

**THE IMPACT OF THE 1989-1990 TRANSITION AND GLOBALIZATION  
ON NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SPORT IN HUNGARY  
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

Summary of PhD Thesis

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## 1. Introduction

The present doctoral thesis deals with the relationship of social changes and sport, and in a narrower sense, the effect of the recent and present-day socio-economic changes, the 1989-1990 political and economic transition in Hungary and the processes of globalization, on the situation and opportunities of Hungarian sport in the global arena.

With the dissolution of national limitations related to globalization, the nation building function of sport seems to have been transformed. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the strengthening of national identity used to be the task of history writing primarily, whereas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century sport also made a significant contribution to it. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the athletes of the world do not only compete in the context of nationality-based contests. The globalization of sport seems to change the frameworks that used to define modern sport (local and national frameworks).

The examination of the significance of national identity in sport can offer answers to those working in sport to the question whether national frameworks can still be regarded as an existing force which resists the tendencies of globalization, or it is time to adopt a new paradigm which takes less consideration of nationalities and national identities. Exploring the relationship of sport and national identity can also provide insight to Hungarian sport actors in issues such as: *Who do the athletes play for? What do they work for? Who are proud of them? Who can they expect help from? What is the significance of Hungarian sport in preserving national identity?*

The tendencies taking place in world sport make it more and more important to revise the situation of Hungarian elite sport, and re-assess the social functions of sport that may be related to other areas, but can play a vital role in the contribution of sport to a better, more successful and more integrated society.

## 2. Objectives

*The objective of this PhD thesis is to analyze the relationship of national identity and sport through the examination of Hungarian sport policy, sport media and public views. Although international research on the topic is relatively rich, there has been no relevant investigation of Hungarian sport from this aspect;* the relationship of sport and national identity has only been marginally touched during analyses of the past and present of Hungarian sport, or at the analysis of the national feelings of Hungarians.

On the institutional level, sport political decisions and strategies enforced by the state authorities were in the focus of the research. As for the business sector and the media, their role in forming the discourse of sport and national identity was investigated. The media can make a decisive impact on the perception of certain social groups (e.g. women, minorities, or one's own nation), and can play a crucial role in the dynamics of identities and distancing from identities. On the individual level, the views and opinions of sport leaders and supporters/citizens were to be examined since the enduring beliefs on public views define sport political decisions and the discourse of the media. In accordance with the objectives, the following research questions were put forward:

#### **Sport policy**

- *How has the political sphere used sport for its nation-building goals?*
- *How does the theme of nation appear in sport political documents?*

#### **Sport media**

- *How do the sport media appeal to the national feelings of Hungarian supporters?*
- *How do they react to success/failure?*
- *How do they react to possible scandals?*

#### **Public views**

- *How proud are Hungarians of their elite sport success?*
- *How do they perceive below-par performances?*
- *How important do they find success at the Olympics, World and European championships?*
- *How do they react to scandals?*
- *How do they reflect on the naturalization of athletes?*

In order to make a comprehensive analysis of the topic of national identity and its relations to Hungarian sport, it was necessary to interpret the results in the context of the 1989-1990 transition and of globalization, and to elaborate on how the social, economic, political and cultural changes in the past 20 years changed the environment of Hungarian sport. Answering the research questions can also contribute to the assessment and re-definition of the possible identity-building functions of sport and, and through this, to the repositioning of Hungary on the global map of sport.

## **2.1 Hypotheses**

**H<sub>1</sub>** It was assumed that politics and sport policy see the nation-building potential of sport exclusively in relation to elite sport.

**H<sub>2</sub>** It was assumed that the sport media use national themes and narratives when boosting expectations or reporting on success, however, in case of failure or scandals, these patterns are abandoned.

**H<sub>3</sub>** It was assumed that the public identify with the athletes of the nation in case of success, but less so in case of failure, and that in terms of pride due to elite sport success there are significant differences between different social groups.

**H<sub>4</sub>** It was assumed that elite sport success is highly important for the Hungarian public, but this is not in accordance with their expectations from sport policy.

## **3. Methods**

The research is historical and sociological at the same time; therefore, the methods applied were also selected from these disciplines. In order to have an insight on the aspects of the relationship of sport and national identity, both quantitative and qualitative methodological strategies were used.

Through the analysis of documents, the dimension of sport policy can be understood. The most important sport political documents were the Sport Acts and sport-related policy documents (primarily the National Sport Strategy), but newspaper reports on sport and the minutes of the parliamentary debates on sport policy were also included as sources.

The sport related national feelings of the Hungarian public were explored with survey method. The survey was designed to test the existing common belief that sport has a significant role in the strengthening of national identity, and to mark possible differences in the attitudes and expectations of various social groups. Data were collected from a random and stratified sample (n=1027), which is representative to the Hungarian population, thus, conclusions drawn can be accepted as valid for the whole population (within the margins of statistical error). The data were processed with the SPSS for Windows 10.0 software, during the analysis, two- and three-dimensional cross-tabulations, chi-square test, Pearson's correlation, principal component analysis, factor analysis and linear regression were applied.

To understand the ‘activation’ of national identity, the method of content-analysis was used. The comments to an internet article related to the research topic and selected by the author were examined from a qualitative approach in order to interpret an aspect omitted from the survey that is, the reactions to an incident threatening national identity. This method can be considered as a focus-group interview without a moderator, which allows insight on the views of a sample of supporters. For data processing, the ATLAS Ti5.0 program was used, which made it possible to administer and analyze the most typical patterns in the comments.

The sport media was also investigated with content analysis. The period of examination covered the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and the weeks preceding and following the event. In this part of the research, the issues of *Nemzeti Sport*, the Hungarian daily sports newspaper published between 1 and 30 August, 2008 were investigated, as it is the time of the Olympic Games when the greatest attention is devoted to sport and the sport media in Hungary.

In order to further analyze the sport media, a case study was also applied as a complementary research method, in which the television broadcast of an international ice hockey game was examined. The studio conversation before and after the game and the match broadcast itself gave the opportunity to illustrate with quotations how the sport media relies on the national feelings of supporters.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Sport policy**

Hungarian sport policy can be described with the dominance of the state sector. The institutional heritage of sport is also preserved by the state, as successful athletes are remunerated, and there are official celebrations held when Olympic athletes return home and at anniversaries of great results. Elite sport has been a national symbol for long decades and has been regarded as an important source of Hungarian identity by all the existing paradigms in sport policy.

Elite sport could become such an important source of national identity, because in the state socialist system it offered the only public spaces where national symbols could be displayed and people could openly express their national feelings without any political consequences. In this respect it can be stated that sport was almost an exclusive

field where national identity could be experienced, and even sport leaders used national themes in their speeches, despite the otherwise non-nationalistic political discourse.

After the 1989-1990 political and economic transition, the social functions of sport changed. National feelings could freely be expressed at different forums, and there were numerous candidates to look after the institutional and cultural heritage of the nation. Nevertheless, sport policy continued using elite sport success as a source of legitimacy, as this was assumed to have some kind of safety valve function for the post-transition Hungarian society.

In spite of the doping incidents of the 2004 Olympics, the contradictory nature of elite sport and the fact that it can also become a source of national shame was not mentioned in the Development Plan of Hungarian Sport (2005). The Sport XXI National Sport Strategy which was accepted in 2007 also takes notice of the identity building function of elite sport; however, the idea of national identity does not appear in the vision of the “sporting nation”. It can be observed that the existing paradigms of sport policy still see nation building through sport as a top-down process.

In the parliamentary debate of the Sport Strategy held in May, 2007, almost all the speakers reflected on the positive effects of elite sport success on national pride, yet, national disappointment in case of below-par performances or scandals was not recognized by any of them. Some of the speeches included the contradictory proposition of “small country – great achievements” and concerns whether the previous level of success can be maintained in the future. Despite these comments, expectations before the 2008 Beijing Olympics on the part of politicians and sport leaders were higher than the actual results achieved at the event.

In October 2008, the Hungarian Olympic Committee made a report on the Olympic performance. According to the document, four factors were behind the below-par results: the continuous dissolution of the system of sports clubs, the unsatisfactory appreciation of coaches and sport professionals, the insufficient financial support, and the shortfalls of scientific and medical background.

In addition to these, the unfavourable sporting statistics of the population and the lack of smaller sports facilities are often mentioned in these analyses. The approach of these arguments shows that Sport for All, school sport and university sport are all primarily considered to be the basis of elite sport. The starting point of this paradigm is definitely elite sport, and all other areas are subordinated below this, while in Western European countries enhancing the physical activity of citizens and the successful

preparation of elite athletes are treated as separate issues. Moreover, the physical activity data of the recent decades do not even support the role model function of elite sport, which is further undermined by the publicity surrounding the deviances and anomalies related to it (doping, betting scandals, deaths from over-exercise).

The examined documents and the public speeches and discussions indicate that in the discourse of sport policy, the importance of elite sport is underlined by its recognition as an important source of national pride. As a result of this, sport political decision makers are not willing to take the risk of sacrificing elite sport success for Sport for All and through this, the improvement of national health statistics.

## **4.2 Sport media**

Before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, expectations of the Hungarian team could be sensed in the public discourse of sport. The daily sports newspaper, *Nemzeti Sport* had been dealing with the potential medal winners for months preceding the Olympic Games, and as the event was approaching, the cover of the sport newspaper was also increasingly devoted to the Olympics. In addition to reporting on the expectations of prominent sports personalities, the journalists themselves also published articles related to the chances of Hungarian athletes. Every event and the Hungarian participants were introduced in the paper, and in the titles of articles words such as *medal*, *surprise* and *dream* appeared in many cases at events where at most some Olympic points but no medals were won eventually. The writings often referred to the rich traditions of Hungarian sport, and as the Games were approaching national symbols and elements of sport history were more and more emphasized. On 6 August, a medal table was published based on the results of the preceding world championships, in which Hungary was placed 15<sup>th</sup>. On the day of the Opening Ceremony (8 August, 2008) the cover of the newspaper displayed with large fonts that “*We are optimistic about the 29<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games: Our bet is 9 gold medals.*”

### **4.2.1 Success postponed: the narratives of disappointment**

The analysis of the issues published at the time of the Olympic Games is to be started with the writings about disappointing results, since in spite of the few successful events of the first week these defined the voice of the daily sports paper. In order to explore the discursive complexity of the disappointment resulting from failures, the

terminology of Luhmann (2009) concerning the differentiation between the normative and cognitive narratives of disappointment was used. Normative narratives of disappointment mainly emphasize a kind of moral weakness, often questioning the ability and vocation of athletes, and in a wider framework, demonstrate the negative changes in the values of institutions and the society at large, at times with a sense of nostalgia. As opposed to this, cognitive narratives of disappointment focus on more objective reasons, and therefore, financial and institutional shortcomings are more emphatic.

In the first articles reflecting deep disappointment, which had more and more influence on the voice of the newspaper from Day 3 onwards, the narratives of disappointment were primarily normative; these reports cast doubts over the competence and vocation of athletes and sport leaders. The different points of view of the expert and the journalist are well illustrated by an article reporting on the fencing competition of Day 4, in which the expert of NS, a former world champion relied on a mainly cognitive narrative of disappointment and was optimistic about the forthcoming, whereas sports journalists used normative elements in their assessment.

After Day 9 of the Olympics, the leaders of the Hungarian team made more and more outraged comments, primarily targeting politics about the adverse circumstances of sport and the disappointing results were not left unanswered by the daily sports paper, either. On the second page, an article was published with the title “*We are still struggling*”. This editorial article focused on the crisis of sport leadership in its normative narrative, and marked the leaders of Hungarian sport as those responsible for the weak performances. Although national symbols were not directly referred to in these writings, the controversy of the glorious past and the shameful present appears in several articles (e.g. the article titled “*The mortal agony of a former superpower*”).

#### **4.2.2 Narratives of success: medals, gold medals and relief on the last day**

The staff of Nemzeti Sport was probably not prepared to have to fill the paper with writings analyzing the crisis of sport and reporting on failures. In spite of the below-par results, the covers usually delivered positive messages, which could not report on gold medals, but still focused on partial successes and future chances. More negative writings appeared on the second page perhaps in order that the surface of the paper holds up the enthusiasm of the supporters.



Delivering success is certainly an easier task; these narratives can be built on the greatness of the athletes, their achievement, but can also evoke the emotions of fans by recalling the medal ceremony in which national symbols such as the anthem or the Hungarian flag are also present.

In the last three days of the Games, the Hungarian team finally won some gold medals, and from this time on, the panels of success-narratives, which had been waiting in the toolbars of Hungarian sports journalists could finally emerge. As national pride can best be manifested in team sports, it was an accentuated goal, and owing to the previous disappointment, it became a crucial issue that the iconic Hungarian water polo team, which participated in the “most Hungarian” sport, should win the third gold medal. On the day after the final victory, the sports paper was never short of appreciation: “*On the last day of the Games the Hungarian water polo team made history*”, referring to the exceptional achievement that this was their third Olympic gold medal in a row. The epic writings praising the team and their head coach used symbols and concepts such as anthem, flag, history, campaign in order to evoke the feeling of national pride from the readers.

#### **4.2.3 Case study**

Further examination of the sport media was done through a case study analysis. The intention was backed by the fact that on 23 April, 2010 the Hungarian national ice hockey team had a game deciding on promotion at the Ljubljana Division 1 world championship. In the recent years, mainly due to the strengthening of the national squad ice hockey has become increasingly important for the media and the supporters alike. Furthermore, in this case success is the result of a small subculture in one of the most globalized sports. Concerning conditions (financial and facility) Hungary falls considerably behind countries with similar results. Accordingly, the public discourse of ice hockey is not defined by the former superpower status of Hungary, but by the “over-achievement of a small sport in a small country”.

During the broadcast, the commentator tried to boost the enthusiasm of the viewers with the help of national symbols and buzzwords, and tried to connect the television viewers and the fans in the arena. Towards the end of the game it became apparent that the Hungarian team is going to lose. Although the reporters relied on a normative narrative of disappointment, they blamed the referees, the circumstances related to playing away and the misfortune, while players were not among the scapegoats.

## **4.3 Public views**

### **4.3.1 Pride and success**

Previous studies dealing with the national feelings of Hungarians examined national pride related to sport exclusively through the success of elite athletes. In the research it was intended to make a more complex analysis of the effects of sport on national identity. According to previous research results, sport results are the most important sources of national pride in the Hungarian society, and in addition to these, artistic and scientific achievements and pride of the nation's history are also significant. Nevertheless, it is interesting that these factors of success cannot be regarded as some kind of common social achievement; they emphasize the outstanding efforts of individuals.

The results of the survey indicate that pride in case of successful performances is much more typical than disappointment in connection with failures. It can be observed that in case of failure, identification tends to decrease. Therefore, the question may be raised whether identity related to sporting success can be connected to sport, or perhaps rather to success. The attitudes of different social groups to sporting success and failure are not the same. People with higher qualifications and men react more intensively to both success and fiascos. Among men, there are significant differences in terms of settlement level and regions as well. It seems that while those living in regional centres are more enthusiastic, people living in the capital are more critical to elite sport performances at international events. The results underline that the supporter base of Hungarian elite sport is to be found primarily in the regional cities.

It was examined with the help of principal component analysis how important it is for Hungarians to see that elite athletes perform successfully at international events. The average values of the principal component show that sporting success is not equally important for the members of Hungarian society. For low-status groups typically living in smaller rural settlements the statement can be regarded as valid according to which fundamental existential issues take precedence over the desire to experience group belonging. In case of groups less involved in sport, either as physically active citizens or as consumers, it is perhaps due to the lack of experiences mobilizing national identity that they do not consider elite sport success to be important.

The research also focused on whether the expectations of citizens were in accordance with their preferences concerning the sport budget, in other words, whether

those who find elite sport success important also emphasize elite sport spending in their division of the budget. The correlation coefficients indicate that people who find elite sport success important indeed preferred areas related to it significantly more than the areas related to Sport for All.

The results show that the sport-related views of Hungarians are defined by the paradigm characteristic of sport policy and the sport media. In this approach, physical activity is of individual interest, while elite sport is a communal one, thus many of the supporters also urge that more substantial support be given to elite sport. The majority of the society identifies with success, but in case of failures, similarly to sports journalists, the extent of identification considerably decreases. The results indicate that elite sport can boost national pride only if success can be maintained and even then, only for those who follow sporting events and receive the messages of the media.

Absence from sport consumption can be due to exclusion, but a voluntary decision as well. The relatively privileged status of elite athletes is a frustrating stimulus for the taxpayers and the socially excluded groups as well; therefore, the issue of premiums has been put on the agenda more and more often. Reports on the scandalous behaviour and below-par performances of elite athletes tend to judge them from a moral aspect; consequently many people lose their interest and decide to stay away from supporting.

In case of groups voluntarily staying away or forced to be excluded from sport consumption, the nation building function of sport cannot be realized. Furthermore, owing to their day-to-day struggle for a living, the socially excluded groups may find it increasingly difficult to identify with any *imagined community*. At the other end of the spectrum there are those Hungarians living in Hungary or in a foreign country, who have high social status and can follow athletes successfully representing the nation in global-level sports (football, basketball, motor sports, tennis) on channels of the new media. These tendencies indicate a widening gap in terms of access to sport as one of the most important sources of national pride.

#### **4.3.2 Reactions to the Athens doping scandals**

The emotional and cognitive reactions of Hungarian citizens to scandalous events were explored through their opinions about the incidents of the 2004 Athens Olympics. Owing to the intensive reactions in the public discourse it is not surprising that four-fifth of the respondents have heard about the doping cases and an overwhelming

majority agreed with the statement that the scandals had a negative impact on the reputation of the country. Similarly, approximately three quarters felt that the cases discredited Hungarian sport. What we can see from the data is that Hungarians, regardless of their social status, care about how foreigners see Hungary (*Fremdbild*). It is interesting that residents of the capital city were more reserved in blaming the athletes, and the ratio of uncertain people was also the highest in the capital city. The difference might be explained by the fact that people living in the capital city are more exposed to a multitude of perspectives and interpretations, which may result in a more complex and informed opinion.

The results underline that in case of scandals, a sense of collective shame emerges among the supporters, which is not necessarily rooted in their identification with the athletes, but rather in the acceptance of the statement that athletes are the diplomats of the country and as such, they certainly have an influence on how foreigners see Hungary.

#### **4.3.3 Hosting international sporting events**

Previous research results support the idea that as the host of a major event, a community, a city or even a country is responsible for successful organization, which demands, and during preparations, certainly strengthens community and in some cases, national integration. The nation-building potential of Hungary hosting the Olympics, the Football European Championship or other major international events is often referred to in the public discourse of sport policy, and on these occasions the support of the wider public is always mentioned. Even so, the results show that organizing mega events is less supported than the hosting of international competitions in traditional Hungarian sports.

Besides the ratios of those supporting and opposing bids for sporting events, the arguments brought in favour of supporting them can also indicate how much the identity building potential of these events is reflected in the views of citizens. Although the respondents could express their opinion in their own words to the open-ended questions, the answers centred around two main themes, the foreign recognition of the country and economic benefits. The reasons for support diverge with respect to the size of the event (mega-event or smaller international competition). The economic and image-related benefits of bigger events are more recognized, however, the lower ratio of those

supporting their hosting indicates that Hungary bidding for mega events is not regarded to be a realistic idea.

There are significant differences between socio-demographic groups in how much they recognize the importance of the image-building potential of these events. According to the results, among men the group with the highest standard of consumption, whereas among women those with a college/university degree, the youngest age group and those living in regional centres showed significantly higher values. The differences indicate that the image of Hungary in the eyes of foreigners is a more important concern of the higher status groups. Nevertheless, perhaps owing to the previously unsuccessful bids, the public does not clearly support the organization of mega events. As opposed to this, smaller international competitions were given more backing, mainly because there are many people who do not think that the country is ready to host a mega event. It is also interesting that the public does not primarily support Hungary's hosting international competitions because they would like to attend these events.

#### **4.3.4 Carnival identity**

It is a remarkable result that merely 6.3% of the respondents claimed that by hosting international sporting events Hungarian fans can have personal experiences. The members of this small group can be regarded as the ones who consider these events to be sources of national identity. The data reflect that this dimension of national identity is not nearly as significant as elite sport success or the identity related to the image of the country. The social embeddedness of the third form of national identity can further be observed through the public attendance of sporting events. The vast majority of the Hungarian population never or hardly ever visits sporting events. It is important to mention that behind the rare positive answers, not only national, but local ties can also be found, since the corresponding question did not only refer to games of the national teams or international competitions.

In terms of visiting sporting events, there are significant differences by gender, age, educational level and standard of consumption as well. The differences according to educational level, which can be considered as a relevant status indicator in today's Hungarian society, and according to the possession of certain consumer goods seem to indicate that the lowest status groups have become more and more excluded from this leisure time activity, while the most active, or rather, less inactive groups are recruited

from the upper and middle classes. Visiting sporting events is not a social event any more, even though for those present it can strengthen the local identity of a small village or a town, and national identity as well. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the bigger the settlement is, the less significant this community function can be (where the point is being together), and the more important entertainment becomes, which however is strongly related to success. Furthermore, sport consumers living in cities can find other alternatives to spend their leisure time in an enjoyable way.

#### **4.3.5 The views of supporters on naturalization**

The increasing geographical mobility of athletes has also made naturalization more common in the age of globalization. The category of 'nation' is relativized, or at least softened, since it may include people who do not meet the traditional criteria of nationality (birthplace, mother tongue, cultural heritage). Naturalization is a widespread phenomenon in handball, and Hungary is no exception in this respect. Accepting the loss, when "one of us" is taken is a more sensitive issue. In the recent years Hungary was an inwards open, outwards closed country, which had foreigners naturalized but did not have to face the traumatic situation of losing excellent Hungarian athletes.

However, recently, at the end of 2009 it became an issue that László Nagy, the captain of the men's handball team would not play for the Hungarian team and would play for the Spanish team at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Since the topic is still on the agenda of the media, which treats the issue from a moral aspect, the reactions of supporters in connection with the related articles are also diverse, and many times the comments of fans include strong opinions. From the articles published, the most detailed one was titled "*László Nagy: I am Hungarian*"; the article, owing to its provocative message, generated 103 comments from the readers, which were processed with the AtlasTi 5.0 software. After the coding it became apparent that the most frequent theme was the moral weakness of the player; in the corresponding comments supporters practically disinherited the son of the nation, based on the traditional perception, which does not allow national belonging to be a matter of choice. Distancing from the player also ensures that the fans do not have to be ashamed, only the unfaithful athlete. Many comments referred to the institutional shortcomings as well, primarily concerning the functioning of the association. In these comments the feeling of national shame does appear; however, it is reflected on the leaders of the association

while the player is acquitted. In comparison with these, the remarks made in connection with naturalization in general include fewer normative elements, or at least there are some more rational approaches to it, and furthermore, they also join the player in pointing out the controversy between not being able to accept someone's departure and the uncritically positive reception of newcomers.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1 Checking the hypotheses**

The assumption, according to which politics and sport policy see the nation-building potential of sport exclusively in relation to elite sport, was verified. In the documents and public speeches examined, it is the success of elite sport and the hosting of international elite sport events which are seen as the potential sources of national pride, while similar ideas related to Sport for All were not present in the public discourse of sport policy. It must also be added that in case of both kinds of sources, according to a kind of optimistic approach, only the potential positive effects on national identity are mentioned, and the negative effects of possible failures have only been recognized after disappointing or scandalous incidents happened.

The hypothesis, according to which the sport media use national themes and narratives when boosting expectations or reporting on success, but abandons these patterns in case of failure or scandals, can be partly accepted. The articles published in the daily sports paper and the broadcast of the sport television referred to the Hungarianness of the athletes when articulating expectations and reporting on success, and used national symbols, such as the anthem and the flag. The abandoning of national patterns in case of failure is valid in the way that the representatives of the media blamed the athletes and the sport leaders in their normative narratives of disappointment, but even in these, national belonging was equally important. In the television program examined, national symbols appeared despite the loss, so the abandoning of national patterns cannot be marked here.

The third hypothesis, according to which the public identify with the athletes of the nation in case of success, but less so in case of failure, was also verified. The majority of the Hungarian population is proud when Hungarian athletes perform successfully at international competitions; however, disappointment is much less intensive; to this

question typically neutral answers were given. In terms of pride due to elite sport success there are significant differences between different social groups. The results also underline that the influence of socio-economic status is a strong one: the identification of people with a higher status with the athletes of the nation is more intensive, perhaps because nation can be regarded as a post-material value and the lower status groups can be characterized with material values primarily related to sustenance.

The fourth hypothesis, according to which elite sport success is highly important for the Hungarian public, but this is not in accordance with their sport political expectations, was rejected. The results indicate that those who find elite sport success important indeed prefer sport policy areas related to elite sport. Citizens therefore have a fairly coherent picture about the necessary financial background to ensure elite sport success; even so, it must be added that the ratios of the current sport budget show the preference of elite sport even more strongly than the divisions given in the answers.

## **5.2 Problems to be addressed**

The results show that for the actors of sport policy and sport media it is equally important that the elite athletes of Hungary perform successfully at international sporting events, especially at the Olympic Games. However, it must be admitted that the world of sport has undergone radical changes in the past decade and there is a growing number of competitors in the global race, which now includes the ‘third world’ countries of the bipolar world that used to be underdogs in sport. The sport system of these works along the same logic in many respects, thus they would be keen on using Olympic success for nation building purposes and are willing to provide their national athletes with all financial and institutional support. In addition to this, the dominance of political-economic superpowers is also apparent, which seems to underline the increasing inequalities in sport as well. These tendencies have resulted in the setback of countries with strong traditions but weak economic potential and a narrow social base, such as Hungary and other countries of the former Eastern Bloc. In case of the ‘Third World’ countries and the Republic of China it can be said that the status and prestige of elite athletes is fairly high and sport is the only channel of social mobility for many, while in Hungary, traditionally successful sports can only ensure a secure living in case of national team membership and outstanding international results. Competitive sport is



by no means the only channel of mobility; in fact, we can observe the narrowing of this channel in the recent years. Nevertheless, the state-financed talent development system is a true flagship of the selective Hungarian sport system which focuses on excellence rather than participation.

During the Beijing Olympics it could be seen that the political and media actors who had built up the discourse of the “sports nation” had difficulties when assessing the results. The role of the sport media is crucial in forming the sport discourse. The broadcasts and reports of elite sport events are delivered according to the trinity of *expectation – result – analysis*, which can become a circulatory process during the Olympic Games. In the first phase (expectation), the importance of the event is always over-emphasized. In the second phase (result), emotions are involved to draw the line between *us* and *them*. The third phase (analysis) is always based on the first phase and depends on the second. This is the phase in which it is decided whether the discourse of sport turns to the discourse of crisis or the discourse of success. However, one thing is certain: the final conclusion is always further or even stronger support of elite sport, either because “we are in a crisis” or because “we are on the right track”.

The dynamic of failures and scandals in the national sport discourse is also a very interesting one. First, the journalists distance themselves from the fallen athlete and start to look for the reasons. In accordance with this, the sport leaders who could take responsibility are interviewed, but they delegate the problem to the level of budget distributors instead. From this point on, the moral aspects of the problems become simple financial issues and the pathways of solution are narrowed. What remains unchanged is the firm belief that elite sport is very important for Hungary, as it is the flagship of not only the sport sector, but that of the country as well.

In the wake of the processes of globalization and the 1989-1990 political and economic transition, the influence of the business sector on sport and especially elite sport has increased considerably. The international success of elite sport largely depends on the successful functioning of the clubs, which operate as economic ventures. However, the support of sports clubs almost exclusively depends on the financial decisions of sponsors and on the political decisions of the government. In the state socialist sport model, business and market-based operation, sponsoring and merchandising were unfamiliar terms for sport associations and sports clubs, and several organizations are still incapable of working in accordance with a modern marketing approach. It is a further problem that most of the traditional Hungarian sports

are among the less marketable sports of the globalized sport industry, and consequently, neither the associations, nor athletes or coaches can hope for sufficient income, especially from television revenues, which would ensure sustainability without substantial state funding. Currently, *sport in Hungary is one of the unsustainable social subsystems*; the existing state support does not seem to be enough for the secure operation of sport, therefore, the involvement and re-involvement of the other two sectors that is the civil and business sector is a crucial issue.

In the examined documents of sport policy, the other most often mentioned sport-related source of nation building is the hosting of the Olympic Games. However, it can be observed here as well that the number of competitors has increased and even traditional superpowers cannot be regarded as clear favourites when bidding. The idea of the Budapest Olympics is still on the agenda of the public discourse, even if it cannot be connected to a political party, but to a civil initiative. Nevertheless, it must be added that the Budapest Olympic Movement (BOM), which is a civil organization receiving relatively intensive media attention cannot be considered as a “bottom-up” initiative, in terms of its membership or its objectives. The citizens themselves are only expected to offer their passive assistance and give their consent to the project.

In connection with hosting the Olympic Games, critical voices often point out that the expenditures on the part of the public sector and the civil sphere are not in balance with the revenues of the private sector, and this seems to be a realistic scenario in case of Hungary as well. Behind the countries/cities winning the right to host the mega events of globalized sport there are states with a strong economy and/or powerful interest groups of the global economy. In the case of Hungary it is doubtful that even the concurrences of political will, the support of economic actors and the silent approval of citizens would provide sufficient resources to win a bid of such high prestige, let alone the actual organization, the functions of the facilities built and their long-term sustainability. Similarly to the previously mentioned trinity, the three steps of candidacy – decision – evaluation can also be observed here, which in case of unsuccessful bids can again be delivered as the failure of the nation. This pessimistic approach is not manifested in the public discourse of sport policy.

It has become more and more difficult for elite sport to meet the expectations created by itself and the media, thus it cannot easily build the *imagined community* of the nation. However, in the disintegrating Hungarian society, not only *imagined*, but *real* communities would be needed as well. The community building function of sport is

not exclusively related to the success of ‘heroes’, but in the public discourse of sport in Hungary, elements of nation building that are not related to competitive sport are not emphatic yet. The tendencies taking place in world sport make it more and more important to revise the situation of Hungarian elite sport, and re-assess the social functions of sport that may be related to other areas which were given less attention in the sport policy of the recent years, but can play a vital role in the contribution of sport to a better, more successful and more integrated society. There are countries where Sport for All could also become a source of national pride; for example cycling is a national symbol of the Netherlands and citizens of the Scandinavian countries are also proud of their sporting statistics.

It would be worthwhile to capitalize on the integrative power of sport on these areas, but in order to allow the manifestation of identities independent of Olympic results, sport should not only be regarded as the contesting of nations (*difference*), but as a scene for encounters of people with different ethnic and social backgrounds (*diversity*) by the actors defining the public sport discourse. For this, a kind of paradigm change would be needed, which would mean turning back the upside-down pyramid of sport, an approach which does not see Sport for All as the basis of elite sport, since adult sport for example cannot be fitted into this picture. In the paradigm change, the myth of leisure and school sport stemming from elite sport (and its role model function) should also be abandoned, especially because neither has it been proved by the sporting statistics of the recent years/decades, nor by international tendencies.

Although the institutional national heritage is embedded in the society, its content is not about the achievement of the entire Hungarian nation, but about that of outstanding individuals. In order to achieve social integration, it would be vital that pride related to national belonging should not only manifest in this ‘passive’ form. For the strengthening of an active, civil aspect of national identity, the spreading of volunteerism and the democratization of the discourse on national identity are both indispensable conditions, which would mean a decrease of political influence on sport (as well).

Meanwhile, in the public discourse, the content of ‘nation’ as a category has also become politicized, the same way as sport. Two decades after the 1989-1990 transition sport is not the only scene of expressing national belonging any more, but perhaps the only one where national symbols do not have political connotations. The political division of Hungarians also has a negative effect on communities, and although sport

has not yet become one of the dividing symbols, it must be ensured that this is not to be changed in the future. In order to achieve this, the influence of politics should decrease and the role of local communities should become more emphatic both in operating sport and in forming national identity.

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