

## HOW TO CREATE A NATIONAL SPORT STRATEGY: A SUBSTANTIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Due to its numerous positive effects on individuals and society as a whole, sport has become an important socio-economic subsystem of the national environment. To regulate, develop, and monitor the impact of sport at national, regional, and local levels, countries often develop and adopt various strategic documents, which can be found under the name of national program or strategy for sport development at the national level. Due to the importance of understanding the substantial comprehensiveness of national sports strategies (NSS) and the precision of the methodological-processual approach, the purpose of the present paper is to present a methodological and substantive view of the process of creating NSS and to develop a comprehensive concept (model) that appropriately places the substantive part in the phases of the process.

**Method:** The methodology of writing conceptual research papers was used. This approach provides a bridge or link between different concepts and scientific disciplines. The methodological approach was the “model paper” which aims to provide a theoretical framework that predicts relationships between concepts. A model paper identifies connections between constructs and introduces new constructs.

**Findings:** The development of the substantive model for the preparation of the NSS revealed that the comprehensive sport system at the national level can be understood within the framework of five substructures (financial, organizational, developmental,

material, and program) that contribute significantly to the development and implementation of activities related to sport and physical activity. They are interconnected and interdependent and are surrounded by a so-called integrity framework that protects the sport system from the deviations of modern society. The methodological process model reveals that for the implementation of the process of NSS preparation, the most appropriate is the strategic management methodology, which enables accurate and efficient management of planning, organization, implementation, and control of the NSS. The combination of both perspectives (substantive and methodological) enables the development of a comprehensive concept (model) of NSS preparation.

**Conclusions:** The developed concept (model) of the NSS preparation comprehensively covers the issue of the NSS preparation management and is dialectical, open, flexible, and repeatable, enabling future users to manage the NSS preparation in a substantive-holistic and process-effective manner.

**Keywords:** Methodological perspective, national sport strategy, preparation, substantive perspective.

## KAKO OBLIKOVATI NACIONALNO ŠPORTNO STRATEGIJO: VSEBINSKI IN METODOLOŠKI POGLED

### IZVLEČEK

**Namen:** Šport je zaradi številnih pozitivnih učinkov na posameznika in družbo kot celoto postal pomemben družbenoekonomski podsistem nacionalnih okolij. Za urejanje, razvoj in spremljanje učinkov športa na nacionalni ravni, države pogosto pripravljajo in sprejemajo različne strateške dokumente, ki jih imenujejo nacionalni program oziroma strategija razvoja športa na nacionalni ravni. Zaradi pomembnosti razumevanja vsebinske celovitosti nacionalnih strategij športa (v nadaljevanju: NŠS) in natančnosti metodološko-procesnega pristopa je namen prispevka predstaviti metodološki in vsebinski pogled na proces oblikovanja NŠS in razviti celovit koncept (model), ki bo vsebinski del ustrezno umestil v faze procesa.

**Metoda:** Uporabljena je bila metodologija pisanja konceptualnih raziskovalnih člankov. Ta pristop zagotavlja povezavo med različnimi koncepti in znanstvenimi disciplinami. Metodološki pristop je bil »razvoj modela«, ki poskuša zgraditi teoretični okvir, ki napoveduje odnose med koncepti. »Razvoj modela« opredeljuje povezave med konstrukti in uvaja nove konstrukte.

**Ugotovitve:** Razvoj vsebinskega modela za pripravo NŠS je pokazal, da je celovit sistem športa na državni ravni mogoče razumeti v okviru petih podstruktur (finančne, organizacijske, razvojne, materialne in programske), ki pomembno prispevajo k razvoju in izvajanju dejavnosti, povezanih s športom in telesno aktivnostjo. Podstrukture so med seboj povezane in soodvisne ter obdane z integritetnim okvirom, ki varuje športni

*sistem pred deviacijami, povezanimi s sodobno družbo. Metodološko-procesni model razkriva, da je za izvajanje procesa priprave NŠS najprimernejša metodologija strateškega menedžmenta, ki omogoča natančen in učinkovit management načrtovanja, organizacije, izvajanja in nadzora NŠS. Povezava obeh vidikov (vsebinskega in metodološkega) omogoča razvoj celovitega koncepta (modela) priprave in uveljavitve NŠS.*

**Zaključek:** Razvit koncept (model) priprave NŠS celovito pokriva problematiko menedžmenta priprave NŠS ter je dialektičen, odprt, fleksibilen in ponovljiv. Prihodnjim uporabnikom omogoča, da pripravo NŠS vodijo vsebinsko celostno in procesno učinkovito.

**Ključne besede:** metodološki pogled, nacionalna strategija športa, priprava, vsebinski pogled.

## INTRODUCTION

Sport has many definitions and can be defined in different ways, depending on the different views and orientations of the author of the definition (Hudson, 2003). However, no definition of sport is so complete that it does not leave out some important function of sport. In 1992, the Committee for the Development of Sport at the Council of Europe adopted the European Charter on Sport, which defines the key principles regarding the general development of sport. This document provides a definition of sport that often appears in the strategic guidelines of different national government documents and defines sport as: “*all forms of physical activity, the purpose of which, through occasional or regular participation, is to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being, create social relationships or obtain results in competitions of all levels*” (Council of Europe, 1992).

Sport enriches the quality of peoples’ lives and has an important influence on society through its various impacts. Sport can be understood as a social, economic, and media phenomenon (Larive, 1994; De Knop et al., 1996). Its role and position in society are contingent upon the level of societal needs development, the perceived value attributed to sporting activities, and the prevailing social attitudes towards them (Tušak & Tušak, 2001). The social role of sport is based on the scientific evidence on the significance of sport for health (physical, mental, and social), socialization and economy (Vuori et al., 1995). Sports activity has various functions and goals, such as winning a competition, learning sports skills, relaxation, maintaining health, rehabilitation, generating financial income, entertainment and, above all, a way of life that contains the substantive concept of “*quality of life*” (Chelladurai, 1992; De Knop et al., 1996). Among the most important functions or goals of sport are those that represent benefits on the most general level: such as physical, mental, social, and material.

In developed countries, lifestyle changes have led to increased subcutaneous fat (Strel, Kovač, & Jurak, 2004), a greater proportion of overweight people (Currie et al., 2004; Wedderkopp et al., 2004; Ng et al., 2014), and reduced physical capabilities, particularly in terms of endurance and strength (Beunen et al., 1992; Boreham & Riddoch, 2001; Craigie et al., 2009). According to the Global Obesity Observatory (Lobstein et al., 2023) in 2020 more than 2.6 billion people were overweight ( $\text{BMI} \geq 25 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ) and 0.99 billion people were obese ( $\text{BMI} \geq 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ), accounting for 38% of the global population. Global estimates indicate that by 2035, more than 4 billion people will be overweight or obese ( $\text{BMI} \geq 25 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ), accounting for over 50% of the world’s population. The rising prevalence of obesity is also expected to be steepest among

children and adolescents (ages 5 to 19 years old), ranging from 10% to 20% of the global boy's population and from 8% to 18% of the girl's population from 2020 to 2035. The study by Craigie et al. (2009) provides good evidence that 12-year-olds classified as overweight or obese according to their BMI had more than a 4 times higher risk of becoming obese by the age of 33 than their normal-weight counterparts. Projected figures for the economic impact of overweight and obesity show that the \$1.96 trillion cost in 2020 will increase to more than \$4 trillion in 2035, based on constant US\$ value. Here, the economic impact includes both medical costs of treating obesity and its consequences and the impact of a high BMI on economic productivity, to which a high BMI contributes absenteeism, presenteeism (reduced productivity during work) and early retirement or death. The economic impact is estimated to reduce global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2.4%, rising to 2.9% by 2035, which is comparable to the impact of COVID-19 on the global GDP shrinking in 2020. The problem of an overweight population is most acute in the entire American region (32% of men and 37% of women) and in the European region (26% of men and 28% of women). These trends highlight risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, which are one of the most common causes of mortality.

An additional economic risk is represented by the demographic characteristics of the developed world (Zubiashvili & Zubiashvili, 2021). For example, the shape of the demographic pyramid of the European Union can be described as a “constrictive pyramid”, which is characteristic of developed societies with low birth and death rates and a relatively elderly population. The population aged 15–65 represents almost two thirds (63.9%) of the total population, while more than one-fifth (21.1%) of the total population is over 65 years of age. Children up to 14 years old represent only 15% of the population. Trends show accelerated population aging and much longer life expectancies in the future (EUROPOP, 2023). The above indicates a triple risk effect on future public financial expenditures. We can expect (1) higher expenditures from pension funds, (2) lower revenues to state budgets (less active population), and (3) higher public costs related to the health risk of the elderly population.

Even more worrying is the fact that a sedentary lifestyle and increasingly prolonged periods of physical inactivity are insidiously and aggressively taking over modern people's lives – at school, at work, at home, and even during leisure time. It may be difficult for many to comprehend and accept, but physical inactivity is becoming the foremost and most significant threat to health in today's society (Pišot, 2022).

The connection between physical activity in general and health is well documented in number of studies (Cabane & Lechner, 2015; Humphreys et al.,

2013; Marques et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2018). Kohl and Cook (2013) state that physical inactivity is a key determinant of health across the lifespan and that a lack of activity increases the risk of heart disease, colon and breast cancer, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, osteoporosis, anxiety, depression, and others diseases. The positive impact on individuals directly expands to economic and social conditions of the community: for example, lower total healthcare costs generated at the state level (Coughlan et al., 2021; Prudky, 2022). Sports participation also has a positive association with the *subjective wellbeing* of the population, as measured by happiness (Downward & Rasciute, 2011). Given that sport has different functions and goals, different sports activities and programs (elite sports programs, developmental sports programs, sports programs for everyone, etc.) have also been developed, which are adapted to fulfil these functions and goals of the participants. One of the key functions of elite sports is the *promotion of the country and the nation*; sport is an important factor in *national identity and national identification* (Kovač et al., 2004). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, national identification found new means of expression, with sports and mass media playing a key role. Major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and World Championships, help individuals become aware of their membership in the nation-state (Hobsbawm, 1993). Public expenditures on high-performance sport are typically justified on the grounds that successes in elite sports produce such virtuous outcomes as the “feel good effect” and enhanced *national pride*, a positive *national image abroad*, and increased *sports participation among citizens* (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). Kolar (2010) found that all effects – both those that measure *quantitative growth* (e.g., the number of athletes in national competition systems, the share of the population active in sports) and those that measure *qualitative development* (e.g., the number of medals at major international competitions) – of sports are statistically significantly related to each other, either directly or indirectly. An analysis of the connections between the effects shows the extreme importance of holistic treatment and simultaneous public investment in all aspects of the growth and development of the field of sports (Škorić & Obadić, 2022). The analysis also showed that the growth and development of the qualitative and quantitative effects of sports activity are explained to a large extent by all aspects of *sports financing* (public and private expenditures), which are positively correlated. Furthermore, each euro of public financial expenditure stimulates an additional 5 euros of private expenditure on sports products and services (Jurak, Bednarik, Kolenc, & Kolar, 2010). Nazarov, Kalantarly, Hajiyev, Hasanova, and Hashimova (2023) argue that the global sports industry is valued between

400 and 500 billion US\$, experiencing an annual growth of 6–8%. It has become a significant source of revenue for state and local budgets.

Sport, owing to its many positive effects on both individuals and society, has become an important socio-economic subsystem of national environments. To regulate, develop, and monitor the effects of sports at the national, regional, and local level, states often develop and adopt various strategic documents. These are often known as national programs (e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, Ireland) or strategies (e.g., Australia, United Kingdom) for the development of sport at the national level. The documents define different development time periods, but in principle the applied strategic period is defined between eight (e.g., Croatia) and ten years (e.g., Slovenia, Australia). National sport strategies (NSS) usually address sport comprehensively, and in this way emphasize the intertwining of sport with various socio-economic areas (e.g. healthcare, education, economy, environment, tourism, culture, and transportation). Therefore, they define strategic goals and measures that integrate sports with other social areas, because only in this way can they ensure the conditions for the comprehensive development of sports, physical activity, and promoting a healthy lifestyle among citizens. NSS are intended primarily for public, state, regional and local administrations, educational organizations at all levels, non-governmental sports organizations in the entire hierarchy, and are of a principled, orientational, and political nature.

In accordance with what was stated in the introductory chapter, the purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework of creating NSS. The subsequent sections will initially establish sport as a public good, serving as the essential foundation for public funding of sports and physical activities. Then, the content and methodological elements of the NSS will be defined.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

We adopted the methodology proposed by Gilson and Goldberg (2015) for writing a conceptual paper, aiming to establish a connection between distinct concepts and scientific disciplines like public affairs, strategic management, and kinesiology. The method approach used was the “model paper” approach, which seeks to construct a theoretical framework that predicts relationships between concepts, identify connections between constructs, introduce new constructs, or explains why elements of a process lead to a particular outcome (Jaakkola, 2020).



Through a literature review, we have defined five key aspects: (1) the risks associated with contemporary lifestyles and the undeniable positive impact of sport and physical activities on both individuals and society as a whole, (2) the significance and relevance of NSS for nations, (3) the role of sport as a public good, (4) the essential components of NSS design, and (5) the utilization of strategic management methodologies and tools in the preparation of NSS. In the end, everything is connected in a comprehensive conceptual framework.

## SPORT AS A PUBLIC GOOD

Since the benefits of sport for society are greater than the benefits for the individual (the person who is involved in sport), sport is classified as a *public good* and is therefore in the *public interest*. According to Andrijašević (1999), a public good is an economic activity that more or less contributes to the well-being of each individual and society as a whole. Public goods are characterized by the *principle of non-competition* in consumption, which means that when an individual consumes a good, this does not hinder others from consuming the same good. For public goods is also characteristic *principle of in-eliminability*, which states that the consumption of the good cannot be disabled or prohibited; i.e., it is not possible to limit the benefits of the commodity to only a select group of individuals. The state (government) solves the problem of in-eliminability by collecting enough money through taxes to co-finance the optimal amount of public goods. There is a public interest in the provision of such goods, which ensures public financing. Examples of such goods include healthcare, education, and social insurance services. The inclusion of these goods in public financing can be explained by the *paternalism* of the state, where the state decides what is good for its citizens, and *specific egalitarianism*, whereby the state opposes too much social stratification in the provision of these goods and therefore provides them through the public sector (Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak & Rajšter, 2010). The paternalistic aspect is understood as the state's legitimate attempt to influence people's behavior with the intention that their decisions will improve their lives and that these people's lives will be longer, healthier, and better (Thaler & Sunstein, 2022). through these efforts, the state endeavors to encourage people to engage in sports and make productive use of their free time, thereby promoting better health, productivity, and resilience against the adverse effects of modern society, such as sedentary lifestyle, substance abuse, crime, and excessive digital media consumption. These are functions of sport that are beneficial for society as a whole. Athletes and sports professionals

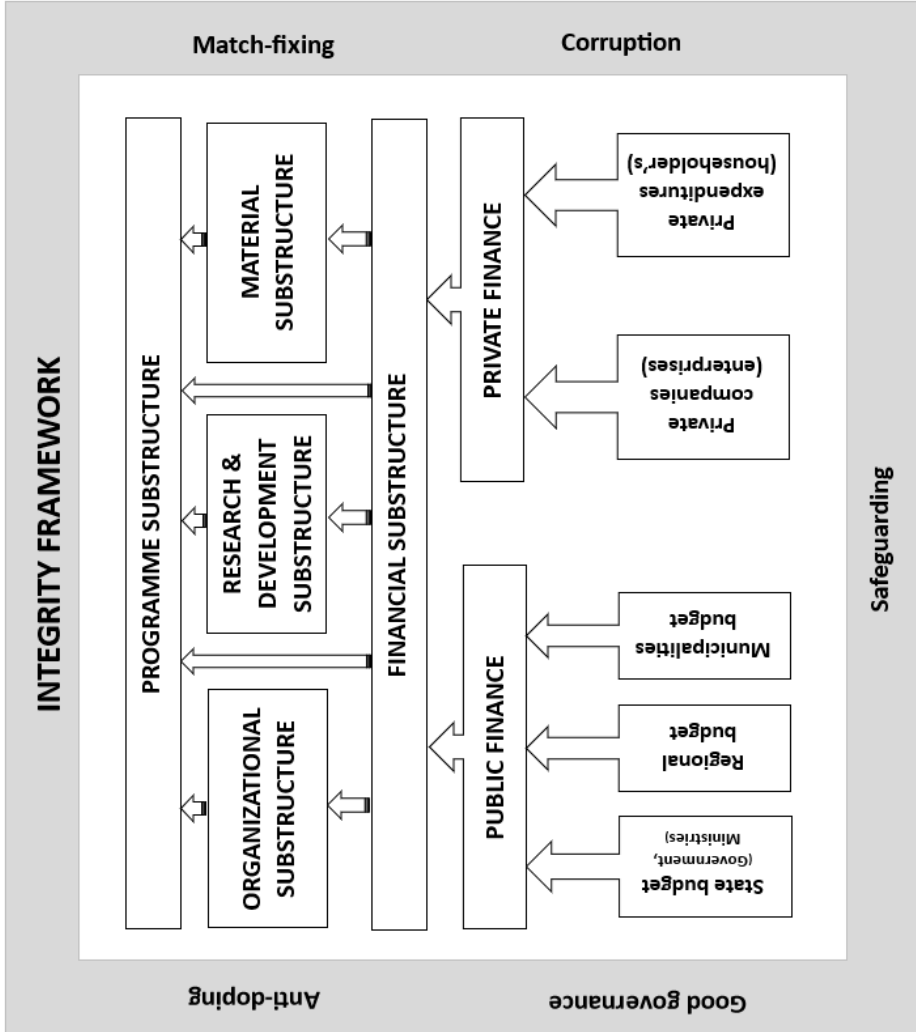


working in the field of sports are primarily concerned with the accessibility and affordability of sports, rather than the source of funding. State co-financing ensures that sports are more affordable and thus more accessible (Bednarik, Simoneti, Kolenc, & Šugman, 2000). Several authors have also demonstrated the positive impact of governmental (public) funding of sports on performance in international competitions (Škorić & Obadić, 2019; 2022; Pauna, Pintea, Lazar, & Maiar, 2020), as well as on life expectancy and population health (Pauna et al., 2020). For all the above reasons, sports represent a public good should therefore be co-financed from public finances at all levels; national, regional, and local.

## THE CONTENT PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL SPORT STRATEGIES

The content perspective of the NSS is related to those segments of the comprehensive structure (system) of sports that have a significant impact on its growth and development. The entire field of sport can be divided into five substructures of sport (Kolar, Bednarik, Kovač, & Jurak, 2010), which have an important influence on the development of sport in all types of environments (national, regional, local): financial substructure, organizational substructure, research and development substructure, material substructure, and program substructure. Figure 1 shows the five substructures, as well as their interconnections, influences, and interdependencies.

Figure 1: Comprehensive sport structure (system) and its substructures (substantive perspective)



## Financial substructure

One of the fundamental substructures of the sports system is the financial substructure, which consists of *public* (state, regional, municipality or local budget expenditures) and *private expenditures* (private company and household expenditures) for sports and physical activity. The financial substructure provides the basic conditions for the implementation of sports activities by providing financial resources for the operation of all other substructures or subsystems of sports. The presented comprehensive financial substructure of sports is consistent with the European model of sports financing, developed by Andreff et al. (1994; 2009) which enables a comparison of the shares and scope of public financial expenditures for sports between individual countries. The average structure of the European model of sports finance consists of 36.2% public expenditures (government sports budget: 11.9%; local authorities' sport budget: 24.3%) and 63.8% private expenditures (household expenditures: 49.7%; company expenditures: 14.1%) for sports and related activities (Eurostat, 2022). In 2021, public expenditures across the EU on recreational and sporting goods and services amounted to €56 billion or 0.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP). The highest shares of expenditure on recreational and sporting services in GDP were recorded in Hungary (1.8%), Estonia (1.6%), the Netherlands and Sweden (both 1.2%), and Luxembourg (1.1%), and, among EFTA countries, in Iceland (3.3%). The lowest shares in total expenditure were observed in Ireland (0.3%), and Slovakia (0.4%) (Eurostat, 2022). Public expenditures represent an important part of the means for financing the operation and implementation of sports programs of non-governmental sports organizations (NGOs), but depending on the development of these organizations, they represent different shares in the structure of their revenues. Jurak, Andreff, Popović, Jakšić, and Bednarik (2014) found that the dependence on public financial revenues is highest (31.6% of the revenue structure) in grassroots NGOs, somewhat lower in semi-professional NGOs (27.5% in the revenue structure) and the lowest in professional NGOs (23.6% of the revenue structure). Given that the total average income of grassroots NGOs (median around €3000) is approximately 12 times lower than that of semi-professional NGOs (median around €35,000) and 200 times lower than that of professional NGOs (median around €600,000), it can be inferred that any reduction in public financial revenues would pose a greater threat to the operation of grassroots NGOs (which represent the majority of all NGOs) compared to semi-professional or professional NGOs. The latter obtain the majority of their funds from the market (sales revenues, TV rights, membership fees, sponsorships, etc.) and, due to their professional structures, size and

available resources, are much more flexible and able to find alternative sources of funds than grassroots NGOs. On average, EU countries allocate €124 per year of public funds per inhabitant to activities related to sports and recreation, with large differences between countries (e.g., €302/inhabitant in Sweden and €23/inhabitant in Bulgaria). From an economic perspective, public financial expenditures on the sports market act as a booster and multiplier, as they make sports (mainly the consumption of sports services/programs) cheaper and more accessible, which in turn encourages greater participation of the population and consequently, greater sales of sports products (sports clothes and equipment). The aforementioned has a positive impact on (1) the operations of companies in the sports industry, (2) the financing of sports organizations and (3) the tax inflow into local and national budgets (Jurak et al., 2010; Nazarov et al., 2023).

### **Organizational substructure**

The next important substructure of the sports system is the organizational substructure. A sports organization is a social entity involved in the sport industry; it is goal-oriented, with a consciously structured activity system and relatively identifiable boundary (Eksteen, 2014). The discussion about the structural characteristics of sports organizations has considered various kinds of organizations among those existing in the world of sports: (1) public, private and voluntary organizations; (2) for-profit and non-profit organizations; (3) organizations producing sporting goods; (4) organizations delivering sporting activities; (5) organizations creating competitive sports opportunities and (6) broadcasting sports events as well as many other organizations related to the sports industry (Bednarik et al., 2013). According to Gómez, Opazo and Marti (2008), sports organizations are all connected to sporting activities, differing in their goals and means, but all serving the overarching mission of promoting and developing sports in society. While public sports organizations (ministries, regions, municipalities, educational institutions, and other public entities) primarily play supportive and regulative roles (financing, providing sports infrastructure, knowledge development and dissemination, and creating regulative formal rules), sports activities (or sports programs) are mainly carried out in the voluntary sector (societies, clubs, national and other sports associations/federations, National Olympic Committees), and partially in private companies (gyms, wellness centers, and ski resorts), as well as in public sports organizations (public sports schools). Gómez et al. (2008) called organizations that primarily deliver sport programs “sport delivery entities” and public organizations

“sport governing bodies”. Public and voluntary sports organizations are mainly non-profit organizations, while the private ones are mostly for-profit organizations. The main task of the national sport organizational substructure is to establish and develop an organizational structure that enables (1) the implementation of all forms of *sports activities* (programs), (2) the designing and organizing of *national competition systems*, (3) *integration* into the international sports environment (European and international sport federations), (4) the *establishment of general conditions* for the development of sports in the country and (5) *promotion* of sport and physical activity.

### Research and development substructure

The research and development substructure is the substructure of the comprehensive system of sport that enables (1) the achievement of a national sporting competitive advantage in the international sporting arena, (2) ensures the humanization and greater safety of sporting activities, (3) increases the quality of work with athletes and the physically active population in sport activities and (4) enables the monitoring of the effects of sport on individuals and society as a whole through the development and use of information and communication technologies. The main tasks of the research and development substructure are therefore related to (1) the comprehensive development of *knowledge* in the field of sports, which is in the narrower sense related to the education, training, and licensing of experts working in various sports professions and, in a broader sense, to perform research work that enables the development of new methods and approaches in ensuring excellence at the applied level. The research and development substructure is also responsible for (2) the establishment of an *information system* that enables the collection, processing and evaluation of key data related to (a) the performance of athletes and sports organizations, (b) talent identification, (c) the determination of the general status and trends of the morphological and motor development of children and youth in a country, (d) the state and the development of sports infrastructure and equipment and (e) the economic effects of sports and sports-related activities (sports competitions, sports tourism, etc.) on the national, regional, and municipality levels. The implementation of tasks of the research and development substructure is mainly in the domain of higher education and scientific-research institutions in the field of sports in cooperation with other organizational segments of the educational system (primary and secondary schools), national sports federations and the National Olympic Committee.

## Material substructure

An important factor in sports activities is also the material substructure (Sallis, Prochaska & Taylor, 2000), which is represented by all *sports infrastructure* and its *equipment*. Dallmeyer, Wicker and Breuer (2018) argue that consistent investment in sports infrastructure is key for the government to promote population participation in sports and physical activity. The term “sports infrastructure” encompasses all indoor and outdoor facilities for sports and physical activities, including (1) events sports facilities, (2) training sports facilities, (3) school sports facilities, (4) indoor and outdoor swimming pools, (5) outdoor training and competition areas (athletic, football stadiums, ski slopes, etc.), (6) multi-purpose outdoor sports areas, (7) outdoor equipped urban sports areas (outdoor fitness centers, skating areas, futsal playgrounds and maintained natural swimming pools) and (8) other natural sports areas (running paths, hiking trails, etc.). A special segment of the infrastructure related to physical activity is also (8) the organized and safe urban network of bicycle paths, which enable the population to exercise daily in the sense of sustainable and healthy daily migration (commute to work or school, and other daily migrations). All the listed types of sports infrastructure and the possibilities of its safe use (equipment) are a fundamental condition for sports and physical activity of all categories of the population, and they also have a direct impact on the development of tourist destinations (active tourism, ski tourism, sports events, etc.) and thus on the economic effects of sport and physical activity. A number of studies have also shown that a proximity to sports space is associated with an increase in physical activities and has a positive impact on population health (Huston, Evenson, Bors & Gizlice, 2003; Roux et al., 2007).

## Program substructure

The program substructure is represented by *various types of sports programs*, which are the substantive basis for sports and physical activity and also the most visible part of sport. Program substructure is generally represented by professionally organized and managed sports and physical exercise, known by the term “*organized sports programs*” (the exception is unorganized sports recreation). Individual forms of sports and physical activity have different goals (as mentioned in introduction section) and, in terms of programs, are tailored to different groups of people, their abilities (knowledge, skills, attributes, and

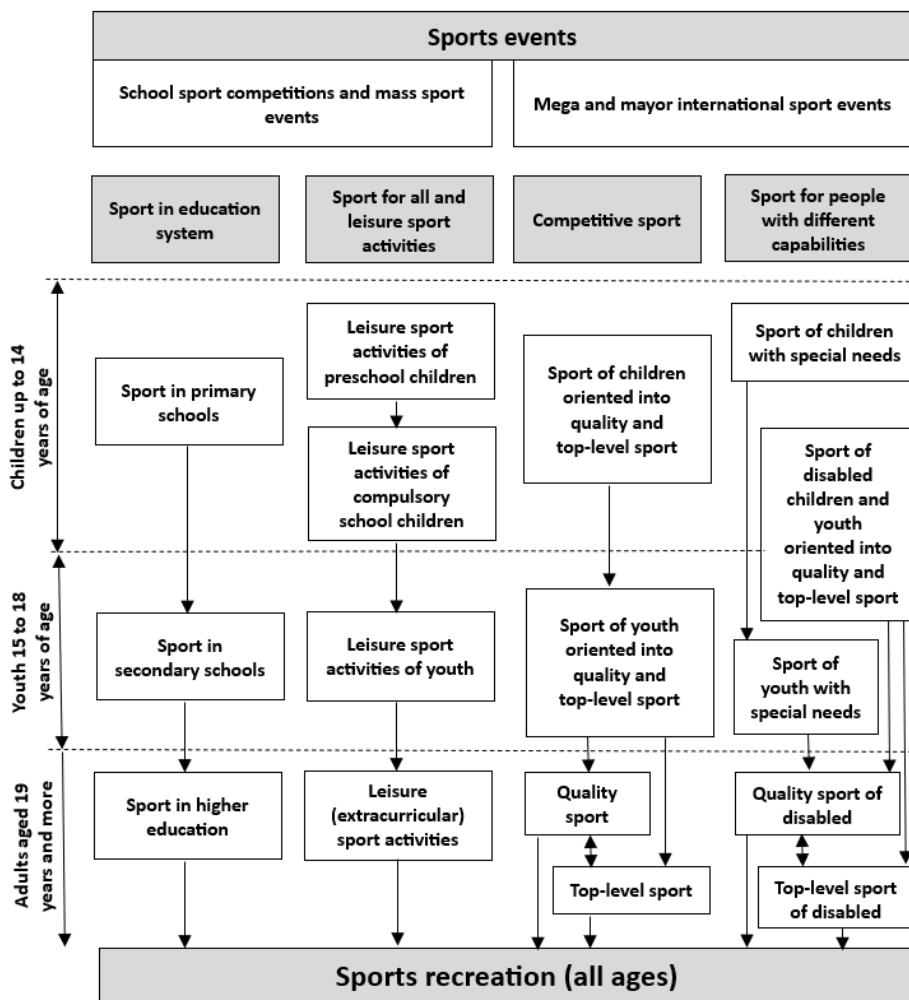
motivation), and their age. For an easier overall understanding of the sports program substructure, refer to Figure 2. As depicted, the entire program substructure of sport can be divided at the highest level into five types of sports programs, which coincide relatively well with the modern division of sport according to Kristan (2002) and Guo (2022). Thus, the program substructure of sports includes sports in the education system, sports for all, and leisure sport activities, competitive sports, sports for people with different capabilities and sports recreation. Among the main basic goals of all organized forms of sports activity are *education for sports*, a *healthy and fun way of spending free time*, and the *motivation for an active lifestyle* in later periods by choosing organized or unorganized regular sports recreation.

*Sports in the education system* represent the only regular sports activities for the whole population of children and for a large proportion of young people in secondary and high schools. Thus, the extent and quality of sports programs in the education system (especially in primary schools) are of the utmost importance for a healthy morphological and motorically development, for the creation of a healthy lifestyle and for proper socialization of children and youth. One of the key channels for increasing activity during childhood and adolescence is schools. School-based sports tend to be compulsory, and so reduce the importance of self-selection. Schools not only provide opportunities for children to be physically active, but can also aid the development of sports skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for physical activity that can be carried into adulthood (Black, Johnston, Propper & Shields, 2019; Morton, Atkin, Corder, Suhreke, & Van Sluijs, 2016), and which reduce the prevalence of health risks in adulthood (Steele, Brage, Corder, Wareham & Ekelund, 2008). For these reasons, it is important that governments ensures that all children and young people in the education system receive the same quality and quantity of sports programs, regardless of which school and in which city or region they are included in the public or private school system. School-based physical education (sport) is the most widely available source to promote physical activity among young people. Therefore, every effort should be made to encourage schools to provide physical activities on a daily basis in all grades, inside or outside of the curriculum and in cooperation with partners from the local community, and to promote an interest in life-time physical activities in all pupils (EUPAG, 2008). An important factor for high-quality sports in schools is accessible, safe, and sufficient sports infrastructure. Attending a school with inadequate sports facilities not only limits opportunities for children and youth to be physically active but also leads to a statistically significant, decrease in the likelihood of physical activity participation during adulthood (Black et al., 2019). In financial terms,



sports within the education system usually fall under the purview of the ministry responsible for education.

Figure 2: Comprehensive sports programs substructures



*Sports for all* (also extracurricular sport activities) and *sports recreation* (also leisure sports activities) is a type of sports activity that is non-competitive in its content and pursues goals such as well-being, learning different movements, developing motor skills, socializing and getting healthy. These forms of sports programs are implemented either in an organized form (extracurricular sports activities at schools or sports clubs, gyms, etc.) or as unorganized forms of self-activity of people of all age groups (running, hiking, jogging, biking, going to the gym, skiing, etc.). This form of sports programs can also be found under the term "mass sports", which is characterized by the fact that participation is higher in clusters with a relatively higher standard of living and income, better opportunities for sports (accessibility and infrastructure), and higher public and household expenditures for sports (Nessel, 2021). The characteristics of mass sports permeate throughout society. While some games may have loose regulations, the primary emphasis in mass sports lies on participation and enjoyment (Guo, 2022). The most important indicator of (1) acceptance and awareness of the importance of physical activity for healthy lifestyle and better quality of life and (2) the success of sports promotion at the national level is the *share of the population actively engaged in sports activities*. The proportion of Europeans that never exercise or play sport has continuously risen over the past decade. Almost half of Europeans (46%) aged 15 or above report never exercising or playing sport, while 54% exhibit some degree of sports activity, with 14% participating infrequently, 40% engaging with at least some regularity, and 7% adhering to a consistent regimen (European Commission, 2018). However, there exist notable disparities in these figures across European nations. Finland, Sweden, and Denmark stand out with the highest rates of active population participation, with 87%, 85%, and 80% respectively. In contrast, Bulgaria, Greece, and Portugal present the lowest rates, with only 32% of their populations actively engaging in sports or exercise (European Commission, 2018). Extracurricular sport activities hold a special importance in increasing the level of physical activity among children and youth. Schools offering organized extra-curricular physical activity several times a week showed a higher proportion of pupils reporting daily participation in recess physical activity (Haug, Torsheim, & Samdal, 2009). Sport for all programs and extracurricular sports programs have been shown to decrease the prevalence of physical inactivity among young people, thereby reducing risk factors for cardiovascular disease, cancer, and osteoporosis in later life (WHO, 2004). These programs also contribute to a decreased BMI and lower rates of obesity (Craigie et al., 2009).

*Competitive sport* is that type of sport in which the participants, under the guidance of qualified coaches and teams of experts, systematically develop their abilities and, in the training process, transform and adapt them to the requirements and needs of the individual sport. Sport-specific motor knowledge and skills acquired during the training process are evaluated, in comparison with others, within the framework of national and international competition systems prescribed by the relevant national and international sports federations. The successfulness of an individual athlete is determined based on the results achieved in each competition. Within the competition systems, the competitions are divided and structured according to the age categories of the participants, which ensures that the result of the athlete does not primarily depend on the biological development associated with the age of an athlete, but in a dominant part on the effectiveness of the implemented training process and micro (athlete's family) and macro (accessibility of infrastructure and equipment for individual sports) socio-economic status. In Figure 2, competitive sport is divided into three (3) age categories and two (2) levels of competitive sport. The first two age categories are defined as *competitive sports for children and youth*, which, by participating in this form of sports programs, are aimed and directed at achieving quality and top-level sports results, while in the category of adult athletes are two types of competitive sports programs (*quality and top-level*). The development and prevalence of competitive sports in the country is usually perceived according to the number of *registered athletes* in all age categories, whereby a registered athlete is defined as any individual who has a recorded competitive result achieved at least within the national competition system up to the level of the national championship. For the needs of the accuracy of the collected data and the evaluation of individual sports federations and sports disciplines from the point of view of competitive sports prevalence, countries usually establish appropriate information systems that facilitate the relevant collection of data on registered athletes in all age categories (national register of "registered athletes"). The collected data on the number of registered athletes often represent an important criterion for the distribution of public money (financing of competitive sports), both at the national and local levels. In order to properly and above all objectively evaluate the achieved results of athletes within the international and national competition systems, countries establish a system of *athletes' categorization* based on the achieved result. The athlete categorization system usually categorizes athletes into different performance classes (categorization ranks) based on (1) the place achieved at the competition, (2) the rank (level) of the competition and (3) the competitiveness of the environment in which the result was achieved

(Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2022). On the basis of the obtained categorization rank, the athlete acquires status rights in the system of public finances and services (education, healthcare, employment, awards, etc.), which they can exercise as an individual during the duration of the individual categorization rank or after the end of their sports career (dual career opportunities). Data on the categorization rank of individual athletes are usually also collected in the national information system (national register of “categorized athletes”), which among other things, is also used by national and local authorities in the process of evaluating sports federations and sports disciplines, when they determine the amount of annual public funding of programs and the operating of sports federations and sports disciplines. Athletes in the adult category (Figure 2) who have higher international categorization ranks are classified in the “*top-level sports*” category, while all others with national categorization ranks and other registered athletes are classified in the “*quality sports*” category. In this way, the registration system represents a *quantitative parameter* that measures the prevalence of an individual sports discipline and, consequently, a sports federation and a categorization system, a *qualitative parameter* for measuring the successfulness (performance) of an individual sports discipline and, consequently, a sports federation in the national environment. Both criteria enable objective evaluation and relevant comparability between individual sports disciplines in prevalence (registration) and results achieved at (1) different levels of competitions, (2) between individual sports disciplines and in (3) different competitive environments (categorization) (Kolar, 2005). Nessel (2021) wrote that high elite (top-level) sports successes have a great impact on the development of sports and the recognition of the country and important external effects on the entire society; however, they do not require only good sports opportunities, but also depend to a large extent on public financial support (Škorić & Obadić, 2019).

*Sports for people with different capabilities* in all its forms has an important psychosocial effect, and it also enables participants in these programs to participate in various sports events (possibility of achieving top results and recreational events). This kind of programs are intended mainly for the preservation of motor abilities, health, revitalization, resocialization, entertainment, and competition of disabled people who voluntarily engage in sports. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, sports programs for people with different capabilities intertwined are with various social fields, the most important of which are healthcare and education. The sports activities of children and youth with special needs during the period of growing up are primarily aimed at adequate care for integration into everyday life. Success in sports activities

affects successful social integration, leading to a fuller and richer life. The forms of activity can be organized as sports training, competition and courses, as well as special programs for specific types of deficits or obstacles. This sports programs can take place both within the sports programs in the education system (schools for people with special needs or regular schools), as well as within the activities of the so-called Special Olympics World Games. In the field of competitive sports for people with special needs, the same guidelines apply as in the field of competitive sports. Some forms of competition in the sports of people with special needs are dominated by the distinct achievement of top-sport results (e.g., Paralympic sports, Deaflympics), while in other places more psychosocial aspects are in the foreground (e.g., Special Olympics World Games). Both of them focus on sports for athletes with a disability and are run by international non-profit organizations. Apart from that, the Special Olympics and the Paralympics differ in three main areas: (1) the disability categories of the athletes that they work with, (2) the criteria and philosophy under which athletes participate, and (3) the structure of their respective organizations (Special Olympics Australia, 2024). But there are also others forms of sports for the disabled under the umbrella of non-Paralympic sports. The aspirations and orientations of international sports authorities are to integrate as much as possible the training processes and competitions of disabled into the national sports federations of (relevant) sports disciplines, as well as the equal evaluation of the achieved competitive results and the resulting status rights of disabled athletes.

A special part of the sports program substructure is the programs related to the *organization of sports events*. Sports events are the main part of the organizational culture of sport with an impact on the promotion of the environment in which they take place (local, regional, and national), and on the development of tourism and other economies. At the same they are of great importance for the development and nurturing of sports culture as they can promote motivation for sport and physical activity and therefore represent the most important form of sports promotion. While the organization of *school sports competitions* is primarily the responsibility of the ministries responsible for education and/or sports, the organization of *competitions up to the level of national championships* in individual sports disciplines is the responsibility and competence of national sports federations. Organization of other sports events (international mass sports events, mega and major sports events) largely depends on the successful integration of all types of resources (financial, infrastructure, staff, etc.) of the state and local communities, national sports organizations, local sports clubs, the private tourism-economic

sector, and volunteers. The benefits of organizing sports events can be broadly divided into economic and non-economic benefits. *Economic benefits* represent the additional spending in the economy due to the organizations of sporting events, and *non-economic benefits* represent the socio-economic, promotional, sports, cultural, environmental, and infrastructural benefits that may arise from organized events (Kolar & Zaletel, 2013). *International sporting events* in the narrower sense include “*mega-sporting events*” (Olympic Games, European Games, World and European Football Cups) and “*major sporting events*” (World Championships, European Championships, World Cups, European Cups, Universiade, EYOF), but, in a broader sense, also competitions of *senior national teams and clubs competing in team sports* championship leagues, *international mass sports events* (e.g., recreational marathons, recreational triathlon) and *international sports congresses and symposia*. However, sporting success and sport events can also create positive arousal (Uhm, Lee, & Han, 2020) among spectators and television viewers, bringing different people together to celebrate (Green & Chalip, 1998) and socialize (Pfister, Mintert, & Lenneis, 2018), which can have a positive effect on the mental dimension of health (Storm & Jakobsen, 2024).

### Integrity framework

The comprehensive sport structure is framed within an integrity framework, which in a symbolic and practical sense protects the sports system from various deviations, which are all too often imposed from other social systems and appear at all levels of sports. In the context of understanding integrity in sport, this term can be perceived (1) as the *antithesis of corruption* (e.g., doping, match fixing, and event and/or sponsorship bribery), (2) as the *principle of good governance* (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Kihl, 2019), and (3) as a *safeguarding principle* that makes sport an inclusive, safe and fair environment for all participants (particularly for children and youth). The integrity framework focuses on morals, norms and values that help determine right or wrong in different contexts. The meaning of sport integrity incorporates both perspectives, where integrity relates to (1) ensuring honest competitions and outcomes (anti-doping, match-fixing), and (2) governance and management practices (good governance, safeguarding and corruption), representing a range of moral values and norms that should be respected by sport stakeholders and organizations in different contexts such as sporting and administrative behaviors, decision-making, and governance systems (Kihl, 2019). Pope

(1996) argued that “*the long-term success of integrity and the fight against corruption depends on comprehensive and not partial reforms*”, which means that the enforcement of integrity in the field of sport must be approached (1) comprehensively, (2) systematically, and from the (3) level of highest national sports authorities. The sports integrity system is also important to maintain the public’s trust in sport.

## METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL SPORT STRATEGIES

The methodological perspective for creation of the NSS is based on the *strategic management* approach, which recommends a series of steps in preparation of such documents (Kolar, Bednarik, Kovač, & Jurak, 2010). Even if there are many different definitions of *strategy*, the fundamental value of a strategy should be that it provides the organization with a way to coordinate activities, communication and decisions across groups and individuals towards achieving shared long-term goals (Mackay, Arevuo, Mackay, & Meadows, 2020). A strategy makes sure that an organization will go in the direction the strategy creators want it to go, that it will reach its goals on time, and create its own future (Williams, 2009). In contrast to the individual goals of an organization, the strategy is a comprehensive set of activities that respond to perceived challenges, whereby a good strategy has a core logical structure consisting of three elements: *diagnosis*, *guiding policies*, and *coherent activities* (Rumelt, 2013). *Strategic management* is intended for those who implement or want to implement the first step in the development and enforcement of strategic changes. It is also a tool for creating successful strategic decisions and consists of the processes of *analyzing* the organization and its environment, *planning* strategic orientations and *implementing* strategic changes. Strategic management skills are useful for all those who plan and manage organizations, regardless of the size and scope of the business, activity or sector of operation: private, public, or voluntary (Williams, 2009). Rigby and Bilodeau (2018) conducted a survey of 1,268 managers worldwide to identify the 25 most popular strategic management methods and the associated level of satisfaction with their use. They found that the number of tools and methods used in the strategic management process has had a marked negative trend over the last 15 years (16 methods used in 2002 and 7 methods used in 2017) and that *strategic planning* is still the most popular tool used worldwide in strategic management (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2018). Strategic planning is defined as a formalized and systematic strategic



process, with a high level of analytical stringency. Strategy formation occurs as a completely conscious process with controlled, rational thinking (Müller-Stewens, 2020). In addition to the above, it is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the process of planning does not end with the determination of strategies and appropriate strategic measures, but also includes the path to their realization (i.e. action plan). In this way, strategic planning is part of strategy formulation while *operational planning* is part of strategy implementation. The concept (model) of the process of preparation of NSS can be seen in Figure 3. The model in its upper part represents the phases of strategic management; i.e., (1) the strategic *planning* phase of NSS creation, (2) the planning and implementing phase of the *organization* for implementation of NSS, (3) the strategy *implementation* phase, and the (4) strategy implementation *control* phase. The middle part of the model shows the phases of the strategic planning process (*mission, analysis, vision, goals, and measures*) and operational planning process (*projects and activities*). Brief definitions and fundamental strategic questions (*why, what, and how*) are added to the individual phases, which strategy creators must answer in the process of preparing NSS (Kolar & Jurak, 2014; Kolar, 2023). In continuation, the basic tasks that strategies creators must perform in each individual phase and a content (substantive) part of NSS planning is added. The content part shows the necessary elements of analysis and planning (strategic and operational) for a comprehensive strategic consideration of the sports system in the process of preparing NSS. The lowest part connects the successive phases of the process and shows the results of the process implementation in the form of *two documents*: (1) a strategic plan or NSS and (2) an action plan for NSS implementation.

As is shown in Figure 3, the process of *strategic planning* begins with the definition of the mission and values of NSS, where the *mission* should define the permanent purpose of the NSS and the reason for its creation, which should be implemented in accordance with the organizational culture defined by the *values* (Planellas & Muni, 2020). In the *strategic analysis* processes, all substantive elements (substructures) of a holistic sports system should be analyzed. For analyzing the substructures, a relevant set of *measurable variables* must be created for each of them, with which we can find out (1) the level of development of individual substructures, (2) the connections and their mutual influences on the past development of sports in the country, and (3) draw appropriate conclusions, which we use to create a SWOT matrix. The findings from the strategic analysis form the basis for defining the vision and strategic goals of the future development of sport at the national level.

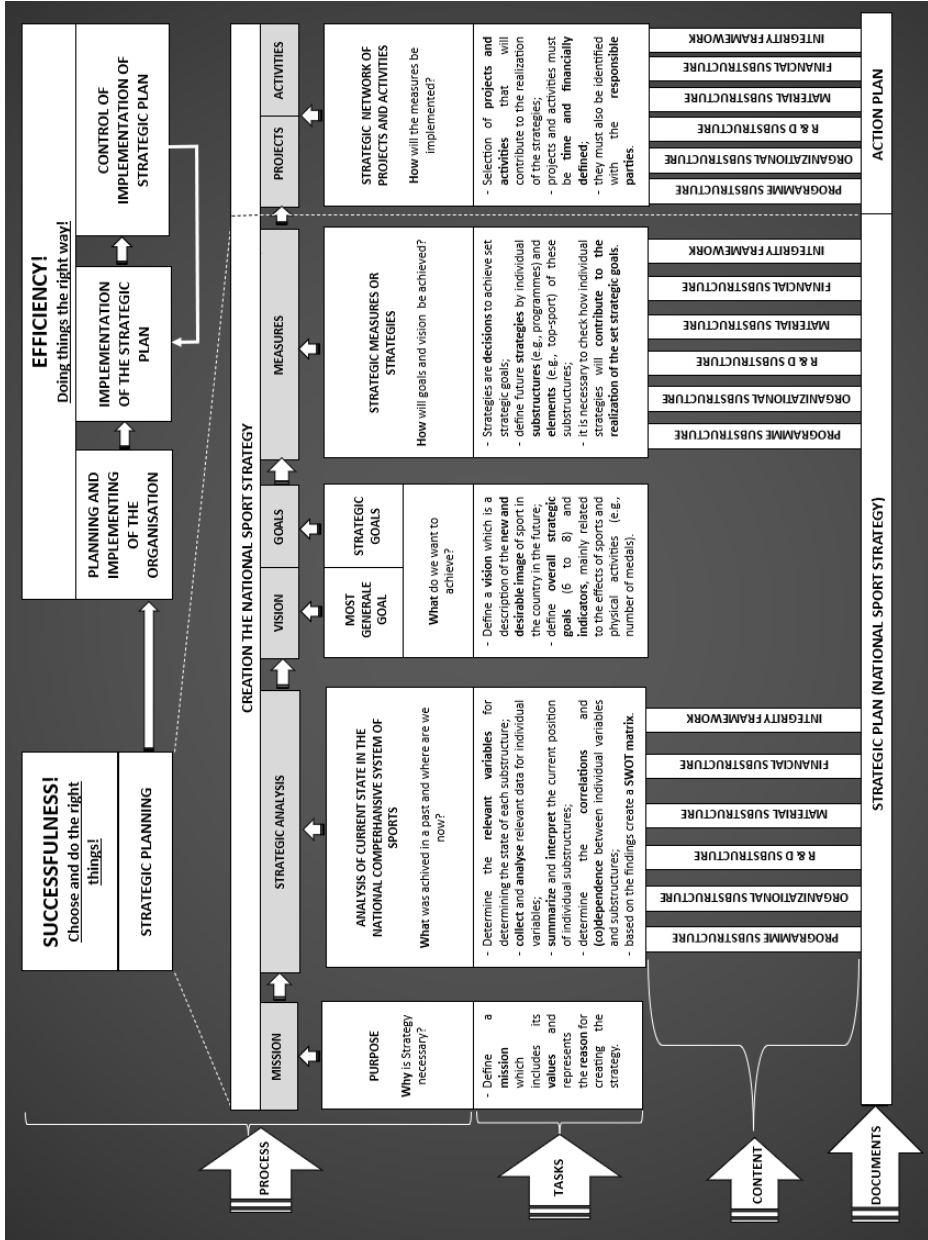
The most general goal is the vision, which represents a description of the new and desirable image of the national sport system in the future, which can easily be spread throughout the sporting (sports organizations in a wider sense) and non-sporting (other important stakeholders) national environment. Mackay et al. (2020) stated that strategic goals are the long-term aims of an organization. They need to be coherent, which means that they should make sense individually, and also as a combined set. In this sense, we can understand goals as targets to which a strategy will lead us. The primary tasks of the strategy development process are: (1) the formulation of various strategies or measures, (2) the evaluation of their potential for the realization of goals, and finally, (3) the decision on which strategies are expected to best realize the strategy's vision and goals, and implement the mission. As Planellas and Muni (2020) states "strategies are decisions; without a decision there are no strategies". With the decision on the selection and placement of strategies (measures) by individual (content) substructures of the sports system, the document (NSS) is completed and the operational planning process begins.

Operational planning, implementation, and controlling are no longer a part of the strategic decision-making process in a narrow sense, but of the newly established operational decision-making process. The implementation of selected strategies (measures) is the phase that comes after strategy selection, and if these measures are not implemented, the strategy will have no impact on the future development of a national sports system. If strategy-makers in the strategic planning are concerned with "choosing the right things" (successfulness), in the strategic implementation they will be primarily concerned with "how to do things right" (effectiveness). During the implementation phase, all the conditions and resources (organizational, personnel, financial, material, etc.) are created, which enable the transition from strategies to actions and the realization of the planned strategic impacts on the field of sport (Planellas & Muni, 2020). Hickson, Miller and Wilson (2003) conclude that the way decisions (strategies) implementation is managed appears to be vital for strategy success.

The implementation phase begins with the planning of strategic projects and activities (Rozman & Stare, 2008) or strategic initiatives (Mackay et al., 2020; Müller-Stewens, 2020) for measures in the individual content substructures of a sports system, which must to the greatest extent possible, ensure the implementation of selected strategies and the realization of strategic goals. This process consists of three steps, namely: (1) variation, in which proposals for projects, activities or initiatives are generated, (2) selection, in which a selection of the most promising proposals is made, and (3) retention, in which the selected proposals are appropriately structured in an action plan (Müller-Stewens,

2020). All projects, activities and initiatives need to be quantified in terms of the associated budget, time frame and organizational responsibility (Mackay et al., 2020). Once the action plan is in place, the organizational structure and its internal processes must be checked and found out if they are in line with the comprehensive idea as it is written in the NSS. In the sense that “structure follows strategy”, the organizational structure must be aligned to support the implementation of the strategy (Müller-Stewens, 2020). The above means that it must be determined whether it is necessary to restructure the organizational structure and, in the process of implementing the new organizational structure, carry out a reorganization that ensures the adequacy of organizational roles and their interrelationships and delegate responsibility, duty and authority for the expedient and effective implementation of the strategy. In terms of process, all the conditions for starting the implementation of the strategy are now provided. The implementation of the projects, activities, and initiatives collected in the action plan represents the beginning of the implementation of the NSS, since the strategy is not implemented directly, but indirectly through the implementation of the action plan. In the process of implementing the action plan, the planning process is re-established, but this time it is about planning projects, activities or initiatives, the planning of which mainly involves the use of project management methodology and the management of a strategic multi-project environment. The process of strategic control is primarily aimed at determining performance, whereby, in a comparison between the planned and actually realized, we determine to what extent we achieve the set strategic goals through the implementation of the strategy and also whether, in the planning process, we have chosen the right goals and strategies for realizing the mission and achieving the vision of NSS (Kolar, 2023).

Figure 3: Concept (model) of the process of creating the NSS (a methodological perspective)



Source: Adapted from: Kolar, Bednarik, Kovač & Jurak, 2010.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the present paper, the authors holistically analyze the process of preparing NSS, which should represent a fundamental document for the development of sports and physical activity within the population of a given country. A modern NSS should answer many questions, related not only exclusively to the development of sports results of national sports heroes, but also or especially to those related to modern lifestyles and the changing demographic image of the population in developed societies. The developed and presented conceptual framework of NSS combines the content elements that are specific to the science of kinesiology with the methodological approach inherent to the scientific discipline of strategic management. In this way, it enables comprehensive management of the preparation and implementation process, as well as the substantive integrity of NSS. The process of preparing such a document usually takes at least one year, which largely depends on (1) the interdisciplinary nature of the approach, (2) the extensiveness of the analytical part of the process, (3) the availability of the necessary data for the evaluation of individual measured variables, and to a large extent also (4) on the regulatory process of confirmation and acceptance of the document within the government-legislative structures of the country's political system. Due to the typically lengthy preparation process, the authors recommend that the strategic validity period of a NSS is between 7 and 10 years, which enables the implementation of the required organizational changes, the provision of the necessary resources, and the effective implementation of a large part of the strategic projects and activities.

The presented model of the preparation and implementation of the NSS in the presented form meets the basic requirements of the system theories, according to which models should enable (1) the organization of the management process of the preparation and implementation of NSS, (2) the establishment of the necessary connections between individual phases (elements of the model) and the entire management process (overall model), (3) substantive comprehensive collection, organization, and analysis of relevant variables for analytical and strategic purposes, (4) testing the meaningfulness of the mission and goals of the NSS and (5) repeatable applicative use of the model in reality. The model comprehensively covers the issue of management of NSS preparation and is therefore (1) *dialectical*, as it takes into account all substantive and methodological essential aspects, (2) *open*, as it can be supplemented with new relevant methodological steps or perceived relevant content during the implementation process, (3) *flexible*, since it can be used, at least in a methodological-procesual sense, in the management of other strategic documents at the national,

regional, or local level, and (4) *repeatable*, since its definition is precise and allows direct multiple use by different types of users.

Given that we used a conceptual approach to the issues presented in the article, one of the fundamental limitations of the study is related to the bounded rationality of the authors and biases that could guide our assessment of the relevance of the used literature and the reevaluation of our own applied experience gained in the preparation of this type of strategic documents. Future research in the field of creating national policies in the field of sports should be primarily aimed at determining the connection and causality that determine the relationships between the substantive substructures of sport presented in the model.

The NSS represent a unique opportunity to present the importance of sports for the development of a healthy, resilient, and sustainable society, the economic development of the country and its impact on its international standing. Because of the above, wide accessibility to sports activities must be a fundamental guideline for the realization of the public interest in the field of sports, and the NSS must guarantee that sport becomes a fundamental human right of every individual.

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