

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Strategic Development of Wheelchair Basketball in Europe and Türkiye: A Systematic Review and Comparative Framework for Sustainable Growth

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This systematic review examines the strategic development of wheelchair basketball in Europe and Türkiye, focusing on athlete pathways, governance structures, and sustainability mechanisms. **Methods:** Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, four databases (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus) were systematically searched. From 731 records, 16 peer-reviewed studies met the inclusion criteria. A qualitative thematic synthesis was conducted, and methodological quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). **Results:** European systems demonstrate structured talent identification, formalized coach education, diversified funding models, and integrated sports science support. Reverse integration and gender-inclusive policies were associated with higher participation and institutional sustainability. In Türkiye, grassroots growth is evident; however, limitations persist regarding infrastructure, performance monitoring, and long-term funding continuity. **Conclusion:** Sustainable wheelchair basketball development requires coherent governance, standardized performance monitoring, and institutional partnerships. Adopting adaptable European best practices while accounting for Türkiye's socio-cultural context can strengthen competitive performance and inclusive participation.

## Keywords

Wheelchair Basketball, Strategic Development, Europe, Türkiye, Sustainable Growth

## INTRODUCTION

Wheelchair basketball is one of the most established and competitive Paralympic team sports, characterized by high physical demands and complex organizational structures. Beyond athletic performance, the sport plays a significant role in social inclusion, lifelong physical activity, and institutional development within adaptive sports systems. As participation expands globally, strategic development has become central to ensuring sustainability, competitive balance, and equitable access (Dehghansai et al., 2017).

Recent research emphasizes that long-term success in adaptive sports depends not only on individual athlete performance but also on coherent development systems involving governance structures, funding mechanisms, coach education, and talent identification pathways (Pate & Bragale,

2019; Ramsden et al., 2023). In wheelchair basketball, these strategic dimensions influence participation rates, performance outcomes, and the durability of clubs and national programs. However, the strategic organization of wheelchair basketball remains underexplored compared to its physiological and biomechanical aspects (Najafabadi et al., 2023).

European countries have developed relatively structured wheelchair basketball systems supported by national federations, formalized competition leagues, and international cooperation. In contrast, Türkiye represents a developing context in which grassroots participation has increased, yet institutional continuity, resource allocation, and performance monitoring remain inconsistent. Comparative analyses examining these differing developmental trajectories are limited in the existing literature (Schmid et al., 2024).

Current studies largely focus on athlete performance metrics or health-related outcomes,

while systematic evaluations of organizational strategies, policy frameworks, and development models are scarce (Latief et al., 2024; Mira et al., 2023). In particular, there is a lack of systematic reviews comparing strategic development approaches across regions and assessing how governance, funding, and talent pathways interact to shape sustainable growth in wheelchair basketball (Hardin & Hardin, 2003).

Therefore, the purpose of this systematic review is to examine and compare the strategic development of wheelchair basketball in Europe and Türkiye (Rossi et al., 2017; Minder et al., 2023). By synthesizing existing evidence, the study aims to identify effective development practices, highlight structural gaps, and propose a holistic framework to support sustainable growth and competitive success in adaptive basketball systems (Luarte-Rocha et al., 2022).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted as a systematic review in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. A comprehensive literature search was performed to identify studies examining the strategic development of wheelchair basketball in Europe and Türkiye.

### Search Strategy

Electronic searches were conducted in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and SPORTDiscus. The search strategy combined keywords and Boolean operators related to *wheelchair basketball*, *strategic development*, *governance*, *talent identification*, *Europe*, and *Türkiye*. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English.

### Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- (a) focused on wheelchair basketball,
- (b) examined strategic, organizational, policy, or developmental aspects, and
- (c) were conducted in European countries or Türkiye.

Studies focusing exclusively on physiological or biomechanical performance without a developmental context, non-peer-reviewed publications, editorials, and conference abstracts were excluded (Prior et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2022).

### Study Selection

All identified records were imported into a reference management system, and duplicates were removed. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts for relevance. Full-text screening was conducted for potentially eligible studies, with disagreements resolved through consensus.

The database search yielded 731 records, of which 16 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. The study selection process is presented in Figure 1 using the PRISMA flow diagram.

### Data Extraction and Synthesis

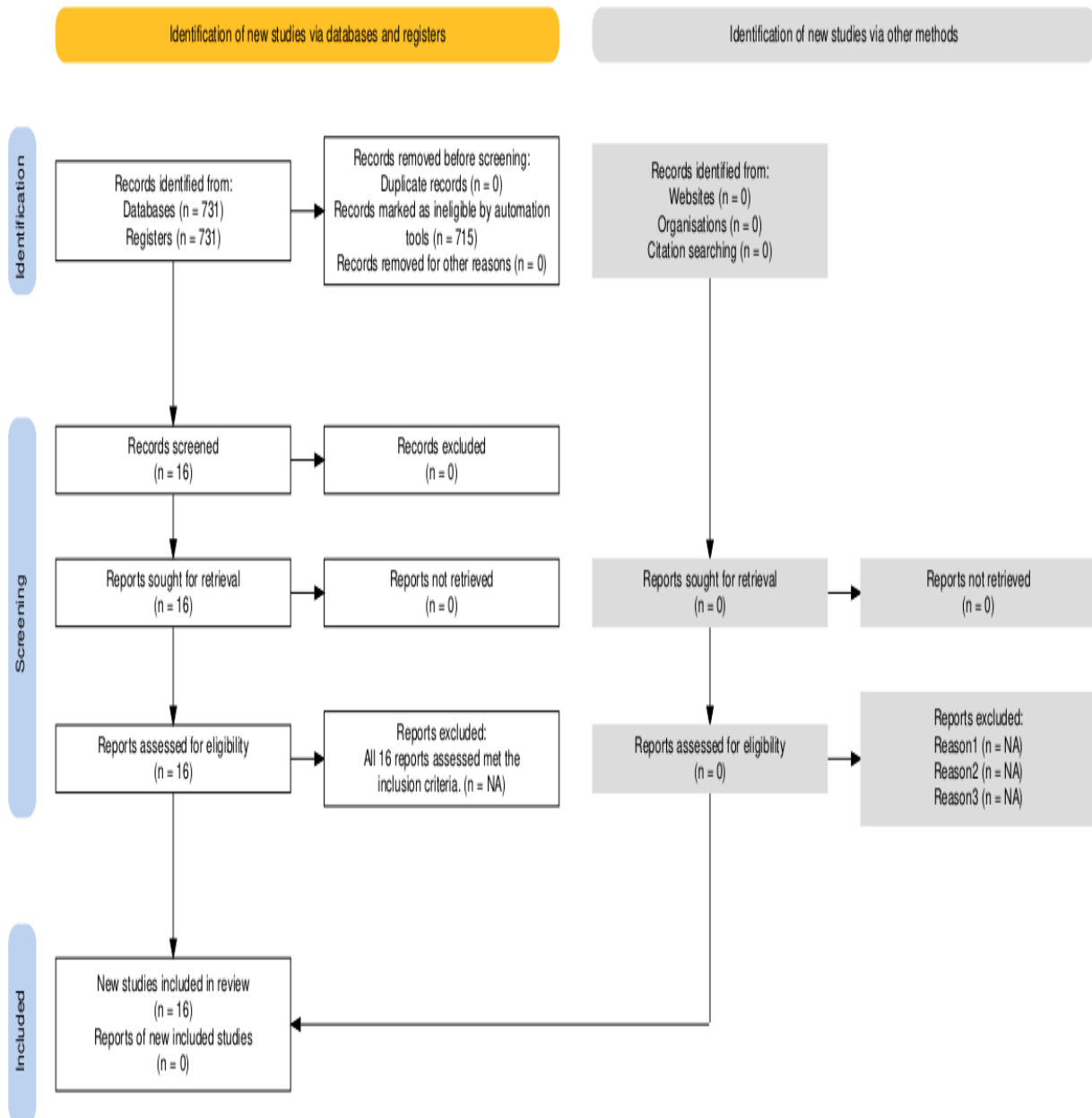
Data were extracted using a standardized form capturing publication characteristics, country context, study design, and strategic focus areas. A qualitative thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify recurring themes related to governance structures, funding mechanisms, talent pathways, coach education, and sustainability strategies.

### Methodological Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018). This tool was selected due to the methodological diversity of the included studies, encompassing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs.

Two reviewers independently evaluated each study according to the MMAT criteria relevant to its study design. The assessment focused on the clarity of research questions, appropriateness of data collection methods, adequacy of analysis, and coherence between data and conclusions. Any discrepancies in quality ratings were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

All included studies met the minimum quality thresholds required for inclusion in the synthesis. Overall, methodological quality ranged from moderate to high, with common limitations related to small sample sizes and descriptive study designs rather than critical methodological flaws. No study was excluded solely based on quality assessment results.



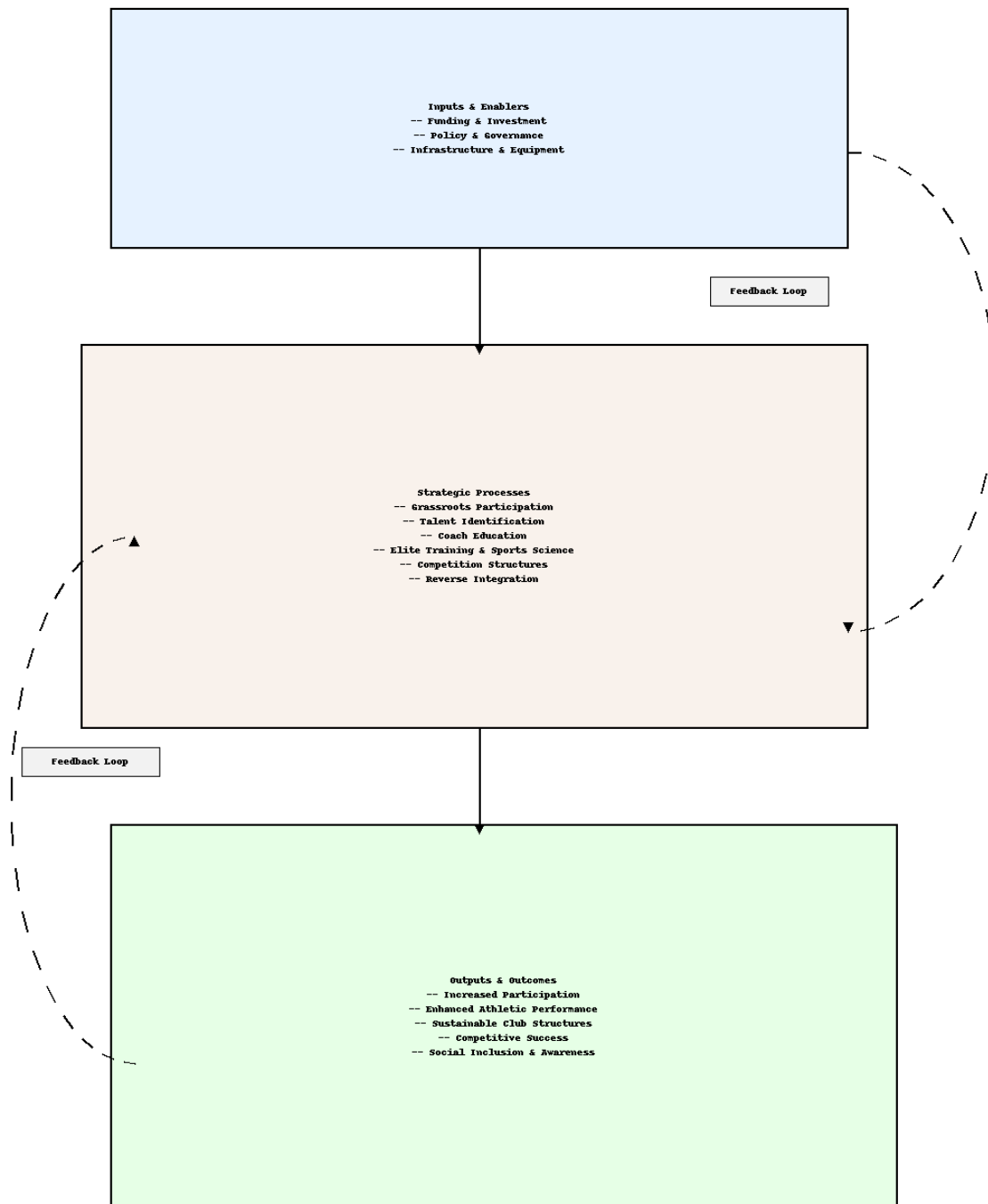
**Figure 1.** Prisma flow diagram of the study selection process

Note: The diagram illustrates the process of identifying, screening, assessing, and including studies in the systematic review. Of the 731 records initially identified, 715 were excluded based on their title and abstract. The full text of the remaining 16 reports was assessed for eligibility, all of which met the inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis.

Source: Created by the author, following the PRISMA 2020 statement. Adapted from Page, M. J., et al. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71, doi:10.1136/bmj.n71

## RESULTS

Sixteen studies meeting the inclusion criteria were analyzed through qualitative thematic synthesis. The reviewed literature revealed several recurring themes in the strategic development of wheelchair basketball, including governance frameworks, funding models, talent identification systems, coach education structures, inclusion policies, and performance support mechanisms. These themes formed the basis for the comparative analysis between European countries and Türkiye.



**Figure 2.** The Holistic Strategic Framework

Note: This conceptual framework, derived from the synthesis of this review's findings, illustrates the interconnected system of sustainable development. It posits that foundational Inputs & Enablers (Funding, Policy, Infrastructure) are necessary to activate key Strategic Processes (Talent ID, Coaching, Competition). The effective execution of

these processes generates positive Outputs & Outcomes (Performance, Participation, Sustainability). Feedback loops (indicated by dashed arrows) are critical for continuous learning and system improvement, ensuring the model adapts to new challenges and opportunities. Source: Developed by the author based on the systematic review findings.

Across European contexts, the findings indicate the presence of relatively structured governance models supported by national federations and league systems. Integrated development frameworks linking grassroots participation with elite performance pathways were frequently reported, emphasizing long-term athlete development and institutional coordination (Smolianov et al., 2014; Collins et al., 2018). Several studies highlighted the strategic importance of formal coach education systems, standardized talent identification processes, and access to sports science and medical support as key contributors to sustainable performance outcomes (Kluge et al., 2021; Minder et al., 2023).

In contrast, the evidence related to Türkiye suggests a developmental structure characterized by strong grassroots engagement but limited institutional continuity. Studies reported constraints related to inconsistent funding mechanisms, restricted infrastructure, and the absence of systematic performance monitoring frameworks. Volunteer-based organizational models and project-dependent funding were identified as factors limiting long-term sustainability and competitive progression (Parnell et al., 2018; Irtyshcheva et al., 2022). These structural limitations were associated with challenges in translating participation growth into sustained elite-level success.

Reverse integration emerged as a prominent strategic theme, particularly within European wheelchair basketball systems. Evidence suggests that inclusive participation models involving able-bodied and disabled athletes contributed to increased participation rates, enhanced visibility, and improved access to financial and institutional resources (Ramsden et al., 2023; Latief et al., 2024). Such approaches were also linked to strengthened club sustainability and broader social legitimacy within adaptive sport ecosystems (Schmid et al., 2024).

Gender inclusion was identified as another critical dimension of strategic development. Several studies reported persistent gender imbalances in wheelchair basketball participation and leadership structures, particularly in male-dominated league environments. Targeted recruitment initiatives, supportive organizational cultures, and gender-sensitive policy interventions were highlighted as necessary strategies for promoting equitable participation and long-term system sustainability (Greve & Süßenbach, 2021; Cho et al., 2024).

With regard to talent identification and development, the findings reveal that most existing studies rely on cross-sectional and descriptive research designs. Only a limited number of studies addressed longitudinal athlete development or intra-individual performance trajectories over time (Rossing et al., 2024). This methodological pattern reflects a broader limitation within sport talent research, where static comparisons are often prioritized over dynamic developmental analyses (Martindale et al., 2005; Baker et al., 2017; Leite et al., 2021). Consequently, evidence supporting long-term athlete progression and individualized development pathways in wheelchair basketball remains fragmented.

Several studies emphasized the role of performance monitoring and assessment tools in supporting strategic development, particularly within elite European contexts. Standardized testing protocols and systematic performance profiling were reported as mechanisms for informing training decisions and supporting athlete health and performance optimization (Luarde-Rocha et al., 2022; Chénier et al., 2021). However, the integration of such evidence-based monitoring systems was reported to be limited or inconsistent in developing contexts.

Overall, the synthesized findings demonstrate clear structural differences between European wheelchair basketball systems and those observed in Türkiye. While European models tend to emphasize institutional coordination, diversified funding, and integrated support services, Turkish development structures are characterized by emerging participation initiatives alongside structural and resource-based constraints. These results provide an empirical foundation for the comparative discussion of strategic development pathways and policy implications presented in the subsequent section.

#### ***Methodological Quality of Included Studies***

Quality appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) indicated that the majority of included studies demonstrated moderate to high methodological quality. Studies generally exhibited clear research aims and appropriate methodological approaches. Nevertheless, common limitations were identified, particularly in relation to sample representativeness, reliance on cross-sectional designs, and limited longitudinal evidence. These methodological considerations were taken into account during interpretation of the findings and are

reflected in the discussion of evidence strength (Ciampolini et al., 2018; Christensen et al., 2024).

**Table 1.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<b>Population</b>	Elite/sub-elite WB players, coaches, administrators; Studies on European nations or Türkiye	Studies on other sports or non-athlete populations
<b>Intervention</b>	Strategies related to development, funding, coaching, talent ID, policy	Studies focused solely on physiology without developmental context
<b>Comparator</b>	Comparisons between European nations, or Europe vs. Türkiye	No comparator needed, but must discuss development
<b>Outcomes</b>	Quantitative (medal counts, participation rates) or qualitative (policy analysis, interview themes)	
<b>Study Design</b>	Empirical studies, systematic reviews, policy analyses	Editorials, letters, non-peer-reviewed articles

**Table 2.** Characteristics of included studies (n = 16)

Author (Year)	Country / Region	Study Design	Sample / Data Source	Strategic Focus	Quality (MMAT)
Pate & Bragale (2019)	USA (transferable)	Qualitative / Policy analysis	National programs	Long-term athlete development	Moderate
Ramsden et al. (2023)	UK	Mixed methods	Clubs & federations	Reverse integration, funding	High
Kluge et al. (2021)	Europe	Quantitative	Elite players	Funding & injury risk	High
Greve & Süßenbach (2021)	Germany	Qualitative	League data	Gender inclusion	Moderate
Luarte-Rocha et al. (2022)	International	Systematic review	Elite WB players	Performance & monitoring	High
Cho et al. (2024)	International	Comparative policy	Federations	Gender policy	Moderate
Chénier et al. (2021)	International	Systematic review	WB athletes	Injury prevention	High
Najafabadi et al. (2023)	International	Narrative review	Competitive WB	Health & performance	Moderate
Rossi et al. (2017)	Europe	Quantitative	League data	Injury prediction	Moderate
Minder et al. (2023)	Europe	Quantitative	Elite leagues	Load monitoring	High
Schmid et al. (2024)	International	Conceptual	Organizations	Sustainability	Moderate
Smolianov et al. (2014)	International	Comparative model	Sport systems	Governance models	Moderate
Collins et al. (2018)	International	Conceptual review	Talent systems	Talent development	High
Martindale et al. (2005)	International	Conceptual	Youth systems	Talent pathways	High
Dehghansai et al. (2017)	International	Systematic review	Disability sport	Talent ID	High
Bailey & Morley (2006)	International	Conceptual	Education systems	Development models	Moderate

**Table 3.** Synthesis of key findings from included studies

Author (Year)	Country Focus	Key Findings	Strategic & Managerial Implications
Pate & Bragale (2019)	USA (Transferable)	Identifies growth challenges: high equipment costs, lack of qualified coaches, and reliance on volunteerism.	Highlights the critical need for strategic partnerships with able-bodied sports clubs (for facilities/coaches) and corporate sponsorships to subsidize equipment costs.
Ramsden et al. (2023)	UK	Reverse integration effectively increases participation, funding, visibility, and breaks down social barriers to inclusion.	Advocates for the development of explicit policies and promotional campaigns to encourage reverse integration as a core strategy for sustainable club growth.
Kluge et al. (2021)	International (WC)	High prevalence of musculoskeletal injuries linked to intensive training loads and limited access to sports medicine professionals.	underscores the strategic necessity of investing in sports science and medical support for elite athletes to ensure health, performance, and career longevity.
Greve & Süßenbach (2021)	Germany	Highlights complexities of gender integration and the unique challenges faced by female athletes in a male-dominated sport.	Recommends strategic initiatives for targeted female recruitment, creating supportive environments, and ensuring equitable resource allocation to develop women's wheelchair basketball.
Luarte-Rocha et al. (2022)	N/A (Review)	Standardized tests (e.g., 20m sprint, dynamometry) are crucial for objective talent ID and monitoring training efficacy in elite athletes.	

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this systematic review was to examine and compare the strategic development of wheelchair basketball in Europe and Türkiye, with particular attention to governance structures, talent development pathways, funding mechanisms, and sustainability-oriented practices. By synthesizing evidence from 16 studies, the review sought to identify effective development models and highlight structural gaps influencing long-term growth in adaptive basketball systems.

The findings indicate that European wheelchair basketball systems are characterized by relatively structured governance frameworks, formalized coach education pathways, and diversified funding models. These characteristics align with prior research emphasizing the importance of institutional coordination and strategic planning for sustainable sport development (Smolianov et al., 2014; Kluge et al., 2021). The integration of sports science and medical support within elite programs further reflects best practices observed in successful

Paralympic performance environments (Ramsden et al., 2023; Minder et al., 2023).

In contrast, Türkiye demonstrates encouraging growth at the grassroots level, yet faces persistent challenges related to infrastructure continuity, performance monitoring, and long-term financial sustainability. Similar patterns have been reported in developing sport systems where volunteer-based structures and project-dependent funding constrain institutional stability (Parnell et al., 2018). The absence of standardized talent identification and monitoring mechanisms may limit the translation of participation growth into sustained elite performance, as also noted in disability sport talent development research (Dehghansai et al., 2017).

A prominent finding of this review concerns the role of reverse integration, whereby able-bodied athletes participate alongside athletes with disabilities. Evidence from European contexts suggests that reverse integration contributes to increased participation, visibility, and access to resources, while reducing social barriers (Ramsden et al., 2023). This finding is consistent with broader adaptive sport literature highlighting inclusive

participation models as catalysts for organizational sustainability and social legitimacy (Schmid et al., 2024). For Türkiye, structured reverse integration initiatives may represent a strategic opportunity to expand club capacity and institutional support.

Gender inclusion emerged as another critical dimension of strategic development. Studies focusing on European leagues highlighted persistent gender imbalances and the need for targeted recruitment and supportive environments for female athletes (Greve & Süßenbach, 2021; Cho et al., 2024). These findings reinforce existing literature emphasizing that gender-sensitive policies are essential for equitable participation and long-term growth in adaptive sports. Türkiye's emerging programs may benefit from proactively integrating gender inclusion strategies during early stages of system development.

From a policy and practice perspective, the results underscore the importance of aligning governance, funding, and talent development strategies within a coherent framework. European examples demonstrate that investment in coach education, sports science integration, and institutional partnerships enhances both performance outcomes and athlete welfare. For Türkiye, adopting adaptable elements of these models while accounting for socio-cultural and institutional contexts may strengthen sustainability without replicating structures that are resource-intensive or misaligned with national capacities.

Overall, this review contributes to the literature by shifting attention from isolated performance metrics toward strategic development systems in wheelchair basketball. The findings suggest that sustainable growth depends on the interaction of organizational structures, inclusive policies, and evidence-based development practices. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and comparative designs to better capture the dynamic evolution of wheelchair basketball systems and inform context-sensitive policy interventions.

These findings are consistent with established talent development perspectives emphasizing long-term, context-sensitive and system-based pathways in sport, where athlete progression is shaped by organizational structures, support mechanisms, and developmental environments rather than isolated performance factors (Bailey & Morley, 2006; Malina et al., 2015; Leite et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

This paper has systematically reviewed the strategic development of wheelchair basketball across Europe and Türkiye, highlighting significant differences and commonalities in their approaches to athlete development and support structures. The findings underscore the necessity of integrating more nuanced, long-term developmental perspectives into talent identification frameworks to foster sustainable athletic careers, particularly considering the specific and long-term developmental and support requirements for elite performance in adaptive sports (Jacob et al., 2018; Coutinho et al., 2016). This comprehensive review elucidates the critical need for a paradigm shift from static talent identification models to dynamic, longitudinal approaches that consider the evolving needs and capacities of athletes over time (Sweeney et al., 2023).

The review provides a comparative framework for the strategic development of wheelchair basketball in Europe and Türkiye. The findings suggest that Türkiye can benefit from adopting European best practices while adapting them to its socio-cultural and institutional context. Actionable recommendations include strengthening coach education, increasing investment in medical and performance support, encouraging reverse integration, and developing policies to promote female participation. These steps will be crucial in ensuring sustainable growth, competitive excellence, and inclusive participation in Turkish wheelchair basketball.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## Author's Contributions

Study Design: AMG; Data Collection: AMG; Statistical Analysis: AMG; Data Interpretation: AMG; Manuscript Preparation: AMG; Literature Review: AMG. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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