THESIS SUMMARY

Attila Szathmári

Elite sport for social wellbeing:

The concept of sustainable (slow) sport

Ph.D. Thesis

Supervisor:

Tamás Kocsis Ph.D.

assistant professor

Budapest, 2021

Department of Geography, Geoeconomy and Sustainable Development

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Table of Contents

Motto:

„For if a set of values is permanently struggling with dysfunctions in social practice, sooner or later the social erosion of the values will begin; they gradually lose their credit, their attractiveness weakens, they are no longer able to control human consciousness and behavior; but they are very capable of hindering the formation of new, workable values by becoming the graces of the formal ritual: the renewal of values."

/Elemér Hankiss, 1983 - Társadalmi csapdák, Diagnózisok (Social Traps, Diagnoses)

Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 248.o./

1. Introduction

1.1 Foreword

Although I have never been a professional athlete, sports have always interested me. As a sports commentator, I was in constant contact with active or already retired professional athletes, I worked with them on various programs and broadcasts. Informal conversations with them were the first impulse that it would be worthwhile to look at this particular world from another perspective. To focus on sustainability and social aspects in the analysis, an important impetus was given by a book, Serge Latouche: Farewell to Growth (2011), which drew my attention to essential, hitherto unseen connections. My research was initiated by the recognition and contradiction I experienced in the lives of professional athletes. Namely, that although they became exemplary in their performance, many of them did not consider what they experienced to be complete, harmonious, and equally livable. I wonder why this duality developed, does it exist? How "fair" is it that those being role models for young people did not follow their path, not to do it all over again? What exactly can this mean? And what can be missing to make this path to be followed, repeated? From an individual, athlete's perspective, I linked well-being (quality of life) to the dilemma that emerged as dissonance among professional athletes. At the system level (because I felt that the problem was not unique and not individual) I linked sustainability, which I used as an appropriate research framework to understand the contradiction and later resolve it. The problem affects several frontiers, as psychology and sociology also appear strongly alongside economics. These formed the basis of my doctoral research, which is explained in more detail on the following pages.

1.2 Abstract

The research started with the exploration of the individual experiences of professional athletes and the knowledge of the sustainability/well-being literature, which led me to compare the perceptions with the views of external observers (stakeholders). This became the questionnaire research, which already enabled system-wide analysis and concept-building. The PCA (principal component analysis) components (future, community, decommodification, performance) and IPA analysis have led to the key factors that seem essential for sustainable sport as a system and the fullest, most harmonious well-being of individual athletes and thus to achieve social well-being. Meanwhile, research on a sustainable vision has been carried out in the framework of athlete identity and backcasting research, but these already go beyond the scope of the doctoral dissertation.

1.3 Research frame

My summary based on three articles:

1. *Attila Szathmári: Building sustainability in sport: A clear offside or chance for a „slow" rebirth? (Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review, XLVIII. ÉVF. 2017. 11. SZÁM/ ISSN 0133-0179. https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2017.11.04.).* The article aims to show the theoretical framework and connection points of sport and sustainability and to analyze its impact on well-being.

2. *Attila Szathmári & Tamás Kocsis: Who cares about Gladiators? An elite-sport-based concept of Sustainable Sport. (Sport in Society, https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1832470).* This study aims to define the concept of sustainable sport to present the relationship between professional sport and sustainability.

3. *Attila Szathmári: 'I wouldn't do anything differently ... although I don't let my child go in that direction': Successful Hungarian Olympians' understandings and experiences at the close of elite sport careers. (Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review, 52(5), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2021.05.06)* The purpose of the paper is to explore what aspects of identity building affect the identity and individual sustainability of professional athletes.

SUSTAINABLE (SLOW) SPORT

Literature review on sport and sustainability

Szathmári, A.: Building sustainability in sport: A clear offside or chance for a „slow" rebirth? Budapest Management Review

In-depth interviews with professional athletes (IPA)

Szathmári, A.: 'I wouldn't do anything differently ... although I don't let my child go in that direction': Successful Hungarian Olympians' understandings and experiences at the close of elite sport careers, Budapest Management Review

What does sport mean for the professional athlete?

"The future of elite athletes, the elite sports of the future" (questionnaire)

Szathmári A.& Kocsis, T.: Who cares about Gladiators? An elite-sport-based concept of Sustainable Sport, Sport in Society

How can professional sport meet the social needs of the community? What is the social perception of sport and professional athletes in Hungary?

An interpretation and thorough understanding of sustainability in one of the most accelerated and competitively imbued social subsystems, professional sport.
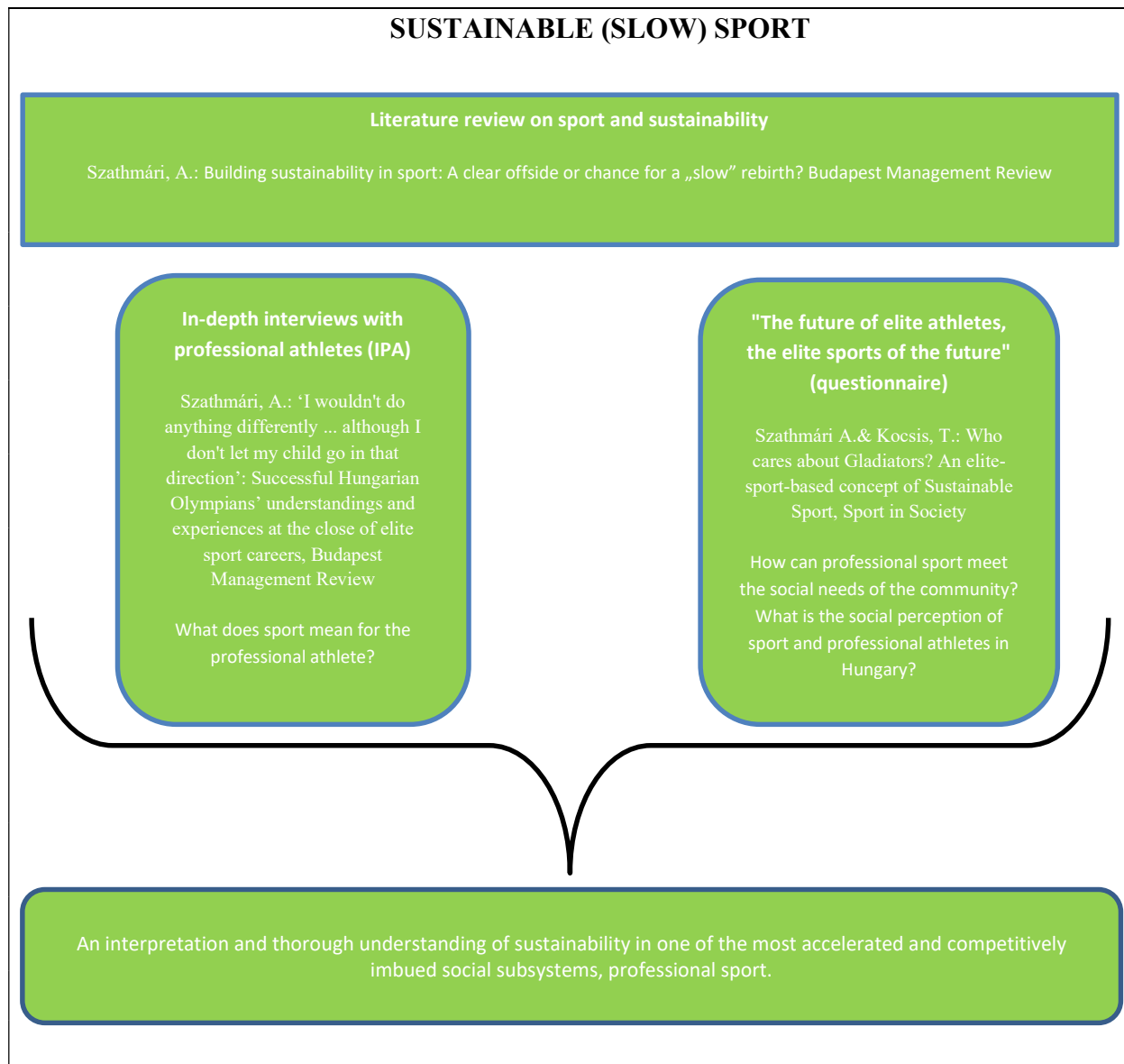
Figure 1. Relationship between research focuses and publications

My research focuses on the question: when can professional sport be considered sustainable as a social subsystem and under what conditions can it be put at the service of individual and social well-being? It focuses on the most-watched slice of the sport, professional sports. I examine this using sustainability, 'slow', and Degrowth as a theoretical framework through qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and questionnaire data collection. The research aims to examine the relationship between sustainability and professional sport, to understand the existing problems and to explore the basic elements of sustainable sport. Furthermore, the creation and extension of the concept of "slow" sport to the wider environment, society and economic life, thus helping to develop a more sustainable model.

1.4 Theoretical background

1.4.1 Sustainability: response to resource depletion

Although the word: sustainability has been used only for a few decades, its content can be discovered already back in the 18th century at Malthus (1798). Malthus thought that if the human population continued to grow, food production would not be able to keep up with demand, so was arguing that the human population was at risk of outgrowing its carrying capacity. In 1864, the English economist William Stanley Jevons observed that technological improvements that increased the efficiency of coal use led to the growing consumption of coal in a wide range of industries. He proclaimed that, contrary to popular belief, technological progress could not be bank on to decrease fuel consumption (Jevons, 1864). The sustainability concept of the Brundtland report (1987) remained the most referred to:

„Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Our Common Future, 1987: 27.)

That is, do not jeopardize the well-being of children and grandchildren, applies not only to the natural environment. Two important definitions arise resource constraints and the need related the poverty, the natural environment and the issue of social equality. But the phrase raises several questions. First of all, do the emerging needs have to be met? Second, how do we know in a specific moment what will be a legitimate need for the future generation? In any case, Littig and Giessler (2005) emphasized the need to change human lifestyles to preserve the ecological system and the sustainability of resources. The proposed equal treatment of the three pillars (society, economy, and environment) is based on the conclusion that human needs cannot be sufficiently met only by providing an ecologically stable and healthy environment, but that – if a society is indeed committed to sustainability – equally legitimate social and cultural needs ought to be taken care of as well. Sustainable economic, social and cultural conditions and values are deemed to be resources that should also be preserved for future generations.

So the definition of sustainability has enlarged to three pillars where in addition to the environmental aspect, the economic and social pillar has an equally important role. Moreover, even beyond this, Roth and Valentinov (2020) discuss social subsystems that interact with each other, such as religion, health, economy, science, art, media, politics, law, education and sports, as well as their unique environment and unique sustainability.

According to Jones, Selby and Sterling (2010) the conditions for both humankind and environment of mutual prosperity, security and the chance of survival can co-exist and have to be met. Much more generally, Senge (2008) suggested considering every boundary, which will contribute to a healthy community of the future. McMichael, Butler and Folke (2003) concluded to maximize the chances for the environment, and the social conditions enable to help to reach safety, well-being, and health. Ehrenfeld (1978), formerly widened those with biodiversity, human rights, equality, openness, and respect dimensions.

On a rhetorical level, in everyday language, sustainability has become a buzzword on economic, environmental and social issues, but in scientific language, a serious discourse surrounds what exactly it means. Although discussing this goes beyond the scope of my research, a specific element of the topic requires a more detailed explanation. The difference between weak and strong interpretations of sustainability (Málovics & Bajmócy, 2009) is decisive in the interpretation of some elements of the research. Separation first appeared in Pearce's (1989) work and then, among others, Neumeyer (1999) analyzed the difference between weak and strong sustainability in more detail:
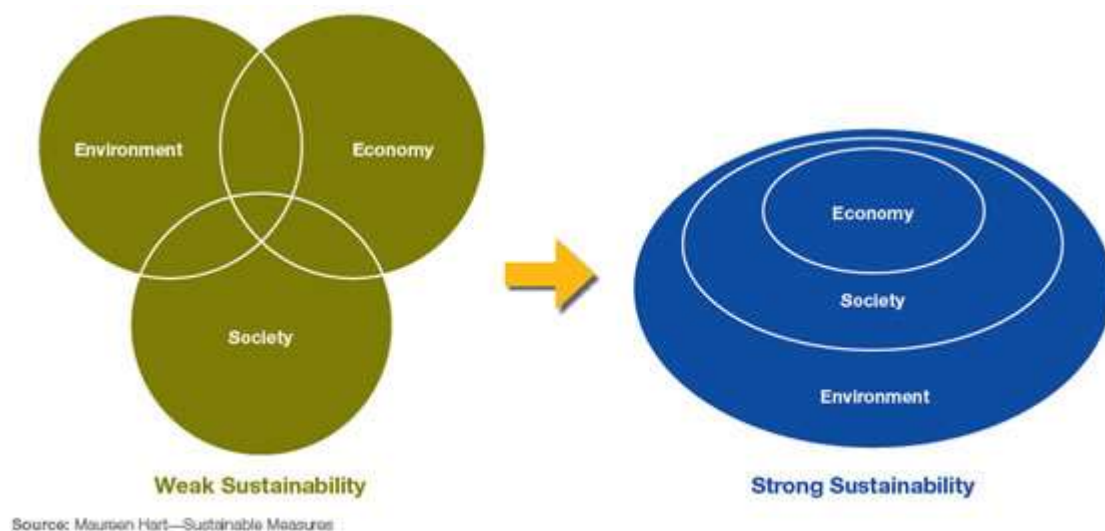

Source: Maureen Hart—Sustainable Measures

Figure 2. Weak and strong sustainability

Researchers typically see the difference between weak and strong sustainability in terms of natural and artificial capital. According to the theory of weak sustainability, natural and human-made capital are fundamentally substitutable. Thus, to meet the criterion of sustainability, it is sufficient that the combined value of the two types of capital does not decrease, ie. the destruction of a natural resource creates human-made capital of at least the same value.

According to the theory of strong sustainability, natural capital is not, or only to a very small extent, substitutable for human-made capital, and therefore constitutes an absolute external sustainability constraint, a minimum level of which must be maintained for the well-being of future generations. This also means that in the case of weak sustainability, economic growth is acceptable, according to a strong interpretation, sustainability can be interpreted with a steady-state (Daly, 1977) or degrowth-oriented (Latouche, 2011) economy. As a result, in ecological economics, the monetary valuation of nature and the efficiency and optimum principle of decisions are questioned - the optimization of well-being and efficient allocation are not even primary goals. Norton et al. (1998) rank them only in third place behind ecological sustainability and equitable (intergenerational) distribution. But if human-made and natural capital are complementary rather than substitutable, as ecological economists claim, then the expansion of the economic subsystem is even more limited. There is no point in increasing human-made capital at the expense of the remaining natural capital once the two types of capital are complementary. An essential element is social justice, based on ensuring equal access to opportunities and sharing the social burden; the pursuit of continuous improvement in the quality of life, which includes health - full physical, mental and social well-being - and in this connection welfare, healthy environmental conditions, democratic rights, security, education for all, etc.

Mapping the relationship between the economy and society, Polányi (2001/1944) described the process as a 'great transformation' by which the market scheme became dominant among the behavioral principles that organized society, the social system transformed into a social system regulated by market economy laws. In this system, the social responsibility of global companies is to contribute by self-restraint to the creation of a social safety net that retains the workforce in its human entity, ie. its human characteristics as a whole, it must contribute to the prevention of the disintegration of nature and accept the social and community orientation of the monetary system (Szalay, 2008). Responsible thinking thus goes beyond the mere production of income in the interests of shareholders but also involves the reconciliation of environmental and social benefits in addition to economic ones (Freeman, 1984). This has led to the issue of sustainability, which can be attributed to a strong or weak indicator (Daly, 1977; Kerekes et al., 2018); and social futuring (Szántó, 2018), where control of human needs can be internal or external (Kocsis, 2018; Heikkurinen et al., 2016).

1.4.2 The dualism of professional sports and leisure sports

In the second half of the 20th century, with the intensification of globalization, the rise of television, the increase of leisure time, and with the change of consumption habits, sport became

more and more a business (András et al., 2019). The processes taking place in contemporary society, including the world of sport, are determined by globalization as a cultural and economic phenomenon, capitalism as an economic system and as the "logic of how things work", the info-communication revolution and apostrophized consumer society, the rather accelerated way of living, and in this context, the pre-existing social functions of sport also seem to be changing (Dóczi, 2011). At the same time, crisis phenomena arising from the above constellation, such as global climate change and the consequent environmental disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the continuing increase in socio-economic inequalities, present the sustainability dilemma as an increasingly pressing issue.

While official sport definition highlights the physical and mental factors: "Sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels." (European Sports Charter, 1997).

From a research point of view, it was imperative that the narrow-broad framework further break down, and ask the question: "what is the subject of exchange here?" Along with this issue, Dénes and Misovitz (1994) and Nagy (1995) sharply separated professional sport (where entertainment, the other movement became the subject of exchange) from the recreational sport. An enormous range of synonyms (professional, elite, high-performance) used to show the main differences, as it is the former, where the athletes get paid and pursue it as a profession. The latter is done in recreational time, for the sake of exercise, or health prevention. From a consumer point of view, we can identify an active-passive boundary (Table 1.).

	ELITE SPORT	LEISURE SPORT
LABELS	*PROFESSIONAL SPORT*	*AMATEUR SPORT*
	WESTERN LOGIC	*EASTERN LOGIC*
	HEROIC ORIENTATION	*AESTHETIC ORIENTATION*
	POWER & PERFORMANCE	*PLEASURE & PARTICIPATION*
ACTIVITY	Profession	Hobby
	Competitive	Non-competitive
GOAL	Income	Recreation
	Progress	Health
	Performance	Community
ATHLETE'S ROLE	Workforce	Consumer
	Competitor	Participant
EXCHANGE	Attention	Doing sport
	Attraction	Equipment
CHARACTERISTICS	Training	Cooperation
	Selection	Involvement
	Exclusive opposites	Complementary opposites
	Peak form	Fun
	Accelerated	**Slow**

Table 1. Elite sport vs. leisure sport *(Source: own compilation bason on: Dénes & Misovitz (1994); Nagy (1995); Horne et al. (2005); Coakley (1994, 2016); Pang&Macdonald (2016); Kocsis&Szathmári (2020)).*

1.4.3 Sustainability, athlete identity and its connection to elite sport

One of the cornerstones of sustainability (in addition to economic and environmental) is social sustainability, whose keywords are quality of life, education, equality, community development, etc. These are the values that are important now and for future generations. Its key philosophical element is "slow", of strategic importance for both the environment and well-being. It is closely related to the ideology of Degrowth. In our accelerated world, "In the Great Acceleration" (Steffen et al., 2015), Degrowth seeks the conditions for non-growth oriented existence by questioning existing economic logic. It simplifies the task if we find a subsystem that is of public interest, its internal logic is easier to grasp, and its language is more intelligible. Such a subsystem is sports, including professional sports, which are held with great interest, the successes are given serious publicity, and its operational logic can correspond to the contexts of growth-oriented economic logic, in many cases it shows them more clearly.

Surprisingly, few scholars have attempted to bring 'sustainability language' into the discussion about high-performance professional sport (Szathmári, 2017). Scholarship exists about how sporting activities can contribute to peace, cultural diversity and tolerance (Barker et al., 2011; Dagkas, Benn, and Jawad, 2011), social justice, social inclusion and wellbeing.

In most general texts on sustainable development, the social needs of present and future generations are discussed regarding equity, ethics, and rights. Equity is regarded as denoting fairness – social justice and equal access to opportunities – generate a range of positive social effects including reinforcing collective identities; uniting people; improving self-esteem; increasing civic pride; raising awareness of disability; inspiring children; providing an experience of work; encouraging volunteering, increasing participation in sport; and promoting well-being/healthy living. Loland (2006) proclaims the importance of people-centered perspectives in relation to the sustainability of Olympic sports, and thus professional sports. He points out that it is humanity's responsibility to create unity, to recognize the complexity and diversity of the ecosystem. From this perspective, the question arises as to how professional sport, through sport, affects the relationship between people and their wider environment. Lawson (2005) found that sport should not see as a homogenous entity. Rather as two underlying philosophy (high performance and recreational sport) which are radically different from each other. Therefore sees the relevance of sustainability is slight about the professional sport in which your keywords are the training, selection, peak performance and load, while fully compatible with the values of recreational sport, often identified with cooperation, participation, relish, and delight. Recreational sport can create a social network, develop community identity, improve human health, can have a real effect on the well-being and human capital.

Due to its system logic and risky consequences, some sports scientists have turned to identity-related concepts to challenge this dualism and elaborate whether and how elite sport might be individually sustainable (Dohlsten, Barker-Ruchti & Lindgren, 2020). Sustainability can mean various things, and individuals may weigh different aspects of the latter concept in slightly different ways (Király et al., 2013). Researchers have claimed that it is rather complex and difficult for sport to meet the requirements of sustainability, as this would involve athletes, coaches, associations, organizers of sporting events, decision-makers, representatives of the economic ecosystem, and sports-related social organizations, too – insofar as sustainability is based on long-term thinking and planning, and a rejection of short-term alternatives to achieve long-term goals (Dingle & Mallen, 2020). This means, on the one hand, promoting the ecological aspects of sustainability - making sport green - and, on the other hand, promoting economic sustainability, long-term return and predictability (Preuss, 2019).

Researchers suggest that sustainability represents "a condition or set of conditions whereby human and natural systems can continue indefinitely in a state of mutual well-being, security, and survival" (Jones, Selby & Sterling, 2010, p. 19). While security and survival have become

increasingly important topics for humankind, surprisingly few researchers have so far tried to build a concept of individual sustainability around elite sports. Lindsey (2008) defines individual sustainability as a longer-term shift in personal identity, ability, and/or attitude through development about participation in sports.

Thus, in relation to the early burnout of athletes, Coakley (1992) examined whether we can speak of a social phenomenon or an individual problem. He concluded that there is a fault in social organizations and their transformation is inevitable. While researchers suggest that the performance needs and resources of professional sports limit the individual sustainability opportunities of professional athletes, they also indicate that a short career does not preclude the sustainability of longer-term careers in other areas. (Vveinhardt, Fominiene & Andriukaitiene, 2019; Szathmári, 2021).

An increasing number of jobs/careers are becoming unsustainable due to high employer- and contextual demands, occupational stress, burnout, and lack of work-life balance (Richardson & McKenna, 2020). The physical, psychological, and emotional demands of a career in elite sport often end in burnout and chronic levels of stress and injury that lead to the end of athletes' careers (Thelwell, Weston & Greenless, 2007). Richardson and McKenna (2020) argue that, although the demand for a high level of performance may limit individual sustainability in elite sport, this should not be inherently problematic and maybe something that can be "managed away." However, doing so may negatively impact athletes' motivation to participate, and hence subsequent performance. Concerning mental health, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) examined the stress tolerance of Olympic champions, and the importance of individual well-being through athlete's career explored by Lundqvist (2011). By focusing on the role of coaches in sustainability, Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) found care as a keyword. The difficulties involved in ending a professional career and the relationship between employment and human capital were examined by Ling and Hong (2014).

In my research, I examine individual sustainability with a focus on athletes as human beings and their personal needs. Lawson (2005) concluded that the sustainability of professional sport is fragile due to its inherent logic. This fragility is closely related to the identity formation of athletes. Athletes who can transform and preserve their identity before the end of their careers are better able to cope with the loss than those who are strongly committed to their athlete identity until the end of their careers, or even later.

Athletes' identities incorporate the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social aspects associated with their roles (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). "Like all role identities, an athlete's identity is developed through the process of constructing and interpreting meanings within various social interactions. In this sense, athletes use socially constructed norms, values and beliefs associated with the sporting role to help understand the world around them" (Ryan, 2018, p. 1). Thus, understanding the identity component of athletes is a vital task when investigating the experiences of athletes, and research into identity concerning individual sustainability in elite sport may offer insight into this specific parameter (Cosh, LeCouteur, Crabb & Kettler, 2013).

While an individual's identity can consist of various dimensions, one of these will probably become a dominant lens through which the others are viewed (Lally, 2007). Ideas about identity formation can thus contribute to understanding how sustainable elite sport can be expanded. Thus, this paper aims to reveal athletes' needs and concerns regarding sustainable elite sport. Specifically, we aim to answer the following research question: What aspects of identity construction influence the identities and individual sustainability of elite athletes? We try to elaborate how the sample athletes make sense of their elite sports careers, including what they see as important factors to their success, and what they see as problems. In this sense, we seek to understand individual sustainability in sports as the product of the correspondence between the demands of an elite sport system and the individual athlete's personal needs and potential (Schubring & Thiel, 2014).

1.4.4 Strong sustainability is a systemic study of professional sports and recreational sports in the context of nature, society and the economy.

For a deeper understanding, it is worth integrating sustainability into a system, with professional and leisure sports as social subsystems. The economic logic of profit maximization (efficiency and competitiveness with quantitative measurement, financial metrics) is a feature of the economic system. But if beyond this logic, other socio-environmental considerations prevail, then we can conclude that the economy has not "absorbed" society and the environment and that strong sustainability prevails.[1]

This dualism has existed since elite sports became a business – a fairly recent phenomenon compared to the development of the rest of the economy since sports professionalism and its commercialization only started within the last four decades (András, 2003; Dénes & Misovitz,

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[1] See more regarding the Degrowth concept (Kallis, Kerschner & Martinez-Alier, 2012; Liegey et, al., 2013; Harangozó, Csutora & Kocsis, 2018).

1994). The logic of elite sport is characteristic of the capitalist society that created it. Elite sport is the product of a growth-based society, with its attendant subsystem and ideological support. Organized according to the logic of productivity, efficiency, evaluation, comparison, hierarchy, etc., elite sport reflects the conditions of society and makes its pitfalls even more visible (Liegey, Madelaine, Ondet & Veillot, 2013).

The spirit of Degrowth emphasizes environmental and social sustainability and social functioning based on peaceful and convivial, i.e. meaningful social coexistence, and transcends the fundamentals behind the economic mechanisms based on current productivism, such as the human image of Homo oeconomicus; labor society; the possibility and necessity of unlimited growth; or the ideal of full employment. These fundamentals, according to the trend, are "false beliefs etched into our world of thought," and call attention to the fact that questioning them can pave the way for a discourse that can lead us to a more sustainable and just society (Köves, 2017).

The main goal of the research is to understand whether strong sustainability can be applied in the field of professional sports as well, to formally examine the experiences of Hungarian professional athletes, how professional sports are related to the components of athlete identity and individual sustainability. The research results can contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic, to the recognition of the importance of strong sustainability not only in the field of sport but also in the broader context of the environment and the economy.

2. Methodology

The three main parts of the research are the creation of theoretical background, an in-depth interview with professional athletes (qualitative), and the collection of a large number of questionnaires (quantitative) exploring the current state of sport, not only in time but also for the main stakeholders. There is also a logical link between these that in-depth interviews helped to define the questionnaire statements of the large sample of quantitative research.

2.1 Qualitative research

IPA is a qualitative research method that is increasingly used, primarily in psychology. The basics of IPA are related to phenomenology and hermeneutics, which emphasize that individuals' experiences can only be interpreted in context. The IPA-based approach allows the researcher to view a specific experience from an "insider perspective," treating the researcher as an expert. The method seeks to identify and understand the experience as much as possible, and to understand how the person involved in the study interpreted it (Kassai, Pintér & Rácz, 2017). The aim of IPA research is thus to explore personal, lived experiences with phenomena,

such as – in our case – athletes' career experiences (Smith, 2011). Qualitative research can help with understanding customers' / consumers' experiences and evaluations of a particular service (Fett, Bruns & Lischka-Wittmann, 2009). IPA is, therefore, an interpretative, hermeneutical method that can appear at several levels in the research process.

The research question is always open, is focused on exploration (no explanation), on the process (not the result), and aims at reporting (not identifying causes or consequences). The research question should also involve a special context (not, for example, a comparison of contexts). At the beginning of the research, we formulated a two-level research question (a first-level research question was followed by a second-level research question that could be theoretically grounded) (Somogyi et al., 2018).

The next step was the creation of emerging themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) by exploring all the interviews from a different perspective to that of the participants. In this, more emphasis was placed on the researcher's organizing and interpretative role. While creating a "new body" of outcomes, the themes continuously develop. A topic may become an emerging issue when it arises in at least half of the interviews (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), and these topics should be written down in the transcript. In implementing this method, the researcher can incorporate psychological constructs into the process of interpretation.

We worked with targeted sampling during the IPA research. Sample members provide access to study a particular phenomenon that represent a "perspective" rather than a population. We implemented a semi-structured interview with each participant. Semi-structured interviews were used because the method permits the researcher's questions to guide the interview process while simultaneously allowing topics identified by the participants to be elaborated upon via probing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Following the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009), a state of homogeneity can be identified. Regarding the experiences of athletes, homogeneity should be present in the sense of the athlete's basic experiences and transitions, and the time spent on professional sporting activities. Accordingly, the main characteristics of the sample members' sporting experiences were similar in terms of individual/team sports, popularity, domestic/international success, Olympic embeddedness, supporting system, and in how much time they had been inactive at the time of the interview. Based on their own experiences, Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) suggest using a sample of three to six people. This is suitable for describing similarities and differences between individual cases. Sample selection was based on Miles and Hubermann's (1994) classification that employs intensity-based criteria and comparable sampling techniques. The essence of the former is investigating information-rich

cases, which describe cases intensively but not extremely. Respectively, I work with subjects who have the same relevant characteristics.

Participant	Gender	Age	Sport	Best international results	Best domestic result
A1	Male	35	Athletics	European championship Top 25	national champion
A2	Male	34	Table tennis	International youth champion	youth champion
A3	Female	31	Swimming	Olympics Top 3	national champion
A4	Female	39	Athletics	Olympics Top 25	national champion
A5	Male	44	Athletics	Olympics Top 15	national champion

Table 2. Basic data of the interviewees

During the interview lead-up process, we identified five professional athletes whose selection process we considered homogeneous according to the criteria detailed below. One of the criteria was the sport itself – namely, interviews were restricted to athletes who had competed in individual sports (e.g. swimming or athletics). This was necessary because we hypothesized that those in team sports would experience the effects of success/failure, expectations, and other mental factors differently, more intensively, and managing the effects of group dynamics would have complicated the research process, so we filtered out this effect. An important criterion is the role of success: in terms of domestic success, those who reach the Hungarian championship title, internationally registered, turned up at the Olympics, placed there, placed a medal and thus serious financial support, became the participants of the homogeneous sample. Our goal is to examine athletes who can be considered successful in a purely outcome-based, measurable approach. Finally, the role of time is also an important criterion, ending with a professional career that has been sporting for more than a decade, giving them the right distance and insight into this stage of their lives. They have not been cut off from sport, they are still considered to be within the "system" in some form.

Contact was based on pre-established relationships. This ensured that all the above-mentioned "intensity criteria" were met. Interviews were documented in a friendly environment known to the athletes. This prior contact ensured an open and frank atmosphere and increased the chance that subjects could boldly express themselves. A semi-structured interview process was applied that incorporated the results of the former questionnaire survey. Inquiring about the phenomenon we wanted to investigate (including experiences of injury, failure, or success) during the interviews allowed the identity of the interviewees to be evaluated in the context of the given experience. Interviews were documented in 2015, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Before these, participants were oriented about the object of the research and gave their informed consent. Recordings were made which were later destroyed. Documentation was transcribed and major nuncupative elements were labelled (such as chuckling and meaningful silences) and noted down.

2.2 Quantitative research

Based on the literature, our own experience, and the above qualitative research (semi-structured interviews), we prepared a questionnaire consisting of 23 statements, using a 1-5 grade Likert scale. This was the starting point for the quantitative research questionnaires. (Table 3.)

LABEL	STATEMENT
LESS_UNEQUAL	Elite sport plays an important role in reducing social inequality.
CAREER	Elite sport is one of the greatest career opportunities for young people.
RESPECT	Top athletes receive social respect through sport.
LESS_CONFLICT	Elite sport can help to reduce conflict between people.
PROUD	Hungarians can be proud of their achievements in sports.
NAT_HAPPINESS	Achievements in sport contribute to the nation's happiness and wellbeing.
SPORTMANSHIP	In elite sport, the principle of athleticism prevails within and outside the field.
USEFUL	Doing elite sport is useful.
LAB	Things are going to be done in the laboratory [medical interventions/doping] rather than on the sports field.
MEDIA	The media is more harmful to the elite sport than supportive of it.
ENTERTAINMENT	The role of elite sport is entertainment.
MONEY	The role of money in elite sports has increased too much.
BET	It is good for elite sports that more and more types of betting are available.
DOPING_DANGER	Prohibited performance enhancers (doping) endanger the fundamental values of elite sport.
BURNOUT	Pressure to perform due to the limited length of athletes' careers leads to burnout.
EVERYEFF_REV	It is good that elite athletes make every effort to achieve results. (Reverse coded!)
HEALTH	Sports help keep elite athletes healthy.
LIFELONGSUCCESS	An elite athlete can base their life around their sporting activity.
GOODSITUATION	The situation of Hungarian elite athletes is good.
HEALTHDEMANDING	Sport places demands on the health of elite athletes.
GOODCOMPETITION	Pressure to perform also brings out the best in elite athletes over the long term.
IDOL	Elite athletes are role models for young people.
MYCHILD	I would like my child to be an elite athlete sometimes.

Table 3. The elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport questionnaire emerged from interviews with Hungarian elite athletes.

A total of 388 respondents completed the questionnaires, which were implemented in two waves. The first wave was organized in January–February 2016 through a sports-related social media page (https://eurosport.hosszabbitas.hu) and the second through the first author's personal social media site (reference later) (N=216; later referred to as the 'mixed sample'). The second wave was implemented later (April–May 2016) at the University. Bachelor students who had chosen to study a basic, elective Environmental Economics course (N=150; later referred to as the 'student sample') were asked to participate in the research. The sample is slightly over-represented by men (52.8%), with a roughly similar proportion of those with a professional sports background (52.6%) and those without (47.4%). Almost half of the respondents had the highest educational attainment was graduation (46.9%), the main reason for this being that part of the questionnaire was conducted among university students. Almost three-quarters of the respondents grew up in cities (71.5%).

The two samples are far from representative of Hungarian society, but the research was designed as a pilot project for revealing the structure of sports-related problems that prevail in society, thus we do not seek to extrapolate the findings to the whole of Hungarian society.

3. Results

3.1 Result of qualitative research

3.1.1 First-level interpretation: the most important elements of professional sport

My basic research question is, "What does sport mean to the athlete?". In this system of relationships, what sport means to the participant, the athlete living in it defines the core values of sport. The question can be integrated with the research as a whole, can records of sustainability, commitment to defeating an opponent, in other words, desire for more, run into constraints similar to the scarcity of resources in our natural environment? There, the excessive use of resources is the main constraint, even if efficiency improves due to continuous innovation (rebound effect, population growth). If we equate humankind with the natural environment in sport and examine its limits, we must look for what is desirable directly to human. What can be shown to be efficiency gains and results in the short term is not supportive of human well-being in the long run? In addition to its physical and mental factors, it also includes the study of the human environment. The question is, has the sport, the professional athlete, reached or exceeded the point where this balance was upset? Is there still room for improvement in athlete efficiency without longer-term harm. What can be done to restore the balance between short-term and long-term interests?

The next step in the analysis is to define emerging themes (Table 4.). During the coding of the first interview, the emotional escalation became emphasized as the athlete talked about his coach, parents, age group, using several motives (desire, love, protective cover) that suggest an analogy of a relationship. Of these stakeholders, these three groups appeared in all interviews and are therefore listed as separate topics. Attitudes towards training and competition were also decisive. Just as the opportunity to get to know the world was present in all interviews, so was the impact of sport on health and the issue of career closure.

PARENTS' ROLE	DESIRE	MENTAL/PHYSICAL HEALTH
you are your own person	sport as love	always pain
there is no fight	coaching for love --> crazy	coach physical --> psychologist mental
familiy pressure --> study	easier way vs. learning	enormous load --> hit back

TRAINING	COACHES' ROLE	ABROAD
monotonous, hideous	luck, responsibility	horizon
playfulness <---> get results	no private life - after own's head	scholarships
no training --> still success	no killing-noticed-was built up	money, better facilities

COMPETITION	VISION	AGE GROUP RELATION
injustice	sport as protective cover	trust only yourself <--> society
happiness	closed world: grime ---> cleaner, easier	embarassing not to study
eternal pain	black hole, vacuum	marriage, children later

IDENTITY: WHO HAVE I BECOME?
never give up
tomorrow will be better
start at the bottom
role model, positive personality traits

Table 4. Exploratory themes that emerged during the coding process

Thereafter, we sought to identify the connections (such as chronological links) between the emerging themes and those overarching topics that could cover several subtopics. By using quotes from the interview transcripts and trying to reveal the patterns and groups of topics among the interviews, further interpretation of unfolding themes – called "master themes" – can be developed (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). During the analysis, the researcher interprets how the interviewee has interpreted their experience; this dual interpretation is a process of "double interpretation" wherein the second, scientifically and systematically performed interpretative work of the researcher can be considered a part of the reflective phenomenological attitude of IPA – as opposed to interviewees "naturally adjusted" pre-reflective observations, using Husserl's expressions (Smith et al., 2009).

The indicative identity of athletes was constructed within a performance-based narrative plot. By exploring the identity-construction aspects of elite athletes in the re-readings and rearrangements of the text, stories emerged around three unfolding themes: the (a) "central role of coaching" during the careers of elite athletes; elite sport reflected as a (b) "protective cover"; and (c) "social connectedness" related to identity development.

Role of coaching		Protective cover		Social connectedness	
Gains	Lack of...	Age-group	Problems	Cognitive dissonance	Child-like values
Appreciation, relationship, coach, emotions, love	Concept, working system, lifelong program, human focus, appreciation, long-term perspective	Privileges, comparison, exit, integration, otherness	Mentality, health, age group, human relationships, transition	Belief, values	Motif, playfulness
It was the expectation of the [trainers at the] swimming pool that educational studies would continue.	...these days people - who do something terrible, worthless - gets into the focus of society.'	'Those of my age group got married earlier and had babies earlier. There is no healthy golden mean, only extremes.'	Ask anyone at the top! Sport is not healthy anymore.'	'I wouldn't do anything differently ... although I won't let my child go in that direction.'	'[Participating in the] Sydney [Olympics] was like taking a kid to the amusement park.'
...results must be produced at all cost for coaches so that they can prove their existence.'	To offer alternatives and not to let go of one's hands when they quit.'	Everyone loves athletes. Especially if you are successful. In life, you can never normally do something that everyone unconditionally accepts and loves.'	I can understand the people who - it will sound rude - jump out the window to finish their participation in athletics or any sport.'	After retirement, it was complicated for me, and it was a severe problem that time was running out of my hands, days and hours, deadlines of all kinds.'	Little ones should be playful. This is the biggest mistake in relation to performance constraints.'
...he did not burn me out in the drive to be successful; I was systematically built up to be good.'	'Only the very crazy stay there for that minimal amount of money, doing it with love.'	'I went around the world because of my running and jumping.'	It was a space: a vacuum and I felt that I couldn't find my place in my age group.'	I think the most serious problem is that an athlete counts as long as he/she is active.'	...hold hands for a few years and be by her side as she becomes independent and switches over to everyday life.'

Table 5. primary and secondary themes identified and unfolded during the IPA process.

(a)   The "**central role of coaching**." Closely associated with other emerging themes (parents, training, competition, and desire). The role of coaches (as part of a supporting system) is remarkable in terms of the original discovery of the athletes ("seeing something in me"), managing them properly ("not killing me") and long-term planning ("built-up"). We identified motifs associated with long-term planning (athlete-coach-sport), athletes who face "burn-out," and other factors. "I was lucky with my coach as he did not burn me out in the drive to be successful; I was systematically built up to be good." The coaches' role emerged as vital in shaping the athlete's identity and creating the chance for an individually harmonious career: "I think the most serious problem is that an athlete counts as long as they are active. While an

athlete is in this phase of their life, they should be prepared for the next period." A lack of the elements of long-term planning, a human-centered approach, and a life-long program may be components of an elite sport system, and a missing part of the individual athlete's personal needs and have potentially negative effects on individual sustainability.

(b)   The "**protective cover**" The role of contradictions, such as the comparison of the internal/external world and active/formerly active athletes, is essential in identity construction. "Everyone loves athletes. Especially if you are successful. In life, you can never normally do something that everyone unconditionally accepts and loves." An individual's identity can consist of various dimensions, while the existence of a "protective cover" is identified as a dominant lens through which "the outside world" is viewed. Sport is like a small world surrounded by a protective sheath that separates and protects athletes yet making it extremely difficult to quit. A "closed world" that "itself is dirty but still simpler, cleaner (!) and not as infected as the outside world." Age as a sub-theme also forms the basis of continuous comparison to social status, becoming a substantial part of subjective social self-image. Constant comparison was also related to raising awareness about what sport ("worldview" sub-theme) could give athletes in return. A "black hole" or "vacuum" may arise after emerging from under the protective cover of a life in sports. Athletes who can restructure and preserve their identities before finishing their athletic careers might be better able to cope with such losses. Accordingly, restructuring and preserving their identities before finishing their athletic careers might help them to cope with the experience of loss. Here, security is considered key in terms of to what extent it is available to athletes. Personal security comes under threat during transition periods (starting and finishing a career, turning professional etc.) so a systematic approach that can protect oneself becomes essential.

(c)   The third main theme is the issue of **social connectedness** and athlete identity. All this can be grasped with the child motif, which can be found in all three perspectives (athlete, parent, coach). Values are important, playfulness as a coach, but the dilemma as a parent is whether the child chooses the same path, which is perhaps the strongest indication that the desired balance between short- and long-term interests is disintegrating.

3.2 Results of the quantitative research

Despite the different characteristics of the two quantitative subsamples described above, we found no significant differences ($p > 0.95$) in the means of answers to our elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport questionnaire (Table 2). Thus, we regard the whole sample as the uniform for further analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.704)

and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi 2$ = 931.219; p = .000) indicated that there is room for dimension reduction in this sample. Thus, to reveal and map the main structure of the items regarding elite sport, dimension reduction was undertaken. The analytical strategy for dimension reduction was as follows. In the first step (1), multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used to visualize the structure of items from our questionnaire. Then, (2) four-component principal component analysis (PCA) was performed to reveal the deeper structure of items and to understand the axes identified by using MDS.

For the two-dimensional solution of MDS, Young's S-stress formula was used with squared distances. The stress value was 0.167 which – according to Sturrock and Rocha (2000) – is adequate for 23 objects in two dimensions. From this phase of the analysis, we constructed Figure 3, which served as a raw map of Sustainable Sport elements (without the sets of variables in this phase of the analysis).
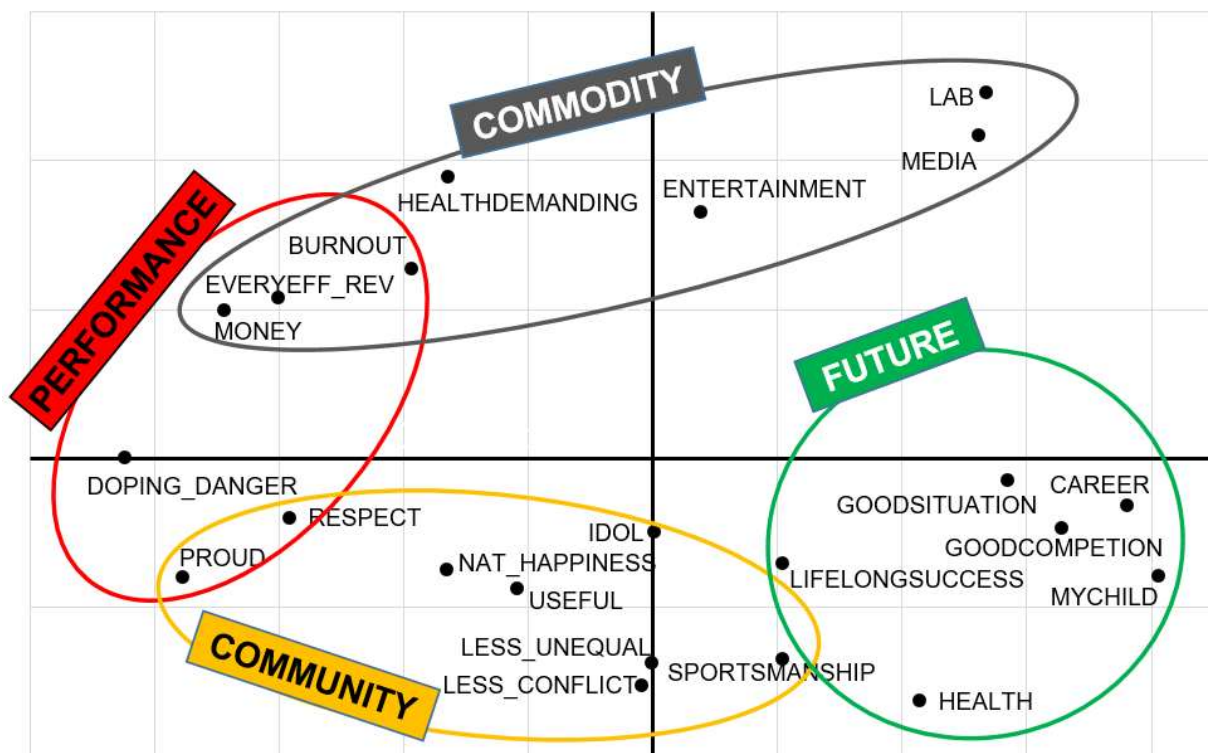

Figure 3. Map of elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport obtained from multidimensional scaling (MDS) and four-component principal component analysis (PCA) *(For labels and statements, refer to Table 2.)*

3.3 The main elements of sustainable (slow) sport

Table 6 contains the rotated component matrix of elite sport statements. Information based on this PCA-based solution helped us to accomplish and structure the raw map of Sustainable Sport with sets of variables (Table 3). This process also gave meaning to the emerging axes: PERFORMANCE and FUTURE are definitive for the horizontal axis, while COMMODITY and COMMUNITY are for the vertical one.

	FUTURE	COMMUNITY	COMMODITY	PERFORMANCE
LIFELONGSUCCESS	0.686			0.298
CAREER	0.588	0.259		
HEALTH	0.582			
GOODSITUATION	0.569			0.357
GOODCOMPETION	0.531			
MYCHILD	0.506	0.369		-0.274
ENTERTAINMENT	0.492		0.296	
LESS_UNEQUAL		0.625		
USEFUL	0.316	0.607		
NAT_HAPPINESS		0.605		
PROUD		0.531		0.449
SPORTSMANSHIP		0.531		
LESS_CONFLICT		0.512		
IDOL	0.358	0.470		
LAB			0.658	
BURNOUT			0.617	0.293
HEALTHDEMANDING	-0.357		0.562	
MONEY			0.548	
MEDIA			0.485	
RESPECT		0.251		0.543
DOPING_DANGER				0.534
EVERYEFF_REV				0.506

Table 6. Rotated component matrix of elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport questionnaire items (for the statements refer to Table 3) *(Notes: components are FUTURE, COMMUNITY, COMMODITY and PERFORMANCE; values in grey italics concern connections between components; values of less than 0.25 were suppressed)*

(1) FUTURE. According to the participants, elite sport can represent a good career opportunity and a means of lifelong success, and they can imagine their child being an elite athlete – as long as this helps maintain health (i.e. is not overly 'healthdemanding'). Competition and pressure to perform are also thought to help to build a strong personality. 'Entertainment' has the least – albeit still significant – loading with FUTURE but also appears here: being able to entertain others appears to be important for sample respondents when the future of the individual is at stake. However, multidimensional scaling associates 'entertainment' rather with the COMMODITY

component of the system (when using a two-dimensional solution to map the elements). Being an 'idol' is also somewhat important here.

(2) COMMUNITY. Sport can reduce conflict and social inequality between people, thereby contributing to national happiness. Elite athletes may be seen as role models and, in general, respondents are proud of their elite athletes and believe that professional sport is a useful activity. All these considerations highlight the community component of sport (career, respect and 'mychild' are also important components here).

(3) COMMODITY. This component indicates that laboratory tricks (doping) and the media are rather detrimental to the situation of sport. When sport is overly demanding about the health of athletes it often leads to burnout. The role of money has increased too much – and not independently of the entertainment factor. As all the statements were negatively/critically worded to this component, we use the reverse of 'commodity' to define Sustainable Sport: it is thus not surprising that COMMUNITY and COMMODITY are the components that are most different in the system. Thus, what is needed is rather decommodification, whereby money and substitutability are relegated to the background.

(4) PERFORMANCE. Performance and respect go hand in hand in the model. However, a redefinition of performance is needed: prohibited performance enhancement (doping) is dangerous to the fundamental values of elite sport and, according to respondents, it is NOT good that elite athletes make every effort to achieve results. (For this reason, we reverse-coded the component labelled 'everyeff' as multidimensional scaling locates it in this component: 'everyeff_rev.')

4. Summary, additional questions, expected results

The study aim was to define the concept of sustainability to one of the most competitive and accelerated subsystems of human activity, elite sport, to gain a robust understanding of it. To succeed, we analyzed what elite sport means to society and what effects it may have on general wellbeing and sustainability. During the qualitative part of the research, well-known Olympians, and other elite athletes – the gladiators of our modern, accelerated era – gave us their thoughts about this topic in interviews. Following this (during the quantitative part of the research), others who love to watch sport or do it mainly in an organized/club-based form and sustainability-interested university students filled in our elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport questionnaire constructed using the former findings. From these samples, a picture of elite sport emerged whereby the fundamental values and factors that endanger sport could be evaluated.

We have mapped the views and values of individuals about elite sport to create an idealized picture of sport called Sustainable Sport. Based on the principal component analysis, a four-component solution was elaborated. According to this explorative model, we constructed the concept of Sustainable Sport which reflects the problems of sport particularly, and (hypothetically) of society and the economy in general. Sustainable Sport (1) is future-orientated due to its focus on the treatment and education of upcoming generations through sport, and its creation of balanced careers with long-term opportunities for pursuing sporting aims and an environment in which humans can develop in the long term; (2) emphasizes community by concentrating on the cooperation, happiness, and sportsmanship that sport can bring to individuals and society; (3) focuses on decommodification by creating a healthy media–sports relationship that uses money as a tool but not an end in itself, and treat athletes less as objects and more as humans; and, consequently, (4) redefines performance by supporting the creation of future-orientation, community, and decommodification in the sense of winning respect.

The research also sheds light on what a successful athlete's career means to those who have experienced it. We have seen that cognitive dissonance exists. I identified the negative factors that affect their well-being through the acceleration of being an athlete and suggested that long-term planning, being viewed as human, and a "slow approach" could help with treatment. I am confident that this research will encourage organizations to help athletes during the transition period, thereby reducing the negative impacts on their well-being. I emphasize that coaches/mentors and career planning have a key role to play in making the professional sport more sustainable.

Another indirect, but no less important, the goal of the research is to envision a desirable, sustainable socio-economic model in which sport is part of a wider human environment. Increasing efficiency and results orientation can jeopardize well-being in the long run. The question is whether the pursuit of efficiency - quantified and often in monetary terms - has reached a point where the balance has already been lost.

Further research is needed to understand how sport can contribute to human wellbeing and how this can be institutionalized. Different social groups should be identified to target and promote the idea of Sustainable Sport more effectively. Professional athletes may be involved in further research to create a deeper understanding of what values sports represent for elite athletes, and how the latter can contribute to their mental and physical health and happiness. This paper may contribute as input for sport backcasting research (Király et al., 2013) in which the main goal

is to identify whether elite sport can be envisioned as sustainable. What would the future of elite and leisure sport be in an era of Sustainable Sport?

A deeper quantitative analysis is also needed. It would be valuable to identify whether in different countries and cultures the same problem structure exists as we have identified in Hungary. How can wider society be structured along with the elite-sport-based Sustainable Sport questionnaire (which should also be refined), and what types of clusters can be identified? What psychographic variables and economic situations significantly influence the responses? Answering these questions is important if we are to identify a path to a more sustainable society with more widespread wellbeing. The above-mentioned factors are also the limits of this research. Our definition of Sustainable Sport is based on a limited, medium-large (N=366) Hungarian sample which should be extended in terms of both quantity and quality (e.g., by addressing a broader stratum of society and/or members of different cultures).

The concept of Sustainable Sports, developed/defined through professional sports, is ultimately universal, not specifically aimed at professional sports or recreational sports. The term "slow sport" is the subject of serious debate in the academic world: and 'slow' was treated on an oxymoron basis, received with radical rejection, in the context of the two, the term sustainable sport was initiated, which we adopted). Since the concept was built on professional sport, (one of the most competitively socialized and accelerated human subsystems) I think the concept is well-founded. If there is a way and a means to move towards sustainability in such a results-oriented, performance and competition-oriented subsystem, why not apply it to another subsystem that operates less along with the growth logic, or even to the economic system as a whole? The message is that all forms of movement in sport must be sustainable: future-oriented, community-building, decodified, and people-centered. At the same time, performance and its measurement need to be nuanced.

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