrastructure pressure;
- communication difficulties;
- limited specialised expertise.

Comparative Regional Perspective

Although municipalities operate under very different local realities, the assessment identified several common regional characteristics across all participating countries:

- growing awareness of sustainability issues in sport;
- willingness to adopt greener practices;
- strong dependence on limited human resources;
- insufficient practical guidance and methodology;
- limited monitoring and evaluation systems;
- increasing interest in stakeholder cooperation;
- strong demand for practical tools and training.

The findings suggest that municipalities across the Black Sea Basin region are at different stages of sustainability integration, but share a common need for:

- structured operational support;
- practical implementation tools;
- simplified methodologies;
- measurable indicators;
- capacity-building activities;
- exchange of good practices;
- long-term behavioural change approaches.





These conclusions provide the foundation for the next stages of the GreenMascot project and the development of a practical and adaptable toolkit capable of supporting municipalities with diverse capacities and territorial realities.

4. Emerging Good Practices

Although the assessment identified multiple structural and operational challenges, it also revealed a growing number of promising local practices that demonstrate the potential for integrating sustainability principles into sports activities across the Black Sea Basin region.

Several municipalities have already introduced practical environmental measures, even when these are not yet fully institutionalised or supported by formal policies.

Waste Reduction and Recycling Practices

Waste management was one of the most common sustainability dimensions identified across participating municipalities. Several local authorities already apply:

- waste separation systems;
- recycling bins during events;
- post-event clean-up activities;
- awareness campaigns connected to waste reduction.

Municipalities such as Burgas, Marmaraereğlisi, Thessaloniki and Limanu demonstrated practical efforts to improve waste management during sports activities and public events.

Particularly notable examples include:

- recycled-material sports tribunes in Marmaraereğlisi;
- “Bring Your Waste, Take Your Coffee” awareness activities;
- beach and public clean-up initiatives linked to sports participation;
- waste sorting systems connected to local event organisation.





These examples demonstrate the growing operational understanding that sports events can function as platforms for environmental responsibility and public participation.

Renewable Energy and Sustainable Infrastructure

Some municipalities are already integrating renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure principles into sports facilities and public areas.

Ahmetbey Municipality presented one of the strongest examples of planned sustainable sports infrastructure through:

- solar-powered lighting systems;
- rainwater harvesting;
- compost systems;
- integration of ecological education and sports infrastructure.

Similarly, municipalities such as Thessaloniki and Naoussa highlighted efforts related to:

- energy-efficient sports infrastructure;
- photovoltaic systems;
- reduced operational energy consumption.

These initiatives indicate growing awareness that sustainable sport should include not only event management, but also long-term infrastructure planning.

Digitalisation and Reduction of Printed Materials

Several municipalities increasingly use:

- social media;
- digital communication;
- electronic registration systems;
- digital reporting processes.





This trend is especially visible in larger municipalities such as Thessaloniki and Çorlu, where digitalisation is also linked to reducing paper consumption and improving administrative efficiency.

Community-Based Environmental Awareness

The assessment also identified important examples of community-oriented environmental engagement through sport.

Several municipalities combine:

- sports participation;
- volunteer engagement;
- environmental education;
- public awareness campaigns.

Examples include:

- environmental walks and clean-up activities;
- school-based awareness initiatives;
- volunteer-supported sports events;
- child-oriented sustainability activities;
- local sports club cooperation.

These approaches demonstrate strong potential for using sport not only as a recreational activity, but also as a tool for long-term behavioural change and community mobilisation.

5. Implications for the GreenMascot Toolkit

The transnational assessment clearly demonstrates that municipalities require practical, flexible and operationally realistic tools rather than highly technical or overly complex sustainability systems.





Although participating municipalities differ significantly in size, structure and capacity, several common expectations towards the future GreenMascot Toolkit emerged consistently across all countries.

Need for Practical and Easy-to-Use Tools

Municipalities repeatedly emphasised the importance of:

- simple implementation tools;
- practical checklists;
- ready-to-use templates;
- visual communication materials;
- easy monitoring mechanisms.

Especially for smaller municipalities, complex certification systems or advanced reporting requirements would likely create additional administrative burden rather than support implementation.

Therefore, the toolkit should prioritise:

- simplicity;
- accessibility;
- adaptability;
- low-cost implementation.

Flexible Structure for Different Municipality Types

The assessment showed that municipalities operate under highly diverse territorial conditions, including:

- coastal areas;
- mountain regions;
- urban centres;





- rural settlements;
- tourism-oriented municipalities.

For this reason, the toolkit should avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach and instead provide:

- modular guidance;
- municipality-type-specific examples;
- scalable implementation options.

This would allow municipalities with limited capacity to adopt realistic first steps while enabling more advanced municipalities to develop broader sustainability actions.

Monitoring and Evaluation Support

One of the strongest common needs identified across all countries relates to the lack of environmental measurement systems.

Municipalities would benefit from:

- simple indicators;
- basic sustainability metrics;
- participant feedback templates;
- event evaluation forms;
- waste and mobility tracking tools.

The toolkit should therefore support municipalities in moving from informal sustainability practices towards measurable and evidence-based implementation.

Behavioural Change and Communication

The assessment also demonstrated that behavioural change remains one of the most difficult dimensions of sustainable sports management.

As a result, municipalities require:





- awareness campaign models;
- communication templates;
- participant engagement tools;
- volunteer mobilisation approaches;
- school and youth-oriented materials.

Sport has strong potential to support environmental awareness, but municipalities need practical methods to translate visibility into long-term behavioural impact.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the transnational capacity assessment, several strategic recommendations can be identified for municipalities, project partners, and future GreenMascot activities.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Municipalities would benefit from:

- additional staff support for sports and sustainability activities;
- improved interdepartmental coordination;
- stronger integration between sports, environmental, tourism, and education departments;
- clearer operational responsibilities related to sustainable event management.

Special attention should be given to smaller municipalities, where limited human resources significantly affect implementation capacity.

Developing Practical Sustainability Methodologies

The assessment demonstrated a clear need for:

- practical sustainability checklists;
- operational guidelines;





- measurable indicators;
- simplified monitoring systems;
- standardised evaluation templates.

Future support tools should remain practical, flexible, and adapted to the real operational conditions of municipalities with varying administrative capacities.

Expanding Stakeholder Cooperation

Municipalities consistently highlighted the importance of cooperation with:

- schools;
- sports clubs;
- NGOs;
- volunteers;
- local businesses;
- tourism actors;
- public institutions.

Strengthening these partnerships can significantly improve both the operational capacity and the long-term sustainability impact of sports events.

Supporting Behavioural Change Through Sport

Sport demonstrates strong potential as a platform for environmental awareness and community mobilisation. However, municipalities require:

- communication tools;
- awareness campaign models;
- youth engagement activities;
- volunteer mobilisation approaches;
- educational materials linked to sports participation.





Future GreenMascot activities should therefore place strong emphasis on behavioural change and public engagement.

Increasing Financial and Technical Support

Many municipalities face difficulties related to:

- insufficient budgets;
- limited technical expertise;
- lack of specialised sustainability knowledge.

Future initiatives should therefore support municipalities through:

- training activities;
- practical toolkits;
- peer-learning mechanisms;
- exchange of good practices;
- low-cost implementation solutions.

6.2 Conclusion

The GreenMascot transnational capacity assessment demonstrates that municipalities across the Black Sea Basin region are increasingly aware of the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into sports activities and public events.

Although participating municipalities differ significantly in terms of size, geographical context, institutional structure, and available resources, the assessment identified several common regional trends. Most municipalities already apply isolated environmental practices and demonstrate strong motivation for greener event organisation. However, sustainability is still rarely embedded within formal strategic frameworks, and municipalities frequently lack practical methodologies, measurable indicators, and sufficient administrative capacity.





The findings also reveal that human resources, financing, stakeholder coordination, and behavioural change remain among the most significant challenges across all participating countries.

At the same time, the assessment identified numerous positive examples of local innovation, volunteer engagement, environmental awareness initiatives, sustainable infrastructure approaches, and community participation models. These practices demonstrate the strong potential of sport to function not only as a recreational activity, but also as a tool for environmental awareness, social mobilisation, and sustainable local development.

The results of Activity 1.2 provide a strong operational foundation for the future GreenMascot Toolkit, pilot activities, and capacity-building actions. Most importantly, the assessment confirms that municipalities across the Black Sea Basin region are open to cooperation, willing to improve their sustainability practices, and motivated to further strengthen the connection between sport, environment, and community engagement.

