

Interview with ICSSPE's President – Professor PhD Rares Stanescu

1. Having recently been elected Vice-President of ICSSPE, what does this new role represent for you personally and for your vision as part of ICSSPE?

Being elected Vice-President of ICSSPE is both a personal honor and a professional responsibility. On a personal level, it represents a deep validation of the years of dedication I've invested in the fields of sport, physical education, and science because I was managing in these years different types of organizations like Sport Federations, Sport Clubs, International Associations and Departments. It also reflects the trust and confidence that my peers and colleagues within the global community have placed in my leadership and vision.

From a broader perspective, this role offers a unique platform to help shape the strategic direction of ICSSPE. As Vice-President, I see a vital opportunity to reinforce ICSSPE's mission of promoting evidence-based policies, inclusivity, and sustainable development through physical education and sport. My vision includes strengthening collaborations between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers all over the world. I also aim to promote innovation in physical education and sport science, ensuring they are accessible, equitable, and aligned with global development goals. Ultimately, this role is not just about leadership, it's about service. Service to the community, to the values ICSSPE stands for, and to the shared goal of harnessing sport and physical activity to build healthier, more inclusive societies.

2. Could you walk us through your academic and professional journey — what led you from teaching sport management & tennis training to international leadership positions?

I graduated from the National University of Physical Education and Sports of Bucharest specializing in tennis, a master's degree in Sport Management, and a PhD and Habilitation in Sport Science and Physical Education. In 2013 I was elected as Director of Communication and International Relations and Erasmus Institutional Coordinator in my university and so my international trip started.

My academic and professional journey has been shaped by a deep passion for sport—not only as physical activity, but as a powerful social and educational tool.

I began my career grounded in the fundamentals: teaching sport management and tennis training. These early years allowed me to understand the practical side of sport, from coaching and athlete development to the organizational and logistical demands of running sport programs. Working closely with students and athletes gave me insight into the challenges and opportunities within grassroots sport and education systems.

Academically, I pursued advanced studies in sport science (my PhD and my Habilitation), management (master's degree), and policy, which broadened my perspective. I became increasingly interested in how sport could be leveraged to influence public health, education, gender equity, and social development at a systemic level managing a lot of Erasmus Plus projects. This curiosity led me to engage in research (over 30 articles published in international reviews), international collaborations (as Director of International Relations and President of International organizations), and eventually policy advising.

As I participated in global conferences (keynote speaker in World Tennis Coaches Conferences-2015,2021,2025) cross-cultural projects (project manager in Erasmus + Sport projects), and networks like ICSSPE, I saw the critical need for leaders who could bridge the gap between academic knowledge, field practice, and policymaking. I took on roles in national (Romanian Tennis Federation and Football-Tennis Federation) and international sport organizations (International Tennis Federation), contributed to global initiatives, and served on advisory boards—each step expanding my scope and influence.

It's been a journey of connecting the micro-level experience of coaching and teaching with the macro-level vision of shaping international sport policy. And through it all, I've stayed grounded in education, believing that knowledge-sharing is key to sustainable impact. My path wasn't linear, but it's been driven by a consistent belief in sport's transformative potential.

3. Your research has included social entrepreneurship, coaching, management, and sustainable development in sport. Which of these areas do you see as especially under-explored or as a big opportunity on the global ICSSPE stage?

While all four areas are important, I see social entrepreneurship in sport as especially under-explored and a major opportunity on the ICSSPE stage. We often talk about sport as a tool for health, education, or diplomacy, but less attention is given to how innovative business models—led by young entrepreneurs, NGOs, and local communities—can drive sustainable change. Social entrepreneurship can make sport more inclusive, bring opportunities to underserved groups, and create self-sustaining initiatives that don't rely solely on government or donor funding. Coupled with management and coaching innovation, and framed by the principles of sustainable development, this could be a powerful way for ICSSPE to showcase how sport is not just a game, but also a catalyst for social and economic transformation worldwide.

4. In your view, what are the most pressing challenges facing physical education, sport science, and sport policy in Eastern Europe / at global level today (e.g. inequalities, digital transformation, environmental sustainability, youth engagement)?

In my view, four pressing challenges stand out. I will start with the youth engagement because there is a global trend toward sedentary behavior, especially among young people

(smartphones, screen time, remote schooling etc.). Physical Education and Sport need to compete with many alternative (often less physical) leisure options.

Physical Education classes are sometimes undervalued; time allocated, quality of instruction, teacher training are insufficient. This leads to PE being seen as non-essential, easy to cut when budgets are tight. Mental health, well-being and social isolation are increasingly intertwined with physical inactivity and unfortunately COVID-19 pandemic amplified these issues.

Then I will underline the inequalities of access—many young people, especially in rural or disadvantaged communities in Eastern Europe and beyond, still lack quality physical education and inclusive opportunities.

Regarding digital transformation I will say that technology offers powerful tools for teaching and research, it also risks widening the digital divide and raises questions about ethics and data use.

Last but not the least environmental sustainability—sport must both adapt to climate change and reduce its own footprint, from facilities to events. Addressing these challenges requires stronger cross-sector collaboration, so that sport and science truly serve healthier, more inclusive societies.

5. Considering your role in communication and foreign relations, how would you like to strengthen ICSSPE's partnerships?

The communication and international relations are linked. In my role, I would like to strengthen ICSSPE's partnerships by focusing on three directions. First, deepen collaboration with universities and research institutes to ensure that our work is grounded in cutting-edge science and accessible to the next generation. Second, building bridges with international sport federations, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations so that sport and physical education are included in broader agendas such as health, education, and sustainability. And third, enhancing communication with our existing partners by creating platforms for knowledge exchange, joint projects, and regular dialogue. In this way, ICSSPE can become a hub that connects research, policy, and practice globally.

6. Given your teaching and research experience, what advice would you offer to young researchers, sports educators or coaches who want to make a difference internationally?

If I were to give advice to young researchers, educators, or coaches who want to make a difference internationally, I would start with this: stay curious and let evidence guide you. In sport and education, credibility comes from solid research and a commitment to learning across disciplines—whether that's health, psychology, technology, or sustainability.



At the same time, remember that contexts differ. What works in one country or culture may not work in another. Approach every new environment with humility, respect, and the willingness to adapt. True international impact comes from listening as much as from teaching.

Communication is also essential. Learn how to share your knowledge clearly—through research papers, presentations, but also through digital platforms and public outreach. Today, being visible and accessible can open doors to collaborations you never imagined.

And speaking of collaboration—do not try to walk this journey alone. My experience in team sports showed me that a player is nothing without the team! Join international associations, exchange programs, and research projects. The greatest progress in our field rarely comes from individuals working in isolation, but from diverse teams who learn from one another.

Finally, never lose sight of why we do this work. Whether you're coaching a young athlete, teaching a class, or writing an article, your ultimate goal is to improve lives, expand opportunities, and make sport and education more inclusive. Ask yourself: how does my work contribute to healthier, more resilient communities?

So, my message is simple: combine scientific rigor with empathy, courage, and an open mind. If you do that, you won't just make a difference internationally, you will help shape a healthier and more inclusive world.

7. If you had to describe your vision for ICSSPE's future in just one sentence, what would it be?

*My vision for ICSSPE is **to inspire** the next generation of researchers, educators, and coaches to make sport and physical education a driver of global well-being.*