

## CASE STUDY

Described for the project: "The Hexagonal Leader"

### Name of the organization

PADEL IRELAND

### Website of the organization

[www.padel-ireland.ie](http://www.padel-ireland.ie)

### Logotype of the organization



### Type of organization

- Business organization
- Public administration
- NGO's
- Others (what kind?) SPORTS ORGANISATION / INDUSTRY

### Size of the organization

- Small
- Medium
- Large

## Economic sector

SPORT / BUILDING

## Brief description of the organization

Padel Ireland is a small company that was created in Ireland to help with the introduction of padel tennis in the country. It has been operating since 2011. The company builds padel courts and also manages clubs and sells padel related accessories. They also a wide range of services to clubs including padel instructor training programmes in conjunction with the Padel Federation of Ireland, padel lessons, organisation of tournaments, open days and clinics, the distribution of padel equipment and maintenance and repair of padel courts.

Padel is a sport which combines action with fun and social interaction. It's a great sport for players of all ages and skills, as it is both quick and easy to pick up. Most players get the basics within the first half an hour of playing so that they can enjoy the game. Padel is not as dominated by strength, technique and serve as it happens in Tennis and therefore is an ideal game for men, women and youth to compete together. An important skill is match-craft, as points are won rather by strategy than by sheer strength and power.

## Case study description (situation / the problem they are facing) [max 2000 characters]

The company had to introduce a new sport in a country where there was no structure, no players or facilities, no recognition and the sport of padel was quite unknown. The company managed to introduce padel as a sport in the country, built courts in several cities, started two clubs of their own and has offered support to all clubs and facilities in Ireland. Since the start they managed to get higher authorities involved in the project and the Minister for Sport inaugurated the first court in Ireland. Since then the sport has gained recognition by the Irish Sports Council. Ireland has also joined the European Padel Federation (FEPA) and the International Padel Federation (FIP) and are full members since the end of 2019.

Despite the tough challenge of starting from scratch, they now also face a situation where the sports sector has been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. Decisions made at the corporate level has seen the company rise to success in a relatively short period of time. Good management and persistence have made the company resilient and open to feedback. Padel Ireland flexible and entrepreneurial management has been quite open to hearing feedback from players and clubs.

Despite small and humble beginnings, the company has achieved great sporting achievements including international competition at the top level. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the sports industry but padel has mostly continued to operate in Ireland as non-contact sports were allowed to be played in the country. In fact only golf, tennis and padel were allowed to be played during lockdown situations.

## Suggested solutions (added pros and cons)

Padel Ireland have continued to operate in tough economic times and have continued support for all clubs and facilities despite having a very tight budget. Despite the adverse circumstances of having to introduce a new sport in the country and then facing economic crisis due to the pandemic situation, Padel Ireland has adapted to the new environment implementing measures that have been positive, creative and enterprising.

The process has not been easy for the company management, having to deal with many different issues and challenges along the way. From the outset the company decide to operate on a tight budget and start small, focused initiatives. Quick fix investments were avoided so that the sport could be grown gradually, in an organic way.

The initial temptation was to invest heavily and grow the sport immediately. However, the decision was taken very early on to start operating with a small budget and introduce the sport of padel in a country where the sport was totally unknown and inexistent in an organic way. The decision has paid dividends, as the sport has grown gradually and organically, making facilities available as the sports has grown in number of players and interest from the public.

Acceptance of padel in Ireland has not come easy, as tennis has seen the growth of padel worldwide as a threat to their sport. Ireland has not been oblivious to this growing trend internationally. Tennis players, managers of clubs and institutions have tried to defend their interests in the face of a new up and coming sport. The decision was taken not to try and oppose tennis, but to try and grow the sport alongside, as it had happened in many countries before. The idea behind was to encourage tennis clubs and players to see padel as an ally rather than an enemy. In fact, the growth of padel in Ireland and worldwide has had a positive impact on tennis clubs. The clubs have seen a rise in the number of players coming to their facilities and the initial fear has subsided. Clubs have realized that introducing padel has meant higher number of players and more people coming to enjoy their facilities.

Padel is the fastest growing sport worldwide. In recent years padel has grown rapidly and is now played by over 8 million players worldwide. While statistically speaking this still makes padel a relatively small sport, especially when compared to the biggest sport in the world, which is football. In comparison, approximately 265 million people play football according to FIFA data, which is 4% of the entire world population.

Even though padel has technically only started from relatively small numbers, it has a great growth potential and grows at a rate of roughly 250,000 new players every year. Currently, Spain and Argentina are the largest padel nations in the world. Spain has more than 11,500 courts and Argentina more than 8,000. Aside from those two countries, padel is also growing in other markets around the world and this is happening fast.

While it is difficult to estimate exactly how many padel players there currently are around the world, the worldwide sales of padel rackets are a good indicator of growth. In 2002, 83,000 padel rackets were sold, and in 2017 the number was rising to 409,000. Particularly since 2010, the world of padel has

been growing and thriving consistently and is now viewed by people all over the world as the fastest growing sport.

### Chosen solution

Padel Ireland decided back in 2014 to try and target Public Authorities and set up padel facilities alongside tennis. This continued the policy of implementing and spreading padel on a small budget. Since then they have managed to get funding for the building of padel courts and also of a complete padel club (within a tennis setting), which is the first of several public projects to be completed.

The first public facility built at Bushy Park in south Dublin in May 2017 and it was an initiative of the biggest public authority in the country: the Dublin City Council. Bushy Park Tennis & Padel Club started with 9 tennis courts and 4 padel courts. Since the opening of this community based Club, many padel initiatives have taken place and new clubs will be built as a result.

Dublin City Council took the initiative in terms of vision. They were convinced that padel could make a difference to the community, bringing a sport to a public park and making it accessible to players of all ages. The facility in Bushy Park has grown to be the blueprint for future public facilities for public councils in Ireland. The Dublin City Council has planned 3 new clubs and many public authorities have got in touch with them to initiate similar projects in the counties. Many more padel facilities will be built in Ireland in the future, taking Bushy Park as an example.

However, the impact of the decision of Padel Ireland to contact public authorities is now reaching far beyond councils. Many tennis clubs and private initiatives are being planned to emulate the success achieved at community level. The new clubs and facilities projected for 2021 will mean a good number of additional courts available in the country. The estimated number of new courts stands at 26 and three new council projects will also start in 2021.

### Rationale of the decision taken

There was very little money in the country to start facilities and investing private money with no possible initial return. A small budget approach and growing the sport organically was implemented to avoid failure at the outset. This decision has been proven to be the correct one.

Let's take a look at what has happened since the sport was introduced in Ireland in 2011. Padel Ireland was registered in May 2011 and the first court was set up in secondary school setting in October 2012. For three years that padel court was the only one in Ireland. There are now 8 clubs and 15 public courts in the country and 2 private padel courts spread around Dublin, Kildare, Portmarnock, Cavan and Belfast. However, this coming year the number of courts will more than double as new private and public facilities are being planned.

The decision to start building facilities in an organic way has made an impact. In the last few years the number of players has risen to over 7,000 and the Padel Federation of Ireland (PFI) was established, gaining recognition in the country (working alongside Tennis Ireland) and joining the Irish Sports Council. Ireland has also joined the European (FEPA) and International Padel Federation (FIP).

The Padel Federation of Ireland (PFI) was set up as a non-profit organisation and it was founded in 2011. Since its establishment, the PFI has made significant headway in the promotion of the sport of padel in Ireland. It is the PFI's aim to promote padel in Ireland, to maximise participation in padel, to provide support to players, coaches and organisations and to regulate and develop the sport of padel in Ireland. Since its establishment, the PFI has been working towards this aim in conjunction with a number of sporting organisations, wellness organisations and local authorities. These partnerships have borne great success, as is evident from the increasing levels of membership in our affiliated clubs, the opening of facilities across the country and the ever growing interest in the sport in Ireland.

Through these initiatives in Ireland the organization has brought interest to the new sport and has made a difference to so many players of different ages. The sporting landscape has changed in Ireland and it will continue to do so in the future.

### Solution implemented in practice

The assistance of public authorities has worked and it is growing. New projects are planned and will be undertaken in the next couple of years. The new clubs and facilities projected for 2021 will mean a good number of additional courts available in the country. The estimated number of new courts stands at 26 and three new council projects will also start in 2021.

The result of the solution implemented in practice by Padel Ireland has meant that the geographical spread of padel has grown in Ireland and it will spread even further, always in an organic way, adapting to the real demand for the sport, rather than based on quick fixes and investments that may not succeed.

The initiative of getting the Padel Federation of Ireland up and running has meant that the sport had official status from the very start.

Since the opening of the first court in a school, Padel Ireland has overseen the continued growth of padel in the country. Below is a summary of milestone events and initiatives taken since 2012:

- In October 2019, the Federación Internacional de Pádel/ International Padel Federation ('FIP') recognised the PFI as the official body to govern padel in Ireland. The FIP, founded in 1991, is the official world governing body for padel and this affiliation has helped enable the PFI to continue to grow the sport both domestically and on a global stage by granting Irish padel players eligibility to compete in international tournaments.

- The PFI has developed a programme for National Padel Teams to represent Ireland in European and global competitions. The National Team and the National Veterans Team are now eligible to represent Ireland in male and female international competitions, most recently in the European Championships which took place in October and November of last year respectively. The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the Padel World Championships are due to take place in Qatar in November of this year and this will be the first time that Irish athletes will be eligible to compete in the World Championships. The PFI is responsible for the selection and management of the various National Padel Teams.
- The PFI launched the 'Irish Padel Tour' a new padel circuit for all padel players in Ireland. This tour caters for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels of skills, with male, female and mixed competitions being organised at each of these skill levels. The tour consists of five preliminary local events across Ireland, which then culminate in the All-Ireland Padel Championship finals which have been contested in Bushy Park, Dublin for the past four years. The PFI rank the best players in Ireland based off performance at these events and there are currently over 500 'ranked' adult padel players in Ireland.
- Since 2017, The PFI has also organised a Junior All-Ireland Open Padel Tournament for school children across the country, an event which has also continued to grow year on year.
- A round of the Madison International, an international amateur padel tournament, has been organised in Dublin by the PFI for the past five years. The Madison International has taken place in 58 cities, in 30 different countries and in five continents across the world since its inception. Last year 33 cities hosted a round of this tournament, with the Dublin event recording the second highest number of participants and the most diverse field of contestants, with 18 different countries being represented in Bushy Park, Dublin.
- The PFI now organise courses for individuals who wish to become coaches in the sport of padel in full compliance with the requirements of the FIP. These courses take place twice a year and form a part of the certified national coaching programme which also ensures a continuing level of support and development for coaches following completion of these courses. The PFI has also begun the process of organising courses for individuals who wish to become padel umpires in Ireland.
- The PFI organise regular padel clinics in all affiliated clubs across the country. These clinics often include the involvement of the World Legends Padel Tour players as instructors. Padel camps and clinics are also organised through our affiliated clubs during holiday periods and mid-term breaks throughout the year for children aged 7 to 17. Over 400 children attended our most recent round of padel summer camps which shows a great interest in the continued growth of the sport.
- The PFI have become fully compliant with The Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations ('CVC Code'), in line with the 10-year National Sports Policy published

by Sport Ireland in 2018 which has the objective that all funded bodies be compliant with the CVC Code.

- The PFI have become involved with the Dublin City Council regarding the Dublin City Sport and Wellbeing Partnership. This initiative delivers programmes across Dublin to support communities increased participation in sport. As a part of this programme, children from communities in Dublin city have been able to attend padel camps organised by the PFI at no cost. The PFI are constantly engaging with Dublin City Council in relation to this partnership and provide a report to the Council on these matters every six months.
- The PFI have also participated in the operation of the 'Dublin Sportsfest' for the past three years. The Dublin Sportsfest is a week-long event in Dublin which seeks to promote and increase participation in sport across all sectors of society. The PFI have organised open days showcasing padel, the skills involved and the physical and mental health benefits which come from playing the sport.
- The PFI also organises programmes for people with intellectual disabilities and students in various schools who have learning difficulties.
- In October 2019, the PFI was chosen to become a Gaisce challenge partner. Gaisce - The President's Award - is a self-development programme for young people which seeks to enhance confidence and well-being through participation in personal, physical, community and team challenges. Young people will now be able to do their placement in PFI affiliated padel clubs throughout Ireland, before receiving a medal and certificate signed by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins.
- The PFI has become involved with the Sports Management division of University College Dublin. This allows eligible UCD students to undertake an internship with the PFI gaining relevant industry experience by being involved with the organisation of padel related activities and camps in the community.
- In 2018, the PFI were involved with RTÉ's Operation Transformation programme. Padel coaches in Bushy Park offered drop-in padel lessons to all participants as a part of the programme's goal to promote the practice of wellness through sport in Ireland. Operation Transformation operates in conjunction with Sport Ireland and the Local Sports Partnerships.

## Lesson learned

Involving public authorities is a slower process, but it is already paying dividends in terms of the numbers of people involved now in the sport, the growing number of clubs and the development of padel in the country. A small budget is no obstacle for getting an initiative such as this off the ground. A lot can be done with scant resources.

Because of this, padel has also been recognized as operating in Ireland by the European Padel Association (FEPA) and the International Padel Federation (FIP). Additionally, Ireland has already competed internationally at the highest level at European Tournaments. This coming year Ireland will also compete in the World Padel Championship.

The lessons learned can be broken down into:

**-Good decision making:** The Padel Ireland management team has been enterprising and patient in the establishment of the new sport of padel in Ireland. Because of this despite the low initial investment, the sport has developed and grown organically and gradually and it has paid dividends both financially and sporting wise.

The following aspects affected those decisions:

- management making good choices to many possible solutions
- use of approaches in decision making with particular emphasis on the creative approach
- right actions taken at each stage of decision-making by the management team
- identifying and dealing with barriers and obstacles in the decision-making process
- use of flexibility in decision-making and adjusting to the circumstances
- process of engaging the whole team in decision making

**-Manager Transition:** The incorporation of new management staff brought new talent and ideas and many different initiatives were developed to establish the sport in Ireland.

The following aspects affected the transition:

- description of the approach of managers to new environments
- description of actions taken by the management team at particular stages of strategic management
- description of methods and tools used by the managers to motivate and build trust in the organisation
- positive delegation process

**-Feedback:** The Padel Ireland team accepted feedback and criticism from the very start of the settling process. The challenge was quite vast as not only a new sport was being introduced in Ireland, but also a new company to make this new initiative happen.

The following aspects affected the feedback process:

- application of the principles and techniques of assertive communication in the course of providing feedback by management
- analysis of pitfalls and mistakes when giving feedback by managers
- recognising various types of biases and dealing with them in the feedback process

- description of the situations arising from giving feedback to the managers and giving positive and negative feedback and the consequences of these actions.

### Connection to the six skills depicted in the project

DECISION MAKING  
MANAGER TRANSITION  
FEEDBACK