

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in
Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FOOTBALL ECOSYSTEM CAPACITATION IN
SLOVENIA

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Abstract

Exploring the Football Association of Slovenia's (NZS) pivotal role, this study draws parallels with the Portugal Football School (PFS) to illuminate NZS's potential in shaping Slovenian football. Through qualitative research methods, a strategic roadmap has emerged, outlining key steps for NZS to increase quality of football ecosystem in Slovenia, not only the competitive on-pitch part, but the overall benefits for other stakeholders as well. Recommendations are tailored to emphasize education's pivotal role in advancing football industry. This thesis advocates for NZS's proactive pursuit of capacitating the football ecosystem, fostering a vibrant and prosperous future for Slovenian football.

Keywords

Football ecosystem; Football Education; Stakeholder engagement; Football Association of Slovenia (NZS); Roadmap; Portuguese Football Association (FPF)

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	5
2.1. Football’s stakeholders	5
2.2. Role of skills & competences	6
2.3. Relation to the research topic.....	6
3. Methodology.....	8
3.1. Research Approach	8
3.2. Limitations	9
4. Portuguese Football Association – The Benchmark.....	9
4.1. Status Quo in Portugal	9
4.2. Current Strategy	10
4.3. Ecosystem Capacitation	11
4.3.1. Portugal Football School.....	11
4.3.2. Interview with FPF - André Seabra	12
4.3.3. Results.....	12
5. Football Association of Slovenia – Topic of Research	13
5.1. Status Quo in Slovenia.....	13
5.2. Current Strategy	13
5.3. Ecosystem Capacitation	14
5.3.1. Awareness	14
5.3.2. Impact for stakeholders.....	15
5.3.3. Interviews with NZS – Eva Červinski & Iztok Kavčič.....	16
5.3.4. Results.....	16
6. Critical Analysis	17
6.1. Status Quo Comparison	17
6.2. Strategic Plan Comparison.....	18
6.3. Ecosystem Capacitation Comparison and Findings.....	19
1st Finding: Educational Body	19
2nd Finding: Science.....	19
3rd Finding: Knowledge Transfer	20
7. Roadmap.....	20
7.1. Assessment.....	20
7.1.1. SWOT Analysis	21
7.1.2. PESTEL Analysis	21

7.2.	Stakeholder Consultation	22
7.3.	Strategy and Project Evaluation.....	22
7.4.	Curriculum Development.....	23
7.5.	Partnerships.....	23
7.6.	Stakeholder Engagement	24
7.7.	Monitoring and Evaluation	24
8.	Conclusion.....	25
9.	References	26
10.	Appendix.....	29
	Appendix 1 – Interview with André Seabra, the Director of Portugal Football School.....	29
	Appendix 2 – Interview with Eva Červinski, Head of International and Legal department, NZS	33
	Appendix 3 – Interview with Iztok Kavčič, Head of Coach Development department, NZS.	39

1. Introduction

Slovenia is renowned for its passion for sports. As the world's number one sport, football co-creates Slovenian culture, captivating the hearts and minds of thousands. As one of the most beloved sports in Slovenia, football transcends mere entertainment, serving as a unifying force that fosters community spirit and national pride. At the heart of Slovenia's football ecosystem lies the Football Association of Slovenia (NZZ), a central governing body responsible for the pivotal task of stewarding the growth, development, and education of all of its stakeholders.

This thesis endeavours to explore the multifaceted role of NZZ as the primary entity entrusted for steering the course of football in Slovenia. As a benchmark, the top-of-the-class example of Portugal Football School (PFS), a Portuguese Football Association's project (FPF), will be used. With a focus on promotion, progression and education, this study seeks to illuminate the influence and capabilities in shaping the landscape of football one central football association can have and how to transfer and apply them for the Slovenian case.

By examining its interactions with diverse stakeholders ranging from players and clubs to managers, journalists, medical teams, educational bodies and others, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the NZZ's impact of the football ecosystem at large. I will dig into the status quo and understand what NZZ is doing to leverage its influence to educate and empower stakeholders, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, competences, and resources to thrive in an ever-evolving football landscape. By shedding light on the pivotal role of the NZZ in promoting, progressing, and educating football stakeholders, this research endeavours to pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for Slovenian football.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Football's stakeholders

To begin the theoretical part of the study, we first have to define some of the terms, fundamental for this research. According to Freeman and McVea (2001), a stakeholder is an individual or group with the chance to influence an organisation's achievement of its objectives or can be influenced by the organisation to achieve its goals. In the world of business there are many definitions of who and what a stakeholder is – which will not be investigated. For the purpose of this study the following idea by Freeman et al (2010) is more important: “Understanding the economics of markets is important, but at the centre of starting, managing, and leading a business is a set of stakeholder relationships which define the business.” The authors agree that every market is in fact conditioned and further defined by its shareholders.

Thus, lets transmit this to the topic of the research. Football is a market (Manoli and Kenyon 2018). So, football as a market, should be conditioned and defined by its stakeholders. In such manner, who are the stakeholders of the football ecosystem? Cicut et al (2017) provide a structured overview of the stakeholders. The authors used a French Ligue 1 giant Olympique Marseille as an example and analysed its stakeholders. For the purpose of this study, there is no need to categorize stakeholders into internal and external buckets since the scope is different. However, this transparent overview of the subjects that contribute to one club, gives an idea that was needed. Stakeholder categorization is provided in the following figures.

Internal stakeholders	Main expectations	Internal stakeholders	Main expectations
Owners	Sports, economic, financial, social, media and political	Team collaborators	Sports
Directors	Sports, economic, financial, media and political	Administrative employees	Financial and social
Coaches/General managers	Sports, financial and media	Support association	Sports, societal and values
Players	Sports, financial and media	Youth academy	Sports and economic
Technical and medical teams	Sports	Volunteers	Recognition

Figure 1: Internal Stakeholders as per Cicut et al (2017)

External stakeholders	Main expectations	External stakeholders	Main expectations
FIFA	Football development and regulatory	Coaches union	Respect, promotion and defense of the profession
UEFA	Football development and regulatory	Players union	Respect, promotion and defense of the profession
FFF	Football development and legal	Referees union	Respect, promotion and defense of the profession
LFP	Football development, regulatory and economic	Agents union	Legitimacy and recognition
DNCG	Regulatory	Spectators	Sports and entertainment
EU	Legal and regulatory	Supporters groups	Sports, entertainment, social and identity
Ministry of Sports	Football development, legal and regulatory	Media	Audience/visibility, sports, entertainment, economic and financial
Ministry of Economy and Finance/Ministry of Labor	Legal and financial	Suppliers	Visibility/image, economic, financial and social
Home Office	Regulatory	Clients	Visibility/image, economic and financial
City	Sports, political, image and territorial development	Competitors	Sports and entertainment
Other local authorities	Political, image and territorial development	Environmental, residents and territory defense associations	Compliance with laws and rules and defense of the association's interests
Players agents	Sports and financial	Social associations	Defense and promotion of the association's social object
Chairmen union	Professional clubs development	Financial community	Funding in compliance with the rules set by the supervisory bodies

Figure 2: External Stakeholders as per Cicut et al (2017)

2.2. Role of skills & competences

For some group to prosper, its individuals have to progress on their own. This common sense idea is backed up with the research results by Škrinjarić and Domadenik (2020), who state that gaps in general competences (like teamwork, motivation, organization, and presentation) are significantly related to firm performance. Individuals can only be successful at work if they possess knowledge, skills, experience, motivation, beliefs, habits, and values, in one word: competences (Retar et al 2013). Lipičnik (1998) states that a man's success depends on their skills, knowledge, and motivation. Muršak (1999) defines competences as the "consequence of an individual's concrete experience, which is proven when the acquired theoretical or practical knowledge can be used in practice. Vukasovič-Zontar and Korade Purg (2008) state that the desired knowledge in management are the skills and abilities of an individual, thus conditioning the successful performance of work and tasks within the scope of a job in a concrete business environment.

2.3. Relation to the research topic

Funnelling down the theoretical findings, they can be summarized with the following proposition by Herneckzy, Varga and Marsalek (2010): "The competitiveness of an entire

national economy (or in this case *football ecosystem*) is basically determined by human resources with the suitable competencies.” For sports industry specifically, a gap has surfaced between the requirements of the industry and student/employee qualification, highlighting the necessity for systematic updates of education within this field. This underscores the importance of fostering sustainable development in this scientific domain (Guidotti et al 2023).

Retar and others (2013) have acquired empirical findings about the key competences a successful sports manager in Slovenia should possess. Managers should: develop a positive working environment; work and act as a professional; have the moral authority; and have appropriate organisation and delegation of tasks. Other skills include: the ability to cooperate with people; use the acquired knowledge in practice; and create new ideas. Organically, it is key to target sports managers segment specifically when trying to motivate a systematic change. While it is true that each stakeholder should improve on his/her specific skills, it is also true that leaders first and foremost have to be acquired with their key competences. They, as leaders, will only then be able to spread the right mentality among others.

Studies by Jurak (2006) and Bednarik and others (1998) emphasise that generally, individuals with inappropriate professional competences are the ones dealing with sport organisation management - highlighting it as the central problem of Slovenian sport management. Retar and others (2013) state that less than a third of workers in sports have the appropriate professional education. An average Slovenian sport manager harmonises the work of various people, and this is mostly done on a voluntary basis (in 87.4% cases) (Jurak, 2006). Organisations are led by presidents (67.4 %), followed by secretaries (20 %) and others - coaches, assistant secretaries, and treasurers.

So, to summarize the paragraph, there is no secret that many economic sectors nowadays are led and run by under-skilled stakeholders. Literature review serves as a proof that this holds

even more true for football industry in Slovenia. Hence, a systematic reset is needed to form a sustainable football community, able to improve and progress. Guidotti et al (2023) state that this is viable. Integration of data, dependable and valid research methodology and aligning theoretical underpinnings with global benchmarks are some of the vital steps.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This work project was kickstarted with a simple idea that Slovenian football is not reaching its maximum potential. A thorough examination of status quo took place for over a year. News, multiple visits of football facilities, events and conferences provided a clear overview. Fostering direct contact with key personnel helped to do a qualitative comparison. Brinkmann (2014) pointed out that informal discussions are crucial in establishing trust which may take the communication to another level, enabling it to dig under the surface and unravel complex ideas. Once the topic of the thesis was officially confirmed, a comprehensive literature review took place. Methods included description, compilation, comparison, analysis, and synthesis.

For the empirical part of the project, a qualitative type of research was chosen. The method used was the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is planned around predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue as per DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006). The authors admit that this is often the sole data source for a qualitative research project. Three in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study. Precisely this flexibility to open and discuss additional topics enabled a deeper understanding of the interviewee's feelings, and perspectives (Marshall and Rossman 2014).

First interview was conducted with an expert from the area of strategic management of the football ecosystem in Portugal, André Seabra. The interview was conducted through a videocall and lasted 60 minutes. The second and third interview were conducted with two

esteemed experts from the Football Association of Slovenia, Eva Červinski and Iztok Kavčič. These two 60-minute interviews were conducted live. All interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed afterwards. They can be found in the Appendix part of this work.

A precise formulated research question elevates the relevance of the research study on one hand, and further enhances practical applicability, ultimately contributing to factual, true impact, per Kotler and Armstrong, 2018. The **Research Question** for this study is:

How can football in Slovenia improve – considering all stakeholders this sport engages?

3.2. Limitations

The first limitation to point out were the logistics. When comparing football ecosystems from two countries, located more than 2700 kilometres away from each other, the communication obstacles occur. The comparison was challenging also because of how different in terms of progress the two subjects of research are. Also, there is always a risk of misunderstanding during the communication. The use of digital technology presented an additional constraint, as there was a lack of access to the non-verbal cues and body language by Portuguese interviewee.

4. Portuguese Football Association – The Benchmark

4.1. Status Quo in Portugal

Football has represented a very important part of Portugal culture and identity for a long time (Kumar 2023). Groups of fans migrate to stadiums weekly contributing to shape the football ecosystem (Peixoto and Sousa 2020). Portugal is also enjoying one of the highest percentages of population interest in football (74%) (FPF 2022). Not only that Portugal is enjoying a high social engagement for this sport (Kumar 2023), its level of quality in terms of football competitiveness is high as well (UEFA 2024) (FIFA 2024). The central football association FPF constantly works on improving the sport by incorporating scientific knowledge in their

processes. Its football school has provided 19 PhD work projects, 216 scientific papers, 16 books, 5 international conferences and 1 scientific journal. The association is collaborating with 8 national universities, and its programs have engaged more than 1300 participants in last year alone (Portugal Football School 2024). This rationale serves as a strong argument on why precisely Portugal Football School was chosen as the benchmark institution for this study.

4.2. Current Strategy

The interconnectedness of so many people and segments into this game is clear also to the central football organisation in the country – the FPF (FPF 2024). FPF launched a strategic plan ‘Futebol 2030’ in 2022 to be realised until 2030. It is essentially oriented around the unpredictableness of the modern world. Hence, the core idea of the plan is that in order to get to 2030, association has to transform and evolve (FPF 2022). After researching modern trends, FPF predicts that in 2030 we will live 100% digitally, which will open new markets. We can expect a consolidation of macro cities and greater awareness of ESG causes. These facts will have implications on football on and off the pitch. Technology will likely transform football experience. Women's participation in football will likely increase, as well as the growth of esports. Changes to TV rights and sponsorship structure will have impacts as well (FPF 2022).

Four goals have been set. In terms of *practice*, turning football into an educational tool for children promoting healthy growth is the first one. Raising quality of men's and women's football and futsal is another goal. Regarding the *consumption*, continuing to monitor and expand its relationship with consumers is the target. Crucial to remember is that football does not have consumers per se, but fans instead. Lastly, in terms of *organization*, ensuring sustainability and a qualified ecosystem are the objectives. FPF further crystalized the drivers for the consolidation of this path. Facilities, digital, innovation, resource qualification and data orientation are the decisive elements for the strategic plan to become rewarding (FPF 2022).

In order to fulfil the ambitions, Portuguese Football Association has outlined 15 transformation programmes and initiatives divided into 5 strategic pillars that ensure continuous contact with consumers and football players throughout the different stages of their lives. New evolution programmes have been brought up as well for each pillar. The association has set 3 key milestones including the final evaluation of the strategic plan in 2023 (FPF 2022).

4.3. Ecosystem Capacitation

4.3.1. Portugal Football School

PFS is the research and education unit of the football association. It was launched in 2017 and has served to deepen the development of football, futsal and beach football (Portugal Football School 2024). In the presentation (2023) held at the 6th anniversary of the organisation, PFS explained that they engage a lot of stakeholders from football ecosystem – coaches, referees, observers, leaders, general secretaries, sport directors, team managers, players, physicians, physiotherapists, psychologists, nurses, game analysts, scouts, communication experts, nutritionists, and directors of training entities. The training courses are covering several areas, but mostly sports management, training, journalism, financial management and health with performance. PFS's goal is to establish itself as a reference in sports law, management and integrity of competitions, team leadership, organization of sporting events, digital communication and football marketing or medicine (Portugal Football School 2024).

It offers different ways of transferring the knowledge, such as conferences, seminars, books, specialized magazines and more. With help from academic partners, PFS seeks to dignify and give credence to the FPF and its main mission, which is to promote the development of football in all aspects, ages, and gender. Their purpose and mission are also supported by the Portugal government, since the Portugal Football School as a research and development unit is accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (Portugal Football School 2024).

4.3.2. Interview with FPF - André Seabra

André Seabra is the current Head of Portugal Football School. With decades of experience, the director of PFS holds the authority to manage the central research and development football body in Portugal. Professor at the Faculty of Sport at the University of Porto and a PhD graduate is an author of over 100 scientific papers (ResearchGate 2024). Willing to take time and collaborate in an in-depth interview, Mr. Seabra opened an access to some valuable insights, which could not be found on the Internet. These information go deeper below the surface and help get a broader understanding of the idea and vision of the Portugal Football School.

4.3.3. Results

The Portugal Football School was inaugurated with three cornerstone proposals in mind. First is to educate all involved stakeholders. The idea was – if the association wants to improve football in Portugal, then all the subjects who co-create this sport have to educate. Not just the closest actors, like coaches and referees, but rather the whole ecosystem. The second proposal was that education itself is not enough. Instead, scientific knowledge should be crowned and given a major role in this project. Because the only right way for the representatives at the federation to make important decisions is by having a scientific-based research database behind it. And the third proposal was that the knowledge should not only be gathered, but also transferred. Which means that besides the research projects, PFS also produces and organizes conferences, trainings, articles, books, podcasts, videos and more. For all these purposes to come true, Portuguese Football Association had to partner with Portugal universities to enable the constant flow of reliable and credible scientific data, which enable innovation and prosperity.

The department is exclusively financed by the association. Its goal is not to make profit, but to educate. PFS is run by 3 people who are involved in all the tasks. However, there are 15 PhD professionals who work in the Health and Performance Unit. These individuals are responsible

for the development of scientific projects. Many segments are targeted by PFS's programs, but there is however one prioritised group. The leaders of football clubs are recognised as the weakest part of the ecosystem. Majority of club directors and managers in Portugal don't have any kind of managerial or sports academic background. Understanding that these people lead the clubs which greatly contribute to the football reality of Portugal is alarming.

The beginnings of the program were tough, as the stakeholders resisted to participate. However, this period did not last long. Even though Portugal Football School's projects have been used as a reference of excellence by the organizations of highest scale, such as UEFA and WHO, its biggest accomplishment is the recognition by Portugal football community, admits Mr. Seabra.

5. Football Association of Slovenia – Topic of Research

5.1. Status Quo in Slovenia

The Football Association of Slovenia is the governing body of football in Slovenia. Men's national team is currently ranked 54th on FIFA rankings, while its highest appearance was 15th place (FIFA 2024). Olimpija Ljubljana is highest ranked Slovenian football club on the 140th rank in Europe, while Slovenia's Prva Liga Telemach is the 30th most competitive league (UEFA 2024). Football is socially given higher importance only at extraordinary successful performances. National fanaticism is not to be felt in great extent in Slovenia's culture (Konjar 2022). There is limited evidence on association's focus in organising events, conferences or contributing in any other way with purpose to spread scientific football knowledge (NZS 2024). Headquartered is in a new infrastructure complex from 2016, a modern football facility fulfils all required organizational support for a sufficient development of Slovenian football (NZS 2016).

5.2. Current Strategy

NZS has also set its short-term and long-term goals. The first is named Strategy 2025 and is oriented towards transparency, winning mentality, and improvements of the quality of the game

while also ensuring higher profits, better public awareness, implementation of new digital technologies and a group of 75.000 players that co-create an organized football play. On the other hand, Vision 2030 for now seeks to set football as the number 1 sport nationally, shaping society as well as ensuring safe and quality circumstances for everyone (NZS 2023).

The organization offers support to football's direct stakeholders. NZS constantly re-invests money in football clubs, players, coaches, referees, infrastructure, and partners. Its goal for the development of young players is to ensure additional professional support. This can be seen through different workshops or other football activities with instructors and a collaboration with two high schools to offer sports-integrated academic programs (NZS 2023).

According to the strategic plan Strategy 2025, four fundamental guidelines have been developed. *Quality* of football game; *football reputation*; *making business* while investing in football development; and the *effectiveness* of NZS's professional jobs. To bring these plans to reality, multiple actions and projects have been planned for the years following to 2025 (NZS 2021).

5.3. Ecosystem Capacitation

5.3.1. Awareness

The influence this sport has for different segments in a country could be seen in the Strategy 2025 plan, where one of the strategic projects is to set up an educational centre. Its purpose is to certify management positions and to digitalize educational and training programs. The vision behind this is to contribute to quality of football management to reach more stability. This was set up with a couple of goals in mind. Besides the mentioned certification system for all the stakeholders and a digital platform for educational purposes with the knowledge-testing tools, there is also some attention for knowledge transfer into the digital environment. This is to be achieved with the need for the definition of the concept of educational centre, the need to define and create content and the need to establish a digital platform (NZS 2021).

5.3.2. Impact for stakeholders

In their Annual Report (2023), NZS writes about its contribution to different stakeholders involved in the football game showcasing some understanding of the scope of this sport.

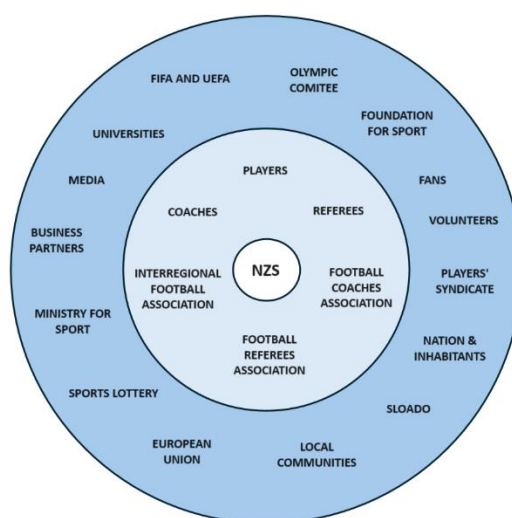


Figure 3: Matrix of football stakeholders in Slovenia as per NZS (2023)

Young players can take part in one of two high-school programs offering combining education with high-performance football obligations. Coaches can develop through a detailed, structured, and advanced education program. Referees Association is promoting referee positions to bring in young talents. Slovenian referees regularly officiating highest-level games on a global scale serves as a proof of excellence. NZS coordinates and supports nine interregional associations. A program ‘Football for all’ has been going on for five years with the aim to promote football in each region of Slovenia (NZS 2023).

By attending UEFA and FIFA seminars NZS constantly updates its operations. NZS engages recreational players, such as veteran and walking football. With SloAdo the fight against doping in sports is promoted, and with the European Union, there is an ongoing partnership project VERA – Voice for Equality and Rights of Women Athletes, promoting intersexual equality and respect. Local communities feel the help from NZS with new infrastructure. This way local football clubs can progress. Ministry for Sport probably feels the most contribution by NZS in football terms, as football promotes school system, brings financial resources, helps

health wellbeing, social benefits for communities and promotes economic stability. Football also offers jobs positions, lowers the state of criminal records, promotes infrastructure construction, and brings discipline to kids. NZS also collaborates in social programs, targeted for individuals with special needs (NZS 2023).

5.3.3. Interviews with NZS – Eva Červinski & Iztok Kavčič

The first candidate was Eva Červinski – the Head of International and Legal Department at NZS, responsible for realisation of parts of the Strategy 2025 plan. A University of Lausanne graduate holds UEFA certificates for Football Management and Football Law Programme. Mrs. Červinski provided valuable insights from a structural, corporative nature.

Currently NZS is mostly investing in developing coaches, players, and referees. So, to understand the mechanics behind this philosophy, Iztok Kavčič was recognized as the right fit. The current Head of Coach Education has been involved in coach development process for the past 22 years. As such, Mr. Kavčič possesses undeniable expertise and knowledge arsenal, to be able to provide another look at the topic of research.

5.3.4. Results

NZS is aware about the importance of education for all stakeholders in football ecosystem, which can be seen by the inclusion of goals in the current strategic plan. Progress is moving closer to completion of pre-set goals. NZS does not want to stop here, stakeholder engagement will be included in the strategic plan for the next period as well.

Focus on segments directly involved with football performance – where NZS is at the forefront in European scope in terms of educational program quality – is currently being deliberately pivoted on other groups. The "Club Secretary" program is established with the aim of equipping club secretaries with skills that would establish order and organization in club football. This program is already being implemented. Later, NZS will undertake the training of management

personnel – sports directors. Certification criteria would be ideal, but this can only be reached with educational programs and licensing. This would help regulate these positions, which are so important for the operation of one club and football in a country as well. The director will have to undergo courses and obtain certificates, which will give him the necessary skills to lead a football club. A club, like a company, should be managed comprehensively, and its leader must help it grow in multiple directions. Therefore, sports directors must master economic, financial, marketing, sports law, and football knowledge, as all of this helps in making important decisions that are part of the responsibilities of such position on a daily basis.

NZS is not connected to educational centres in a way that could effectively train football stakeholders. However, it aims to get there by involving its experts in university programs to expand acquisition of scientific knowledge for football purposes. Ideally, scientific knowledge would be used for improving processes and improving operations, thereby ultimately ensuring comprehensive growth of football in Slovenia. Establishing its own research department is not in NZS's current plans, as they lack financial and personnel capacities.

6. Critical Analysis

6.1. Status Quo Comparison

One of the most outstanding characteristics is the cultural and social importance of football in both countries and for their citizens. Football holds valuable meaning for Portugal nation as it is deeply ingrained in the country's culture and identity (Mariovet & Silvéiro 2019). The sport enjoys a high level of interest among the population (Peixoto and Sousa 2020). This is not to be felt in such extent in Slovenia (Konjar 2022). Comparing the capacity for both, we see that there are around 15k players (NZS, 2023) in Slovenia whose total population is 2M, compared to 400k players (FPF 2022) in Portugal with its respective population of 10,5M. This means, that football is played by every 133rd Slovenian and every 26th Portuguese. Not only that this

enlarges the pool of players and consequently raises the quality of performance, but it also justifies the high level of reputation football has for the Portuguese nation (Kumar 2023). So, the cultural importance of football is much higher in Portugal compared to Slovenia.

Per a recent study by Gu, Song, and Lan Xue, collectivism is proven to be able to improve athletes' ability to cope with stressful situations in sports, which may allow them to achieve a better performance. The national football identity thus holds impact for the success of football performance of both national associations (Gu, Song, and Lan Xue 2022). Portugal national and club teams are far more successful at the European and global scale compared to Slovenia. Per Transfermarkt (2024) the value of both national squads, Slovenia team is worth €130,85M, while Portugal squad values €1.06B. Football is also a promotor of Portugal, with its players being more than just athletes. Represented as big international brands with power and influence, they hold great impact on football ecosystem stakeholders (Merten et al 2024).

These massive margins show that – taken the current status quo of both countries into account – we are talking about two different worlds in terms of size and power.

6.2. Strategic Plan Comparison

Strategic plans are important for the organizations to know where they stand and what are the key activities which will lead the way to fulfilling the goals with examining some KPIs along the way (Ilić 2013). This structured way of operating is promising for both analysed associations.

Strategic goal-setting process has to implement strategic goals, which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SAMSHA n.d.). NZS's goals lack clarity, measurability, and the dimension of achievability. Goals such as *increased competitiveness*, *impact on society* and *quality development of young players* are not credible since it is hard to set a timeline for their capacitation. For example – NZS has set a platform NZS TV for streaming all their games

as one goal (NZS 2023). However, deadlines, reach, targeting, development, and pricing, are yet to be determined. Quite contrary, FPF has its goals set very precisely, radiating deep understanding of the purpose of each goal, which gives a feeling of thorough research prior to the plan's foundation. Including sense of scientific argumentation, the strategic plan seems credible and serves as a sufficient anchor for an optimistic tomorrow.

6.3. Ecosystem Capacitation Comparison and Findings

All research methods so far have led to some results, which will now enable a comprehensive comparison of how the topic of ecosystem capacitation is dealt with in both associations.

1st Finding: Educational Body

The major discrepancy is seen in existence of educational body. Engaging various stakeholders, PFS works to deepen the development of football through various programs like 'Walking Football', for example (FPF 2024). NZS still plans to set up an educational centre. The centre aims to certify management positions and to digitize training programs. Education of other stakeholders will be considered for the upcoming strategic plans (NZS 2021).

First finding is therefore the duality of two realities. FPF already engages different stakeholders of the game through their educational body, while NZS only considers doing so in the future.

2nd Finding: Science

The desire to "*take better decisions*" drives PFS to develop scientific knowledge, which enables a thorough understanding of a rationale behind problems and therefore enables to take more precise decisions. This scientific aspect is missing at NZS. Optimistic and promising to know about the importance of this topic, it serves as an untouched potential, which could have been addressed by now. If FPF currently has 15 PhD experts in-house, then it is fair to say that a smaller association like NZS could have at least one or two such individuals.

The second finding provides an insight into the fundamental aspect of decision making. While PFS is continuously working on assuring their decisions are taken according to provable, scientific reasonings, NZS for now hasn't dug into the additional background work, which questions the relevance of their decisions.

3rd Finding: Knowledge Transfer

With a goal to improve football quality the need for knowledge distribution emerges. FPF understands that in order to influence the football nation positively, it should first collect and then further transfer scientific findings to the stakeholders for them to be able to learn the new principles and start applying them. For this purpose, PFS often publishes scientific papers, books, videos, podcasts and organizes conferences. Since scientific knowledge is not the topic of interest for now at NZS, it could not be transferred to other stakeholders. Still, even awareness about the importance of knowledge transfer seems to be lacking.

Third finding points out the aspect of education. Attaining knowledge has low effect if it is kept at one place. PFS strives to reach full potential by spreading it, while NZS is far behind.

7. Roadmap

Analysing the data gathered, some recommendations were developed and summed up in a Roadmap plan. The following steps are the results of this work project research and serve as a guideline for a development of an educational body for football ecosystem capacitation.

7.1. Assessment

NZS should first and foremost dive deep into the prevailing status of football in Slovenia. Theoretical aspect should be the starting point, researching the current state (Ilić 2013).

7.1.1. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is carried out to identify existing resources, investigating their trends that may have positive or negative impacts (Gurl 2017). This will help NZS identify internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats (Puyt, Lie & Wilderom 2023).

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + High awareness about the importance of education for football stakeholders + High quality level of coach education + Modern, advanced infrastructure + Reaching out to external peers in search for best practices – motivation to progress + Strategic thinking already in NZS philosophy + Investing in off-pitch stakeholders: club secretaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? More educated stakeholders ? Revenue opportunities ? Knowledge transfer through universities ? Ecosystem capacity growth - improves probability of better performance results ? Consult with Aleksander Čeferin – the President of UEFA – expertise & knowledge ? Target education for presidents along secretaries, as suggested by Jurak (2006)
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak strategic plan with unclear goals - Shy performance – especially club football not competitive on international level - Size (population, football base) - Lack of educational expertise by key personnel, managing football organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ! Unsustainable business model – too challenging to finance with no returns ! Will it work? – Question for the social meaning of football in Slovenia’s culture ! There may exist some resistance to change among NZS authorities

Table 1: SWOT Analysis

7.1.2. PESTEL Analysis

PESTEL analysis is another handy tool for strategic planning. PESTEL stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal factors. It helps businesses and organizations like NZS understand the external macro-environmental factors that could potentially impact their operations and influence their final success (Bou Hatoum et al 2023).

P	E	S	T	E	L
Political	Economical	Social	Technological	Environmental	Legal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Political instability could potentially affect utilization of the program ◇ Can NZS count on government support in any way? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Macro - economic trends ◇ Industry economic situation globally ◇ Inflation, interest, and employment rate patterns ◇ Loan access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Culture and lifestyle – football perspective ◇ Stakeholder statistics ◇ Media ◇ NZS brand reputation ◇ Willingness to educate and progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Digital platforms expanding total reach ◇ New ways of promotion ◇ Upgrades to improve the program and enhance learning experiences? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Impact for global warming? ◇ Program to boost sustainability mindset in NZS/Slovenia ◇ Ecological trends to be included in curriculums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Comply with legislation about sports education, protection ◇ Protecting intellectual property rights (materials, programs, branding)

Table 2: PESTEL Analysis

Completing this step, NZS should: Learn about the broader picture. Having more positive traits than negative, the macro-environmental trends do not speak against the new project as well.

7.2. Stakeholder Consultation

After understanding the ongoing situation, stakeholders should come to focus – NZS already has a clear understanding about their segments. Still, being overlooked by the strategy these segments should be addressed. Engaging with stakeholders and consulting with them would help understand their needs, challenges, motivations, and aspirations. Focus groups, interviews and surveys are some of the most convenient methods for qualitative feedback gathering.

Completing this step, NZS should: Look at the ecosystem from stakeholders' perspective, address specific needs of each segment and efficiently adapt strategic plan accordingly.

7.3. Strategy and Project Evaluation

A new, topic-related strategic plan should be developed with measurable, provable, and concrete goals with corresponding activities for completion. NZS currently lacks personnel to be appointed on this topic, so an educational body should be established – focusing only on research and development of the ecosystem. Authorized with full responsibility for promotion and progress of football in Slovenia, this concept requires a group of top-class specialists.

Educational body is not expected to be profitable for the federation, so it must be completely financed by NZS and eventually by sponsors. So, prior to the inauguration of the department, project evaluation should be completed to assess financial sustainability of the project. The whole idea could be ended at this point if the evaluated resources needed are infeasible. However, this is the worst-case scenario, which is for an association like NZS hardly believable.

Completing this step, NZS should: Manifest the financial and HR resources needed, scout for skilful and ambitious team of experts and start working on completing the strategic goals.

7.4. Curriculum Development

The selected team of experts can start working on concrete topics, such as curriculum development. Curriculum should be comprehensive, cover various aspects of football education including sports management, coaching methodologies, sports science, sports law, ethics, and leadership. These skills should be tailored for every stakeholder segment - narrated by the assessment and consultation stages of this Roadmap. Nevertheless, all curriculums should be dynamic, evidence-based and aligned with UEFA and/or FIFA standards. Moreover, they should be interactive, creative, engaging, and innovative to be appealing for the stakeholders. Only then, knowledge-recipients can really take the most from the education.

Completing this step, NZS should: Have the curriculum programs designed, prepared and ready for the first workshops, training courses and other methods of education.

7.5. Partnerships

Since the financing part is mostly in NZS's hands, it is hard to expect that many resources could be dedicated to the new project. Especially so when the idea is not expected to boomerang monetary benefits. Its success will be evaluated by the state of the football ecosystem in the future. Bringing sponsors to the picture would enable the department to be more creative and

effective. Program's reach and potential success would eventually boost brand reputation – which could be appealing for sponsors, looking to invest in targeted marketing campaigns.

Partnering with academies might be especially rewarding, offering knowledge exchange, joint research projects, and interdisciplinary collaboration. As Mr. Seabra said – the crucial step is to realise that you cannot do that in a right way if you don't pair up with the universities.

Completing this step, NZS should: Have isolated key potential partners on the market, reached out to them, and negotiated terms of collaborating.

7.6. Stakeholder Engagement

It is clear that the stakeholders involved in football ecosystem are at the heart of this topic. But for an education program to make impact, cooperation is needed. One can only learn new things when open to new knowledge and motivated to progress. Therefore, NZS should organize campaigns for stakeholder engagement to promote motivation for upskilling and to raise awareness of how important it is to educate in order to progress. Once the topic will be buzzing in public, the program should serve as a natural solution. Another, easier way, is for NZS to engage in already existing programs who already have their communities set.

Completing this step, NZS should: Emphasize importance of educating on national level by investing in promotion campaigns and witness eagerness among stakeholders to start engaging.

7.7. Monitoring and Evaluation

When the process of education is running, it is crucial to monitor it carefully to ensure the gradual improvement of the system. Since the project would be started from scratch, there are no experiences to look up to. Everything is based on theory, so practice will most likely bring unpredictable situations and pitfalls. Feedback from stakeholders is of key importance, enabling the necessary iterations. Robust mechanisms to track progress, impact and effectiveness would need to be established. KPIs should be regularly assessed, and strategies

adapted based on lessons learned. Responsible team should always stay agile and responsive to emerging trends, technological advancements, and evolving needs of football community.

Completing this step, NZS should: Gradually observe progress through KPIs by implementing new methods and making corrections when such need is monitored.

8. Conclusion

“To develop a research program, a mindset reset is needed,” Mr. Seabra concluded when asked about how to trigger football ecosystem capacitation. This work project served as a testament to the topic of how an association like NZS could develop such a department, whose mission is to generally improve the quality of football. The study proves this is feasible only through association’s understanding, that to improve sport, all of its stakeholders have to be educated.

Research proved, that NZS authorities are aware about what is needed for football to prosper in Slovenia. But besides a decent coaching program and some targeted investments in education of secretarial positions at football clubs, not much more has been done for now.

The tone of the work project was dictated by the research question: *‘How can football in Slovenia improve – considering all stakeholders this sport engages?’* Research results were summarized in a roadmap of steps. Steps which may serve as a new strategic plan for NZS and propels them towards capacitation of football ecosystem by also kicking off an educational department responsible for spread of knowledge among stakeholders involved in this sport.

Football is a sport, beloved by millions who internalise pride monitoring this simple, yet so nail-biting game. Too often, management cares only about on-pitch results and sadly, this mindset can hardly be changed shortly. To conclude this paper, I would propose an idea, which is often told young football kids by their coaches: Football is fair. If you commit to football, it will reward you in return. So why would we ever stop taking care for this beautiful game?

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10. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview with André Seabra, the Director of Portugal Football School

Good afternoon. My name is Žan Černivec and I am currently a student at NOVA SBE. For my final master's thesis, the goal of my study is to establish a strategic plan for football ecosystem capacitation for the Slovenian football association by taking the Portuguese Football Association as an example. For this reason, I would like to conduct a 60-minute semi-structured interview with you. During this time, I will ask you a series of open-ended questions, from which I will try to get the best possible understanding of the strategic thinking, reasoning, and ideology of PFS. Thus, I will kindly ask you to respond with justified and thorough answers. In order to be able to analyse the interviews afterwards, I would like to record our meeting, if that does not represent an obstacle for you. It will be kept anonymous, and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of May 2018 you will not be contacted again after this interview.

Questions

1. What is the Portugal Football School all about? In practice what does it offer?

The strategic plan was implemented by Portuguese Football Association in 2012 when our president started his mandate. During the years the president and the board decided to form a school with three different proposals. The first one is to give education to different stakeholders, not only coaches and referees. The board decided that if you want to promote sport in Portugal, you need to give education to leaders, players, health departments, scouts, psychologists, nutritionists. The second proposal was to develop science inside our organization and to develop scientific projects, because we want to take better decisions. You take better decisions if you have science behind it. We developed different scientific projects, mostly focused on football, futsal and beach football. And the third proposal is the transfer of

knowledge. It is important to distribute this knowledge. We publish scientific papers, books, videos, podcasts and different strategies to transfer knowledge. When the school was launched our president with the ministry of education and the ministry of science thought that if you want to improve sport in Portugal, you need to bring to our federation the universities, schools, research federations but also to take back the knowledge to these institutions. We have 15 PhD professionals in our organization who have knowledge. We have more than 40 training programs, PhD students working for us who develop projects inside the federation in the main area of sport science. We also organize conferences to transfer knowledge. We are a reference for UEFA.

2. What was the reason for the inception of Portugal Football School?

To promote sport in Portugal in general, but more specifically football and futsal, beach football. And to promote sport, you have to give education to all stakeholders. For example there was a project called Walking Football. It is used to promote physical activity for elderly, but first to identify and study how walking football helps diseases like prostate cancer. After studies they found that the implementation during an academic year physical activity of 3 times/week for 60 minutes costs a little over 3 euros per session. We learned how to scale up the findings of small studies and use them for the nation. And of course the idea that for a better decision-making process, we should have scientific background on the topic. These were the main two ideas of the board when the program was introduced.

3. How is the PFS organized/structured? How many people does it involve?

In the moment, the PFS consists of 3 persons who work in all the tasks – implementation of education and training courses for different stakeholders, but inside of the association we have 15 PhD professionals who work in ‘health and performance unit’. Scientific projects are

developed by these guys. The majority of them are physiologists of our national teams and also professors in universities.

4. How is it financed?

Completely by the federation, we don't have any sponsor. It was a decision of the board. Majority of nations don't have this football school, there are only a few who have a department for education, like Georgia, Romania, Netherlands, and Germany. The money costs are not too high. So, the money is not the reason for the lack of this schools. PFS is not intended to have profit, only to do a break-even. Profit is not the goal.

5. Who is it targeted to?

Leaders, managers of the clubs. Majority of the leaders of clubs don't have background in management and in sports. Of course you need to give education to these people.

6. How did the PFS engage stakeholders, including clubs, players, and fans, in the strategic planning process? How did you promote the program?

At the beginning it was hard, but now they understand that this can help to progress, improve and achieve better players. The clubs are ready to participate in the courses. The beginning was hard, but it didn't last long.

7. What is its biggest value, biggest accomplishment?

Having the collaboration with universities. Possibilities to have education programs, partnerships with universities. Nevertheless, to be invited by World health Organization for two times in the European commission. But the most important is the recognition of football committee and community – this is the biggest achievement.

8. Can you discuss any challenges or obstacles encountered during the implementation of the program?

There were not many barriers in the process. When you work in our federation and you have the board behind you, there are not many obstacles. At the beginning there were some minor problems, like when we decided to create education courses and scientific projects, we had to find some space to implement the projects and also we had to find the participants who can participate in the studies. But those problems were minor.

9. What are the future goals of PFS? How are goals assessed, so that they are realistic and challenging at the same time?

By the year of 2030 we want to have at least 1 leader with PFS initial course in every Portugal club. We have three levels of courses: initial, intermediate, and advanced course. And the board decided that until 2030 leaders in Portugal clubs must complete the basic, an initial training course for leaders. Also to have more scientific projects, to obtain a certification in order to give training for physical education teachers. FPF is a sports organization and not a school we so can't give the graduation degree. For this we have to collaborate with universities who can give a degree, but FPF is the partner.

10. Why is PFS a role model and what does make it stand out compared to practices in other countries?

When we started in 2017 the difference was to have education and training for the stakeholders. Up until today, basically all the countries offer this. Probably not within the country football association, but surely through universities or private courses. So now the real point of differentiation is that we develop scientific knowledge. We as a football organization develop scientific projects and provide specific, football related knowledge. We have 15 PhD science experts, who are not graduates in marketing, strategy, finance or economy. They have all obtained a degree in sports science. We have in our organization 27 national teams who each have a physiologist with a PhD. They are all sports scientists.

11. And how do you measure success/effectiveness??

The number of participants in our courses. Also we decided to obtain certifications of quality of our training and educational courses. And also to have science published in journals, scientific papers, peer reviews – these are also recognitions that we are in the right way. Also to use the studies to create national programs.

12. Could a country smaller than Portugal develop a similar project?

In some countries it is probably not easy to do what we are doing. Because if you want to develop an educational program, you have to have collaborations with research centers, but also to take back the knowledge we have to these centers. The relation between a sports organization and an university is not easy to form, especially at the beginning.

13. Based on your experience what advice or recommendations would you offer to other football associations looking to drive change within their football ecosystem?

First, to understand that if you want to improve sport in the country, you need to educate all the stakeholders, not only coaches and referees. Second, you need to understand that you have to have a partner in the universities and research centers. These are the two main ideas that all the sport federations need to understand.

Appendix 2 – Interview with Eva Červinski, Head of International and Legal department, NZS

Good afternoon. My name is Žan Černivec and I am currently a student at NOVA SBE. For my final master's thesis, the goal of my study is to establish a strategic plan for football ecosystem capacitation for the Slovenian football association by taking the Portuguese Football Association as an example. For this reason, I would like to conduct a 60-minute semi-structured interview with you. During this time, I will ask you a series of open-ended questions, from

which I will try to get the best possible understanding of the strategic thinking, reasoning, and ideology of NZS. Thus, I will kindly ask you to respond with justified and thorough answers. In order to be able to analyse the interviews afterwards, I would like to record our meeting, if that does not represent an obstacle for you. It will be kept anonymous, and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of May 2018 you will not be contacted again after this interview.

Questions

1. Do you know the Portugal Football School program, what it deals with, and what its purpose is?

We know it in general. It deals with educating various stakeholders and groups, similar to what football associations do, except they are intensely connected with universities and place great emphasis on research work, based on which they then implement their own activities or strategic plans. I think the advantage of this school lies precisely in this scientific research work. They are very advanced, if not the most.

2. Does the Football Association of Slovenia have ambitions to work towards integrating science and establishing a research department?

The ambition of the Football Association of Slovenia is to invest comprehensively in the development or education of all stakeholders in the game of football with various approaches. Research is just one part of this area, while another part is educating leaders in management and leadership skills. It is also important to note that while some content can be transferred by the Football Association of Slovenia, it is also necessary to collaborate with important groups in the country that are responsible for this – such as collaborating with universities. Of course, we want to strengthen these ties, but success is not guaranteed. It is necessary to acquire appropriate contacts, establish appropriate promotion of football's influence in the country, and

present the benefits that football brings to stakeholders. Effective communication is important in this, and such project also takes time. However, we cannot ignore finances either. The Portuguese association probably has more resources available for such a department, while we, due to our size, have to rationalize things a bit. The key goal of football development in a particular period is also a question to discuss. But, of course, we need to work and progress in this direction.

3. What does this mean at the moment?

Currently, the goal is to establish an educational system that comprehensively manages education and invests in various areas of education according to priorities. This is what we are doing at the moment, while also dealing with how to conduct these educations. We are introducing a digital platform to reach as many stakeholders as effectively as possible. We are setting up pillars, such as providing as much information as possible to the general public to creating specialized programs. Coach and referee programs are already very developed.

4. Why the shift towards e-learning and digitalization?

Because it's easier, faster, and more effective. We also expect a greater impact.

5. So, currently, the focus is on educating competitively oriented groups, such as coaches, while educating other stakeholders is not currently a priority?

We are currently in the phase of drafting a strategic project. We are working on this and expect the first results this year. So, establishing a digital platform, transferring existing content, and also establishing new programs. We are currently working on the "Club Secretary" program, which is a program in the field of club management.

6. Who are the target segments that NZS targets in education?

Key employees in football clubs. The goal is to raise the level of their understanding and knowledge so that they can better manage these processes. The Secretary of Football Club is the key contact for managing the processes, areas, and communication of a club, which in larger clubs may be divided into individual departments. So, secretaries are the target audience at this stage, and in the next stage probably also sports directors, later also financial and marketing directors, and others.

7. Clubs are often led by sports directors who do not have the necessary competencies for management. Can the NZS somehow standardize this area?

Yes, and we are working in this direction. So far, only guidelines, regulations, and rules of optimal operation have been offered to these staff. We have found that people need to be educated in a way that presents them with the context and guides them through all the important content. Only then do they gain knowledge and internalize it. The breadth of knowledge that such a position requires is too extensive for someone to simply read a regulation and be prepared for challenges.

8. Is knowledge also verified, or are certificates awarded solely based on attendance?

We assess how candidates apply acquired knowledge to their own cases.

9. Now I will list the groups of actors who are indirectly involved in the football scene in Portugal, which PFS regularly educates: medical professionals, journalists, analysts, scouts, nutritionists, psychologists. Does NZS intervene in the development of any of these groups as well?

Within the UEFA Hattrick program, we hold workshops once a year for national team doctors, doctors of first-league clubs, and also women's first-league clubs. This follows UEFA's guidelines. This was not our own initiative. However, the program is aimed at acquainting them with modern trends.

10. In incorporating science into your field, research work is necessary. One possibility is involving your staff in university institutions, another possibility is, for example, establishing your own internal development department in this area. Which option is more feasible for the Football Association of Slovenia?

Establishing its own department within the Football Association of Slovenia is perhaps an idea of a long-term strategy of NZS, at least five years. The question is also how sensible it is. Collaborating with educational centres is more realistic, also because they have their scientific areas, and the connection with football topics is more feasible. Based on the research, we can then create conclusions and strategic directions. The other aspect is also that besides Portugal, some other national associations are researching the field. Scientific results already exist, which could also be useful for our field. It might be useful to establish a system of flow and sharing of information, databases from which everyone could draw. Then it's more of a question for UEFA.

11. One of the "strategic projects" of the Strategy 2025 of NZS is "Educational Center (certification of management and other functions) and digitalization of educational programs." Was this goal conceived following the Portuguese practice? If not, what was the model?

The program was our idea, but it is true that we gather examples of good practices from various spheres. However, there is no model that we would like to copy. Academies vary widely across European associations, some even considered as professional training or master's studies, others more focused on rapid knowledge transfer through workshops. We opted for e-learning with a combination of practical face-to-face education. We also aim to advance towards certification, meaning that a certificate would be a requirement for someone wishing to hold a position as a club manager.

12. How is this point of the strategic plan progressing? Are activities being implemented, and how close are the set goals?

We are deep into this project. We already have the digital platform prepared, and we have a very precisely shaped program for club secretaries. Some more work will be required to transfer existing content to the digital platform. The platform should be fully set up in a year or two, while it will be operational by the end of this year. This goal of the strategic plan of the Strategy 2025 will be achieved.

13. What will be the new goals for the next strategic plan?

Probably the area of the use of new technologies, innovation, and research, as well as the upgrade of current content. Of course, through collaboration with universities and the recruitment of experts who will be involved in education.

14. What skills are crucial for sports managers?

The secretary is not a purely managerial position. For them, it is essential to know the processes, regulations, and to be able to carry out administrative tasks. While the sports director occupies a managerial position and must have leadership skills in leading an organization, people, communication abilities, networking, seeking innovative solutions, financial resources, and so on.

15. What is the current situation of football directors in Slovenia?

The level of the situation is very different, and in rare cases, these positions are also at a very high level. We must know that out of 250 clubs in Slovenia, only 10 are professional in the first league. Even among these, the levels are different.

16. The director of the Portuguese school gives two pieces of advice to countries that do not yet have such a program: that sport in the country cannot advance until the umbrella

organization realizes that it is necessary to educate all involved actors, and that the key is the partnership with universities. How do you comment on behalf of the responsible person for this department at NZS?

I agree with both. We must know that football, as a system, is a network of many stakeholders and that as a whole, it is difficult to advance if not all are involved. Investing in this area in various ways is necessary. Lately, we at the Football Association of Slovenia have been investing financially and in terms of program management in this area. We have found that educating all involved is crucial for the system as a whole to progress. I would add that it is important to raise awareness of how significant football is in society. An example is the Portuguese campaign "Walking Football", which promotes health in society. Such projects should also be of interest to government authorities.

17. Do you think the Slovenian Ministry would be receptive to such projects?

We haven't tried yet. In our country, there is a lot of interest in sports, but less is invested, and it is done quite thoughtfully considering the time and opportunity, with an emphasis on infrastructure and event organization. With such projects, the Football Association of Slovenia is condemned to finance independently, without the help of the state. On the contrary, UEFA is very receptive to development projects. UEFA provides great support for the advancement of associations, organizes seminars and training events, where networking with representatives of other associations is established, and all of this contributes to the exchange of good practices, opinions, and ultimately progress.

Appendix 3 – Interview with Iztok Kavčič, Head of Coach Development department, NZS

Good afternoon. My name is Žan Černivec and I am currently a student at NOVA SBE. For my final master's thesis, the goal of my study is to establish a strategic plan for football ecosystem capacitation for the Slovenian football association by taking the Portuguese Football

Association as an example. For this reason, I would like to conduct a 60-minute semi-structured interview with you. During this time, I will ask you a series of open-ended questions, from which I will try to get the best possible understanding of the strategic thinking, reasoning, and ideology of NZS. Thus, I will kindly ask you to respond with justified and thorough answers. In order to be able to analyse the interviews afterwards, I would like to record our meeting, if that does not represent an obstacle for you. It will be kept anonymous, and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of May 2018 you will not be contacted again after this interview.

Questions

1. What is the importance of science in football?

Science is highly significant in relation to football. In the future, we should integrate science with practice. This connection needs to be established either through universities or by establishing a department. Science and knowledge are what drive you forward to be able to teach confidently. Currently, the integration with science lags behind, and it's important to discuss this topic.

2. Are you familiar with the Portugal Football School program, what it deals with, and what its purpose is?

Yes, I had the opportunity to attend certain forums at UEFA where the Portuguese presented their approaches, so I am somewhat familiar with their system. Surely, this is the right path, which we also had in the past. Previously, all NZS trainings took place through universities because the sports faculty used to be the main provider of coaching education in our country. About ten years ago, this education shifted under the auspices of NZS. We haven't been developing science within the association, and that's a problem. We need to find a way to re-

establish this in better connection with universities. Our recent experiences with cooperation with universities haven't been the best because there hasn't been much happening in football.

3. Why hasn't there been any football research happening?

There have been too few studies conducted on football-related topics. There aren't scientific articles and in-depth research on the game, as is the practice in other countries. I would say that the sports faculty's department in this area has been too inactive.

4. Does the NZS have ambitions to rectify this situation?

I believe that the NZS should address this issue and start incorporating science. This can happen either by finding the right personnel and appointing them to the appropriate positions at universities or by establishing a department and conducting research internally.

5. Is this involvement in university education programs feasible?

Yes, partially. We don't always have control over whom the university hires. I'm trying to establish good contacts with researchers to involve them in programs. An example is the university program for kinesiology, where we are already involved, and they conduct a lot of research, and these guys also lecture at our programs. There are opportunities for collaboration, especially with younger individuals who follow new trends. The problem arises with older professors who are not open to new approaches. Football is evolving, but some resist change.

6. Are referee and coaching education programs in Slovenia at a high level compared to European competition?

The Football Association has been working a lot in this area in the last four years since I joined this department. Previously, for example, there was only one person in this department, but now we have four or five. This concerns coach education and related programs. We have also started with analytics - we are the first in the Balkans to introduce performance analysis.

Progress is also visible externally, as we received a better rating from UEFA. Some time ago, for instance, a German contacted me because he noticed NZS as a good practice with modern approaches and wanted to be a part of it and introduce his own topics. We are slowly gaining a good reputation in Europe. Now that we have five people in the team, it's easier - it's still a bit less compared to other countries - but we are moving forward.

7. Why did the staffing increase in this department – which enabled such progress?

Because the association had ambitions to invest in knowledge. With one person, this is impossible. We have twelve programs and offer eighteen courses annually. If you want quality, you have to have enough people, especially if we want to invest in new programs. But we won't stop here; we have to continue investing.

8. How important is the education and upskilling for the leadership personnel in football, such as sports directors for example?

A good practice example is Italy, which has had training for sports directors established for several years. It's different here. Yesterday someone might have been a football player, and tomorrow, through connections, they're appointed as a sports director. This person lacks the competencies for managing a football club, leading people, coaching knowledge, and the ability for selection of their support team. There is also a high turnover rate in these positions.

9. Isn't the NZS responsible for standardizing this area?

Until the NZS does not develop training programs for these positions, standardization cannot be introduced. NZS is working in this direction by establishing a digital platform with educational content that will offer training to these individuals to make them more competent for their roles. This can be expected in one or two years.

10. Now I will list the groups of actors indirectly involved in the football scene in Portugal, regularly educated by the PFS: medical workers, journalists, analysts, scouts, nutritionists, psychologists. Does the NZS intervene in the development of any of these groups?

I really like this question. I think this is the right path for us as well. For now, we only cover analytics. Medical workers sometimes give lectures here because we involve physiotherapists, but they're not being educated in this sense. We also conducted training for journalists through the coaching department for them to use appropriate and modern terminology, and we also issued a document on this topic.

11. Why the shift towards e-learning and digitization?

It offers the possibility of blended learning. Certain content that can be taught online would be moved to the platform. This would also be more feasible for people to afford the lectures. Why should someone travel to the other end of the country to attend lectures if they can read it at home? Other things, such as developing leadership skills, dealing with stressful situations, communication skills, teamwork skills, and others, will continue to be conducted face-to-face.

12. Is knowledge also assessed, or are certificates awarded solely based on attendance?

Acquired knowledge is assessed through tests.

13. What skills are key for sports managers?

In my opinion, a sports director should have basic skills in economics, finance, and sports law because there are many contracts in this business, and one needs to be able to compete in such an environment. Of course, leadership and football skills are also essential. Directors should have some basic coaching qualifications so that they understand the content of football and the

training process and can assess who is suitable, for example, for the position of head of the football school at the club.

14. What is the current situation of football directors in Slovenia?

The level is too low because there are no criteria, and people without competencies are appointed to these positions. Most of them are former players who potentially could be good directors, but they would need to undergo some training.