



# PROSWAVE

**Weightlifting: good practices and testimonies**

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## INTRODUCTION

Weightlifting is considered as a niche sport, resulting in lower recognition among European public compared to other sport (e. g. football, skiing, tennis etc.). Despite the fact that weightlifting is a sport that has been practiced for centuries, it is still underrepresented when it comes to its general image and recognition. It is considered to be a side sport activity to many other sport disciplines, which are much greatly known.

The PROSVAWE project aims primarily at promoting the weightlifting as a sport discipline among general interested public with a special focus on how this sport discipline can help vulnerable groups to raise their social, health and mental conditions. Weightlifting is much more than just lifting different weights. It is a sport with a long tradition, an activity that is part of every other sport (to help improving muscle tone of the body) as well as a therapeutically method in physiotherapy. These three elements have been many times disregarded by general public, which mainly knows the competitive side of weightlifting.

Since weightlifting is not only a sport, but an integral part of other non-sport activities, we wish to highlight its cross-disciplinarity. With this short brochure as one of the project's results, we try to demonstrate the positive effects of weightlifting. Doing so, we believe that we can as well transfer our sport values to other sectors and disciplines, thus contributing to better understanding of the sport itself as well as improvement of quality of life of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Stories, testimonies and good practices collected in this short brochure will hopefully fill in the gap of positive perception of weightlifting as well as its positive effects in other sport disciplines, medicine, physiotherapy, general well-being and mental health of different groups of people.

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Title: Promoting Sport Values through Weightlifting

Abbreviation: PROSWAVE

Project duration: 1 September 2022 – 29 February 2024

Weightlifting is an ancient sport, which is most recognized in Asia, but to less extent in Europe. On contrary, weightlifting as a side sport discipline is much more known and present in Europe due to its positive effects on body training in different sport disciplines (e. g. football, tennis, canoeing etc.). Moreover, weightlifting is a typical discipline that is practiced in numerous other non-sport fields (e. g. physiotherapy, medicine, social therapy etc.), thus we can claim that this is one of the most cross-disciplinary sport. Especially Europe (and particularly in the USA) is known to use and practice the weightlifting for a specific target group –people with disabilities. It has been proven by many medical studies that keeping muscle weight improves the overall health condition as well as significantly helps building and improving self-confidence and self-perception. There are also numerous articles and analysis on how weightlifting can help transforming mindset, enrich social life, build confidence, raise self-esteem and thus empower people in the society.

Despite weightlifting being a precondition for many other sports and disciplines, this sport discipline is very little known to the general public, since it is usually hidden in the shadow of other sports and thus gets very little media attention. The project partners are facing this issue throughout Europe, therefore they see a strong need to raise awareness about the weightlifting as a sport discipline, as a sport that is suitable for wider public as well as a side training (sport) in other fields. We wish to bring closer this sport discipline to the public in order to better understand how much it can contribute to better physical and mental health.

Since weightlifting has been often used in therapeutical manners, we wish to target a very specific group, i. e. people with disabilities. The weightlifting for this purpose is much better developed in the USA, where they have a specially dedicated weightlifting clinics for people with disabilities (as well as for other purposes). Project partners have sporadically worked with different groups of people with disabilities in the past, but we wish to capitalize this aspect of the weightlifting as well. Therefore, with this project, we wish to bring attention in partner countries about this aspect of the weightlifting, involve relevant institutions in it and thus design more structured trainings and classes for people with disabilities.

Project partners are mainly small sport clubs, working at the local level, thus facing all constraints, deriving from these circumstances. With the project, we wish to come up with a more structural partnership at the EU level, since we are all newcomers to the project. In addition to this, we wish to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in our activities, since we believe that the weightlifting is a sport that can help them improve their social interaction and health. At the level of partnership, our main objective is thus to build the capacity of our sport clubs to be able to perform at the EU level, transfer and use the knowledge at the local level and thus improve transnational aspect of our daily work.

## SLOVENIA

*Coordinator: Klub dvigovanja uteži – Inštitut za težko atletiko*

Our project has been dedicated to improving the well-being and health of individuals with special needs, including blind and visually impaired, deaf and hard of hearing, and those with physical limitations. Through tailored programs and unwavering support, we have strived to empower them to overcome personal challenges and show them they can train and compete with people without those so called short comings.

Programs for Blind and Visually Impaired. We worked with the Association of Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovenia, where we implemented specialized training program focusing on auditory cues, tactile feedback, and adaptive equipment. Through these initiatives, participants have gained confidence, improved physical fitness, and enhanced their overall well-being. Additionally, we have facilitated inclusive sports events and workshops to promote social inclusion and accessibility.

Initiatives for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We worked the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Slovenia, where our efforts for the deaf and hard of hearing community have centered on providing sign language interpreters, visual aids, and clear communication strategies during training sessions and events. By removing communication barriers, we have created an inclusive environment where individuals can fully participate and engage in physical activities. Moreover, we have offered workshops on health awareness and safety tips tailored to their specific needs.



Individuals with physical limitations have received special attention focusing on adaptive exercises, mobility aids, and strength-building techniques. By addressing their unique challenges, we have enabled them to improve their physical abilities, gain independence, and enhance their quality of life. Additionally, we have facilitated peer support groups and mentorship programs to foster a sense of community and encouragement.

Our work has yielded tangible results, with participants reporting improvements in physical fitness, self-confidence, and overall well-being. Many have overcome personal barriers, achieved fitness milestones, and embraced a more active lifestyle. Furthermore, our initiatives have promoted social integration, raised awareness about disability rights, and inspired positive change within the broader community.

In conclusion, our organization remains committed to empowering individuals with special needs to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. By offering tailored programs, inclusive environments, and unwavering support, we continue to make strides in promoting well-being, accessibility, and inclusivity for all. As we look to the future, we remain dedicated to advocating for the rights and dignity of individuals with disabilities and fostering a society where everyone can thrive.

*Martin Janžekovič*

*Head coach*

## AUSTRIA

*Partner: Favoritner Athleten' Club Goliath*

Participating in this project was not only transformative but also instrumental in expanding our reach and impact, especially among youth. It offered us an unprecedented opportunity to highlight weightlifting's role in promoting physical and mental well-being among younger demographics. Our involvement in this EU-backed initiative allowed us to forge a network with local politicians, medical experts, educational institutions, and other clubs, all united by a common interest in supporting youth health and development.

The project's emphasis on inclusivity and community engagement, particularly towards youth and kids, has been a cornerstone of our efforts. We aimed to make weightlifting accessible and appealing to the younger generation, demonstrating its benefits beyond physical strength, including discipline, confidence, and mental health. The support and recognition from the EU project have not only validated our commitment but also enabled us to bring weightlifting to a wider audience through these strategic partnerships.

**Austrian Weightlifting Federations:** ÖGV (Austrian Weightlifting Federation) and WGV (Vienna Weightlifting Federation) provided invaluable support by endorsing the project, offering expertise, and facilitating connections within the weightlifting community.

**Dachverbände (Umbrella Associations):** ASKÖ Wien and Union Wien played crucial roles in extending our reach, providing platforms for engagement, and fostering relationships with other sports disciplines and communities.



**Other Clubs:** Kraftsport Tulln, by participating, enriched the project with their unique insights, athletes, and shared commitment to promoting weightlifting and physical fitness.

**Physio Team:** Physelis brought critical medical and physiotherapeutic support, ensuring participants' well-being and highlighting the importance of proper physical care in sports.

**Press:** Coverage by Wiener Bezirksblatt and Bezirkszeitung played a pivotal role in raising public awareness, attracting a wider audience to the project, and showcasing the community's engagement and achievements.

**Politics:** The Bezirksamt Favoriten (District Office of Favoriten) was instrumental in providing logistical support, local outreach, and facilitating connections with other municipal resources and programs.

**Schools:** While direct integration into school programs was ambitious, our project successfully initiated communication with the Bildungsdirektion Wien (Vienna Education Directorate), garnering valuable contacts within the educational sector. These initial steps have laid the groundwork for potential future collaborations, aiming to introduce weightlifting and physical fitness into schools and contribute to the development of youth health initiatives.

The feedback from the event has been overwhelmingly positive, marking a milestone for our club and the Austrian Weightlifting Federation.

Gerhard Peya, President of the Austrian Weightlifting Federation, commended the event for its content and offering, noting its style, substance, and the heartfelt and intellectual effort put into its organization, calling it "grandiose."

Natascha Terdina, President of the Vienna Weightlifting Federation, thanked us for hosting an exceptionally engaging event, highlighting the dedication and charm of the Goliath Team and the infectious joy they brought to the event. She noted that the event was a complete success, attributing it not only to the organization but also to the spirit and engagement of everyone involved.

The project significantly raised awareness about the importance of weightlifting, not just as a sport but as a community builder and a promoter of health and wellness. The positive feedback and direct outcomes, such as the increase in club membership, including young athletes and female participants, are testaments to the project's success in broadening the appeal and understanding of weightlifting. The engagement and interest generated by our events have laid a solid foundation for future growth and success, demonstrating the sport's potential to reach a wider and more diverse audience.

*Philipp Latschenberger*

*Weightlifting coach*

## SPAIN

*Partner: WePabellon Weightlifting Club*

As a weightlifting coach of my club, Ourense Weightlifting Club, my story is marked by a passion for the sport and a commitment to the personal growth of my athletes. Every day, I wake up with the determination to help my athletes achieve their sporting goals and to better themselves as individuals, regardless of the challenges they face along the way.

In my club, I've had the privilege of working with a wide range of athletes, from those aspiring to compete at national and international levels to those simply seeking to improve their physical fitness and overall well-being. My approach has always been the same: to provide personalized and motivating training that challenges my athletes to reach their full potential.

One of the most inspiring stories of my coaching career was when I worked with an athlete who had suffered a serious injury that left them with a physical disability. Despite the physical and emotional challenges they faced, this athlete was determined to return to weightlifting and to overcome their limitations. With patience and dedication, we adapted their training to fit their specific needs, focusing



on rehabilitation exercises, strength building, and proper technique. We worked together step by step, celebrating each small breakthrough and overcoming each obstacle with determination.

But most importantly was the impact this process had on the athlete's life outside the gym. As they gained physical strength, they also gained confidence in themselves and their abilities. They became an example of perseverance and determination for

other members of the club, inspiring them to overcome their own challenges and to never give up in the face of adversity.

As a coach, my greatest satisfaction comes from seeing my athletes grow not only as athletes, but also as individuals. Through the transformative power of sport, we've created a united and supportive community where each individual feels valued and supported on their journey to success.

Ultimately, my goal is to continue being a guide and mentor to my athletes, helping them reach new heights in weightlifting and in life. Because in our club, it's not just about lifting weights; it's about lifting spirits and building a brighter future for all our athletes, no matter the circumstances.

*Miguel Gómez Cid*

*Head coach*

## MALTA

*Partner: Malta Weightlifting Association*

For over a decade, our association has been dedicated to nurturing young athletes from diverse backgrounds. Our coaching experience spans working with students diagnosed with dyspraxia, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), hearing impairment, and those hailing from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Throughout our journey, we have employed tailored strategies to address their unique needs, witnessing firsthand the profound impact Olympic weightlifting training can have on their holistic development. Dyspraxia poses challenges in motor coordination and movement planning. Hence, in working with individuals with dyspraxia we learned that breaking down complex movements into smaller, manageable steps fostered gradual skill acquisition. Moreover, we also incorporated several visual and kinaesthetic cues during the session to help the athlete understand better the nature of the movement. In fact, these strategies proved fruitful as the student managed to successfully learn both techniques of the Snatch and Clean & Jerk and has also competed in local competitions.

Moreover, during his time in the gym with us, he forged new friendships with his peers and has also become more confident in his ability to overcome challenges. Throughout the past years we have also



worked with several individuals on the autism spectrum who often struggle with sensory processing and social interaction. Hence, in our sessions, we create a structured environment with clear routines and visual schedules, fostering predictability and reducing anxiety. Moreover, given the noisy nature of the sport (dropping of barbells) we tried to minimize the noise as much as possible by using drop pads. We

also made sure that the gym physical environment was appropriate for the athlete with appropriate lighting and space to work. Furthermore, we encourage peer interactions through group activities in warm-up and cooldowns to nurture social skills and create a sense of belonging within the gym environment.

We also work with a good number of young athletes with ADHD which is characterized by difficulties in attention, impulse control, and hyperactivity. To cater to these challenges, we implement short, training sessions which keeps that athletes continuously on task to maintain engagement and prevent boredom for example while other athletes are resting between sets, athletes with ADHD would have an extra exercise that is of lower intensity aimed at addressing a particular weakness. Of course, we learned that as such athletes grow older, they become more accustomed to the training and train like all other athletes. Moreover, we set clear, achievable goals and always provided immediate feedback after each set to reinforce focus and self-regulation. Finally, we also incorporated mindfulness techniques, such as box breathing exercises to help the athlete control their attention and emotions especially when attempting heavier and maximal lifts. This empowered individuals with ADHD to channel their energy effectively.

Currently, we are also working with a young girl with hearing impairment who may face communication barriers in traditional coaching settings. For this reason, we utilize visual aids such as written instructions to ensure effective communication. Additionally, we incorporate several visual and kinaesthetic cues to aid the athlete in understanding and executing the lifts. In fact, she is currently doing very well, demonstrating great improvement from one competition to another. Given the



location of our gym we also coach a good number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds who may encounter financial constraints and limited access to resources. For this reason, we offer free coaching and training program to such individuals to give them the opportunity to equally succeed. Moreover, we try to move away from being just coaches and try to become mentors for such students and help them develop holistically by helping them also grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Finally, by instilling values of discipline, resilience, and goal setting through weightlifting, we empower individuals to transcend socio-economic limitations and strive for excellence.

In conclusion, Olympic weightlifting emerges as a transformative avenue for enhancing physical, emotional, and social well-being across diverse populations. By tailoring coaching strategies to address the unique needs of individuals with disability, we witness profound improvements in their motor skills, self-confidence, and social integration. Furthermore, by offering inclusive and accessible training opportunities, we reaffirm our belief that weightlifting is a sport for all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Through its inherent principles of discipline, determination, and inclusivity, weightlifting transcends barriers, empowering individuals to unlock their full potential and thrive both inside and outside the gym.

*Jesmond Joseph Caruana*

*President, coach*

## SLOVAKIA

*Partner: Krasno nad Kysucou weightlifting club*

The project has played an instrumental role in furthering our goals and passions as a weightlifting club. It has provided us the opportunity to emphasize weightlifting as a holistic sport beneficial for physical health, mental wellness, and overall discipline. The most noteworthy aspect of the project was how it fostered a vibrant, connected community through weightlifting, enhancing cooperation among partners, and sharing successful practices. It has solidified our belief in the transformative nature of the sport and its potential to positively impact individuals and communities.

Engaging clubs and institutions was a vital aspect of the project. We involved local schools, encouraging children to participate in weightlifting as an extracurricular activity. The project also engaged with the



members centralized military sport organization, which oversees the progression of talented young weightlifters. Further we have worked with other weightlifting clubs from Slovakia and notably also with the local government.

During the course of the project, we hosted events which reached audiences beyond our initial scope. The presence of reigning Youth World Weightlifting medallist, Vladimir Macura, offered a unique opportunity for spectators and young participants alike, as they watched him compete, asked questions, and were inspired by his skill. His active participation, coupled with the strong turnout of spectators, helped transform the event into a powerful stand for weightlifting supporters and hopefully turning point for the naysayers.

We strongly believe that the project greatly contributed to the raised awareness about the importance of weightlifting as a sport. Through the project, we managed to resonate with people by focusing on the benefits of weightlifting, including improved health, increased strength, and enhanced flexibility among weightlifters. The promotions through traditional and social media also played a significant role in escalating awareness and improving the perception of the sport.

*Vladimir Kubala*

*Member of the club*

## ITALY

*Partner: Institute for Olympic Weightlifting (IOW) – Nuova Pesistica Triestina*

A.S.D. Nuova Pesistica Triestina has always been committed to promote physical well-being among individuals with special needs in the local community. Thanks to the cooperation with several associations, it had the chance to extend the benefits deriving from weightlifting to a vast range of athletes.

The association collaborative efforts with like-minded organizations such as A.S.D. Taekwondo Olimpico Trieste and Polisportiva Fuoric'entro A.S.D. gave the chance to the association to promote well-being, health, and personal growth among each other's members, particularly those with special needs.

The collaboration between A.S.D. Nuova Pesistica Triestina and A.S.D. Taekwondo Olimpico Trieste is focused in providing physical preparation for athletes with disabilities. Thanks to specialized trainings,



specifically tailored to the requirements of taekwondo, individuals with disabilities can develop strength, agility, and confidence. All these skills create a solid foundation for their journey in taekwondo.

This partnership exemplifies the commitment of both associations to empower individuals with disabilities and facilitate their

participation in sports. Furthermore, A.S.D. Nuova Pesistica Triestina actively engages with Polisportiva Fuoric'entro A.S.D. to promote the inclusive sport called "Baskin" within the community. By organizing joint events and initiatives, the associations work together to raise awareness and encourage participation among individuals of all abilities.

This collaborative effort underscores the belief in the transformative power of sports to foster social integration and mutual respect. The commitment to social activities of A.S.D. Nuova Pesistica Triestina is highlighted by the number of activities and initiatives promoted by association to create a supportive and inclusive environment where all members feel valued, empowered, and finally can enjoy the benefits of physical activity.

The set of activities may vary from structured training sessions to community events, to social parties, the focus remains on promoting physical and mental well-being within the community. Thanks to partnerships with associations such as A.S.D. Taekwondo Olimpico Trieste and Polisportiva Fuoric'entro A.S.D., the association continues in its social effort, actively promoting social cohesion. It is evident that, in the future, A.S.D. Nuova Pesistica Triestina will continue to be dedicated to its mission of promoting well-being, health, and personal development for all members of the community, regardless of ability.

*Federico Legovich*

*Chairman*