

## SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN COUNTRIES WITH SIMILAR POPULATION AS IN SLOVAKIA

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**Abstract:** Sports policy in the country is key in managing local sports. Laws and the government's approach affect the activities of all sports organizations and athletes, regardless of the sport or level at which they operate. There are different approaches to sports management and topics, that are relevant from the point of view of sport in the country. The main goal of this article is to identify countries with a similar population size as Slovakia, but with a different geographical, political and cultural environment. By bringing together sports policy in these countries, represented by the position of sport in the country and the main topics in the field of sport, it is possible to define different management of sport by governments around the world.

**Keywords:** sport management, small country, slovakia, policy, nationalism, government

**JEL Classification:** MO

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most countries use sport as a tool for nationalism and economic and social development. Government through laws controls, supports or regulates the activities of individual sports organizations. Most of them try to financially and materially support training institutions serving the development of athletes for domestic or international competitions, support sports organizations in organizing international events or participate in the maintenance of national sports facilities (stadiums, halls, swimming pools...). In exchange for this support, the government can influence mass sports in the country or present messages related to a healthy lifestyle or the fight against alcoholism, cigarettes, drugs, gambling and discrimination [1].

Various "small countries" from around the world were selected to demonstrate the diversity of the system and the position of sport in the country. The population or area is often used to define small countries.

Depending on historical and socio-cultural conditions, different small countries choose different sports strategies. Some focus on supporting a narrow range of sports, some on organizing international events, others on copying strategies from neighbouring countries with similar conditions but a larger population [2]. Sport offers an ideal platform for the development of cultural values and the formation of national identity. Especially in small countries, international sports achievements support nationalism and serve to make the country visible in the world [3] [4].

### 2. FINDINGS

Finland, New Zealand, Jamaica, Lebanon, Qatar and Hong Kong, which are comparable in population to Slovakia, were selected to compare different approaches to sports management.

#### Finland

Finland is a Nordic country, the European Union member, with a population of 5.5 million. The country's

sports system is largely dependent on voluntarism, and compared to other countries, there is not much importance given to sport. The original role of sport in Finland is accessibility for the community and for educating people.

Neighbouring countries started implementing sports strategies much earlier than Finland. Probably due to the deep-rooted ideal of equality and the emphasis on pluralism, the country did not even focus on selected sports. Therefore, it is no surprise that this has been reflected in one of the traditional indicators of success, such as Olympic medals. As a traditional winter sports country, Finland won only 5 medals at the Sochi 2014 Olympics and only 6 medals at Pyongyang 2018.

The basic issue that sports in the country deals with are investments in mass sports and investments in elite sports. Supporters of mass sport consider that increased investment in this type of sport leads to success even at the highest level. On the contrary, those who consider investing in elite sports to be a priority claim that without targeted subsidies they will not maintain their current level on the international stage and elite sports should be the engine of the entire sports system in the country [3].

#### New Zealand

New Zealand is an island country in Australia and Oceania with a population of 4.8 million. Sport is one of the main features of national identity. It is considered one of the tools of visibility, which presents the world with the image of New Zealand as a sporting country. In particular, the national sport of rugby is supposed to give the impression of bravery, resilience, independence and prosperity.

The organization international events such as the Rugby World Cup in 2011 or the co-organization of the Cricket World Cup in 2015 the government considers as a sign of the ability, despite its size and geographical isolation, to make the most of the country's economic and social cohesion. Even by meeting the challenges of sport, New Zealand wants to be a small but capable and innovative

country rather than blaming itself for the lack of resources [5].

### Jamaica

Jamaica is a Central American island nation with nearly 2.9 million inhabitants. It is part of the British Commonwealth.

Although sport in Jamaica is considered an important part of national development, it has only a low budget priority for the local government. Commercial sports are more semi-professional than professional, as most competitions are dependent on amateur athletes. The only sport that can be considered fully professional is horse racing. Most professional athletes, especially in athletics, work outside Jamaica. Occasional commercial international sporting events (golf, tennis, cricket ...) organized by the country have only a minimal representation of domestic professional athletes.

Sports policy addresses four main themes [6]:

- sport for all (healthy lifestyle and socialization),
- sport for peace and unity (a tool of a stronger community system),
- sport for economic development (development of sport as a sector that can contribute to GDP),
- sport and the environment (sustainable landscape development and a healthy environment).

### Lebanon

Lebanon is a country in the Middle East with a population of six million. Sport in the country is fundamentally influenced by the politics and religious communities of Christians and Muslims. Funds for individual sports are redistributed according to the beliefs of the stakeholders (ministry, president of the federation, general secretary, majority representation of athletes in a particular sport).

The supremacy of religion over sport in the most popular sports, football (president and secretary general are Muslims), basketball (president and secretary general are Christians), prevents talented athletes from other religious communities from participating.

Redistributing funds to sports federations that are "under political protection" without audits, controls and evaluations damages the image of sport. Private investors are therefore very careful when entering elite or community sports.

In addition, the sport generally does not appeal to a stronger fan base. The reason is the violence at sports events, which is again caused by religious differences [7].

### Qatar

Qatar is an emirate with 2.6 million inhabitants, located on the Arabian Peninsula. Thanks to oil, it is a rich country with a high standard of living. Due to its wealth, it has successfully become a global sports centre. The policy in the field of sports is mainly focused on the organization of international sports events and the building of sports infrastructure. In 2022, Qatar will organize the World Cup.

When representing the country, the so-called naturalization, derogatorily named "buying athletes". This principle consists in changing the citizenship of athletes from other countries. It also seeks to integrate the children of migrants who have come to Qatar for work.

Top sport lacks strategic planning. This small country focuses on too many sports, instead of focusing on just a few disciplines. The current support of team sports such as football or handball takes away many potential athletes for individual sports in which there are better prospects for success.

Investments in the organization of major sports events and elite sports may not bring increased interest in sports among the population. The main development problems are mainly cultural barriers, especially the low participation rate of women in sport [8] [9].

### Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a former British colony with more than seven million inhabitants, which since 1997 has become a special administrative region of China. Even after Hong Kong became part of China, it was able to retain its capitalist system and autonomy in all areas except diplomacy and defence. Therefore, the entire sports structure in the country is independent. Rapid economic growth is also reflected in a high standard of living.

Despite a more systematic approach over the last decade and work with greater governmental and non-governmental financial resources, sport in the country is still very underdeveloped in this country. Through further investment, the government wants to reflect the country's fundamental economic progress, foster national pride, and undermine China's sense of subordination through international sporting achievements.

The three main topics of sports policy are:

- sport for all,
- supporting top sports,
- creating conditions for the organization of international sports events.

Although the government is trying to find a balance between all three areas of interest, in fact, funding does not give everyone the same attention.

The country invests the most in elite sports, which are considered inspiration for young people, and in international sporting events, which are considered as a tool to strengthen the international image. Hong Kong was a co-organizer of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and a major organizer of the 2009 East Asian Games.

Despite significant efforts, the biggest problems so far are in the third area, mass sports. The reason is the absence of tradition and culture of physical activities and the focus of young people more on the academic environment than on sports [10].

### Slovakia

In Slovakia is the public interest in sports to support and develop youth sports, ensure the preparation and participation of the sports representation of the Slovak Republic in a major competition, protect the integrity of sports and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Legislatively, sport in Slovakia belongs to the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The sports public, led by the strongest football and hockey association, is of the opinion that sport is not a priority for the state, as evidenced by the problematic law and funding of sports [11].

### 3. CONCLUSION

Sports policy has a major impact on all sports organizations in the country. Limited human and financial resources force small countries to adapt sport to these conditions. The logical precondition for these states is to focus on a narrow range of sports and to train competitive athletes in them. However, not all countries are acting in accordance with this assumption. The reasons may be the popularity of global sports, a liberal approach to sport or the influence of religion. Some countries want to present their national pride or economic strength to the world with the help of their top athletes and events they organize, without hesitating to use inadequate financial resources, either for

events or, in some cases, for the naturalization of athletes. However, there are countries where sport is, for various reasons, explicitly on the fringes of social interest. A comparison of the position and main topics in the field of sports in the analysed countries is shown in Table 2.

The different positions of sport in the country and the main topics in the field of sport point to the importance of geographical, social, economic, political but also religious influence on sport. A thorough knowledge of the conditions and importance of sport in each country can help to better understand the importance and mission of sport for a global society.

**Table 1** Main topics in the field of sports in the analyzed countries

COUNTRY	THE POSITION OF SPORT IN THE COUNTRY	MAIN TOPICS IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS
Finland	A community-based tool for educating people based on volunteering	Financing of mass sports Financing of professional sports
New Zealand	A sign of national identity used to present the image of the country	Presentation of positive qualities and prosperity of the world Organizing international events
Jamaica	Part of national development, but with low budget priority at mostly semi-professional level	Sport for everyone Sport for peace and unity Sport for economic development Sport and the environment
Lebanon	Form of presentation of political and religious views	Religious and political affiliation of representatives of sports federations
Qatar	A tool for presenting the country as a global sports center, but with the absence of strategic management of its own sports structure	Organizing international events Naturalization of athletes
Hong Kong	A way of presenting economic growth through international events, but with underdeveloped own sports structure	Sport for everyone Support for professional sports Creating conditions for organizing international sports events
Slovakia	Promoting a healthy lifestyle and representing the country at major events	Sports laws Sport financing Development of youth sports

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