



Development and Organisation of an Effective Elite Sport Policy System in a Small State: A Case Study of Slovenia

by

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Abstract

Despite being a state small in population, geographical size and GDP (Thorhallsson, 2006), Slovenia tends to do well in medal rankings per GDP and per capita at the Olympic Games. To understand the influences of success of Slovene elite sport, it is important to investigate the elite sports policy system in Slovenia. Thus, this study set out to explore the contemporary structure of the elite sport policy in Slovenia, as well as the extent to which the SPLISS pillars can act as a framework for explanation of the Slovene system and to identify what other factors need to be added to this framework to better account for the characteristics of Slovenia. SPLISS was identified as the primary analytical model in the study as it is the leading model in elite sport policy analysis (Andersen, Houlihan, & Ronglan, 2015b). However, SPLISS is intended to be used as a comparative tool of elite sport policy between states (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & Van Bottenburg, 2015), but was not used as such in the study of a single case. Instead, SPLISS served as framework that has utility within the study as a starting point for data collection and analysis. A bioecological model was introduced to supplement the SPLISS framework as an analytical lens to account for the influences of success not considered within the SPLISS pillars. The study made a contribution because it provided an in-depth case-study of one setting which examined a small state and illustrated that there may be policy and practice variations that are a result of the specific context of the state within which the system operates. The development and structure of elite policy systems in a small state of Slovenia with limited population and GDP reflects the contextual characteristics in order to maximise success.

The research adopted a qualitative approach within a case-study research design. A multi-method data collection approach was undertaken. This included documentary analysis of 43 sport policy and sport policy related documents as well as six one-time one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders within elite sport in Slovenia in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia.

A thematic analysis of the data revealed that the elite sports system in the small state of Slovenia is determined by the size and the context of the state. As highlighted by participants and in the documents, GDP and population size, as well as the historical development, culture and natural environment also influence the elite sports policy system in Slovenia. While these context specific factors limit and determine the routes taken to develop international sporting success, they also allow for adaptation and flexibility to create strategic advantages that may

not be possible in different contexts. The findings also indicate that in Slovenia the elite sport system is fully integrated within the wider sports system and does not exercise a priority position over recreational sport. In fact, both recreational and elite sport are identified as priorities of the sports system. Thus, elite sport is not separate, but mutually dependent on recreational sport where there is reciprocity between the systems.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that the SPLISS model was useful but not sufficient for examining the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. While all nine SPLISS pillars were vital in identifying the positive influences of international sporting success, not all factors that were derived from the data that were specific to Slovenia were accounted for within SPLISS. Moreover, some of the existing SPLISS pillars proved to be too narrowly defined to fully encompass the success factors of the Slovene elite sports system. For these reasons, additional 'non-SPLISS' influences of the system were identified separately using the bioecological model, while some influences not accounted for in any of the analytical models were identified as well. Through the study it was proposed that an adapted version of the SPLISS model to better reflect the small state context of Slovenia could be developed based on four particular adaptations.

Adaptation 1 proposed consideration that the influence of Pillar 2 on other pillars in the context of Slovene elite sport policy system is perceived higher than the influence of Pillar 1. Secondly, Adaptation 2 proposed the inclusion of the macro-level related influences, including historical characteristics, cultural characteristics, characteristics of the natural environment and scale characteristics. Characteristics of history and culture of Slovenia were identified through the bioecological lens. The climate and geographical characteristics within the domain of the natural environment were included in Pillar 6. Furthermore, Adaptation 3 also suggested broadening the original SPLISS Pillar 5 to consider the importance and impact of the primary environment of the athlete, specifically family support, which is considered within micro-level factors. Lastly, Adaptation 4 recommended including other influences of Slovene sporting success that could not be identified by applying SPLISS or bioecological lenses. These included independence, international sports environment and ongoing challenges within the elite sport policy system in Slovenia.

Key words: elite sport policy, Slovenia, elite sport policy system, SPLISS, international sporting success

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List of Abbreviations

ADSS-PCS	Association for Sport of Disabled Slovenia – Paralympic Committee of Slovenia
APS	Annual Programme of Sport
CSF	Critical Success Factors
ECh	European Championships
EU	European Union
FIG	International Gymnastics Federation
FIS	International Ski Federation
FSO	Foundation for Sports Organisations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IFs	International Sporting Federations
IOC	International Olympic Committee
MESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
NGB	National Governing Body of Sport
NPS	National Programme of Sport of the Republic of Slovenia
OCS	Olympic Committee of Slovenia
OCS-ASF	Olympic Committee of Slovenia – Association of Sports Federations
RS	Republic of Slovenia
SAPC	Slovenian Association of Physical Culture
SAS	Sports Association of Slovenia
SEM	Socio-ecological Model
SLOADO	Slovenian Anti-doping Organisation
WCh	World Championships
YAPC	Yugoslav Association of Physical Culture
YOC	Yugoslav Olympic Committee

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1) Introduction

This thesis seeks to investigate and explain the contemporary elite sports policy system in Slovenia, whilst critically analysing the extent to which the SPLISS framework allows for an explanation of the system. The introductory chapter provides the reader with preliminary remarks on the context and development of Slovenia, and a brief overview of Slovenia's profile for a better understanding of the research topic. This is followed by research motivation that underpins the aims and research questions that follow. Lastly, the structure of the thesis and a brief synopsis of the chapters are provided.

1.2) Preliminary remarks

In the last thirty years, Slovenia has experienced major social, political and economic change through transitioning from a communist East-oriented to a democratic West-oriented settlement. The consequences of this were political, economic, cultural, and social with resultant implications for all social domains, including sport.

Slovenia became an independent country in 1991 as a result of democratic movements that started in the 1980s (Velikonja, 2002). Prior to its independence, Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia since its establishment in 1918 (Singleton & Carter, 1982). Yugoslavia as a political entity went through two major stages of development, each with its own political system. From 1918 to 1941 it was a monarchical system (Velikonja, 2002), then after being under occupation during the World War II (Čepič, Guštin, & Ivanič, 2005; Velikonja, 2002), it became the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Prout, 1985; Singleton, 1976; Vucinich, 1969; Vuckovic, 1997), after the King's deposition in 1945 (Singleton, 1976). As a Federation, Yugoslavia at first adopted a Soviet regime of socialism and centralisation (Singleton & Carter, 1982). However, in 1948, Yugoslavia was expelled from the world Communist movement (Cox, 2005) resulting in a break of the Soviet monopoly in 1949 (Riordan, 1999). The split caused Yugoslavia under the guidance of Marshal Tito to evolve into a more liberal Communist state with experimental and open policies focused on self-management and decentralisation

(Cox, 2005). For Slovenia, the era of the Yugoslav Federation lasted until 1991, when Slovenia became independent (Hansen, 1996).

Throughout the era of Yugoslavia, sport played an important role. In fact, even prior to the establishment of Yugoslavia as a nation state, sport was used as a vehicle for militarisation (Rohdewald, 2011) and for nation-building (Riordan, 1999). Athletic movements called *Sokols*, or rather *Sokol* associations, were central to nation-building in the multi-ethnic population functioning as a promotional tool of national and political projects and identities (Riordan, 1999). During the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the importance of *Sokols* intensified in order to build Yugoslavs' national identity as sport was vital to the building of a strong nation state (Rohdewald, 2011). As Riordan (1999) explains, patriotism aligned to sporting success was integrated through the system funded by the government to provide conditions for discovering, organising and developing talent in sport with an emphasis on Olympic success. Sport was for the masses and open to talents in all sports with opportunities for women and ethnic minorities. Later, in the Federal Yugoslavia, the state still regulated all aspects of the public and lives of citizens and sport was no exception.

The dissatisfaction of Slovenes with the Yugoslav regime resulted in their pursuits for an independent country with a democratic political system. Strong national identity, nationalism and a desire for an independent state emerged from a belief that "Yugoslavia threatened the existence of Slovenia" (Hansen, 1996, p. 479). For Slovenia, social, political and economic transition to a new regime has been relatively smooth (Velikonja, 2002). Transition required two major changes; the first was building of a new socio-political system and the second was integrating Slovenia with the European Union (EU) (Fink-Hafner, 2010). Slovenia actively tried to gain international recognition by becoming a member of various international alliances but sport also remained a highly valued vehicle to promote the Slovene state as success offered opportunities to be in the international limelight (Riordan, 1999). According to Rohdewald (2011), many newly independent states used sport for fostering national awareness and interests, and while integrating in the European space. In fact, many post-Communist countries utilised sport to promote national identity and positively impact economic and social development, and many Slovenes still believe sport is valuable in national identity building among citizens and in the international context (Topic & Coakley, 2010).

1.3) Profile of Slovenia

The Slovene Constitution places the organisation of the state and authority over the legislation in the hands of the Parliament (Gow, 2010). It comprises of two houses; the National Assembly and National Council, where the first enacts legislation and chooses its president – Prime Minister – while the latter advises the Assembly and can also veto or introduce the legislation to the Assembly (Cox, 2005). Within the Parliament, there is the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Sport, an advisory body on sport policy, and although the state has the responsibility to look after the public interest in sport, the Slovene Constitution does not include sport (Samec, 2005).

The President is elected every 5 years by the citizens (Cox, 2005). The majority of the population is Slovene (Jurak, 2017), and one of the unique features of Slovenia are the autochthonous Slovenes living in the neighbouring countries (generally in Italy, Austria and Hungary) or autochthonous citizens from neighbouring countries that are living in Slovenia (mostly Italians and Hungarians) (Urad Vlade RS za Slovence v zamejstvu in po svetu, 2016). These are considered an important legal and cultural phenomenon, where these minorities are given the rights for official dual-language use (Cox, 2005). Furthermore, Slovenia is a country small in both population and size, with only about 2,064,000 citizens (Statistični urad RS, 2016) and 20,273 km² (Cecić Erpič, 2013). Yet, Slovenia has 212 municipalities or local communities (Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

1.4) Research motivation

The term sport has a broad meaning, extending from casual participation to elite competition levels. According to the European Sports Charter, sport “means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (Council of Europe, 1992, para. 9).

At the highest level of sport competition is elite sport (De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019), consisting of those at the highest level of sports performance (Torres & McLaughlin, 2015). Within the Slovene context, elite sport has been defined as the sports programmes for training and competition of elite athletes, oriented towards achievement of elite sporting results on the international level (Zakon o športu, 2017). Here, elite sport is defined as sports programmes

aimed at competition at the highest international level, including the Olympic Games, World Championships (WCh), European Championships (ECh), the World Games, the Mediterranean Games and World Cup competitions (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017). On the opposite side of the spectrum to elite sport is sports recreation. In the Slovene environment, recreational sport presents an active use of people's leisure time and is defined as physical activity that may be participated in via organised programmes of sports organisations or outside of those organisations (NPS, 2014).

Elite sport is the focus of this research within the Slovene context that has developed as a result of specific historical, cultural, social and economic conditions. A rich sports history prior to the independence plays an important part in the present Slovene sport system and athletic success. This sports development was subjected to the notions of sport being an important constituent of culture, which is still highly present today. Hence, despite Slovenia being a young and small state, its rich sporting history and culture persist and continue to be developed further through contemporary achievements of Slovene athletes. Sporting success of Slovenia is generally expressed in relative terms, such as medals per capita and/or GDP which is normal for smaller and poorer states (De Bosscher, De Knop, & Heyndels, 2003). For example at the 2014 Winter Olympic Games, Slovenia placed 2nd in the medals per capita ranking ("Olympic Medals per Capita - medals per capita; 2014," 2014) and 1st in the GDP ranking ("Olympic Medals per Capita - medals by GDP; 2014," 2014); at 2018 Winter Olympic Games, Slovenia placed 8th in the medals per capita rankings (Nevill-Manning, 2018); at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, Slovenia placed 6th in medals per capita ranking ("Olympic Medals per Capita - medals per capita; 2012," 2014) and 26th in GDP ranking ("Olympic Medals per Capita - medals by GDP; 2012," 2014); at 2016 Olympic Games, Slovenia placed 7th in medals per capita rankings (Nevill-Manning, 2018).

To understand the reasons behind the relative success of Slovenia in international sport, it is important to research how the elite sport policy system operates and how and why it came to be, as it is commonly understood that one cannot understand the present without understanding the past. The successful results, cultural, social, economic and historical developments all aid in Slovenia being an interesting case for investigation. Hence, in this thesis, emphasis is placed on the historical development of sport in the Slovene territory prior to the independence of Slovenia. In addition, the thesis examines the contemporary elite sport policy system using the SPLISS framework which is a leading framework in elite sports policy analysis that aims to explain how sports policies can influence country's international success, while also

identifying its crucial determinants via nine pillars (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, & Shibli, 2006; De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, Shibli, & Bingham, 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). The pillars comprise of (1) financial support; (2) governance, organisation and structure of (elite) sport policies; (3) participation in sport; (4) talent identification and development system; (5) athletic and post-career support; (6) training facilities; (7) coaching and coach development; (8) (inter)national competition; and (9) scientific research and innovation in elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015). SPLISS offers an innovative approach to development of elite athletes by proposing that governments invest strategically in policy processes (De Bosscher et al., 2009). SPLISS however, does not consider factors such as size, population, culture and development when analysing and comparing elite sport policy systems in different countries (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, & Shibli, 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2015), even though these characteristics are highly deterministic of the environment in which sport policy is implemented (De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2015; Shibli, De Bosscher, Van Bottenburg, & Bingham, 2014).

This thesis provides a case-study of the historical development and characteristics of the contemporary elite sport policy system in the small state of Slovenia because “there are few detailed studies of how national elite sport systems are organised [and] even fewer provide insight in how they actually operate and support elite sport efforts” (Andersen & Ronglan, 2012, p. 168). And since there is a scarcity of research in sport in states with a population less than five million (Sam & Jackson, 2015), “more systematic studies of the strategies and experiences of small states would...enrich our understanding of sport policy processes in a distinctive and extensive group of states” (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015, p. 342).

1.5) Aims and research questions

The aims of this research are twofold:

1. To examine the development and contemporary structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia.
2. To critically analyse the extent to which SPLISS allows for an examination of this system.

In order to pursue the main aims of the thesis, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1: What is the contemporary organisational structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ2: To what extent can drawing on factors identified by SPLISS act as a framework for a single country case-study explanation of the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ3: What other factors need to be added to this framework to better account for the development and characteristics of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

In this study, an emphasis is placed on in-depth understanding of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, its operation, development, and contextual constraints, determinants and facilitators. Specifically, the research consists of several consecutive stages that allow for the answering of the research questions:

1. SPLISS was identified as the primary analytical framework for the study.
2. While conducting a historical review of sport development in the Slovene territory, factors of Slovene elite sport policy system were identified that were not featured within SPLISS. These mainly included factors related to development, culture and context.
3. The utility of using an additional framework besides SPLISS was recognised. The bioecological model was selected because it enabled the researcher to view the Slovene elite sport policy system as a ‘developing mechanism’ and this therefore complemented the SPLISS framework by offering an additional lens through which to view the Slovene elite sport policy system.
4. Documentary analysis was undertaken based using the two frameworks - SPLISS and the bioecological model, and other themes that derived from the historical review.

5. Some of the additional themes not accounted for in SPLISS that emerged through this process were related to the historical development, cultural and contextual determinants, while these also included other success factors that shape the Slovene elite sport environment.
6. Stakeholder interviews were then conducted to further examine the themes identified through the documentary analysis. As for the documentary analysis, the researcher allowed for new themes to emerge from the interview data.

It should be noted that the study does not seek to apply and evaluate the SPLISS model through Slovene case *per se* because SPLISS methods are not explored or adapted. The aim of the study is not to replicate SPLISS because its original design as a comparative tool is not applied. Instead, the study represents only a partial application of SPLISS to a single case-study where SPLISS pillars identify (and describe) the areas that may be important in achieving international sporting success and thus, serve as a starting point for elite sport policy analysis in Slovenia. In other words, SPLISS pillars are used as a means to gain knowledge about and examine the Slovene case-study, while they also provide structure to the research and data analysis processes.

Equally, the study does not set out to evaluate whether or not Slovenia is successful in sport internationally. While SPLISS identifies the factors that may lead to success, the study looks at the elite sport system in Slovenia and identifies influences associated with success that are not accounted for in SPLISS. As there are no statistical associations explored in the study and thus, no statistical relationships have been identified, the term 'influences' is used because these are assumed within the policy to positively impact success and the interviewees believe them to be factors for success. In conclusion, Slovene sporting success, along with unique rich sports culture and history make Slovenia an interesting case study and provides a rationale for the subject studied.

1.6) Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

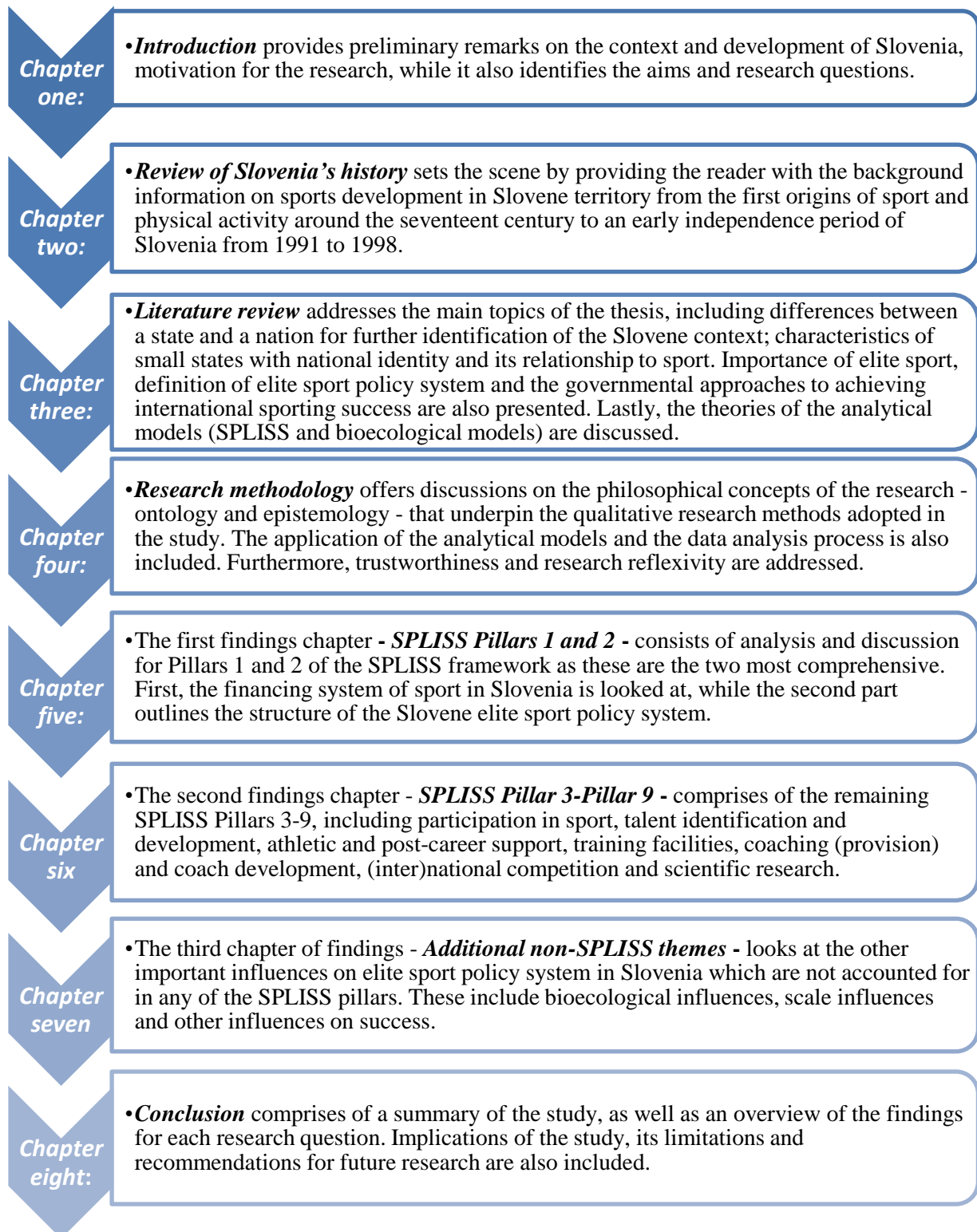


Figure 1. Thesis structure.

Chapter Two: Review of Slovenia's history

2.1) Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the five-century long road of sport development in the Slovene territory prior its independence in order to set the scene and provide background information for this thesis - it is based on the notion that one cannot understand the present without understanding the past. A brief section of the chapter is also dedicated to the early years of independence to provide further background information on the early /development of sport in the independent Slovenia. To better understand the nature of change affecting Slovene sport, the chapter is divided into five historical stages defined by reference to relevant historical events, such as the two World Wars and the Slovene war for independence. The stages are as follows:

- Slovene sport in the pre-Yugoslav period and the World War I (prior to 1918),
- Slovene sport during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941),
- Sport during the World War II in Slovene Territory (1941-1945),
- Slovene sport in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991¹),
- Early independence (1991-1998).

A timeline correlating to sports development in Slovene territory is also provided below (see Figure 2). Lastly, it should be mentioned that the main themes tracked through the development of sport in Slovene territory include sport and the military - *Sokols*; social role of sport and the importance of physical activity and sport for Slovene society; geographical and climate conditions; national identity and sport; popularity of and success in a wide range of individual sports; institutionalisation of sport; media; and sport in the education sector.

¹ For Slovenia, the year 1991 is used to indicate the end of Yugoslavia or perhaps more accurately the beginnings of its final disintegration (Hansen, 1996).

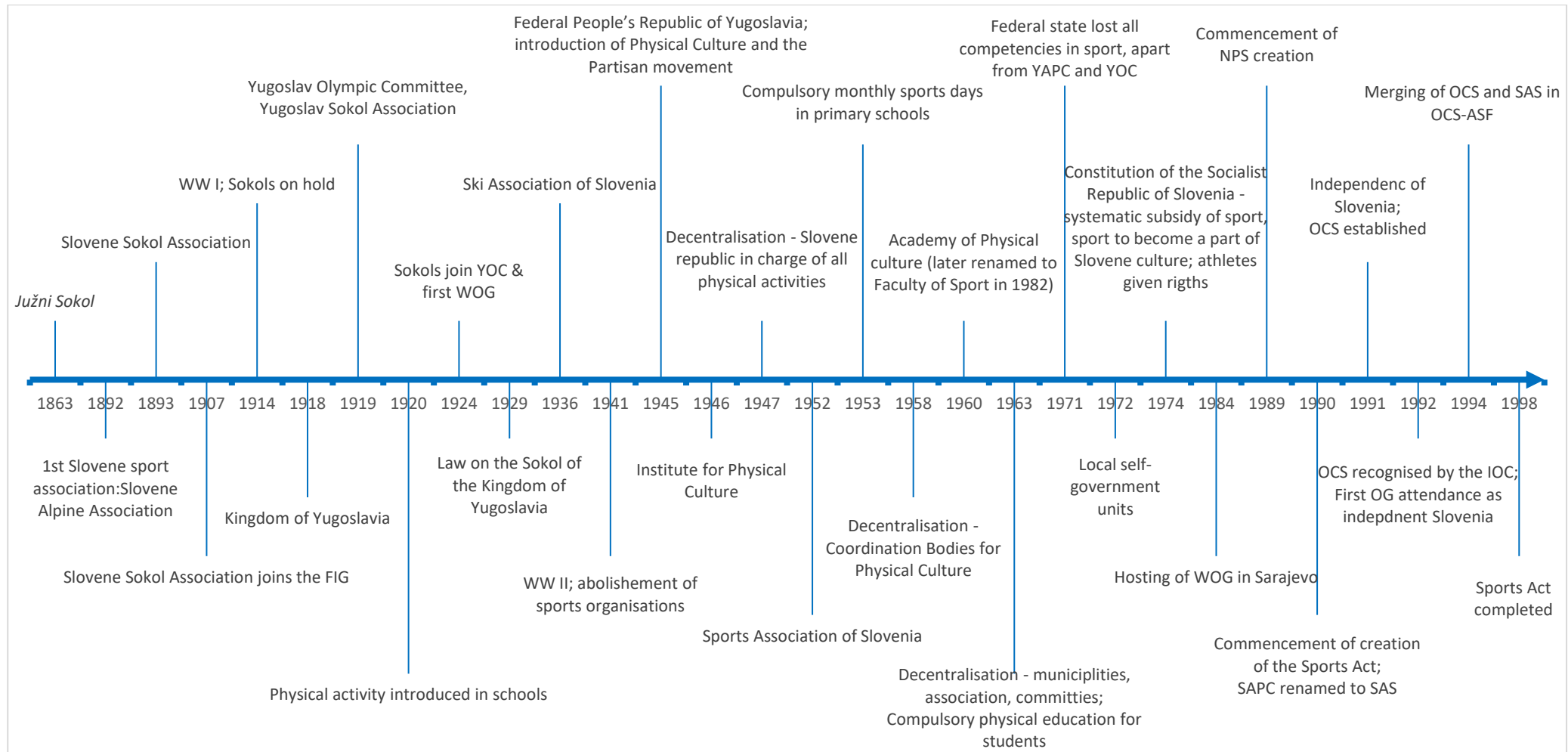


Figure 2. Timeline of Sports development in Slovene territory.

2.2) Slovene sport in the pre-Yugoslav period and the World War I (prior to 1918)

In Slovene territory, indigenous forms of sport can be traced back to the seventeenth century. There is not a lot of written evidence but based on the folk customs and traditions it is assumed that antecedents of skiing and fishing were the most popular (Šugman, 1991, 1997, 1999). Later, activities such as ball games, hunting and horseback riding were introduced (Rohdewald, 2011; Šugman, 1991). Collins (2013) describes that development of physical activity started to be linked with militarism and nationalism in the nineteenth century resulting in the establishment of nationalist gymnastics movements in Germany, Sweden, and Czech, Slovene, Croat and Serbian areas. Popularity and the social role of sporting activities in Europe led to emergence of institutionalisation of sport (Godnič, 2005) by establishing different international sporting federations (IFs) - the first being the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) founded in 1881 (Godnič, 2005; Šugman, 1991) followed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 (Kolarič, 2011b) that led to the rebirth of the Olympic Games in 1896 (Godnič, 2005).

Among Slovenes, sports like gymnastics, skiing, mountain climbing, football and cycling were on the rise with an emergence of new sports clubs and by 1892, the Slovene Alpine Association was established (Godnič, 2005; Rohdewald, 2011). In 1912, the first Slovene participant at the Olympic Games (Cecić Erpič, 2013; Godnič, 2005; Pavlin, 2011) won a bronze medal in fencing while Slovenes also had a world champion in gymnastics in the same year (Pavlin, 2011).

2.2.1) *Sokol* movement in Slovene territory

Special attention should be given to gymnastics due to its ability to include the masses which led to the emergence of gymnastics movements referred to as *Sokols*². *Sokols* were an important Pan-Slavic movement that used physical activity (gymnastics) to unite Slavic nations against continually growing Germanisation (Cerar, 2014; Godnič, 2005; Šugman, 1991) and to promote different national and political projects in different contexts (Rohdewald, 2011).

In October 1863, the first Slovene *Sokol* club, *Južni Sokol* was established (Cerar, 2014; Jurak, 2017; Pavlin, 2000, 2008; Žvan, 2014), which is considered a major stepping stone in the development of Slovene physical education and culture in general (Žvan, 2014), and marks the “beginning of the general organisation of physical activities in Slovenia” (Jurak, 2017, p. 223).

² Falcon in English.

Južni Sokol developed from a reading society (Nemec Novak, 2014), indicating how entwined different cultural features were at the time. *Sokols* published books and articles, organised public and private sessions (Podpečnik, 2014), and undertook fundraising to build gymnastics facilities (Cerar, 2014). They also created the first section for women's gymnastics in 1898 (Rohdewald, 2011) initiating a great step towards emancipation of women (Podpečnik, 2014). Furthermore, in 1893, the Slovene *Sokol* Association was established to unify Slovene *Sokols* (ibid.) and in 1907, it became a member of the FIG (Pavlin, 2008, 2011), which allowed participation in competitive gymnastics, initiating for Slovenes a long legacy of excellent results. Successful results in sport strengthened national identity, and above all, enabled Slovenes to gain recognition within the Habsburg Empire (Podpečnik, 2014).

2.2.2) Slovene sport during the World War I (1914-1918)

With the eruption of the World War I, development of the *Sokol* movement in the Slovene territory was put on hold (Pavlin, 2014b; Podpečnik, 2014). The movement was revived at the end of the war and became central to militarisation (Rohdewald, 2011), continuing its emphasis on nation building (Pavlin, 2014b).

2.3) Slovene sport during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918 - 1941)

After the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire at the end of the World War I (Cox, 2005; Dragnich, 1983), on 1 December 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed (Jurak, 2017; Pavlin, 2000, 2011; Prout, 1985; Singleton & Carter, 1982; Vucinich, 1969). The Kingdom of Yugoslavia left a large number of Slovenes (Velikonja, 2002), along with their sport clubs and associations outside its borders and beyond its control ("Yugoslavia and Olympism," 1978). As Šugman (1991) describes, for Slovenes in Austria, gymnastics was not the most popular physical activity. Instead, skiing and mountain climbing took its place due to suitable geographical and climate conditions. Slovenes living within borders of Italy had their Sport Association dissolved in 1924. Lastly, Slovenes living in Hungary did not have any organised sport of their own but followed the Hungarian sporting system.

Within the Kingdom's borders, new sports disciplines (Rohdewald, 2011; Šugman, 1997), leagues (Jurak, 2017), clubs, associations and federations (Kustec-Lipicer, 2007; Pavlin, 2011) were emerging; the Yugoslav Olympic Committee (YOC), Football Association of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav *Sokol* Association were founded in 1919 (Pavlin, 2014a, 2014b). YOC

comprised of two types of subcommittees; the Olympic subcommittees based in Ljubljana, Belgrade, Sarajevo and Split, and subcommittees for different disciplines, e.g. Football Association (Pavlin, 2011). *Sokols* joined the YOC in 1924, just in time for the Paris Olympics (ibid.), where Slovenes gained an Olympic champion (Jauk, 1998). As explained by Pavlin (2011), this was the starting point of the Slovene gymnastics legacy, resulting in gymnastics being the most successful discipline during the Kingdom's duration. Equally important was the introduction of the first Winter Olympics in 1924. In less than a decade, winter sports in Slovenia developed to such a degree that Slovenes dominated winter sports in Yugoslavia. Contrarily, football was more accepted among Croats and Serbs, leading to negative stereotypes about football among Slovenes (Godnič, 2005). Furthermore, as Croats were the instigators of the Yugoslav athletic movement, most associations and federations were based in Croatia, while the largest sporting organisation, Yugoslav *Sokol* Association, and winter sports bodies were based in Slovenia (Pavlin, 2011).

Regarding the education sector, physical activity was introduced in schools in 1920 (Godnič, 2005; Šugman, 1997) and followed the *Sokol* model by mostly promoting gymnastics (Pavlin, 2008; Starc, 2014). However, in 1925, skiing was also introduced (Šugman, 1997). It enabled a greater variety of physical activity, but also served as a stepping stone for Slovene skiing that spread among the wider population and led to the establishment of Ski Association of Slovenia in 1936 (Godnič, 2005).

2.3.1) The *Sokol* movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The Yugoslav *Sokol* Association was based on a unitary principle of nationalism – one nation, one state, one *Sokol* (Pavlin, 2000) – which intensified the *Sokols*' significance even further (Pavlin, 2014b; Podpečnik, 2014) by aiming to build a Yugoslav national identity (Rohdewald, 2011). The emphasis had shifted from national-defence to culture and state-formation of Yugoslavia (Pavlin, 2000, 2014a). Due to the Serbs' privileged position in the state, *Sokols* mostly promoted Serbian policy and identity in schools, while outside of schools, Slovene *Sokols* dominated as they were the most institutionalised (Rohdewald, 2011).

In 1929, King Alexander proclaimed his dictatorship and immediately imposed a Law on the *Sokol* of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and by doing so, nationalised *Sokols* (Pavlin, 2014a). The new organisation based in Serbia (Pavlin, 2014a) continued the role of previous *Sokols* (Pavlin, 2014b) only now it had “a legal basis and was financed from the [federal] budget” (Pavlin, 2008, p. 8). Hence, this presents the first interference of the state in the sport sector in Slovene

history. The new Law prioritised mass participation (nowadays recreation) and marginalised elite sport, as mass participation was seen to be an important factor in national stability, enlightening of the public and militarisation of society (Pavlin, 2000, 2014a). *Sokols* introduced new disciplines (Pavlin, 2008) and maintained their main role in the competitive sector, where competition costs would be covered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Pavlin, 2014a). The investment in elite sport paid off as Yugoslav athletes, especially Slovene gymnasts, won medals at major international competitions (i.e. WCh, the Olympics), indicating the professional competence and development of the *Sokol* movement in the Kingdom (Pavlin, 2008).

2.4) Sport during the World War II in Slovene territory (1941-1945)

During the World War II sporting life in the Slovene territory did not fully fade away. Numerous Slovene sports organisations were incorporated in the sports associations of the occupiers. Under the tight German regime, sport organisations were abolished, whereas the Italians only abolished a few (Čepič et al., 2005). Generally, there were plenty of organised competitions in the Slovene territory throughout the war, while new sports disciplines were also emerging (ibid.).

2.5) Slovene sport in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991)

In November 1945, Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was established (Prout, 1985; Singleton, 1976; Vucinich, 1969; Vuckovic, 1997). The dissolved *Sokol* movement was substituted by the Soviet '*fizkultura*'³ to comply with the new Communist regime (Pavlin, 2008, 2011). The umbrella organisation for sport ("Yugoslavia and Olympism," 1978) and the main body for physical culture in Slovenia – Slovenian Board of Physical Culture later renamed to Slovenian Association of Physical Culture (SAPC) – comprised of two sections, physical education (recreation) and sport (elite sport) between which were still considerable inequalities (Stepišnik, 1968). The Board also represented the interest of the republic on a federal level (ibid.).

³ Physical culture (English).

In 1947, the first Slovene Constitution declared the republic in charge of all physical activities, and thus placed the management of sport in the hands of the main sporting body (Čuček, 2015) - SAPC (Pavlin, 2008). This initiated a long period of decentralisation. While sports federations were emerging under SAPC, more powerful committees formed their independent federations (e.g. football, athletics and swimming) (Šugman, 1997) and united under a new organisation – Slovene Association for Sport – in 1952 (Čuček, 2015; Pavlin, 2008; Stepišnik, 1968).

In the 1950s, new *Partisan*⁴ movement mirrored *Sokols* by aiming to become a mass organisation for physical education and elite-level gymnastics, however not long after, the Slovenian Gymnastics Federations took on the management of gymnastics (Pavlin, 2008). During this time physical culture became an integral part of the nation-development due to a belief that there is no high quality life without physical exercise (Pavlin, 2010). As the growing tension between sport and physical education was becoming the biggest challenge in 1950s (Čuček, 2015), Coordination Bodies for Physical Culture were established in each republic to represent the interests of both spheres of sport in 1958 (Stepišnik, 1968).

Following the 1963 Constitution, competences in physical culture were carried over to the republic level (Kustec-Lipicer, 2007) and municipalities (Čuček, 2015) through founding of various associations and committees (Stepišnik, 1968). The federal state lost all its competencies in this area in 1971 and the Yugoslav Association of Physical Culture (YAPC) and YOC remained the only sport organisations at the federal level (Šugman, 1999). Thus, at the federal level the control was focused on elite sport, whereas physical culture or mass participation sports were in the hands of the republics. Čuček (2015) describes that in the 1960s, Slovenes reaped international successes in gymnastics, while basketball, and Nordic skiing gained momentum with annual Ski jumping competition in Planica, Slovenia, spreading enthusiasm among Slovenes. Furthermore, due to the shift towards greater freedom of choice in participation and a more individual approach, the role of *Partisan* clubs changed to merely providing facilities for physical exercise and taking a direction towards recreation (Pavlin, 2008).

In 1972, local self-government units were established as a form of sport nationalisation and aimed to provide (1) a more structured funding source; (2) partial autonomy of sport from the state; (3) improved management of sports infrastructure; (4) increase in research and education

⁴ Named after *Partisan* troops that played a pivotal role in Italy's capitulation (Čepič et al., 2005).

of personnel; and (5) success of elite athletes and recognition of recreational sport. Hence in 1974, the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia provided a complete definition of physical culture and provided it with a place within the social environment, while also implemented the subsidy of sport (ibid.). It enabled internal distribution of funding for sporting organisations and thus provided them with a greater authority (Čuček, 2015). Following the 1974 Constitution, Slovenia aimed to develop a sports model that would enable sport to become an essential part of Slovene culture as a result of the freedom of participation principle as at the time, the sports system in Slovenia was based primarily on pre-school and school institutions (Šugman, 1998). The results in elite sport were important but not at any cost, yet athletes were given several rights with the legal recognition of the elite athlete's status; (1) accident insurance along with pension and disability insurance; (2) bursaries, scholarships and supplements for food; (3) the rights for curriculum adaptation in education; and (4) remuneration and rewards for sporting achievements (ibid.).

Furthermore, Čuček (2015) describes that during 1970s, successes in ice hockey, alpine and Nordic skiing raised the awareness of the (in Yugoslav terms) unique characteristics of Slovenes. Slovenes dominated individual summer and winter sports and skiing especially strengthened Slovene self-image. Sports disciplines in which Slovenes were surpassing other Yugoslav republics became regarded as Slovene national sports (Stepišnik, 1968). Negative stereotypes about football broadened among Slovenes due to low numbers of Slovene footballers (Godnič, 2005). By the time of the emergence of the political crisis in the late 1980s, Slovenia was known as a skiing nation with skiing reinforcing new Slovene national identity and serving as a means of distancing Slovenia from the regions of the 'South' (Čuček, 2015). Despite the differences, successes of Slovene skiers were celebrated across Yugoslavia and similarly, the successes in football were celebrated in Slovenia (ibid.).

In general terms, (Čuček, 2015) explains that during Federal Slovenia, the most popular sports were football, gymnastics, skiing, athletics, basketball and ice hockey, while factors affecting popularity were availability, accessibility, and media coverage. The media, for instance, recognised greater interest in sports such as football, basketball, skiing and ice hockey and thus publicised those more, although momentary sporting successes also had a great influence on sport's popularity.

2.5.1) Yugoslav Olympic Committee

Pavlin (2011) notes that the new YOC was founded in August 1947. Unlike other sports federations, YOC was a central body, without sub-committees in each republic. Its main role was promotion of the Olympic movement that became an international symbol of Yugoslavia, ensuring training of the athletes and enabling them to participate at the Olympic Games. The 1984 Winter Olympic Games held in Sarajevo were considered the highest sporting recognition for Yugoslavia.

2.5.2) Sport in the education sector

Pavlin (2010) describes that development of physical culture increased the demand for education of sport professionals and in 1946, Slovenia got its own Institute for Physical Culture in Ljubljana. Changes in the curriculum of physical education followed and physical activity in primary and secondary schools became compulsory. Moreover, the education of sports personnel widened when the Institute offered a post-secondary study in 1953, while in 1960, the Academy of Physical Culture was established. It was renamed the Faculty of Sport in 1982 which contributed to rapid development of the research department (Šugman, 1997). Additionally, compulsory monthly sports days were also introduced in primary schools in 1953 (Pavlin, 2010; Stepišnik, 1968) leading to increased demand for physical activity (Stepišnik, 1968). Compulsory physical education for students followed in 1963 (Šugman, 1997), leading to an increase in the compulsory physical activity at all levels, which led to rapid development of school sports competitions ("Yugoslavia and Olympism," 1978).

2.6) Early independence (1991-1998)

In the public sphere of sport, during and even before the independence period, the Republic Committee for Education and Physical Culture⁵ began ground works for two major changes within the Slovene sport sector. The first – Sports Act (Law on Sport) – was a project undertaken in February 1990, whereby creation of National Programme of Sport of the Republic of Slovenia (NPS) that would define financing of the sport programmes by the government was undertaken in 1989 (Šugman, 1999).

⁵ Republic Committee for Education and Physical Culture is known today as Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

On 25 June 1991, Slovenia declared its independence (Fink-Hafner, 2010; Silber & Little, 1995; Velikonja, 2002; Vuckovic, 1997). A ten-day war that followed (Fink-Hafner, 2010; Gow, 2010; Hansen, 1996; Velikonja, 2002) enabled Slovenia separation from Yugoslavia (Hansen, 1996). During the war, Slovene athletes were asked to leave Yugoslav national teams and Slovene sport professionals resigned from their roles in Yugoslav sports bodies (Pavlin, 2011). Throughout the moratorium (7 July-7 October 1991) Slovene athletes were active under the (not yet recognised) Slovene flag and where necessary under the Yugoslav flag wearing symbolic Slovene emblems, which enabled Slovenia to promote itself through sport (Šugman, 1997). Moreover, already in 1991, Slovene National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) began with the organisation of national championships in various sports (Šugman, 1999), ensuring the development of competitive sport. Following the transitional period (1 April 1990 – 23 December 1991), the management of sport fell under the Sport Association of Slovenia (SAS), previously known as SAPC (Pavlin, 2011). After the proclamation of independence, the work for the two major documents in sport - Sports Act and NPS – was still underway. The Sports Act was rejected by the SAS in 1994 (ibid.) and finally accepted in March 1998 (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). The rejection of the Act by the SAS shows the interlinking of public and non-governmental sport sectors in contemporary Slovenia.

In October 1991, the Olympic Committee of Slovenia (OCS) was founded (Šugman, 2011), whilst SAS made calls for Slovene sport organisations to begin desegregation with their Yugoslav partners and to join the IFs instead, including the IOC (Pavlin, 2011). The Ski Federation of Slovenia was recognised by the International Ski Federation (FIS) in November 1991 (Šugman, 1999). In this way, FIS accepted a country that was not yet recognised as a legal international entity (Šugman, 1997). For this reason, the IOC agreed to officially recognise the OCS after Slovenia was recognised as independent by at least the following countries; Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy (Šugman, 2011). OCS became a permanent member of the IOC on 5 February 1992 just in time for the Winter Olympics in Albertville, which was of great importance as it enabled Slovene athletes to participate under the Slovene flag (Šugman, 1999). Moreover, within the first two years of independence, all Slovene sport federations were granted permanent memberships in their respective IFs (ibid.).

Organizational changes in Slovene sport continued well after the independence war, when in 1992, SAS and OCS decided to restructure the organisation of the civil sphere in sport and unite in one organisation (Šugman, 1999, 2011). It was not until December 1994 that the new

non-governmental or civil central authority for sport in Slovenia called Olympic Committee of Slovenia – Association of Sports Federations (OCS-ASF) was founded (Šugman, 1999).

2.7) Conclusion

The above review described the development of Slovene sport from its beginnings in the seventeenth century through Yugoslavia to Slovenia's independence. During the Yugoslav formation, sport played an important part of the national culture as a nation builder and creator of a national identity. The *Sokol* movement especially, played an integral role while it was also crucial in forming of the perceptions of physical activity for citizens. As a mass participation movement in recreational sport it internalised the notion of a healthy mind in a healthy body, making physical activity a daily routine. Moreover, while the focus was mostly on mass recreational exercise, elite-level sport was not ignored. Highly developed *Sokol* clubs in Slovenia achieved successes at the Olympic Games. With sports development, segregation between recreation and elite sport was becoming more permanent.

In the post-World-War-II-period, Yugoslavia aimed to establish a wide spectrum of sport development. The main aim was to encourage mass participation in recreation, however, elite sport gained importance when the freedom of participation was introduced. Towards the disintegration of Yugoslavia, for Slovenes sport was a point of separation between Slovenia and other Yugoslav republics. The past changes in the sport and wider political environment shaped the present perceptions and attitudes towards sport, traditional sports and hence, set the scene for development of the organisational structure for sport in the newly independent Slovenia.

Chapter Three: Literature review

3.1) Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the main concepts discussed in the thesis. First, the difference between the state and nation is discussed as this plays an important part in identification of the Slovene context and history. Linked to the Slovene context is the following section on characteristics of small states. Then, one of these features, national identity and its relationship to sport is looked at separately in detail. Further on, the focus shifts beyond national identity to elite sport and its importance in the political and social spheres. The elite sport policy system is defined as it presents the main focus of the thesis. Lastly, the role of governments in elite sport as well as approaches to achieving international sporting success are presented to provide the basis for the research topic – the elite sport policy system in Slovenia.

3.2) State versus nation

Although the two terms – state and nation – have been and continue to be used as synonyms, they nevertheless belong to different realms (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009). Lister and Hay (2006, p. 5) claim that the concept of the state is difficult to define as it is a modern concept, yet regard it as “an institutional complex claiming sovereignty for itself as the supreme political authority within a defined territory for whose governance it is responsible”. Furthermore, they emphasise that few of the more obvious roles of the state lie in mobilising populations, regulating the information within the public sphere, intervening within the economy, and regulating, monitoring and policing behaviour within society. Hence, the state falls within the political realm, representing aggregation of political and administrative institution, while the nation, on the other hand falls within the cultural realm comprising of the shared decent (Harris, 2002).

On its own, nation is one of the most debated notions in modern social and political discourses (Bairner, 2001). It is a modern concept (Morgan, 1997; Smith, 1991) and an abstract multidimensional construct (Smith, 1991). A less complex characterisation of a nation is a group of human population connected by the so-called collective cultural identity, founded on common language and common symbolic descent or history, most commonly expressed via durable aspects of national symbols, values, traditions, customs, myths, memories and

ceremonies handed down through generations (ibid.) Each nation has its own original way of being (Morgan, 1997). According to Anderson (1991), nation is essentially an imagined community as the shared common belief or fellowship encompassing sometimes many millions of people that may never meet (much less know each other) is imagined. Moreover, nation is imagined as limited because it exists within and is distinguished by the style of its imagination. Although, most of the elements defining a nation are intangible, Smith (2001) adds that nations are indeed constrained by their territories and without the so-called homelands, nations are outcast people.

Hansen (1996) goes further and distinguishes between political and cultural conceptualisation of the nation, where the former stresses a civic territory – the state, while the latter emphasises historical belonging, i.e. descent, language, tradition and customs – the nation *per se*. This then leads to a misconception when using the term ‘*nation*’, while referring to the ‘*state*’ because the so-called ‘*political nation*’, regardless of its own characteristics falls under the greater notion of the ‘*state*’. This is explicitly vivid in the field of sport, where one would refer to nations competing against each other for an Olympic gold, when states are being recognised. Indeed, it is the state that is considered a primary unit of measure in organisation of international sport and in elite sporting success analysis (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015).

Furthermore, Bechhofer and McCrone (2009) explain that states may have several nations within them – these are known as multinational-states. States cannot exist without a nation, yet multiple nations can exist within the same state. When a state is populated by one national group, the phenomenon is regarded to as a *nation-state* (Harris, 2002). However, due to globalisation and the phenomenon of multination-states, the significance of *nation-state* has diminished (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009; Henry, 2007).

Prior to 1991, Slovenia was a nation that existed within the multinational state of Yugoslavia. With political independence in 1991, Slovenia became a state in addition to being a nation. It is then of high importance to distinguish the two concepts in this thesis. State is a political entity with governmental institutions exercising control over the people living in a defined geographical territory. Due to its political role, it is considered as a unit of comparison between other states and is represented by its symbols on an international stage, such as flags, anthems, political representatives, national team athletes etc. Nation, on the other hand, has been defined as a group of people from the same ancestry, living in a defined territory, sharing the same history, cultural norms, beliefs and traditions.

3.3) Small states

In this section, the characteristics of small states and their approaches to sport are discussed as small states despite their similarities with medium and large states, have their distinctive features (Bray, 1991).

Classifications of small state determinants are relatively fluid (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Thorhallsson (2006, p. 7) identifies four traditional variables that determine the state's size within the EU: "population, territory, gross domestic product (GDP) and military capacity". Sam and Jackson (2015) in a more recent study, identify three determinants of a state's size, which are population, geographical size and economic size (GDP). The importance of military capacity was high in the 'old' international system for states' survival but has diminished in the new European system (Thorhallsson, 2006), therefore the categorisation of small states will follow the one offered by Sam and Jackson (2015).

In the first category of population, Thorhallsson (2006) identified the traditional two-fold categorisation of small and large states, along with a more diversified four-fold categorisation of large, medium, small and micro-states. Regardless of the typology, Slovenia, with its two million inhabitants, falls within the 'small state' category. The distinction between small and large or small and medium is drawn at approximately fifteen million citizens. When considering geographical size, this refers to the size of the land area (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Thorhallsson (2006) demonstrates that Slovenia falls within the category of small states, with no specific distinction in the area size between small and large states being provided. Lastly, economic size refers to the state's GDP, size of the domestic market, and trade and tax base (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Thorhallsson (2006) illustrates that based on the two-fold typology of large and small states according to GDP, Slovenia falls within the scope of small states. Based on the four-fold typology, Slovenia falls within the so-called 'micro-state' category. Ultimately, smaller economy means fewer businesses to support and sponsor sporting events and athletes, and in reference to public funding, a smaller tax base indicates less revenue being allocated to sport (Sam & Jackson, 2015). For the reasons listed above, Slovenia, with its characteristics in the categories of population, GDP and geographical size, falls within categorisation of a small state.

While small and large states share many concerns (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015) and size having an impact on sport policy in small states (Sam, 2015), "generating explanations regarding how and why size matters for sport raises numerous questions regarding the possible differences,

challenges and opportunities of being a small ‘state’” (Sam & Jackson, 2015, p. 319). Despite lower GDP, population and geographical size, small states have developed some adaptive and beneficial features of their own, which enable them to build on their resilience (Sam, 2015). Although there is a subjective element associated with small states perceiving themselves as weak (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015), “being a small underdog may enable or force people to think, adapt and act in innovative ways, allowing them to succeed despite what appears to be overwhelming odds” (Sam & Jackson, 2015, p. 319). Some claim that small states thrive because they have experienced long-term vulnerabilities of economy and geopolitics in aspects that large states do not (Campbell & Hall, 2009). Bray (1991) suggests that what sets small states apart from their larger counterparts are the following factors; human resources are viewed as the most valuable assets; there is a strong sense of cultural unity and national identity, and closer interpersonal relationships. These factors are discussed below and relate to the context of small state of Slovenia.

Human resources

When discussing specificities of small states in sport, human resources, understandably, provide a smaller talent pool in relation to athletes, coaches and officials (Sam, 2015). In fact, soft resources and mindful husbanding of talented individuals is what most small states must depend on (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). According to Sam (2015), due to a limited number of athletes, injury or sickness may come as a major setback to the medal count on the international stage, deviating from the initial expected outcome. Moreover, smallness enables distribution and mobilisation of resources that might otherwise not be possible, nor acceptable (Sam, 2015). This can, however, lead to vulnerabilities of the system including corruption, cronyism and rent-seeking (Campbell & Hall, 2009).

On one hand, lower number of athletes may lead to lack in competitiveness nationally (Sam, 2015), while according to Sam and Jackson (2015) on the other hand, this may prove to be advantageous in the sense that young athletes are given opportunities to compete at international level, something that they may not be able to experience otherwise. Additionally, in the case that a small state maintains a wide range of different sports, the chances to rise to the top nationally are greater for an individual athlete than they would be in a country with a larger athlete talent pool. Houlihan and Zheng (2015) also point out that some small states have been able to develop their niche sport(s), such as Slovenia in men’s handball for example. However, this may become more difficult to obtain due to the increase in the number of states

participating at the major world-scale competitions, which is why small states are also particularly sensitive to changes in the format of the disciplines and multisport competitions. Although there has been an increase in the number of small states attending the Summer Olympic Games, the competition playing field makes it more difficult for small states to identify opportunities for niche sports and be successful (ibid.).

Closer ties

Closer personal ties, where everybody knows everybody, even in various contexts (Bray, 1991), lead to more trusting relations that also increase resilience of the state as a whole (Sam & Jackson, 2015). A smaller talent pool, for example, allows for a better cooperation and development of relationships (Campbell & Hall, 2009). The lower numbers of athletes for elite-level competitions result in the coordination between sport and educational sectors, sometimes to such an extent where it is impossible to distinguish the two (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Bray (1991) elaborates that, on one hand, close interpersonal relationships in small states may lead to:

- An individual's role to become more significant;
- Individuals may know political leaders personally and may communicate with them directly, leading to improved intersectoral coordination and minimising exclusion of groups from important considerations; and
- The relationships between people and especially employees can become more meaningful and deeper, assisting managers in promoting a strong sense of community.

On the other hand, however, close interpersonal relations:

- May become difficult to manage, especially in cases of accommodating diverging views and potential cases of hostility;
- May cause individuals to become more vulnerable to group pressures; and
- Can lead to lack of criticism of senior officials and political leaders (ibid.).

Cultural unity and national identity

According to Campbell and Hall (2009), small states with a strong national identity and cultural unity have the institutional advantage and capacity to coordinate policy for better cooperation and flexible manoeuvring to suit the national interests. Although small states are not the only

ones influenced by their shared mythologies around sport that shape the identity of national perception, the ability of sport to foster national identity and unity in small states may be much stronger than in their larger counterparts (Sam, 2015). Indeed, a study by Evans and Kelley (2002) showed that small state citizens are much prouder of the state's achievements in sport and therefore, pride in sport is more important to small states. It then becomes clear why small states should use sport as a means of developing national unity and social integration (Sam & Jackson, 2015).

Houlihan and Zheng (2015) explain that the presence of small states is consistent in international sporting events that offer a platform for small states to receive recognition and acknowledgment which may then lead to claims to sovereignty. As such, international sport aids small states in portraying their cultural distinctiveness which further strengthens their sovereign status. Participating at the major international sporting competitions provides small states with a "rare opportunity to share a formal symbolic equality of status with the major (sports) powers most evident in the opening and closing ceremonies" (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015, p. 333). Hence, it is important to realise that sport does not only provide opportunities for national expression and unity but "it may also represent one of the clearest and most tangible indications of a...[state's] very existence" (Bairner, 1996, p. 315). Additionally, hosting of sports events by small states can serve as a social cohesion policy because it demonstrates sound governance and effective management of economy of the state (Sam, 2015).

Since size does matter, one cannot avoid the question of:

how small states are supposed to compete against giants like USA, China, Russia, Brazil and Germany. How much money should be spent on elite sport development and/or the hosting of mega-events in what is quickly becoming the equivalent of a 'sporting arms race'? (Sam & Jackson, 2015, p. 319).

Despite or maybe as a result of the limitations of small states, especially resource scarcity, this leads to consolidation, targeting, rationing and narrowing of objectives (Sam & Jackson, 2015) and can only take place in an environment of close networks (Sam, 2015). Narrowing of priorities is especially evident in sport and poses a different scale of distortion to sports systems in small than large states (Sam & Jackson, 2015).

As the capacity for strategic development in small states is highly constrained, it is crucial to shift the focus on which resources they do possess and how can they ensure the most effective

utilisation and deployment of them (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Sam and Jackson (2015) specify that small states tend to lean on mimicking larger states because they appear successful, however, they must take into consideration their specific settings of limited resources, pressures of global environment and closely related networks. In other words, “It is often desirable at least to modify basic models and perhaps even to create new ones...Each country faces different circumstances, and structures and procedures must be adapted to fit the goals, cultures and resources of individual societies” (Bray, 1991, p. 11). In this way, smallness of the state is also internally constructed by the state and its people, which underpins the state’s culture and is informing the choices of action (Sam, 2015). For example, non-governmental organisations can act as extensions of the sport policy system in pursuing their non-sporting and sporting objectives (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015).

The reliance on the smaller number of sports in which states win most of their medals proportionately increases with the decreasing size of the state (ibid). Houlihan and Zheng (2015) point out that the limited resources and markets may only allow for a concentration on a narrow range of sports in small states, adding to their vulnerability and reflecting their status in the international sport policy arena where they are mainly perceived as policy-takers and not policy-makers. Nevertheless, small states should not be recognised as weak in the international sport policy arena (Sam, 2015) as they can be very skilled at operating the diplomatic and political gaps between other major powers (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). In cases where international federations operate on a one nation-one vote rule (Giulianotti, 1999), small states may even hold a disproportionate amount of power (Sam, 2015). It may be true that small states face the same issues as large states when it comes to recognition and voice in elite sport, yet they normally use sport as a resource for pursuing broader diplomatic goals (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015), which is why they could, indeed, benefit from investing in sport (Sam, 2015).

In conclusion, the size of the state, although being only one influence in sport policy (Sam, 2015), should not exclude small states from international politics of sport policy analysis (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). More research may assist policy makers and researchers to better understand the implications of close networks in small states for sport (Sam & Jackson, 2015).

3.4) National identity and (elite) sport in Slovenia

National identity is one of the main themes that derived from the review of development of sport in Slovene territory. Its relation to sport throughout history indicates its importance and therefore this section provides a definition of national identity and a further investigation into the relationship of national identity and sport.

3.4.1) National identity

National identity is one of the basic and most fundamental social identities⁶ (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009; Smith, 1991). It is dynamic and as such “treated as identification and a process...[and] connects large groups of people within a territory in a natural way by the same language, culture, symbols, religion and history” (Godnič, 2005, p. 4). Campbell and Hall (2009) elaborate that a shared set of values and trust between people determine the strength of national identity, yet the willingness to (physically) fight for one’s country should not be neglected. The perception of national identity can also vary as the cultural and national characteristics can be used for different means of creating shared feelings (by politicians, leaders for example).

Furthermore, the process of creating and maintaining national identity provides means for defining ourselves in the world (Smith, 1991). In fact, national identity is expressed through citizenship and/or nationality (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009). This means that national identity comprises simultaneously of concepts of state and nation, and is, therefore, located in political and cultural realms (Smith, 1991). For the purpose of the present research, national identity has been defined as an identification of individuals of the same descent with the same nationality, shared territory and cultural characteristics, consisting of beliefs, values, symbols, history, tradition, language and myths.

3.4.2) National identity and sport

Many have identified a link between sport and national identity, and between formation of national identities in particular (Bairner, 1996, 2001; Coakley & Pike, 2014; Duquin, 2000; Evans & Kelley, 2002; Groll, 2006; Houlihan, 2000; Morgan, 1997; Pisk, 2006; Sam, 2015; van Hilvoorde, Elling, & Stokvis, 2010). Sport can be seen as important catalyst in relation to nationalism (Allison, 2000) – an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity,

⁶ Religion, class and race are some of other types of social identities (Smith, 1991).

autonomy and unity of a nation (Smith, 1991, 2001) – however, there is a level of ambiguity when it comes to sport symbolism being used in building of nations and nationalism (Houlihan, 2000) and connections can only be suspected (Allison, 2000). Nevertheless, in their study of national pride in 24 countries including Slovenia, Evans and Kelley (2002, p. 315) concluded that sport can be considered as “the most widely dispersed source of pride” and can influence national identity.

Sport is an important but not the only feature of national identity (Coakley & Pike, 2014; Godnič, 2005; Houlihan, 2000; Sam, 2015; van Hilvoorde, Elling, & Stokvis, 2010), for “national identity...is a product of working in many different areas: political, educational, scientific, school, and athletic” (Godnič, 2005, p. 4). Although sport is integrated within other institutions, it is generally considered separately (Blanchard, 2000). Since sport offers many opportunities for expression, formation and perception of national identity (Groll, 2006), it is often considered as compensation or a cure against its loss (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010).

Sport, like other rituals, is a distinctive component of culture (Blanchard, 2000; Godnič, 2005), created by communities and is a reflection of (Morgan, 1997) and a vehicle for their norms and values (Blanchard, 2000). Sport therefore serves as community building (Duquin, 2000) and without it, societies would be different to what they are now (Struna, 2000). It can aid the creation of collective imagination revealing not only how individuals regard themselves but also how nations and states see themselves (Morgan, 1997). While sport has the capacity to aid in building and forging national identities and transcending social divisions, it is also bound up with divisions present even in the most homogenous states (Bairner, 1996).

Sport is in its nature global and the interest at world level, along with world records surpasses all else (Allison, 2000). However, when comparing the impact of events between the Olympic Games – the highest profile global multi-sporting event (Shibli, Bingham, & Henry, 2007) – and national sports, ‘national sports’⁷ can reflect nationality to a greater extent (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). This is because international sports create a language oblivious to cultural and national differences (Allison, 2000; Morgan, 1997), whereas national sports focus “on national unity and identity, championing the dominant values, ideals, and resources of the nation in which they originate” (Kotnik, 2009, p. 53). The importance of cultural significances and

⁷ National sports are those sports that are an important cultural element of state or nation (Kotnik, 2007).

international success of Slovenes in sport is illustrated with the example of skiing and winter sports tradition in the Review of Slovenia's History.

Sport offers a great and extensive source of stories, ceremonies and rituals that are a mirror of national identity (especially when regarding the Olympic Games) and can be re-told (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). While both elite sport on one end and recreational sport on the other end influence and strengthen positive national consciousness and national belonging (Pisk, 2006), it is elite sport which is frequently viewed as the main driving force for cohesion and pride within a state (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). Elite sport provides an arena for symbolic competition between states (Kotnik, 2009), where displays of 'nationality' and nationalism are common (Coakley & Pike, 2014; Krüger, 2015). Sport events enable individuals to realise their belonging to a country (Godnič, 2005). For when it comes to international sport, a great amount of it exists in competitions between athletes/teams representing their states (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2014). The power of national identity emphasised and groomed through sport is not limited to athletes being born nationals, but can also be attained through "residence, marriage, ancestry, immigration, political asylum, or any of the other ways that people obtain their nation status" (Morgan, 1997, p. 3). Nevertheless, 'home-grown' athletes may become more valuable than foreign athletes point out Sam and Jackson (2015).

Athletes and teams become symbols of states and when fans and/or residents identify with national athletes and teams, the fans/residents assume they are being represented by the athletes, when in fact that is not the case as the athletes representing their imagined communities create imagined accounts concerning real people (Morgan, 1997). Sporting events, thus, offer unique occasions where a strong bond and sense of community emerge between complete strangers that can be understood only by an idea of the *political nation* (Bairner, 1996). Similar effects can only be found during the times of war, which is why sport is considered as an alternative to war where states battle directly with each other (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). There are not many other opportunities that offer more frequent expression of individuals' or even public commitment to a *political nation*, let it be as participants in competitions or, in more cases, as spectators (Bairner, 1996).

Sporting achievements identify and connect collective identity of who 'we' are by saying "we have won" or "we have lost", "three-zero for us" (Eichberg, 2006). Feelings of unity and identity considered as a 'feel-good' factor can be inspiring (Coakley & Pike, 2014), give faith in strength of the state and consequently strengthen national identity (Groll, 2006; Štaud, 2014).

As Duquin (2000) explains, in spectating, emotions can be compared to those of religious rituals that underpin cultural and personal life. However, nowadays, “sport is no longer part of a religious cult but became a cult of its own” (Krüger, 2015, p. 524). In addition to sport strengthening positive peaceful emotions towards one’s nation (Pisk, 2006), serving as expression of national solidarity (Bairner, 1996), it can also spread a state’s positive image internationally (Houlihan, 2000). Competitiveness in sport between states can also influence relationships between them (Godnič, 2005) and bring them together peacefully (Coakley & Pike, 2014). As Morgan (1997, p. 13) states, “sports have been, and continue to be, the *lingua franca* of nations, and that in this capacity they have shown themselves capable of delivering a variety of moral messages, be they messages of nationalist solidarity, anti-colonialism, or international self-presence”.

Furthermore, the expressions and identifications of fans are linked with strong emotions, be that positive or negative (Duquin, 2000; Groll, 2006) such as in times of defeat or denial of sports representation (Allison, 2000). Sport can also re-direct the attention from important subjects such as fairness and justice and most states use sport for their own interests (Coakley & Pike, 2014). In the past, sport has been used for more hostile nationalistic emotions displaying one state’s power over another (e.g. 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin) (Pisk, 2006). For this reason, Krüger (2015) warns that the conflicts in sport need to be articulated fairly and peacefully.

Moreover, Morgan (1997) critiques the idea of national and state representation in elite and international sport. He argues that practice of international sport remains ethically ambiguous, harming lusory aspects of sport by promoting extreme ‘national(istic)’ biases and reducing perceived differences. While lusory changes in sport are not necessarily bad or good, they nevertheless fail to support the intention of elite sport to determine the best athlete/team. The criteria are not based solely on athletes’ athletic ability but are also limited by their state’s affiliation. There, thus, exists a duality of the international sport, especially at the Olympic Games where on one hand athletic merits are disregarded to suffice geographical diversity, and on the other hand, the same merits are valued when considering religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and race. With this, the enjoyment of spectators is marginalised as well since support for one’s state exceeds appreciation of elite performances. For this reason Morgan (1997) puts forth a daring proposition for nationalism to be removed from elite sport and to re-evaluate importance of nationality in elite sport as the time of international sport being considered as a cultural artefact has long passed. If nationality was irrelevant, the quality of

playing field would be higher. However, the fact that nations are real communities even in the imagined sense cannot be ignored as “people will naturally bond with members of their community” (ibid., p. 15)

In conclusion, “sport sometimes channels, sometimes releases, sometimes even creates complex and powerful nationalist sentiment” (Allison, 2000, p. 354). It possesses at least two crucial roles for the state; (1) through sport states present themselves to the world, and at the same time (2) sports stimulate (and release) national emotions among members of the state (Godnič, 2005). Moreover, as much as sport is a part of national identity, the same is applied in reverse, where national ideology is an important part of sport (Allison, 2000), indicating the reciprocal relationship between national identity and sport.

3.4.3) National identity, sport and media

Building on the point of reciprocal and challenging relationship between national identity and sport discussed above, this section introduces the role of the media in fostering of national identity as well as promoting sport and vice versa.

The (international) success of athletes and representation of sport would not be such a crucial factor in formation of national identity without its intimate link to the media, which publishes international achievements as national interest (Štaud, 2014). Since the 1960s the relationship between media and sport has been gaining momentum (Whannel, 2000). For each sporting event gains real value when it is mentioned on the radio and especially on the television, informing citizens of the events in which they are not participating themselves (Godnič, 2005). Daily media consumption creates a sense of community (Pisk, 2006) and together with sport they play a great role when forming and influencing national identity (Godnič, 2005). The status of a national team is inevitably changed by television, where it has been made possible to watch and support one’s national team competing even thousands kilometres away (Allison, 2000). Furthermore, national recognition by other countries and knowledge about the states’ heritage and history can only be achieved by extensive media coverage of sports events and by winning medals (Coakley & Pike, 2014). This development of media within sport has led sport to become more important to some people than economy and politics (Godnič, 2005).

Thus, the relationship between media, sport and identity formation is reciprocal as it is recognised that “outstanding performances attract media attention” (De Bosscher, Sotiriadou, & Van Bottenburg, 2013, p. 333), which then indicates that sport has the power to influence

and increase media consumption. In fact, as Godnič (2005) describes, sport has the ability to ensure a wide range of audiences for the media and in return, the media allow for sport to have a special status in society and an audience outside the sporting arena. They both manipulate and are being manipulated in return. Their distinct relationship can be best illustrated through the role or influence of television, where sport has subordinated to such an extent that it has changed its rules in a sole aim of increasing television viewership numbers. Sport has become a means of marketing that must be as interesting as possible for the viewer, not too long and not too short. In this way, athletes can embody and spread moral and ethical norms, with sporting heroes playing similar roles as the actors in films (ibid.).

3.5) Elite sport and government

For a better understanding of the sport policy context and the relationships between elite sport and the government, notions such as sports sectors, policy, politics, governance and the main focus of the study – elite sport policy system – are defined in the Table 1 below.

Table 1

Sport policy context definitions.

NOTION	DEFINITION
Public sports sector	Public entities are those “created by the people for the people” (Pedersen & Thibault, 2019, p. 13). These entities fall within the jurisdiction of the state, for example local, regional and national governments, and specialist agencies for development of sport policy, provision of funding and support for specialist roles for drug control and development of elite athletes (Hoye, Smith, Nicholson, & Steward, 2018). Furthermore, public organisations strive to ensure a safe access to sport for everyone through policies and provision of facilities, sport programmes and services (Pedersen & Thibault, 2019).
Non-profit or voluntary sports sector	The voluntary or non-profit sector is comprised of sports clubs, associations and NGBs (Hoye et al., 2018). Most sports organisations and clubs are non-profit – they exist to serve the needs of their members and/or to address a social cause (Pedersen & Thibault, 2019).

Private sports sector	The main aim of the private or commercial sector is to make profit and it comprises various different commercial organisations for sport including franchises, leagues, retailers, media, sport providers and goods manufacturers (Pedersen & Thibault, 2019).
Sports sectors	Hoye et al. (2018) point out that the three sectors do not operate in isolation but are interlinked. For example, the state provides funding to non-profit organisations, which in return provide sporting opportunities for community, along with developing coaches, athletes and officials (administrators). The state also intervenes in the commercial sector by providing legal framework and regulations for operation, and building of sporting facilities. The private sector is supported by the non-profit sector by providing talent for leagues as well as coaches and officials for competition facilitation. In return, the private sector provides the audience and participants in sports through sports promotion and broadcasting.
Politics	Politics, according to Coakley and Pike (2014), encompasses the power to make and shape decisions that affect members of a specific state. Decisions are generally done by governmental entities, which fall within the public sphere and affect all members of that specific state, regardless of their level and the status of the organisation (e.g. private, public or non-profit).
Policy	Policy, as stated by Hums and MacLean (2018), is considered as broad guidelines to provide direction for achievement of goals/objectives. This is normally expressed in documents via formal statements of organisations that are updated over time to be in line with the organisations' changing environment. Implementation of actions and plans to achieve goals determined by policies is executed through strategy (Hums & MacLean, 2018) which is "the long-term direction of an organisation" (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, & Regnér, 2017, p. 4). In relation to the public sector, public policies are those "that originate within, or are dependent upon the resources of, the state" (Houlihan, 2005, p. 165). It should be noted here that not all decisions relating to sport are made publicly and formally as many of these decisions are, indeed, made in a less explicit and in ad hoc manner (Houlihan, 2016).

Governance	In simple terms, governance refers to implementation of policy (Andersen et al., 2015b) or execution of authority (Hums & MacLean, 2018) by providing the system with elements of control and direction (Hoye et al., 2018). Andersen et al. (2015b) illustrate that even though governance stems from the state, it can become complex as it needs multi-layer coordination and interaction. In sport, “governance is associated with power, authority, control, and high-level policy making in organisations....Sport governance occurs mainly on three levels – local, national and international” (Hums & MacLean, 2018, p. 3).
Elite sport policy system	Based on the definition of public policy, the elite sport policy can be viewed as the public policy for elite sport. As the main subject of the research, the elite sport policy system, however, encompasses more than just policies. Hence, the elite sport policy system is defined as the governance, management and implementation of the public policy for elite sport via its constituent elements and mechanisms such as sports clubs, sports associations, coaches, athletes, officials and other support systems (e.g. health support and research).

3.5.1) Government interests in sport

In the modern era, governmental policy making and sport have become intertwined (Chalip, 1995). The relationship between sport and politics is complex to the point where separation of the two notions is deemed impossible (Coakley & Pike, 2014). There was a period of decline of governmental interest in sport after the end of the World War II (Houlihan, 1997). However, by the 1990s, sport has been a recognised feature on governmental agendas of most developed countries, where governments pay attention to and set explicit budget or ministerial recognition for sport (Houlihan, 2005).

Despite the numerous claims stating that politics should have no place in sport, involvement of government is seen as necessary as many sports need regulation, organisation, facilities and sponsorship (Coakley & Pike, 2014). “The old exhortation heard from many sports administrators and politicians ‘to keep politics out of sport’ has long been abandoned” (Houlihan, 2005, p. 182). Nowadays, many governments feel the pressure to regulate certain aspects of sport, among which are treatment of young athletes, drug abuse, monopolistic leagues and freedom of movement of athletes (Houlihan, 2000). Their power comes from them

being formal political organisations and having the authority to establish and enforce rules that affect people's lives in a given territory (Coakley & Pike, 2014).

Coakley and Pike (2014) explain that through passing laws and establishing policies, governments safeguard the public order, protecting citizens' participation rights by determining where and when sports can be played, who must have the opportunity to participate, who is allowed to use public facilities at allocated times, and what safety equipment must be used. Additionally, political issues such as defining sport and its legality, establishing and enforcing the rules of sports, locating, organising and monitoring sports events, setting eligibility criteria for participants, and distributing the rewards, have become a central part of sport.

Houlihan (1997) describes that over the last few decades central governments have become more and more closely involved in sport. There are various motives as to why that is and although each country has its own approach, there are also considerable similarities between the motives across different countries. Governments exploit sport and see it almost exclusively as an instrument to pursue a wide range of policy objectives at both domestic and global level (ibid.). There is no universal one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to the relationship between sport and politics (Allison, 2000). Nevertheless, Coakley and Pike (2014), who build and expand on the work of Houlihan (2000), propose a series of similarities for the purpose of governments involvement in sport. The forms vary by societies, yet share the following common generalities:

- [1] safeguard public order;
- [2] maintain health and fitness among citizens;
- [3] promote the prestige and power of a group, community or nation;
- [4] promote a sense of identity, belonging and unity among citizens;
- [5] reproduce values consistent with dominant ideology;
- [6] increase support for political leaders and government structures;
- [7] promote economic development; and
- [8] serve as a foreign policy tool (Coakley & Pike, 2014, pp. 459-460).

These purposes for government involvement in sport reflect mostly non-sporting objectives and are particularly relevant to elite sport as elite sport offers a space for comparison of individual countries' development via international sporting success (Green & Houlihan, 2005). That is why most literature on sport policy includes considerations of sport's role in achieving the state's aims (Sam, 2015). The reality is that because of its power of attracting masses of people, sport is appealing for political manipulation (Godnič, 2005), where public investments sometimes benefit some people more than others (Coakley & Pike, 2014). Nevertheless, it should be noted that "people generally take issue with government involvement only when it does not bring the results they want; otherwise they seldom notice it" (Coakley & Pike, 2014, p. 442).

Based on the points made, it is evident that government intervenes in sport in various ways which is justified as it serves the public good (Coakley & Pike, 2014). Although sport has benefited greatly from the ever-increasing interest of the government, it has also been paying a price for government patronage (Houlihan, 1997).

3.5.1.1) Elite sporting success and government interest

While some believe that sporting success is a mirror of national identity and pride, others believe that national pride is something that can be created and fuelled by winning medals (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). When achieving sporting success, the attitude of the population as a whole towards sport as a social phenomenon can be shaped and influenced (Štaud, 2014). As government officials believe that winning medals enhances country's image and legitimacy (Coakley & Pike, 2014), many governments intervene in sport via public policy (De Bosscher, Shilbury, Theeboom, Van Hoecke, & De Knop, 2011) to stimulate the development of elite sport (Houlihan, 1997). They justify large public investments by arguing that hosting sporting events and elite sporting success bring about many positive outcomes (De Bosscher et al., 2015). The financial investment in elite sport has been on the rise since the 1960s, coinciding with a simultaneous increase in competition of states to win medals at major international competitions (Shibli et al., 2014). This is supported with the research conducted by Green and Houlihan (2005), who concluded that since 1995, there has been an increased government intervention with an aim to establish and improve elite sport policy in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

Thus, governments around the world have started to realise the power of sport, leading them to becoming strategic in their approach to development of elite athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

Indeed, “athletes are now ‘engineered’ as intensely as their facilities and equipment” (Guttman, 2000, p. 254). Successful elite athletes are considered as a strategic planning output (Shibli et al., 2007) where their success “depends increasingly on the performance capacity of the national system and its effectiveness in using all relevant resources for the benefit of elite sport” (De Bosscher et al., 2006, p. 186). Therefore, those nations that can financially afford development of effective elite sport strategies and system (Oakley & Green, 2001a), integrate work of sports federations and governments with a particular focus on success at the Olympic Games (Andersen et al., 2015b). It should be pointed out that financial government support for sport is constantly limited by and subjected to other government priorities such as Health and Education, leading to an increasingly competitive lobbying for public funds and making sport vulnerable to external pressures (Oakley & Green, 2001a).

The phenomenon where governments invest strategically in elite sport in order to produce international sporting success has been referred to as the ‘global sporting arms race’ (Oakley & Green, 2001b). In brief, Oakley and Green (2001a) point out three main stimulants for this occurrence;

1. The use of sporting success by emerging states to establish themselves in the world, and to create and establish their identity;
2. The difficulties of the ‘traditionally and economically established’ states to maintain their sporting success in the increasingly competitive international arena; and
3. Politicians’ recognition that sporting success is of public value, since it has the power via media to reach high numbers of the population and to influence consumer culture.

Within the scope of the first stimulant – the pursuit of recognition, prestige and identity – falls the reasoning of government subsidies for national teams, in particular teams for Olympic sports (Coakley & Pike, 2014). According to van Hilvoorde et al. (2010), this may also explain the increased importance of the Olympic medal table (due to the high level of competition at the Olympic Games), which most governments see as a measure of sporting success and sports policy internationally, and therefore use as guidelines for future investment in sport. Olympic success is linked to efficient resource allocation, scientific measures and state-level development of elite sport (Oakley & Green, 2001a) causing governments and government officials around the world to work tirelessly on the so-called sporting success ‘on-demand’ (Štaud, 2014).

Elite sport organisations, operating in competitive and uncertain policy environments, are under great pressures as they must justify and protect public investment for the Olympics, in particular for individual Olympic cycles (Andersen, Houlihan, & Ronglan, 2015a). For many states and their governments, the Olympic Games represent the defining moment about their policies in elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2011). In order to achieve their policy objectives, governments generally cooperate with sports organisations (Houlihan, 2000) – governing bodies – operating on various levels including local, state and international (Coakley & Pike, 2014). These levels all govern sports with different agendas, yet influence each other (ibid.). Events on a global level can, for example, have consequences for governance on a local level, and state-level issues can influence local and global agendas.

Despite the many claims that elite sporting success is generally a result of a planned, coordinated and strategic approach (Green & Houlihan, 2005), De Bosscher et al. (2006) argue that some countries are more successful than others, due to specific unquantifiable winning characteristics embedded in the culture. Therefore, despite the popular believe that international sporting success is a result of a carefully planned strategies, there is an idea stipulating there might be more to this approach. This then begs the question to what extent are the elite sport policies and strategies limited by and/or built on the culture of a nation? How can cultural specificities related to sport act as supportive mechanisms in achieving elite sporting success? The importance of cultural characteristics in relation to shaping and stimulating the elite sport development in Slovenia is explored throughout this thesis.

3.5.2) Government approaches to elite sport development

Following the discussion on the importance of policy and strategic direction, the focus now shifts to specific approaches undertaken by governments in order to support the development of the elite sport system with a goal of international sporting success by winning medals.

The strategic developments of governments and sports organisations have stimulated much under-developed “academic interest in describing the elite sport systems, analysing the processes by which the policy was established and evaluating the impact of these policies on elite athlete success and on other elements of the sport field” (Andersen et al., 2015b, p. 3). Since the 1980s, states have attempted to build these approaches based on research, with the focus on effective practices (ibid.). Houlihan (2000) surprisingly notes that public policy outputs in different countries, irrespective of their diversities such as wealth, sports traditions, political and educational systems, are quite similar. This similarity might be a response to the

globalisation and shared common socio-economic development and political issues (Houlihan, 2009).

Andersen et al. (2015b) explain that there are important differences in structures of elite sport systems and a state's role. They elaborate that all systems for elite sport require management, but it is the differences in the mechanisms and principles that vary across states and levels. The relationships between the local, regional and central levels are considerably dynamic, with limited academic attention being placed on managing the overall system and integration of resources and inputs on the local level. For successful systems, it is not necessary that an organisational lead is coming from the state, as this role can be replaced by non-governmental organisations such as IFs and the IOC (Houlihan, 2009). Houlihan (1997, pp. 66-67) for example, provides a five-category typology based on the various patterns of government responsibility for sport; with the first category consisting of countries

where a central government department fulfils a major role in the execution of sport policy.... The second category includes those countries where the administration of public policy is more fragmented, with the impetus for policy development lying partly outside the centre at sub-national government level.... The third category contains those countries where significant authority for sport is delegated to a quango (quasi-autonomous national governmental organisation) or similar semi-independent agency.... The fourth category contains those countries where responsibility for sport is shared between a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and government.... The final category contains those countries where government involvement is minimal.

Following the above classification, Slovenia adopts the “‘fragmented administration of public policy’ because the responsibilities for sport policy are shared between local and central governments” (Jurak, 2017, pp. 229-230). Similarly Camy, Clijsen, Madella, and Pilkington (2004) (in VOCASPORT project) propose four different configurations of government intervention in the EU countries; the ‘bureaucratic configuration’, the ‘missionary configuration’, the ‘entrepreneurial configuration’, and the ‘social configuration’. Slovenia was identified as adopting ‘bureaucratic configuration’ by the authors which is

characterised by the very active role that the public authorities take in regulating the system. There is almost always a legislative framework specific to the field (law on sport). This is a system characterised by rules from a public authority which,

with its political/democratic legitimacy, does not necessarily negotiate to any great extent with other players (Camy et al., 2004, p. 53).

Furthermore, sport policy differences between countries can also be explained by path-dependency (Scheerden, Claes, & Willem, 2017) which implies that the past development limits and shapes current and future possibilities for structural or constitutional organisation (Jessop, 1990, 2005; Nielsen, Jessop, & Hausner, 1995). Once a particular path was instituted, it tends to be repeated and it may be difficult to divert the course from it (Nielsen et al., 1995). Consequently, countries can only draw inspiration from other countries, they cannot copy the entire sport policy system because the specific contextual characteristics that had been shaped by the past policy decisions must be taken into consideration (Scheerden et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, Kay (2005) notes that path-dependency is neither a framework, a model or a theory, it is instead an empirical category or an organising concept used to mark a chronological process and should not be used on its own, but alongside other frameworks. One of the main critiques of the path-dependency is its lack of explanatory power. While it does have potential in explaining the policy system 'whole', it lacks the power to explain the mechanisms that shape the so-called 'whole' and provide sufficient and necessary conditions for the process to be observed. In this way, path-dependency is perceived as theoretically underdeveloped with a limited number of successful empirical applications in the field of policy studies. When applying the concept of path-dependency there is a possibility that all past paths can be referred to as path dependent and consequently explained in that manner. For example, in applying path-dependency to the Slovene context one could explain that Slovenia adopted a decentralised management model in sport as it followed the latest Yugoslav model. On the other hand, one could also claim that if Slovenia adopted a centralised sports model, it did so to distance itself from the decentralised approach in place during the last decades of Yugoslavia.

Despite similarities between elite sport policy development in different countries, there are also substantial differences (Scheerden et al., 2017). It would be inaccurate to assume that countries do not maintain any of their specificities in their approach (Oakley & Green, 2001a). Nevertheless, Oakley and Green (2001a) observe that policies, strategies and systems that exhibit the greatest efficiency in attaining medals are, indeed, receiving international attention. What is more, the methods used in those systems are being replicated by the aspiring countries leading a movement of a single model of elite sport system. Based on their findings, they

propose ten most common characteristics or approaches of enhancing elite sport development, deriving from primary and secondary sources of six states as listed below.

(1) a clear understanding about the role of the different agencies involved and an effective communication network which maintains the system; (2) simplicity of administration through common sporting and political boundaries; (3) an effective system for the statistical identification and monitoring of the progress of talented and elite athletes; (4) provision of sports services to create an excellence culture in which all members of the team (athletes, coaches, managers, scientist) can interact with one another in a formal and informal way; (5) well-structured competitive programmes with ongoing international exposure; (6) well developed and specific facilities with priority access for elite athletes; (7) the targeting of resources on a relatively small number of sports through identifying those that have a real chance of success at world level; (8) comprehensive planning for each sport's needs; (9) a recognition that developing excellence has costs, with appropriate funding for infrastructure and people; and (10) lifestyle support and preparation for life after sport (Oakley & Green, 2001a, p. 91).

These elements for the development of elite sport reflect views of senior coaches and performance directors, rather than grassroots coaches, clubs and athletes, which is why this model is a representation of the top-down view of development of elite sport (Andersen et al., 2015b). The research by Oakley and Green (2001a) was considered the most influential at the time and “provided the basis for much more detailed analyses, including...SPLISS” (Andersen et al., 2015b, p. 6). The SPLISS framework illustrates how sport policies can influence international sporting success and also identifies nine pillars as crucial factors for success (see Figure 4) (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). The model is considered of high importance in the present research as the primary analytical model by providing a starting point for identifying the factors associated with elite sporting success. Further details about the model and its use in the study are provided in the next section and in the Chapter 4.

In addition to studies identifying key success factors, “there are studies that aim to understand elite sport from a broader political or historical perspective” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 38). For example, Green and Houlihan (2005) research elite sport policy in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, while Andersen and Ronglan (2012) investigate the Nordic Countries

through historical development of their diverse national elite sports systems and present challenges.

3.6) The analytical model - SPLISS

SPLISS stands for Sport Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (De Bosscher et al., 2006). The SPLISS model has been selected as the main analytical model in the study because it is the dominating model for analysing national policy for elite sport (Andersen et al., 2015b) and for analysing policy factors crucial for achieving international sporting success (Henry, Dowling, Ko, & Brown, 2020). SPLISS has gone beyond other such studies by developing a framework, by using a mixed methods approach and by involving athletes, coaches and performance directors as the main stakeholders in elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Furthermore, SPLISS is important because it includes a variety of countries and because it is an on-going research (Andersen et al., 2015b).

The SPLISS model was developed due to the lack of comprehensive frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of elite sport policies (De Bosscher et al., 2011). SPLISS adopts a mixed methods approach (De Bosscher, Shibli, van Bottenburg, De Knop, & Truyens, 2010; De Bosscher et al., 2015), where both qualitative and quantitative data are transformed into quantitative scoring system (De Bosscher et al., 2010) and thus quantitative techniques of measurement are applied to qualitative data (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Specifically, SPLISS is based on a content analysis of a comprehensive review of literature on the organisation of elite sport development at a country level, which was accompanied by two micro-level studies focused on understanding the determinants of success for individual athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & van Bottenburg, 2016). The supplementary studies with experts and stakeholders (elite athletes, coaches and performance directors) comprised of open-ended question interviews to identify factors with the highest contribution to athlete's international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2016). Inductive approach was then used to group the qualitative review and interview data into themes (ibid.) which identified nine policy areas or pillars important for international sporting success and led to a development of a conceptual framework of sport policy factors leading to international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2010). What followed was SPLISS 1.0 (De Bosscher et al., 2015) - a quantitatively based international comparative pilot study with six states (De Bosscher et al., 2010; De Bosscher et al., 2015, 2016) in order to understand the functioning of pillars in

different states (De Bosscher et al., 2010). Furthermore, the pillars were operationalised into measurable characteristics of successful elite sport policies referred to as Critical Success Factors⁸ (De Bosscher, 2016; De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Bosscher et al., 2011). There are 96 CSFs (De Bosscher et al., 2015) and 750 sub-factors that underpin the SPLISS model (De Bosscher et al., 2016).

The second SPLISS study went beyond SPLISS 1.0 and included 15 states to gain further insights into the relationships between policies/pillars and success, to develop a more comprehensive methodology and to gather more exhaustive qualitative data (De Bosscher et al., 2016). Two research instruments were used to gather the data – an overall sport policy inventory and elite sport climate survey (De Bosscher et al., 2015). The overall sport policy inventory was used to collect mainly qualitative data via policy documents and interviews, whereas elite sport climate survey was used to gathered mainly quantitative data via structured questionnaires with elite athletes, coaches and performance directors (De Bosscher et al., 2010; De Bosscher et al., 2015). As a part of content analysis, induction and deduction were applied for qualitative data analysis for each pillar and for understanding of the elite sport’s context in each state (De Bosscher et al., 2010). Additionally, a scoring system that included transforming qualitative and quantitative information into 0-1 scores was applied and allowed for pillar comparison between states (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Thus, “as one of the largest empirical studies of its kind within the sport management domain” (Henry et al., 2020, p. 527), SPLISS identified nine sport policy factors or pillars vital for international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2006), while it also identified how can these be developed (De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibli, Van Bottenburg, & De Knop, 2008). In this way, SPLISS showed that production of medal-winning athletes requires a holistic (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and strategic approach via public policy (De Bosscher et al., 2011). Governments across the world are willing to intervene and spend increasing sums of money on elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2011; Shibli et al., 2014) and have, in the ‘global sporting arms race’ (Oakley & Green, 2001b), become increasingly homogenous in adopting elite sport systems (Shibli et al., 2014). It then becomes important to investigate how specifically governments approach achieving international sporting success via public policy.

⁸ Critical Success Factors are considered crucial in strategic management, where they define a process or activity required to ensure an organisation’s success (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

According to the SPLISS framework, factors determining sporting success are classified into three levels; macro-, meso- and micro-level (see Figure 3) (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015);

- Macro-level consists of factors of social and cultural context in which people live, such as population, wealth, political system, cultural system, degree of urbanisation, geographic and climatic variation. De Bosscher et al. (2011) point out that sporting organisations compete for resources with other organisations at the macro-level. For example, governmental sports organisations compete with other policy areas such as culture, media etc. in order to receive funding and resources;
- Meso-level presents sports policies and politics that may influence sporting performance in the long-term, i.e. policies on coaching development and/or policies on talent selection and identification (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008);
- Micro-level comprises, first, individual athletes and their genetic characteristics or qualities and, second, athletes' close environment, which includes their parents, coaches, friends etc. It is important to note that, at this level, most factors cannot be influenced by policies such as genetics, but there are a few factors that can be controlled by policies, such as training tactics and techniques, medical and psychological support (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015).

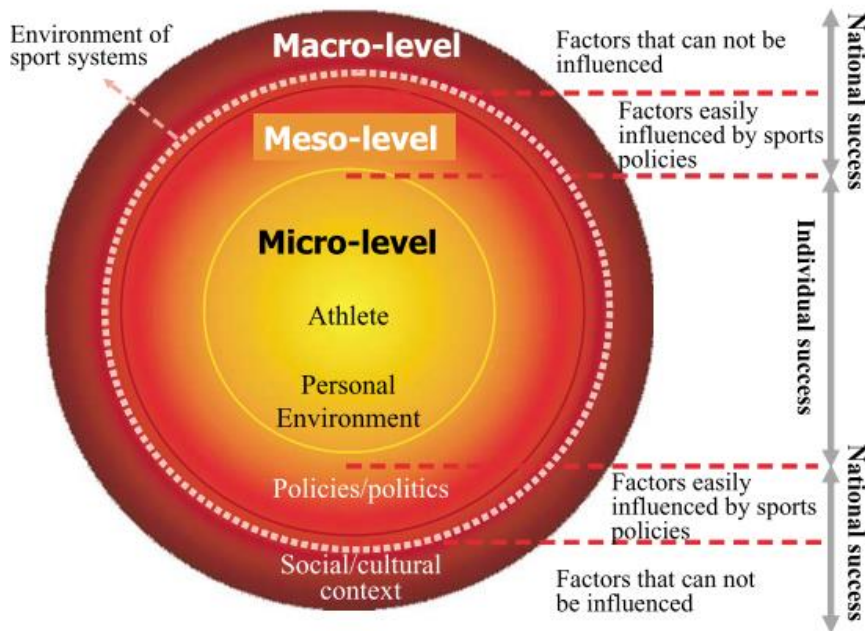


Figure 3. Model showing relationship between factors determining individual and national success (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008, p. 17).

Throughout their SPLISS studies, De Bosscher et al. (2006) point out that the levels cannot be regarded as completely isolated from one another because they interact and overlap. Indeed, it is the interaction of all three level factors that best explains achieving elite sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2015). For example, elite sport development is greatly impacted by the private sector, education system, mass media, sports tradition and sports culture (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

The listed macro-level factors cannot be influenced by the sport policies directly and/or in short-term, therefore, these were eliminated from the SPLISS analysis as its application is placed solely on factors that can be influenced by sport policies (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2010; De Bosscher et al., 2015). These mostly fall under the meso-level category (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009). The area of division of factors in levels presents a grey area in SPLISS. Dowling, Brown, Legg, and Beacom (2018) and Henry et al. (2020) claim that it is, in fact, not possible, nor appropriate to isolate micro-, meso- and macro-level factors. As macro-level factors influence policy processes the isolation is impossible (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Grix, 2018) while it also disregards the uniqueness and specificities of sports systems (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018). However, the SPLISS authors – (De Bosscher et al., 2006) – continue to emphasise the influence of the macro-level by stating that it should be

taken into account when comparing international sporting successes, yet fail to include these in the research as they cannot be influenced by the sporting policies .

Furthermore, a research by De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al. (2008), showed that together GDP, population size and a current or former communist political system explained 52.4 % of medal winning success at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, while the latest SPLISS research, published by De Bosscher et al. (2015, p. 105), concluded that population, wealth and former communism account for 41.6% of the medal success at the summer Olympics. This figure decreased over time, for which the assumption is that other factors are becoming more important. Furthermore, population and wealth are the two most determining macro-factors of sporting success of states, with population itself determining around 20% of the success (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; Shibli et al., 2014). The reason behind the population importance lies in the notion that the bigger the population, the greater the talent pool from which elite athletes can be selected (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; Shibli et al., 2014). In terms of wealth, it applies that richer countries with greater financial means can invest more in sport and thus enable a wider quality and spectrum of sports to individuals (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). The political structure determinant of sporting success, pointed out by De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al. (2008) addresses whether the country has or has had a communist regime in the past. The communist regime supported scientific research that led to innovative ideas in sport which enabled athletes various types of athletic advantages (Shibli et al., 2014). As population and wealth are an essential part of macro-level factors (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008), this then begs the question how can Slovenia, a country small in population, area and wealth (Thorhallsson, 2006) achieve its success in international sport, despite its ‘disadvantaged’ starting point?

3.6.1) Pillars of the SPLISS model

From a different, more analytical perspective to micro-, meso- and macro-level, the SPLISS model consists of inputs, throughputs and outputs (Figure 4) (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Bosscher et al., 2011; Shibli et al., 2014). It places the athlete at the heart of the model as the main stakeholder of the elite sport system and concentrates on what is best for the athletes’ development in order to achieve the set outputs (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Essentially, this offers another way to look at the development of elite athlete through a model of policy processes (Shibli et al., 2007). De Bosscher et al. (2009, p. 131) concluded that “elite sporting success is more the result of a strategic planning process

where countries invest in a blend of pillars” or policy processes. However, the authors note that there will always be uncertainties in the relationship of policies, leading to variations of success levels across countries (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

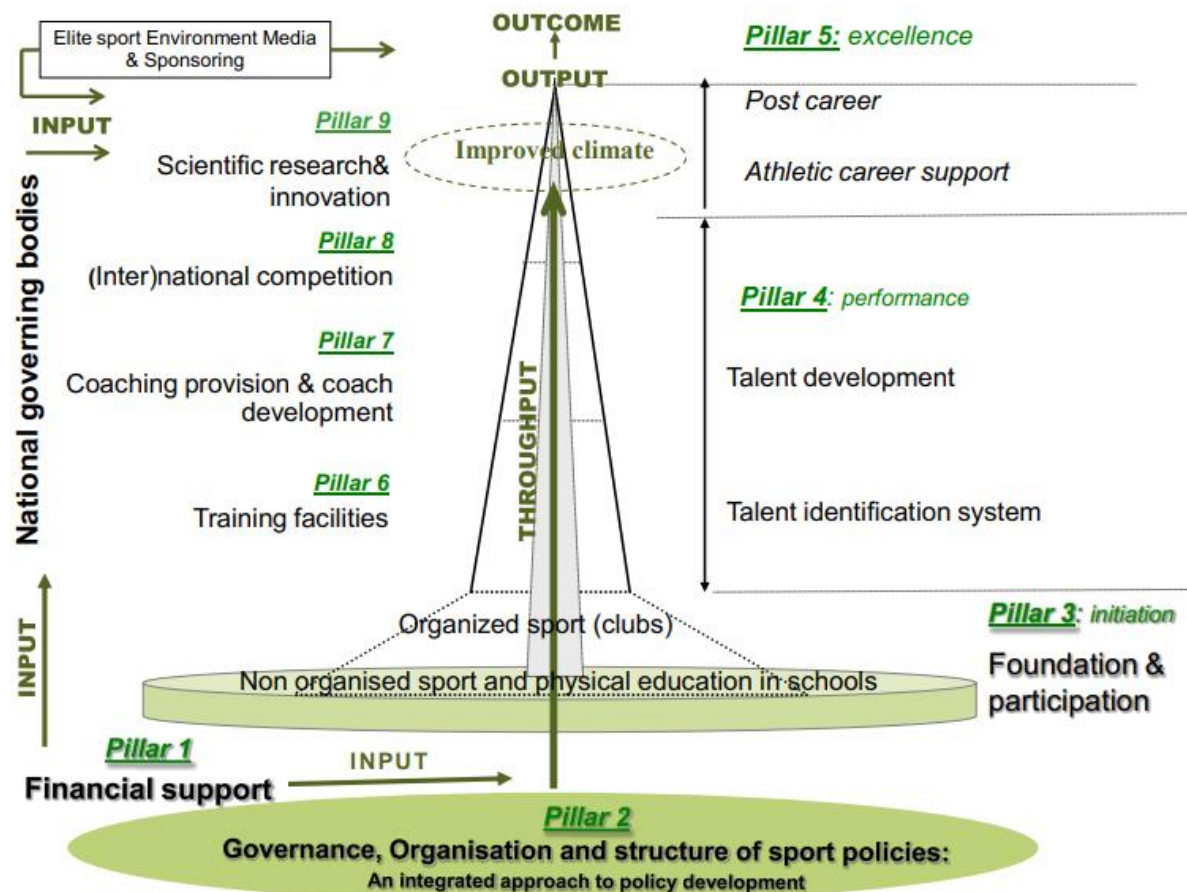


Figure 4. The most recent version of the SPLISS model (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 42).

Inputs and throughputs together form nine pillars or policy areas (see Figure 4) that result in outputs and can help to explain the international sporting success of a state (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Hence, the pillars illustrate the effectiveness of the use of resources (inputs), processes or methods adopted and outcomes obtained (outputs) (Shibli et al., 2014).

Despite the above, Henry et al. (2020) question the role of SPLISS, its predictive account and whether it offers anything more than descriptive explanation and classification of factors of sport policy. While SPLISS authors argue that SPLISS does not, in fact, point out cause-effect relationships (De Bosscher et al., 2015), they do claim that it does offer insight into how dimensions of success can be developed and thus solving the ‘black box’ issue (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Henry et al. (2020) comment that these actions are still, however, hidden from view, implying the ‘black box’ problem is not solved. They argue that

the knowledge of associated relationships does not lead to understanding or explaining “how inputs are used to achieve or *cause* particular outcomes” (ibid., p. 524). This coincides with the claim of Shibli et al. (2007) who state that despite statistical relationships between some inputs and outputs, these cannot explain how inputs change into outputs.

Nevertheless, the SPLISS authors recognise that the pillars of the model do not present an all-embracing framework applicable to any context, country or situation (De Bosscher et al., 2015), but rather a basic framework (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009) of general elite sports policy elements (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Thus, the model is not deterministic (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and can “be adapted over time...to different sport settings, different sport contexts and situations” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 46). For example, the original SPLISS model, introduced the nine pillar system, however in their most recent SPLISS research, De Bosscher et al. (2015) have suggested a Pillar 10 that might be used for the future analyses and would consist of some macro-level factors. Moreover, despite the inconclusive results, these indicate that pillars prioritised in the most successful states could be perceived as the possible drivers for effective systems (De Bosscher et al., 2009). Nevertheless, it should be noted that

a system leading to success in one nation may be doomed to fail in another. Therefore it needs to be emphasised that the combination of the nine pillars may be specific to a given...context [of the state] and that different systems may all be successful (De Bosscher et al., 2006, p. 209).

3.6.1.1) Inputs

Inputs consist of a single pillar (De Bosscher et al., 2009).

Pillar 1: Financial support

Pillar 1 consists of financial resources, available to or intended for sport and elite sport (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). These are relatively easy to measure in quantitative and qualitative terms (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

For financial resources as a measure of input it applies that the more countries invest in elite sport, the greater the possibility to create more opportunities for athletes to develop their talent and train under ideal circumstances (De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015; Shibli et al., 2014). It should be noted that having financial means does not guarantee success, but it

may enhance its chances of occurring (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Thus, a strong organisational structure is important to create the most efficient sport policies and enable the inputs to be managed in an optimal way (De Bosscher et al., 2006). This is reflected in the Pillar 2 of the next stage – the throughput stage - of the SPLISS model.

3.6.1.2) Throughputs

Throughputs refer to how effectively sport policies are managed to deliver the desired outputs (De Bosscher et al., 2006) or the medal winning capability of the athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Hence, they refer to ‘what’ is invested and ‘how’ it is used or realised and may lead to an increase in a state’s sporting success internationally (De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). According to De Bosscher (as cited in De Bosscher et al., 2015), it is at this stage where it becomes important how the pillars are connected, how they interact and how policymakers invest in them.

The throughput stage of the SPLISS model consists of the Pillars 2-9 (De Bosscher, 2016; De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Bosscher et al., 2011; Shibli et al., 2014), however, the idea of introducing a Pillar 10 is also discussed here. The pillars in the throughput stage are more difficult to measure than the inputs and outputs and that is why generally, indirect methods are used (De Bosscher et al., 2006) such as interviews and surveys.

Pillar 2: (Governance, organisation and structure of (elite) sport policies) An integrated approach to policy development

Pillar 2 is the most extensive pillar including 13 CSF and 119 sub-factors, and incorporates structure and organisation of the sport policy system (De Bosscher et al., 2015). As stated, different governments may use different ways of formulating sports policies and may adapt different ways of implementation of those policies, while still achieving international sporting success. It is then important to keep in mind other characteristics that can influence the success of a state in sport. As sport falls under the wider cultural system (Blanchard, 2000; Godnič, 2005), a strong organisational structure of sport within the broader concept of society and culture of a state is crucial (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Essentially, social and cultural factors are not the only ones influencing the elite sports policy but also historical and organisational contexts (De Bosscher et al., 2015). All these factors need to be coordinated in the form of elite sport initiatives (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

Pillar 3: Participation in sport

Pillars 3, 4 and 5 tend to be a logical progression and are considered the athlete development stages (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2016). On its own Pillar 3 represents sport participation, sport opportunities at school and quality improvement management (De Bosscher et al., 2015). In most cases, elite athletes originate from the grassroots participation in sport (Shibli et al., 2014). However,

a broad base of sport participation is not always a condition for success, but it may deliver a foundation for potential success because it provides a supply of young talent and various training and competition opportunities for this talent to hone their skills (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 44)

in numerous sports and at different levels of capability (Shibli et al., 2014). This can be further linked to previously mentioned notion about states with larger populations having greater talent pools from which potential athletes can be selected (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; Shibli et al., 2014).

Pillar 4: Talent identification and development system

The second step of the first elite athlete development process is represented by Pillar 4, where athletes, depending on their ability, may be identified as ‘talented’ and receive special attention (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Hence, Pillar 4 consists of two phases, talent identification and talent development (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Talent identification starts with a discovery of a talented individual, who then receives exclusive treatment, normally by the respective NGB (Shibli et al., 2014). Talent development, on the other hand, consists of athletes excelling in their sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Shibli et al., 2014). In fact, “many countries have developed nationally co-ordinated initiatives to support governing bodies in setting up high-level training and competition programmes and to support athletes to combine their academic career with a sport career” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 44).

Pillar 5: Athletic and Post-career support

The last step of first elite athlete development process is captured in Pillar 5 that is a logical extension of Pillars 3 and 4 (De Bosscher et al., 2015, 2016; Shibli et al., 2014). It is coordinated and managed by the elite sport clubs and/or NGBs (Shibli et al., 2014) and it consists of the

athletes that have remained in the system after the talent development phase (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and who are capable of competing at the highest level (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2015; Shibli et al., 2014). De Bosscher et al. (2015) claim that the role of NGBs in supporting athletes during and after their sporting career is crucial because many athletes identified as talented quit their sport before reaching their peak. Only selected sports enable athletes to make a living and therefore, many countries offer athletes financial support for their sporting programmes and living costs (Shibli et al., 2014). Thus, at the heart of the Pillar 5 is the way in which governments provide financial support for athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2015), however, Shibli et al. (2014, p. 93) point out that athletes must also “be prepared for life after sport while they are still engaged in their athletic careers”. Due to the nature of Pillar 5, factors considered in it, need to be analysed at a sport-specific level (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Pillar 6: Training facilities

Pillar 6 represents another first stage of investments essential for the development of elite athletes that consists of Pillars 6-9 (Figure 4), where Pillars 6-8 require attention on both levels of sport; recreational or development and elite level (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Training facilities captured in Pillar 6 are an important success factor that enables athletes to train in a high-quality sporting environment (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Shibli et al., 2014). The extent to which facilities are provided also feeds into the link between overall recreation and elite sport (Shibli et al., 2014). For elite-level sport, Pillar 6 focuses on the network of regional and national elite sports facilities that include all-round support such as medical, scientific, educational and accommodation (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Pillar 7: Coaching (provision) and coach development

In terms of Pillar 7, “the quality and quantity of coaches is important at each level of the sport development continuum” (Shibli et al., 2014, p. 93). As De Bosscher et al. (2015) explain, at the elite level, there are two areas to look at. First is the organisation and quality of training, education or certification. Second is the coach’s availability regarding time and commitment. There are different recognitions of coaching, where coaches are respected in some countries, and underpaid and undervalued in others. Additionally, Shibli et al. (2014) state that the best athletes will only reach their potential if they are granted and enabled access to the best coaches. Coaches, in the same way as athletes, need to be trained and there should be a mechanism in place that would produce coaches of the future enabling the sporting system to depend on structures and procedures instead of key individuals.

Pillar 8: (Inter)national competition

A co-ordinated approach to hosting international sporting events is the eighth factor leading to a state's international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Research indicates a positive effect of home advantage in hosting of international sporting events, by providing home athletes the benefits of familiar weather conditions and facilities, low-cost travel and home crowd support (Shibli et al., 2014). The structure of national competitions is also deemed a crucial factor in developing and filtering athletes (ibid.), yet De Bosscher et al. (2015) note that for any further claims, national competition structures need to be studied at a sport-specific level.

Pillar 9: Scientific research (and innovation in elite sport)

Pillar 9 is the final SPLISS pillar and it encompasses elite sport only (De Bosscher et al., 2006).

It

seeks to examine the extent to which nations take a co-ordinated approach to the development, organisation and dissemination of scientific research and knowledge. It also is concerned with the extent that (technological) innovation plays a role in elite sport success (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 46).

Hence, at the heart of the scientific research pillar are the ways of systematic gathering and dissemination of scientific information a country collects in areas such as talent identification and development, psychology, physiology, medicine, nutrition, biomechanics and sport coaching (ibid.). These factors are crucial for nations who want to outperform others (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and are now considered a commonplace for innovation, but were, in the past, typical for the former communist countries (Shibli et al., 2014).

Pillar 10: Elite sport environment, media and sponsoring

It had been established that the SPLISS model can be adapted according to different contexts, settings and situations. Therefore, it is no surprise, that in 2015, De Bosscher et al. have implied that there might be a possibility to introduce a new Pillar 10 in addition to the original nine pillars. Pillar 10 would consist of the macro-level factors; i.e. national education system, private sector partnership, mass media, attitude towards sport. Despite emphasising the role of the elite sport environment, the authors have failed to include it in their research. Instead, they extended

their argument for exclusion and related it to methodological reasons due to the difficulty of measuring the ‘macro-factors’ and comparing them between the states.

3.6.1.3) Outputs

Within the context of SPLISS, success in elite sport competitions is an output that indicates success (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015), hence if these are being strategic in their elite athlete production, then they must also assess the outputs or results achieved (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). As the focus of the thesis is not placed on the evaluation of success, this area is discussed briefly and not in detail.

In elite sport, outputs can be clearly measurable (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; Shibli et al., 2014) and identifiable, and are normally result-oriented, e.g. win/loss outcomes, final rankings, finals achieved (De Bosscher et al., 2011). Absolute or relative measures are usually used to measure outputs (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). The absolute measure of success also known as a standard measure can be expressed in the number of total medals won or market share (Shibli et al., 2014). This however, does not allow for variables such as socio-economic determinants, nor does it allow for medal quality, such as bronze, silver and gold or a sport’s perceived quality where a medal in a particular sport, such as archery may be valued differently than the one won in swimming (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). On the other hand, relative success in elite sport is a measure of total achievements in a sporting event but controlling one or more macro-level factors, such as population and wealth (De Bosscher et al., 2003), which is mostly used when attempting to identify state’s sporting efficiency (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2015). What then follows is that sporting success is, in many cases, expressed in terms of medals per capita (per head of population) or GDP (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; Shibli et al., 2014) that is especially evident with smaller or poorer states, which may view success differently than larger ones (De Bosscher et al., 2003).

Furthermore, when evaluating success, it is important to further establish the criteria by identifying competition(s) for the analysis. To many, the Olympic medal table of each Games presents an order of merit, even though the IOC itself refuses to recognise so (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). For this reason, the SPLISS model studies the results achieved at the Olympic Games as “this event covers a wide range of sports and may therefore represent the overall sport systems” (De Bosscher et al., 2009,

p. 116). In order to be more inclusive in their latest SPLISS analysis, De Bosscher et al. (2015) included the results of performance in Olympic events over a four-year period.

Lastly, it should be highlighted that the present study is not a replication of SPLISS, but only a partial application as the model's methods are not adopted. Instead, SPLISS is used as a framework as the pillars represent the areas that may be vital in achieving international sporting success and thus serve as the starting point for the analysis of the elite sport policy in Slovenia.

3.7) The analytical model – bioecological model

The literature review indicated that culture and context might be important considerations in elite sport policy system in Slovenia, so the decision was taken to look for an additional framework to supplement the use of SPLISS as a framework to ensure a fully inductive approach. Hence, in this section, the reader is provided with a brief overview of bioecological model and justification as to why the model was selected as a secondary analytical model in the study.

The bioecological model was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). At the beginning, the model was referred to as an ecological model in order to stress the interplay between the individuals and their environment, however throughout the development, the name was changed to bioecological model to make the person's participation in their own environment even more explicit (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

In essence, the bioecological model is a theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) concerned with the developing person, the environment and the developing interactions between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It provides a framework to study individuals in ecological contexts (Neal & Neal, 2013) – the environments “in which human beings live their lives” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986b, p. 287). Here, humans are recognised as producers and not only as a product of their own development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In the present context, human development is replaced by elite sport policy system development that is considered as a developing mechanism.

Within the context of the bioecological model, the ecological environment “is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3) (see Figure 5). As illustrated in Figure 5, the developing individual is at the innermost

level of the model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) much like the athlete in the SPLISS framework. The next interconnected structure surrounding the individual is the *microsystem*, that consists of “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15). The *microsystem* includes not only interactions within particular dyads (e.g. child-mother), but within triads (e.g. *N+2* models) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986b).

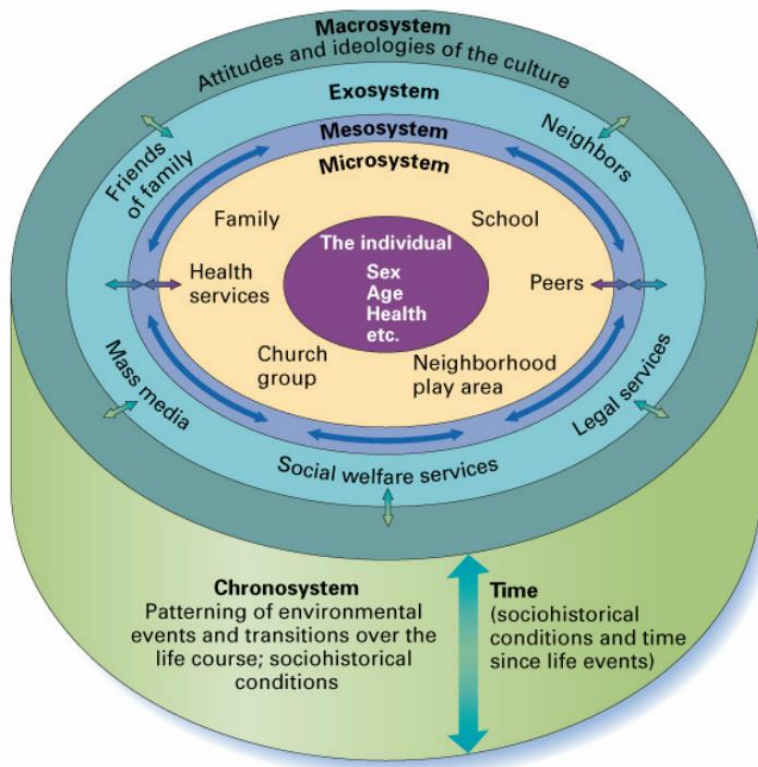


Figure 5. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (Santrock, 2008, p. 33).

The following system termed *mesosystem* consists of processes and linkages between at least two settings involving the developing person, with special focus being placed on the synergistic effects caused by interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The next core system – *exosystem* – consists of interactions between two or more settings with at least one of these not including the developing person (ibid.). Furthermore, definition of the outermost structure – *macrosystem* – strengthens the model’s application at the level of developmental theory and research design by explaining that

the *macrosystem* consists of the overarching pattern of *micro-*, *meso-* and *exo-* systems characterised of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief

systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25).

Lastly, *chronosystem* is an additional fifth core system of the bioecological model and reflects “change or continuity across time that influences each of the other systems” (Neal & Neal, 2013, p. 725). *Chronosystem* allows for the research and analysis of relationships between the processes, as it enables the study of changes over time within a person and the environment in which the person is living, rather than studying only the changes occurring within individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a).

The described bioecological model (Figure 5) represents the second stage of its development. There are three phases of theoretical development of the model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), however only the second phase is relevant for this research, due to its innovative introduction of *chronosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b). Moreover, the visual representation of the model at this stage (Figure 5) resembles some elements of the micro-, meso- and macro-level on which the SPLISS model is built (Figure 3) by placing the individual at the heart of the model and recognising different levels of environment.

The first phase of the bioecological model for example, provided less explicit attention to a developing person’s role in the environment, developmental processes, and the recognition of culture and subcultures as important parts of the *macrosystem*, while there was also no *chronosystem* (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Up until the second stage, “passage of time has been treated as synonymous with chronological age” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986b, p. 291), rather than incorporating change over time within the individual’s environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a). As the importance of time is crucial in this study – it enables researchers to seek for reasons, the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of decision making that led to present state of existence and policies – the first stage of the bioecological model is less appropriate than its next level of development. The third stage of bioecological model development introduces new properties, namely Process-Person-Time-Context (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which lacks visual representation and moves the overall theory away from the idea of a nested structure, making it less appropriate for use than its predecessor stage two model.

Moreover, the first stage of the bioecological model is also highly similar to socio-ecological model (SEM) in terms of the environmental layers and placing an individual at the heart of the model. SEM also appears to be more applied in the sporting context, especially in sports

participation, through the examples of Rowe, David, Lesley, and Hinckson (2013), Casey, Eime, Payne, and Harvey (2009) and O'Connor, Alfrey, and Payne (2012). Generally, SEM like stage one of the bioecological model does not take into consideration the aspect of time. However, as illustrated in Figure 6, O'Connor et al. (2012) introduce a time dimension. This is only considered in an aspect of individual's timeline and does not encompass the change over time across other dimensions as is the case for stage two of the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a). For this reason, stage two of the bioecological model development is more appropriate for the present study.

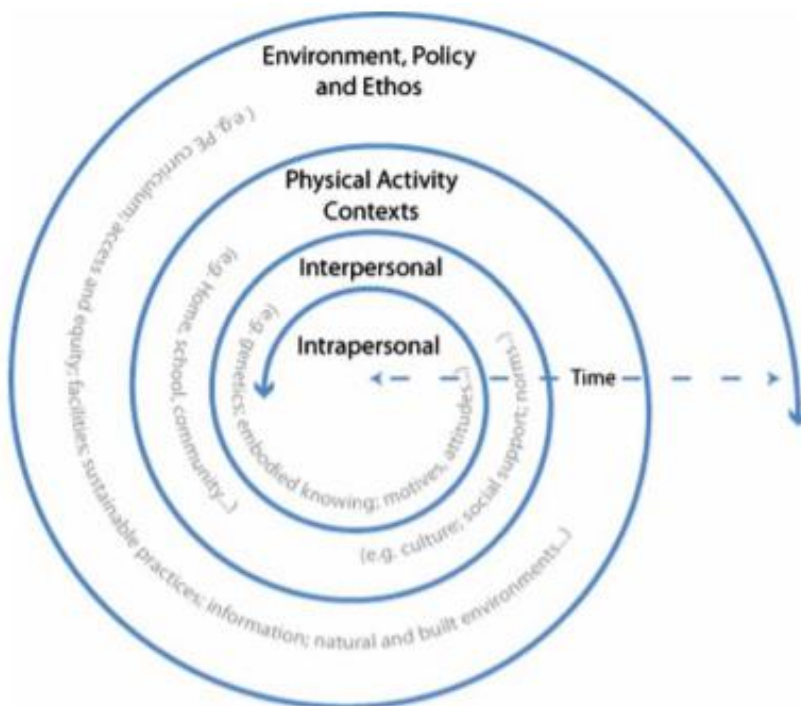


Figure 6. Socio-ecological model for physical education (O'Connor et al., 2012, p. 371).

3.8) Conclusion

The Literature Review chapter identified the difference between a state and a nation, and indicated that post-independent Slovenia is both, a nation and a state, whereas during the times of Yugoslavia it had only been a nation. Characteristics of small states were then discussed in order to justify the description of Slovenia as a small state. Included were also the considerations how a small state's size may affect its approach to development of elite sport, indicating there is no single approach to the development of elite sporting success. This recognition represents the basis for development of the first research question to examine the

contemporary organisational structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Hence, the present case-study of a small state of Slovenia aims to contribute to the underdeveloped area of research of small states and their elite sport policy systems.

Furthermore, as one of the main themes of historical overview of sports development in the Slovene territory, national identity and its relationship to sport was reviewed. Not only is there a reciprocal relationship between national identity and sport, but also between national identity, sport and the media. Sport offers a platform for expression of national emotions and identity (Godnič, 2005), and in return sport is expressed through national identity (Allison, 2000). The media enable this relationship to happen. It can foster national identity and promote sport through reporting of successful result, while successful results and expressions of national identity also attract media attention (Godnič, 2005).

Within the last sets of topics in this chapter, the focus shifted towards the government and its relationship to elite sport, in particular the ways in which the state regulates and supports elite sports development. The main policy concepts were also defined, including the elite sports policy system, the primary focus of the thesis that is defined as more than just a set of public policies for elite sport by including the elements of its implementation. It was established that the state's intervention in regulation and organisation of sport is necessary (Coakley & Pike, 2014) and it is mostly to achieve non-sporting objectives (Green & Houlihan, 2005). Hence, international sporting success represents a means to achieve those objectives which is why the states are placing great emphasis on the development of elite sport. The literature also suggested that states are adopting quite similar approaches to this, despite their fundamental differences (e.g. size, culture, history) (Houlihan, 2000).

Lastly, the SPLISS model was discussed in detail as a well-established model for research into how governments approach achieving international sporting success through public policy and as the main analytical model of the present study. Nevertheless, SPLISS does not take into consideration the factors outside of its nine pillars. Thus, second and third research questions were formed to explore to what extent the SPLISS pillars can act as a framework for explanation of Slovene system and what other factors need to be added to this framework. An additional framework was sought and a bioecological model was introduced as the second analytical model due to its ability to take into consideration the influences of the Slovene sport identified through the historical review - development through time, the context and the reciprocal relationship between the individual or in this case system and its environment.

Chapter Four: Research methodology

4.1) Introduction

This study aims to examine the development and contemporary structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, whilst also critically analysing the extent to which SPLISS allows for an examination of the system. To achieve the study aims, the following research questions must be answered:

RQ1: What is the contemporary organisational structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ2: To what extent can drawing on factors identified by SPLISS act as a framework for a single country case-study explanation of the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ3: What other factors need to be added to this framework to better account for the development and characteristics of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the adopted methodological characteristics of the study that have allowed for the research questions to be answered. The methodology outlines the research protocol, how theories are created or tested and how specific theories underpin specific research topics (Blaikie, 1993). The chapter follows the structural elements of methodology as identified by Hay (2002), starting with ontology, epistemology (section 4.2) and followed by research methods (section 4.3), where each concept underpins the next (Figure 7). This is followed by a discussion of qualitative research methods used in the study, particularly the use of documentary analysis and qualitative interviews as data collection methods. The rationales for document and participant selection are also provided. Additionally, thematic analysis of data is outlined, while the critical reflection on the evidence derived from the study and trustworthiness are also considered. Lastly, researcher reflexivity (4.4) and structuring of the findings chapters are discussed (section 4.5).

4.2) Philosophical concepts in social sciences

In the world of social sciences, there are many philosophical approaches to research and there is no ideal one-size-fits-all approach as suitability depends on the purpose of exploration of a phenomenon that lacks understanding – ranging from exploration, understanding, description, change, explanation and evaluation (Blaikie, 1993). Based on the study aims, exploration into as well as understanding and explanation of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia are crucial. Following the identification of the topic, it is then necessary for the researcher to identify the appropriate meta-theory that will inform their empirical research (Cruickshank, 2003; Stoker & Marsh, 2010). This is because

Meta-theoretical stances logically position (but note, do not determine) how we go about giving accounts of the social world....Meta-theoretical arguments, in the field of social theory, are aimed at establishing the mode of existence of those causal mechanisms that are social in nature (social ontology), how it is possible that we can have knowledge of them (epistemology) and what the techniques, procedures and processes are that we should deploy in order to produce said knowledge (methodology) (López, 2003, p. 77).

This point leads to an acknowledgement of three important constituent parts in social scientific theorising, which are presented in an adaptation of the visual presentation as constructed by Hay (2002) in Figure 7. It should be noted here, that what both López (2003) and Hay (2002) refer to as methodology are, in fact, research methods. As Blaikie (1993) warns, there are many examples in the literature where the terms are used interchangeably and methodology is used when method would be more suitable. Hence, the terms ontology, epistemology and research methods are used to present three components of the philosophy of social sciences, while ‘methodology’ is used as a coherent context within which these three (ontology, epistemology and research methods) notions exist.

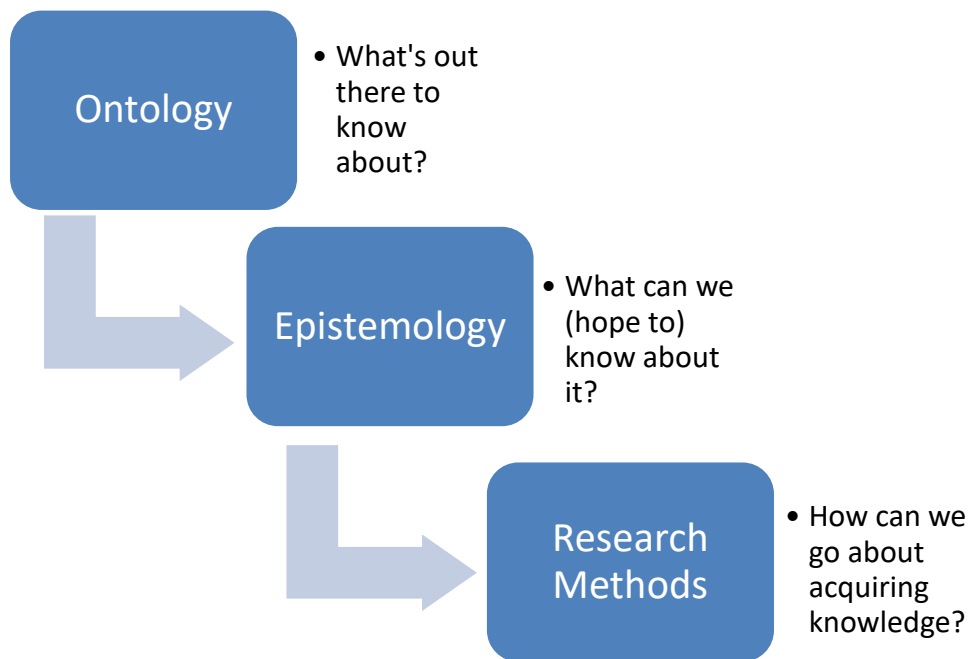


Figure 7. Ontology, epistemology and methods: a relational dependence (Adapted from: Hay (2002)).

4.2.1) Constructivist meta-theory

The present research falls within the meta-theory of constructivism, of which one of the main characteristics is the notion that the individuals create the realities within which they live in and respond to, indicating their proactive participation (Mahoney, 1988). For example, the elite sport policy system in Slovenia is a result of individuals, institutions comprising of individuals as well as the individuals that form the broader environment and the individuals of the past.

Moreover, according to Hay (2002) constructivists tend to use theory to simplify the reality, but not to fit it to a more general model or draw predictive accounts from observed regularities. Instead, theory guides the empirical research and allows for abstract reflection on the complex processes to highlight crucial periods of change. The researcher focuses primarily on of progression and timing of the subject studied. The importance of this lays in establishing and following causal processes over time and the theoretical explanations of said processes. As such, theory informs and sensitises the researcher to the causal processes being explained. Thus, constructivist analysis comprises

of a *dialogue* between theory and evidence as the analysts...pieces together a rich and *theoretically informed* historical narrative...Such historical narratives seek to preserve and capture the complexity and specificity of the process of change under consideration, examining the interplay of actors, ideas, institutions and establishing

the conditions of existence of the mechanisms of evolution and transformation described (ibid., p.47).

In the thesis, the development and processes of contemporary structure of Slovene elite sport policy system were uncovered via documentary analysis and interviews. As the mechanisms and processes may or may not be directly observed and events are perceived and experienced differently by different individuals, this may present a potential challenge for the researcher warns Lawson (2006). They advise that researchers adopt a level of critical imagination when creating explanations and not merely rely on participants' accounts and own notes.

Furthermore, constructivists tend to avoid completely inductive or deductive logic of reasoning (ibid.), which is reflected in the study. Primarily, the study explores the application of the SPLISS model in Slovene context which indicates the adoption of the deductive approach to research (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Huberman & Miles, 1998; Newman, 2007), while inductive reasoning is also applied when generating further complements to using the SPLISS model in a case-study of Slovenia based on the findings (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Newman, 2007).

Lastly, it should be noted, that constructivism is not considered only as a meta-theory (Mahoney, 1988) but also as an ontological position (Blaikie, 1993), which is demonstrated in the next section. General notions of the meta-theory are applied to the empirical research that enables a construction of specific theories based on the chosen topic (Cruickshank, 2003). It should be noted however, that meta-theoretical stances should not be mistaken for formation of social theories (López, 2003). This means that constructivism as a meta-theory should not be mistaken with models of explanation or in this case analytical models – SPLISS and bioecological models.

4.2.2) Ontology

Ontology is the science, study or philosophy of being (Blaikie, 1993; Hay, 2002); it relates to what exists, what is (Blaikie, 1993; Effingham, 2013; Hay, 2002), what it looks like and what units it is made out of and how those units interact with each other (Blaikie, 1993). A researcher's ontological position, therefore answers the question of 'What is the nature of investigated reality?' (Hay, 2002). In terms of the classical approaches to social research, there are two strands of ontology – realism and constructivism. These classical approaches appear to contradict each other in the way how social reality is constructed, whether it is constructed

independently of the observer and therefore, observers share the same reality (realism) or the observers construct their own reality, leading to different realities to be constructed by different observers (constructivism) (Blaikie, 1993).

While the perception that the elite sport policy system exists independently and the policies are ‘the same for all’, the study adopts primarily constructivist ontology for which it applies that the studied reality is a product of “the actors, of interactions and institutions” (Flick, 2018, p. 36). Hence, the elite sport policy system in Slovenia is viewed, perceived and experienced differently by individuals, whilst it is also a product of the space and time within which it developed and continues to exist and cannot be considered as independent. Though there are commonalities across sport systems of different countries (Houlihan, 2000; Shibli et al., 2014), a successful sport system in one state will not necessarily lead to success in another state, and it is the unquantifiable characteristics such as culture that may lead to success of the system (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Thus, the same approach to elite sport development in two different contexts may lead to two different outcomes. Moreover, while SPLISS as a comparative tool generally looks for statistical associations and thus ‘facts’ (Henry et al., 2020), it does not consider other factors outside the nine pillars. The present single case study, however, is concerned with detailed investigation that goes beyond the nine SPLISS pillars, including contextual and historical development as it provides a justification and reasoning required to follow the evolution of a phenomenon studied to better understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ it came to be and how it shaped the present condition.

4.2.3) Epistemology

Once the ontology is established, epistemology can be defined. It has been recognised that ontology and epistemology are linked and dependent, but one should keep in mind that they are, nevertheless, two different concepts (Figure 7) (Everitt & Fisher, 1995). Literally defined, epistemology means the philosophy, theory or science of knowledge (Blaikie, 1993; Everitt & Fisher, 1995; Hay, 2002); “what can be regarded as knowledge” (Blaikie, 1993, p. 7). Hay (2002) explains that if ontology seeks the answer to what is there to be known, then epistemology explores the answer to the question to what are the conditions of gaining knowledge of what exists?

Like ontology, so does epistemology provide two classical solutions – positivism and interpretivism – that seem to represent the opposite poles. It should be noted however, that different authors use different terminologies for the same concepts. Interpretivism, for example,

can also be known as anti-naturalism, anti-positivism or post-positivism (Blaikie, 1993). The inconsistency of terms used throughout literature can be quite confusing for a reader, and terms positivism and interpretivism are used hereafter.

According to Blaikie (1993), positivism claims that only knowledge that derives from experience is acceptable, truth can only be determined by observation which is uncontaminated by theory, without value judgements as these cannot be tested by experience. Hence, positivism is based on objectivity. Interpretivism, on the other hand, claims that individuals already produce and reproduce meanings of the world or reality; and that regularities of the world can only be explained or understood by imposing models of meanings. Thus, the key element in interpretivism is subjectivity as opposed to objectivity (that applies in positivism) because the world is already interpreted by individuals before the scientist becomes included. In simpler terms, Bryman (2016) describes that positivism suggests that scientific knowledge has only one 'true' form based on facts and objectivity that is used to test theories, whereas interpretivism suggests that knowledge has multiple 'truths' as it is subjective and based on the experiences and perceptions of the constantly changing world. SPLISS pillars do not take into account cultural and demographic characteristics of a state and thus overlook the fact that not all national elite sport policy systems are based on the same population (Henry et al., 2020). However, for the purpose of this research that explores a single case-study, it acknowledges the fact that not all elite sport policy systems are the same and proposes adaptations to the SPLISS model, this suggests interpretivist epistemology.

Furthermore, establishing meanings that individuals give to social action and the reasons behind their actions cannot be overlooked and need to be established, hence, the role of the scientist, then, is to evaluate those reasons critically (Blaikie, 1993). Moreover, as results in social sciences can feed back into the world and transform it; this requires self-reflection on the side of the scientists and indicates that good explanations combine causal and interpretative analysis (Jessop, 2005). Nevertheless, Potter and López (2001) warn that a level of caution must be applied when creating new explanations, knowledge and theories because researchers can be mistaken when producing and reproducing meanings of the world.

4.3) Research methods

This section presents the techniques, processes, procedures and tools used to, first, gather and, second, analyse the gathered data. Indeed, research methods consist of “data collection, analysis, and interpretation that researchers propose for their studies” (Creswell, 2014, p. 16) and are an integral part of a meta-theory, as meta-level assumptions inform the adopted approach (Cruickshank, 2003). As illustrated in the Figure 7, the researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions inform the way their research is carried out and what research methods are utilised (Amis, 2005; Bryman, 2016; Furlong & Marsh, 2010).

4.3.1) Research design

To achieve the aims of the study and examine the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia, whilst also critically the extent to which SPLISS allows for this examination, an in-depth research into the system itself and its development is required. In-depth research into the Slovene elite sports system places the study within a case-study research design, which comprises of a rigorous study of a specific case (individual, group, organisation etc.) to gain a holistic understanding of it (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Indeed, case-study research design is applicable when the research requires an in-depth and extensive account of a complex phenomenon studied (Yin, 2014, 2018). As such, it is used “to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political, and related phenomena...and allows the investigator to focus on a “case” and retain a holistic real-world perspective” (Yin, 2014, p. 4). Thus, via the holistic perspective and understanding of the case studied, the researcher can draw out and make sense of a complex set of elements, factors and relationships (Easton, 2010). This allows for generalisation and expansion of theories (Yin, 2014) rather than generalisation to other cases or populations (Bryman, 2016).

Furthermore, a case study approach is preferred to use when “(1) main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events; (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon” (Yin, 2014, p. 2). For example, the researcher has no control over the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Additionally, while the study considers the historical development of the system, the main emphasis is on the present organisational structure. While “how” or “why” questions are more explanatory, and not all study research questions fall within this category, the case study design is appropriate “the more that...questions require an extensive and “in-depth” description of some social phenomenon” (2014, p. 4).

As a final point, it should be stressed that case study is appropriate where a researcher is likely to depend on multiple sources of data rather than a singular source (Yin, 2003). Via historical review, policy document analysis and one-to-one interviews with participants, different perspectives and opinions on the subject matter were collected with an aim for the research to provide well-rounded depiction of the subject topic in order to be able to achieve the study aims.

Specifically, the consecutive stages undertaken to allow for achieving of the research aims are outlined below.

1. SPLISS was identified as the primary analytical framework for the study.
2. While conducting a historical review of sport development in the Slovene territory, factors of Slovene elite sport policy system were identified that were not featured within SPLISS. These mainly included factors related to development, culture and context.
3. The utility of using an additional framework besides SPLISS was recognised. The bioecological model was selected because it enabled the researcher to view the Slovene elite sport policy system as a ‘developing mechanism’ and this therefore complemented the SPLISS framework by offering an additional lens through which to view the Slovene elite sport policy system.
4. Documentary analysis was undertaken based using the two frameworks - SPLISS and the bioecological model, and other themes that derived from the historical review.
5. Some of the additional themes not accounted for in SPLISS that emerged through this process were related to the historical development, cultural and contextual determinants, while these also included other success factors that shape the Slovene elite sport’s environment.
6. Stakeholder interviews were then conducted to further examine the themes identified through the documentary analysis. As for the documentary analysis, the researcher allowed for new themes to emerge from the interview data.

4.3.2) Qualitative research approach

The present research adopts qualitative research approach. This is applied when there is a need for a detailed and complex understanding of the phenomenon and a need to explore how individuals or groups construct reality and give meanings to things (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 2011). In this way, participants are encouraged to provide, in their own words, their experiences, opinions and perceptions of the Slovene elite sport policy system.

The provision of personal views in qualitative research is linked to interpretivism, which allows for multiple realities to be 'true' as the reality is individually constructed (Bryman, 2016). It is indeed that these subjective interpretations of individuals are the sole focus of qualitative research in order to be able to gather rich data on the topic. This is because qualitative studies

Are especially well suited to finding causal relationships; they can look directly and longitudinally at the local processes underlying a temporal series of events and states, showing how these led to specific outcomes...In effect, we get inside the black box; we can understand not just that a particular thing happened, but how and why it happened (Huberman & Miles, 1998, p. 191),

By adopting a qualitative research approach, organisational features of Slovene elite sport policy system and influences that determine Slovene sporting success as perceived by participants and addressed in the policy documents, were uncovered. Furthermore, the idea that development is a continuum and should be viewed as such further supports the argument that the past shapes the present as suggested at the beginning of this thesis.

It is worthy to note that definitions of qualitative research vary (Creswell, 2013) and there is no theory, paradigm or research methods that would be considered as distinctively qualitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 2011). Yet, it applies that qualitative research takes place in a natural setting, uses words as measures, focuses on a single concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, 2014) and emphasises processes and/or meanings that may not or cannot be measured in terms of frequency, amount, quantity and intensity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 2011). Furthermore, qualitative research is considered as interpretative, where the researcher engages with participants (Creswell, 2014) in order to gather rich, deep data (Bryman, 2016).

4.3.3) Qualitative data collection

In qualitative research, there are several data collection methods including observation, interview, documentary analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a). On one side, data is determined by the researcher and on the other side, the researcher enables for data to emerge from participants of the research (Creswell, 2014). Depending on the source, data can be considered as primary or secondary. Primary data is the data collected by the researcher (e.g. interviews) and secondary data is data that is already out there and available for use, such as government statistics, documents, newspapers and other kinds of information (McNeill, 1990). The present research incorporates both primary and secondary types of data via collection of interviews and

official state documents, which is referred to as a multi-method approach and is common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Fontana & Frey, 1998). Additionally, the historical review also provided insights into the elite sport policy system and more specifically, the historical development of Slovene sport.

This process is also known as triangulation (Fontana & Frey, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1998; McNeill, 1990) which implies that by looking at a topic from more than one view enables a better understanding of the said topic (McNeill, 1990). The advantage of adopting triangulation is the fact that different sources of data may complement each other by providing different views and strengths (Huberman & Miles, 1998). In this case, the research methods adopted consisted of two phases. Documentary analysis of more ‘objective’ (in comparison to interviews) sport policy documents was adopted first to review Slovene elite sport policy and gather information on the present state of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Following the documentary analysis, interviews were conducted with six key stakeholders in Slovene sport, with the SPLISS and bioecological models, historical development, literature review and documentary analysis serving as a base for formation of interview questions. The purpose of the interviews was to uncover more in-depth ‘subjective’ accounts, beliefs, notions of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, as well as the decision-making processes behind document creation.

4.3.3.1) Documentary Analysis

As secondary data, documents are already out there available for use (McNeill, 1990) and ‘only’ need to be assembled, gathered and analysed (Bryman, 2016). Nevertheless, as Bryman (2016) observes, this can be challenging and time consuming. In the present research, ‘public’ (Creswell, 2013) or ‘official’ documents (Bryman, 2016) were used. As the research deals with the policy at the national level, official state documents and support documents were gathered and analysed for the research purposes.

It should be noted that documents had to be interpreted as they may carry important meanings of a socially and politically constructed past. Therefore, the constitution of the present depends very much on how the past was reconstructed and while undertaking such an endeavour, one must be careful of any hidden meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b). This is then another point where the historical development is considered crucial and advantageous. Furthermore, it is of high importance to note, that “people who write documents are likely to have a particular point of view they want to get across” (Bryman, 2016, p. 553). Hence, documents “require more

contextualised interpretation...they need to be understood in the contexts of their condition of production and reading” (Hodder, 1998, p. 111). This means that the time and environment in which documents are created have great impact on their role, message and aims. In order to uncover the underlying themes, ideas and contextual understanding of the environment in which the documents were produced and of the significance they hold, a critical analysis of the documents was undertaken by the researcher.

4.3.3.1.1) Document sample of the study

Key sport related policy documents were identified via the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia. These documents are in place to regulate Slovene sport and thus, provide rules and regulations on how the sporting sphere is governed, while they also provide directives and objectives to be achieved in the future.

In 2017, at the time of the data collection, there were 18 Acts or Laws in Slovenia and additional 9 Rules or Decrees (see Table 2) related to the sports field. In addition to official documents, 21 of the ‘support’ documents that shape, describe and analyse the (elite) sports environment in Slovenia were also identified and considered (see Table 3). These are based on and derive from the main sport policy document – Sports Act – which implies their significance in the matter.

Regarding the assembly and selection process of the documents, all 48 listed documents were read to determine their relevance to the present research. Not all documents were considered applicable. The documents that do not address or impact sport directly or in a matter that would be significant for this research were excluded in the study. One such example is the Police Act, which was not used in the analysis as it has little application to elite sport. The remaining 43 selected documents (highlighted with a ‘tick’ in Tables 2 and 3) were then used in the research. It should be noted that the year 2017 was a quite turbulent time when the main Government document Sports Act had just been adapted for the first time, which further affected other Rules by becoming obsolete. These kinds of documents were therefore excluded from the study. One such example is Rules on Bursaries for Activity in Sport (see Table 2).

Table 2

State documents for (elite) sport in Slovenia 1990-2017 – statutory documents.

Document (Acts)	Used	Document (Rules and Decrees)	Used
Sports Act	✓	Rules on the Criteria for Co-financing the Annual Programme at State Level	✓
Societies Act	✓	Rules on the Internship and Examination of Expert Workers on the Field of Sport	Lapsed
Nordic Centre Planica Act	✓	Rules on the Work of the Committee for Bloudek Awards	✓
Foundations Act	✓	Rules on Administering the Register of Private Workers in the Field of Sport and the Register of Professional Sports People	✓
Institutes Act	✓	Rules on Administering the Register Required by Sports Act	✓
Act Regulating the Supplement to Pensions for Work and Outstanding Achievements in Sports (2017)	✓	Rules on the Title Promotion of the Employees in Sport	Lapsed
Act Amending Act for Outstanding Awards and Pension for Outstanding Achievements	✓	Decree on the Method and Procedure of Co-financing of Providers of the Annual Sport Programme	✓
Protection against Drowning Act	✓	Rules on Bursaries for Activity in Sport	Lapsed
Bloudek Awards Act	✓	Rules Governing the Criteria Specifications in Demonstrating Major Achievements in Order to be Granted the Status of an Association Operating in the Public Interest in the Field of Education, Science and Research, Culture and Sport	✓
Firearms Act	✓		
Lipica Stud Farm Act	-		
Defence Act	✓		
Police Act	-		
Public assembly Act	✓		
The Protection of Public Order Act	✓		
Ownership Transformation of the Lottery of Slovenia Act	✓		
Gaming Act	✓		
Bridging Insurance of Professional and Elite Athletes Act	✓		

Table 3

Support documents for (elite) sport in Slovenia 1990-2017 – policy documents.

Support documents	Used
National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010	✓
National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2014-2023	✓
Analysis of the National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010	✓
Annual Programme of Sport in the Republic of Slovenia (annual plans in place since 2002) – 16 documents	✓
Examination of Funding of Sport in the Republic of Slovenia 2001-2010	✓
Terms, Rules and Criteria for Registration and Categorisation of Athletes in the Republic of Slovenia	✓

Below is the chronological list of the publication of documents (Table 4). The most extensive document used in the research was the *Analysis of the National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010* with 340 pages, followed by *Terms, Rules and Criteria for Registration and Categorisation of Athletes in the Republic of Slovenia* with 253 pages. By comparison the Annual Programmes of Sport (APS) in Slovenia only consist of five pages for each year.

Table 4

Chronological timeline of documents.

	Year	Document	Type
1	1990	Act Amending Act for Outstanding Awards and Pension for Outstanding Achievements	State document
2	1991	Institutes Act	State document
3	1994	Bloudek Awards Act	State document
4		Defence Act	State document
5	1995	Foundations Act	State document
6		Gaming Act	State document
7	1996	Ownership Transformation of the Lottery of Slovenia Act	State document
8	1998	Sports Act	State document
9	1999	Decree on the Method and Procedure of Co-financing of Providers of the Annual Sport Programme	State document
10	2000	Protection against Drowning Act	State document
11		Firearms Act	State document
12		National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010	Support document
13	2002	Public assembly Act	State document
14		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2002	Support document
15	2003	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2003	Support document
16	2004	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2004	Support document
17	2005	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2005	Support document

18	2006	Societies Act	State document
19		The Protection of Public Order Act	State document
20		Rules on the Work of the Committee for Bloudek Awards	State document
21		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2006	Support document
22	2007	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2007	Support document
23	2008	Rules on Administering the Register of Private Workers in the Field of Sport and the Register of Professional Sports People	State document
24		Rules on Administering the Register Required by Sports Act	State document
25		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2008	Support document
26	2009	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2009	Support document
27	2010	Nordic Centre Planica Act	State document
28		Analysis of the National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010	Support document
29		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2010	Support document
30	2011	Examination of Funding of Sport in the Republic of Slovenia 2001-2010	Support document
31		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2011	Support document
32	2012	Rules Governing the Criteria Specifications in Demonstrating Major Achievements in Order to be Granted the Status of an Association Operating in the Public Interest in the Field of Education, Science and Research, Culture and Sport	State document
33		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2012	Support document
34	2013	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2013	Support document
35	2014	Terms, Rules and Criteria for Registration and Categorisation of Athletes in the Republic of Slovenia	Support document
36		National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2014-2023	Support document
37		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2014	Support document
38	2015	Bridging Insurance of Professional and Top Athletes Act	State document
39		Rules on the Criteria for Co-financing the Annual Programme at State Level	State document
40		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2015	Support document
41	2016	Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2016	Support document
42	2017	Act Regulating the Supplement to Pensions for Work and Outstanding Achievements in Sports	State document
43		Annual Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2017	Support document

4.3.3.2) Qualitative interviews

Interviews – conversations conducted by asking questions and listening –are the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b). In order to gain

an understanding of perceptions and opinions of the key actors in Slovene sport policy, interviews were conducted as they are considered to be the most powerful tool used to try to understand human beings (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Interviewees provide their own view points on what they see as important (Bryman, 2016) by talking “about their own experience in their own words” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 156).

As a form of data collection method in this research, one-time, one-to-one, verbal interchange was conducted with each participant. Interviews were semi-structured, also known as the qualitative or in-depth interview and consisted of open-ended questions (Bryman, 2016). According to Fontana and Frey (1998), semi-structured interview enables and encourages the interviewee to speak freely on the topic, with the interviewer avoiding imposition of their own or academic preconceptions on the interviewee but instead trying to understand participant’s point of view. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to enable the researcher a flexible approach regarding the order of questions asked and asking further probe questions (Gratton & Jones, 2010). As explained by Bryman (2016), a flexible interview structure allows for the interviewer to follow the response of the interviewee, which can lead to a different sequence of questions from the planned interview guide/schedule. All the planned questions, however, are still asked with the same or similar wording. Furthermore, due to difficulty of following the flexible structure and paying attention not only to what is said but also to how it is said, it is best for an interview to be audio-recorded. This minimizes the concern about writing down notes on what is said. Therefore, each participant was asked for the interview to be audio-recorded and all agreed. This proved to be beneficial and useful, as the interviewer would not have been able to write down such detailed notes throughout the interview. Once the interview was done, the researcher was able to transcribe the participant’s response verbatim, enabling a more thorough analysis than it would have been otherwise.

4.3.3.2.1) Ethical considerations

When conducting interviews, causing harm to the participants should be avoided (Fontana & Frey, 1998). To ensure the interview data collection was in accordance with the ethical guidelines, the Ethics Approval Sub-Committee at Loughborough University granted ethical approval prior to commencement of the interviews on 11th July 2017 (see Appendix I).

According to Fontana and Frey (1998), traditionally there have been three areas for ethical concerns in research, including informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm. An informed consent form was given to participants prior to the interview to inform them that

they participate in the study freely and by their own choice to do so. All interviewees were adults. They had been informed about the research and their right to withdraw before signing the consent form and in the initial invitation that included the project summary. Moreover, the participants' right to privacy had been ensured throughout the study by using pseudonyms to protect their identity, with the data gathered being stored on a password protected computer and electronic cloud storage space. The only information that is included in the thesis is the participants' role and their sports organisation, for example, 'coach'. Additionally, participants were protected from harm as they were not exposed to any dangerous environments, nor were they asked any sensitive questions. Hence, during interviews, the interviewer paid special attention to any potentially sensitive questions and did not pressure the interviewees for a response (Bryman, 2016). Although none of the participants expressed any concerns, few stated that they lacked knowledge of the topic and would thus prefer to skip a particular question.

Lastly, a pilot interview was carried out prior to conducting interviews to collect data for the research. This was done in order to minimise the ethical concerns, to review and test the interview questions, and to pinpoint any other issues that might occur during the interview (Bryman, 2016). However, based on the rich and valuable data gathered during the pilot interview, it was decided to use the data in the research.

4.2.3.2.2) Interview sample

Interview participants were identified using purposive sampling as they were selected based on their knowledge or experience regarding the topic or phenomenon being studied (Amis, 2005; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Silverman, 2000). The criterion for the selection of participants was based on their knowledge of the research topic – namely the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Therefore, the aim was to recruit the main actors within the Slovene sport sector. In order to gain different perspectives, six key stakeholders in Slovene elite sport with different backgrounds were recruited to provide their opinions based on their role, history, knowledge and experience in Slovene sport (see Table 5). Most of the interviewees had experience within the formation of sport policy process in Slovenia, while some also had experience as members of IFs. It is important to note that the circle of professionals within the sports discipline in Slovenia is small, which is a direct result of Slovenia's population size. Therefore, many of the interviewees undertook several roles within the sports sector.

Initially, seven people were invited to participate in the research via electronic mail. Five of those responded and were willing to participate, while one proposed an alternative person and

declined their own participation. The newly suggested candidate failed to reply to the invitation, as well as one of the primarily selected participants. The researcher was not provided with a response after several attempts of making contact. Therefore, five participants were interviewed in addition to the pilot interview (n=6).

Table 5

List of participants in the study.

Code name	Date	Participant's role	Type of interview	Reason for inclusion
Interviewee 1	27.8.2017	Official of the Local Community Sports Association	In person	Local community and coaching point of view
Interviewee 2	29.8.2017	OCS-ASF official (1)	In person	Long-term involvement in sport
Interviewee 3	30.8.2017	OCS-ASF official (2)	In person	Policy-related, academic and coaching point of view
Interviewee 4	5.9.2017	Faculty of Sport professor (1)	In person	Developmental, academic and societal point of view
Interviewee 5	8.9.2017	Elite sports coach	In person	Coaching point of view
Interviewee 6	20.11.2017	Faculty of Sport professor (2)	Skype	Policy-related, academic and societal point of view

4.3.3.2.3) Interview Guide

According to Amis (2005), the general interview guide comprises of the predetermined themes, each with a set of questions. Three such themes were identified through the historical review, SPLISS and bioecological models and most importantly, documentary analysis. These themes included;

- The development of the (elite) sport policy system in Slovenia;
- SPLISS based questions; and
- Slovenia's sport-related characteristics and specificities.

In addition to the listed themes, introductory questions such as 'What is your profession?', 'What is your history in sport?' were also included in the interview to gain an understanding of the participant's background and build the rapport with the participant (see Appendix II for the interview guide and questions). The use of semi-structured interviews enabled flexibility of the order in which those questions were asked based on the respondents' answers and also allowed further questions to be developed when the new themes emerged throughout the course of the interview (Amis, 2005). The longest interview lasted two hours and forty-eight minutes, while the shortest lasted an hour and two minutes. The latter is the result of the participant not being able to answer some of the questions due to the lack of knowledge of the topics discussed.

Since participants agreed for the interview to be recorded, after the completion of the interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim.

4.3.4) Application of the analytical models

As the first study of its kind that led to the development of a model of policy factors or pillars vital for international sporting success, SPLISS had been identified in the thesis as the primary analytical model. The objective of SPLISS is to analyse sport policies that can lead to success in elite sport by comparing different states to each other. The present research, however, is only concerned with one specific case and context – elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Thus, the present study does not seek to replicate SPLISS, instead SPLISS was used as a framework for data collection and analysis, where the pillars were used as a starting point of the research and helped its structure. However, as SPLISS does not take into account factors outside of the pillars, an additional model – bioecological model – was introduced. Via the bioecological lens, some of the model's constituent parts and notions (aspects of time, importance of culture etc.) act as a complement to the SPLISS pillars and were therefore included in the research.

The development of SPLISS and its methods was explained in Section 3.6. It was stated that in SPLISS, quantitative techniques of measurement are applied to qualitative data (De Bosscher et al., 2015). For that reason Henry et al. (2020) suggest that qualitative accounts and analysis are required for each SPLISS pillar to maximise the ability of causal explanation in research. In the present qualitative case study in-depth answers from participants in one-to-one interviews were permitted and encouraged, new themes were uncovered by applying induction, links between identified themes were searched for and lastly, developmental aspect and macro-factors were included in the analysis (this is addressed in the next Section 4.3.5).

Moreover, as the present research is underpinned by the notion that one cannot understand the present without understanding the past, an overview of historical development of sport in the Slovene territory was conducted in order to trace the patterns of development in sport that would aid in explaining why a particular approach to or in sport was adopted. As stated by De Bosscher et al. (2016, p. 85),

Critical analysis of the history of (sport) and its elite development in a country is equally important to understanding the building blocks (pillars) of elite sport policy, and what it takes to link these pillars in an integrated set of policies, procedures and strategies.

Certainly, ignoring the past would be a mistake since development of policy is limited by and a result of the historical context within which it exists (Houlihan, 2013). Development of elite sport systems is country specific, highly complex and continuous (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2018), which is why any attempt to separate the (macro-, meso- and micro) levels leads to ignoring or overlooking the unique variations that are aimed to be uncovered in the first place (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018). This indicates that macro-level factors, especially cultural features are crucial in understanding and developing of sport policy. For these reasons, it was deemed vital to include the macro-level factors (social and cultural characteristics, size characteristics – GDP and population, geography and climate) of Slovenia in the analysis. These aspects were mostly identified via the biological lens, because SPLISS does not account for the context such as political regime as well as general and sports cultures (De Bosscher et al., 2015), regardless of the claims that the model sets out to evaluate elite sport policies from a multidimensional perspective (De Bosscher et al., 2011). Since sport as a social phenomenon “cannot be understood without a clear comprehension of culture” (De Bosscher et al., 2003, p. 66) and policies in elite sport are specific to the state, research into and inclusion of sports culture in elite sport policies may prove to be more fruitful in developing successful athletes than following approaches of other countries (Sotiriadou, Gowthorp, & De Bosscher, 2014). Sotiriadou et al. (2014), for example, urge for future research to include sport-related cultural traits as these can increase the long-term success because it may be conditioned by a positive culture towards (elite) sport. `

The above listed macro-level factors have become of even greater importance in the present instance of a single state analysis. To incorporate historical or developmental aspects and include the macro-level factors, this required rich qualitative accounts to provide detailed explanations of the elite sport system at the state level, as well as the explanation of how the present system came to be.

4.3.5) Data analysis process

By gathering multiple forms of data via documentary analysis and interviews, the study resulted in a large amount of material that needed to be managed and interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a). In general, the aim of the analysis is to make sense of the text data (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) by taking it apart and putting it back together (Creswell, 2014).

First, documentary analysis took place. To analyse the documentary text data, thematic analysis of policy documents was adopted as it allows for the organisation and depiction of a rich and large body of data by identification, interpretation, analysis and reporting of reoccurring patterns with highlighted similarities or differences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Thematic analysis is the most common approach to data analysis in qualitative research, where gathered data are grouped “into codes, themes or categories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 65). The first stage of thematic analysis is coding (Jones & Gratton, 2015) which adds structure to the otherwise unstructured large mass of data (Amis, 2005). Coding consists of assigning labels to sections of data that describe the content of the section and can range from single words to pages of text (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). A theme on the other hand is a label for grouped codes that are conceptually linked (Jones & Gratton, 2015) and when similar themes are joined together, these represent a category (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) as illustrated in Figure 8. For example, codes of ‘Categorisation, ‘OCS-ASF’ etc. were grouped together under a broader theme of ‘Slovene sport system’ and were only considered separate due to the extensive and comprehensive subareas within the Slovene sports structure. Many of the elements of ‘Slovene sport system’ ended up within the scope of ‘Pillar 2 – Governance, organisation and structure of (elite) sport policies’ theme as the analysis process followed the structure of the SPLISS model.

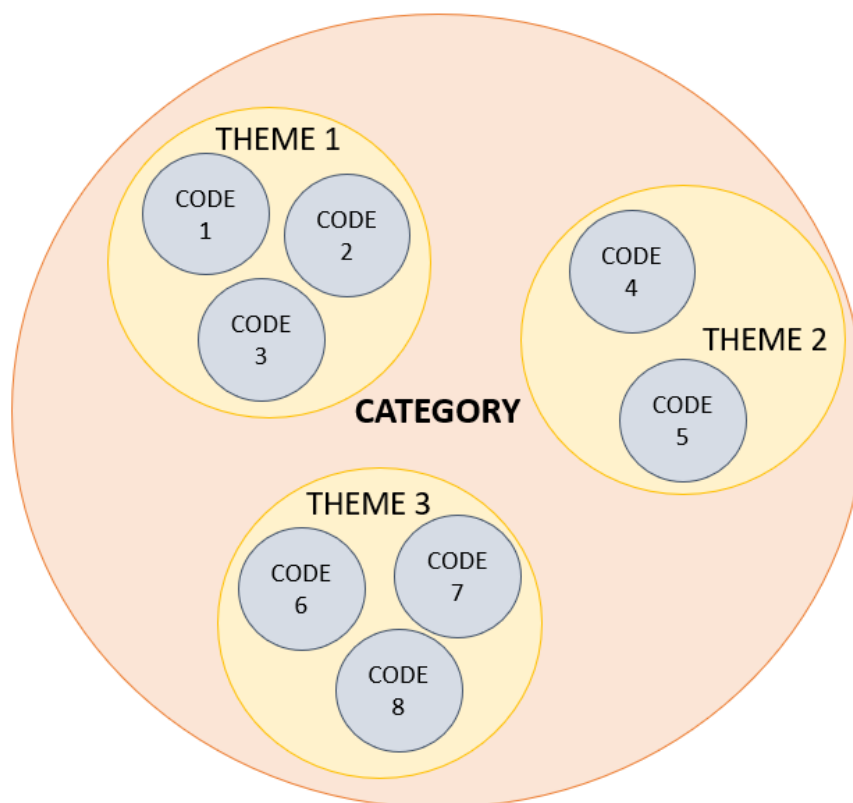


Figure 8. Thematic analysis constituents and their relationships.

Policy documents were coded using *a priori* themes listed in Table 6 below comprising the SPLISS themes, bioecological themes and other themes that derived from the historical review. Specifically related to the partial use of SPLISS in the analysis of policy documents, it follows that the pillars were adapted to include the developmental aspect as stated in the previous section. The SPLISS pillars provided a starting point for the analysis of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. These were used to inform the way policy documents were coded. To include the additional aspects of elite sport that arose from the historical review, research into models including characteristics of macro-level factors, especially culture and historical development was undertaken. Thus, the bioecological model was uncovered and identified as useful in the study. In the end of the prolonged and thorough time spent comparing and contrasting the models, themes and codes, some elements of the bioecological model (mainly development and culture) were added to the study. It should be noted that the document analysis, allowed for new themes to emerge which were not evident in the historical review or the models.

Table 6

The a priori themes derived from analytical models and historical review.

SPLISS themes	Bioecological themes - ideologies and attitudes of culture	Other themes
Financial input	Sports history or development	Geographical and climate conditions
Governance, organisation and structure	Sports culture	
Participation in sport	Tradition	
Talent identification and development system	Mentality	
Athletic and post-career support	(mass) media	
Training facilities	National identity	
Coaching (provision) and coach development	Family	
(inter)national competition		
Scientific research		

Following the documentary analysis, this informed the way in which qualitative interviews were undertaken and what questions were raised. For example, within the Pillar 2 – governance, organisation and structure of (elite) sport policies – questions regarded the present organisation of elite sports policy system were posed. Added to these initial areas of SPLISS were additional questions regarding culture and other characteristics of Slovenia that were informed by the

historical review and documentary analysis in hope of further clarification and explanation on the matters.

Once interviews were conducted and recorded, the first step of interview data interpretation was to transcribe the audio-recordings into text verbatim as only then in written form, can these be analysed further (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Hodder, 1998). Once in written form, the interview data were coded using themes from the historical review, analytical models and documentary analysis, while the researcher allowed for new themes to emerge from the interview data as well. Furthermore, thematic analysis of data was repeated to double check the themes and reduce possible coding mistakes that could have occurred during the processes.

It should be noted that while the realisation of the bioecological model's value was relatively straight forward in the research, it was the decision making on how specifically to include these elements that took place over the extensive period of time ranging from prior to the data collection to the final writing up period of the thesis. It was the decision-making regarding which elements of the model to integrate, which to merge, which to eliminate and how to complete this process that took the longest. At one point, it was considered to merge both models as equally important in the research, however, through another review of the entire set of data, codes and themes, the conclusion was that the analysis was predominantly based on the SPLISS model, with bioecological model aspects complementing SPLISS.

Following the demanding data analysis process and decision-making regarding the definition of themes and codes, some of the original themes were relocated within sections as a result of the findings, including some of the overlapping codes and themes (e.g. 'Slovene Sport System', 'Structure and Organisation of Sport' and 'General'). Firstly, the SPLISS topics were identified. If there was an overlap between themes, these were placed within the SPLISS themes if the SPLISS theme allowed for this inclusion. For example, 'geographical and climate conditions' was moved from 'other themes' and added to 'Pillar 6 – training facilities' as in the Slovene context these allow for the use of natural outdoor spaces for training and competition. Thus, instead of a simple deductive application of the predetermined model (Henry et al., 2020), the present adaptation of SPLISS also includes the adoption of a more inductive application by extending and potentially developing the model further.

If there was a level of similarity between themes, but there was no direct association with SPLISS pillars, then the themes were regarded as being outside of the SPLISS model. This set of themes was identified as 'additional non-SPLISS themes' to make the distinction of themes

not accounted for within the SPLISS pillars more evident and clearer. If the theme then fitted within the bioecological factors, it was placed within ‘bioecological themes’, otherwise it was considered within the inductively derived themes under ‘size-related themes’ or ‘other influences of success’. The final set of themes can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

Final list of themes including themes derived inductively from documentary and interview data.

SPLISS themes	Additional non-SPLISS themes		
	Bioecological themes	Size-related themes	Other influences of success
Financial input	Historical development: -Development of the new system	Individual approach	Independence
Governance, organisation and structure	Cultural specificities: -National identity -Tradition and national sports -Mass media	Flexibility of the sports system	International sports environment
Participation in sport		Knowledge and expertise -international cooperation in sport	Challenges within the system
Talent identification and development system		Multiplication of roles in sport	
Athletic and post-career support (including family)		Genetics and mentality	
Training facilities (including geographical and climate conditions)			
Coaching (provision) and coach development (including cooperation between coaches)			
(inter)national competition			
Scientific research			

For the process of thematic analysis, NVivo software was used for easier and quicker coding and theming of the data. Computer-assisted models and software programmes may be of use (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a) as management and interpretation of the data is considered to be a complex process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b). It should be noted, however, that NVivo does not help analyse the data, it merely helps the researcher to categorize and retrieve gathered data within the coded themes.

4.3.6) Critical reflection upon evidence derived from qualitative data

Following the discussions on data gathering and analysis, it is important that the focus is also placed on the critical reflection on the evidence that derived from the data. Most of the literature regarding the level of evidence regards the field of medicine and health and is thus explored and applied here in a context of the study. Generally, the hierarchy of evidence (see Figure 9) provides a means to rank the evidence gathered from methodologically different studies and to aid in assessment of study designs that allow for contribution of valid evidence (Evans, 2003).

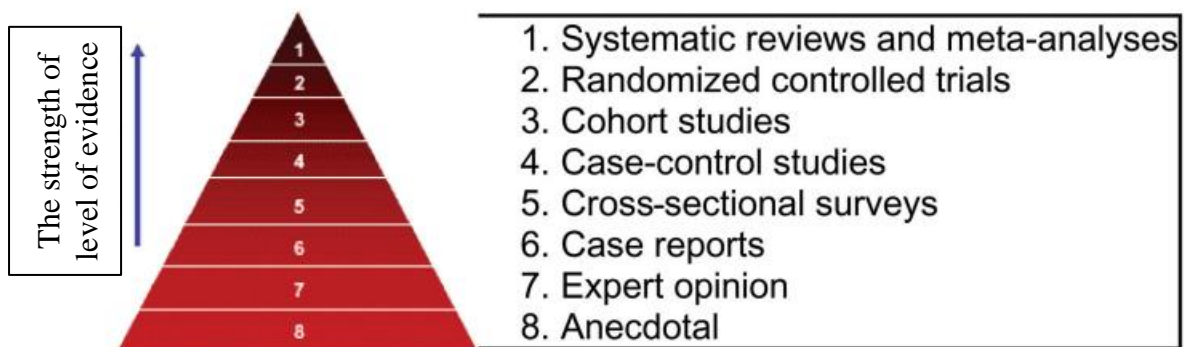


Figure 9: Hierarchy of evidence (Adapted from: Evans & Boyce, 2008, p. 184)

Walach and Loeff (2015, p. 1252) challenge the assumptions of the hierarchical model “as different research methods complement each other because the types of validity they produce are incompatible and complementary”. Indeed, in qualitative research, it is the capacity to explain the observed phenomena through identification of themes and explanation of patterns emerged that provides stronger evidence (Green et al., 2007). On the other hand, however, Thorne (2009) explains that within the context of hierarchy of evidence it applies that the exploratory, subjective and descriptive evidence, such as the expert opinion in the present study, is considered less strong than that which is generated from more bias-free research. Thus, decisions based on large population measures tend to be accepted more confidently than those based on expert knowledge as qualitative research will always have lower objective neutrality than a randomised controlled trial for example.

To achieve the study aims, an in-depth exploration into the elite sport policy system in Slovenia was required, which was completed by adopting qualitative case study approach, documentary analysis and interviews. Therefore, uncovering subjective views and experiences of participants was crucial (Bryman, 2016). The gathering of subjective data is aligned with the adopted interpretivist position. Moreover, it should be highlighted that the documents also

needed to be approached with caution as they are a reflection of the time and space within which they were written (Bryman, 2016) and thus may include some level of subjectivity. Hence, as the level of evidence gathered in the study is considered to be on the lower end of the hierarchy, a level of criticality and caution was applied in analysing participants claims and believing them at face value (e.g. in examples of exaggeration, such as the claim that ‘the entire nation picked up ski jumping’). Regarding the documentary analysis, most documents represent an ideal approach and guidance on the application of policies, but do not provide the basis to determine if and how these policies are and have been implemented in practice. For example, discrepancy is demonstrated in the documents regarding forecasted public fund allocation to sport (Table 12) and actual fund allocation to sport (Tables 9 and 10). The *Analysis of the National Programme of Sport in Slovenia 2000-2010* that provides an analysis of the past national sports strategy is the only document providing retrospective insights in the actual application of the policies, evaluation of implementation of the policies, and future directions.

4.3.7) Trustworthiness

An important part of any research is its quality and there are many different criteria on how to measure and improve quality of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research the quality criteria is called trustworthiness. They propose that trustworthiness is established by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the level of believability of findings (Jones & Gratton, 2015) and can be increased by triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is the ability to apply the findings to another context, where rich descriptions are used to provide others with information for evaluating the possible transferability of findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is the ability to “ensure sufficient detail is provided so that the study could be repeated by others, even if the findings would not be exactly replicated” (Jones & Gratton, 2015, p. 106). Lastly, confirmability is a demonstration that the findings were caused by respondents and not the biases or subjectivity of the researcher, which is why the researcher should make apparent that they did not allow for their personal values or preferences affect the research findings (Bryman, 2016).

According to Creswell (1998), at least two measures are enough to ensure trustworthiness. The measures adopted in this study included triangulation (credibility); rich descriptions (transferability); and researcher reflexivity (confirmability). Triangulation was carried out by using two data sets (Jones & Gratton, 2015), documentary analysis and several different

interview transcripts. When themes emerge from multiple data sets, this aids to a more coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2014). To make the descriptions more realistic, these were gathered and are presented in a detailed and descriptive manner (ibid.), while the reflections on researcher's history, nationality and mother tongue were also addressed in order to minimise the level of bias (next section). Following the suggestions of Creswell (2014), transcripts, codes and themes were double checked to reduce possible mistakes that could be done during the processes. Furthermore, the researcher spent prolonged time gaining and developing in-depth understanding of the research topic, even though they were already familiar with the culture and context of the research as a Slovene national and were an international athlete.

4.4) Researcher reflexivity

Reflexivity is a process that enables the researcher to critically reflect on their own characteristics (values, attitudes, background), their role within the research process and how these could have influenced the findings (Jones & Gratton, 2015).

Firstly, the researcher's history must be addressed. The researcher has a rich history in Slovene culture and context due to being a born national and having lived there for most of their life. Additionally, the researcher was also an international athlete and gained knowledge of the Slovene elite sport system through their sporting experience. The understanding of the context and language was used to the advantage of the study. The researcher was able to ask more detailed questions about the Slovene sport policy context that a non-Slovene could as they might not be able to pick up on fine details and question participants about it. As Shklarov (2007, p. 535) elaborates,

concepts and ideas related to the culture under the study can take months to understand for an English-speaking, monolingual person, whereas for a researcher who begins the study as a member of this culture, these concepts might be a natural part of his or her identity.

Despite having an in-depth knowledge of the Slovene context, during the study process the researcher stayed free of their own preconceived notions, beliefs and opinions, remained critical and allowed themselves to be led by the data. It is, indeed, paramount for the researcher to be open to others' opinions across all the stages of the research process to avoid doubt (ibid.).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the language used in the data sets was Slovene – the researcher’s mother tongue. All interviews were conducted in the Slovene language, while all but one policy documents were also in Slovene. Hence, the author assumed the double role of a researcher and translator and was diligent in translating the interview questions from English to Slovene and vice versa when translating the respondents’ answers and policy documents and Slovene literature. Undertaking the role of the translator from start to finish enabled consistent use of terminology throughout the thesis and a better understanding of the topic.

The adequacy of translation is paramount and comes with many challenges of cross-cultural interpretations and linguistic differences (Shklarov, 2007). The advantage of bilingual researchers is that based on their knowledge of a community, they will know of any differences in meanings of English and non-English words (Temple, 2006). Certainly, contextual and cultural interpretations play a crucial part in translation, where the words’ meaning must be maintained (Shklarov, 2007). The importance of translation of meaning, rather than direct word-for-word translation (where the meaning is lost) is something that the researcher is familiar with. They have prior knowledge in translation and are bilingual as they have completed an undergraduate degree in translation and interpretation (Slovene to English and vice versa).

Despite the researcher’s knowledge of the Slovene and English contexts, Temple (2006) notes that the meanings should still be researched and investigated rather than simply building translations on questionable notions. The prolonged time that the researcher spent researching the topic prior to conducting interviews as well as undertaking a MSc study in Sport Management in the English context, have provided the researcher with a better understanding of the English terminology used in sport academia. Moreover, according to Shklarov (2007), bilingual researchers are in an advantaged position regarding expertise in a cross-cultural setting due to their ability to understand and identify potential concerns based on their understanding of the target culture. This cultural understanding is an optimal basis for protection of participants’ rights and avoiding causing harm.

In order to minimise researcher bias, the researcher remained self-observant and objective throughout the study process by critically evaluating any potential pre-conceived conception on the research topic. Rather than seeing their own historical and cultural links with the Slovene context as a limitation, the author aimed to utilise these as an advantage. For “the ability to perceive and consider the ambiguity of various linguistic, cultural, and ethical contexts is one

of the essential conditions of achieving ethically sound research outcomes” (Shklarov, 2007, p. 537).

4.5) Structure of the findings chapters

The research findings are provided in the next three chapters along with the discussions and are structured accordingly to the final set of themes (see Table 7) - SPLISS and non-SPLISS themes as follows:

- Chapter five – SPLISS Pillars 1 and 2,
- Chapter six – SPLISS Pillar 3-Pillar 9,
- Chapter seven – Additional non-SPLISS themes.

Thus, the first findings chapter discusses Pillars 1 and 2 as these are the most comprehensive. The second chapter delves into Pillars 3-9, whereas the last findings’ chapter identifies and addresses other important factors of the Slovene elite sport policy system that were not accounted for in any of the SPLISS pillars and consist of ‘bioecological themes, ‘size-related themes’ and ‘other influences of success’.

All three chapters aid in answering the research questions, although the structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia is mainly addressed in the Pillar 2 section (RQ1), while the proposed enhancements to the SPLISS model (RQ3) are mostly addressed in the third findings’ chapter that discusses the themes outside of the SPLISS domain.

4.6) Conclusion

Adopting a more constructivist philosophical approach to research allowed for adoption of a qualitative research design that included conducting one-time, one-to-one interviews and documentary analysis in order to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Slovene elite sport policy system. This was a starting point in achieving the first study aim to examine the development and contemporary structure of elite sport policy system in Slovenia. In total, 43 sport policy and sport policy related documents were analysed, and six participants were interviewed. By applying thematic analysis, gathered data were categorised according to *a priori* and *inductively* identified themes, which mainly derived from the analytical models and

historical review. The use of SPLISS as the main analytical model in the study was discussed, while the contribution of the biological model was also discussed. The bioecological model was introduced due to its ability to emphasise the importance of development through time and the broader social environment (context), while also incorporating the reciprocal relationship between the individual or in this case system and its environment. The bioecological model thus also provided the basis for identification of influences of success not accounted for in SPLISS. This aided the realisation of the second study aim to critically analyse the extent to which SPLISS allows for an examination of the discussed system.

Chapter Five: SPLISS Pillars 1 and 2

5.1) Introduction

This chapter presents the findings relating to Pillars 1 and 2 of the SPLISS framework. Initially, the chapter examines the system of financing of sport in Slovenia and provides an analysis of the financial allocation to sport and difficulties related to financing that derived from the data analysis. The second part of this chapter outlines the structure of the sport system in Slovenia with a particular focus on policy and strategy document (NPS) in place at the time of data collection.

5.2) Pillar 1 – Financial support

Prior to discussing Pillar 1 - Financial Support – in the Slovene elite sport policy system, it is necessary to provide some preliminary insights into the organisational structures which are aligned with the funding of sport in Slovenia and are discussed in greater detail in the following section dedicated to Pillar 2.

In Slovenia, the main responsibility for sport sits within the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) which “is responsible for the networking activities of all actors while being helped by government agencies” (NPS, 2014, p. 56). Within MESS, there is an autonomous unit for sport – the Directorate of Sport whose role is to coordinate and ensure the delivery of the state level tasks as defined in the Sports Act and the NPS, including co-financing of sport and enabling the uninterrupted functioning of sports organisations (ibid.). Besides the MESS, there is OCS-ASF operating as a civil umbrella association of sport that links together national, municipal sports associations and other sports organisations, while it is also a member of the international Olympic movement (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Therefore, OCS-ASF represents sport at all levels, the higher elite level as well as recreational sport.

Furthermore, Slovenia is one of the countries that adopts a Sports Act (Law on Sport) (Camy et al., 2004) as a systematic approach to sports development as pointed out by Interviewee 6. The Sports Act provides guidelines on the governance and regulation of sport in Slovenia, while it also provides the basis for the NPS – a 10-year strategic document for development planning of sport that also defines the public interest in sport (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Moreover,

NPS defines strategic, financial, professional and organisational directives needed for the realisation of the Sports Act, along with defined actions and measures (NPS, 2014). The most recent NPS of 2014 identifies seven main areas of focus in sport as illustrated in the Table 8. The areas encompassing elite level sport are highlighted in bold. It should be noted that all of the listed areas are discussed throughout the findings chapters. Depending on the topic, the focus areas are discussed accordingly in the relevant SPLISS pillars as indicated in the table below.

Table 8

Focus areas and subareas of sport identified in NPS 2014⁹.

FOCUS AREA	SUB-AREA	Discussed in	
Sports programmes	Sport in the education system	P3	
	Leisure time physical education of children and youth	P3	
	Physical education of children and youth with special needs	P3, P5	
	Extracurricular sports activities	P3	
	Physical education of children and youth oriented into national and elite sport	P2, P5	
	National level sport	P2, P5	
	Elite sport	P2, P5	
	Disability sport	P3, P5	
	Sports recreation	P3	
Sport of senior citizens	P3		
Sports facilities and outdoor natural sports areas		P6	
Development tasks in sport	Education, training and specialisation of expert professionals in sport		P7
	Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes	Education of talented and elite athletes	P5
		Monitoring of athletes' physical prowess, training advice and expert support programmes	P5
		Health care of athletes	P5
		Elite athletes and elite level coaches' employment in state administration and in business companies (dual career)	P5, P7
	Publishing in sport	P9	
	Science and research in sport	P9	
Information communication technology in sport	P9		
Organisation of sport	Functioning of sports organisations	P2	
	Voluntary work in sport	P2	
	Professional sport	P2	
	International cooperation in sport	P7, 8, 9 and scale	
Sports events and promotion of sport	Sports events	P8	
	Sports tourism	P2	
	Public information about sport	P2	
	Sports heritage and sport museums	P2	
Social and environmental responsibility in sport	Sporting behaviour	P2	
	Prevention of doping in sport	P2	
	Athletes' Ombudsman	P2, P5	
	Sustainability in sport	P2	
Support mechanisms for sport	De-bureaucratisation of sport	P2	
	Prevention of corruption in sport betting	P2	
	Quality assurance and supervision of NPS implementation	P2	

Note. Adapted from NPS (2014).

⁹ Some of the terminology used in the official translation of the document has been rephrased to maintain the meaning in the English language.

5.2.1) Financial input

The following findings regarding the financial input address the overall and elite sport financing system structure, public fund allocation to sport and financial challenges within the Slovene sport system.

In Slovenia, sport is considered a public good and is therefore financed from public funds (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, & Rajšter, 2010). With transparent public funding of sport, the state aims to maintain the accessibility of sport to people of all ages and all abilities (NPS, 2014). There are two main public providers of funds on the state level; MESS and Foundation of Sports Organisations (FSO)¹⁰, while a third and the largest provider of public funds are local communities which on average contribute over 70% of public funds for sport (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010) as seen in the Table 9 and Table 10. This indicates that Slovenia adopts a decentralised model of financing in sport (NPS, 2014).

Table 9

Public financing of sport for the 2001-2004 period.

	2001		2002		2003		2004	
MESS	8,201,707€	19,11%	10,350,663€	21,64%	11,125,546€	21,23%	13,488,160€	26,43%
FSO	3,913,444€		4,509,284€		5,990,586€		5,860,195€	
LOCAL COMMUNITIES	51,296,540€	80,89%	53,802,389€	78,36%	63,503,902€	78,77%	53,865,991€	73,57%
TOTAL	63,411,961€	100%	68,662,336€	100%	80,620,035€	100%	73,214,344€	100%

Note. Adapted from Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010 (pp. 52-53).

Table 10

Public financing of sport for the 2005-2008 period.

	2005		2006		2007		2008	
MESS	13,747,747€	26,03%	14,569,167€	24,60%	19,338,079€	26,41%	17,539,957€	30,13%
FSO	6,677,796€		10,253,713€		8,112,167€		12,635,487€	
LOCAL COMMUNITIES	58,052,343€	73,97%	76,077,994€	75,40%	76,491,426€	73,59%	69,972,988€	69,87%
TOTAL	78,477,877€	100%	100,900,874€	100%	103,941,672€	100%	100,148,432€	100%

Note. Adapted from Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010 (pp. 52-53).

MESS resources are provided by the Government budget of the Republic of Slovenia (RS), while local-level resources are provided by the budgets of the local communities (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). According to the Gambling Act (*Zakon o igrah na srečo*, 2011), the FSO is financed mainly from concessional fees from sports betting and other games of chance - 80% of concession fees made from sports betting, gambling and quiz lottery; and 20% of concession

¹⁰ FSO is a stable provider of public funds for sport programmes on a local and national level via APS, while it also involved in solving many sports issues (NPS, 2014).

fees from other types of lottery ticket sales are allocated to the activity of sports organisations. The funds are received by the FSO and are then distributed further to sports organisations.

When adding the financial investments from the public sources (Table 9 and Table 10) and comparing it as a proportion of GDP in Figure 10, the lowest ratio of public expenditure was in 2005 at 0.290% of GDP, while the highest was in 2006 at 0.352%. Despite the ratio of public expenditure being proportionally lower than in most other EU countries (NPS, 2014), there is minimal funding provided for the sport system from other resources due to the size of the Slovene market, making it uninteresting for investors, sponsors, advertisers etc. (Jurak, Bednarik, Kolenc, & Kolar, 2010). Indeed, as suggested by Šugman (2010) the ratio of public expenditure decreased in comparison to the times before the independence.

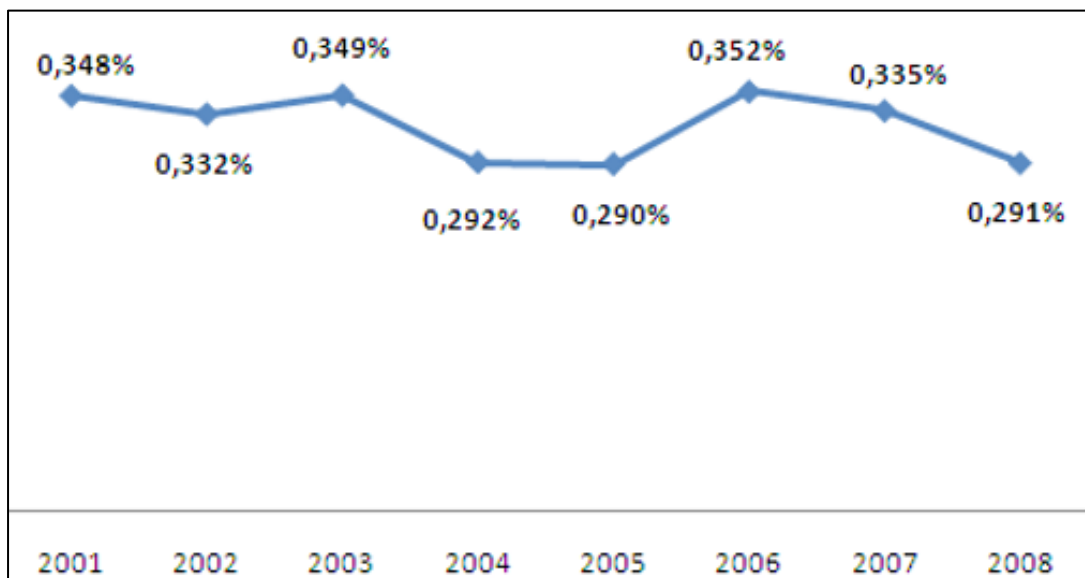


Figure 10. Proportion of public expenditure for sport according to GDP for 2000-2008 period (MESS, 2009 and FSO, 2009 as cited in Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010, p. 56).

5.2.2) Annual Programme of Sport

The Sports Act of 2017 states that public funding in the Slovene sport system is based on the Annual Programme of Sport (APS), a document reviewed for each calendar year defining areas of sport that are co-funded by public funds, as well as the budget allocated for each of these. The APS follows the classification of sports areas of the NPS illustrated above (Table 8) with the exception of *Support mechanisms for sport* and identifies the following focus areas eligible for co-funding:

- sports programmes;
- sports facilities and outdoor natural sports areas,

- development tasks in sport,
- organisation of sport,
- sports events and promotion of sport;
- and social and environmental responsibility in sport (*Zakon o šport, 2017*).

According to NPS 2014, the funding of sport in the education system falls under the scope of the education department within the MESS, as well as most of *Disability sport* (as it falls under schools while adult disability sport is considered within the domain of the sports department) and *Leisure time physical education of children and youth*. For this reason, NPS places greater emphasis on the organisation of public financing of competitive sport. Furthermore, in order to fully implement the NPS, funding is also required from organisations responsible for its delivery, other ministerial sectors and private resources. APS at the state level is set by the Minister responsible for sport, and by the Council of the FSO for FSO (NPS, 2014) while on the local level, the APS is determined by the Municipal Councils on the basis of the municipal sports associations (if there is one) (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). Similarly, the funds for delivering the APS at state level are provided by the MESS, for the FSO funds are provided by the organisation itself and for the local communities, the local municipalities provide the funds as well (*ibid.*).

Although the funding structure follows the NPS, in case of insufficient funds, priority tasks must also be considered when setting the APS at all levels. The tasks are divided into group one and group two as identified in Table 11, where the first group takes priority over the latter (*NPS, 2014; Zakon o športu, 2017*).

Table 11

Priority areas in sport as defined in NPS 2014.

Group one – Highest priority	Groups two – Secondary priority
Leisure time physical education of children and youth	Extracurricular sports activities
Physical education of children and youth oriented into quality and elite sport	Physical education of children and youth with special needs
Sports facilities and outdoor natural sports areas	Sports events
Sports recreation	Publishing in sport
Sport of senior citizens	Ombudsman of athletes' rights
Elite sport	Science and research in sport

Education, training and specialisation of expert professionals in sport	Information communication technology in sport
Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes	National level sport
Functioning of sports organisations	Sports heritage and sport museums
Voluntary work in sport	Sporting behaviour
Prevention of sport doping	Sports tourism
Disability sport	
Public information about sport	
Sustainability in sport	

Note. Adapted from NPS (2014).

Additionally, at the local level Municipal Councils have the power to prioritise those sports areas that are “important for the local community and take into account the traditions and the specificity of sport in the local community” (NPS, 2014, p. 58). This indicates the flexibility of the Slovene system for the allocation of funds. As explained by Interviewee 6, different local communities have different interests and traditions, and the system allows for the funds to be allocated accordingly. For example, in Kranjska Gora, Nordic skiing is considered a high priority by locals and therefore this sport receives greater funding than elsewhere.

The funding of sport in Slovenia is not simply allocated to sports organisations, but these must apply to a call for tenders in order to receive funding (*Pravilnik o merilih za sofinanciranje izvajanja letnega programa športa na državni ravni* 2015). Funds are then allocated based on various criteria including *inter alia* the popularity of the discipline, quality of sporting achievements, national importance, attractiveness to media and other factors as defined by the MESS (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010). The level of expertise of the staff (trainer, instructor, coach etc.) is also an important factor in funding allocations as more professionally qualified staff should receive higher funds (NPS, 2014). Funds received for a specific programme are intended for that programme only and where these are funded entirely from public providers, they should be available free of charge (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). MESS monitors the use of public funds allocated via APS (*Pravilnik o načinu in postopku sofinanciranja izvajalcev letnega programa športa, 1999*) and the programmes costs must be made publicly available (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). Allocated funds are intended for different use depending on the sports area and programme, however, overall on the state level, the programmes cover one or more of the following: the costs of facilities; professional staff; material costs of the programme and competitions; regular measurements of training; accident insurance; special

technical means and equipment; and bursaries/scholarships. On the local level, however, the public funds cover the financing of facilities and professional staff (NPS, 2000).

5.2.3) Elite sport financing

Elite sport funding in Slovenia is aligned with the structure of public financing of sport in general (Interviewee 3; Interviewee 6). Public funding, according to Interviewee 3 is considered the most stable source of financing for elite level sport, while the OCS-ASF via its own programmes related to the development of elite athletes (especially for the Olympics), is also seen as an important financier. OCS-ASF receives its funding from the international environment (e.g. IOC), sponsors and the state. Furthermore, Interviewee 6 explains that broadly, the largest part of elite sport is financed from private resources, such as households (entry fees, membership fees) and businesses (sponsorship resources)¹¹. Interviewee 3 also points out that from a different perspective, elite sport financing regarding the NGBs comprises of two segments; the functioning of the NGBs themselves and the sponsors and economy which have been growing. In the largest NGBs, for example, public funding accounts for 10-20%, while other funding comes from sponsors, membership fees, international resources etc.

Table 12 below illustrates the state's forecasted fund allocation to elite sport as defined by state-level APSs for the 2002-2017 period (in contrast to Tables 9 and 10 where the actual allocation of all public funds to sport in general is illustrated). Although the first NPS was intended for the period of 2000-2010, the APS for 2000 and 2001 were not available. The figures show that the investment in elite sport has been disproportionate to the overall investment in sport. For example, in years of the overall decrease (2012, 2014, 2016), elite sport was allocated proportionally more funding than otherwise, and during the years of the overall increase (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015), elite sport has received proportionately less funding. There were no insights provided as to why these fluctuations occurred.

¹¹ Private funding does not relate only to elite sport but also professional sport, however the line is often blurred between the two. For example, there is a segment of elite sport that businesses do not perceive as interesting from the marketing point of view, and then there is a segment of sport that is not elite but gains funding from businesses (Interviewee 6).

Table 12

Funding allocated to elite sport for 2002-2017 period.

Year	Elite sport funding allocation		TOTAL
	Tolars ¹² (SIT), Euros (€)	Proportion of total investment	
2002	747,885,000 SIT	30,91%	2,419.555,000 SIT
2003	771,455,000 SIT	31,6%	2,444.200,000 SIT
2004	814,243,000 SIT	27,15%	3,099.012,000 SIT
2005	851,939,000 SIT	24,12%	3,531.971,000 SIT
2006	844,400,000 SIT 3,524,000 €	25,19%	3,351.557,000 SIT 13,986,000 €
2007	3,468,100 €	14,52%	23,882,400 €
2008	3,670,700 €	12,49%	29,382,469 €
2009	4,384,394 €	12,53%	34,994,333 €
2010	4,476,060 €	11,83%	37,850,064 €
2011	4,484,303 €	13,53%	33,146,958 €
2012	5,485,717 €	26,45%	20,739,064 €
2013	5,367,477 €	12,60%	42,610,242 €
2014	4,268,527 €	28,67%	14,888,366 €
2015	4,519,073 €	12,12%	37,287,227 €
2016	6,368,327 €	39,74%	16,028,482 €
2017	6,192,827 €	22,23%	18,177,482 €

Note: Adapted from *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2002 (2002)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2003 (2003)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2004 (2004a)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2005 (2004b)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2006 (2006)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2007 (2007)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2008 (2008)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2009 (2009)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2010 (2010)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2011 (2011)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2012 (2012)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2013 (2013)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2014 (2014)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2015 (2015)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2016 (2016)*, *Letni program športa v Republiki Sloveniji za leto 2017 (2017)*.

Furthermore, apart from the priority sports areas (Table 11), there are no priority sports as such identified in Slovenia, instead public co-financing in sport is based on the evaluation of sports disciplines and their programmes (Jurak et al., 2010). By investing in a broad range of sports, Slovenia adopts what Shibli et al. (2014) termed ‘diversification’ approach. As explained by Interviewee 3 “priority sports do not fit within the system we live in, you cannot limit the

¹² Tolar (SIT) was the currency in independent Slovenia before the introduction of the Euro.

provision of help to someone in advance and enable it to others”. This is also supported by Interviewee 2 who claims that the Portorose Resolution¹³ proved to be wrong in prioritising certain sports over others because in a civil society everyone has the right to participate in the sport of their choice. Indeed, “priority sports as identified in Portorose Resolution would be unethical in today’s society, although the system of categorisation could be seen as a type of prioritisation” (Interviewee 6).

5.2.3.1) Categorisation system and financing in elite sport

“The present categorisation model was evolved from a similar model in place during the times of Yugoslavia” (Interviewee 4) which highlights the importance of historical links in the development of the sport system in independent Slovenia. The present model as explained by Kolar and Rajšter (2010) was established during the strategic period of the first NPS (2000-2010) as a research project of three expert groups dealing with the evaluation of sporting achievements. Essentially, the model provides the basis for sports discipline classification based on comparative variables in various categories, including the athletes’ results. The higher the results, the higher the variable value. Based on their results, athletes are categorised into six categories; four senior categories (Olympic, world, international and national) and two junior categories (prospective and junior). (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017). Prior to 2017, there were only 5 categories, as the Olympic level was added later (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013). Following the points and variable calculation, the ranking is completed for each sports discipline (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013). The funds are then allocated to NGBs accordingly (Interviewee 6) by the MESS, while the categorisation system itself is managed by the OCS-ASF (Interviewee 1).

It should be emphasized that while

NGBs do not offer financial support as such, they ensure the programme implementation for their athletes. They aim to support their athletes through their careers and also ensure they stay in sport as coaches, officials after they retire as athletes (Interviewee 6).

¹³ Portorose Resolution of 1976 provided a list of priority sports (Žabčič, 2012).

Interviewee 1 notes that athlete programmes cover expert staff, facility use, training camps and competition costs. On the other hand, Interviewee 5 explains that ensuring the resources to cover the costs of competition for athletes, coaches and officials can be considered an achievement for some NGBs as they receive funding from the government and then decide how they will spend this money themselves. Despite the variation in the use of allocated funds by NGBs, for elite sport it applies that public co-financing covers training programmes as well as athletes' statutory rights (including health, disability and pension insurance), professionalisation of athletes covering employment in the civil services and sports organisation, and execution of the rights of professional athletes (Kolar & Rajšter, 2010). At local level, sports clubs receive funds for their athletes that cover the cost of facility use (Interviewee 1).

Many interviewees mentioned that they believe the financing system based on categorisation is correct and appropriate as everyone needs to have the right to receive funding and categorisation allows for that. Indeed, as explained by Interviewee 3, the Slovene sport financing system

is dynamic, where you are ranked annually based on the results and you can move up or down and the funding is adjusted accordingly, is fair and appropriate. The challenge is, of course, how to balance financing between individual and team sports. As we know, team sports require significantly more funds to achieve a sporting result than individual sports do. Then, how to find a balance between sports disciplines that are traditionally successful and those that are breaking through as there should be a balance to enable disciplines to become and stay successful. Furthermore, how to balance financing when you are successful and are receiving lots of funds and then when you are less successful, and the funds are reduced. You are facing an issue of how to become successful once again with less funding....These are all questions we are facing all the time when building this system of financing elite level sport. I think that we have dealt with these questions relatively well so far as we have recognised them and built them into the system. For example, funding cannot be increased or decreased by more than 20% per year, which means that some basic level of funding remains and can support system maintenance and development. Each year, sporting results are checked, how many categorized athletes there are, how many registered athletes there are, the recognition of the sport discipline etc. If you are successful based on these criteria,

you [as an NGB] will be ranked higher in terms of financial support. Also, the system is structured in such a way that it distinguishes the amount of funds for team and individual sports, which means that the issues are being recognised. These challenges are being dealt with, there is no permanent solution, and it always needs to be checked if it fits the present times.

Since its creation, the categorisation system had a positive effect on the development of quality, quantity and dispersion of the elite sport in Slovenia (Kolar & Rajšter, 2010). Categorisation therefore enables funding to be allocated to a wide range of sports.

According to Interviewee 6, there are many sports disciplines in Slovenia, with new ones constantly emerging and they all want a share of the funding available, which is a problem because there is a limited amount of public funding that needs to be allocated among several disciplines and many disciplines receive very little. Nevertheless, they suggest that maintaining the width of fund allocation has proved successful over the last decades and Slovenes have been successful in various sports disciplines, even non-traditional ones. As added by Interviewee 4 “traditionally success would have been expected in rowing, skiing, yet [Olympic] medals have been won in sailing, judo, cross-country skiing, snowboarding etc. So, all of a sudden, there are all these new sports and the democracy is kept”. This coincides with another study which concluded that the diversification approach leads to winning more medals in a greater variety of sports than the approach where certain sports are prioritised (De Bosscher, Shibli, & Weber, 2019).

5.2.3.2) Financial challenges

Despite the positive trends of public financing in the Slovene sport system, which is in some cases essential for survival of NGBs (Interviewee 6), interviewees unanimously agree that there will never be enough public funds for sport. Interviewee 2 elaborates that Slovene sport is absolutely cheap and that

the state does not provide enough funds for sport, not even from the view of Slovene sporting successes. This does not only depend on the Government...but also on the general economic state. This is improving, however, it is difficult to expect that the Government would take on the entire financial weight. There is also another thing, we must know that the investment in the sporting achievements in Slovenia will always be lower than that of some large and developed countries

because, put simply, there is no money. To illustrate with an example, the transfer of Jan Oblak [football player] is being negotiated at about €100 million. That is silly. Or the contracts of Anže Kopitar [ice hockey player], Dragić [basketball player] etc., in these cases the athlete or their clubs receive more than the entire Slovene sport sector.

Interviewee 6 continues that commercialisation of sport forces athletes to follow their earnings, and

a lot of people say that our system is not good because athletes are leaving to work abroad. This is not the case at all, they are leaving because they have different conditions there...some basketball players left because they can earn several thousands of Euros at the age of 15, 16, which will never be possible in Slovenia. These are some concerns and challenges for the future.

Furthermore, Interviewee 5 adds that the ‘normal’ level of funding is only received in the first ‘tier’, while all other NGBs are left with no funds. Thus, the success in sport is not permanent but it is a coincidence. For example, both world champions in artistic gymnastics, Aljaž Pegan and Mitja Petkovšek, were training in impossible conditions with out-of-date equipment and facilities¹⁴, with minimal financial support and proved that they can be at the top of their sport regardless. They also point out that a greater financial input would enable a more comprehensive approach, a development of an entire system of teaching that is applied in some other countries. These comments can be linked to the argument about small countries and their limited financial pool in comparison to their larger counterparts. This point is further supported by a remark made by Interviewee 1 when stating that in Slovenia there is less emphasis on how much funding is allocated, as it is the case in the United Kingdom, where the National Lottery distributes funding based on purely mathematical model. In Slovenia, the question is how much, but more importantly how the funding is turned around and re-distributed to ensure the best support throughout the entire system.

Another challenge in sport financing according to Jurak et al. (2010) is that due to mostly amateur staff within the civil sphere, the management of sports organisations is poor and the rivalry between these is low. This leads to sport losing its market share to other forms of leisure

¹⁴ Note of the author: the facilities originated from the times of *Sokols*, did not have proper heating and were not appropriate for more developed forms of gymnastics. The ceiling was too low, and a hole had to be cut out for the athletes to be able to perform the skills.

activities and negatively impacting its financial state. Kolar (2010) on the other hand points out tax legislation issues. Firstly, the legislation limits the donations and sponsors to sports organisations as the organisations are required to pay 20% tax. Secondly, Slovene taxation policy does not favour athletes, which may be the reason why Slovene athletes move to countries with better taxation policies.

Particularly related to coaching, Interviewee 5 discussed the issues of national-team coaches, which in some cases may be paid by the NGB, however, in financially less stable sports, coaches are not financed by the state and therefore have to undertake other jobs to survive. Moreover, the clubs that employ some of these coaches are at a loss as they have to cover the shifts when the coach is absent from work due to their other obligations. They also point out that in their sport, the NGB covers the competition costs for athletes, coaches and officials which is considered positive as this is not the norm across the board. Indeed, as elaborated by Interviewee 3, some NGBs created debts during the latest financial crisis. They had to decrease their programmes and are still struggling with rebalancing the funds.

5.3) Pillar 2 - (Governance, organisation and structure of (elite) sport policies)

An integrated approach to policy development

5.3.1) The elite sport policy system in Slovenia

Building on the discussion in the preliminary notes, organisation and structure of the sport policy system in Slovenia consists of the public/governmental and civil spheres. OCS-ASF acts as a representative of the civil sphere in opposition to MESS as the public entity (Interviewee 1). These segments may not always see eye to eye. For example, MESS representing the government may wish to promote different interests to those of OCS-ASF that represents the interests of NGBs, sports clubs, and athletes. The role of OCS-ASF in participation in governing of sport has been lawfully recognised by the Sports Act in 2017 by giving the OCS-ASF the power to approve NPS, to nominate six out of seventeen members of the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Sport, to manage the categorisation system and athletes ombudsman, and to lead vocational education or training for coaches (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). Another specificity of OCS-ASF is that it represents both ends of the sports spectrum, elite and recreational sport. There is no separate body representing these two aspects individually as it

is the case in many larger European countries including the United Kingdom. This is a structural characteristic with origins in Yugoslavia, specifically in times of centralisation and the introduction of self-management (1945-1952) (Stepišnik, 1968). An important part in sport is also played by the Association for Sport of Disabled Slovenia – Paralympic Committee of Slovenia (ADSS-PCS), an umbrella association for disability sport that links together NGBs for disabled and is a member of the International Paralympic Committee (*Zakon o šport, 2017*).

Furthermore, the name MESS highlights that the education and sport sectors are merged together in one Ministry. Interviewee 4 explains that this is due to historical links of sport and physical activity with schools during the Yugoslav times. Indeed, currently most of the so-called sport programmes are delivered in the educational system (Jurak, 2010a). As explained in the Sports Act (*Zakon o šport, 2017*), in addition to MESS having an autonomous unit for sport - Directorate for Sport – the Sport Minister can also establish the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Sport as an advisory body composed of sports experts, elite athletes and professional workers in sport. The body “is responsible for making decisions on expert professional matters, on technical issues in sport and for technical assistance in decision-making as well as the preparation of regulations” (NPS, 2014, p.56). Furthermore, state and local communities can establish Public Institutes (non-profit organisations) for sport to carry out expert, organisational, technical, administrative and other work in sport, which are funded via APS (*Zakon o šport, 2017*).

When asked if there was a need for an independent Ministry of Sport in Slovenia, interviewees provided various answers. For example, Interviewee 2 pointed out that there is a large Government in Slovenia as it is and it would be very ambitious, too costly and irrational to have an independent Ministry of Sport. Interviewee 4 on the other hand proposed the link of sport and culture based on the historical links of the term physical culture and the logic of sports clubs being the basic organisational unit in sport. Alternatively, Interviewee 3 pointed out the complementary aspect for a potential Ministry of Sport and Tourism as they believe that there is almost no tourism without physical activity. They add that the link between youth and sport places sport within the education sector to a certain degree, but this excludes elite sport. Additionally, they state that

The power of the Ministry within the Government is measured according to the ratio of public expenditure and for sport this is around 0.2 or 0.28%. Therefore, the power of a Ministry of Sport would be exactly that and it would be difficult to

achieve more, while in the current constellation of the Ministry [with education] that has the largest budget in the state, it also has greater power. And, here it all begins. This is where all the systemic documents are prepared etc. (ibid.).

Lastly, Interviewee 6 noted that having an independent Ministry could have positive consequences, or maybe even having a Secretary of State for Sport would be enough. This would enable a direct access to the Government. The interviewee emphasises that they have, along with their colleagues, already proposed this.

In Slovenia, there are some similarities between the organisational and financial structure of the sport system. As Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 6 explain, the Slovene sport model is based on decentralisation, meaning that sport is financed, organised and delivered at the local community level. For this reason, local sports organisations can unite together into municipal sports associations that act as central sport organisations at local level (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). Due to the shared administration between the central and local governments, Slovenia adopts what Houlihan (1997) termed as fragmented administration of public policy. With the number of municipalities increasing from 147 in 1991 (Šugman, 1997) to 212 in 2017 (Jurak, 2017) this suggests a highly diverse local community environment in the small state of Slovenia. Furthermore, according to *NPS* (2014), sports clubs and associations as basic sports organisations unite in NGBs at the state level. Most of these are then further united in the OCS-ASF. Sports clubs and association also represent the basis of national and elite level sport and are considered a significant provider and stakeholder of children, youth and family sports programmes.

Sports clubs, organisations, associations or federations are defined as societies and are autonomous and non-profit entities established to realise mutual interests (*Zakon o društvih, 2011*) with sport being listed as their main activity (*Zakon o šport, 2017*). From 2001-2008, there has been a 91% increase in the number of sport service organisations from 3,895 to 7,439 (Figure 11). The greatest absolute increase was in the number of sports clubs (2,370 new clubs), while the smallest relative and absolute increase occurred in the field of public institutes and organisations (31% and 9 new organisations) (Kolar, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2010). This increase across the board in the number of sports organisations shows that sport is still developing.

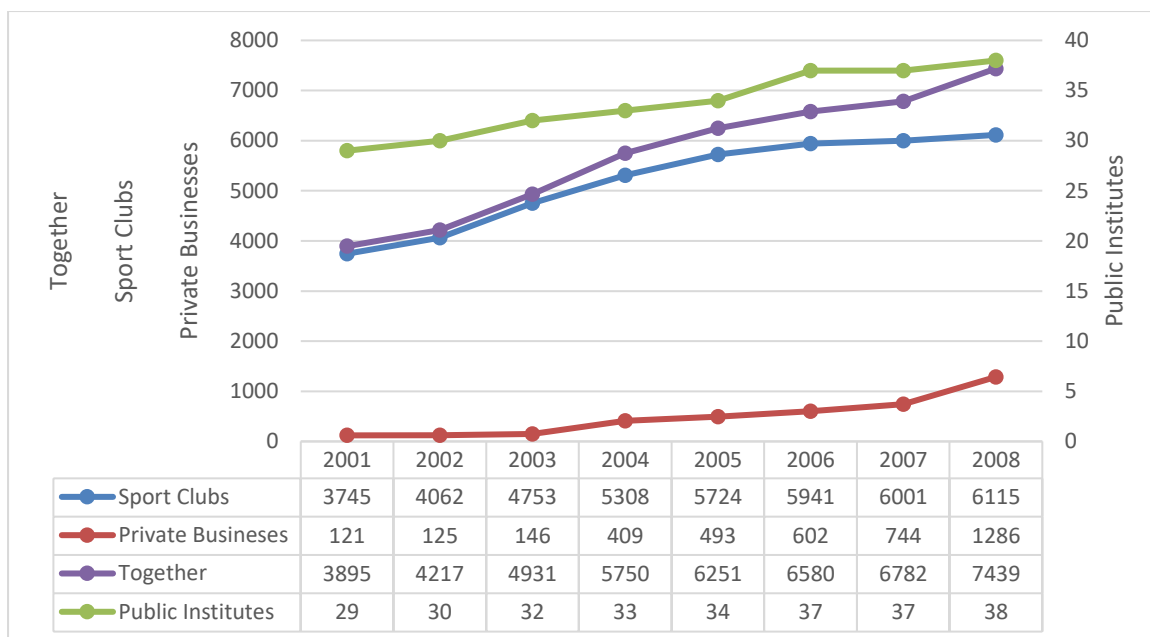


Figure 11. Increase in numbers of sport service organisations in RS for 2001-2008 period (Adapted from: Kolar, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2010, p. 34).

According to Verovnik and Kolar (2010), the sport system within the border of Slovenia follows the above description, while Slovenes living outside the Slovene border in neighbouring countries (a concept mentioned in the historical overview) have their own sports organisations which coordinate closely with bodies based in Slovenia. This is deemed crucial for the maintenance of Slovene identity outside of Slovene borders, maintenance of national consciousness, and creation of a unified sports space of ethical culture.

5.3.2) Elite sport

Regarding the elite sport structure in Slovenia, Interviewee 3 explains that

at the highest level, OCS-ASF deals with the development of the elite sporting result...with its elected bodies. Mainly, this is the concern of the Board in charge of the elite level athletes and competitive sports. Elite sport itself however, is not delivered by the OCS-ASF but is implemented within the domain of the national teams of the NGBs. The NGBs have their own expert bodies that develop strategies for development of elite level sporting results....The system is very clear here, very transparent. If someone asks who is responsible for the success of Primož Kozmus at hammer throw, you know that it is the Slovenian Athletics Federation, his coach and the expert body.

Similarly, Šugman (2010) highlights the importance of sports clubs individually or together in the form of associations or federations, when they emphasise that these form the single most important factor of sport organisation in Slovenia. When referring to elite level sport, the elite athletes are made exclusively in sports clubs. Furthermore, they add that sports clubs do not only represent heritage but also an important culturally civilizational value. As described by Interviewee 1, the development of the elite-level result is left to the NGBs, where the state (via MESS and FSO) provides funding directly to the NGBs. These funds should cover implementation of sports programmes, participation at competitions, and training facilities. Provision of expert professionals falls under the jurisdiction of the state via national sports schools. At local level, elite sport is financed in the form of training facility provision, while no funds are provided for the coaches of the elite level athletes. Interviewee 1 adds that NGBs along with their member clubs adopt their own politics and decide on further funding distribution. For example, Federations for Rowing and Judo re-distribute public funds received between the clubs or athletes, which are then being managed by them themselves. The Gymnastics Federation for example, decides who receives funding through a centralised approach. Therefore, the flexibility of a system that enables adjustments to the environment and time can be viewed as an advantage.

Elite sport does not only encompass the financing of sports programmes, but it includes all the support mechanisms available to the athletes that enable them to continue their sports career, therefore, it incorporates the creation of the entire support system (Interviewee 6). For this reason, MESS, along co-funding, provides financial rewards for medals won at the Olympic Games, WCh, ECh, and other rights including employment of athletes (Interviewee 3). These support mechanisms are discussed in more detail in Pillar 5 – Athletic support.

5.3.3) Sports Act

The Sports Act is a Law on Sport. The first Sports Act came into force in 1998 (*Zakon o športu*, 1998), seven years after the independence of Slovenia from Yugoslavia in 1991. Interviewee 6 explained that with the adoption of the first Sports Act in 1998, Slovenia was one of the rare countries in Europe and even the world that adopted such an Act with the purpose to create conditions for sports development. Although, Interviewee 2 claimed that many developed countries do not have a Sports Act and the Act itself does not signify a qualitative difference, however, if the state regulates sport in a non-disruptive way, this is good. They added that there are also numerous solutions provided by Law that are not even implemented in real life.

Additionally, they point out that some believe Slovene sport legislation is written as if the state regulates sport, which is not the case as sport is a category of civil society where the state only manages the system and provides finances as sport is in the public interest.

The first Sports Act defined the following areas: public interest in sport; NPS; APS; the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Sport; sports facilities; Public Institute for Sport; expert workers in sport; private work in sport; athletes and elite athletes; health care of athletes; sports events; informatics in sport; and penalties in sport (*Zakon o športu*, 1998). In 2017, the Sports Act was revised and adapted. According to Interviewee 3, the 'old' Act was not of poor quality, however it was not in accordance with modern sports development. Although the new Act should have been accepted earlier, it was mainly accepted so that the NPS 2014 could be implemented fully, as the Act provides the legal basis for its implementation. Interviewee 1 explained that a comprehensive analysis of the 'old' NPS was conducted which gave direction for future development and provided the basis for the NPS 2014. This then provided the foundation for the Act and not the other way around which is normally the case. Hence, this is another example of the flexibility in management and operation of the Slovene sport system.

In comparison to the first Act of 1998, the main changes adopted in 2017 relate to coach training and development, dual careers for athletes with employment opportunities and systematic changes in the relationship of the civil sphere to the state, where the role of OCS-ASF has been lawfully recognised (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 6 elaborated that although the new Act generally follows the premise of the old one, the paradigm for the changes was to increase the workforce's professional development to enhance the quality of work. Under the new Act, there are no more compulsory licence renewals (as many federations used it for commercialisation) but this now falls under the jurisdiction of NGBs themselves. Some interviewees expressed their worries in relation to the new coaching qualification system being reduced from a 3-tier to 2-tier system, while Interviewee 2 believed the changes will have a positive effect. This issue is discussed more in-depth in Pillar 7 – Coaching provision. Changes have also been made in regard to categorisations that determine the statutory rights of athletes and is one of the criteria for funding allocation as explained by Interviewee 6.

The most recent Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017) defines the public interest in the field of sport, mechanisms for its implementation, responsible bodies, conditions for expert work in sport, athletes' rights, public sport facilities and outdoor natural areas, sport events, databases and monitoring in sport. The 2017 Sport Act is underpinned by several general principles for

the sport system in Slovenia to achieve. In summary these principles state that the sport system should provide:

- Opportunities for every resident of RS to participate in sport irrespective of their gender, race, social status, religion, language and nationality or any other personal circumstance;
- Opportunities for participation in quality sport in a safe and healthy environment;
- Safe sport and the strengthening of moral and ethical values and avoidance of unfair achievement of results (doping, match fixing);
- Sports heritage conservation care¹⁵;
- Sustainable development¹⁶;
- Promotion of sporting behaviour¹⁷ (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

As demonstrated above, there is a great emphasis on ensuring the accessibility to sport for all citizens in Slovene legislation. As explained by Interviewee 6, the modern Western model of sport

brought about some weaknesses. If during Yugoslavia, children did not have to pay membership fees, the entry to market capitalism changed that and sport became a good/commodity as any other. Nevertheless, with public financing via local communities, the state and FSO we strive to provide some public funds to enable lower prices of sport. However, sport is also bending the rules here...it moved away from being accessible for all. With the mechanisms we are putting in place, also with the new Sports Act, we aim to define these public funds purposefully so that the contribution of parents is as little as possible...so that some segments of sport for children and youth could be free.

5.3.4) National Programme of Sport 2014

As mentioned in section 5.2, NPS is a strategic document for the development planning of sports that defines the public interest in sport via seven main areas (Table 8). NPS is adopted

¹⁵ Due to the tradition and heritage of sport in Slovenia, preservation of these historical aspects is crucial. While the Institute for Sport of the Republic of Slovenia looks after the sports collection, the Museum of Sport still needs to be developed (*NPS*, 2014).

¹⁶ Sustainable development of sport, limitation of negative impacts on society and development are intertwined with various areas of NPS, including facilities, outdoor areas, events, programmes etc. (*NPS*, 2014).

¹⁷ Sporting behaviour includes following the rules of the game, respect of others, without intentional injury, verbal or psychological harassment or the use of prohibited substances etc. (*NPS*, 2014).

by the Parliament of RS on the proposal of the Government of RS. The proposal is given to the Government of RS by the MESS, following agreement by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Sport and OCS-ASF (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). MESS oversees linking NPS with other strategies and policies at national level, as it defines, manages and coordinates activities of NPS as well as institutions responsible for achieving NPS objectives. Coordination encompasses of publicly funded NPS programmes. Prior to adoption of the APS, FSO and the MESS are obliged to consult with OCS-ASF. Other ministries may also be involved in the implementation of NPS, for which the work is coordinated by the Directorate of Sport. The Directorate of Sport must establish an information system for keeping the registers and indicators to measure the actions of NPS (*NPS*, 2014).

As explained in the NPS (2014) the main management (and delivery) responsibility of the NPS at state level sits within the OCS-ASF and the MESS, while the implementation of the programmes falls under the responsibility of all organisations that deliver NPS (e.g. OCS-ASF, ministries, local communities, NGBs, schools, sports clubs, schools, kindergartens, other sport related institutions etc.). An illustration of managing of NPS is provided in Figure 12:

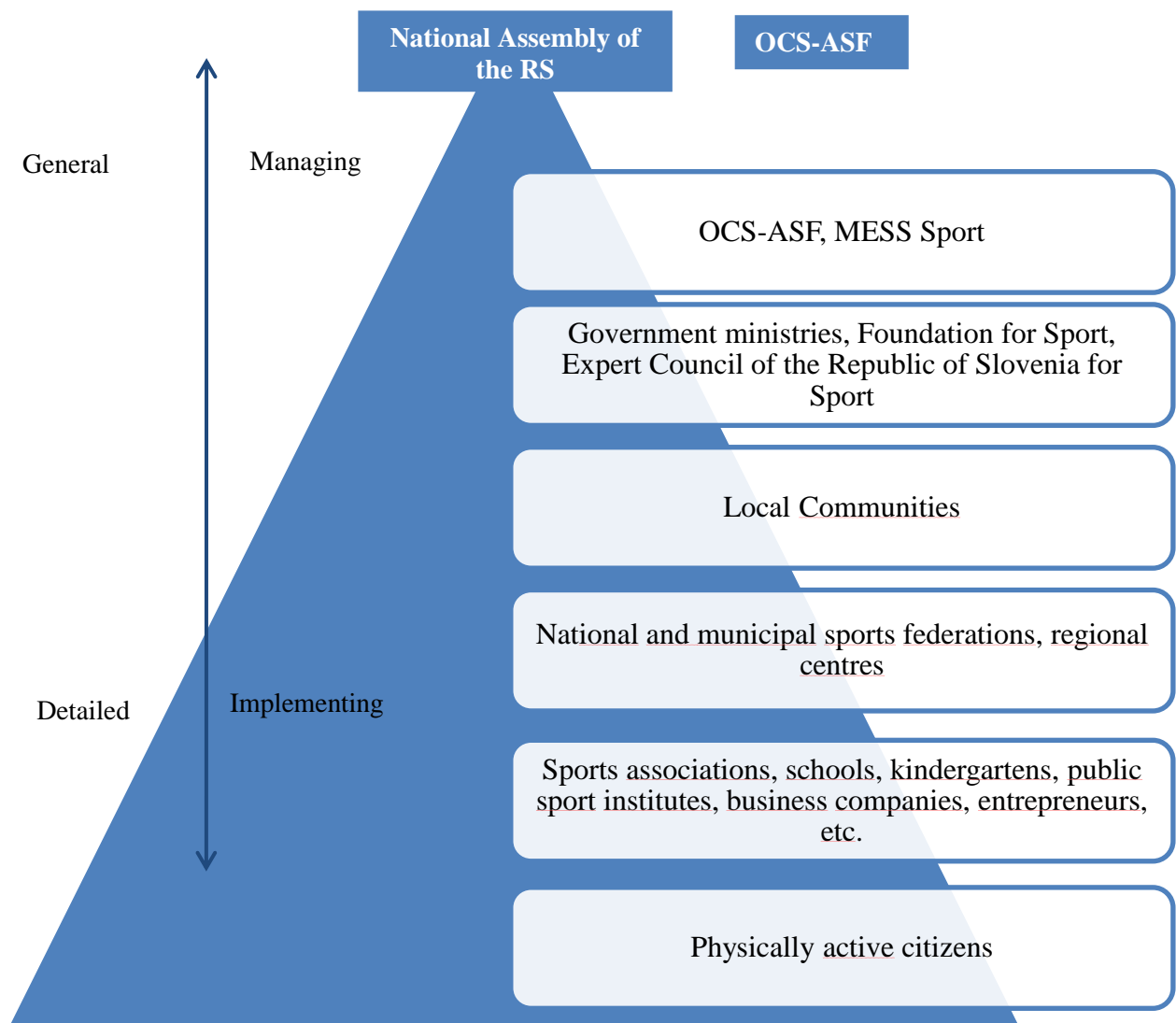


Figure 12. NPS managing (Adapted from: NPS, 2014, p. 55).

As explained by Interviewee 6, NPS defines the relationships and factors that must be followed in order to build Slovene sport, while clarifying the concepts on how the development of sport should proceed. In the areas where sport is intertwined with other social sectors, NPS “determines the basis for the positioning of sport into the strategies and policies of those sectors and thus tries to promote their mutual action for the common public good” (NPS, 2014, p. 4). Via the NPS (2014), the state aids in creating sports development conditions as an important developmental element for society and the individual and reduces the inequality in sport and exercise accessibility. NPS also follows the European guidelines related to physical activity, sport and health (including the guidelines of the Council of Europe). Therefore, as stated in the Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), the public interest in sport encompasses tasks of national and local importance defined in the NPS and intended for the provision of conditions for greater and higher quality participation of citizens of RS in sport and physical activity for health

benefits. Evidently, there is a great emphasis on accessible provision of sport and physical ability for all Slovenes. Specifically, the NPS 2014 mirrors the 2017 Sports Act, as it provides the mechanisms through which the Sports Act is implemented and thus NPS aims to achieve the public interest objective by:

- providing each individual with opportunities for active participation in sport in a safe and healthy environment;
- ensuring that all young people have quality extracurricular sports activities which shall jointly with the quality physical education enable them to acquire physical and other competencies at such a level that sport becomes a part of their healthy lifestyle;
- providing each individual up to his/her interest and capabilities a possibility of improving his/her personal achievements with confirmation in organised international sport and with the possibility of public recognition of his/her importance, leading to an increase of the country's reputation at the international level;
- safeguarding and encouraging the enforcement of moral and ethical values in sport, and by respecting human dignity and security of all connected with sport;
- creating in accordance with the guidelines of sustainable development an encouraging environment for the development of various types of sports activities for all groups of society, active daily transport of people (walking, cycling, roller skating, etc.), their socialising and spending leisure time together (playgrounds, parks, natural pathways, etc.); and
- strengthening the role and importance of those sports associations which provide society with quality sporting services, and have a character of public good and as such occupy an important part of civil society and which mostly through their voluntary activities, strive for the benefit of the entire society (NPS, 2014, pp. 4-5).

5.3.4.1) NPS focus areas

Following the structure of NPS 2014 in Table 8, this section offers a brief overview of those focus areas and sub-areas that do not fall under any other SPLISS pillars or any other themes. Those areas not considered in this section, are thus discussed in greater detail in their respective pillars and other themes.

5.3.4.1.1) Sports programmes

Sports programmes represent professionally organised and managed exercise, except for sports recreation where many people exercise outside sports organisations. Sports programmes are the most visible part of sport and present the substantive basis of it. Individual types of sport have different goals and are suited for different groups of people based on their age and abilities (skills, attributes, motivation, knowledge). Sport programmes are defined by the NPS and are delivered by different contractors, for which the organisations delivering/implementing the programmes are responsible (NPS, 2014). The structural relationships of sports programmes and their various levels is illustrated in the Figure 13 below:

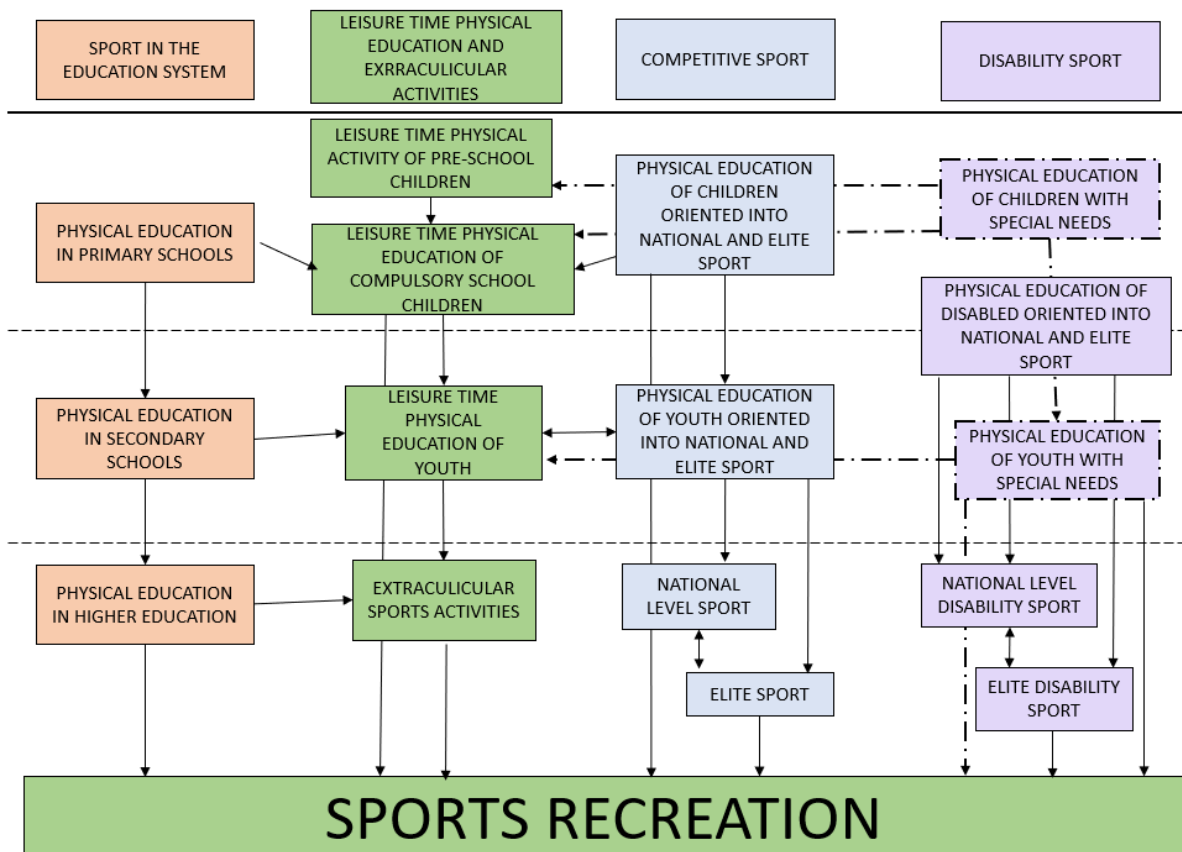


Figure 13: Sports programmes and their structural relationships (Adapted from: NPS, 2014, p.13).

Sport in the education system; Leisure time physical education of children and youth; Extracurricular sports activities; Disability sport; Sports recreation; and Sport of senior citizens are discussed in the Pillar 3 analysis, which addresses participation in sport. Similarly, although *Physical education of children and youth with special needs* and *Disability Sport* slightly overlap with *Elite sport*, these sports programmes are also discussed in Pillar 3.

Physical education of children and youth oriented into quality and elite sport

These programmes consist of the quality sporting activities for children and youth in order to achieve success in sports performance, including systematic care and support for these young athletes on their road to achieving elite sporting results on the international scale prior to and at competitions (NPS, 2014). These are delivered by sports clubs and NGBs (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), while training is carried out at the level of individual sports discipline and under professional staff or educated experts with at least a second level qualification. Additionally, these programmes must allow athletes to successfully continue their educations (this falls under the *Systematic support* discussed in Pillar 5) (NPS, 2014).

National level sport

National level sport consists of programmes of preparations and competitions of individuals and teams in senior age groups that do not qualify for the status of elite athletes yet compete for the title of the national champion and in international competitions (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). These types of programmes are an upgrade from the above programme and are considered important for the creation of a competitive environment for individual sports at national level, for increasing the number athletes in competitive sport, and for the development of professional sports (NPS, 2014).

Elite sport

Elite sport is perceived as “one of the highest forms of human creativity in the field of sport. It is often referred to as a sporting activity to demonstrate the ultimate limits of human physical and mental abilities” (NPS, 2014, p. 21). According to NPS (2014), it is difficult to analyse the complexity of elite sporting achievement, yet elite performance inevitably comprises of the ability of the coach and athlete, material and financial resources, scientific findings, and hard and systematic work. Therefore, in addition to training, the elite level result is an outcome of an individualised, planned and technologically sophisticated process comprising many people as well as organisations (from sports clubs to NGBs). Despite the recognisable positive role of elite sporting achievement, negative aspects such as doping, unfair treatment of athletes etc. are also considered and dealt with accordingly.

Elite sport includes programmes of preparation and competition of elite athletes, oriented into achievement at international level (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Actions from the previous decade had a positive impact on the development and growth of professional sports, which is reflected

in the success of Slovene national teams, as well as in the increasing number of athletes and a continuous increase in medal tallies at the largest sports competitions (ibid.). There has also been an increase in the number of the disciplines in elite sport as pointed out above (Kolar & Rajšter, 2010). As the costs of elite sport are increasing and Slovenia aims to remain competitive, NPS places even more attention

to the provision of statutory rights of [elite] athletes and [elite] coaches, to creating a favourable environment for the integrated development of [elite] athletes during their sporting career and after as well as to the improvement of spatial opportunities for preparation and performance of Slovene athletes (NPS, 2014, p. 22).

Therefore, rather than providing highly increased financial investment, the focus is on holistic development of athletes and provision of a stimulating environment (ibid.) The areas and programmes encompassing elite level sport are highlighted in bold in Table 8, illustrating that elite sport concerns many other areas.

An athlete gains access to their statutory rights via the categorisation model, which defines the criteria for gaining the title of an elite level athlete and in this way provides the basis for provision of statutory rights (ibid.) According to the Sports Act, an elite athlete is an athlete with international, world or Olympic categorization that achieved an elite result at an international competition (senior level) and is listed in the register of registered and categorized athletes as an elite athlete (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). More on athletes' support, their rights, and the categorisation system is covered in *Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes* in Pillar 5 – Athletic support.

5.3.4.1.2) Sports facilities and outdoor natural sports areas

The material environment is an important factor in sporting activities. The emphasis in this section is not merely on the sports facilities that can be built but also on the outdoor natural areas that can be used for sports purposes (NPS, 2014). More on this topic is covered in Pillar 6 section.

5.3.4.1.3) Development tasks in sport

These are support activities to all other sports activities. They are intertwined and generally expert related tasks, ensuring success in all areas of sport and representing a vital part of sport

in a small country such as Slovenia (ibid.). Sub-areas of *Development tasks* are discussed in their respective pillars as indicated in Table 8.

It should be noted in this section that the work and achievement in sport can be rewarded with a Bloudek Award or Bloudek Plaque. These awards are of the highest level in RS (*Pravilnik o delu Odbora za podeljevanje Bloudkovih priznanj*, 2006) and are given for extraordinary contribution to development of Slovene sport in many areas, including scientific research, journalism, organisational work, planning and constructing of sports facilities, elite level results, popularisation of sport, or a life's work in sport (*Zakon o Bloudkovih priznanjih*, 2005).

5.3.4.1.4) Organisation of sport

Functioning of sports organisations

The foundation of sport outside schools are sports clubs which are, alongside sports associations, non-profit voluntary associations of citizens. Maintaining of these sports organisational structures provides the basis for operation of non-profit sports organisations, which have seen an increase in numbers over the last years (*NPS*, 2014).

Voluntary work in sport

Volunteering in sport represents very important free workforce, which must be as professional as possible. Thus, volunteers represent economic power and are influenced by volunteering tradition (ibid.).

Professional sport

A professional athlete is an athlete listed in the register of professional athletes and independently carries out work in sport as a primary or subsidiary occupation (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). In professional sport, athletes get paid for their appearances which includes elite athletes employed in public administration (*NPS*, 2014). Since professional sport is globalised, it has global media exposure and attracts sponsorships that can lead to economic development via sporting events, products, services. While in the *NPS* (2014, p. 43) it is stated that Slovenia “provides for a tax favourable environment for the development of professional sports” (ibid., p. 43), Kolar (2010) points that there are issues regarding tax legislations. This shows different perspectives and inconsistency in the literature reviewed.

International cooperation in sport

This is a necessity for national and other organisations in sport. It includes the organisation of international sporting events, transfer of national practices and science research to further Slovene expertise on the international scene (NPS, 2014). This is discussed further in Pillars 7, 8 and 9.

5.3.4.1.5) Sports events and the promotion of sport

These help with economic and tourism development, as well as aid in development of sports culture via promotion of sport (ibid.).

Sports events

Sports events are important for local and national environments and include events such as the Olympic Games, Mediterranean Games, Universiade, WCh, ECh, World Cups, Grand Prix, senior level competitions in Slovenia, clubs in champions league, local sports events and any other events that are of national importance (symposia, congresses) (ibid.). This is addressed in more detail in Pillar 8.

Sport Tourism

This includes different types of sports tourism such as sports events, active tourism, viewing of sports sites, use of sports destinations for training camps (ibid.). Sports tourism is based on sustainable development and is gaining interest due to terrain, climate conditions and natural resources in Slovenia that are enabling sports tourism development, and Mountain tourism in particular has a special role (climbing, skiing, hiking etc.) in Slovenia (ibid.).

Public information about sport

As described in NPS (2014), a key component in mass communication is mass media. It possesses great influence on the growth of sports culture, whilst also undertakes an explanatory role. Since sports media rights represent a substantial source of content for most media, it can cause a distorted image about sports by mainly representing commercial sports.

Sports heritage and sport museum

There is a long tradition and heritage of sport in Slovenia (Kovač et al., 2004). Without the historical aspect, preservation and museum, sport is merely a transient social phenomenon. The

Institute for Sport of the RS Planica owns and manages the sports collection, while there are also many local and state sport museums (ibid.).

5.3.4.1.6) Social and environmental responsibility in sport

NPS 2014 is founded “on humanism and active responsibility towards the environment, and strives for human rights protection and promotion of ethical values in sport, taking into account its rules and regulations and sustainable development” (NPS, 2014, p. 49).

Sporting behaviour

This includes following the rules of the game, respect, intentional injury, verbal or psychological harassment, or the use of prohibited substances etc. (ibid.).

Prevention of doping in sport

Fairness by all participants and protection of health and equality are some of the most important rules in sport. This is why the Slovenian Anti-doping Organisation (SLOADO) was established during the period of the first NPS (ibid.).

Prevention of doping in sport is based on the protection of the fundamental rights of the athlete to train and compete in a sport without doping....Organisations implementing sports programmes, athletes and athlete support personnel are obliged to comply with the World Anti-Doping Code together with the international standards and Antidoping regulations of the SLOADO (ibid., p. 50).

Athletes' Ombudsman

The Athletes' Rights Ombudsman is identified by the OCS-ASF. It applies ethical principles of the Olympic movement and sport, as well as OCS-ASF rules (ibid.).

Sustainability in sport

The aim is to encourage sustainable development of sport and limit negative impacts on society and the environment. These measures are intertwined with various areas of NPS, including facilities, outdoor areas, events, programmes (ibid.).

5.3.4.1.7) Support mechanisms for sport

These enable realisation of the NPS via which the state implements the public interest in sport.

De-bureaucratisation of sport

Complex administration is a burden for sports organisations. Therefore, computerization and streamlined procedures can aid in reduction of this. OCS-ASF and FSO take on these tasks at national level, while at local level this is helped with relevant local level governmental agencies, municipal services and municipal sports organisations (ibid.).

Prevention of corruption in sports betting

Betting in sport can be a promoter of sport as well as a source of financing. This applies for FSO, however, sports betting can also compromise sports integrity and lead to money laundering, corruption and other crimes. For this reason, sports betting organisations must be under constant surveillance and the state must put suitable regulatory mechanisms in place (ibid.).

Quality assurance and supervision of NPS implementation

To ensure the quality of NPS implementation, its implementation is supervised by a variety of inspection services. The inspectorate is a body within MESS that is open to the public and collaborates with various other government bodies where appropriate (ibid.).

5.4) Discussion

So far, the findings to the RQ1 indicate that the present Slovene elite sport system has specific features that are a result of the historical development, contextual and macro-level characteristics of Slovenia.

One of the outcomes of the structural overview was the realisation that within the Slovene sports system, there is far less structural differentiation between the elite and recreational sectors, with OCS-ASF representing the interests of both. In fact, the system aims to achieve elite sporting results and high levels of mass participation. This shows that the legislation does not prioritise elite sporting results over recreational participation in sport as both are seen valuable. Together, they form the sport policy system in Slovenia, where elite sport is seen as an extension of the more general recreational and nationally competitive sport and not as separate. Another aspect of interlinking is noticed in the management at state level, where MESS (public sphere) and OCS-ASF (civil sphere) work together to govern sport. This finding

is in line with the claim of Houlihan and Zheng (2015) who stated that non-governmental organisations may act as extensions of the sport policy system within small states. There is also a high link of sport to schools, insofar as sport and education are joined in the same Ministry. Moreover, flexibility of the system is also recognised as a feature of the Slovene sport system. There is the flexibility of fund allocation where local communities can distribute funding based on tradition and other specificities of the local community. NGBs are also allowed to take different approaches to fund allocation, ranging from direct allocation to the athletes or clubs or through a more centralised approach. Another aspect of the system flexibility was pointed out by Interviewee 1. Namely, the creation of sport policy documents where the NPS 2014 was created first and the Sports Act followed in 2017 to enable complete realisation of the NPS. It should also be noted that while sports legislation is not the norm among the states of world, Slovenia falls within the group of states that do have their sports-specific legislation (Camy et al., 2004).

Additionally, during the research and writing processes, it became evident that the financing and organisational systems in Slovene sport are linked. In fact, findings indicate that the financial system is aligned with the organisational structure of sport in Slovenia that is based on the decentralised approach, where local communities play a significant role in both organisational and financial aspects. This (characteristics and link of organisational and financial structures) then opens the space for discussion on the influence of the first two pillars within the SPLISS model and whether the Pillar 2 – ‘organisation and structure’ has a greater impact on other pillars than the Pillar 1 – ‘financial support’?

The SPLISS authors recognise that since having financial resources may increase but not guarantee the likelihood of success in international sporting events, it is the structure of sport (i.e. Pillar 2) that plays a critical role in managing the inputs in the optimal way (De Bosscher et al., 2006). This indicates the importance of structural characteristics, however, the financial support can be perceived as the most influential Pillar over other pillars because it can enable greater execution of the remaining pillars (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Since the population, wealth and political structure of a country account for over 40% of the medal success at the Olympic Games (De Bosscher et al., 2015), it is important to ask how can Slovenia, a state small in population, GDP and territory (Thorhallsson, 2006) compete with its larger counterparts?

As illustrated by Interviewee 2, “the investment in elite sport in Slovenia will always be lower than that of large and developed countries”. For this reason, the emphasis is not on how much funding is available or allocated to sport but on how is the funding utilised and turned around as it was stated by Interviewee 1. This is also supported by Houlihan and Zheng (2015), when stating that as the capacity for strategic development in small states is highly constrained, shifting the focus on which resources are possessed and how can these be utilised in the most efficient way is crucial. Similarly, Henry et al. (2020) claim that it is not the financial input that explains success, but how the financial investments are used (to generate specific outcomes) and how the system is organised to enable such use. These ‘how’ questions can only be explained through explanations of causal mechanisms and how the resources within a specific context produce particular outcomes (ibid.). Since the explanations of ‘how’ finances are distributed and used in Slovene sport are linked to the structural characteristics and the organisation of the sport policy system, the influence of organisation of the system precedes the influence of the financial support. This does not indicate that financial support is not important in the Slovene context, it means that the contribution and influence of Pillar 2 – ‘organisation’ on the remaining pillars is greater than that of Pillar 1 – ‘financial support’.

The importance of structural characteristics in the international sporting success of small states is also supported in the research on the Danish elite sport system by Storm, Nilsen, and Thomsen (2016, p. 197), who concluded that despite the prevalent belief of the total financial input being the most important factor of sporting success, it is in fact “a well-functioning elite sport system [that] can help small nations to become successful”. While De Bosscher et al. (2016) note that Pillar 2 is complex and there may not be a direct link between the efficient organisational structure and success, they also emphasise that well-coordinated and strategic management of the sports system is expected to have positive influence on international sporting success. Indeed, “as the predictive value of macro-level factors (e.g. population and GDP) for success decreases, the management of elite sport systems becomes more important” (Truyens, De Bosscher, Heyndels, & Westerbeek, 2014, p. 459). Hence, due to constraints of being small, Slovenia created a unique elite sports policy system that fits and operates within its wider social, cultural, political, economic and historic environment. It is believed that not only small states, but all states, develop their own sports systems that are characterised by their various configurations (Ferkins & van Bottenburg, 2013). Indeed, the features of individual states such as culture and the environment should be taken into consideration and influence their structure as they are all different (Bray, 1991).

5.5) Conclusion

In this chapter, the financial input and organisation of Slovene elite sport policy system were summarised and discussed. The findings indicate that the features of the Slovene sport system are a result of being a small and relatively new state with a long and rich sporting history. The greatest responsibility for sport is placed on MESS. This also shows that sport is joined with education, which is based on historical links between schools and sport. OCS-ASF as a civil representative of sport and an umbrella association also plays a great part in governing of Slovene sport. OCS-ASF represents the interests of the elite and recreational level sports, which is also one of the main characteristics of the system, where these two concepts are not considered as separate, but mutually dependent. This feature enables greater links between recreational and elite sport.

Furthermore, Slovenia adopts a Sports Act that along with the NPS provides the legislation on sports governance as well as objectives for future development. The first Sports Act came into force in 1998 and was revised in 2017. The first NPS was created for the strategic period of 2000-2010 and the second NPS for the period of 2014-2023. The Sports Act defines the public interest in sport as sport is seen as an important part of Slovene society and thus it is considered a public good, while the NPS is a strategic document identifying priorities of the state in sport. Additionally, sports recreation is seen as equally important as elite level results, which is another feature of the system. The main management of NPS 2014 falls under the main sporting bodies, MESS and OCS-ASF. This interconnection of public and civil spheres of sport in governing of Slovene sport is yet another characteristic of the system. Furthermore, the flexibility of NGBs and local communities in fund allocation is also a characteristic of the system.

Specifically related to fund allocation, findings show that sport is funded from public funds as it is recognised as a public good. The funding structure is aligned with the organisational structure of the system, where funding is allocated annually via APS – a document defining the annual public funding allocation to sport. There are two main providers of public funds at state level: MESS and FSO, while the local communities are the third and largest provider of public funds. This indicates that Slovenia adopts a decentralised model not only in management but also in funding. It should be noted that not all sport programmes are financed from the sports budget as some of these fall under the education department within MESS. In addition to public fund providers, OCS-ASF is also an important financier of elite sport through its elite level

programmes. It is important to highlight that there are no priority sports in Slovenia as this is seen unethical, instead funding is allocated based on assessment of sports disciplines.

The above listed characteristics have shaped and defined the sport policy system in Slovenia and are crucial for understanding the structural characteristics and operation of the sport system in a small state of Slovenia.

Chapter Six: SPLISS Pillar 3-Pillar 9

6.1) Introduction

This chapter looks at the (elite) sports policy system through the remaining SPLISS pillars:

- Pillar 3 – Participation in sport
- Pillar 4 – Talent identification and development
- Pillar 5 – Athletic and post-career support
- Pillar 6 – Training facilities
- Pillar 7 – Coaching (provision) and coach development
- Pillar 8 – (Inter)national competition
- Pillar 9 – Scientific research (and innovation in elite sport).

Additionally to the financial support and organisational structure, these are deemed as influences of the international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2015) in the context of Slovenia.

6.2) Pillar 3 – Participation in sport

6.2.1) Elite sport policy system in Slovenia - Inter- and intra-linking of sport segments

The documentary review and the qualitative interviews revealed that the elite sport policy system in Slovenia is not viewed as being distinct from other sport priorities and also that sport is not distinct from other policy areas. For example, in the NPS (2014), it is noted that sports development cannot solely depend on sports organisations, as it is entwined with other social sectors such as health, the economy, environment, education, culture, tourism, traffic, finances etc. As illustrated in Table 11, *Elite sport* is a priority featuring in group one, however, it appears alongside *Sports recreation* and *Physical education for children and youth*. Thus, elite and recreational sport are both identified as priorities in the Slovene sport system and co-exists. Indeed, as argued by Interviewee 6, elite and recreational sport do not exist independently but are a part of the same system as a result of their mutual dependence. Given that financial resources are limited in a small state like Slovenia there is more focus on ensuring that the

value of the investment is maximised. They further claim that focusing merely on elite sport can be dangerous as it prioritises a snapshot view at the expense of the long-term view:

We need to see everything as an investment. If you create a good network, good foundation, you can see the fruits of your labour at the top as well. For example, I am sure that basketball would not have achieved such a great result¹⁸, if they did not have this foundation, that they are provided with school premises, courts, where masses of children can practice. And then they have this infrastructure that is linked to sports clubs and then it can happen that we have players in the best leagues in the world and we can achieve such an elite result. This means that we cannot only discuss that basketball national team should receive three-times more funds because this will not have a proper effect. Investments need to be made so that we can come to this stage, where we can raise a group of good athletes (Interviewee 6).

The recognition of the inter-dependence between elite sport and recreational sport was also noted by other interviewees. For example, Interviewee 3 believes that elite sport success impacts on mass participation in physical activity and sport, when they refer to their research that concluded:

All sport segments, such as number of active citizens, number of children in the competitive system, the results of elite athletes etc. are statistically dependent... My opinion is that the elite sports result is the driving force for this dependency because it is constantly visible – it is in newspapers, tv etc. and people watch this and internalise it, not just the sports discipline but sport as such. Due to this a lot of young people do sports and become physically active... Elite sports result is the driver for this because as soon as it is removed from the media, the interest for that discipline would decrease.

Interviewee 2 further explains that having sporting role models or heroes is important as it drives the participation in sport and there is no systematic investment behind this approach, it is just the athletes' success that drives the momentum. For example, the 'entire nation' picked up ski jumping after international successes of Slovene ski jumpers. A level of criticality must be applied here in acknowledging that it was not, in fact, the entire nation, but that the

¹⁸ Note of the author: Slovenia won the ECh in men's basketball in 2017.

participant has experienced an increase in ski jumping participation. Additionally, the same interviewee notes that most elite athletes who are successful in Slovenia will eventually leave Slovenia because of the constraints of the sports system. Most will leave as Slovene clubs cannot afford them which is directly related to the financial limits. Thus, although the thesis focuses on the elite level sport, recreation should not be neglected and is included in the study.

6.2.2) Participation in sport

Pillar 3 of the SPLISS framework represents foundation and participation, and comprises of three parts:

- Sport opportunities at school,
- Sport participation rates,
- Management to improve quality (e.g. sports clubs quality) (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Therefore, due to their relationship to sport participation, the following NPS 2014 sports programmes (Table 8) are considered relevant for Pillar 3: (1) *Sport in the education system*; (2) *Leisure time physical education of children and youth*; (3) *Physical education of children and youth with special needs*; (4) *Extracurricular sports activities*; (5) *Disability Sport*; (6) *Sports recreation*; and to a slightly lesser extent (7) *Sport of senior citizens*.

Sport in the education system

Although all sports programmes contribute to greater physical activity of Slovene citizens (NPS, 2014), the largest scope of sports programmes (66%) is delivered in the education system (Jurak, 2010a). Therefore, the NPS area of *Sport in the education system* is critical in this aspect. Physical education is compulsory in the Slovene curriculum from primary to secondary school (at least 2-3 sessions of 45 minutes per week), while in kindergartens, toddlers have daily movement classes (Kovač & Jurak, 2010). At university level, only some courses of the first two stages of the Bologna process, offer modules of physical activity (NPS, 2014). Physical education or sport in the curriculum represent

the only regular sports activities for the whole population of children (aged 6 to 15 years) and for a large proportion of young people (more than 95% of young people between 15 and 17 years, and about 80% of young people between 17 and 19 years) (ibid., p.14).

Interviewee 6 noted that Slovene “children are amongst the most physically able in the world. We have an extremely good system of physical activity...in the public schools...which are available to everyone and this is the first foundation of success in sport”. Regular professionally led physical exercise has highly positive effects on health (*Pravilnik o merilih za sofinanciranje izvajanja letnega programa športa na državni ravni 2015*), development of physical abilities, socialisation and the creation of a healthy lifestyle for children and youth, which is why the quality and extent of sport in the education system is of crucial importance (*NPS, 2014*). There is a wide range of school sports competitions with the main aim of participation and gaining experience, rather than winning as explained by Interviewee 6. They add that media coverage of these is poor. However, parents search for the information on children’s health themselves and recognise sport as an important health factor which is good. Therefore, there are hopes that the school sports competitions will come to the forefront.

Leisure time physical education of children and youth

As explained in the *NPS (2014)*, this area comprises of a range of after-school sporting activities provided by sports clubs, federations or private entities intended for children/youth that are not a part of NGBs’ competition systems. The aim is to provide at least an hour of physical activity per day. Despite positive trends in this area, negative lifestyle changes reflected in the number of obese and overweight children, have not yet been neutralised. It should be noted however, that these negative trends are significantly lower in Slovenia than in other European countries (*ibid.*).

Physical education of children and youth with special needs

These programmes are intended for those in need of physical activity with specially modified practice and the additional help of professionals, where the primary aim is to offer participants an appropriate care for their integration into everyday life as a logical continuation of regular sporting activities in school (*NPS, 2014*). Additionally, these programmes include the development of sporting results for disability athletes outside of the school system (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov, 2017*).

Extracurricular sports activities

These are composed of organised and non-organised sporting activities for students to complement their intellectual work. The aim is to achieve an hour of physical activity per day as this is deemed necessary in the extended period of adolescence (*NPS, 2014*).

Disability sport

Disability sport consists of sport intended for disabled people outside the school system (*Zakon o športu*, 2017) as disability sport for children and youth is a part of the curricula and thus mostly takes place in schools (*NPS*, 2014). As described in *NPS* (2014), disability sport that focuses on sporting results (e.g. Paralympic Games) overlaps with elite level sport. There is a variety of sporting activities for disabled people in Slovenia with the central branch association being ADSS-PCS. Disability sport is intertwined with various other social sectors due to its interdisciplinary nature and it has an important psychosocial impact.

Sports recreation

NPS (2014) defines programmes of sports recreation as a logical continuation of the above programmes and competitive sports programmes for adults of all ages, including families as illustrated in Figure 13. The aims of sports recreation include a positive life attitude and a healthy lifestyle (maintaining wellbeing, health, vitality, competition, social integration, as well as fun). This is not only beneficial for the health of individuals but also for public health, which along its power to aid in development of sports tourism, places it highly on the public agenda. People may participate in recreational sport through professionally organised and managed programmes or outside sports organisations. Such activity presents an active use of people's leisure time and is especially recommended for family activities (*ibid.*).

In terms of participation rates, Slovenes are one of the most physically active nations at 64% (*Bednarik, Pori, & Kolenc*, 2010), while the Eurobarometer research concluded that 'only' 22% of Slovenes do not do any physical activity, placing Slovenes fourth in the participation in physical activity of residents among the EU countries (*Special Eurobarometer 412 - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2014; *Special Eurobarometer - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2010). Furthermore, with 15% of residents exercising or doing sports on regular basis, Slovenia ranked second, after Ireland at 16% (*Special Eurobarometer 412 - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2014). Despite the increase in sports activity and activity offer, sports participation remains income dependant in Slovenia (*NPS*, 2014). This means that the greater the disposable income, the more likely individuals are to participate in sport. It is also known that the ratio of physically active increases with the increasing size of sports areas, as accessibility of these enables participation in sport for all social classes¹⁹ (*Jurak*, 2010a). Therefore, one of the main priorities

¹⁹ Accessibility to sport is enabled via good network of sports facilities (mostly in schools) and outdoor areas in Slovenia (*Interviewee 4*). This is described in more detail in *Pillar 6*.

of NPS (2014) is placed on improving the accessibility of sports recreation facilities, especially outdoor areas.

Lastly, there has been a distinct increase in physical activity amongst women (Jurak, 2010a), especially mothers (NPS, 2014) that will be, according to Interviewee 6, the driving force of physical activity in the future by determining the patterns of family leisure time. Furthermore, in younger age groups, according to Kovač and Jurak (2010), the decrease in physical ability has been greater for boys than girls, and while on average boys are more physically active than girls, the difference between genders has also been decreasing in all ages due to the greater participation rates of women.

Sport of senior citizens

NPS (2014) states that aging of the society leads to social changes, which is why sport of senior citizens is treated separately even though it falls under recreation. Essentially, it represents a continuation of sports recreation of adulthood and is meant for people over 65 years of age. As regular sports activity helps maintaining physical, emotional and mental health, physically active senior citizens can have positive effects on the reduction of expenditure on health (ibid.).

6.3) Pillar 4 – Talent identification and development system

Pillar 4 relates to national strategies for young talent identification (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Interviewees provided a wide range of opinions on the topic of talent, from questioning what talent is and if it even exists (Interviewee 3; Interviewee 5), to addressing early specialisation problems (Interviewee 6), to claiming that not having a talent identification system may be a weakness of Slovene sports system (Interviewee 1) and to suggesting that all sports and schools start working on this together (Interviewee 2).

In Slovenia, there is no general state-level talent identification system (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 5). This was present in the past (Interviewee 4), but presently talent identification is dealt with at the sport club (Interviewee 1) and NGB levels (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 4). Interviewee 1 explains that years ago, there was a module called Expert Modelling at the Faculty of Sport, where athlete models for different sports were made and linked to the national project – ‘physical-education chart’ – which included eight motor and three anthropometric

tests. The ‘chart’ dates back to the 1960s during times of Yugoslavia²⁰ (Interviewee 4). Based on gathered data from the tests, pupils were advised to try a particular sport (Interviewee 3). In this manner, local community clubs and NGBs could perform initial selection of those ‘most suitable’ for individual sport, however, due to the data protection act this was stopped (Interviewee 1). Nowadays, as described by Interviewee 3, there is

‘SLOfit’ which is a similar system to the ‘physical-education chart’ that can aid in recognising why a certain child is more adaptable and suitable for a certain sport. Because the end success depends on the knowledge and knowledge is not genetic. The end success depends on the capabilities which are partially genetic and mostly on morphology. If you are tall, you will not be a gymnast. However, this is so broad that we cannot talk about ‘talent’ as picking someone and them becoming a world champion.

Similarly, Interviewee 4 explains that the ‘SLOfit’ is different to talent identification system as there is no one-size-fits-all approach in sports because each discipline must be looked at individually. Interviewee 2 describes how tests on dispositions for cross-country skiing were conducted years ago and the results showed that the entire national team was extremely untalented. As far as they are aware these tests are still practised in skiing. According to Interviewee 5, in their sport, they test motor and morphological abilities that are important for the sport, yet these are merely used as guidelines and not rules because there are other circumstances and factors that cannot be measured and are extremely important. Therefore, no one is turned away if they do not fall within these ‘norms’. Likewise, Interviewee 2 claims that the easiest thing is to measure physical factors, everything else is unreliable and difficult to control. Sometimes, there is a strange combination when someone with low expectations succeeds and sometimes someone with high expectations underperforms. Someone with will power can overcome a lot of things that they lack physically by turning weaknesses into strengths. This notion is further built on by Interviewee 3, who does not believe in talent as such and emphasises the individual approach instead. They argue that development of a competitive sporting achievement

²⁰ These models were based on the physical culture models, adopted also in the Soviet Union, where children were checked at the lowest level - school. And, since school is compulsory for everyone, it provides the best opportunity for recruitment (Interviewee 4).

is based solely on the adaptability of an individual to perform a certain activity, which is much broader than what is considered or understood as talent. That and the activity and influence of the environment, which is mostly linked to the knowledge of the coach.... There will always be individuals in the [so-called talent-identification] system that are adaptable so that they can become elite athletes, where their primary (family) and secondary (schools), tertiary (sport) environment must be extremely encouraging. If this is not the case, they will never become elite athletes. And, it is much more important how much they are willing to work themselves, which is learnt. This means how much effort they are willing to put into something and how the environment will form them into elite athletes. This is because someone could be highly adaptable and if their coach cannot teach them the skills, they will not know how to perform them, they would do them wrongly or end up injured. For this reason, searching for talent as a starting point is wrong, instead you must build a system that can create an elite athlete.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Slovene elite sports policy system is built in such a way that it enables the development of an elite athlete according to their individual characteristics and needs. There is no general model that would eliminate those that do not fit the model as the model is flexible.

Similarly to Interviewee 3, Interviewee 2 points out the support of an athlete's closer environment, in particular the financial support of the parents, club is important as some talents were 'wasted' because of insufficient financing. They recognise that it is difficult to create a system that would provide finances as soon as someone is identified as 'talented' and this cannot be expected from society. Financial rewards do not stem from identification, but the results achieved, which may or may not follow the identification. For this reason, they claim that categorisation cannot be viewed as talent identification as talent identification must occur early because it needs to be developed and built. Interviewee 6, however warns against early talent development when they note that early specialisation is, indeed, a weakness of the Slovene system as it forces the athletes to specialise at the age of six. While some sports demand that, football on the other hand, as the most organised and commercialised sport in Slovenia applies very early specialisation. They emphasise that this is harmful for children because in the period of 6-10 years of age they need to be exposed to various types of movements, rather than being limited to a few.

Nevertheless, as the categorisation system provides the basis for evaluation of sporting results, the junior categories could be used as talent indicators for senior categories. In fact, according to NPS (2000), children and youth in programmes of *Physical education of children and youth oriented into national and elite sport* can acquire one of the junior categorisation titles; junior or prospective athlete. Hence, these sports programmes (discussed in Pillar 2) could be considered a stepping stone for national and elite sport within the scope of the so-called talent identification.

As an illustration of progression of young athletes with categorisation in the 2001-2008 period, there has been an increase from 1162 to 2277, while the number of 'talented' scholarship/bursary holders also increased from 110 to 145 in the same period (Kolar & Kovač, 2010). The number of athletes in 'sports discipline schools' had also increased from 1.897 to 8.913. 'Sports discipline schools' provide the highest quality material, staff and organisational resources for sports programmes of children and youth (Kolar, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2010). Interviewee 1 explains that via these schools local communities employ coaches that deliver quality work with children and youth on the local sports club level.

6.4) Pillar 5 – Athletic and post-career support

Within Pillar 5 the following NPS 2014 programmes are considered: a section of (1) *Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes*; (2) *Physical education of children and youth oriented into national and elite sport*; a section of (3) *Physical education of children and youth with special needs*, national class athletes within (4) *National sport*, (5) *Elite sport*, and a section of (6) *Disability sport*. The statutory rights of athletes are dependent on the level of their success, defined by the system of categorisation (NPS, 2014).

6.4.1) Categorisation and statutory rights of athletes

The categorisation document is one of the most important systemic documents in Slovene sport as it provides the criteria for registration of athletes, their sports organisations, competition systems but most of all, it defines the criteria for gaining the statutory rights of athletes (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013; *Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017). It is updated each Olympic cycle, in the year following the Summer Olympic Games, where the proposal is submitted by OCS-ASF based on the comments of NGBs and approved by the Expert Council of the Republic of

Slovenia for Sport (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013).

Individuals can be registered as athletes if they are at least 12 years old (or 10 years old in sports where senior category is achieved before the age of 18), members of an OCS-ASF or ADSS-PCS registered club, participate in the official competition system of OCS-ASF, and are listed in the register of registered and categorised athletes (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Categorized athletes, on the other hand, must be residents of RS, at least 14 years of age with a junior, national, prospective, international, world or Olympic categorization title, and are listed in the register of registered and categorized athletes as an elite athlete (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017; *Zakon o športu*, 2017). Professional athletes can also earn a categorisation title. The new increased age limit for categorisation defined in the new Sports Act is considered positive by Interviewee 6 as it removes early specialisation where coaches and clubs are not dependent on competition results receive funding. They argue that children need motor and movement diversity regardless of whether they participate in recreational or competitive sport.

The categorisation document (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017) specifies that in junior categories, a prospective title can be achieved solely at international competitions, while a junior title can be achieved at national and international competitions. At senior level, national class athletes can achieve their title at national and international competitions, while elite athletes can achieve the title of international, world or Olympic athlete at international competitions only. The senior title is effective for 1-4 years, depending on the results achieved, with the junior title being limited to a maximum of two years. In cases of injury, pregnancy or illness, individuals can also extend their categorisation for 3-12 months. Following the NPS programmes, participants of *Physical education of children and youth oriented into national and elite sport* and *Physical education of children and youth with special needs* are oriented towards junior categorisation, while *National level sport* is oriented towards national categorisation and *Elite sport* at international, world and Olympic categorisation.

In 2013, there were 60 NGBs and 136 sports disciplines in Slovenia that counted towards categorisation (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013), while in 2017, there were 63 NGBs and 168 sports disciplines in Slovenia that counted towards achieving categorisation (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje*

športnikov, 2017). This does not only show the development in the range of sports disciplines but also in the level of competitiveness. Furthermore, Kolar, Bednarik, and Kolenc (2010) concluded that there has been an overall 76% increase in the number of categorized athletes, 14,7% increase in the number of elite athletes and an increase in medals won at the largest sporting competitions during the 2000-2008 period. In 2012, there were 122.052 registered athletes and 5.295 categorized athletes in Slovenia (NPS, 2014).

6.4.2) Athletes' rights and support

The elite "athlete support system in Slovenia is in its infancy" (Interviewee 5) and there have been difficulties in "endeavours for holistic personal development" (NPS, 2014, p. 10) of these athletes. However, with the new Sports Act of 2017, the legal basis and funding (by MESS) have been established for creation of the Athlete Ombudsman as explained by Interviewee 1. The role of the Ombudsman is to look after the rights of athletes and expert personnel, as well as providing examples of good practice (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). In this way, the Slovene sport policy system follows the international guidelines including the European Sports Charter (1992) (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017), White Paper on Sport (Interviewee 1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Children's Rights (NPS, 2014).

Building on the discussion in Pillar 2, Interviewee 6 claims that support for athletes is not merely about financial provision for sports programmes of elite athletes, it is about all other support mechanisms and about the creation of the entire support system, including mechanisms identified in the *Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes*. Interviewee 2 adds that there is never enough support for athletes and that the state must provide some support during athletes' careers, while the actual delivery of support, however, is within the athlete's club or NGB. For example, as explained by Interviewee 5, their NGB provides minimal financial support in the form of scholarships/bursaries for athletes with specific results and it covers competition expenses. In addition, it provides testing and monitoring. Once the athletes are eligible for categorisation, they gain some benefits, however, until they establish themselves, they do not receive support from the NGB.

Additionally to the state and NGB support, the importance of the primary environment of an athlete is pointed out in NPS 2014. Although the primary environment (family) cannot be controlled by policies, its value and influence on an athlete's welfare are recognised, indicating

its importance. For example, the following supportive environments of an elite athlete are also considered important:

- “family (athlete's private life);
- school (balancing school and sports commitments);
- sports team (health monitoring and preparedness of athlete); and
- professional environment (harmonisation of work and sporting commitments)”
(NPS, 2014, p. 21).

In a way, the above confirms the claim that Pillar 5 is coordinated and managed at the club and NGB level (Shibli et al., 2014) requiring for analysis to be done at a sport-specific level (De Bosscher et al., 2015). However, in Slovenia, the support to athletes is also provided by the state via *Statutory rights* discussed below.

6.4.3) Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes

The athletes’ rights are lawfully defined at the state level in the Sports Act. In detail, an athlete has the right to:

- adjustment of school and study obligations defined in the school or university regulations;
- adjustment of high school graduation exams (equivalent to A-levels);
- adjustment for enforcing the right to enrolment into further education;
- safe training process provided by the executers of sports programmes;
- preventive health insurance; and
- a period of no training and no competition in the case of injury or illness (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

In the NPS 2014, however, the *Statutory rights of athletes* are divided into the following sections: (1) *Education of talented and elite athletes*; (2) *Monitoring of athletes’ physical prowess, training advice and expert support programmes*; (3) *Health care of athletes*; and (4) *Elite athlete and elite coaches’ employment in state administration and in business companies (dual career)* (see Table 8) (NPS, 2014). The listed areas are addressed below for athletes and in Pillar 7 for coaches.

6.4.3.1) Education of talented and elite athletes

It is described in the NPS (2014) that due to poor sponsorship opportunities in Slovenia, athletes' social status in their post-athletic retirement period is dependent on the level of their education. Therefore, a systematic approach and good coordination aim to ensure success in education and sport. For example, *Physical education of children and youth oriented into national and elite sport* must enable an athlete's successful education by providing systematic support along with provision of sporting activities. A systematic approach and coordination are implemented via provision of equal educational opportunities for elite and talented athletes by adapting their study or school obligations to obtain a profession post-retirement and thus reducing the negative effect of professional sport. This is executed by the state via affirmative actions, innovative approaches in the athlete's educational processes and even by provision of legislative solutions. The affirmative action encapsulates "sports departments in high schools, sports schools of national importance, [and] scholarships to talented students and world-class athletes" (ibid., p. 32).

As further explained in NPS (2014), considering different needs of talented pupils and students is crucial for the effective implementation of sports classes, which fall within the responsibility of MESS. There are different types of coordination for educational obligations. In primary school pupils can, based on their categorisation, gain the 'athlete's status' that enables them to have individual adjustment of learning obligations. In secondary schools there are sports classes with smaller number of individuals that also enable individual and personalised teaching; adjustments in schedule (attending training instead of PE), content and absence; foreseen exams and conditional progression; end of year exams; options to stay in hostels etc. On the school-level, schools themselves must provide policies on how they will deliver these models of coordination, while at the level of higher education, these models have not yet been established in so much detail.

As clarified by Interviewee 4, there has been progress in this area since Yugoslavia. However, despite the legislative provision of athletes' rights and an improved administration, in primary schools these are mostly dependent on the teacher's support of coordination of educational obligation. While the policy enables the adjustments, they urge that these should be regulated across the education levels. The interviewee also draws on personal experience stating that having 'athlete status' helped them with managing university obligations when they were absent because of competitions. At the same time, they note that adjustments depend on the

type of study. In the areas requiring more practical and laboratory work, for example, this may be more difficult to implement, while it also depends on the student-lecturer relationship. Development of long-distance study also aided in this and led to collaboration by OCS-ASF with some educational establishments for the enrolment of Olympians in long-distance studies.

6.4.3.2) Monitoring of athletes' physical prowess, training advice and expert support programmes

This section is the basis of professional strategic work in sport, including proper exercise, lifestyle, nutrition and hydration (NPS, 2014), which places it within the micro-level factors (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). As elaborated in NPS (2014), this demonstrates humanisation of work with elite and talented athletes and foundation of their physical performance, while it also includes advice to children's parents and for children with developmental problems and thus represents holistic development support. The strategy for monitoring of athletes' physical prowess is established at state level for covering the comprehensive treatment of the athletes.

Jurak and Rajšter (2010) explain that the Institute of Sport under the lead of experts, together with NGBs prepare the annual monitoring of athletes' prowess and training advice. For preventive health checks of athletes, designated medical centres are contracted with the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. Interviewee 1 argues that "it is good that there is the Institute for mandatory health checks...but it is questionable if this is actually implemented". At NGB level, Interviewee 5 shares an example of athlete support in relation to physiotherapy and psychology in their sport when they state that

We do not have any medical support, physiotherapy [at the level of the NGB], however, we have employed an individual that should look after some of these issues....There have been cases when the NGB puts athletes in touch with doctors, physios but this is not like it is in more advanced countries where they have their own physios for preventive care massages, [health] checks, therapies etc. In our case it is more linked when the problem already exists, and we try to solve it. Again, we have financial problems linked to this...the best people, the specialists cost a lot therefore we link more with the beginners and they cannot provide us with the support we would like. But again, the NGB is trying, earlier this did not exist.... Currently we are working with a psychologist. Previously, many people have worked with them privately, but we are trying to sort these things via the Federation.

I have had negative experiences with many others, but I have good experiences with this person and the Federation enables the best female national team members to work with them according to their needs. This means that they are not always present, but if someone needs them, finances are provided to cover the costs. We have used this a few times.

6.4.3.3) Health care of athletes

Health care of athletes is underpinned by health policy measures and is integrated within the general health care system. It includes medical and other health-related measures for athletes with an aim to maximise the health of not only individuals but also society and to evaluate potential sport related risks (NPS, 2014). Specifically, the health care of athletes includes “preliminary preventive medical examinations for all registered athletes, annual preventive medical examinations for all categorised athletes and targeted periodic preventive health examinations for all top-level athletes” (ibid., p. 36).

When it comes to curative health care, this is based on an individual’s above-standard health insurance (covering immediate emergency medical services, ‘no’ waiting time), where depending on the level of categorisation, some funding is provided for this for elite athletes via APS of the state and NGBs, while other categorised athletes can pay for it themselves (ibid.).

6.4.3.4) Elite athletes and elite coaches employment in state administration and in business companies (dual career)

This section of athlete support is in line with The White Paper on Sport (European Commission, 2007) and is considered as an important support system provided by the state. It is based on the premise that athletes can only be successful if they are provided with economic and social stability, in addition to appropriate training and competition conditions (NPS, 2014). The Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017) states that elite level athletes have the right of employment in the public sector as a way of support and systematic help in elite sport. Based on the OCS-ASF selection criteria, candidates must achieve a noteworthy result at a large international competition or be selected for participation at a large international competition. Elite athletes employed in public administration fall under the category of professional athletes and can be employed “at the Ministry of Defence - the Slovenian Armed Forces, Ministry of Internal Affairs - Police and the Ministry of Finance - Customs Administration” (NPS, 2014, p. 37). Interviewee 3 explains that employment via the Ministry

is crucial for these 115 athletes as it enables them a certain level of social security so they can continue doing sport. This is relatively well taken care of. Now, these are not high salaries, yet they enable some security – health, social and disability related.

Indeed, Interviewee 1 sees the systematic and transparent employability of athletes as the biggest change in independent Slovenia related to athlete support. Although athletes were employed in the past, this was based on the socialist model, whereas nowadays, there is a developed system with criteria of categorisation. This also means something to athletes as their results get recognised and provide them with statutory rights.

In terms of the dual career in the transitional period, Interviewee 3 discusses this in greater detail. They explain that there has been great progress made, where

OCS-ASF and the Ministry work together on this. Athletes receive a free education, which means that the fees are paid for and they are provided with a ‘pension’. This applies for the medal winners of large sporting competitions. New Sports Act organised this field quite well....This started when...there were some ‘left-over’ EU funds and we started developing this project. First few athletes... proved to be 100 % successful. Now we have extended it for another 6 years with considerably higher funds...The athletes have three options: (1) they can complete their education to become coaches or (2) they can undertake a normal dual career, for example in banking and they must attend Faculty of Economics or (3) those that already are educated, they can enter the system of research in sport. We have developed the entire system from the beginning...After retirement from sport, OCS-ASF should take over the athlete...our partner Adecco²¹ creates an athlete’s profile – their abilities, qualifications and also their interests... This profile enables them to enter the dual career, where they get resources in the form of scholarships, which is a salary. The athlete should receive these resources as an employee of OCS-ASF. Practical competences would be acquired at one of our partners, e.g. if they want to study banking, the SKB [bank] etc. and they also need to finish their studies, which present the theoretical competences. The aim is that after completion

²¹ In 2004, IOC and their partner Adecco developed a programme for athletes to help them with employment after retirement from sport and in 2005, OCS-ASF joined the project and signed the contract with Slovene Adecco branch (Kolarič, 2011a).

of the studies the athlete is an employee and not merely employable. This means that upon completion of studies they should get a position at the business where they gained practical knowledge. This is a long-term process, but I believe we are taking steps in the right direction (ibid.)

Interviewee 2 further links dual career to the past where there have been some issues with athletes becoming social problems in Yugoslavia. That is why they urge for this model to become a system of transition that enables elite athletes' self-assertion in other areas after their retirement. They further explain that dual career follows the assumption that athletes with relatively good working qualities enter the working sector later than others and this needs to be overcome. For example, Miroslav Cerar (Olympic Champion on pommel horse) started his career as a lawyer at the age of 30, while his colleagues started at 25 so he was already behind.

Lastly, bridging insurance for professional and elite athletes should also be addressed in this section. Bridging insurance is based on contributions of professional/elite athletes and the state that provides tax benefits. It is a saving system that enables its users social security in times of the bridging period after retirement from professional or elite sport (*Zakon o premostitvenem zavarovanju poklicnih in vrhunskih športnikov*, 2015).

6.4.3.5) Other rights of athletes

In addition to the above support and rights of elite athletes, the state also aims to create municipal, national and Olympic centres to provide technical support to programmes and an Olympic University Sports Centre for the coordination of training and study commitments of elite level student-athletes in Ljubljana (NPS, 2014). Winners of medals at the Olympic Games, WCh and ECh are given a prize (Interviewee 3) and have the right to reimbursement of educational fees and exceptional pension (as discussed in the previous section) (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

Despite the above positive comments about the state efforts to help elite athletes, Interviewee 6 points out that the support of athletes between and after their career is a multi-layered problem. They explain that

It has been scientifically proven that athletes are very egocentric, and this also enables them to be as successful as they are. However, when they retire, this changes, they become less interesting for media. This is a traumatic period that can lead to traumatic experiences...Athletes also prepare themselves poorly for this.

Professional athletes receive high salaries, above average for a normal person and they get used to living like this and it is not necessary that this provides a lifetime supply... We cannot blame the state whether it provides some mechanisms or not (dual career and qualification of athletes), but it is also about the fact whether the athletes are willing to enter this or not. We cannot force the athletes to do so... although in the NBA athletes are forced to gain qualifications etc. I see the future where we educate athletes about what lies ahead and that they should not just neglect education... this seems very important to me.

6.5) Pillar 6 – Training facilities

Sports facilities are an important factor in sports activities (NPS, 2014). Interviewee 3 lists infrastructure as one of the crucial factors for success on the international level (along coaches, individual approach, environment and knowledge). Likewise, Interviewee 4 explains that an activity cannot be developed without infrastructure, which can bring about not only results but tourism via hosting of competitions and venue sightseeing. Without facilities, a change in organisation of sport cannot occur since

a sports facility can enable us to have some disciplines of our own, e.g. ski jumping in Kranj... we acquired conditions for education of a new generation of ski jumpers by cooperation with a local school that provided all the support. This needs to be looked at multi levels (Interviewee 6).

Nevertheless, since one of the main priorities of NPS (2014) is an affordable and efficient network of facilities and outdoor areas, the emphasis in Slovenia is not merely on the manmade infrastructure, but also outdoor natural areas that do not need to be specifically equipped for sport (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Hence, Slovenia has created a network of sports areas achieving the set NPS 2000 objective of “0,33 m² of indoor and 3,18 m² of outdoor sports surface per capita” (NPS, 2014, p. 28), while the objective for the 2014-2023 period is to ensure “,35 m² of indoor and 3,2 m² of outdoor sport area per capita” (ibid., p. 29). It is unknown if any other country adopts the same approach to monitoring and measuring the area of the sports facilities and outdoor natural areas.

6.5.1) Outdoor natural areas

The network of sports areas ensures access to sporting activities for most of the population (NPS, 2000), which is crucial because free and accessible sports infrastructure is the base for peoples' sporting activity (Jurak, 2010a). The fact that outdoor natural areas play an integral role in physical activity of Slovene citizens has been supported by EU research, where Slovenes placed first in the category for using natural outdoor areas (*Special Eurobarometer - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2010). This demonstrates the realisation of a long-term strategic objective of the use of outdoor natural areas as the largest sports area (Jurak, 2010a). Natural sporting spaces should be reflected in the corporate image of sport, organised well and in accordance with sustainable development and environmental principles (NPS, 2014).

6.5.1.1) Geographical and climate conditions

It is difficult not to take into considerations the climate and geographical conditions of Slovenia when discussing the outdoor natural areas intended for physical activity, competitive sport and hosting of sports events. In relation to competitive and elite sport, interviewees provided slightly varied opinions on the importance of climate and geographical conditions, yet most of them agreed that these conditions are crucial for Slovene sporting success.

For example, Interviewee 3 stated that in Slovenia, the four seasons, rivers, mountains, sea etc. create an ideal environment for the development of sporting success. These factors provide Slovenia with a competitive advantage in comparison to other countries that do not have these conditions. Similarly, Interviewee 6 firmly believes that natural resources in Slovenia are unique and have an exceptional influence on sport participation and sporting results. In comparison to other urban centres, the Slovene capital provides plenty of opportunities for sports participation. Natural resources can increase identification with individual sports. They explain that if ice-skating is not visible to people, they cannot identify with it, but if they can participate in it, it will grow on them.

Furthermore, Interviewee 4 links their argument to the cultural specificities of Slovenes. They argue that climate and geographical conditions have an impact on sport participation and sporting results as they enable quicker development of individual sports disciplines. Slovenia has ideal conditions for cycling, running, mountaineering, skiing, and lots of spaces for games etc. These conditions also had an impact on the development of attitudes towards nature, physical activity and one-self. Interviewee 4 continues that when physical activity started to

develop at the end of the 19th century, climate and geographical conditions enabled development of skiing, hiking and mountain climbing that are linked to mountains and hilly landscape, even though most of physical activity took place in towns (e.g. gymnastics). This shows that development of a sports and physical activity culture can be linked to climate and geographical conditions that enabled particular sports disciplines to develop and become a part of Slovene sport culture and tradition. For example, as a national sport, skiing is linked to its long history of elite results and national identification to distinguish one-self from others (Čuček, 2015) as discussed in the historical review.

On the other hand, Interviewee 2 acknowledges that the Slovene climate is suitable for and impactful on sports participation, but it is not a deciding factor. They are of the view that global warming influences skiing and limits the so-called first selection, where in the past children would ski in their backyards in the valleys. Now, there is less snow so children must go to higher areas, which increases financial expenses, impacts their school commitments and time management.

6.5.2) Sports facilities

Sports facilities (public, or private) are recorded in the registry of sports facilities (*Pravilnik o vodenju razvidov po Zakonu o športu*, 2008) yet this needs to be developed further with a more analytical overview (Jurak, 2010a). When asked about the sports facilities in Slovenia, interviewees provided varied answers. Interviewee 2 for example stated that a

great step has been made in terms of sports facilities in comparison to 1940s and 1950s, when a classroom was transformed into a gymnasium. After that, all newbuild schools had to have a gymnasium which assisted in delivery of compulsory physical education in schools....Therefore, when Slovenia became independent it had a relatively good coverage of facilities, however, most were in need of a refurbishment....Nowadays, there is almost no school in Slovenia without its own gymnasium, maybe one or two.

Indeed, school sports facilities nowadays enable a good use of the space for pupils, parents, sports clubs and private citizens out of school hours (Jurak, 2010a). This is managed by schools themselves in accordance with the Sports Act and can be funded by local communities via APS (Interviewee 1). Despite the efforts, it is recognised in NPS (2014) that there have been difficulties in rationalisation of this as well as in provision of facilities for particular sports

disciplines as generally multipurpose facilities have been built. This is confirmed by Interviewee 6 in stating that “we have training and event facilities and have generally good infrastructure. There are, however, some gaps in individual disciplines, individual facilities, e.g. swimming pools because that is a relative expensive facility to maintain”. Hence the overall infrastructure at national level is good enough, some disciplines have high quality facilities, some do not “but, the question is if it is well used” (Interviewee 1). As pointed out by Interviewee 2,

sports facilities are not just a matter of politics but also fashion and then at one point the entire Slovenia is full of basketball courts or tennis courts that are not used by anyone anymore because the fashion changed. On the other hand, there are a lot of facilities missing....We have, at the same time, not enough facilities and some that are empty most of the time.

Interviewee 6 builds on this by saying:

I am not in favour of building facilities that would not be sufficiently used because that would definitely affect [funding for] sports programmes. I am in favour of filling the gaps we do have....The aim is to construct the facility...that is not an expression of ambition but rather the need.... For their training, athletes do not require a large stadium, they need a football pitch or a basketball court or an ice hockey rink.

Furthermore, the use of general sports event facilities should reach beyond sports events and should be integrated with segments of culture and tourism (NPS, 2014). There must be some rational politics behind decision making to avoid the issues linked with Olympic facilities where these are used for ten days and then falling apart for another fifty years notes Interviewee 2. Some of the largest sporting venues in Slovenia such as Ljudski Vrt in Maribor which is full once a month, or Stožice and Koper serve their purpose relatively well (ibid.).

As explained by Interviewee 4, Stožice is a new facility, yet the content is out of date because of negative effects of professionalisation, and the question for the Mayor is how can this facility be filled? To avoid these issues, facilities should not be built without context and purpose in mind. Some refurbished facilities, such as Tivoli have become a subject of their own without links to clubs where athletes must pay and arrange everything themselves. Interviewee 4 urges that it needs to be realised that the facility is there because of sport and not the other way around.

Nevertheless, they point out that Stožice also serves as a good example of how facilities can impact the hosting of international sporting events that demand a certain number of high-quality facilities (this is discussed in greater detail in Pillar 8). On the contrary to the positive comment about the quality and number of facilities above, Interviewee 5 states that there are not enough sporting facilities and even those that exist are of poor quality. There is not a single club in their sport that would have an appropriate training facility and because of this Slovenes are quite good in adapting to lower quality facilities.

6.5.2.1) Public facilities

Interviewee 1 explains that after independence, the social system changed and affected co-financing and ownership of sports facilities. Those facilities that were considered important were identified as public facilities at state or local community level. Nowadays, public sports facilities and natural areas for sport are intended for public use and are constructed, owned and managed by the state or local communities (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). In fact, most public sports facilities are actually owned by local communities, not the state pointed out Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 6, and the biggest credit for improved infrastructure since independence goes to local communities, where Mayors see having a good sports facility as a symbol of prestige (Šugman, 2010).

6.5.2.1.1) Costs

Interviewees 5 and 6 mention issues with costs in facility management and construction. Jurak (2010a) also calls for a more thought-out approach because presently building, refurbishing and maintenance depend on the cost expenditure, with the focus being on the cheapest option which is not sustainable in the long-term. As most public sports facilities are managed by local communities, this can be too high a burden for them. The responsibility also falls on the local communities if the local clubs struggle to provide sufficient funds for maintenance (Interviewee 4). As explained by Interviewee 6, there is no meso or regional level in Slovenia. As there is a wide range of sizes of local communities, their organisational and material infrastructure cannot be the same. On their own, local communities cannot afford to build even smaller sports facilities. Therefore, the interviewee calls for regional unions, where several local communities would build a facility together and enable access to athletes from all communities involved.

6.5.2.1.2) State-owned facilities and national centres

The only sports facility owned by the state is the Nordic Centre Planica (Interviewee 4). It is a centre for Nordic skiing disciplines managed by the Public Institute for Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, while its functioning is considered to be in the public interest (*Zakon o Nordijskem centru Planica*, 2010). “Other national centres are under private ownership, e.g. Football Centre in Brdo pri Kranju or under ownership of local communities, such as Gymnastics Centre Ljubljana, which is a national centre but is owned by the local community” (Interviewee 1). Otherwise, as summarised by Interviewee 1, there are no national centres as such. Instead, elite athletes have, according to the law, some priority in terms of facility use²² with which there have been issues due to financing. A few years ago, OCS-ASF tried to implement licencing of sports centres, where centres would be labelled as Olympic, national, regional, municipal. These centres would commit to give priority to elite athletes. This is documented in NPS (2014), where a proposal for creation of municipal, national and Olympic sports centres is made. The Olympic Centre would provide technical and coordination support to professional sports and programmes. Local and national Sport Centres would provide infrastructural and programme integration of certain areas of sports exercise to further spatial opportunities for athletes’ preparation and performance (NPS, 2014). As Slovenes only occasionally watch sports competitions in person (Godnič, 2005), Jurak (2010a) suggest that it makes more sense to fund Olympic, regional and other sports discipline centres than event facilities. Furthermore, free access to facilities can be granted via public tenders (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

6.6) Pillar 7 – Coaching (provision) and coach development

Participants are of the view that coaches are the most important factor of Slovene sporting successes. This has also been recognised in the policy documents. The quality or ability of coaches is recognised as a necessity for the achievement of elite sporting results on the international level (NPS, 2014). Indeed, the athletes can only reach their potential if they have access to the best coaches (Shibli et al., 2014). As stated by Interviewee 6 coaches are “one of the competitive advantages of Slovene sport. We definitely have high quality coaches and their

²² It applies that school curricula and APS are given priority in terms of use of public sports facility and outdoor areas. Followed are extracurricular sports programmes, sports clubs delivering APS programmes, sports clubs that do not deliver APS programmes but have a status of a public interest club, and lastly sports clubs that do not deliver APS programmes (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

quality of work is also acknowledged abroad. The area of coaching is not one of the problems of Slovene sport”.

Although there has been an increase in the number of qualified expert professionals in sport (Bednarik, Kolenc, & Kolar, 2010), Interviewee 5 claims that the state does not have a high interest in having a lot of coaches. In fact, it is about quality and not quantity of coaches and the question is, whether coaches only gain qualifications because the law requires them to do so, and whether good quality coaches actually get employed in clubs remarks Interviewee 4. As pointed out by Interviewee 1, in Slovenia, it is enough to have only few good coaches and overall, there is a lack in the number of coaches in elite sport because being an elite level coach is not financially successful, apart from in commercial sports. Interviewees 1 and 5 further emphasise that the results achieved by Slovene athletes indicate that there are, nevertheless, a lot of good quality coaches in Slovenia. There might be a coach missing in certain sports disciplines, but this is most noticeable by the NGBs notes Interviewee 6. Hence it could be argued that the effects of small size in population and market have a visible influence on the number of elite level coaches.

6.6.1) Training and development of coaches

The NPS category of *Education, training and specialisation of expert professionals in sport* is listed as key to development and success in sport (NPS, 2014) and had already been recognised as such in the first NPS (2000). According to the Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), the expert work consists of planning organising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of sports activity or training process. The expert work in sport can be carried out by an expert listed in the register of expert workers in sport with an appropriate qualification (education or vocational training). This means that there are two types of coach development pathways in Slovenia, one is linked to education as a university or higher education study and the other is vocational training remarks Interviewee 4, while Interviewee 6 adds that the latter represents shorter programmes in the domains of NGBs. Those educated are professionals of the highest level (NPS, 2014) with the highest competencies and the greatest width of work because the number of hours completed in education is higher than those in training courses (Interviewee 6). Interviewee 5 explains that education of coaches is carried out at the Faculty of Sport, which provides the individuals with some width, however, the narrow professionalism or specialisation for individual sports disciplines can only be acquired through other qualifications via NGBs or privately. According to Kolar (2010), “an appropriate system of education,

qualification, and progression has been established in RS. For all levels of staff development there are programmes in place that are delivered by competent personnel”.

As described in NPS (2014), the care of expert professionals in sport is placed in the hands of research, higher education and other institutions educating sports professionals. These must cooperate with OCS-ASF and NGBs in the training of sports professionals, while also providing ongoing knowledge development. Interviewee 5 explains that ongoing knowledge development is organised by the state and NGBs, where coaches can participate in specialisation courses of European or other IFs. These, however, are more likely to be week-long seminars than six-month placement-like opportunities. Interviewee 5 also notes that there are quite a lot of these seminar opportunities. These international activities in the area of coaching could be considered within the NPS area of *International cooperation*, regardless of their strong association with other expert work (NPS, 2014). As mentioned in section 5.2, programmes led by highly qualified coaches receive higher public funds (ibid.) which shows the importance of highly qualified staff.

Furthermore, Interviewee 4 explains that the expert work in Slovenia is good and that coach qualification system is satisfactory, but this is the inertia of tradition. Similarly, Interviewee 1 claims that exceptional development of coach knowledge is a result of “Faculty and NGB programmes, self-initiative of coaches, possibly tradition and transfer of knowledge from one generation of coaches to another...This is where we are very successful in elite level sport”. These two comments suggest the occurrence of cultural transfer of knowledge between generations of coaches, which furthers the importance of the contextual characteristics of the Slovene sporting environment. This could be further linked to the overall small number of coaches due to population size and could also suggest more interlinked cooperation between coaches in formal as well as informal ways. Indeed, smallness enables mobilisation of resources that might otherwise not be possible, nor acceptable and can eventually lead to more trusting relationships (Sam, 2015).

6.6.1.1) Education of coaches

Workers in sport can gain their education in a public post-secondary or higher education programme or any other type of education in accordance with the first and second level of study in sport as defined by the Minister of MESS (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). In the 2000-2010 period, two higher education programmes for coach education (Faculty of Sport University of

Ljubljana and Faculty of Education University of Maribor) were established (Bednarik, Kolenc, et al., 2010).

6.6.1.2) Vocational training of coaches

Expert workers in sports coaching are those older than 18 years of age with a secondary vocational education and expert training in the first or second level of sports coaching (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

The training of expert professionals in sport is understood as the programmes where different skilled personnel are being trained in individual sports disciplines, which allows them to work in sports. Training programs are shorter programs for personnel who have been already educated or trained to work in sports, but wish, or are required to, upgrade their knowledge. These programs, together with self-education, give support to lifelong learning as one of the priorities of the European Union (NPS, 2014, p. 31).

According to Interviewee 4, the vocational training system of coaches is based on the system of cooperation between NGBs and Faculty of Sport, where NGBs deliver practice and the Faculty of Sport (or Institute of Sport) delivers theory. This system of cooperation was in place during Yugoslavia and is now being re-introduced. Additionally, vocational training of coaches can also be delivered by OCS-ASF, and/or ADSS-PCS in coordination with the University rehabilitation Institute RS – Soča (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). While Interviewee 2 states that the system in place is considered above the European average, they also note that it could be improved further. Interviewee 6 points out downfalls of national and international associations having their own qualification systems, for example, UEFA Pro which as a franchise is the one with the most structured system. Other more commercialised federations adopt a similar approach and create payable licence seminars as a commercialisation of their performance. They continue:

I am not saying these are not needed as things change over time etc. but for illustration, medical doctors need to renew their licence every 7 years and our federations have annual licence seminars. This means that this is about making revenue, which is bad (ibid.).

Similarly, Interviewee 4 notes that the licencing renewal

system where NGBs train their coaches has roots in Yugoslavia. And now, when this became interesting from the profit-making point of view, it can impact the quality of the system, which can have drastic consequences for the professional segment of the sports system....Each discipline has their own system and they are being calculative...some may provide courses to increase the income.

As the final and crucial point of this section, Interviewee 1 describes that “in the last 5 years, these trainings have been supported very well financially by OCS-ASF projects with the EU funds, and all these training opportunities are practically free for coaches”. Hence, free training of coaches provided by the OCS-ASF may be viewed as a stimulating factor towards higher participation in and driving force of knowledge development in coaching, and hence potentially furthering coach quality in Slovenia.

6.6.1.2.1) Levels of vocational training of coaches

As described in the Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), there are two levels in vocational training programmes of coaches within the present system. The main difference is the number of hours completed to gain a qualification, where the first level comprises of 80-160 hours, while the second level comprises of 100-650 hours of training. The experts with the first level can deliver and monitor the training process, while the level two qualification experts can plan, organise, deliver and monitor the training process.

Each level of qualification has a defined...optional and compulsory content. Compulsory contents are those general ones, applicable to all sports, such as anatomy, physiology, psychology. Optional contents are those determined by each NGB individually and include practical and theoretical programmes for a specific sport (Interviewee 1).

6.6.1.3) Changes in coach development pathways

The system of education and training for coaches has been updated with the new Sports Act notes Interviewee 3. Prior to amendments of the Sports Act in 2017, there were three levels of coach qualifications adds Interviewee 1, while under the new Sports Act there are only two levels²³ (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Most participants expressed concerns about this change. For example, Interviewee 4 expressed their worries that the pathways may become too

²³ Previous second level is now equivalent to present first level qualification, while previous third level is now equivalent to the present second level qualification (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

administrative, while Interviewee 6 mentioned that under the new Sports Act, there are no more compulsory licence renewals, leaving these decisions to be made at the NGB level, where some NGBs use these for commercialisation purposes mentioned above.

6.6.2) Statutory rights of coaches

Elite level coaches, like elite level athletes have their rights identified under the NPS area of *Statutory rights of athletes, coaches and expert support to programmes*. Specifically, this refers to employment of the elite level coaches in the public sector (NPS, 2014). It has been recognised that there have been some difficulties in establishing of these rights in the past and hence, upgrades in this area had been identified as one of the actions of NPS 2014. For coaches to be eligible for employment in the public sector, they must perform expert work with a senior national team or with elite athletes (*Zakon o športu*, 2017).

6.6.3) Perceptions of coaches and their status in the society

Despite their importance in creation of elite sporting results, coaches are considered underpaid and perhaps underappreciated in Slovenia according to Interviewee 5. Based on their experience, the interviewee provided some insightful views into the world of coaching, including perceptions and status of coaches. Firstly, they explained that being a coach is not a highly recognisable role and coaches are not celebrities. This may only occur in some team sports or coaches of Olympic champions. Secondly, they emphasised that fewer coaches want to work in elite sport and prefer to coach in recreation where there is less pressure and their pay is not result-dependent. Individuals look at the coaching role more as a job and are less willing to submit their entire life to sport, which brings about the issue of keeping the coaches in sport. Thirdly, they pointed out the financial issues. Being an elite level coach cannot be considered a full-time employment apart for a small amount of people and those

younger beginners get paid less and then maybe find a job somewhere else. I am lucky that I receive a normal salary from my club but if we compare this to other head coaches of national teams, the amount I receive is ridiculous. The head coach in football earns my annual pay in a month, maybe a week...Normally you have to have the club's support where they deliver a lot of other recreational programmes to bring in the profit so that one coach can function at elite level, otherwise this is impossible. As a national team coach and coach manager at one of the most successful clubs in my sport, I couldn't survive if I only coached my elite athletes

because the amount I receive from the Ministry is too low....Those clubs that are ambitious in achieving an elite level result, have to support the elite coach otherwise everything would die down (ibid.).

Furthermore, they elaborated that in some NGBs, the national team coach is paid by the NGB, which is not the case in their sport, where national team coaches do not receive any kind of financial compensation. The Federation cannot offer this kind of support because of the lack of funds in general (ibid.).

6.7) Pillar 8 – (Inter)national competition

6.7.1) National level competitions

If an athlete wishes to compete in the official competition system²⁴ in Slovenia, they must possess a competition licence provided by the respective NGB for which they must pass a preventive health check (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017). At national level, elite sport is represented by national sport programmes (including national competitions), which are an important factor in establishing a competitive environment and increasing participation at national level, and for the development and promotion of professional sport (*NPS*, 2014). Nevertheless, according to Interviewee 5, in their sport, domestic competitions are entirely non-competitive in comparison to international competitions.

We are so small that the winning of the national championships would not indicate a success on the international level. Only in few sports, maybe in ski jumping where there is highly competitive level...However, the system of national competitions is extremely important for maintenance of the Slovene sport system (Interviewee 3).

This is further supported by Interviewee 6 when explaining that in some sports,

many athletes are lured to go abroad so there is no appropriate competitiveness left.

For example, in football where players are leaving to play in other leagues due to

²⁴ The official competition system is composed of domestic and international competitions in individual sports disciplines following the rules of the respective NGBs or IFs recorded by the OCS-ASF (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), or competitions recognised by the IFs under the jurisdiction or recognition of the IOC (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017).

better financial opportunities... Therefore, I couldn't say that our football league is a great platform for international comparison. Similar applies for some other commercialised sports, however, we should know that most sports in Slovenia are not commercialised yet²⁵.... We could say that a national competition serves as a very good starting point for entry in the international space.

Interviewee 4 mentioned that since independence, there have been difficulties with the establishment of quality national leagues in team sports, which provide a permanent momentum to sport and can improve its market value that can further increase NGBs' finances and aid in its recognition internationally.

6.7.2) International sports competitions

As told by Interviewee 4, the independence of Slovenia enabled many more Slovene athletes to become members of the national teams than was the case in Yugoslav times due to lower competitiveness. Thus, Slovene national sport took a step back in quality, however, this enabled many athletes to perform on the international level and the priority of NGBs was to allow and support this. As NGBs in Slovenia have the freedom to allocate their funds according to their own rules, Interviewee 5 considers it a success that their NGB covers competition expenses for athletes, coaches and officials as that is not the case for all NGBs. They also believe that the young athletes get enough opportunities to compete on the international level.

In the Slovene context, sports competitions fall under sport events that consist of the following:

- Large international sporting events and senior level qualifications of team sports (these are listed in the next section);
- Mass sports events;
- Local sports events (important for local environment); and
- Other events of national importance (symposia, congresses, conferences etc.) (NPS, 2014).

Therefore, the focus is not merely on competitions but is also related to organisational and academic development (this is discussed in more detail Pillar 9).

²⁵ This could be due to the unattractiveness of the small Slovene market.

6.7.2.1) Importance of hosting of international sports competitions

As elsewhere, hosting sports competitions in Slovenia is linked to economic and tourist impact locally and nationally (Kolar & Verovnik, 2010). Additionally, these sport events are linked to the development of sports culture, organisation of sport, environmental promotion and overall promotion of physical activity or sport (NPS, 2014). During the first NPS of 2000, there was no particular emphasis on the above, which is why Kolar and Verovnik (2010) urge the state to reconsider the importance of achieving these multi-applicable benefits. The improvement followed via NPS (2014, p.12) in the form of one of the main actions – “sports event and sport promotion (strengthening of sport promotion and creating social and economic benefits)” – recognising that the role of sport reaches far beyond sport itself. Similarly, hosting of international sports competitions is considered important for Slovene sport by the interviewees. According to Interviewee 3:

Organisation of international competitions is extremely important for Slovene society and elite level sport. Slovene society and its sub-systems like NGBs and OCS-ASF demonstrate that they are not just a federation but are also organisationally capable and...this is extremely important internationally. Sports competitions are the mirror of sport and it is of high importance that competitions held in Slovenia are of good quality and good organisation. It is a mirror of sport to our people, through which they get to know the athletes, the importance of sport etc. and in the international environment, they [people] get to know the country as...the county that knows how to do things and has a healthy environment within which the event is occurring.

Interviewee 1 provides a similar view, explaining that

organisation of international competitions is very important for all aspects. Not only from the view of elite sport but because of the added financial value, because it is linked to tourism. For every event like this, considering we are a small state, it means that all capacities in the host city/town are full during that period. This means that the hotel capacities are full, restaurant and bar capacities are full... this is not like in London, where an international event gets lost... Here, all capacities of the host city/town are full, all potential...staff is used and also sports infrastructure is...used to its maximum.

Not only that but after successful championships “you immediately see children with a [hockey] stick in their hands...and there is a lot of talk about it...leading to possible increase in membership” (Interviewee 4). With a strategic approach to event hosting and good marketing, sports disciplines can develop and gain popularity and with each hosted event, there is also potential for the development of sports infrastructure notes Interviewee 1, while Interviewee 3 adds that there is also potential for development of the economic aspect of an individual sport and while the state is not yet supportive of this, it should be in the future. Hence, Interviewee 6 explains that when it comes to hosting of large sports competitions, the legacy should be considered because

there must be a paradigm of a sporting tradition that is linked to the questions of Why do we organise an event like this? What do we want to achieve? Is it infrastructure?...these are crucial criteria for me. Do we want to increase our identification through one sports discipline? I am critical here. I think in the past, we have not fully used the opportunities we had, for example Eurobasket 2013.

Finally, Interviewee 2 points out that the international competitions are an integral part of presence in elite sport and if there are no such competitions hosted then the athletes are in a handicapped position and find it a lot more difficult to succeed on the world stage.

6.7.2.2) Hosting of large sports competitions

According to the Sports Act (*Zakon o športu*, 2017), the following are considered large international sports competitions for Slovenia:

- Olympic and Paralympic Games,
- European Games,
- Youth Olympic Games,
- Deaf Olympics,
- Chess Olympics,
- World Games,
- Mediterranean Games,
- Universiades,
- European University Games,
- World and European Championships (including Junior level),
- EYOF,

- World Cups,
- Qualifying competitions/matches of the national team to qualify for large international sports competitions and international club matches in European club leagues in team sports at the highest level.

During the 2001-2009 period, Slovenia hosted 321 large international sporting competitions, of which the largest portion represented Grand Prix competitions at 143, and the smallest Euro Cups at 27 (Kolar & Verovnik, 2010). In recent years, however, there have been on average 8 WCh hosted in Slovenia per year, which is considered a lot as having too many events may lead to difficulties with attracting spectators mentioned Interviewee 3. This is because Slovenes seldom watch sports events in person (Godnič, 2005) and it could also be linked to the popularity of sports disciplines hosted. As explained by Interviewee 4, there is a question of categories of large sports competitions being hosted in Slovenia. For example, in ice hockey, Slovenia has hosted WCh on several occasions. This is because of the Slovene representatives in the IFs Councils where they can lobby directly and because of the recognition built. Slovenes are known as good organisers, which stems from Yugoslavia, and when the first competition is done well, then sooner or later, another bid will be won. Additionally, Interviewee 2 points out that good organisation of competitions in Slovenia has been recognised for a long time. They add that in skiing, World Cup competitions of the highest level are hosted in Planica, Kranjska Gora, Maribor and Rogla. Slovenia also hosted WCh in ski jumping but has not yet won the bid to host it in Nordic skiing. While the latest is extremely costly requiring over €50 million investment, however, with the new modern facility, Slovenia has all conditions to host it. However, in bidding Slovenia competes against larger states such as Austria, Germany, Norway etc. that are a lot stronger according to some basic parameters.

Furthermore, while Slovenia cannot host the largest of sports competitions, i.e. in football because of required financial investment, it still manages to organise large competitions in basketball and handball every so often mentioned Interviewee 5. Interviewee 1 adds that most of the hosted ECh and WCh have participation numbers ranging between 2000-3000 and for any larger competition, cooperation with local communities and the state is needed. Furthermore, as Interviewee 4 suggests perhaps a joint candidature with neighbouring countries is a way forward. In fact, via joint candidature, Slovenia had bid twice to host the Winter Olympic Games, yet lost the bids to Austria and Italy. For this reason, the interviewee sees joint hosting as something that Slovenia contributed to greatly and they hope that it spreads to regions and not only countries.

A negative example in hosting is pointed out by Interviewee 1 when Slovenia did win a bid for the Winter Universiade in 2013, which failed due to poor financial and organisational support of the state and the competition was moved to Italy. Hence, the state's support in organisation of sports competitions is seen as one of the weaknesses of the Slovene system by Interviewee 1. As further noted by Kolar and Verovnik (2010), since 2002 local communities have been providing most of the public resources for the hosting of large international sporting competitions as the state's support is minimal. This shows that the interest of the local communities for hosting of these events is much larger than one of the state.

6.8) Pillar 9 – Scientific research (and innovation in elite sport)

Based on the SPLISS framework, Pillar 9 – scientific research – encapsulates co-ordinated approach to scientific research and (technological) innovation, while it is also believed that “the best performing nations in summer and winter sports...have a national sport research centre, and co-ordinate, disseminate and communicate scientific research well” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 331). Following the NPS 2014 structure (Table 8), the area of *Science and Research in Sport* falls within the category of *Development tasks in Sport*. Within this category, the following areas have also been identified as relating to scientific research: *Publishing in Sport; Education, training and specialisation of expert professionals in sport* and *Information communication technology in sport*.

6.8.1) Development tasks in sport

In NPS (2014), it is described that *Development Tasks in Sport* encompass support activities to other areas to ensure success in sport. Without implementation of these tasks Slovene sport would not be of such quality, it would not be safe, educative, widespread and competitive with that of the developed countries. To achieve international excellence, Slovenia as a small state must strengthen the basic opportunities for sports performance further. Thus, the purpose of these tasks is to provide options and standards for the implementation of sports activities comparable to those of the developed countries.

As further discussed in NPS (2014), there must be a link between the users and providers of *Development Tasks in Sport*, which is why the establishment of the Olympic Centre of Expertise is proposed. This shall provide an organisational structure at state level, while at local level, municipal sports federations must provide conditions for execution of these tasks.

Presently, OCS-ASF along with the research and educational institutions coordinate delivery of NPS development tasks in sport, and in conjunction with expert councils of NGBs aid in the implementation of expertise into practice.

6.8.1.1) Science and research in sport

This area encompasses the study of functioning of the human organism during training and its effects on health, and functioning of humans in different tasks and loads (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). In broad terms, the purpose is to gain basic knowledge of kinesiology and to transfer research into practice through development and applied research in sport. It should be noted that sports technology is evolving. Bodies responsible for this area are public research institutions in cooperation with civil sports organisations or businesses (*NPS*, 2014). Prior to NPS 2014, sport was not provided with an adequate position in the national research funding strategy, therefore, the objectives of the NPS 2014 are linked to improving the practicality of research and with gaining visibility of kinesiology (*ibid.*).

6.8.1.1.1) Importance of scientific research

NPS of 2000 states that scientific and research tasks in sport enable success in all fields of sport and without these, Slovene sport would regress quickly. Utilisation of these tasks are the only way in which Slovenes are able to have equal entry in the sports-cultural areas of the developed world. Likewise, NPS of 2014 identifies scientific research as crucial in elite level sporting achievements, which is also confirmed by the interviewees. According to Interviewee 1, scientific research enables development of knowledge that others do not have. As explained by Interviewee 3,

Each activity can develop only through continuous development, which is based on scientific foundations. Full stop... We almost don't have basic research, but we have a lot of applied research and all these have an effect. Most of our research is in the field of gymnastics... then there is a lot of research in rowing... a lot in the discus, 100-meter hurdles women... ski jumping. We were leading in the field of biomechanics in alpine skiing for a long time... Anywhere that we have a large contingency and a base of research, we have or have had sporting results. Therefore, this is directly linked, there is no development without in-depth insight into the activity.

Interviewee 6 expands this argument by pointing out that research is also crucial in more general terms of sport, for increasing physical activity in general, and that the main part of the research findings is applied through the work of coaches. That means that it is not about conducting research to uncover techniques of an individual sport as much as it is about the fundamental things like correct biomechanics of a specific movement or a training process. It is also important that the coaches know how to apply findings in their coaching, especially if findings are based on research and not 'quasi-beliefs'. On the other hand, Interviewee 1 questions the link between research and practice. They state if this was done in collaboration with NGBs, Institutes, Faculty of Sport or even at national level under OCS-ASF then it would be more beneficial.

Furthermore, through a more historical lens, Interviewee 4 describes that after the Institute of Sport was built at the Faculty of Sport, research and science started to become important. Prior to that, considerable changes were made in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Faculty was among the first established in Yugoslavia. There were close collaborations with other Faculties at the time as well. With independence the research spread out, and the interviewee worries that without central politics, the Institute may gain too many rivals which can lead to its stagnation.

6.8.1.1.2) Who does the research?

Institutions delivering science and research in sport are higher education institutes in the field of sport and other persons fulfilling criteria for science and research work in sport (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Interviewee 5 admits that they do not know much about this topic. This realisation is important for the present study as it shows that the national level coach is not acquainted with this, and hence, this is an area where cooperation and communication could be improved.

During the 2000-2010 period there were 85 researchers and 11 expert and technical workers in sport (Jurak, 2010b), and in 2014, there were "nine laboratories within the Institute of Sport...and one laboratory at the University of Primorska ...in addition, there are various private organisations providing the same services" (NPS, 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, Institute Planica as a public service institution also implements scientific research in the area of ski jumping, cross-country skiing, Nordic combination and altitude training (*Zakon o Nordijskem centru Planica*, 2010). Closely related to the number of laboratories and scientific research is the NPS area of *Monitoring of athletes' physical prowess and training advice*. Interviewee 6 explains that this

is a direct analysis of an individual athlete which we have at the Institute of Sport...where the athlete is approached strictly scientifically...from various perspectives; physiology, psychology, biomechanics and they attempt to optimise the athlete's athletic performance. Therefore, there is basic knowledge and very individually oriented... This is also determined in the NPS...and we have been adapting this approach since independence.

As described by Jurak and Rajšter (2010), laboratories are led by experts (PhD level) and most of measurements take place at the Institute of Sport. For the delivery of preventive health checks of athletes, two medical centres (Centre for Sports Medicine and community health centre Celje) are contracted by the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. The conditions enable them to conduct over 3000 health checks a year, however, the number of categorised athletes increased to 4300 in 2010, resulting in long waiting lists (ibid.).

6.8.1.1.3) Dissemination of the research

According to Interviewee 4, science in sport depends on the attention NGBs place on it and how they collaborate with the Faculty of Sport. In ice hockey, for example, the interest had not been expressed, while in cycling, cross-country skiing, track and field and some other sports regular monitoring is adopted. Even if there is lack of initiatives by the NGBs, elite athletes may still participate in testing, but this cannot be considered scientific research explains Interviewee 5. In cases where the athletes do participate in scientific research, they state:

I do not think coaches use the information gained from scientific research... The problem is bilateral. First, coaches are not provided with this information. Second, coaches do not really put any attention to research so that means that these are almost two separate fields - scientific research and coaching...Coaches could probably learn something, but the collaboration is bad on both ends (ibid.).

On the other hand, Interviewee 6 claims that the study feedback is used by coaches and that it is used in coaching. Provision of two opposite opinions in this area shows that there could be a gap in communication and dissemination of information to coaches.

6.8.1.1.4) Financing of scientific research

There had been a reduction in financing of science and research in sport, however, this area remains relatively broad and successful, which "is due to the general national strategy of

science oriented towards publishing scientific results at international level and less towards studying practical problems at home” (NPS, 2014, p. 8). In greater detail, via APS funds are provided for diagnostic equipment, development of new training methods and measurement procedures, research projects of national importance in sport and kinesiology (*Pravilnik o merilih za sofinanciranje izvajanja letnega programa športa na državni ravni 2015*). The Faculty of Sport has been identified as the most stable financer of science and research in sport through the APS (Kolar, 2010). However, Interviewee 4 points out that there was a moment when the Faculty ‘fell asleep’ and the state financing was reduced, which prohibited employment of new staff.

6.8.1.2) Publishing in sport

Publishing of sports literature in the Slovene language is important due to the narrowness of the language area and population size. Although on an annual basis, sports and other organisations publish approximately 70 pieces of professional literature in sport, there is a need for further publications (NPS, 2014).

6.8.1.3) Education, training and specialisation of expert professionals in sport

As described in Pillar 7, the care of experts is placed in the hands of higher education institutions and other institutions educating professionals, which must cooperate with OCS-ASF and NGBs. There is no progress in sport programmes without expert professionals (ibid.).

As detailed in NPS (2014), during the period of the first NPS, a system of training, education and specialisation was established for all levels of personnel development. There are 282 programmes for education and training, which are provided by 60 organisations. During the same period, there had been 1130 experts successfully completing sport studies at higher education level. Furthermore, 9679 professional personnel had been trained in sport. Many qualification programmes in sports management, including a new Master’s programme had also been created (Bednarik, Kolenc, et al., 2010).

6.8.1.4) Information communication technology (ICT) in sport

ICT is considered important in and for sport (NPS, 2014). It is viewed as a support mechanism to sports participation, monitoring and analysis of impact levels, as well as for the marketing and tourism purposes and also for the use of digital content of sport in training, education and research (ibid.). According to Kolar (2010), by the end of 2005, 20 web applications had been

developed. These enable online business (e-commerce) and collaboration between sports organisations and between sports organisation and the state. The author further points out that this type of infrastructure could increase competitive advantage of sport in the leisure industry.

6.9) Discussion

This findings chapter addressed Pillars 3-9, which together with Chapter five provide an overview of Slovene elite sports policy system through all nine SPLISS pillars. This study confirms the finding of Sotiriadou et al. (2014), who concluded that there is some overlap between SPLISS pillars, making it difficult to completely separate them. This includes education of experts within Pillars 7 and 9, the categorisation system from Pillars 2, 4 and 5, athlete support in Pillars 5 and 9. Overall, Pillars 3-9 findings continue to identify features of the elite sports system in Slovenia as discussed below according to the research questions. In general, findings of the present chapter confirm and add to those of the first findings chapter.

Concerning the RQ1, the present chapter further identifies and discusses the characteristics of the elite sports policy system linked to historical development and to contextual macro-level characteristics of Slovenia. Some of the noteworthy discoveries are the influence of cultural characteristics such as sports culture; high participation rates in sport or physical activity; individual approach to elite athlete development due to overall lower numbers of elite athletes; cultural transfer of coaching knowledge; employment of coaches in the public sector; organisation of international sporting events. The high participation rates and strategic emphasis on sports participation build a strong sports culture. This also positively impacts elite sport as elite sport is viewed as a continuation or extension of the more general recreational sport where citizens see physical activity as a part of a healthy lifestyle. Hence, the distance between elite and recreational sport in Slovenia (even structurally via OCS-ASF) is bridged and connected. Experts are in the view that success in elite sport is normative for Slovene citizens because the elite result is constantly visible in the media leading to internalisation of sports passion and increasing participation. Creation of sports-aware citizens begins in schools, where most sports programmes are delivered within the educational system (Jurak, 2010a).

Historical associations to Yugoslavia are also evident in the sports infrastructure being linked to schools, where gymnasia can be used for sport and physical activity out of school hours; quality and areas of scientific research that are linked to traditional Slovene sports; and athlete

support. While the athlete support during and post-career is generally managed and utilised at the club or NGB level (Shibli et al., 2014), in Slovenia the state also provides several levels of support to athletes via *Statutory rights*. Categorisation system provides the criteria for access to these rights. While the importance of family support (primary environment) for an athlete as a part of the micro-level is also recognised by participants and policies, policies regarding family support as such do not exist. However, provision of support through *Statutory rights* could be seen as having an indirect positive impact on elite athletes' family lives, especially in cases of dual career and systematic employment in state administration. Adding to micro-level support factors, most of these are encompassed within *Monitoring of athletes' physical prowess, training advice and expert support programmes* and include nutrition, proper exercise and lifestyle (NPS, 2014), while the development and qualification of coaches can also be perceived as an element of the close athletes' environment under state regulation.

Furthermore, coaches are recognised as the most important factor of Slovene success by interviewees where transfer of knowledge between coaches is identified as a possible reason for successful Slovene coaches. Indeed, close personal ties can lead to more trusting relationships in small states (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Lastly, geographical and climate characteristics of Slovenia that offer outdoor areas for sports practice all year round are also considered to positively influence Slovene international sporting success by most interviewees. Indeed, winter sports, of which skiing is a Slovene national sport, are particularly impacted by geography (Nassif, 2017). Although climate and geographical characteristics, as a part of the natural environment (outdoor natural areas for sport) fall under macro-factors and are therefore outside of the policy control (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2015), these features are discussed within the Pillar 6. This is because the state capitalises on these assets via its policies and actively aims to maximise the use of outdoor natural areas for physical activity and sport at all levels. These conditions had an impact on the development of the nation's sports culture and attitudes towards physical activity, as well as national sports, which reiterates the importance of history and culture.

Regarding RQ2, combining the findings of the present chapter with those of the previous chapter, it applies that in the present partial application of SPLISS all nine SPLISS pillars are important and proved useful in examining the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, however, there were areas identified that are not accounted for in SPLISS pillars. Based on the documents and expert opinion, the following elements of Slovene elite sport policy system were added;

geographical and climate characteristics via outdoor natural areas for sport, and the recognition of the importance of family support in an athlete's primary environment. This family role is also recognised as the immediate environment of an individual in the bioecological model which shows an instance of the models overlapping, in addition to the outer macro-level layer. Furthermore, cultural characteristics such as the physical activity rates and importance of sport; historical links of sport, schools and facilities; size- and scale-related features such as individual approach, cultural transfer of knowledge and closer cooperation between coaches; financial factors such as lack of finances to host large sporting competitions in globally popular sports, have also been identified as important and influential for the Slovene sport system by the experts and in the documents. Incorporating these features allowed to encapsulate the Slovene elite sport policy system in full. The inclusion of a developmental aspect throughout the pillars allowed for contextual explanations of 'how' and 'why', for uncovering reasons and causes for decision making based on participants' expertise and experience. Indeed, characteristics of Slovenia as a small and relatively new state with rich sporting history shape the elite sports policy system and cannot be ignored when examining this system.

In conclusion, it should be noted that SPLISS is useful and valuable in examining and explaining the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, however the system possesses features that are not accounted for within SPLISS pillars, and therefore it does not fully encapsulate the Slovene sport policy system. Based on these findings, the following smaller refinements are proposed for SPLISS to better account for features of the Slovene elite sport policy system (RQ3). The role of family as the primary environment support of an athlete should be considered in Pillar 5. Outdoor natural areas for sport that are a result of climate and geographical condition are to be included within Pillar 6. Next, sports perceptions, sports culture or attitudes towards sport should also be included as this may influence participation in sport and physical activity. Furthermore, SPLISS should allow for greater inclusion of causal explanations to offer the accounts of development and reasoning behind the decisions made and routes taken in sport. For example, the reasons for a great link between sport and education are to be sought in the historical development and the answers to why is there a focus on hosting large sporting competition in less recognisable sports lies in the financial limitations (macro-factors) and history of Slovenia as well as in the sports infrastructure conditions.

6.10) Conclusion

The analysis of the data on Slovene elite sport policy system via SPLISS Pillars 3-9 identified further characteristic of the system in addition to those already identified in the previous chapter. For example, the effects of small size (macro-factor) are reflected in the talent identification system where an individual approach is adopted; in statutory rights of athletes by striving to safeguard and provide the fewer overall number of athletes with some level of security; generational transfer of knowledge between coaches; and in organisation of international sporting events. Historical links to Yugoslav times aid in explanation and understanding of the significance of physical education in schools and its influence on creating a culture of sports-aware and physically active Slovene citizens that perceive physical activity as an important part of a healthy lifestyle. This results in Slovenes placing high in inter-national comparisons of physical activity. Furthermore, the prevalent sports culture in Slovenia could be linked to the structural characteristic of recreational and elite sport being a part of the same system and not being considered as independent. Their interlinking is highly complex to the point where it is difficult to distinguish between the two, which according to the findings, is also the reason why recreation is seen as an important part of the elite sport policy system. Another Yugoslav legacy is seen in the provision of athletes' rights, scientific research, and sports infrastructure, particularly school sports infrastructure. Moreover, the data revealed that outdoor natural areas for sport resulting from the geographical and climate characteristics of Slovenia are considered as decisive factors of Slovene international sporting success. Lastly, although difficult to measure and regulate with policies, and excluded from the SPLISS framework, the importance of the primary environment of the athletes is recognised as an important factor of athletes' success by interviewees and in documents.

Chapter Seven: Additional non-SPLISS themes

7.1) Introduction

In this third and final findings chapter, themes that are important within the context of Slovenia, but which are not accounted for in any of the SPLISS pillars are included and discussed (see Table 7). This study identified gaps in the SPLISS framework for understanding and explaining other important influences affecting the development of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. These are separated into three categories:

- bioecological influences;
- scale influences; and
- other influences of success of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia.

Influences examined through the bioecological lens include historical and cultural factors impacting elite sporting success of Slovenia, while the ‘scale influences’ include individual approach, flexibility of the sports system, knowledge and expertise, multiplication of roles and genetics and mentality. As well as these, effects of independence, international collaboration and existing challenges within the system are also addressed within ‘other influences of success’. It should be noted that while the listed influences are not based on statistical associations, these are assumed within policy to positively influence and impact Slovene sporting success and were identified and interpreted as influences of success by the interviewees and in the documents.

7.2) Bioecological influences of the Slovene sport system

During thematic analysis the following bioecological themes were uncovered and hence, they are discussed in this section: historical development and cultural characteristics that include national identity, tradition and national sports, and mass media.

7.2.1) Historical development (of the new system)

As stated at the beginning of the thesis, an important assumption for this research is that one cannot understand the present, without understanding the past. Although elements of historical development have been included throughout the SPLISS-pillar analysis to allow for

explanations of 'how' and 'why', the bioecological model via its *chronosystem* explicitly emphasises the importance of development over time. Here, the development is placed on the organisational system of Slovenia as a mechanism that develops and evolves with time, while development of the broader environment is also crucial. Hence, the influences of historical development and decision making are followed throughout the analysis chapters mostly to illustrate why a certain phenomenon has occurred. These build a background story and aid in understanding the present as well as providing the context in which the decision making and forming of a sports system takes place. As confirmed by Interviewee 4, "evaluation of sport and its system must be looked at through time". The fact that historical or developmental aspect is considered in policy documents adds to the importance of such view. In the section below, development of the sports system in independent Slovenia is addressed as described by participants and in policy documents. It should be noted that while the purpose of data collection was to uncover rich descriptive data of events as experienced or known by the participants, their responses may reflect their own views and opinions, and are not objective. Similar applies for documentary data that may be subjected to and reflect the environment within which the data originated.

Interviewee 4 elaborates that the period of Communism in Yugoslavia developed an attitude towards physical activity with a focus on participation, however, with the transition to independence, this took a different approach with a focus on economic values. The organisational shifts of the Physical Culture in Slovenia started to occur in 1989-1990 as sport had to adapt to capitalism as socialism was abandoned in 1989. The first step to building an independent sport system was international membership. Slovene sports entities had to lose their ties with their Yugoslav counterparts²⁶ and gain independent memberships in IFs. As stated by Interviewee 3, formal organisational accession of Slovenia in the international environment was done relatively quickly. Within the 1991-1993 period, all NGBs became members of their respective IFs. In fact, sport was one of the first activities that united organisationally and demonstrated Slovene identity to the international environment. Interviewee 2 adds that Slovene athletes were advised to leave the Mediterranean Games in Athens in 1991 as Yugoslav athletes because they were now a part of the Slovene national team. At the time of independence, strong national emotions were present across the country and the Slovene Skiing Federation was the first that gained membership of its respective IF – FIS. Due

²⁶ Despite this, Slovene athletes were allowed to compete for Yugoslavia to keep in shape for future competitions. This was not seen as a betrayal (Interviewee 4).

to the fact that Slovenes identify through sport a great deal (Godnič, 2005), especially through winter disciplines, these sports had stimulated development emphasises Interviewee 3. “Sport played a role when Slovenes were establishing themselves, but it was not as decisive as the political and military events” adds Interviewee 2.

“In the multination state, the wins and losses in sport generated ideas of organisation, reorganisation, and new financing of sport for it to be more competitive and successful” (Interviewee 4). Hence, independence brought about some changes in the social system itself and in the financing of sports programmes and infrastructure, however, organisational models of sport were kept remarks Interviewee 1. Interviewee 3 further explains that this was because sport was organised quite well in Yugoslavia. The sports model, where sport is created in sports clubs and is, as a part of a civil society, joined together in associations on the local and state level and then further linked through umbrella association – OCS-ASF – was kept. The new system adopted a decentralised approach in terms of financing and organisation.

7.2.1.1) Olympic Committee of Slovenia

In the Spring of 1991, the initiative Committee for OCS was created, and OCS was established in December and then accepted as an IOC member just in time for the 1992 Winter Olympic Games notes Interviewee 4. Interviewee 2 explains that the process of IOC membership was relatively good, transparent and without complications, especially when compared to Kosovo that needed 15 years to be accepted. Equally, it took longer for Russia to get the same recognition, which means that Slovenes were more proactive in this area adds Interviewee 1. Interviewee 4 elaborates that a great role in this was played by Slovene officials, such as Janez Kocijančič who was an official of FIS at the time. These links therefore proved to be very beneficial. Before Slovenia was accepted by the United Nations in May 1992, Slovenes had already participated at the Olympic Games as an independent state in February, indicating that they asserted their recognition quite quickly explains Interviewee 2. “This means that by the time Slovenia gained political independence, it had already established its own sport system” (Interviewee 4). According to Interviewee 6, the

credit goes to people in leading positions at the time that were very well-aware of the international operation. The fact that we managed to include Slovene sport in the international family of sports is in my opinion an extreme success. This was one of the greatest achievements of sports diplomacy to this day because we gained recognition by international sports associations and the IOC so quickly.

In 1994, OCS as the umbrella association for sport integrated with SAS - the umbrella organisation of general physical activity that mainly linked local sports associations (Interviewee 3). This was a rational decision for a small country as it reduced bureaucracy, despite the findings indicating there was only 20% of shared activities between organisations before unification elaborates Interviewee 2. Since then Slovenes have a uniform organisation of sport - OCS-ASF concludes Interviewee 3.

7.2.1.2) Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

Contrary to the quick recognition of Slovene independence in the international sport arena, Interviewee 3 describes that the establishment of public sports institutions took much longer. During 1989-1991 debates on where to place the field of sport took place, as prior to independence, sport was a relatively autonomous unit. In the end it was decided that sport would be joined with the Ministry of Education. As explained by Interviewee 4, historically, there has been a great connection of sport and physical activity with school, especially during the *Sokol* period and during socialism. During Federal Yugoslavia, expansion of sport to recreation was linked to the politics of new school, new gymnasium (which continued post-independence). This development of infrastructure and sports programmes links sport to schools and education.

7.2.1.2.1) The Sports Act

Interviewee 3 explains that the 1991-1998 period was extremely good because sports documents were written, the state's sports sub-system was built, and sport became a part of the Ministry. If the Sports Act was written in 1992, it would have been a catastrophe and many changes popular at the time, such as privatisation, would have been adopted. They continue that at the time, it was also modern to set all the state's sub-systems, such as culture, health, education as far away from the socialism as possible. For this reason, the long development was good, as it could have been worse. Additionally, they point out that the procedure of such a law, especially one that provides a comprehensive directive for a specific field lasts at least three years. In 1998, Slovenes got the first Sports Act that was in place until 2017 and created a relatively good system concludes Interviewee 3.

Interviewee 1 emphasises that with the first Sports Act "Slovenes got, for the first time, a clear model of what to develop, what is in the interest of the state as this was now determined by law. And then, NPS provided a type of a white book on how to develop this". According to

Šugman (2010), the period following the first Sports Act was characterised by enforcement of the Act and acceptance of the regulatory decrees, of NPS etc. They add that the Act also changed the relations between public and civil spheres in sport and gradually nationalised sport, which actually started well before the adoption of the Sports Act. The Act merely lawfully recognised it and with it, Slovenia re-established the model of sport according to education culture and followed the politics of 1974. With the Constitution of 1974, Slovenia aimed to develop a model where sport would become an essential part of Slovene culture as a result of the freedom of participation principle - if an individual chooses to participate in physical activity freely, this indicates a higher level of sporting culture, and understanding and realisation of this belief is what determines sporting success (Šugman, 1998). On the other hand, however, Interviewee 3 claims that sport is not formed in the apparatus of the state and is thus not nationalised. Indeed, the Slovene Constitution does not include sport (Samec, 2005). Instead, sport

is formed in the apparatus of the civil society, where the state 'merely' manages these interests and provides financial support... The state cooperated well in the genesis of the new sports system and the good organisation positively affected development of sport in terms of results (Interviewee 3).

Specifically, the systematic shift that followed due to the Sports Act is reflected in the increasing number of medals won at the Olympic Games, where nowadays, Slovenia is among the most successful countries in medals per capita comments Interviewee 1. As a developing country, Slovenia was

establishing institutions. These institutions started treating sport seriously as a social sub-system, which led to creation of better opportunities for training and development of a sporting result, finances increased, infrastructure was being built. The state was creating systems for performance of sport professionals, which was an added value... It also led to an increase in sports success during the development. All in all, the development through the systematic approach created better conditions for ongoing improvement in achieving of sporting results and this is still the case nowadays (Interviewee 3).

There is a lot that goes into creating a sporting result, and all these different areas must be considered when creating and developing a sports system. Interviewee 2 describes that while sport may belong to athletes, it cannot survive on its own. Therefore, it needs organisers,

doctors, physiotherapists, people that invest in the infrastructure, people with ambitions who may never do sport themselves but will ensure the conditions so that sport can be practiced at all. Furthermore, another area that needed to be addressed during the early times of independence was the ownership of sports facilities. Interviewee 4 points out that following independence, sports facilities fell under public ownership, i.e. local communities as declared by the first Sports Act. With this ownership transition, sports clubs experienced the greatest loss as many were left without their facilities overnight (Šugman, 2010).

Lastly, another quantitative shift since Yugoslav days is pointed out by Interviewee 6. This is the fact that nowadays sport is much broader. There are more sports disciplines than there were in Yugoslavia, which followed the decision to avoid prioritisation after a failed attempt of the Portorož Resolution.

7.2.2) Cultural characteristics

Highly linked to historical development of sport is the culture that arose with it and the attitudes that shaped and are shaping current perceptions towards sport. This section can therefore be viewed as a continuation of development and is vital because sport-related cultural traits can forecast the effectiveness since long-term success may be conditioned by a positive culture towards elite sport or sport in general (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). In small states in particular, cultural homogeneity and strong national identity are used as an institutional advantage for the creation of successful policies (Campbell & Hall, 2009).

As mentioned in Pillar 2, there is a long tradition and heritage of sport in Slovenia and due to the historical aspect, sport is more than just a temporary phenomenon. According to Interviewee 2, Slovenes gained independence relatively late, considering the “Slovene national space started to awaken in 1848. Primarily the emphasis was on civil law areas, such as education and culture, however, later sport was definitely a means of expression of ‘Slovenism’”. Sports clubs as societies have contributed greatly to heritage and formation of cultural (and civilisation) norms and values (Šugman, 2010), while sports events are also known to be linked to the development of sports culture (NPS, 2014). Within NPS (2014), sport is recognised as an important part of Slovene culture, as a fundamental right and critical for wellbeing and healthy lifestyle of citizens. Interviewee 4 believes that sport or physical activity is the second most important part of Slovene culture after language. In fact, all participants agreed that sport is extremely important to Slovenes and a vital part of Slovene society. Indeed, in the study of national pride in the Slovenia’s economy, arts and literature, science and sport,

participants ranked sport the highest (Evans & Kelley, 2002). Similarly, Kovač et al. (2004) concluded that Slovenes value their athletes and their sporting achievements greatly. Interviewee 2 suggested that a successful athlete will win against a cultural worker or a humanitarian in the 'name of the week' radio show, while Interviewee 1 noted that Slovenes are also aware of their past and recognise and appreciate those who work hard and have a great amount of sports knowledge. Similarly, Interviewee 3 pointed out that Slovenes are considered to be highly sports-aware, knowing a lot about sport whilst also being one of the most active people. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Interviewee 6, a lot of the time sport is under-recognised by the state, as for example in the latest Strategy of Slovenia, sport is not mentioned and the interviewee along with their colleagues have already proposed changes to this. Moreover, as mentioned above, sport is not included in the Slovene Constitution (Samec, 2005) highlighting the under-recognised role of sport by the state in Slovenia.

7.2.2.1) National identity

The link between national identity and sport has been identified in Chapters Two and Three. This section examines instances of relations between national identity and sport in the context of Slovenia through the eyes of interviewees. Interviewee 3 for example claims that it is important to take into consideration the cultural aspect because culture is linked to national identification through sporting results. In the past, national identity in Slovenia had been formed through language, whereas now it is developed and shaped through sport (Godnič, 2005). Thus, as Šugman (2010) suggests results of Slovenes athletes are special and are sources of Slovene national pride. Indeed, in an international study of national pride in 24 countries, Slovenes placed fifth in the category of pride in sporting achievements (Evans & Kelley, 2002), which indicates a high importance of sporting successes to Slovenes. Interviewee 3 paints a picture of the relationship between national identity and sport in Slovenia when they describe that

sport in the form of gymnastics was one of the main builders of national recognition. It became a part of national identity because *Juzni Sokol* was established quite quickly and it served as an element of the Slav identity within the Germanic space. Therefore, gymnastics was an important part of national identity building... On the other hand, as one of the Yugoslav republics we were also competing with other republics. As a nation of skiers...we achieved results that exposed us the most within Yugoslavia....Sport is an important cornerstone of national identity.

Furthermore, Interviewee 4 explains that *Sokols* were members of the FIG which was a historical phenomenon as they performed with national symbols and used their own name. Competing and winning in sports built national identity, which also had political connotations. Nowadays, people are less and less aware of historical links of sport, national identity and consciousness, and young people have new heroes, e.g. Filip Flisar, Goran Dragic etc. notes Interviewee 1. Interviewee 3 explains that during the first few years of independence, Slovenes tried to distinguish themselves from Yugoslavia where their identity was linked to sports with Slovene representatives, e.g. Ivo Daneu in basketball and that is why Slovenes accepted basketball. Skiing, on the other hand as pointed out by Interviewee 2, never lost its momentum and after the death of Tito, national identity was increasingly built on skiing. There was a national skiing campaign 'PODARIM-DOBIM' from which a national lottery developed explains Interviewee 3. "With the transition there has been a shift and identification started to appear in other sports as well" (Interviewee 6).

Research conducted in Slovenia concluded that Slovenes identify the most with skiing, where hosting of the Golden Fox competition represents the highest level of national pride (Godnič, 2005). Hence, as explained by Interviewee 3 the symbolic aspect of sport plays a significant role because sporting competitions represent actual competition between states. Good results of Slovene athletes are important to people because this shows that

we can compete with large nations. Winning ECh in basketball means beating a country like Spain and contributes to some level of confidence that we are capable. Considering the fact that we are a young nation as well, this is much more important for instilling confidence in people because that leads to collective consciousness/mentality which is the driving force of social development (ibid.).

In fact, for a small state like Slovenia, every slightly larger sporting event is seen as the best promotion of Slovenia and considered of national importance because it creates a feeling of pride among the people and thus shapes collective national identity (Godnič, 2005). As the last point to take into consideration when discussing national mentality, Interviewee 2 emphasises that caution must be taken because in several cases a person who is not Slovene succeeds, yet, this person is still a part of the environment and once foreign athletes start representing Slovenia, they identify with and become an integral part of this environment. Hence, they note that caution should be made here not to see this as a nationally pure sport as it does not exist. It is always the case of a sport of a nation and sport of the environment.

7.2.2.2) Tradition and national sports

Sports culture in Slovenia is highly linked to tradition due to the developmental aspect. For example, successes of Slovene athletes during Yugoslavia set the scene for Slovene sports where Slovenes were dominant in individual (Interviewee 5) and in winter sports (Interviewee 2). As explained by Interviewee 2, pre-independence, Slovene preferences were evident in sports where Slovenes were equal or more successful than other Yugoslav republics. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia won six Olympic medals, all of which were won by Slovenes in gymnastics (apart from a team medal that included a Croat). Therefore, gymnastics is the first traditional sport. On the other hand, Interviewee 4 is sceptical towards national sports because a sport that gains popularity and successes is quite quickly declared a national sport. Nevertheless, they confirm that the following can be counted as national sports with cultural specificities; skiing due to its long history with beginnings in the 18th century; gymnastics as a cornerstone of the national consciousness, a herald of modern physical activity and competitive success; rowing due to successes; judo due to recent results; and ski jumping, biathlon and football due to popularity in the media. In the independent Slovenia, some traditional sports such as boxing nearly disappeared, while judo established itself (Interviewee 2) although Slovenes find it difficult to identify with judo (Interviewee 3).

Furthermore, as described by Interviewee 4 there has been a kind of renaissance of team sports in the independent Slovenia. Football for example experienced its revival by qualifying for European and World Football Championships. Although it was played early on, it lost the impact of a national sport in the '70s-'80s. When Slovenes were looking for their own identity, they turned to other sports, not football. Due to these historical links with Yugoslavia, team sports have a high national importance during times of relative success and can lead to euphoria notes Interviewee 3. Interviewee 2 explains that history led to emergence of new tendencies where Slovenes want to be successful in sports in which Yugoslavia was traditionally successful, e.g. football, basketball, handball, volleyball. Despite the still-present negative perceptions of team sports²⁷, Slovenes proved they can be successful in these as well, which means that Yugoslavia might have been a restrictive factor (Interviewee 5).

Lastly, tradition is also one of the factors in evaluating sporting success that is linked to funding provision (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). As stated in the 'obsolete' categorisation document, variables

²⁷ For example, no one wanted to be involved in football due to its negative connotation of being a sport for Southerners, which was a shame for development of football (Interviewee 3).

determining the level of tradition include: the year of establishment of the IF; the year of the first WCh of the discipline; the year of the first time the discipline was included at the Olympic Games; the year of establishment of the NGB; the year of the first performance of the national team at the Olympic Games; the year of the first performance of the national team at WCh (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013).

7.2.2.3) Mass media

Building on the points made in the Literature review (Chapter Three) and in Pillar 2 regarding the importance of mass media for the growth of sports culture, this section provides further insight into the relevance of and practices applied in this field in Slovenia.

NPS (2014) recognises mass media as important in promotion and popularisation of sport and in growing the sports culture. As described by Interviewee 5, the media can make or break a sport. If sports are mentioned on television, people follow them and if Slovene athletes are successful, they follow them even more. However, they point to the problem whereby some sports do not make it on television. There is no equal support for different sports and the media are decisive in terms of what is being watched which leads to people not knowing the athletes. As illustrated by Interviewee 2, non-traditional and domestic sports are rarely talked about in the media;

Dnevnik, for example shortened their coverage of team sports and focused on individual sports. *Delo* has maintained some width, while *Ekipa* discusses football on the first five pages, *Sport TV* broadcasts football, there is barely anything else to watch. Therefore, this is very unobjective reporting. Additionally, media on one hand...aid to the market value of sport. On the other hand, media can be too linked to international sport, neglecting domestic sport, influencing lower number of live viewership causing a loss of money generated from ticket sales. Hence, there is a level of duality here.

Furthermore, Interviewee 6 points out that

on one hand, media are the mirror of the society and on the other hand, they represent the driving force of development, which linked to commercialisation has negative effects. As media are in the vicious cycle with sponsors and mass interest, football is the main media focus, leaving less room for other sports. This is negative for football and for sport development as diversity is being lost. Furthermore,

media only discuss competitive sports, which is dangerous and harmful. Due to this, other areas of youth sport; school sport; recreation; professional workers; mass sporting events; importance of sport for a healthy nation and good results; importance of diagnostics for correct exercise receive too little attention.

The above is also pointed out in the NPS (2014), where the issue of a distorted image of sport due to overly publicised professional and commercial sport is addressed. The importance and role of the media is further illustrated by an example put forth by Interviewee 3, when they state that the value of a sporting result is created by the media. Athletes, for example

value the title of the national champion relatively the same. If you are a World Champion, you are a World Champion...It is true that we have developed an evaluation system for comparison in terms of how many countries are participating etc. Nevertheless, a World Champion is a World Champion. The media, however, are those presenting the value of the result to the general public and if they underestimate the result when reporting, the result will have a smaller exchange value. This exchange value begins to be measured with an economic impact or recognition of the result by the general public. Some people achieve local recognition...some...become national heroes. However, this depends on how it is reported in the media; if you are not talked about in the media, your result does not have the exchange value. We have done a research about links between the evaluation of a particular sporting result by a journalist and sponsors. The result showed that this is fairly equal and that the sponsor perceptions are dependent on the media portrayal (ibid.).

Similarly, Interviewee 6 suggests that media appearance is important to sponsors and an athlete that finished 6th at a competition and received media attention is considered more valuable for sponsors than a World Champion that did not receive any media attention (Interviewee 6).

On the other hand, however, Interviewee 2 sees the relationship between the media and public opinion as interactive or where the public influence the media more. In order to survive, journalists and media must adapt to changes in the media landscape, where print media and television are in decline and must write about what people want to hear. According to Interviewee 1, in the world of instant news, the media are looking for sensational approaches, most of which are not linked to sport but are instead about private lives of athletes. Therefore, athletes must adapt to these changes and some are very successful at this and have become

more recognisable. Furthermore, Interviewee 4 mentions that the media may have become too demanding and expect an athlete to keep on winning, which can become too much for the athlete. Nevertheless, in the eyes of spectators and sport enthusiasts, medals are what count even though for those working in sport a fourth or twelfth place may be perceived as an elite level result (Interviewee 5). On the contrary, Interviewee 1 believes that

the media are as critical as we enable them or give them reasons to be, which is done by athletes and also individual disciplines and their relationship with the media. Skiers are well practiced in PR and can turn a bad result into a positive story, and then on the other hand, some sports achieve a good result and it is seen as disappointment.

7.3) Scale influences of the Slovene sport system

Participants are of the view that Slovenes are successful in international sport. Slovenes place high in the Summer and Winter Olympic medal rankings per capita and per GDP (Nevill-Manning, 2018) as illustrated in the Introduction chapter. It is difficult to establish a wide base for all sports with such a low number of citizens, yet Slovenes are successful in a number of different sports describes Interviewee 5. Additionally, the system of reinvestment of finances into quality is highly successful (Interviewee 2) and the financial costs of winning a medal at the Olympic Games are lower than those in developed countries (Interviewee 6). In comparison to Great Britain, the costs of winning an Olympic medal are considerably lower in Slovenia and indicate a greater efficiency of the sport system explains Interviewee 1. Indeed, during the 2001-2008 period, the costs of a medal won at the Olympic Games, WCh and ECh were calculated to be €155,558 (Kolar & Rajšter, 2010), while findings showed that an individual medal won by Great Britain at the Athens Olympics in 2004 cost £2.3 million and £1.6 million at 2008 Beijing Olympics (Grix & Carmichael, 2011). Nevertheless, according to Interviewee 2, claiming that the Slovene sporting success is the result of a good legislation would be wrong because there are a range of other things influencing this. As some of these influences have been discussed in previous sections, the following sections offer an overview of those influences that do not fall within either of the analytical models.

Smallness of Slovenia in terms of citizens and financial resources has been addressed throughout the analysis, identifying adaptations of the Slovene sports system to these

conditions. Here, the ‘individual approach’, ‘flexibility of the system’ ‘knowledge and expertise’, ‘multiplication of roles’, and ‘genetics and mentality’ are discussed separately below. While some of these are referred to indirectly in the SPLISS pillar analysis, it is here where they are considered as stand-alone examples of size-related adaptations leading to the success of Slovene sport as perceived by the interviewees and in the documents.

7.3.1) Individual approach

By not having a state-level talent identification system as such, Slovenes have adapted and resulted to a more systematic individual approach to the development of elite athletes as pointed out by Interviewee 3. This finding corresponds to a claim of De Bosscher et al. (2011) who state that there are alternatives to states’ development of sporting success without utilising talent identification. Interviewee 3 draws on the example of the individual approach, stating that

the reason for our success is...the application of the individual approach. This can be between the team or athlete and the coach and is important especially because in large systems, the system makes the individual approach difficult, as it forces you to work...with many and it does not necessarily allow you the intergenerational intake. In such systems you can develop a good sporting result, even a team result...but a lot of these individuals fall through the system. If we worked like this, we would never achieve high sporting results, therefore, the individual approach to athlete is crucial in Slovenia.

As Interviewee 2 points out, age is a predictor of sporting success and the decrease in numbers of young people means low numbers of competitive individuals where athletes must thus succeed in highly competitive conditions. They link this to the issue of continuity, where there may be a generational gap in certain sports due to low numbers of young citizens. Moreover, they illustrate that when a Slovene athlete reaches the top, they must get up again and again. Spela Pretnar (alpine skier) for example got injured every other year but she always came back. Nevertheless, Interviewee 3 also points out the weakness of the individual approach when explaining that there are periods of success and decline in sports due to a chronic lack of potential in many levels, which will continue to be an issue due to low citizen numbers. There are not enough young people to maintain the constant level of success and when undertaking an individual approach, coaches cannot work with developing athletes because they need to dedicate their time working with an already established athlete. This, as experienced by

Interview 3, leads to a demise when a generation changes and coaches start working with younger athletes again.

7.3.2) Flexibility of the sports system in Slovenia

The claim made by Campbell and Hall (2009) that small states adopt flexible manoeuvring of policies has been confirmed in the present study. Flexibility of the sports system in Slovenia has been put forth by Interviewee 1 who identified it as an advantage in terms of the use of allocated funding provided by the state to NGBs, where NGBs have the freedom to redistribute funding differently. Additionally, they pointed out the flexibility in the approach to and management of policy development, where the Sports Act was based on the analysis of NPS 2000. Lastly, the flexibility of the sports system can also be reflected in the individual approach as discussed in the previous section.

7.3.3) Knowledge and expertise

Another outcome of the limiting factor of size is the expertise of Slovene sport professionals according to the gathered data. Interviewees identified knowledge and expertise across the board in sport as the main reason for success of Slovene athletes internationally. In fact, human resources and talented individuals are central for success of small states (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). For example, Interviewee 1 believes that the advantage of Slovene sport comes from the internal environment by having experts in all segments of sport, i.e. coaching, organisation, science, politics. On top of an extremely good system of physical education in schools, there is a branched system in sports clubs, federations and associations with highly competent staff describes Interviewee 6. Furthermore, Interviewee 4 is of the view that knowledge and expertise are the most important factor of Slovene success as sports clubs, despite the lack of funding still manage to produce international sporting successes, while the as the second most important factor they listed strong organisation of sport that. As pointed out by Interviewee 3,

there is an exceptional development of knowledge behind these results. We cannot compete in the international environment in anything else but in knowledge. We cannot be better in anything else, not in infrastructure, not in financial capacity, not in the number of potential athletes, not in the number of coaches...the only thing that we can be competitive in or...be better than others is in the individual approach and the constant development of knowledge, especially in the field of coaching.

Likewise, Interviewee 2 believes

that the only advantage that we have as a small ‘nation’ in sport and anywhere else, is knowledge. Knowledge needs to be developed... I think this needs to be invested in systematically and in the long-term...I had been suggesting that we should try to make a referential world centre or at least a European centre for some sports so that we would organise congresses, symposia. In this way we would organise knowledge transfers, even the most subtle in some sports. No one wants to disclose their methods as this is a part of strategic advantage, but this requires a breakthrough.

Participants also made an explicit reference to coaches and their expertise as the main reasons for success of Slovene athletes. Interviewee 5 states that the education of coaches is higher than average, where they are ‘really’ experts in their field as they are able to create high quality results despite having lower quality conditions (facility and other). Furthermore, according to Interviewee 1, in Slovenia, the coach is the principal source of a sporting success as they do not merely provide technical knowledge, but also require a wide range of knowledge in other areas that enable the coaches to follow the training process more easily on daily basis.

7.3.3.1) International cooperation in sport

NPS area of *International cooperation in sport* encompasses coach education and development discussed in Pillar 7, international collaboration for hosting of sports events in Pillar 8 and international cooperation across scientific research and knowledge development (e.g. conferences, symposiums etc.) in Pillar 9.

Highly linked to sports event hosting is the positioning of Slovene delegates within the IFs. Not only is this linked to direct lobbying as noted by Interviewee 4, but Verovnik and Kolar (2010) identify this as an important strategic advantage of Slovenia in comparison to countries that do not have their representatives in the IFs. This is because delegates have the input and power to influence the direction of international sport development and witness decision making first-hand, which makes the information transfer to the Slovene context quicker. Similarly, attendance of Slovenes at congresses and conferences of IFs is of high importance for the development and success of Slovene sport as it “increases the impact and importance of the Slovenian expertise in a wider international context” (NPS, 2014, p. 43). This finding is also confirmed by Houlihan and Zheng (2015) when stating that small states can be highly skilled in diplomacy in international sport.

7.3.4) Multiplication of roles in sport

A small number of citizens indicates a small number of experts and professionals in sport. On one hand this can be seen as an advantage as described by Interviewee 1, where the expertise in different areas of sport are, in a lot of the cases, joined together in the same individuals. This means that these different spheres of sport do not need to collaborate as such and there is less risk of poor collaboration. Interviewee 2, however argues that it would be better if coaches, judges, referees would not adopt these roles at the same time because of the risk of bias in certain sport with subjective scoring. Indeed, as pointed out by Campbell and Hall (2009) small states may be more subject to corruption, rent seeking and cronyism.

7.3.5) Genetics and mentality

According to SPLISS, genetics falls within the micro-level environment and is excluded from the analysis as it cannot be controlled by policies (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). Nevertheless, Interviewee 6 is of the view that Slovene genetical structure is favourable in terms of height with Slovenes being one of the tallest 'nations' in the world. Despite it being a difficult element of analysis, Interviewee 2 interprets biological characteristics as important for Slovene success since

Slovenes are...genetically mixed and mixing of genes is important. They are also the most Western Slavic nation and had to face very aggressive nations at the borders in order to survive. Throughout history, Slovenes tried to prove that they are equal or even better than their neighbours with a 1000-year old Roman culture or multimillion German population. This led to development of a rebellious mentality that is very nicely expressed in sport. Hence, this national mentality of space and genetical mix of Slovenes can be considered as decisive factors of Slovene success in sport.

Similarly, Interviewee 5 talks about the willingness and readiness of Slovenes to work hard for an achievement, while Interviewee 1 points out the link between cultural mentality and the smallness complex, where Slovenes feel inferior to larger, more developed states and are, thus, willing to work harder to assert themselves. Hence, this smallness of the state is internally constructed, and it underpins the general culture (Sam, 2015).

7.4) Other influences of the Slovene sport system

This section addresses positive and negative influences of international sporting success of Slovenes. These influences were identified in the data and are not accounted for within SPLISS, bioecological model or influences of scale. Thus, this section addresses the ‘independence’, ‘international sports environment’ and ‘existing challenges of the system’.

7.4.1) Independence

Sporting success of Slovenes at the Olympic Games is normally expressed in relative terms. As described by Interviewee 2, if an analysis of all results of the independent Slovenia at the Olympic Games was made, then Slovenes would place absolute first. They elaborate that when comparing with other Yugoslav republics, the success is very vivid in Slovenia. Furthermore, Šugman (2010) illustrates that Slovenes won 12 medals at the last ten Olympic Games (five winter and five summer – 1972-1991) prior to independence, whereas in the first 10 Olympiads after the independence, Slovenes won 17 medals. During both periods, Slovenes achieved the same number of medals at the winter Olympics (4). When taking into consideration the fact that during Yugoslavia, Slovenes represented 85-95% of the national team at winter Games and only between 15-20% at the summer Games, this shows that Slovenes did not progress with the medals won at the winter Games and secondly, Slovene athletes were not selected for the national teams for the summer Games (ibid.). Perhaps independence enabled Slovenes to be represented on the world stage, confirming thoughts of Interviewee 5 that Yugoslavia might have been a restrictive factor. Additionally, Interviewee 6 explains that despite smallness, Slovenes do well in team sports which is exceptional when considering that the Slovene football team qualified twice for the football World Cup and European Championships and won medals in volleyball, basketball, handball. In fact, there has been an overall increase in quality of sport in Slovenia since independence, which has been measured in the increase in numbers of sports disciplines, participation of women, categorised athletes, medals won at major sports competitions (NPS, 2014).

7.4.2) International sports environment

Interviewee 2 warns that Slovene sport does not occur in a vacuum and thus, one should not lose sight of the global sports picture. They raise concerns that international sport may be in a crisis due to disproportionate salaries of some athletes that earn more than the value of the sports budget of some states. International operation in sport is considered essential for

Slovenia (NPS, 2014). Thus, Slovenia is a member of the international sports community and follows all main international sports documents (Interviewee 1), including the White Paper on Sport, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on Children's Rights. Slovenia cooperates with international organisations, such as WADA, UNESCO, EU, the Council of Europe, United Nations etc. (Verovnik & Kolar, 2010).

7.4.3) Existing challenges within the Slovene elite sport policy system

Despite the consensus of participants that Slovene elite sport system is functioning well, they also identified many challenges in the system and areas for further improvement. Many of these suggestions have been addressed throughout the findings chapters, such as the issues of annual licence renewals; early specialisation issues; lack of recognition of sport by the state; lack of financial investment in sport in general; coordination between researchers and coaches. Additionally, Interviewee 1 points out a failed organisation of the Winter Universiade and calls for a better financial and organisational support by the state for hosting large international sporting competitions. Secondly, they urge for greater penetration into the international space via the organisation of competitions and undertaking more roles within the IFs. Thirdly, they suggest an umbrella organisation or a health centre for all sports. Although individual disciplines may have access to these, there is not enough financial resources for a state-level organisation that would develop some common knowledge applicable to all sports.

Another challenge in sport is the poor management of non-profit sports organisations due to amateur staff that leads to low rivalry and to a reduced market share in leisure expenditure (Jurak et al., 2010). Kolar (2010) on the other hand points out few issues regarding tax legislation and describes the state as irresponsible. Furthermore, Interviewee 3 refers to the issue where instead of coaches, athletes are recognised as the creators of sporting results. This causes lack of opportunities for coaches to create an economic base for survival due to poor media exposure causing a lack of interest in the coaching profession. This point is also supported by Interviewee 5 when they identify the financial struggles of some of the national team coaches that are not financed by the state and require much needed support and understanding from their sports clubs.

7.5) Discussion

Building on the first two findings chapters based on SPLISS pillars, non-SPLISS features discussed in this chapter are divided into three categories: ‘bioecological influences, ‘scale influences’ and ‘other influences of success’ of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. Themes identified through the bioecological lens further confirmed findings of previous findings chapters. Namely, this includes the importance of development and the broader cultural ideologies when analysing the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. As stated by Bronfenbrenner (1993), the context of what is studied is as relevant as the effects of *time* on development and the *chronosystem*. They explain that study of the context is needed for two reasons: the notion that human beings are not only the products but also producers of the environment and the environment is symbolic, where symbols are cognitively, emotionally, socially and motivationally loaded. Applied to this research the above implies that as a developing mechanism, the sports system is a product and a producer of its environment which is filled with culturally deterministic and significant values. As the sports system develops so does the environment within which the system exists and while the environment impacts the functioning of the system, the system also shapes the environment. Thus, development of the system as well as its environment need to be taken into consideration. The importance of context, or in this case the cultural characteristics of the development process is also recognised by Houlihan (2005, p. 176) when stating that “to understand the development of sport policy and its current salience it is important to appreciate the environment in which it emerged and continues to operate”.

In relation to RQ1, this chapter confirms findings of previous two chapters. Namely, while including the cultural and historical accounts and characteristics of the national sports system, this allows for a more in-depth understanding and explanation of the system itself. Regarding RQ2, the findings in this section add to those stated in the previous analyses. It applies that while SPLISS pillars are, indeed, crucial for explaining of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, these do not allow for provision of contextual explanations of ‘how’ and ‘why’. This is evident via identification of additional ‘non-SPLISS themes’ and the themes that have been referred to indirectly or ignored throughout the SPLISS analysis due to the lack of policy influence over these. Via application of the bioecological lens, thematic analysis uncovered two main areas identified in the model - historical development and cultural characteristics. Within the cultural aspect, the influence of media on cultural perceptions, national identity and national sports was also recognised, confirming the reciprocal relationship between the media,

sport and national identity (Godnič, 2005). This also partially aligns with the idea of Pillar 10 for which it is suggested to consist of the mass media, attitudes towards sport areas, and the national education system (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Furthermore, thematic analysis of the data further identified two sets of success influences that were not accounted for in either of the analytical models. These included 'scale influences (individual approach, flexibility of the system, knowledge and expertise, international cooperation, multiplication of roles and genetics and mentality) and 'other influences of success' (independence, international environment and existing challenges within the system).

Based on the above findings, the following suggestions are made for SPLISS to better account for the unique characteristics of the elite sport policy system of a small and relatively new state of Slovenia (RQ3). Firstly, inclusion of development of the sports system through time that also reflects the broader development of the environment is required. Historical development plays an important part in this thesis as it applies that development of policy is constrained by its historical context (Houlihan, 2013). Although some of the post-independence development has been discussed in the historical review, via qualitative narrative the researcher aimed to investigate perceptions and views of interviewees on this matter to gain more critical, value-based accounts. By undertaking qualitative research, this allowed for emergence of causal opinions regarding explanations of 'how' and 'why' (and 'getting inside the black box') (Henry et al., 2020) through analysis of development and following how specific actions within a specific context led to specific outcomes (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Hence, to offer a more comprehensive explanation of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, it is suggested that the SPLISS model moves away from providing a value-free view, and instead allows for inclusion of more in-depth value-based qualitative accounts that allow for rich explanations. For example, in order to truly explain how and why education is joined with sport the answers can be found in the historical development and in order to explain why there are no priority sports in Slovenia, references are made to historical and social, cultural views. Therefore, the second suggestion is the inclusion of the macro-factors such as cultural perceptions, characteristics and size-related influences for understanding the approach undertaken in the Slovene elite sport policy system. Moreover, it was suggested previously to include cultural features, however, here it is suggested that these should be included as a separate influence that should comprise an overview of the ideologies of culture and sports culture, as well as national identity in relation to sport as this might act as the driving force behind participation and the weight people give to elite sporting results. As the shaper of people's national identity perceptions on sport, the

mass media should also be given attention in this section. For example, in the NPS 2014, the role of mass media is recognised in creating and fostering sports culture, educating citizens on benefits of physical exercise and achievements of Slovene athletes.

The visual representation of the bioecological elements identified and included in the present study of the elite sports policy system in Slovenia is provided below in Figure 14. In addition to those mentioned above, ‘family’ is also highlighted (family role is discussed in the conclusion of previous chapter) as the athlete’s primary environment, while the coaches would generally also fit in this layer of environment, however they are already included via Pillar 7. The development together with cultural characteristics as the two main elements identified via the bioecological lens link the SPLISS themes together.

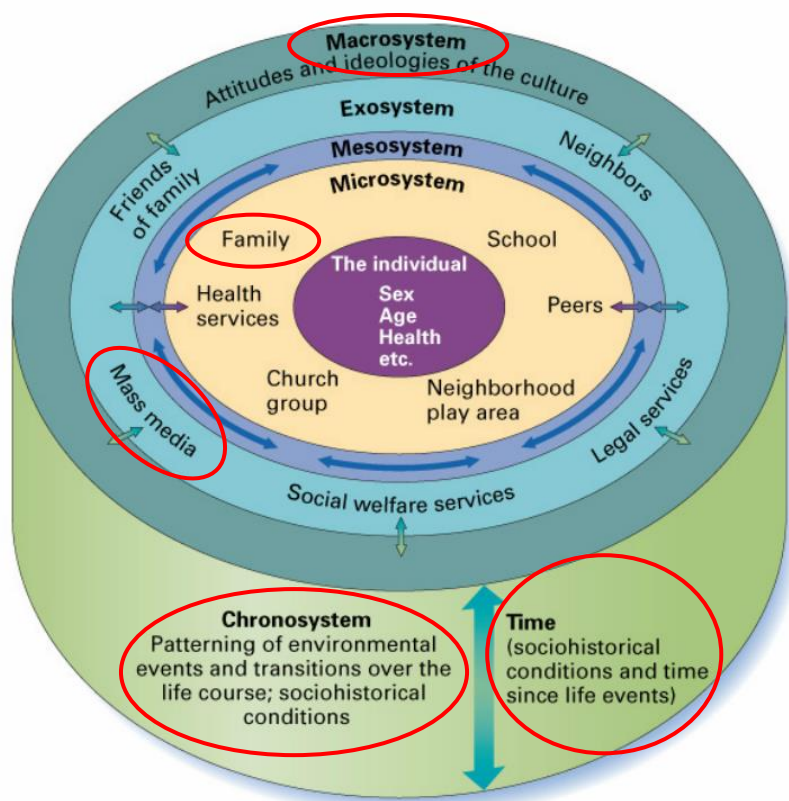


Figure 14. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (Santrock, 2008, p. 33).

As a final point, features of the elite sports system in Slovenia that facilitate success must also be added as an extension of the SPLISS model. These are a result of adjustments to macro-factors (scale, culture) and development, and comprise of ‘individual approach’; ‘system flexibility’; ‘knowledge and expertise’ across the system as well as knowledge of coaches; multiplication of roles within the same persons; ‘work hard mentality’; ‘independence’; ‘international environment’ and ‘existing challenges within the system’. By taking into

consideration these features of Slovenia and its elite sports system, the fundamental characteristics of the sports system outside of the nine SPLISS pillars are no longer overlooked.

7.6) Conclusion

In the third findings chapter, themes deriving from the data on the Slovene elite sport policy system that are not accounted for in the SPLISS model were identified. These identified gaps were grouped into three sections: 'bioecological influences, 'scale influences, and 'other influences of success'. Within the set of bioecological influences, the main areas of expansion of the SPLISS model comprised of historical development and cultural characteristics of Slovenia. The findings also pointed out that scale influences, independence, and international collaboration have a positive effect on elite sporting success of Slovenes. Although the identified factors have positive implications, the existing challenges of the system in place were not overlooked and were considered as well because these aspects may lead to further improvements of the system.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1) Introduction

The first section of this chapter (8.2) draws together a research summary. Sections 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5 provide a detailed summary of the findings for each of the three research questions and outline some suggested adaptations to the SPLISS framework that are relevant to Slovenia. The remaining sections of this concluding chapter outline the implications of the research and its contribution (8.6), future research directions (8.7) and research limitations (8.8).

8.2) Research summary

The present research set out to explain the elite sport policy system in independent Slovenia through the application of the SPLISS model, whilst considering historical development and specificities of Slovenia. The aims of the research were thus twofold:

1. To examine the development and contemporary structure of elite sport policy system in Slovenia.
2. To critically analyse the extent to which SPLISS allows for an examination of this system.

To achieve these aims, the following research questions were identified:

RQ1: What is the contemporary organisational structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ2: To what extent can drawing on factors identified by SPLISS act as a framework for a single country case-study explanation of the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

RQ3: What other factors need to be added to this framework to better account for the development and characteristics of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia?

First, a review of the historical development of sport in the Slovene territory was produced, with an intention to provide background information on the context and development of

Slovenia and Slovene sport since the present cannot be understood without understanding the past. Through this review some of the main themes and influences of the contemporary elite sports policy system, as identified and interpreted by the experts and in the documents, emerged. These included the development of sport; links between national identity and sport; links between education and sport; importance of sport for Slovene society, geographical and climate conditions; media, and a wide range of Slovene sporting successes.

Next, in Chapter Three, a literature review of the main research topics was provided. These included state and nation in order to distinguish between the nation of Slovenia during the Yugoslav times and the post-independent state of Slovenia as this plays an important part in understanding the Slovene context. Further linked to the context of Slovenia, the characteristics of small states were considered indicating that small states are, in fact, different to their larger counterparts and thus, adapt their approaches based on their limitations and strengths. Furthermore, national identity as one of the themes that emerged from the review of historical development and as a more present characteristic of small states was looked at separately, while the relationship between national identity and sport was also considered. It was acknowledged that the media play a great role in this relationship and the reciprocal relationship between sport, national identity and the media was recognised. Attention then shifted to the importance of sport politically and socially, with a particular focus on the approaches of governments in supporting and regulating elite sport development. Additionally, the elite sport policy system was defined as the governance, management and implementation of the public policy for elite sport via its constituent elements and mechanisms such as sports clubs, sports associations, coaches, athletes, officials and other support systems (e.g. health support and research). It was recognised that intervention in regulation and organisation of sport by the states is necessary (Coakley & Pike, 2014) and it mostly serves to achieve non-sporting objectives (Green & Houlihan, 2005) including *inter alia* promotion of economic development, power and prestige, health and fitness, and national identity and unity (Coakley & Pike, 2014). While there are differences between states, these are adopting similar approaches to development of elite sport (Houlihan, 2000). The SPLISS model was also discussed as a well-established model for research into how governments approach achieving international sporting success through public policy and as the main analytical model of the present study. A bioecological model was sought after as an additional framework to consider factors outside of the SPLISS pillars.

In Chapter Four, a case study research design was identified suitable for the study because it is applied when there is a need for an in-depth and extensive research of a complex phenomenon

(Yin, 2014, 2018). A broad constructivist philosophical approach and qualitative research were also outlined and applied in the study to achieve the study aims. The data collection comprised of two elements, desk-based analysis of policy documents and qualitative one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders within elite sport in Slovenia. In total, 43 sport policy and sport policy related documents were analysed, and six participants were interviewed. By applying thematic analysis, gathered data were coded initially using *a priori* themes based on the historical review and analytical models (SPLISS and bioecological models). SPLISS was used as the primary model to underpin the data collection and analysis, while elements of bioecological model were added to overcome the limits of the SPLISS framework for the Slovene context. The researcher also allowed for new themes to emerge through the inductive coding of data. Research findings were grouped according to the SPLISS themes, where the first findings chapter (Chapter Five) addressed ‘SPLISS Pillars 1 and 2’, Chapter Six discussed ‘SPLISS Pillar 3-Pillar 9’, and the last findings chapter (Chapter Seven) looked at ‘additional non-SPLISS themes’. A brief overview of the main findings is provided below.

The study findings suggested that the contemporary organisational structure of the elite sports policy system in Slovenia reflects its size and context. The greatest responsibility for sports is placed on MESS where sport and education are joined in the Ministry. This is a result of the historical links between schools and sport. On the other hand, there is OCS-ASF that represents the interests of recreational and elite-level sports. These two strands of sport are not separate but are perceived as mutually dependent which enables the distance between them to be bridged and this is considered one of the main characteristics of the Slovene sport system. Furthermore, Slovenia adopts a sports legislation – Sports Act and NPS. The Sports Act defines the public interest in sport and NPS as a strategic document identifies the state’s priorities in sport. The documents identified participation in sport and sporting results a priority, building on the previous finding that participation and elite-level sport are considered equal. The main management of NPS 2014 falls under the main sporting bodies, MESS and OCS-ASF, which is another feature of the Slovene sport system where public and civil spheres of sport work together.

In Slovenia, the organisational structure of the sports system precedes the public funding structure for sport. Funding is allocated on an annual basis via APS. There are two main providers of public funds at the state level: MESS and FSO, while the local communities are the third and largest provider of public funds, indicating Slovenia adopts a decentralised approach to funding. Nevertheless, the education department within MESS also provides

funding for sport programmes in education. Regarding elite sport, OSC-ASF is a crucial source of funding for NGBs. NGBs and local communities have flexibility in fund allocation which is yet another characteristic of the Slovene sport system. There are no priority sports in Slovenia, as these are considered to be unethical and instead funding is allocated based on the rating of the sports discipline and there is therefore fluidity in which sports are prioritised over time due to democratic processes.

Moreover, there is also no talent identification system as such at state level and a much more individual approach is adopted. Once fulfilling the criteria, elite athletes are provided with statutory rights that allow them a level of safeguarding and security through provision of adjusted education criteria and programmes; monitoring of their prowess; provision of health care and employment in state administration (dual career). The origins of this support date back to the Yugoslav times. Although not explicitly referred to via policies, the importance of the primary environment of an athlete is recognised by participants and policies. Indirectly, family support could be reflected by the support the athletes receive from the state. Further elements of Yugoslav legacy are also evident in scientific research and the school sports infrastructure that is used out of school hours by citizens and sports clubs (Jurak, 2010a).

Slovenes are recognised as a sports-aware and see physical activity as an important part of culture (Evans & Kelley, 2002; Kovač et al., 2004) and daily lifestyle (*Special Eurobarometer 412 - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2014; *Special Eurobarometer - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2010). This, along with the structural links between recreation and elite sport, and geographical and climate conditions were identified as the reasons behind high physical activity rates of Slovenes by participants and in the documents. Geographic and climate conditions allow for the use of outdoor natural areas as the largest area for physical activity (NPS, 2014) and also contribute to the success of Slovene athletes internationally. Another characteristic of the Slovene elite sports policy system was the occurrence of transgenerational transfer of knowledge between coaches in Slovenia that contributes to their professional competences.

This study has demonstrated that the SPLISS model does not fully explain the Slovene elite sport policy system due to the specific structural, developmental and contextual factors of Slovenia. While all SPLISS pillars are deemed important for explaining the case of Slovenia, smaller adaptations to the original pillars are proposed. These include the consideration that the influence of Pillar 2 on other pillars is considered to be greater than that of Pillar 1 in the context of the Slovene elite sport policy system. It applies that Pillar 1 enables the execution

of the remaining pillars (De Bosscher et al., 2015), however, due to constraints related to the size (financial resources and population), the organisation of the sports system becomes more significant (Truyens et al., 2014). The expertise of Slovene sport professionals highlighted as crucial by interviewees is reflected in the structure that impacts the other areas of the sports system, including financial support, which furthers the influence and importance of Pillar 2. Lastly, the financing structure is underpinned by the general structure of the sports system in Slovenia which demonstrates the influence of Pillar 2 over Pillar 1. This poses the question whether the Pillar 2 – organisation and structure has a greater impact on other pillars than Pillar 1 – financial input for small states because the constraints of the available funding will typically be greater in this context and therefore the structure of the sports system is likely to have a greater influence on the remaining pillars and the success of the state than levels of funding.

Furthermore, inclusion of outdoor natural areas for sport subjected to climate and geographical conditions of Slovenia in Pillar 6 is suggested as the policy facilitates capitalising on the natural resources available within a context where other resources are limited as a small state. The importance of the supportive primary environment (Pillar 5) was also identified, however this is difficult to measure and regulate with policies. Nevertheless, the realisation of the family's importance suggests that the creation of elite athletes is a complicated process and does not rely simply on state policies.

In addition to these small adaptations of the SPLISS pillars, the study has demonstrated that there are additional factors that are perceived to have influenced the development of elite sport policy in Slovenia. These factors were identified through applying the bioecological framework and included characteristics such as the historical development and cultural characteristics of Slovenia. Developmental aspects were suggested to be important influences of the elite sport policy system and it was proposed that recognising their significance was useful as they may contribute to increased explanations of 'how' and 'why' to better understand the operation of the sports system.

Lastly, a number of success factors were also identified that related to the scale influences of Slovenia including an individual approach, flexibility of the system, knowledge and expertise, international cooperation, multiplication of roles and mentality, while independence and international environment were also identified as important for Slovene sporting success. These were grouped into 'scale influences' and 'other influences of success' respectively, while the

latter also included the existing challenges within the elite sports policy system in Slovenia. The existing challenges address the potential areas of improvement for the future.

8.3) The contemporary organisational structure of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia (RQ1)

The contemporary organisational structure of the Slovene elite sports policy system was addressed throughout all three findings chapters, but it was mainly discussed within the scope of Pillar 2 of the SPLISS framework within section 5.3. This section provides a synthesised explanation of the elite sports policy system in contemporary Slovenia whilst highlighting its features.

The findings indicate that the elite sport system in Slovenia is fully integrated within the wider sports system which suggests that the elite sport system should not be considered as standing alone. Instead, the findings suggest that within Slovenia recreational and elite sport cannot be isolated because they are mutually dependent, and both exist within the same sport system. Thus, in Slovenia, both recreational and elite sport are identified as priorities for the system and focusing solely on elite sport is seen as prioritising the present at the expense of the long-term view. This is particularly evident in physical education in schools where over 60% of physical activity is delivered (Jurak, 2010a) and this effectively serves as a base for participation for children and youth, while it is also the first foundation for success in international elite sport (Interviewee 6).

The link between schools and sport is also evident in the organisational structure of the Slovene sports system, where the MESS that holds the main responsibility for sport, represents and joins together education and sport (NPS, 2014). These links have a long history of alignments having originated during the Yugoslav times. Within MESS, however, the Directorate of Sport acts as an autonomous unit for sport, which delivers all state related tasks as defined in the state's Sports Act. In addition to MESS, there is OCS-ASF – a civil umbrella association for sport and a member of the IOC (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). It represents sport at all levels, which is another structural characteristic with its origins in Yugoslavia during the time of decentralisation and the introduction of self-management (Stepišnik, 1968). In Slovenia, sport consists of public and civil spheres, with the public sphere representing the government, and the civil sphere the NGBs, sports clubs, athletes etc. and therefore these may promote different

interests. Furthermore, as another feature of the system, OCS-ASF deals with recreational and elite sport. However, elite sport is not delivered by the OCS-ASF but it is instead delivered within national teams of NGBs and sports clubs. The NGBs have the freedom to adopt the policies and redistribute allocated funding in line with their own priorities and preferences.

As first discussed in section 5.3 Slovenia is one of the countries that adopts the Sports Act as a systematic approach to sports development. The first Sports Act came into force in 1998 (*Zakon o športu*, 1998), seven years after the independence of Slovenia in 1991, yet its preparation started before independence, in 1990 (Šugman, 1999). Similarly, ground works for NPS began as early as 1989 (*ibid.*). The most recent Sports Act of 2017, defines the public interest in the field of sport, mechanisms for its implementation, responsible bodies, conditions for expert work in sport, athletes' rights, public sports facilities and outdoor natural sports areas, sports events, databases and monitoring in sport (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). Not only does the Sports Act provide sport with a space within the state's environment, it also provides the basis for the NPS – a 10-year strategic document for the development planning of sports politics (*ibid.*). The NPS (2014) clearly identifies the priorities for the state which are centred on the creation of sports development conditions as an important developmental element for society and for individuals which seeks to reduce the inequality in accessibility of sport and exercise. As outlined in section 5.2, the NPS outlines seven main areas of focus (Table 8):

1. Sports programmes;
2. Sports facilities and natural outdoor sports areas;
3. Development tasks in sport;
4. Organisation of sport;
5. Sports events and promotion of sport;
6. Social and environmental responsibility in sport; and
7. Support mechanisms for sport (*ibid.*).

The main management of the NPS 2014 falls under MESS and OCS-ASF (*NPS*, 2014) indicating the interlinkage of governmental and civil spheres of sport, as well as the role of OCS-ASF in the governing of Slovene sport. The role of the OCS-ASF in governing sport has been lawfully recognised by the Sports Act in 2017 (*Zakon o športu*, 2017). The implementation of the NPS, however, falls under the responsibility of all organisations that deliver the programmes (*NPS*, 2014).

The review of the organisational structure of the Slovene elite sports policy system so far outlined general structural characteristics. Below, the focus shifts to more specific organisational features of the system that include the financing structure, athletes' rights, coaches and experts, characteristics of scale and culture, and climate and geographical characteristics.

Financing structure

Because sport is considered a public good in Slovenia, it is co-financed from public funds. The funding structure is aligned with the overall structure of the sports system and it is allocated annually according to APS (NPS, 2014) - a document defining annual funding for sport according to various criteria including *inter alia* the popularity of the discipline, quality of sporting achievements, national importance, attractiveness to the mass media and other factors as defined by the MESS (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010). There are two main public providers of funds at state level: MESS and FSO, while the third and largest provider of public funds are local communities, which on average contribute around 70% of public funds for sport (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak, et al., 2010) indicating that Slovenia adopts a decentralised model of financing. The funding of sport in the education system falls under the scope of the education department within MESS, along with most of the delivery of disability sport. For other sports programmes and areas of NPS, excluding *Support mechanisms for sport* funding is allocated as defined by the APS at state level (NPS, 2014). The NPS allows for flexibility in fund allocation by local communities based on their interests and traditions (Interviewee 6) highlighting again that the development of sport, history and tradition are inter-connected. While public funding is the most stable source of funds for elite sport, OCS-ASF is also an important financier. They provide funds to elite sport development programmes. Moreover, it is important to note another feature of the Slovene elite sports policy system, namely there are no priority sports as such identified in Slovenia. There was an attempt to adopt priority sports in the past, yet it failed and nowadays the idea of having priority sports is seen as unethical and instead funding is based on evaluation of sports disciplines and their programmes (Jurak et al., 2010), which includes the categorisation model that provides the criteria for evaluation of the sports disciplines as well as sporting achievements/results (NPS, 2014).

Athletes' rights

In addition to being a model for the evaluation of sports disciplines, categorisation also provides the basis of the criteria underpinning the statutory rights of athletes (*Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2013; *Pogoji, pravila in kriteriji za registriranje in kategoriziranje športnikov*, 2017). The model evolved from a similar model in place during Yugoslavia, highlighting another organisational link to the past. The model applies that the better the athlete's result is, the more support and rights they are provided with. Support for athletes comes in many forms including the adjustment of school and study obligations; monitoring of their physical prowess and expert support to their programmes; health care support; elite athlete employment and dual career. Additionally, there is also the athletes' ombudsman.

Coaches and experts

Like athletes, elite level coaches are also provided with employment opportunities in the public sector (*NPS*, 2014). There are two coach development pathways in Slovenia, one being education through higher education study, while other is vocational training (Interviewee 4) within NGB programmes (Interviewee 6). Undergraduate study is mostly free in Slovenia and so are most of the vocational training programmes, which shows the level of support for the development of coaching staff. On the other hand, however, most NGBs require annual licence renewals resulting in additional costs for workers in sport. In addition to the official qualification pathways of coaches being satisfactory, an interviewee suggested that there might also be a cultural transfer of knowledge occurring between coaches of different generations, which signifies a strategic advantage in the Slovene elite sports system. The small field of Slovene sport professionals enables the development of closer ties between not only personnel but coaches within the same or different sports disciplines. The smaller number of citizens may lead to closer personal ties (Bray, 1991) and better cooperation (Campbell & Hall, 2009). Indeed, smallness enables mobilisation of resources that might otherwise not be possible or acceptable (Sam, 2015) and can increase the state's resilience (Sam & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, due to size-related drawbacks of Slovenia (GDP and population), coaches as well as expertise and knowledge across the board in sports field are considered the most important influence of Slovene elite sport successes by participants and in the documents. In fact, human resources are what small states depend on (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). For example, expertise and knowledge, including scientific research are perceived as the only area in sport, where the

Slovene sports system can be competitive at international level. Hence, to develop knowledge, international cooperation in terms of coaching, research and events, as well as having Slovene officials within IFs is considered important.

Characteristics of scale and culture

Due to its small size, Slovenia developed additional features in its elite sports policy system. For example, individuals in sport undertake several roles (for example, being a coach and a club or state-level official etc.). This can make the decision-making and information transfer easier as expertise in different areas is held within the same individual. The lower total number of elite athletes also enables the application of the individual approach tailored to each athlete demonstrating another example of the flexibility of the system. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is no general talent identification system at state level as pointed out by interviewees. This was present in the past but is nowadays dealt with at the NGB and/or club level. However, due to low numbers of athletes and the application of the individual approach, no one is turned away based purely on their motor and morphological measurements even at the elite level because there are many other aspects that can influence success but cannot be measured (Interviewee 5). Another result of smallness pointed out by participants is the work-hard mentality, which stems from centuries of Slovenes trying to prove to be equal to other larger nations (Interviewee 2) and attempting to assert themselves (Interviewee 1). It applies that in small states, the role of sport in fostering national unity and identity is stronger than in their larger counterparts (Sam, 2015).

Moreover, with sport and physical activity being culturally significant due to the rich history, Slovenes are also one of the most physically active nations in the EU, with only 22% of Slovenes not doing physical activity (*Special Eurobarometer 412 - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2014; *Special Eurobarometer - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2010). With most sports programmes being delivered in the education system (Jurak, 2010a), these school-based programmes are of high quality resulting in Slovene children being amongst the most physically able in the world and this provides the first foundation for elite sporting success (Interviewee 6). There has also been a noteworthy increase in women's participation (Jurak, 2010a) and especially mothers that are shaping the use of family leisure time (Interviewee 6).

While the state-level competition system in Slovenia is not competitive relative to the international level, the hosting of international sporting events is still considered crucial for

sports development. Due to history and tradition, the most major international competitions are hosted in winter sports in Slovenia.

Climate and geographical characteristics

Practice of summer and winter sports is enabled by the suitable geographical and climate conditions (NPS, 2014), which have also shaped the perception and attitude towards sport. While opinions on the quality of sports facilities differ, there is almost no school in Slovenia without its own gymnasium. These facilities offer additional space for physical activity and sport outside of school hours (Jurak, 2010a). Nevertheless, indoor sports facilities are not the only provision of space for physical activity, as the natural outdoor areas also fall within the network of sports areas that enable free and accessible access. In fact, Slovenes placed first in the category of using natural outdoor areas among the EU countries (*Special Eurobarometer - Sport and Physical Activity*, 2010), which highlights the strategic importance of such spaces not only in physical activity but also in facilitating competitive sport in Slovenia. Thus, the state makes conscious effort to maximise the use of these assets via its policies.

In conclusion, the above summary demonstrates that the present elite sport policy system has its roots in Yugoslavia and can, as such, only be understood by taking into consideration the contextual and historical development of the current elite sport policy system. The contextual characteristics of Slovenia such as size determine the routes taken to develop international sporting success, while they also allow for adaptations and flexibility to create strategic advantages. Without taking into consideration the context and development, there is a lack of understanding as to why a particular approach was undertaken. Furthermore, the historical aspect plays a crucial part in understanding the cultural features of tradition, perception and importance of sport, while outdoor natural areas resulting from geographical and climate characteristics are also not to be neglected as their use is influenced by policy.

8.4) Drawing on the SPLISS factors as a framework for a single country case-study explanation of the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia (RQ2)

As a framework that can be modified to different sports contexts and settings (De Bosscher et al., 2015), the SPLISS model proved to be useful - but not sufficient - for investigating and explaining the elite sports policy system in Slovenia. While all nine pillars were addressed and discussed in order to examine the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, not all the success influences identified within the documentary analysis and interviews pertaining to Slovenia are reflected within the SPLISS model. Consequently, additional factors not identified within the SPLISS framework were identified separately using the bioecological model. These included 'historical development' and 'cultural characteristics, whilst 'scale characteristics and 'other influences of success' were addressed as determinants not considered in any of the models. 'Scale characteristics' comprised of the 'individual approach', 'flexibility of the system', 'knowledge and expertise', 'multiplication of roles' and 'genetics and mentality', while 'other influences of success' included 'independence', 'international sports environment' and 'existing challenges within the Slovene elite sports system'. What is more, some of the existing SPLISS pillars proved to be too narrowly defined to fully encompass the features and success influences of the Slovene elite sports system (i.e. training facilities were expanded to include the outdoor natural areas for sport).

The findings also suggest that the first two SPLISS pillars are highly linked since the financing system and with-it related decision-making reflects, rather than determines the general organisational structure of sport in Slovenia. Hence, by commencing the analysis with Pillar 1, basic organisational constituents (Pillar 2) had to be addressed prior to delving into the financial support. This led to a realisation that in Slovenia 'Pillar 2 – organisation' is a stronger influencer than 'Pillar 1 – financial support' because it has greater impact on the remaining pillars (this is discussed in greater detail in the next section). The analysis indicated that in some cases it was also difficult to separate individual pillars because of the overlap between the pillars as noted by Sotiriadou et al. (2014). Examples of these overlaps include the discussion of the education of experts within Pillars 7 and 9, the categorisation system within Pillars 2, 4 and 5 and the athlete support in Pillars 5 and 9.

Furthermore, SPLISS does not take into consideration the importance of development or history, nor does it allow for consideration of the macro-factors, such as size and culture and their impact on the sports system because macro-factors cannot be influenced by sports policies (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2015). However, these elements impact the elite sport system. The constraints of being a small state shape the elite sports policy system in Slovenia because the system operates within, and reflects the wider social, cultural, economic and historical environment. For these reasons, the separation of the macro-, meso- and micro-level factors is impossible and “any attempt to do so... runs the inherent risk of either ignoring or overlooking entirely the patterns of variation of uniqueness that comparative researchers seek to uncover” (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018, p. 106). Hence, as a model of comparison between states’ policies, SPLISS also overlooks specificities of individual states. As the present single-case study did not include a comparison between states, the emphasis was even greater on providing detailed accounts of the system in place to allow for an in-depth understanding of it. Since states develop their own systems with their own specific arrangements (Ferkins & van Bottenburg, 2013), disregarding the broader historical and societal factors prevents a full encapsulation of the phenomenon studied (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018).

In addition to the listed macro-factors and development, climate and geographical conditions of Slovenia were recognised as an important influences of elite sport policy system within Slovenia as the state the state actively seeks to maximise the use of outdoor natural areas for sport and physical activity through policy and thus, these factors were addressed within the scope of training facilities (Pillar 6) within this thesis. Geography, for example is crucial for winter sports (Nassif, 2017), of which skiing is a traditional sport in Slovenia. These conditions played a role in the development of sport, sporting culture and national identity. Similarly to macro-level factors, attention was also given to family support which is an example of micro-factors. Despite lack of policies regarding family support, the state provides athletes with their statutory rights that may impact athlete’s family lives indirectly.

8.5) Proposed additions to the SPLISS framework to better account for development and characteristics of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia (RQ3)

To examine the contemporary elite sports policy system in Slovenia, a broad range of characteristics and influences needed to be considered, some of which expand beyond those identified in the SPLISS model. Figure 15 illustrates the influences of the contemporary elite sport policy system in Slovenia.

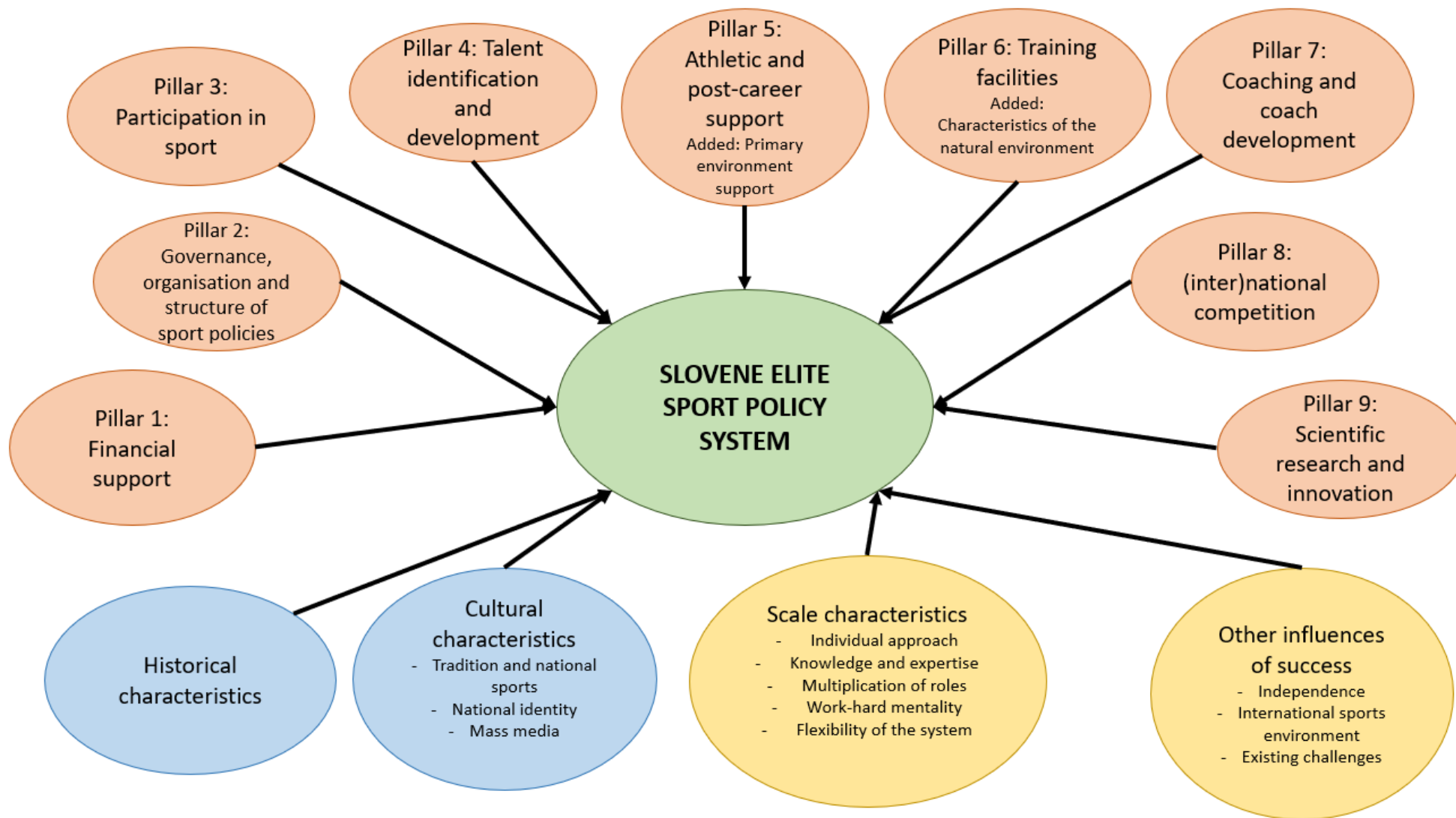


Figure 15. Influences of the contemporary elite sports policy system in Slovenia.

In order to fully encapsulate the elite sport policy system in Slovenia, adaptations in four main areas are proposed to the SPLISS model as SPLISS can be adapted to individual sports settings and contexts (De Bosscher et al., 2015). The first set of adaptations comprise the influence of Pillars 1 and 2, the second and third set of adaptations encompass inclusion of the macro- and micro-level related influences and the last set of adaptations are composed of other influences of success that are relevant to Slovenia. The adaptations are addressed separately below.

Adaptation 1: Influence of Pillars 1 and 2

The impact of Pillar 1 as the most influential Pillar on other pillars is questioned in the study as the influence of ‘Pillar 2 – organisation’ on other pillars is higher than that of ‘Pillar 1- financial support’ in the context of Slovene elite sport policy system. This is supported by three arguments.

Firstly, the influence of financial input derives from the notion that financial input is the best predictor for international sporting success (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008) because greater financial investment allows for the remaining pillars to be implemented and thus it creates “more opportunities for athletes to achieve success” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 43). However, for Slovenia, a state small in territory, population and GDP (Thorhallsson, 2006), “the investment in the sporting result in Slovenia will always be lower than that of larger and developed countries” (Interviewee 2). This becomes particularly relevant when considering that the population alone determines around 20% of success (Shibli et al., 2014), while population, wealth and political structure account for over 40% of the medal success at the Olympic Games (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Consequently, size does matter because the capacity for strategic development in small states is highly constrained (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Despite these drawbacks, small states have developed unique beneficial features (Sam, 2015) which is why the focus is shifted from which resources are possessed to how can these be utilised in the most effective way (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Indeed, with the decrease in population and GDP (macro-factors), “the management of elite sport systems becomes more important” (Truyens et al., 2014, p. 459). This point is supported by Interviewee 1 when claiming that in Slovenia, the emphasis is on how the funding is utilised and turned around rather than how much funding is available. It is the structure of sport (i.e. Pillar 2) that plays a critical role in managing the inputs in the optimal way (De Bosscher et al., 2006) and it is a well-functioning system that enables success (Storm et al., 2016) which is achieved through organisation captured in Pillar 2.

Secondly, the expert professionals are believed by Interviewee 4 to be the most important factor of Slovene sporting success ahead of organisation (Pillar 2) and finances (Pillar 1). However, since this expertise is also reflected in the policies and the unique structure of the elite sport system in Slovenia, this strength further impacts other SPLISS pillars, particularly ‘Pillar 2 – organisation’, which reinforces the importance of Pillar 2. Lastly, as the financing structure reflects, rather than determines, the general organisational structure of the sport system, this indicates that the influence of organisational structure on financing and the remaining pillars is greater and more significant in Slovenia than that of financial input.

Adaptation 2: Inclusion of macro-level related influences

The present research confirms the claim that the separation of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors is impossible when analysing sports policy (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018; Henry et al., 2020), despite the SPLISS model taking into consideration predominantly meso-level policies. By taking into consideration the characteristics of Slovenia and its elite sport system, most of which derive from the macro-level determinants, the fundamental characteristics of the sport system and influences associated with success outside of the nine SPLISS pillar are no longer overlooked. Moreover, inclusion of development over time and macro-level factors such as culture and size enables provision of detailed value-based accounts of causal opinions leading to better understanding of the system and its operation. Consideration of these broader factors contributes to inclusion the explanations of ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Henry et al., 2020). Four examples of the importance of macro-level related influences – historical, cultural, natural environmental and scale – in helping to address causal opinions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ in greater detail are provided below.

Historical characteristics

Highly linked to the point above by focusing on the ‘how’ rather than ‘how much’, the ‘how’ questions can only be explained through causal explanations (Henry et al., 2020). For example, to truly understand why sport and education are joined within the same Ministry in Slovenia, the answer must be searched for in the historical development of sport in the Slovene territory because policy is restricted by the historical context within which it occurs (Houlihan, 2013). Here, the past communist political system plays a great part as many other organisational characteristics in place in the present Slovenia have their roots in the Yugoslav system and are developments built on the past system. For example, employment of elite athletes, school sports facilities, scientific research and many more. In fact, the importance of the past Communist

rule is recognised by De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al. (2008), who conclude that together with GDP and population size, these factors accounted for over 50% of medal winning success at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Hence, the importance of historical development does not only lie in the development of sport but also in the development of the environment and the context within which the sport system developed.

Furthermore, the *Sokol* movement affected the development of elite and recreational sport, where at the beginning, *Sokol* clubs represented both ends of the spectrum. This is still present nowadays, where the inter-connectedness between elite and recreational sport is at the core of the Slovene sports system. This is most vivid in the structure, where OCS-ASF represents sport at all levels, and in the NPS objectives to simultaneously improve elite sport level and stimulating physical activity to become a norm in people's lifestyles.

Cultural characteristics

In most of the above cases, development of sport and culture go hand in hand. Hence, it is the cultural perceptions that shape attitudes towards sport and, at least in the Slovene case, are perceived to positively impact high sport participation rates. These cultural features should be included in the analysis as a separate 'pillar' comprising of sport-related national identity, tradition and national sports, and mass media. The importance of national identity is linked to perceptions of sport, while sport, mass media and national identity are interdependent. A strong sporting identity may be linked to higher participation and can shape the views of elite sporting achievements. The mass media, as a creator of sports culture, educator of citizens (NPS, 2014) and influencer of national identity perceptions, is not to be neglected. There is a great level of self-identification and national identity at times of Slovene victories. Research concluded that Slovenes identify the most with skiing (Godnič, 2005), which is also considered a national sport and is highly linked to the historical development of sport, and is conditioned by the climate and geographical conditions of Slovenia addressed below.

Characteristics of the natural environment

The elite sport policy system in Slovenia cannot be understood without recognising the role of the climate and geographical characteristics of the country. As discussed in Chapter Six the climate and geographical conditions of Slovenia were included in the Pillar 6 overview, due to the state's active approach to maximisation of the use of outdoor natural areas as the largest sports area through policies. Here, it is re-emphasised that the climate and geographical

characteristics that shape the outdoor natural areas for sport are therefore a significant part of Pillar 6 in Slovenia.

Scale characteristics

International success of Slovene sport is important because it shows that as a small and relatively young state – Slovenia – can compete with its larger counterparts. While some of the adjustments to the size-related impacts of GDP and population are present throughout the sports system in Slovenia, these must be considered individually. In the case of Slovenia, the characteristics of scale include individual approach; system flexibility; knowledge and expertise across the system as well as international cooperation; multiplication of roles within the same person; and work-hard mentality. While flexibility of the system has been indirectly addressed across several SPLISS pillars (e.g. Pillar 1 and Pillar 2), it was defined as a separate feature of the Slovene sport system because it was identified as such by the interviewees.

Adaptation 3: Inclusion of micro-level influences

SPLISS pillars primarily consist of the meso-level factors as these can be influenced by sports policy and politics (De Bosscher, Bingham, et al., 2008). As an element of the micro-level factors, family support cannot be controlled by policies and it is thus excluded from SPLISS pillars (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2010). Nevertheless, family support as the form of a primary environment of an athlete cannot be ignored as it was recognised as an important determinant of the athlete's sporting success by participants and policy documents confirming the notion that the development of elite athletes does not rely merely on policies (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Although there are no direct policies regarding an athlete's primary environment, it is proposed that this area is considered in Pillar 5 as it may be indirectly impacted by the state's support to athletes via their statutory rights.

Adaptation 4: Other influences of success

Building on the above set of adaptations related to SPLISS Pillars 1 and 2 and the macro- and micro-levels, this section comprises of features of the Slovene elite sport policy system that could not be identified within the above areas and were not accounted for through the SPLISS or bioecological lenses directly. The adaptations comprise of positive and negative features. For example, independence and international sports environment were considered important influences of the Slovene elite sport policy system.

While the above adaptations mainly reflect the advantages of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia and are built on the key influences of the system and the success of Slovene athletes, it is proposed that ongoing challenges that exist within the system are recognised as well. This will potentially allow for minimisation of these in the future. The findings suggest several areas of challenges including early specialisation issues, frequent renewal of coaching licences, poor recognition of coaches, poor management of non-profit sports organisations, tax legislation issues, and financial struggles of the sports system in general. Additionally, the interviewees call for greater involvement of sports officials and events in the international space, greater support by the state for hosting large sporting events, greater recognition of sport by the state in general, better cooperation between researchers and coaches, and creation of an umbrella organisation or health centre for all sports.

8.6) Implications of the study

Despite the increased interests in sport by governments, the same level of interest has not been matched in academia (Houlihan, 2005). Hence, the present study contributes to the underdeveloped area of research into the organisation of elite sport policy systems and their establishment (Andersen et al., 2015b; Andersen & Ronglan, 2012). Specifically, the present research contributes to findings in the areas of elite sport policy of small states and elite sport policy models by introducing a partial application of the SPLISS analysis to a single case setting of Slovenia, and more specifically by providing an in-depth case-study of one setting which examined a small state and illustrated that there may be policy and practice variations that are a result of the specific context of the state within which the system operates.

Firstly, the findings uncovered several features of the sport system in Slovenia. One of these is the suggestion that in order to overcome its shortcomings in terms of population and GDP size, Slovenia utilises its human resources in the forms of sports experts, especially coaches to create its competitive advantage. This confirms the discovery of Bray (1991) who states that small states turn to human resources as their valuable assets, they allow for closer personal ties and a stronger sense of unity or national identity. Indeed, closer collaboration between coaches has been pointed out in the case of Slovenes, while the multiplication of roles within the same individuals is also seen as an advantage by most participants. Furthermore, strong national identity linked to sport is also identified among Slovenes (Godnič, 2005). The findings suggest that the historical development of sport played an integral part in development of a strong

sporting culture and an individual national identity of Slovenes in the times of Yugoslavia as well as post-independence. It is this sporting culture and tradition where citizens perceive sport and physical activity as an essential element of their lives that fuel the drive for elite sporting successes as well as high participation rates in physical activity.

Moreover, the findings also suggest that the mutual dependence and reciprocity of recreation and elite sport is highly evident in Slovenia where an investment in one element is seen as an investment in another element. The association between recreational and elite sport is at the heart of the Slovene sport system, where sport has developed through time with the recognition that elite and recreational sport are different but not separate. This is because the efforts of the Slovene sports system are placed in providing opportunities and inspiring everyone to embrace physical activity as important and the belief that the shared passion for sport will result in elite sporting success and an active state. This approach is also visible in the structure of the sports system where both elite and recreational sport are identified as priorities, as well as in the governance of sport, where OCS-ASF represents both elite and recreational sport (NPS, 2014). The system in Slovenia also has built-in opportunities for all children and young people to engage with high quality sport and physical activity within the school system where sport participation is normative. Another outcome of the alignment between recreational and elite sport includes the societal benefits, which include maintaining of the strong national identity and culture linked to sport that results in high participation in recreational sport. Indeed, success on the international level is mirrored by success in the high participation rates in all levels of sport (e.g. including recreation where Slovenia placed among the most physically active states in Europe). Another positive outcome includes gender equity in sport participation and elite success where women have made significant progress.

Furthermore, by providing in-depth insights into a single case-study, the investigation produced detailed rich descriptions of the dynamic setting (Eisenhardt, 1989) – the elite sport policy system in Slovenia – which would have not been possible in a multi-state comparison, such as the standard SPLISS analysis as it overlooks the inherent differences between the states (Henry et al., 2020). In fact, in a cross-case comparison, the case-specific success factors are difficult to group because of their variations across settings (Eisenhardt, 1989), yet this research as a single case-study offers exactly that. By purposefully including rich detailed descriptions of the Slovene sport policy system, and providing understanding of political, economic, social, cultural and natural aspects of the environment within which the system operates, the

characteristics of the sport system and influences associated with success outside of the nine SPLISS pillars are no longer overlooked.

Through examining the development of the elite sport policy system through a broader set of lenses than relying wholly on SPLISS and by taking into account the contextual characteristics or macro-level factors and development through time, the study allows for integration of ‘how’ and ‘why’ explanations (Henry et al., 2020). Inclusion of the developmental aspect also allows for a long-term policy analysis. As Houlihan (2005, p. 168) explains, the sport policy frameworks should “facilitate a medium term (5-10 year) historical analysis of policy change on the grounds that any period of shorter duration merely produces a snapshot of policy”. Whilst the SPLISS inventory of CSF over all nine pillars includes their evolution over the past ten years (De Bosscher et al., 2015), the present study included an overview of policy over a longer period (1990-2017).

The contextual characteristics that had been shaped by the past policy decisions were taken in consideration (Scheerden et al., 2017) as these contributed to the poorly understood question of “how contextual factors diversify the conceptualisation and development of sport governance” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2018, p. 216). Additionally, to maximise the capacity of ‘how’ and ‘why’ explanation, qualitative accounts and analysis were applied for each SPLISS pillar (Henry et al., 2020), while the additional influences of development, culture, natural environment, scale and other influences of success that derived from data were added as well. By recognising these features of elite sport policy system in Slovenia, the study confirms the notion of De Bosscher et al. (2006) who state that there are aspects of the system that lead to international sporting success that are beyond the reach of policy. Nevertheless, as these also act as influences of the system and its success, these should be added to the analysis.

Moreover, building on the above point, the SPLISS model proved to be insufficient in examining the elite sport policy system in Slovenia because there was a range of influences and features not accounted for in SPLISS that derived from the data that proved to be crucial in understanding and explaining of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia. By integrating features of Slovenia related to development, culture, scale and other influences of success in the SPLISS model, the present study provides a suggestion on how to integrate influences not accounted for and overlooked in SPLISS. The proposed adapted version of the SPLISS model could serve as a starting point in development of a small-state version of SPLISS.

Furthermore, as there is a scarcity of research in sport in states with a population less than five million (Sam & Jackson, 2015), the present in-depth study of Slovenia enriches “our understanding of sport policy processes in a distinctive and extensive group of states” (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015, p. 342). As there are important differences in configurations of elite sport systems across various states (Andersen et al., 2015b; Ferkins & van Bottenburg, 2013), these becomes particularly important for a small states which generally approach sport development from a disadvantaged starting point in term of human and financial resources (De Bosscher, Heyndels, et al., 2008). Here, the adaptive features of a small state’s sport system to macro-level influences are identified and explored in detail and the findings show the shift in maximising the total financial input to developing an effective system structure that enables the best use of the possessed resources. This finding is in line with that of Storm et al. (2016, p. 197), who concluded that it is in fact a well-functioning system that which can help small states in becoming successful. Similarly, this coincides with the proposition of Truyens et al. (2014) that with the decrease in population and GDP, the importance shifts to the management of the elite sport systems. Furthermore, as illustrated above, influences such as mutual dependence of elite and recreational sport, natural environment, strong sports culture and national identity, suggest that there are other ways to develop successful athletes than financial investment.

8.7) Directions for future research

While the present study adds to the underdeveloped area of comprehensive elite sport system studies as well as elite sport systems in small states, it would be beneficial to expand this field further to include more states, similar in population, GDP and area in the future. This would aid in understanding of how other small states combat similar constraints and what are the similarities or differences in adopted approaches. Furthermore, expanding the study to other small states and adopting quantitative approach would allow for a comparative analysis, like SPLISS, to be completed. By grouping together similar states, this would as argued by Henry et al. (2020) allow for cluster analysis and deliver meaningful generalisations that are not possible with ‘all’ states as these are not sufficiently homogenous. Indeed, future research should include quantitative, objectively measured data, which would increase the neutrality of data, as well as strength of the evidence (Thorne, 2009). Additionally, via quantitative approach, deduction and statistical associations between elements of the sport system would allow for

‘testing’ of some of the participants’ claims and study findings. Testing of findings would allow for generalisation to other cases or populations (Bryman, 2016) and establishment of ‘facts’ (Henry et al., 2020). This would then provide the basis to create a more developed version of the SPLISS model for analysis of the elite sports policy of small states.

Furthermore, with the recent health considerations of the COVID-19 pandemic that considerably affected organisation and implementation of recreational and elite sport, future research could look into the effects of COVID-19 related restrictions on the international sporting success of Slovene athletes.

The most recent SLOfit (2020) measurements show that a two-month closure of schools, sports clubs, playgrounds and sports areas had the greatest negative effects on the physical ability of Slovene children in the history of monitoring. Measurements took place in 100 primary schools that were able to complete the tests. Overall physical ability decreased for over 13% and a decrease in physical ability occurred in almost two thirds of children. Physical ability also decreased in children who were amongst the most physically able (‘talented children’ or those able of achieving elite sporting results). After 2010, there has been an increase among the girls in this group, however, physical ability has decreased for over a third during the schools’ closure. Within the group of physically most active children, physical ability decreased for more than two thirds of children. Furthermore, there has been an increase in subcutaneous fat among more than 50% of children leading to the highest overall increase of 16% in comparison to the previous year. Lastly, the proportion of overweight children has also increased for more than 20%. The researchers and experts call and propose immediate interventions to first, prevent further negative effects and second, to minimise the negative effects of restrictions.

The above highlights the importance of physical activity within the schools as the main platform for delivery of sport programmes in Slovenia. Thus, future research could investigate the sustainability of sporting success of Slovenes following the period when the main segment for delivery of physical activity was hindered. For example, if the children are not physically active, what implications does that leave on the sports system and international sporting success? Also, if Slovenia is going to maintain its international success in sport, to what extent is the contemporary system sustainable under the changing circumstances and whether efforts should be placed elsewhere to maintain present success? Is the democratic system where there are no priority sports still viable? Lastly, with the decrease in the amount of physical activity, research into perceptions and the role of recreation, elite sport and leisure time amongst citizens would

allow for insights into changes regarding the sports culture of Slovenes as one of the main catalysts of sporting success.

8.8) Limitations of the study

While the aims and objectives of the study have been addressed via the research questions, the thesis' limitations must also be considered. Firstly, although applying an in-depth single case-study research was the main purpose of the present investigation and not a comparative study, there are no cases of other countries to weight the findings against. By undertaking an in-depth and extensive study of the phenomenon, this allowed for a holistic perspective and understanding of it (Easton, 2010), however, it did not allow for generalisation to other cases (Bryman, 2016).

Secondly, in comparison to the SPLISS research, the present study does not include a quantitative aspect, that would enable identification of statistical associations between elements in the sports system. Thus, adopting qualitative and predominantly constructivist and interpretivist stance of the researcher in the study meant that uncovering participant's subjective and personal views, opinions, and experiences allowed for several interpretations of reality (Blaikie, 1993) and multiple realities to be true (Bryman, 2016). This was especially evident in cases where participants provided different and sometimes contrasting opinions (e.g. stating that there is a good cooperation between researchers and coaches versus highlighting that this relationship is poor and requires further work). As such, there were no means for testing a participant's claims; i.e. whether their claims are factual. Therefore, the evidence level produced in the study, according to the hierarchy of evidence (Figure 9), is considered less strong than that which is bias- and value-free, based on large population (Thorne, 2009) and generally derives from quantitative research approach.

Next, the time of the data collection was when the Sports Act in Slovenia was adapted. Consequently, some of the support documents became obsolete. Additionally, while the overall number of stakeholders in Slovene sport system is low, an increased number of participants would allow for a greater variety of experiences and opinions, increasing the triangulation. Inclusion of athletes would also enable provision of first-hand experiences and perspectives of the receiving end of the policies and strategies in place, rather than just the top-down approach of views of stakeholders that form and/or implement the policies.

Moreover, the research was undertaken on a part-time basis and included two cases of suspension of studies for a 3-4-month period, resulting in a six-year long research. Under different circumstances of the researcher this time could have been reduced and the findings could have been presented earlier. For example, specifically related to the data, these were collected in 2017 and hence the interviewee responses and findings could be considered dated. While translation of the interview schedule and the data allowed the researcher to become acquainted with the data, this process also took up a substantial amount of time. The study was not only limited by the time-resources but also human resources. The research was undertaken by a single person, whereas in most cases there are teams of people conducting analyses of sport policies. While single-researcher studies may have their own advantages, they also provide limited space for discussion with different experts as it applies that 'there is strength in numbers'. Finally, as with all other qualitative studies, there is a lot of place for scrutiny in the research approach as there is always a chance that another researcher may approach the same research differently.

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List of appendices

Appendix I: Loughborough University ethical clearance

From: Sheryl Tailby
Sent: 11 July 2017 15:00
To: Joe Piggin
Cc: Carmen Horvat
Subject: Ethical Clearance

Dear Dr Piggin,

I can confirm that your ethics checklist:

Development and effectiveness of the elite sport policy in Slovenia in the post-independence period

Has been approved.

Kind regards
Sheryl

Sheryl Tailby
School Office and Compliance Support Administrator
Finance and Research Office, JB.0.16
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
[01509 226336](tel:01509226336)

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ssehs/>

Working days: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday



Appendix II: Interview guide and questions

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS	1.	What is your profession?
	2.	What is your history in sport? - Are/were you an athlete/coach/judge/referee?
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELITE SPORT POLICY SYSTEM IN SLOVENIA	3.	What, if any influence did the organisation of sport during Yugoslavia have on development of sport in independent Slovenia?
	4.	How has the sport system developed since the independence of Slovenia? - How has Slovenia integrated in sport internationally and which international policies are adopted by Slovenia? - What were the main challenges Slovenia faced when establishing its own system for elite sport? What were the main changes in the (elite) sport system in independent Slovenia that you have witnessed?
SPLISS BASED QUESTIONS	PILLAR 1	
	5.	Please describe the financing of the elite sport in Slovenia. - What are the challenges of public funding distribution in elite sport? - Do you think there is enough public funding allocated for elite sport?
	PILLAR 2	
	6.	What is the organisational structure of the elite sport system in Slovenia? - Centralised/decentralised approach? - Is the structure appropriate for a small state of Slovenia?
	7.	How would having an independent Ministry of Sport impact the sport system?
	8.	What are the main changes in the newly revised Sports Act?
	PILLAR 3	
	9.	What is the participation rate in physical activity in Slovenia?
	10.	What are the opportunities of children to participate in physical activities?
	PILLAR 4	
	11.	Please describe the talent identification system in Slovenia. - Is there a national-level talent identification system?
	PILLAR 5	
	12.	What support is offered to elite athletes during and after their sports career? - Is there financial support provided? - Are there any other types of support provided? - Is there enough support offered to elite athletes?
	PILLAR 6	
	13.	What are sports facilities like in Slovenia? - Are there enough sports facilities? - What is the quality of sports facilities? - Which sports disciplines have national centres available?
PILLAR 7		
14.	Please describe the education/qualification process for sports coaches in Slovenia. - Is there a system in place for qualification of coaches from recreational to elite level?	
15.	Are there enough coaches in Slovene sport?	

	16.	Is the coaching role respected? - Does the income enable a good standard of living?
	PILLAR 8	
	17.	To what extent is the national competition system competitive with the competitions on the international level?
	18.	What sports events/competitions are generally organised in Slovenia and why? - What is the rationale for organisation of such events/competitions?
	PILLAR 9	
	19.	What is the significance of scientific research for elite sport in Slovenia? - Is there a national research centre for elite sport in Slovenia?
SLOVENIA'S SPORT RELATED CHARACTERISTICS AND SPECIFICITIES	20.	What are the links between the scientific research and coaches? - Is there an established coordination between the two? - Do coaches use scientific findings in their coaching practices?
	21.	Which factors do you consider deterministic for success of Slovene athletes internationally?
	22.	What is your opinion on transparency in terms of individuals having multiple roles within the sport sector in Slovenia, e.g. athlete, coach, judge/referee, manager, lecturer, policymaker etc.?
	23.	What do you think are important aspects of Slovene culture? - Is sport an important part of Slovene culture? - How important is elite sporting success for Slovene culture and society?
	24.	How does Slovene sports history influence present attitudes towards sport and sports disciplines?
	25.	In what ways is sport a part of national identity of Slovenes and why?
	26.	Which sports can be considered as national sports with cultural significance for Slovenes and why?
	27.	In what ways do climate and geographical characteristics of Slovenia impact the sporting activity and success of Slovenes?
	28.	What is the role of media in elite sport in Slovenia? In what ways media influence public opinion regarding elite sporting achievements?

Appendix III: Participant information sheet



Development and Effectiveness of the Elite Sport Policy in Slovenia in the Post-Independence Period

Adult Participant Information Sheet

Investigators Details:

Main Investigator: Carmen Astrid Horvat, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, LE11 3TU, Loughborough

Email address: c.a.horvat@lboro.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Dr Carolynne Mason, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, LE11 3TU, Loughborough

Email address: C.L.J.Mason@lboro.ac.uk

Contact number: +44 (0)1509 226378

Dr Joe Piggan, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, LE11 3TU, Loughborough

Email address J.J.Piggan@lboro.ac.uk

Contact number: +44 (0)1509 226377

We would like to invite you to take part in our study. Before you decide we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. One of our team will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study before making a decision if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research seeks to investigate the development and effectiveness of the elite sport policy system in Slovenia – a country small in size and population – in the post-independent period (1991 onwards). More specifically, it aims to describe Slovene elites sport policy system as a whole and how it operates; it traces and analyses the changes in the elite sport policy system in the independent Slovenia and then correspondingly relates them with the outcomes measured in terms of sporting results of Slovene athletes at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. This then represents the measurement of the level of effectiveness of the elite sport policy system, which is undertaken by adopting two analytical models – the SPLISS model and the bioecological model – with potential of being developed into a new model for analysis of elite sport policy for countries small in size and population.

Who is doing this research and why?

Carmen A. Horvat, a PhD student in Sport Policy and Management at Loughborough University will be conducting the research, supervised by Dr Carolynne Mason and Dr Joe Piggan. This study is part of a Student research project supported by Loughborough University.

Are there any exclusion criteria?

There are no exclusion criteria. However, participants must hold a Senior official role at various (national-level) sporting organisations in Slovenia and/or they must be athletes that have represented independent Slovenia at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games.

What will I be asked to do?

Participants will be asked to participate in a one time, one-on-one interview, taking between 45-90 minutes.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

Yes. After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have if you are happy to participate we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form, however if at any time, before, during or after the sessions you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact the main investigator. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

However, once the results of the study are aggregated/published/dissertation has been submitted (expected to be by December 2018), it will not be possible to withdraw your individual data from the research.

Will I be required to attend any sessions and where will these be?

There will be one interview, at your preferred time, in a public place and/or at your place of work.

How long will it take?

The interview should take between 45-90 minutes.

What personal information will be required from me?

The only personal information we require are your position in the sport organisation and age.

Are there any disadvantages or risks in participating?

Participating in the interview does not pose any risks to you.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. All your information will remain anonymous. To do so, place of employment and numbers will be used to code individual participants (senior official 1 at Olympic Association).

I have some more questions; who should I contact?

Either myself (Carmen A. Horvat): c.a.horvat@lboro.ac.uk

Or Dr Carolynne Mason: C.L.J.Mason@lboro.ac.uk

Or Dr. Joe Piggin: J.J.Piggin@lboro.ac.uk

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results from the study will be published in a PhD thesis. There is also a possibility of results being published in academic articles and presented at academic conferences.

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Ms Jackie Green, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee: Ms J Green, Research Office, Hazlerigg Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222423. Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/committees/ethics-approvals-human-participants/additionalinformation/codesofpractice/>

Appendix IV: Participant informed consent sheet (English version)



Development and Effectiveness of the Elite Sport Policy in Slovenia in the Post-Independence Period

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

Taking Part

Please initial box

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study, have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I agree to take part in this study. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio or video).

Use of Information

I understand that all the personal information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others or for audit by regulatory authorities.

I understand that anonymised quotes may be used in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.

I agree for the data I provide to be securely archived at the end of the project.

I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Carmen A. Horvat.

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Carmen A. Horvat
Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Appendix V: Participant information sheet and informed consent form (Slovene version)



RAZISKAVA ZA DOKTORSKO NALOGO

Sem Carmen Horvat, študentka doktorskega študija smeri *Sport Management and Policy* (Športni management in politika) na Univerzi v Loughborough v Angliji.

In sicer, naslov mojega doktorskega dela je *Development and effectiveness of elite sport system in post-independent Slovenia*. (Razvoj in učinkovitost vrhunškega športnega sistema v neodvisni Sloveniji). Cilji naloge zajemajo predstavitev sistema za vrhunski šport v Sloveniji in njegovo delovanje, analizo sprememb športne zakonodaje v času po osamosvojitvi Slovenije in povezanost le-teh sprememb z rezultati slovenskih športnikov na olimpijskih igrah. Pri obdelavi podatkov bosta uporabljena dva analitična modela; model SPLISS in bioekološki model. Prvi model še ni bil uporabljen na način, ki vključuje zgodovinske parametre, medtem ko drugi model še ni bil adaptiran za športno področje. Združitev teh dveh modelov predstavlja izziv, hkrati pa ponuja možnost razvoja novega modela za analizo športne zakonodaje v državah, ki so majhne po velikosti in številu prebivalstva.

Zaradi vaših poklicnih in osebnih izkušenj na področju športa v Sloveniji, vas vabim k sodelovanju v raziskavi. Sodelovanje poteka v obliki intervjuja in zaradi vprašanj odprtega tipa traja med eno in dve uri. Vaše odgovore bom beležila/snemala.

Vprašanja se navezujejo na različne teme, kot so: razvoj športa, sodobna struktura športnega sistema, učinkovitost, posebnosti slovenskega okolja in vprašanja, ki izhajajo iz modela SPLISS (financiranje, organizacija, odkrivanje talenta, podpora športnikom med in po karieri, športni objekti, usposabljanje in delo trenerjev, mednarodna in nacionalna tekmovanja ter znanstvene raziskave v športu).

Vaši osebni podatki, pridobljeni skozi raziskavo, so zaupni in varovani z osebno šifro ter tako nedostopni drugim osebam. Če se katero vprašanje ne navezuje na vašo stroko ali pa nanj ne želite odgovoriti, lahko vprašanja preskočite. Na vašo željo lahko intervju tudi prekinete, sicer pa predvidevam, da sodelovanje v raziskavi ne bo povzročilo nobenih posebnih nevšečnosti.

SOGLASJE O SODELOVANJU V RAZISKAVI

Razvoj in učinkovitost vrhunškega športnega sistema v neodvisni Sloveniji

Podpisani izjavljam, da zavestno in prostovoljno sodelujem v zgoraj navedeni raziskavi, ter da:

- Sem bil seznanjen o namenu, načrtih in metodah raziskave,
- Sem bil na primeren in razumljiv način poučen o sodelovanju v raziskavi,
- Sem imel možnost podati dodatna vprašanja o sodelovanju v raziskavi,
- Lahko kadarkoli prekinem sodelovanje v raziskavi brez navedbe razloga,
- Razumem, da je raziskava oblikovana za znanstvene namene ter so bili vsi procesi pridobivanja informacij odobreni s strani Univerze v Loughborough in so v skladu z etičnimi zakoni o pridobivanju informacij,
- Se strinjam, da se anonimni citati uporabijo v različnih publikacijah (poročilih, akademskih člankih, prispevkih na konferencah itd.),
- Se strinjam, da se moje avtorske pravice v zvezi s to raziskavo prenesejo na Carmen Astrid Horvat.

Dovoljujem, da se zbrani podatki obdelajo za namen raziskave ter uporabijo v okviru njenega namena.

IME IN PRIIMEK: _____

TRENUTNO DELOVNO MESTO: _____

DATUM: _____

PODPIS SODELUJOČEGA: _____

PODPIS RAZISKOVALCA: _____

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