

Craiova's Sports Facilities and Their Effect on Sports Performance

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ABSTRACT. This study explores the correlation between investments in sports infrastructure and sport performance in the city of Craiova, Romania. Known for its rich cultural history and sporting tradition, Craiova has undergone significant infrastructural transformations over the past two decades. The article reviews key facilities and their influence on local, national and international sporting achievements, highlighting public investment, access to modern amenities, and community engagement.

Keywords: Craiova, sports infrastructure, public investment, urban development, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Craiova, known as the capital of the historic Oltenia region, is located on the Jiu River, in the centre of this region, in a relatively low-lying lowland area, a city with rich historical tradition, which was first mentioned in 1475.

Craiova is an important urban Centre with a well-developed infrastructure, hosting numerous sporting events, and is a recognized Centre of Romanian sport with traditional teams and high-quality sports facilities. In the last two decades there have been major investments in sports infrastructure.

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AIM

This article aims to analyze the relationship between the development of sports infrastructure and athletic performance in Craiova, Romania. It investigates how recent public investments in facilities such as stadiums, sports halls, swimming pools, and recreational parks have influenced both professional and amateur sports.

Sports Infrastructure: Sports Facilities and Investments

Craiova currently has an extensive network of modern sports facilities serving both professional and amateur athletes. These include football stadiums, multi-purpose halls, swimming pools and various pitches, many of which have been recently built or rehabilitated with public support.

Ion Oblemenco Stadium (Stadionul Ion Oblemenco)

It is one of the most impressive sports arenas in Romania, with a capacity of 30944 seats.

The construction of the stadium, started in 2015 on the site of the old stadium of the same name, cost €52 million, financed by public funds, and was inaugurated in 2017.

The stadium is home to the football teams C.S. Universitatea Craiova (Universitatea Craiova, 2025), one of the top-ranked teams in the national championship (Liga I), and FCU 1948 Craiova Fotbal Club, currently playing in Liga II, both teams consider themselves the successor of the successful University team. We observed that football clubs consider spending money on their team as a consumption activity. As consumers, club owners act as if they are maximizing a utility function where other variables, beside profits, appear as arguments; this might include playing success, stadium attendance, competitive balance, community building, et cetera (Baloga, et. al., 2011, p. 33).

C.S. Universitatea Craiova has won the Romanian Cup twice in recent years (2018, 2021) and was national vice-champion in the 2019-2020 season (Universitatea Craiova, *Stadionul*, 2025).

The first stadium in this location was inaugurated in 1967 with an international match between Romania and Poland (2-2). Famous teams such as Bayern Munich (1981-1982 season) and Benfica Lisbon (1982-1983 UEFA Cup semi-final) have played on the pitch.

Since 1996 the stadium has been named after Ion Oblemenco, known as “The Gunner of the Bănie”, a former legend of Universitatea Craiova.

Between 2015-2017 the original stadium was demolished and completely rebuilt; the works being completed in just two years. The new stadium was inaugurated on November 10, 2017, in a match in which Universitatea received the visit of Slavia Prague (friendly match).

The newly built stadium has a capacity of 30,944 seats, all covered, and is one of the largest and most modern stadiums in Romania, with a modern architecture and a distinctive roof that mimics the shape of a volcano (Universitatea Craiova, *Stadionul*, 2025).

The stadium is mainly used for football matches but can also host other sporting events or occasionally concerts or other cultural events.



Fig. 1. Ion Oblemenco

Craiova Sport Hall (Sala Polivalentă Craiova)

Craiova’s Sala Polivalentă is used for handball, basketball, volleyball and other indoor sports. It also hosts cultural events and is a source of attraction for the local community.

The venue was opened in 2012, after the old Sports Hall was destroyed by fire in 1994, and quickly became a focal point for sporting and cultural events.

The hall has a seating capacity of 4,215, including 109 VIP seats for sports events, and can be expanded to over 5,000 seats for concerts and other types of events, with state-of-the-art technological equipment, including high-performance lighting and sound systems (RAADPFL, 2025).

The hall is used for basketball, volleyball and handball competitions, hosting teams participating in national competitions in women’s handball (Liga Florilor; 6th place, season 2023-2024), men’s basketball (National League, 11th place, season 2023-2024), men’s volleyball (A1 Division, 9th place, season 2023-2024) and women’s volleyball (A1 Division, 9th place, season 2023-2024).

Craiova’s Sala Polivalentă is also ideal for organizing international sports, in January 2025 Romania’s tennis team will receive the visit of the Bulgarian team in the Davis Cup (Digi Sport, 2025).

In addition to sports competitions, the hall hosts concerts (during the We Love Retro event, the largest retro party in Romania, in 2019 (Gazeta de Sud, 2025) Captain Hollywood Project, No Mercy, Mr. President, Rednex, and Brooklyn Bounce Dj), theatre performances, exhibitions, wedding fairs and other events.

Among the modern facilities of the hall, we can mention the multifunctional court, which allows adaptation for various sports, with interchangeable surfaces, the electronic table with LED screens for displaying scores and information

Carol I Swimming Pool (Bazinul de înot “Carol I”)

The “Carol I” swimming pool was rehabilitated and inaugurated in 2020 (Hantea, 2025), after a period of inactivity of more than two decades, with swimming lessons for students aged 6 to 18 years have been organized since November 2022.

Originally built in 1978, the pool was closed in 1996-1997 due to deterioration and lack of funds. The total value of the rehabilitation works that started in 2019 amounted to 2,380,800 lei, with funding coming from the local budget. These works included changing the floor tiles, redoing the interior and exterior installations as well as the central heating system.

The pool is 25 meters long, 9.6 meters wide and between 1.4 and 1.9 meters deep, with five swimming lanes. The building has changing rooms, showers, toilets and is equipped with modern dehumidification and water treatment systems.

Initially, the pool was intended exclusively for the students of the “Carol I” National High School for physical education and sports classes. Later on, access was extended to other children and students from Craiova, by appointment, and swimming lessons were organized.

In Romania some of the swimming pools after the pandemics were still closed, therefore most of the children who were attending swimming classes have switched to basketball, football, tennis and track and field practices (Negru et al., 2020, p.50).

The Carol I pool exemplifies how local investment can bring abandoned sports infrastructure back to life.

Nicolae Romanescu Park Sports Center (Centrul Sportiv din Parcul Nicolae Romanescu)

The Nicolae Romanescu Park Sports Center offers facilities for recreational activities, including football pitches, outdoor fitness areas and running tracks, and is one of the largest and most beautiful natural parks in Romania, with various facilities for sports and leisure activities.

Inside the park you can enjoy a variety of activities in the following categories:

Tennis

There are four professional tennis courts within the Pro Tennis Club, covered with a bubble heated up to 20°C, so tennis can be practiced all year round. The tennis complex has a training room, bar and terrace, showers, changing rooms, coaches, a physical trainer and nurse.

Equestrian sports

The park is also home to one of the largest racecourses in the country, covering more than 17 hectares and containing three horse stables and a wooden gazebo.

As the largest in the country, the racecourse was built in 1903 for equestrian competitions. After World War II, show jumping competitions were organized. In 1957 the equestrian section restarted its activities, founding the Club Sportiv Orășenesc, the section being registered in the Romanian Equestrian Federation in 1960. In 1969 a stable for 12 horses was built, replaced in 1970 with a new one for 21 horses (D.Z. Arena Constructiilor, 2017).

The racecourse has hosted numerous show jumping competitions in the past, including the first Balkan equestrian championship in Romania. Unfortunately, however, due to its state of repair, no more competitions were organized after 2000.

In recent years there have been reports that the local authorities plan to modernize the racecourse to bring it up to international standards, with the aim of organizing major sports competitions.

Other sport activities

Along with tennis and equestrian sports, Nicolae Romanescu Park is a popular place for other sport and leisure activities, the park's alleys offer ideal jogging and cycling trails, and it also hosts a Zoo which is one of the oldest in Romania (opened in 1906) and has a lot of exotic animals.

Nicolae Romanescu Park is a national monument, one of the most representative examples of landscape art in Romania.

Parcul Tineretului (Youth Park)

Parcul Tineretului has a long history, being established in 1882 on the Mofleni estate, as a place to combine relaxation with physical activity. The local authorities invested in modernizing the park's sports infrastructure and the

park was given its current name in 2009, with the inauguration of the tennis courts being carried out by former tennis legends Ilie Năstase and Mansour Bahrami.

Currently the Youth Park is equipped with several sports courts (RAADPFL2, 2025):

- Tennis - 4 approved courts.
- Football - 4 small synthetic grass fields
- Basketball - 2 synthetic surface courts.
- Table Tennis - 10 concrete tables.
- Chess - 10 tables.
- Roller and skate track.
- Mini golf course.
- 12 km of paved jogging and cycling paths.
- Outdoor fitness areas.
- Climbing and extreme sports areas inaugurated in 2022, realized through the project **Basecamp** (Basecamp, 2025).



Fig. 2. Năstase and Bahrami at the inauguration of the tennis courts
(Gazeta de Sud, 2009, <https://www.gds.ro/Actualitate/2009-10-31/Ilie-Nastase-si-Bahrami-meci-in-ploaie/>),

The local administration plans to expand the park's sports infrastructure by adding new courts, including for less traditional sports such as rugby or padel or even creating mountain biking trails. More Olympic sports would be interesting to be also included since some Olympic ball games were included in the program, and then taken out from there, either because of their popularity routes are fought their presence in the tournament again. In such sports as tennis or rugby and golf. During the hundred years of Olympics, nearly, a number of interesting sport balls appeared on the program, and has been forgotten (Bíró et. al., 2016, p. 200). There is also talk of installing night lighting so the pitches can be used in the evening.

Craiova's Youth Park offers a modern infrastructure and a pleasant environment for exercise and training. Unfortunately, however, some pitches (football, tennis and minigolf) can only be used by appointment after payment of a fee (football: 65 lei per hour from 08.00-18.00; 75 lei per hour from 18.00-21.00; tennis: 13 lei per hour from 08.00-13.00 and 15 lei per hour from 18.00-21.00; mini-golf: 6.5 lei per hour from 08.00-18.00 and 7.5 lei per hour from 18.00-21.00).

Fantasy Park

Fantasy Park is a theme park, opening on June 1, 2024, International Children's Day, and is aimed at visitors of all ages, with children's playgrounds inspired by fairy tales and fairy tales.

The park also features a fitness area with outdoor exercise equipment.

Work is currently underway on a skatepark to be completed in the near future. The estimated value of the project is around €2.9 million, which is more expensive than building the park. The tender for the project has attracted great interest with several companies submitting bids.

Once finalized, the skatepark will complete the offer of urban sports (skateboarding, rollerblading, BMX) in the municipality, a category of infrastructure which had been previously missing in Craiova.

Water Park Craiova

Water Park Craiova is a modern leisure and water fun complex in Craiova, opened in 2017 and operating year-round with indoor and outdoor facilities.

Along with the swimming pools, water slides and sauna intended for the public eager to have fun, the water park also contains a fitness room for maintaining health and fitness, and swimming courses are also conducted for those interested. For those who want to swim, there is a 1250 square meter outdoor swimming pool.

Also, for sports, an area with courts for beach soccer, beach tennis and beach volleyball has been set up.

Among the future plans there is information that towards the end of 2024 the University of Craiova has obtained funding through PNRR 8 million euro for the construction of a sports complex that will include an Olympic swimming pool (50x25 meters) and a training pool (25x12.5 meters) (Grosu, 2024). This complex will be intended for the university's students for both sports competitions and recreation.

The major sports clubs in Craiova

Craiova is home to several renowned sports clubs active in various disciplines:

Universitatea Craiova: the football team with a remarkable history, nicknamed "The Champion of One Great Love", is one of the most loved teams in Romania. The club has a strong fan base and has won numerous trophies over the years.

The team's record is impressive: 4 times Romanian champion (1973-1974, 1979-1980, 1980-1981, 1990-1991), 8 times winner of the Romanian Cup (1976-1977, 1977-1978, 1980-1981, 1982-1983, 1990-1991, 1992-1993, 2017-2018, 2020-2021), winner of the Romanian Super Cup in 2021, UEFA Cup semi-finalist in the 1982-1983 season and European Champions Cup quarterfinalist in 1981-1982.

At the beginning of 2025 the team was in title contention, ranking in the top half of the standings.

The club also has a women's soccer team that in the 2023-2024 season was promoted to the second league.

Sport Club Municipal Craiova is a public sports club founded as a public institution subordinated to the City Hall of Craiova and the City Council of Craiova, being established in 2006.

The Municipal Sports Club was established with teams for women's basketball, men's basketball, women's handball, women's and men's volleyball, at the moment operating the teams for women's handball, men's basketball and men's volleyball, respectively boxing, kempo and equestrian sports.

In the 2017-2018 season the women's handball team achieved the notable feat of winning the EHF Cup. In the final, held in Craiova's Sala Polivalenta, SCM Craiova defeated the Norwegian team Vipers Kristiansand 30-25, thus making European handball history (Agerpres, 2018).

More recently, the club stands out for its performances in boxing, with Craiova's sportsmen and sportswomen winning a lot of medals in national competitions and in kempo, both in national and international competitions.

In addition to the big clubs mentioned, Craiova has many private clubs and associations that complete the sports landscape. There are court tennis clubs (e.g. the CSU Craiova tennis section, private clubs of the same profile) that organize courses for juniors, martial arts clubs (karate, judo, taekwondo), sports dance, bodybuilding and fitness, children's football schools, as well as cycling and athletics groups. These smaller entities help popularize sport at the grassroots level and provide opportunities for participation for different segments of the population.

An important role is also played by the Dolj County Directorate for Sport and Youth, which together with the City Hall and the City Council supports the organization of amateur sports competitions and events.

Promotion of sport in Craiova

Craiova City Hall and local sport organizations actively support the development of sport through investments in infrastructure and organization of sport events. The city hosts football competitions, tennis tournaments, handball championships and events for running and cycling enthusiasts.

Craiova has a diversified sports infrastructure and organizes large-scale events, the city demonstrates that sport is a central element of urban life, offering opportunities for all ages and levels of training.

CONCLUSION

Craiova's evolution in terms of sports infrastructure offers a compelling case for urban sports planning in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Continued support for facility expansion and grassroots initiatives remains vital to sustaining this trajectory.

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