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*The Improvement of Sport Governance Through Professionalization of National Sport Organizations*

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**The Improvement of Sport Governance Through Professionalization of  
National Sport Organizations**

**Tanja Bilić Brenner**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration**

**February 2024**

## Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organization, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
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I dedicate this thesis to my beloved daughter Eva and grandson Kristian.

## **Abstract**

*The main aim of this thesis was to examine the possibilities of professionalization of National Sport Organizations as a way to improve sport governance. The main objectives were to investigate the mindset of leading people in National Sport Organizations in Croatia and the region (specifically presidents, board members, and general secretaries/directors), to get an overall idea about the current state of National Sport Organization professionalization, and to find which form of professionalized National Sport Organizations contributes best towards efficiency in the context of increasing demands in sport. Another objective was to find out the possibilities of professionalization, i.e., whether National Sport Organization presidents or board members could be made up of only professionals with specific competencies needed for carrying out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and programme, and finally, to detect the processes (e.g., accounting, legal affairs, organizing competitions, etc.) which could be professionalized in National Sport Organizations.*

The growing demands of stakeholders towards National Sport Organizations lead to constant problems and changes in National Sport Organization leadership structure. Starting from the existing pyramidal structure of the sport system, the aim was to examine whether and what changes could be made to introduce elements of the for-profit world to improve efficiency. Since no research has been conducted on the topic of sport governance in Croatia to achieve the aim and objectives of this thesis, a mixed methodology, exploratory sequential design, was used. The qualitative research was conducted initially, and its results served as the basis for the quantitative research, conducted in a broader sample. The research results showed that professionalization is an option to solve problems in sport governance regarding the functions and processes that follow it. Since sport has a particular significance for Croatian society and the task of NSOs is to develop and promote sport, recommendations were given to the creators of

sport policy in the country to take steps to help National Sport Organizations and other sport organizations improve their functioning.

**Key words:** national sport organizations, non-profit organizations, sport governance, professionalization of sport organizations

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## **List of Abbreviations**

NSO (National Sport Organization)

SD (Standard Deviation)

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)

## **CHAPTER 1 Introduction**

This chapter contains an overview of the research context of the topic of this thesis, which explores the possibilities of professionalizing National Sport Organizations (NSOs) to improve sport governance. The organizational structure of the Croatian model of sport (as a part of the European and International model) with the most important features is presented. The National Sport Organizations (NSOs) boards were discussed as key factors for sport governance. Furthermore, the aim and objectives of this thesis are listed, the methodology, theoretical base for the research, contribution concisely explained, and the structure of the thesis by chapters is given.

### **1.1 The Importance of the Research Context**

Sport is a part of global culture, a worldwide phenomenon that plays an important role in many people's lives through regular active or passive engagement (Breitbarth et al., 2015). Some positive social characteristics of sport are social inclusion, health improvement, community integration, and safety. Many scientific studies have also proved the economic benefits of sport (Feng & Humphreys, 2018; Kwiatkowski & Oklevik, 2017; SportsEconAustria, 2012). Sport is an important economic sector in the European Union, with a share in national economies comparable to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries combined; sport represents a labour-intensive industry in development; sport has the economic characteristics of a luxury good; sports products and services can be found in many other sectors, e.g. in tourism, insurance, legal advice, and many others (SportsEconAustria, 2012).

Despite the benefits, as a sector, sport has never faced such critical examination about how it operates and puts into focus the lack of awareness of good modern governance practices. According to Winand and Anagnostopoulos (2019), increased scholarly activity on the matter is because of some recent scandals, specifically the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics bribery incident (bribes given to International Olympic

Committee members to win the rights to host the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, United States), the 2015 International Association Football Federation corruption crisis (where some current International Association Football Federation officials were accused of fraud, racketeering, and money laundering), and the 2016 International Association of Athletics Federations case (doping practices in Russian athletics in 2015 resulted in their athletes being excluded from major competitions). These cases pointed to problems in governing sport organizations and indicated the need for changes.

Regarding Lam (2014), in its broad meaning, governance is the exercise of power in governing an organization. Moreover, governance in a sport organization must give clear direction to the organization, which aligns it with its mission and vision. Improving governance in a sport organization has been an important topic in past decades for the reasons mentioned above. Sport organizations are continually undergoing organizational and structural changes. Some are driven by a desire to improve what they do, while others are forced into change because of financial, internal, or political issues. Sport governance has become an increasingly important topic (King, 2016) for research and teaching (in sports studies) in a time of constant political, legal, financial, and sociocultural changes. Frequency analysis shows a noticeable increase in sport governance research in recent years, with many non-empirical studies focusing on the non-profit sector because of ambiguities about defining sport governance, which has made it difficult to operationalize empirically (Dowling et al., 2018).

According to Shilbury and Ferkins (2019), governance practices were largely an afterthought in these changing times because of increased revenue, which helps sports organizations increase participation and attract support until commercial pressures and the need for increased accountability became important to the lasting survival and legitimacy of sport organizations. The irony is that the leading people in the governing



structures are volunteers who lack the time to perform their jobs adequately and do not necessarily have the required qualifications for governing. Shilbury et al. (2013) published the results of a survey of sport governance practices from one respondent's experience in governing two sport organizations (basketball and cricket) for 30 years. The participant experienced an era of increasing professionalization in sports. His narrative, which draws on his expertise in governing at the state, national, and international levels, gives insight into the transition from amateur to commercial culture, which they called "*two worlds colliding*" (p. 349).

Significant changes have taken place in sport and the functioning of NSOs, which are voluntary and non-profit sport organizations that represent their sport in the country and are a part of European and International Sport Federations. There have been changes in some important Olympic sports in Croatia (e.g., swimming, volleyball, tennis, basketball) over the last five years. Changes in governing positions in NSOs, mainly due to the unfulfilled expectations of the stakeholders in the sport on which these structures depend, were frequent. The Code for Sport Governance defines stakeholders as persons or groups (internally or externally) interested in the organization or are affected by its activities. The number of competitions has increased, and the expectations of clubs and athletes as internal stakeholders are higher. Furthermore, the legal framework and obligations of NSOs have grown, as have the expectations of sponsors and the public representing external stakeholders. Due to the dissatisfaction of internal stakeholders (clubs and athletes) with the financial situation, poor transparency in providing information to NSO members, and the development of those sports in general, there have been calls for reform in sports.

The question of how to increase the efficiency of NSOs' functioning and satisfy all stakeholders' requirements emerged as a research problem. Changing the voluntary status of board members, defining their competencies, and determining common

processes important for NSOs could improve their functioning. The direction towards the professionalization of NSOs imposed itself as a solution.

Professionalization, by definition, is a process by which any occupation transforms itself into a true “profession of the highest integrity and competence”. According to Lang et al. (2019), the main challenge of professionalization research is the lack of benchmarks, and it is still unclear how much professionalization is appropriate or what forms of professionalization are needed for which type of sport organization. According to Dowling et al. (2014), sport professionalization is the process through which sport organizations, systems, and the occupation of sport transform from a volunteer-driven to a more and more business-like phenomenon. According to Slack (2014), practitioners and researchers must have a common understanding of what professionalization means. It is worth researching whether the concepts applied by scientists reflect the perceptions of practitioners in NSOs, i.e., to investigate a more straightforward concept of professionalization that is common to science and practice in order to facilitate a holistic analysis of professionalization in sport organizations and thus enable a comparison of different forms of organizational transformation (Ruoranen, 2018). Professionalization is primarily perceived as a professional attitude that transforms into the federation culture.

This research explored the relationship between theory and practice and the possibility of professionalization in governing National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in Croatia and the region. To understand the problem of NSO governance, it is necessary to explain their structure.

## **1.2 The Organizational Structure of Sport - The Role of the National Sport Organization**

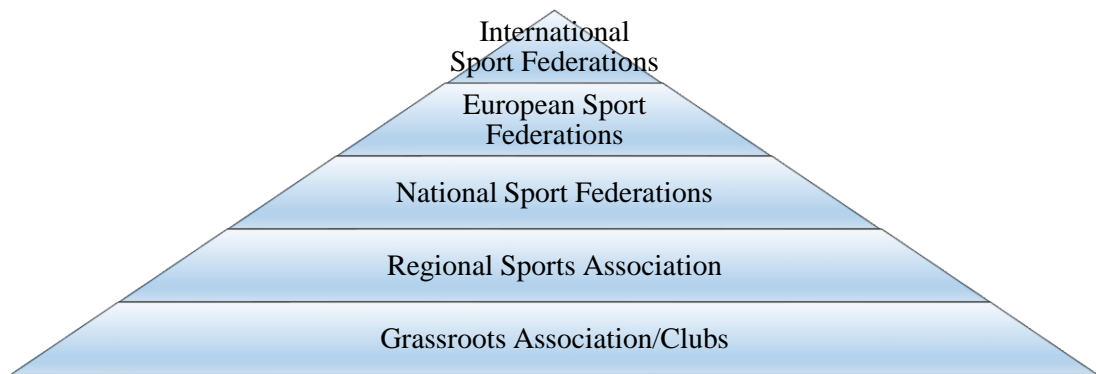
This section explains the organizational context of sport at the international and national levels because they are essential for understanding the problems and challenges

in sport governance leading towards professionalization. The organizational structure of sport resembles a pyramid with a strict hierarchy (European Commission, 1998). From the bottom upwards (Figure 1), this hierarchy comprises clubs, regional sport associations, National Sport Organizations, and European and International Sport Federations at the top.

### ***1.2.1 The Model of Sport***

**Figure 1**

*The Pyramid Model of Sport*



Source: Adapted from the European Commission, 1998

The model of sport (Figure 1) shows that sport is organized according to the so-called pyramidal model. There are national characteristic specificities by which individual countries somewhat differ. The White Paper of Sport (European Commission, 2007c) points out the complexity of the sport organizational system (Rogulski & Miettinen, 2009). The White Paper on Sport was the first document in which the European Commission addressed sport-related issues in a general way, applying a holistic approach to sport. Given the diversity and complexities of European sport structures it considers, however, it is unrealistic to try to define a unified model of the organization of sport in Europe. Moreover, economic and social developments common to most Member States

(increasing commercialization, challenges to public spending, increasing numbers of participants, and stagnation in the number of voluntary workers) have resulted in new challenges for the organization of sport in Europe. The emergence of new stakeholders (participants outside the organized disciplines, professional sports clubs, etc.) poses new issues regarding governance, democracy, and representation of interests within the sport movement. The system of the organization of Croatian sport resembles sport organizations in other European countries. E.g., the Croatian Handball Federation is one of the significant NSOs, in terms of the Olympic and international medals and the number of clubs and athletes. It comprises county/regional associations and some other significant associations for handball (Association of Croatian Handball Referees, the Croatian Handball Federation Coaches). Clubs are members of county associations and the Croatian Handball Federation. Furthermore, the Croatian Handball Federation is a member of the European and World Handball Federation and is also one of the founders of the Croatian Olympic Committee. All the largest NSOs in Croatia (in terms of number of clubs and athletes) are organized similarly.

Most sport organizations, NSOs likewise, are founded as associations of citizens and non-profit organizations. The organization and legal regulation of sports are based on the statutes and rules of the European and International federations of a specific sport or the Olympic Charter of the International Olympic Committee (National Sports Council Working Group, 2011). Sport organizations, at all levels, have the task of meeting the interests of their members as well as providing social benefits. Some characteristics of non-profit sport organizations must be specified to understand the conditions for a governing system in sports.

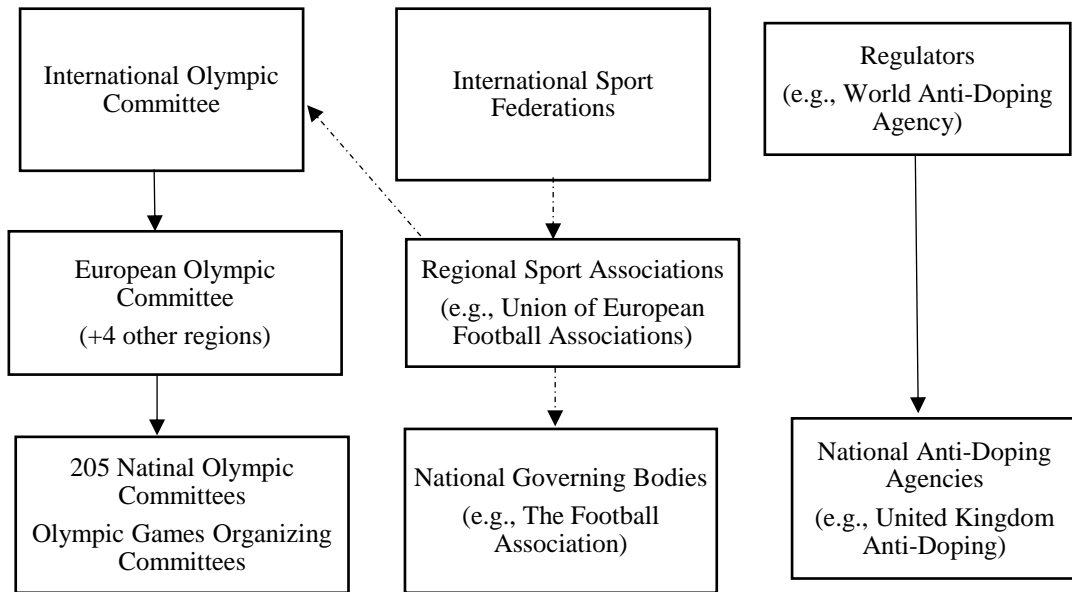
The first characteristic is that federations use this vertical channel of authority to hold a monopolistic position within their sport (García, 2009). The second organizational characteristic of the European sports model is a promotion and regulation system. The

pyramid structure implies linkage among levels, not only on the organizational side but also on the competitive one (competitions from local to international level) (European Commission, 1998b). The third characteristic is the non-profit status of most sport organizations. Their challenge is to establish a system that can meet the varying needs of their stakeholders, both commercial (sponsors) and public (state), while maintaining adequate service and value to their association (O’Boyle & Hassan, 2014). Finally, a significant characteristic of sport is the voluntary status of organizations (Schulz & Auld, 2006). It means that joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The European sport model is organized like the International sport model and has the same characteristics.

Figure 2 shows the infrastructure of International sport. “The sport sector consists of government bodies, non-profit sport organisations including national governing bodies for specific sports, regional and county structures, leagues, associations, and local-level sports clubs, and a raft of commercial organizations including sponsors. If the sector is viewed as a hierarchy, international sports bodies sit above the national, regional, and local levels of sport governance, with membership afforded to representatives of specific nations. Each country or nation-state has a different infrastructure for sport, from almost wholly government (or state) run to almost wholly operated by non-profit (or voluntary) bodies” (King, 2016, p. 8).

**Figure 2**

*The infrastructure of International sport*



Source: Adapted from King, 2016

The International Olympic Committee and the World Anti-Doping Association, as regulatory bodies, have a significant influence on the governance of sport at the national (National Anti-Doping Agency) and local levels and are powerful bodies that shape the sports sector. All these organizations are non-governmental and non-profit sport organizations associated with commercial national and international government bodies. Non-profit sport organizations are run by volunteers and paid staff. They have a mixed economy that balances grants, subsidies, sponsorship revenues, and membership fees. They operate through a sports network and are thus regulated by national and international sports systems (Winand & Hoerber, 2017). As they have to respect all the regulations at all levels, it makes their functioning complex. Non-profit sport organizations depend highly on volunteers, tend to be smaller but more financially self-sufficient, and often have varying resource capacity levels (Gumulka et al., 2005). Finally, voluntary organizations operate in complex environments with different stakeholders, mobilizing resources from government subsidies, membership fees, market operations, and

donations. They are equally capable of pursuing civic and democratic goals, such as advocacy and representing interests, which gives them an advantage over for-profit and government organizations (Enjolras, 2009). The following sub-section describes the organization of sport in Croatia, which is a part of the International sport community and follows their policy.

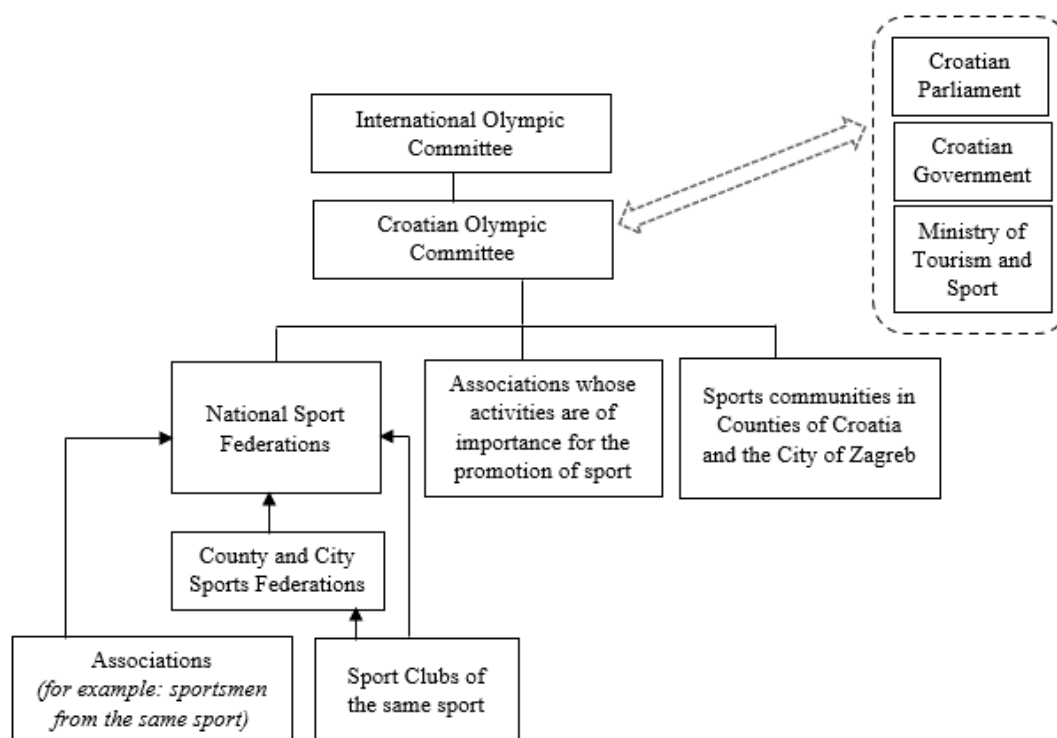
### ***1.2.2 The Organizational Structure of Croatian Sport***

The model of sport forms the base for the organizational structure of sport in Croatia. The difference between the European and Croatian models is that the Croatian Olympic Committee is the umbrella organization that unites NSOs, sports communities in the counties of Croatia and the City of Zagreb, and associations whose activities are important for the promotion of sport. That is one level of organization and is not directly linked with the European and International sports organizations. This means that Croatian NSOs must respect the regulations of both European federations and the Croatian Olympic Committee without colliding with each other. [Figure 3](#) shows the organizational structure of Croatian sport.

The default organizational structure in which Croatian sport operates as part of the international sports community is crucial when seeking to improve governance in sport. As mentioned above, the essential characteristic is the non-profit status of sport organizations, which adds to the complexity facing modern non-profit sport organizations arising from internal stakeholder needs and commercial, government, and social demands. Non-profit organizations can have multiple and conflicting identities. These identities cause conflicts between social mission and economic rationales, particularly between non-management logic and more business-oriented practices from the profit world (Chenhall et al., 2016). Non-profit organizations are mostly viewed as mission-driven organizations, so the business-oriented side is often disregarded.

**Figure 3**

*Croatian Sport Organizations - Croatian Olympic Committee and National Sport Organizations in Relation to Policy Makers*



Source: Adapted from National Sports Council Working group, 2011

At the top of the organizational structure of the Republic of Croatia is the Croatian Olympic Committee (Figure 3), which acts as the National Olympic Committee, the Association of National Sports Associations, and the Association of County Sports Teams (National Sports Council Working Group, 2011, p. 61). The Croatian Olympic Committee is the umbrella association for 88 of its NSOs, representing 6,884 clubs and 249,944 registered competitors ([Appendix V](#)) and organising elite and mass sports.

The members of the Croatian Olympic Committee, according to membership status (September 2023), are:

- Full members (42 NSOs of Olympic sports + 36 NSOs of non-Olympic sports) and 21 Sports communities in counties of Croatia and the City of Zagreb



- Associate members of the Croatian Olympic Committee (five NSOs) + eight associations and institutions whose activities are important for the promotion of sport
- Temporary members of the Croatian Olympic Committee (five NSOs)

The line ministry governs sport policy in Croatia in cooperation with the umbrella associations of Croatian sports (Croatian Olympic Committee, Croatian Paralympic Committee, Croatian Sports Association of the Deaf, Croatian School Sports Association, and Croatian Academic Association) and National Sports Council. According to the Sports Act in Croatia (2022), NSOs develop and promote sports following the National Sports Program 2019-2026 (2019), organize national sports championships, care for their respective national teams, and represent the sport at the relevant European and international sports associations. NSOs are a central link between the two levels of sport, the grassroots and elite levels. Therefore, NSO must be an interface where these two ends meet and create a mechanism where money from top-level competition feeds the grassroots level and contributes to its expansion (Burson, 2019).

The new Sports Act in Croatia (2022) was adopted at the end of December 2022 and came into force on January 2023. Through the new Sports Acts, NSOs were given many new obligations to fulfil. Article 37 of the Sports Act (2022) defines the obligations of NSOs, with some new roles being added:

- deciding on organizing a system of sports competitions including several countries or foreign regions
- professional development and licensing of professional personnel
- management of professional and administrative work related to persons who perform professional work in sport
- participation in the fight against doping
- education of athletes related to anti-doping topics, which is organized in

cooperation with the national body responsible for the fight against doping

- taking care of athletes' healthcare
- concern for the sustainable development of sports
- participation in collecting and updating information for the National Information System in Sport

Article 116 of the Sports Act (2022) prescribes that non-fulfilment of the mentioned obligations is a misdemeanour liability. Considering the already mentioned problems, these obligations can only be fulfilled with changes in the governing and administrative structures of NSOs.

The strict hierarchies of the Croatian model of sport ([Figure 3](#)), the non-profit character of sport organizations, and the presence of volunteer boards are the main characteristics of the sports structure and form the starting point for the research. As sport organizations are run by boards that are crucial for governing them, the following section explains their present role and the challenges they face. Furthermore, selected volunteer boards generally control NSOs (as is the case in sport organizations in Croatia) whose task is to make policies and direct and enhance the organization's performance rather than manage day-to-day operations. The importance of the governance system is that selected groups of volunteers and paid staff in sport organizations performing executive tasks achieve set goals for the organization's and its members' benefit (Parent & Hoye, 2018).

### **1.3 Boards in Non-Profit Sport Organizations**

The boards of non-profit sport organizations must also deal with many challenges in discharging their governance responsibilities. “Boards are identified theoretically as the crucial lynchpin at the head of the organizations. In practice, they are also the point at which the buck stops” (Pye, 2004, p. 65). The strategic role of boards, as one of the most important ones, is a weakness in many sport organizations (Ferkins et al., 2005). Inglis et al. (1999, p. 153) define “Strategic Activities” as roles relating to planning, setting the

mission and vision, developing policy, evaluating the executive director, and focusing intensely on the external environment. Their study confirms the importance of a strategic orientation for non-profit boards. Non-profit literature has offered guidelines for boards managing executive turnover events. However, few studies have investigated how boards fulfil this critical responsibility because boards operate with prescribed responsibilities but varying capacities to fulfil their duties (Stewart, 2017).

A vital component of non-profit human resources in boards is volunteers. As governments worldwide reduce costs and public spending, non-profits face increasing pressure to apply modern human resource management practices in terms of their paid staff and managing volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Volunteers are often said to be the backbone of non-profit sport organizations (Slack, 2014). Since voluntary sport organizations (NSOs as well) are separated from the state, they are managed independently through voluntary boards or volunteer committees and do not return profits to their members (Cuskelly et al., 2006). According to Stebbins (1996) fundamental volunteers are analogous to career volunteers in that volunteering requires specific skills, knowledge and training, and sometimes two or all three of the above. Although they perform their job with care and concern for users of non-profits, human resources probably play a vital role (Word & Park, 2015) in facilitating the engagement, dedication, and work of volunteers. Alfes et al. (2017) show how human resources practices can lead to beneficial outcomes for both volunteers and non-profit organizations. While non-profit sport organizations in the past focused on moving forward and implementing their vision for the future, they are beginning to recognize the importance of applying a more professional approach to volunteer management to make that vision a reality.

### ***1.3.1 Boards in National Sport Organizations in Croatia***

As the research is done in Croatia, it is important to point out that there are various models for selecting board members in Croatia. According to the Law on Associations

and the Sports Act (2022) in Croatia, members of the NSO Assembly of each NSO determine the model of creating their board according to their statute. Knowledge of board selection processes is also important because it affects the relationship with the effectiveness and function of the board (Withers et al., 2012). Thus, there are several models for electing executive boards in Croatian NSOs. Some NSOs select board members even if they are not association representatives. In some NSO executive boards, board members are proposed by the president of the NSO, while in other cases, the NSO Assembly submits the candidates directly. Some NSOs are organized according to a regional principle (such as the Croatian Tennis Federation), and their executive board may consist of representatives of regional sports associations. The provisions of NSO statutes ensure that the executive board includes representatives of the best or most numerous clubs and the representatives of different sports disciplines; some of the NSO boards consist of the representatives of club members. Board members can also be representatives of significant sponsors in terms of the sum of money from sponsorship (such as the Croatian Water Polo Federation). Following the International Olympic Committee's recommendations, the representative of the Athletes' Commission should be a member of the executive board to represent and protect the athletes' interests. However, this is not usually the case with Croatian NSOs. Also, a board member may be another person at the recommendation of the president of the NSO. Board members in NSOs in Croatia are elected according to the representative model and not according to competencies for performing governing functions, which becomes a problem. According to Stenling et al. (2020), general distinctions between representative and performance-based criteria within these categories are quite different.

#### **1.4 Personal Motivation for the Research**

After many years of work in planning and analyzing sports programmes for the Croatian Olympic Committee, the author of this doctoral study mostly uses quantitative

analyses and creates reports and strategic documents for the Croatian Olympic Committee. Through communication with the leading people of the NSOs (presidents, other members of the boards, and chief operatives), the researcher has noticed that work in NSOs is increasingly demanding. Sport has changed significantly in the last two decades. The Sports Act in Croatia (2022), the Law on Associations and other laws related to the functioning of sport organizations give the governing people constantly increasing commitments and responsibilities.

Stakeholders' (mostly NSO members) dissatisfaction has been increasing because of unfulfilled goals, which is why frequent changes in the governing structures occur. Almost 98% of NSO boards have volunteers in the governing positions, so they do not have enough time to detect and monitor all current changes and make decisions accordingly. Moreover, NSOs, as non-profit organizations, are becoming more and more similar to those in the business world.

This thesis addressed how to enable policymakers and academics to understand the professionalizing of NSOs better. As NSOs are both implementers and interpreters of policy, they influence the direction of national policy. The research in this thesis focuses on the leading people in NSOs whose athletes achieve top results at the Olympic Games and other European and international competitions. These are the ones with the most significant number of registered clubs and athletes and for which the state and the public are most interested. Therefore, they also receive most of the substantial financial resources through the Croatian Olympic Committee. Based on the above, the aim and objectives were created and presented in the following section.

### **1.5 Aim and Objectives**

The research aims to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of individuals and activities in National Sport Organizations to increase efficiency in sport governance.

The main objectives are:

- to investigate the mindset of leading people (presidents, board members, and general secretaries/directors) in National Sport Organizations to get an overall idea about the current state of professionalizing National Sport Organizations
- to determine the possibilities of professionalization of board members as a step towards strengthening the effectiveness of governing in National Sport Organizations
- to determine whether National Sport Organization board members (e.g., presidents) could be professionals with specific competencies to better carry out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and programmes
- to determine if some common processes in National Sport Organizations could be professionalized to contribute to efficiency in the context of increasing demands in sport
- to define success metrics for National Sport Organizations

Given that research in the field of sport governance in the direction of professionalization is complex, there are no measurable indicators, so a mixed methodological approach was considered appropriate for this area. This means combining qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. The data collected through in-depth interviews were analyzed. They served as a base for the questionnaire in the quantitative research phase. The results of both phases were analyzed and compared. A comparison with the existing literature from the field of sport governance was done, too.

The basis for this research, considering the importance of internal and external stakeholders for the functioning of NSOs, is the Stakeholder theory, one of the primary governance theories. The New Corporate Governance theory was introduced because it is stakeholder-oriented and points out a strategically targeted composition of the board team.

Using a scientific approach, this research intended to contribute to the existing theories in the area of sport governance on the topic of the professionalization of NSOs by examining the points of view of the leading people in NSOs in Croatia. This research (as a contribution to knowledge) intended to define elements of professionalism that could be applicable in the existing organizational structure of sport which could contribute to increasing the efficiency of NSO's governance and respond to challenges. Moreover, this research contributes to those creating sport policies. Policymakers in sports should consider the idea of changing the framework that will enable NSOs to make changes, specifically those of particular importance for sport development in Croatia.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

The thesis consists of eight chapters. [Chapter 1](#) presents the direction and importance of the research context. The key terms and research problem are defined and introduced. The improvement of sport governance as an important factor in developing the impact of sport in society, identifying the organizational structure of sport and the role of NSOs in sport governance in Croatia and worldwide, as well as the role of boards, are discussed. It also states the research's aim and objectives, briefly describing the motivation, methodology, theoretical basis and contributions.

[Chapter 2](#) presents the different governance theories that are applicable given the context and aim of the research. Based on the various theories, a theoretical framework for solving the problem of inefficiency in sport governance is defined. The New Corporate Governance Theory is introduced as a new theory in the field of sport governance.

[Chapter 3](#) provides further background on professionalization with a particular focus on NSO boards and their responsibilities and performance, as well as the research problem in sport governance, which has emerged from a thorough literature review. The chapter examines the role of boards in NSOs, strategic board functions, the involvement

of volunteers in boards as a complicating factor in the issue of leadership within sport governance, the importance of stakeholders in sport, good governance principles as one of the important roles of the boards, and elements of corporate governance applicable in sport governance. The arguments guiding this research to improve sport governance towards professionalization are also presented.

[Chapter 4](#) presents the system of beliefs and assumptions and the philosophical paradigm. It explains why pragmatism, with its characteristics, is the appropriate choice for this research. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions, which are important for this research, are described. The central research question and some sub-questions are formulated in the context of the problematization methodology and the researcher's attitude. This chapter also presents the methodology and discusses the research design. It explains the mixed methodology design (sequential triangulation design) in detail. Firstly, the qualitative research (the pilot study and the main research) approach (the interview technique, data collection process, sampling, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations) served as a base for the main quantitative research. Through the pilot qualitative study, the length of the interview process and the interview questions were tested, and the aim, objectives, and research questions were revised. Secondly, the main quantitative research (creating the questionnaire, data collection process, sampling, and ethical issues) is described. Finally, the triangulation of data to ensure validity is presented.

[Chapter 5](#) presents the results of the pilot qualitative study, which underpins the main research topic of professionalization related to NSOs, and the results of the main research, both qualitative and quantitative. First, qualitative research was conducted through interviews with presidents, board members, and chief operatives of NSOs. It also shows the possibility of professionalizing board members and some key processes aiming to improve governing in NSOs. The success metrics of NSOs and five key themes



emerged. The research results from the main qualitative research formed the basis for the Questionnaire for the main quantitative research. It also gives the results of the quantitative phase of the research.

[Chapter 6](#) provides the findings of qualitative and quantitative research by the themes. It shows and discusses the congruences and differences of the results.

[Chapter 7](#) discusses the research findings and the existing literature in sport governance.

[Chapter 8](#) presents a comprehensive conclusion to the thesis. It contains an overview of the thesis, key findings, strengths, and its limitations. It also includes recommendations for further research towards professionalization in NSOs. The contribution of this thesis to knowledge and practice as an outcome of the research and its application to practice are also presented here.

## **1.7 Summary**

This chapter presents the importance of the research context arising from the problems faced by the governing structures of NSOs in Croatia and beyond in fulfilling their obligations. The organizational structure (the non-profit status of sport organizations) in which Croatian sport operates as part of the international sports community is crucial in finding ways to improve NSO governance. It also highlights the importance of selected volunteer boards as policy-making bodies in sport organizations. The aim and objectives of the research were defined based on all of the abovementioned factors. The thesis structure is also presented at the end of this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2 Theoretical Framework**

This chapter outlines the primary governance theories relating to the role and relevance of the board in understanding the governance of non-profit sport organizations, critically reviews the mentioned governance theories, and presents new perspectives, approaches and a new theory applicable to sport governance. It also defines the theoretical framework for this research.

### **2.1 Governance Theories**

Definitions of governance depend largely on scholars' respective research agendas or the phenomenon being studied. Geeraert et al. (2013) describe patterns that emerge from the governing activities of social, political, and administrative actors. The mutual agreement with the broader public administration and governance literature remains problematic, with its application so far being imprecise and too meaningless to be useful (Dowling et al., 2018). According to Beech and Chadwick (2004), the term “governance” can generally mean “the act of governing” or “the process of governing”.

The responsibility for the functioning and general direction of the organization, encapsulated by the term “governance”, is a necessary and institutionalized component of all sporting codes from the club level to national bodies, government agencies, sport services organizations, and professional teams around the world (Kikulis, 2000). According to Lam (2014), governance is the system through which organizations are directed and managed. It is usually accepted that governance structures significantly impact the performance of sport organizations. Governance is the process by which organizations make essential decisions, determining the stakeholders of a process and how these processes work (Graham et al., 2003).

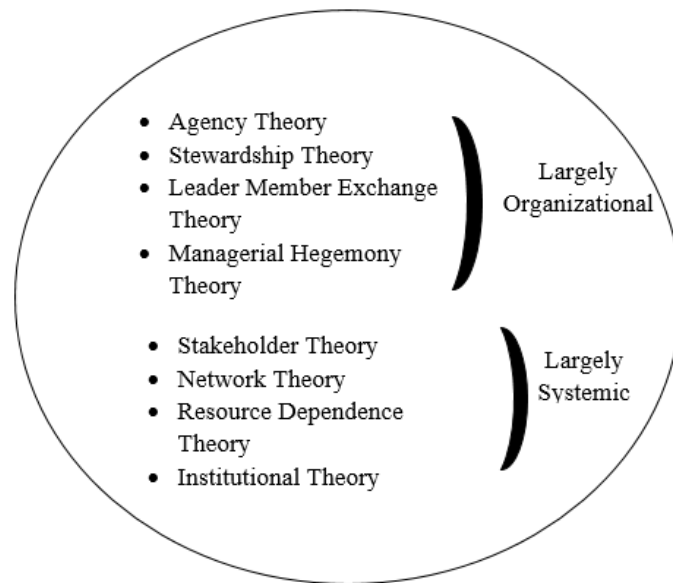
According to Cornforth (2004), the governance of non-profit organizations is under-theorized compared to the governance of profit organizations, with abundant literature on corporate governance. Non-profit organizations exist for entirely different

reasons than their profit-orientated counterparts and mainly involve a higher number of stakeholders in their decision-making structures and processes. The relationships among decision-makers who must decide how the non-profit organization will be directed, controlled, and regulated differ from these relationships in for-profit corporations (Drucker, 1990). While this is unquestionable, the need for efficiency and improved governance exists in non-profit organizations, much like for-profit organizations.

Governance theories are both positive and normative. Positive theories explain structures, processes, and mechanisms (the state as it is – how the world works), while normative theories define these structures, processes, and mechanisms (what ought to be). Both should be used to improve the effectiveness of governance (Masten, 1993). The governance theories described in this section are presented in correlation with the role of the board and their relevance to understanding the governance of non-profit sport organizations. O’Boyle et al. (2019) positioned the theories concerning the federated model of sport as the governance system. The theories shed light on some assumptions, processes, structures, or governance outcomes for sport organizations. According to the authors mentioned above, these theories are divided into systemic and organizational, as shown in [Figure 4](#). Systemic governance refers to cooperation and competition and often involves the need for mutual adjustment between sport organizations and stakeholders. Henry and Lee (2004) say that systemic governance focuses on the relationships between organizations rather than directly on them. In contrast, organizational governance is “*a system by which an organization makes and implements decisions in pursuit of its objectives*” (International Organization for Standardization, 2010). As stated by Henry & Lee (2004), this type of governance approach refers to the accepted norms, values, and processes surrounding the business conduct and management of sport organizations and the governance practices that involve the direct governing of sport organizations.

**Figure 4**

*Primary Theories to Influence Sport Governance Scholarship*



Source: Ferkins & Shilbury, 2019

The following sub-sections overview primary governance theories that influence sport governance scholarship.

**2.1.1 Agency Theory**

Agency theory is characterized by the situation in which an individual (the principal) engages another person (the agent) to undertake a service for them and, in doing so, delegates some of the decision-making authority to the agent (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). Sapienza et al. (2000) state that the principal faces two risks: agent opportunism (acts of self-interest at the principal's expense) and adverse selection (the agent's lack of ability to meet performance expectations). The threat of agent opportunism exists because the interests or goals of the two parties potentially diverge from those of the firm. According to the above, agency theory is relevant for NSOs since it represents the relationship between the agent (paid staff) and the board. In recent times, agency theory has tended to dominate the literature on governance, influencing the conclusion that the central role of the board is to monitor the Chief Executive Officer (Ferkins & Shilbury,

2012).

Like for-profit organizations, most non-profit organizations are characterized by a separation of ownership and control. In addition, many actors, along with the manager and the owner, can be involved in the non-profit organization's activities, such as volunteers, donors, or clients (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). The threat of agent opportunism exists because the two parties potentially have different interests from the firm's. Steinberg (2010) applies the principal-agent theory to non-profit organizations and concludes that the presence of multiple principals with different objectives hinders the potential of agency theory to resolve questions of non-profit accountability. Therefore, a recommendation is to complement agency theory with other theoretical perspectives (Steinberg, 2010).

### ***2.1.2 Stewardship Theory***

In contrast to agency theory, stewardship theory considers situations where managers, as stewards, are motivated to act not out of self-interest but in the best interests of their principals. Stewardship theory negates the so-called agency costs by assuming that a steward's behaviour will not differ from the organization's interests. A steward's behaviour is based on cooperation and pro-organizational and collectivistic actions. The steward's behaviour is pro-organizational and collectivist and has a higher utility level than individualistic, self-serving behaviour. The steward's behaviour will not depart from the organization's interest because the steward seeks to achieve the organisation's objectives (Davis et al., 1997). Stewardship theory focuses on structures that do not insist on control or monitoring but are centred on serving by increasing organizational wealth. A steward's behaviour is based on cooperation, pro-organizational and collectivistic actions, and this is prioritized over self-serving behaviour (Davis et al., 1997).

The literature on non-profit organizations has focused on the limitations of agency theory Steinberg (2010) and has stressed the importance of highly motivated employees

in performing an activity (Ben-Ner & Ren, 2015; Leete, 2000). These authors use a stakeholder approach to distinguish between different categories of external and internal non-profit principal-agent relationships and discuss each from a governance and agency perspective. The literature remains relatively silent on the applicability of stewardship theory to non-profit organizations. Stewardship theory is hardly applicable to non-profit organizations because it does not insist on structures based on controlling or monitoring. However, it can complement agency theory.

According to O'Boyle and Shilbury (2018), agency and stewardship theories focus on the Chief Executive Officer board dynamic, although it can be argued that the broader purpose of a governing board is relevant to these theories. Shilbury et al. (2013) cite that these theories primarily focus on the internal mechanisms in this governing relationship. The systemic governance nature of the federal model and the external governing relationships that are important for its efficacy cannot be explored using these theories (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2018). Furthermore, the authors point out that the notional differences between agency and stewardship theory provide a helpful framework for considering the evolving roles of both boards and professional staff within sport organizations.

### ***2.1.3 Leader-Member Exchange Theory***

The central premise of the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) is a different kind of relationship between leaders and their subordinates or members. It consists of physical and mental effort, material resources, information, and emotional support between the parties (Liden et al., 1997). According to Shilbury and Ferkins (2011), the issue of leadership in sport organizations is very popular with researchers, i.e., the volunteers and paid staff and their relationship dynamics provide a rich environment for research. The survey on the joint leadership by the same authors provided insight into the impact of paid staff on the strategic role assumed by the board, with most findings

suggesting the possibility of reducing accountability in the board's strategic development.

O'Boyle et al. (2019) used the Leader-Member Exchange theory to investigate leadership within non-profit sports governance. The authors applied a case study approach involving three organizations and 16 participant interviews with board members and Chief Executive Officers within a golf network in Australia to uncover key leadership issues in this domain. Ambiguity of leadership, distribution of leadership, leadership skills and development, and leadership and volunteerism emerged as key themes in the research.

Leader-Member Exchange theory provides a framework for exploring shared leadership and the evolving influence between paid staff and volunteer board members. It could underpin significant knowledge on improving board processes, building strategic board capabilities, and thus professionalizing business systems (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011).

#### ***2.1.4 Managerial Hegemony Theory***

Managerial hegemony theory argues that, despite the board having legal power, management assumes real responsibility for the organization (Stiles, 2001). Dallas (1996) recognizes several reasons, including the significant impact of management on the selection of board candidates, pressure on compliance, and increased opportunities for a more profound knowledge of organizational issues. Stiles (2001) concludes that boards do not realize their potential in strategic decision-making. Studies in the theory of sport organizations, especially professionalization and bureaucratization of sport organizations, strongly indicate that there are problems with ownership and control in the context of sport (Amis & Slack, 1996; L. Kikulis et al., 1995). Amis and Slack (1996) found that the relationship between volunteers and professional staff and their fight for control is the main factor contributing to a lack of connection between size and decision-making structure. Ferkins et al. (2005) cite that the noticeable differences found within theories

of agencies and management provide a valuable framework for considering the new roles of boards and professional staff in sport organizations.

### ***2.1.5 Stakeholder Theory***

Freeman (1984) defined stakeholder theory as those groups vital to the survival and success of an organization. Stakeholder theory argues that governance is about achieving members' goals and respecting the interests of other individuals and groups affected by the organization's performance and behaviour, including the general public. This approach also requires the accountability of the organization's leaders and board to their members. Within this framework, the goal should be to identify the interests of other stakeholder groups, including individuals, international federations, sponsors, etc.

Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) found that stakeholder relationships between NSOs and their regional entities are important to the strategic governing function of NSOs. As a result of their study, they advocated a collaborative approach to strategy between 'members-as-owners' and NSOs, as opposed to a more 'top-down' control-oriented model. In essence, this study highlighted the central role of a particular group of stakeholders, namely the legal members of the NSOs, due to their power and legitimacy.

According to Ferkins and Shilbury (2015b), the idea that governance entails responsibility for making decisions on behalf of others is central to the principles of stakeholder theory. The authors conducted a study (on Squash Vic, the state governing body for squash in Victoria, Australia) using stakeholder theory to improve the understanding of governance. The study was conducted over two years and focused on developing governing skills in a way that offers rich insight (collaborative action research). Byers et al. (2012) argue that the relationship between stakeholders and sport organizations is important and that how sport organizations are governed can profoundly influence sport systems where the organization's top leadership group makes decisions. It can have long-term consequences, especially for countries with high degrees of central



government involvement and where non-profit sport organizations dominate (Hoye & Doherty, 2011).

The success of the stakeholder approach ultimately relies on directors/executives who encourage collaborative and productive relationships and achieve the redemption of membership in the organization.

#### ***2.1.6 Network Theory***

Network theory examines the formation and relationships between organizations. Networks provide flexibility, reduced uncertainty, increased production capacity, and access to skills, knowledge, and information (Slack & Parent, 2006). A network must ensure legitimacy for all partners to reach these aims (Child & Faulkner, 1998).

In addition to legal contracts, organizations also have socially binding service contracts that constitute a degree of dependency on organizations, and there is no reason to believe that networks and inter-organizational relationships will end soon (Slack & Parent, 2006). Network theory was used by Henry and Lee (2004) to explain the complicated web of interrelationships between stakeholders in commercial sport organizations (e.g., football) in the United Kingdom. According to them, sport governance is a system that does not rely on a specific organization but on associations or inter-organizational relationships between organizations responsible for joint sport governance. This theory is more relevant to exploring organizational relationships at the management level than the governance level (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2018).

#### ***2.1.7 Resource Dependence Theory***

Resource Dependence theory suggests access to resources and control over them as the key to organizational success (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource Dependence theory can be used to explain the behaviour of organizations in a broad sense. It is necessary to create more precise propositions about which conditions organizations need to fit into their environment and resist or actively change. Such recommendations are

available, according to Oliver (1991). Further adaptations of Resource Dependence theory could easily refer to this. The relationship between securing resources and power must also be clarified (Nienhüser, 2008).

McLeod et al. (2021) examined how boards see their roles in Scottish football clubs using semi-structured interviews. Findings show that perceived board roles fall into five categories: control, service, operations, resource co-optation, and strategy. The organizational size influenced perceptions of board roles in Scottish clubs. At the same time, an apparent alignment of interests between owners and managers and a subsequent reduction in agency cost has implications for the control role. Integrating stewardship and resource dependency theories provides a more holistic understanding of board roles in this context. The authors state that an integrated theory can help explain the roles of boards in other sport organizations of similar size and operational structure. Determining the extent of dependency theory on resource management would be an important contribution to the literature on sport governance, especially given the central role of boards in sport organizations undergoing the critical process of professionalization.

### ***2.1.8 Institutional Theory***

According to Slack and Parent (2006), institutional theorists are interested in how organizations become similar. There is a move from the traditional view of organizational fields, which are stable, towards organizational fields, which are influenced by contemporary dynamics, leading to a need for change. Institutional theory provides a good base for understanding organizational change related to NSO decision-making and governance (Kikulis, 2000). It is also a good framework for understanding processes in sport organizations (Amis et al., 2002). Institutional theory often explains the influence of the environment and adaptation to the usual expectations of other institutions (e.g., umbrella organizations, member organizations, and policymakers) (Washington & Patterson, 2011). To support athletes and the public interest, leading people in sport

organizations face strong institutional pressures to adjust to changes. They are under pressure to commercialize their sport organizations, despite them not fitting in with the organization's core values. In seeking to fill a noted void in the non-profit literature on strategic decision-making, Parker (2007) inductively derived a study using institutional theory to investigate how “non-profit directors distinguish between and balance their strategic and operational monitoring responsibilities” (p. 1454). Boards are constantly caught between focusing on strategic or micromanagement issues. Slack and Parent (2006) state that institutional theory is relatively simple and is widely applied and suggests that members of society share understanding and expectations about the appropriate organizational form.

## **2.2 Governance Theories Applicable to Sport**

According to Houlihan (2005), even though none of the above mentioned governance theories fully explain proper sport governance, they are a valuable contribution to those who govern the sport. Each theory emphasizes the importance of only one specific role, which has led to criticism that they offer a narrow and incomplete understanding of board activities (Kreutzer & Jacobs, 2011). Houlihan (2005), like Cornforth (2004), believes that almost all the listed theories can be used as a base and implemented in the case of non-profit sport organizations, mainly the institutional, stakeholder, network, and managerial hegemony theories. They mainly relate to the type of federal model of sport organizations, the rules in which they exist, and the influence of many different groups.

Hoye and Doherty (2011), reviewing theoretical board performance models from for-profit and non-profit management settings, highlighted several studies that specifically integrated multiple theoretical perspectives and found a strong argument for establishing an integrated model of board work. They emphasized the importance of multiple theoretical perspectives (agency theory, resource dependence theory,

institutional theory, group decision-making processes, legal theory, and managerial hegemony theory). So, they influence the factors they chose as central building blocks for their model (environmental, individual, organizational, and board factors). In practice, boards face tensions when deciding how to divide their time between control and service tasks, and it can be challenging to change their behaviour when changing roles (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). The requirement that boards strike a delicate balance between different roles is not reflected in dominant theoretical perspectives, leading to calls for researchers to adopt a multi-theoretical approach to the topic (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015b). As stated by Booth et al. (2015), the application of a particular theory to sport organizations must take into account the type and industrial context of the sport in question because the sport environment is so diverse, and the reality of this diversity opposes the development of a comprehensive theory of sport governance. In the context of this research’s aim and objectives, as Shilbury and Ferkins (2019) say, there is no comprehensive governance theory, and the development of such a theory does not seem desirable. The eight theories meet this criterion because they represent the relationships between multiple concepts and ideas.

**Table 1**

*Governance Theories, Characteristics and Correlation with Non-profit Sport Organizations*

<b>Governance theories</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Non-profit organizations - relationship</b>
Agency theory	The best way for the board to maximize control of managerial actions and increase the quality and quantity of information for shareholders (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012)	Limited relationship – stakeholders have no financial share in organizations

<b>Governance theories</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Non-profit organizations - relationship</b>
Stewardship theory	The board's needs are focused on enhancing the performance of the organization rather than seeking managerial compliance (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2018)	Hardly applicable – as a supplement to Agency theory
Leader Member Exchange	The board presidents focus on developing relationships with the executive (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011)	Applicable – in non-profit organizations, the relationship between board members, especially the president and chief executive officer, has a more positive effect on board functionality
Managerial hegemony theory	The relationship between volunteers and professional staff and their fight for control (Amis & Slack, 1996)	Hardly applicable – the introduction of professional staff who work for volunteer boards
Stakeholder theory	Examines the relationships among organizations and their stakeholders and conceptualizes organizations as a series of links and responsibilities (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010)	Applicable – non-profit organizations need to manage relationships with many different groups: sponsors, members, staff, boards
Network theory	In addition to legal contracts, organizations also have socially binding service contracts that constitute a degree of dependency on organizations (Slack & Parent, 2006)	Applicable – non-profit organizations display such interdependency. Board members' actions in using their networks can help non-profit sport organizations
Resource dependence theory	Organizations are dependent on other organizations for their work and survival where they get the resources and information they need (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978)	Applicable – the governing board of non-profit sport organizations plays a crucial role in the relationship between organizations and their environment

<b>Governance theories</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Non-profit organizations - relationship</b>
Institutional theory	How organizations behave in an external environment and obtain resources – external pressures to conform to accepted business practice (Slack & Parent, 2006)	Applicable – traditional federated models govern most national and state or provincial sport organizations

Based on the existing literature, some elements of the existing fundamental theories can be used to establish a new sport governance theory and collaborative governance theory in the federal model of managing non-profit sport organizations, and there is a need for a more holistic and nuanced understanding of sport governance (Dowling et al., 2018; Henry & Lee, 2004). Recent sport governance research (O’Boyle & Shilbury, 2018; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015) examined the issue of collaborative governance as, in some ways, a continuation of network theory (Henry & Lee, 2004), but with a particular focus on governance. Moreover, network theory is more appropriate for organizational relationships on the governance line than the managerial level. Collaborative governance is most used in public administration literature (Emerson et al., 2012), but its definition and use are inconsistent. Regardless, these types of governance have changed how public business has been performed in recent decades (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Collaborative governance theory is the basis for sport governance in a federally constructed system (Winand et al., 2016). Regarding Ansell and Gash (2008), collaborative governance is a governing agreement based on creating a collaborative design that is formal, consensus-oriented, and thoughtful. A governance model brings multiple stakeholders together (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Henry and Lee (2004) considered that, given the expanded network and reliance on different types of stakeholders, sport organizations find themselves in systemic governance where organizational and political governance also play a key role.

Collaborative governance theory, for example, has attracted increasing interest within the public and government sectors to investigate cross-sectorial governing relationships (Emerson et al., 2012). It speaks to how multiple organizations across different sectors work together to achieve common goals and outcomes that may not be possible by working in isolation. The tenets of collaborative governance theory are also founded on a formalized consensus-orientated process which involves collective decision-making (Ansell & Gash, 2008). A great degree of significance in collaborative governance theory is given to the human factor (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016), so the voluntary status of boards in sport organizations and the motivation and skills of members can be a problem in adopting this type of governance. Continuing their previous argument, Ferkins and Shilbury (2015a) have suggested in their research that a critical dimension in adopting a collaborative governance theory is the leadership style of boards in sport organizations. A distinct quality of collaborative leadership is that it is more comfortable than direct – it must create the preconditions for stakeholders to cooperate and successfully execute transactions with each other (Ansell & Gash, 2012; Emerson et al., 2012). Leadership primarily has its roots in the field of psychology, where interpersonal dynamics are emphasized, while governance research primarily developed from disciplines such as accounting, economics, and commercial law, which favoured structural approaches and often quantitative research designs (Erakovic & Jackson, 2012). Pye (2004), states that researchers have rarely explored governance and leadership as complementary, and little is known about the impact of the theoretical frameworks from one field on the other.

Winand et al. (2016) claim that using existing theories and models, mainly from areas such as corporate and non-profit management literature, has been the norm in sport governance. However, the characteristics and specifics of managing a federal model and the external relations that affect governance are the keys to its effectiveness, but they are

not well suited for research through the theories outlined above. Corporate governance theories should also be implemented in sport governance (Winand & Anagnostopoulos 2019). The New Corporate Governance theory is discussed in the following section.

### **2.3 New Corporate Governance Theory**

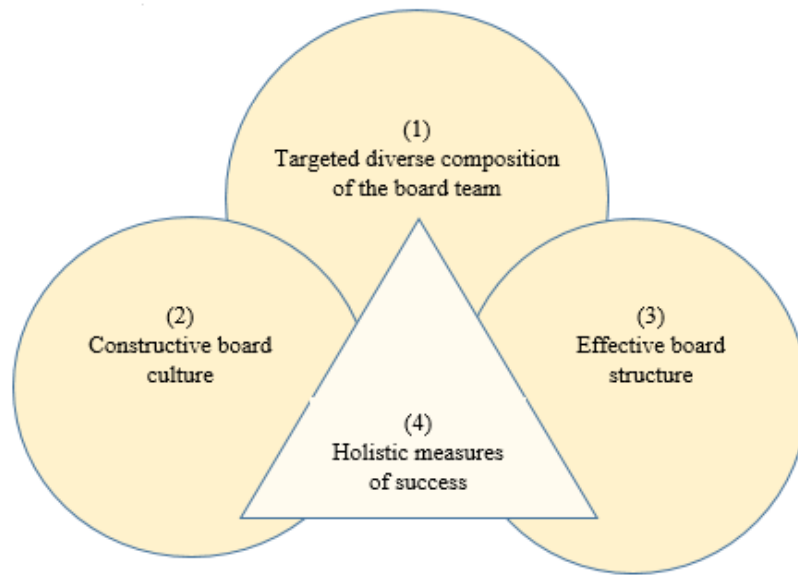
Hilb (2006) criticizes one-dimensional approaches, leading him to develop four guiding principles: the contextual factors in which an organization operates, a competent board team, effective human resource policies, and a holistic monitoring system at the board level. He applied his theories in sectors and institutions with complex constellations like higher education institutions, cooperatives, etc. His ‘New Corporate Governance’ model is based on a holistic approach. He identified four main reasons for problems in governance: lack of adaptation to changing situations (the environment is changing, but governance remains the same), lack of strategic direction at the board level, poor professional human resource practices at the board and upper-management levels, and poor integration of strategic monitoring and risk management functions. All of the above can also be applied to sport governance and provide a proper framework for the research. According to Hilb (2010) in *the Board as Value Driver*, four main preconditions for success in developing, implementing, and monitoring corporate strategy have been proposed:

- a strategically targeted composition of the board team,
- a constructive and open-minded board culture,
- an effective board structure,
- stakeholder-oriented board measures of success.



## Figure 5

*Keep it Strategic*



Source: Hilb, 2010

These four components must be integrated into a process, as shown in Figure 5. At each of the different levels, success measures are to be established. Each of the four preconditions for the successful development and implementation of corporate strategy is discussed. Well-diversified board teams consist of members representing all relevant aspects: functional competencies (e.g., auditing, risk management, human resources management, marketing), team roles (e.g., a controller, a critical thinker, a creative thinker), demographic data (e.g., age, gender), and internal and independent members, stakeholder ‘hats’ such as customers, shareholders, employees, and society/the environment (Hilb, 2010).

Competitive theoretical approaches and conceptualizations offer different analytical perspectives and tools for researchers in the field of governance, allowing them to mix and match different theories in search of an appropriate framework to solve a particular research problem or research question. Furthermore, the authors point out that it is better to choose between many sharp and recognizable theories with their particular

purpose than to transfer a blunt, unified, multi-purpose theory to study modern forms of problem-based governance.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Base for this Research**

Considering the importance of theory in qualitative research in sport governance, Shaw and Hoeber (2016) also encourage us to view our engagement with theory. Establishing a theoretical basis could be rigid and individual, and it should be more like something scientists can weave research into as we progress through the study (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2019). Therefore, there is the question of whether to establish a theoretical position before the project or if it is possible to work flexibly with the theory (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). The value is that it is unlikely that any theory can fully explain the complexity of what might happen within the setting of a board, organization, or sport system Cornforth (2012). Especially in qualitative research, where an emergent and inductive approach is valued, the freedom to rely on multiple theories during research potentially offers a way to gain rich insights (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). Ruoranen (2018) states that the study of approaches to professionalization is “theoretically open-minded” and that professionalization is multiple, and by maintaining openness in theory and approaching multiple approaches, we can better understand different aspects of the phenomenon.

From a stakeholder theory perspective, it is important to balance economic and social goals and individual and communal interests (Bennett et al., 2019). Good governance in sport organizations should prioritize economic imperatives and encourage efficiency through thoughtful decision-making without solely focusing on profits. The board must ensure that the interests of all stakeholder groups, both internal and external, are met, which can be challenging. Thus, the effectiveness of the organization is evaluated by different stakeholders. This approach has proved to be an effective way to assess the board and organizational effectiveness, with scholars seeking empirical evidence to

define good governance (Ferkins et al., 2005). Hoye (2002) has also employed this theoretical framework to investigate sport board performance. It can be further improved by incorporating agency theory to maximize the board's control over managerial actions and internal monitoring issues and better understand the power dynamics between the Chief Executive Officer and the board (Stiles, 2001). According to this theory, the board's primary responsibility is to monitor the Chief Executive Officer's actions.

Since this thesis discusses the possibility of improving governance in NSOs, the stakeholder theory (as one of the primary governance theories) puts internal and external stakeholders in the foreground because they are key to the survival and success of the organization, so it is the most suitable theory for achieving this research's aim and objectives.

Considering a new governance theory that applies to sport, additional arguments in Hilb's New Corporate Governance Theory were found. Hilb (2010) states that the governing body in corporations should act as a visionary and effective decision-making body, exercising both strategic leadership and control. It is also an invitation to think twice about the applicability of "best practices" in different legal contexts and business models. It further addresses the question, "Where do good ideas about committees come from?" In response, Negroponte (1996), the founder of the MIT Media Lab, says, "It's simple: differences". Hilb (2010) suggests mixing disciplines, team roles, demographic variables, and stakeholders. Well-diversified board teams consist of members who represent all relevant functional competencies (e.g., audit, risk management, human resources management, marketing), team roles (e.g., controller, critic, creative thinker), demographics (e.g., age, gender), and internal and independent members. The same author suggests that an effective board culture consists of five factors: outward orientation, learning, holistic perspective, consensus orientation, a constructive, open environment full of trust, and a mix of global efficiency and local adaptability (we call it

“glocal”). In the context of non-profit sport organizations in which boards play a crucial role in running the organization (see [Section 1.3](#)), one should consider how committees should be formed to govern NSOs effectively. Part of corporate governance should be used and adapted in sport governance due to a series of problems faced by NSOs today - the board's constructive and open team culture (Hilb, 2010). Hilb's four guiding principles based on a holistic approach: the contextual factors in which an organization operates, a competent board team, effective human resource policies, and a holistic monitoring system at the board level were important for this research.

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter presents the primary governance theories (shown in [Table 1](#)) that influence sport governance scholarship and their characteristics and application in research. The use of each theory and its application to sport governance have been listed and discussed. The theories that apply to this research are described. Using only one theory is inadequate in explaining the full extent of what boards do. Each theory emphasizes the importance of only one specific role. As stated by many researchers, a holistic approach to the complex governing system in sport is imposed as a solution in the complex sport governing system. Ferkins and Shilbury (2015a) suggested applying a multi-theoretical approach to sport governance. Due to the importance of numerous stakeholders for the survival of a sport organization, Stakeholder theory and Hilb's New Corporate Governance theory based on a holistic approach are presented as a possible theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER 3 Literature Review**

To achieve the objectives of this research, i.e., to determine the possibilities of professionalization of NSO board members, the competencies they must possess, as well as common processes that can be professionalized to increase efficiency, it was necessary to research and compare the literature in the field of sport governance. This chapter focuses on the literature reviewing NSO boards, their responsibilities and performance, good governing principles, leadership issues, relations with stakeholders in sport, and challenges of NSO professionalization. Consequently, some research questions have arisen. There is an absolute absence of relevant research in the field of sport governance in Croatia, providing an opportunity for this research to make a notable contribution.

### **3.1 Boards in NSOs - Responsibilities and Performance**

Explaining who runs the sport organization and what issues and challenges they face helps defining the problem of sport governance and forces upon the need for professionalization in sport organizations. A key function of democratic governance systems (which sport is a part of) is representation, which means that the few are mandated to make decisions on behalf of the majority. The question of how representation of stakeholders' interests should be ensured in reflecting different views on representation (i.e. ideas about how the absent should be present) calls into question what is considered "adequate" board composition from a representative perspective (Stenling et al., 2023). Selected volunteer boards generally control non-profit sport organizations (as is the case in sport organizations in Croatia) whose task is to develop policies and direct and enhance the organization's performance rather than direct day-to-day operational management.

According to Shilbury et al. (2020), the concept of collective board leadership has received limited attention to date, with only a few studies investigating the topic from a theoretical perspective (Ferkins, Shilbury, et al., 2018; Ferkins, Skinner, et al., 2018). The study by Shilbury et al. (2020), which included one sport and three separate organizations

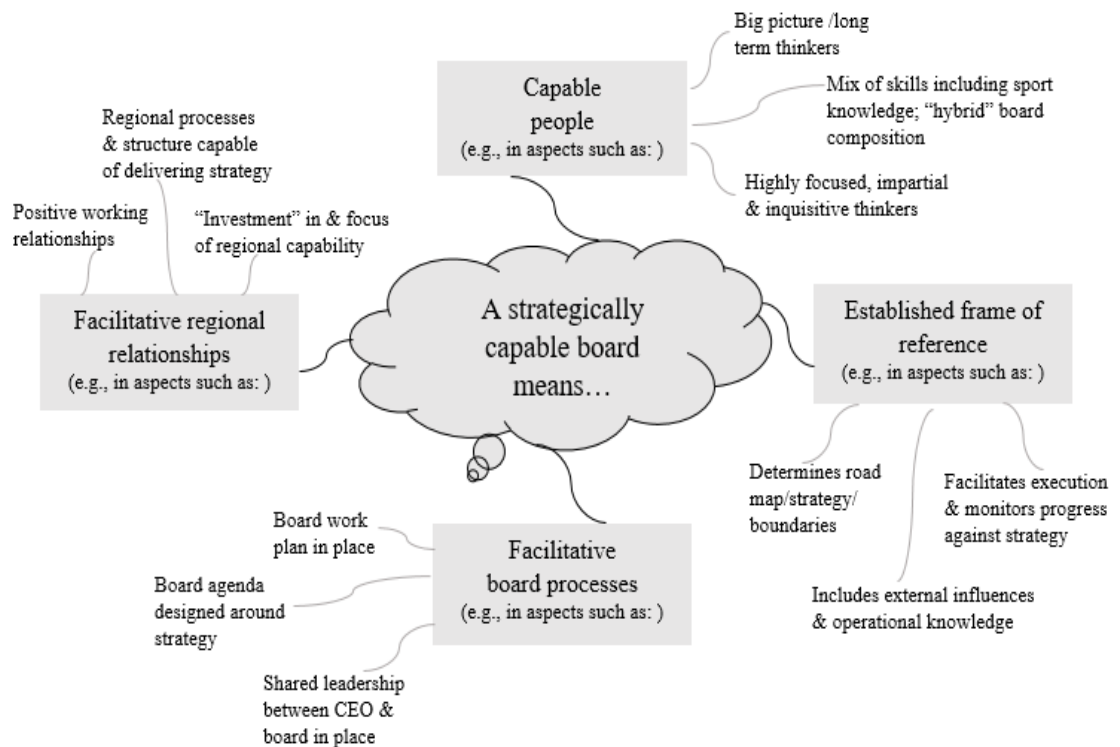
within that sport, provides further insights based on the existing literature on the importance of a collaborative approach to governance, which shaped the board's leadership style. Although the premise of this study was based on the need for collective board leadership to enable and implement collaborative governance (an arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process), there was a much greater understanding of the need for collaboration than the conscious implementation of collective board leadership. NSO boards are essential for sport governance because board members make key decisions for the functioning of NSOs. Relations and cooperation between them are significant, as mentioned by Shilbury et al. (2020). To stress the value of governance in sport organizations, we need to know what meaning NSO board members attach to the concept of “strategic capability”.

### ***3.1.1 Strategic Capability***

Within governance literature, various terms have been used to describe strategic board function, including strategic focus, strategic decision-making, decisive involvement/contribution, vital role, strategy development, strategic processes, strategic orientation, and strategic capability of the board (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012). [Figure 6](#) shows what the strategic capability of a board should be.

**Figure 6**

*Mapping board strategic capability*



Source: Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012

Ferkins and Shilbury (2015a) offer six dimensions (drawn from the literature) which influence the board's strategic capability, leading to the conclusion of the holistic and comprehensive nature of the board's strategic role (Figure 6). The six components are: increasing the contribution of volunteer part-time board members, or 'will and skill'; operational knowledge of the board; a committee that integrates regional entities into a management role; a board that maintains the function of supervision and control; the development of a board leadership strategy; and co-leading board strategy integration into board processes. The relationships and balance between these would lead to the strategic optimization of the board over time.

In most non-profit sport organizations worldwide (as well as in the Republic of Croatia), volunteer boards channel limited resources through limited staffing capacity.

Volunteer boards need to attract significant expertise, which may be a critical point of a non-profit sport organization (Ferkins et al., 2009). Ferkins et al. (2005) state that ways should be found to attract capable individuals to board roles and consider alternative recruitment processes that provide more diverse board groups better suited to ever-competing stakeholder expectations and various organizational goals. Non-profit sport organization boards must also deal with many challenges in fulfilling their governance responsibilities defined by statutes and laws. Within the governance literature regarding the responsibility of non-profit boards, various terms are used to describe strategic board function, including strategic focus, strategic decision-making, decisive involvement/contribution, vital role, strategy development, strategic processes, strategic orientation, and strategic capability (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2016). In most non-profit sport organizations in Europe and worldwide (as well as in the Republic of Croatia), volunteer boards channel limited resources through limited staffing capacity.

### ***3.1.2 Modernization of Recruitment Process of the Board Members***

Sport organizations are moving away from using models and structures based on volunteers acting as board members towards adopting more formal and sophisticated forms along with boards of directors that must be strategic and effective (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012). Voluntary involvement also complicates the issue of leadership within sport governance. The skills, qualities, and characteristics required to lead effectively and collectively are under question (Shilbury et al., 2013). The fact is that board members are mostly recruited representatively. Several studies have investigated different aspects of boards. Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) collected the key elements of board performance and board-executive relationships within voluntary sport organizations. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with 21 executives, board chairs, and board members from seven voluntary sport organizations. They defined the key elements for board functioning: board leadership, trust between the board and the executive, controlling the information



available, and the board's performance responsibility. The problem is that generally, board members currently lack these elements.

Another study about modernization (a process closely related to professionalization) and governance in the United Kingdom National Governing Bodies of sport and how modernization influences the way board members perceive and enact their role was conducted by Tacon and Walters (2016). The data was collected through the first national survey of board-level governance (69 respondents) in the United Kingdom, observing board meetings (14 full meetings), conducting in-depth interviews (11 interviews), and analyzing 39 key documents. The study showed that board members rate their financial and strategic roles as most important, while they view their functions relating to the representation of stakeholder interests as less important.

Studies and literature support the purpose of the selected objectives of this thesis, which deals with the possibility of professionalizing board members and determining the necessary competencies for governance in NSOs. It indicates another important factor concerning human resources. NSOs in Croatia and worldwide, as non-profit sport organizations, are also mainly composed of volunteers on boards, and the question of human resources is of utmost importance.

### ***3.1.3 Human Resources in Non-Profit Sport Organizations***

Houlihan and Lindsey (2013) see the board role as important because boards, according to their function, are likely to be key 'delivery agents' in the voluntary sport sectors of many countries. Regarding the essential and strategic role of boards in running sport organizations (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012), board composition (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2016; Ingram & O'Boyle, 2018), board member skill, and the voluntary status of boards in non-profit organizations may present difficulties in sport governance. However, volunteers today are a crucial component of non-profit Human Resources (Taylor & McGraw, 2006a). As governments worldwide reduce costs and public spending, non-

profits face increasing pressure to apply modern Human Resources Management practices, not only in terms of their paid staff but also in managing their volunteers (Cuskelly, Taylor, et al., 2006). The backbone of non-profit organizations is volunteers. Word and Park (2015) say that although volunteers do their job with care and concern for non-profit users, human resources play a vital role in facilitating their engagement, dedication, and work. Alfes et al. (2017) show how human resources management practices (recruitment selection processes, training and development) can benefit volunteers and non-profit organizations. While non-profit organizations in the past have focused on moving forward and implementing their vision for the future, they are now recognizing the importance of applying a more professional approach to volunteer management to make that vision a reality (Alfes et al., 2017).

### **3.2 Good Governance Principles - Important Task of the Board in NSOs**

In addition to previous considerations related to boards' responsibilities and performance, the principles of good governance are equally important for improving sport governance, which leading people in governing structures of NSOs should also respect. Defining good governance principles is complicated and diverse (Graham et al., 2003). As Chappelet (2018) noticed that over the last 20 years, governmental and national sport bodies and academics have presented more than 30 governance principles for sport organizations.

Regarding Geeraert et al. (2013, p. 282), the main principles of good governance are accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, predictability, sound financial management, fighting corruption, and transparency. They may also include participation and democratization in politics because the environment is a significant factor or background for good governance. Good governance is the essence of good sport, so it is a matter that requires the attention of everyone, from athletes and fans to governing bodies and commercial partners. We live in an era where the principles of good governance are being

questioned, raising numerous questions about its principles, application, and governance (Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2019).

In a systematic review, Parent and Hoye (2018) showed that, despite a keen interest in research on the principles and guidelines of good governance in sport, it is essential that both the international community and researchers define a set of good governance principles that would be applied from the international to the local level. The authors also find that defining these principles is complicated given some factors in sports, such as the existence of the International Olympic Committee, international associations, and legal and cultural frameworks. This means that they are likely to limit and prevent sport organizations from understanding what is fundamental to improve governance. Further, this may be unrealistic given the many stakeholders involved, such as the International Olympic Committee, international associations, and numerous national (sports) agencies, as well as the different legal and cultural contexts surrounding national sport systems. However, a lack of consistency will limit the ability of sport organizations to improve their governance and prevent researchers from understanding what principles and guidelines are critical to improving governance performance in sport organizations.

Parent & Hoye (2018) concluded that the primary limitation of the research published so far has been the lack of reliable, empirical, independent evidence addressing the key question of what governance principles sport organizations should adopt and implement to optimize their management work. The situation has not changed till nowadays. Namely, if volunteer board members are increasingly required to follow good governance principles, regardless of their workload, paying these board members, especially if they are to be independent, becomes a necessary outcome that leads to professionalization, which is the aim of this thesis.

Sport governance research has been looked at on international, national,

organizational, and individual levels of analysis from different perspectives (Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2019). Although there are no clear boundaries between these levels, it is possible to understand their respective meanings. The international perspective looks at the global application of the principles of good governance advocated by international organizations, which has been overshadowed by recent scandals that have directly or indirectly affected sport. National and organizational perspectives look at how governance is applied at the level of national or local organization and the challenges these entities face in implementing governance principles. The individual view takes a person-centred approach in sport governance research, analyzing the micronutrients crucial in developing responsible sport organizations. Alm (2013) quotes the guiding principles that must be followed to achieve transparent and accurate communication, including accountability, information disclosure, fairness, openness, and honesty. Theories and principles need to be implemented in the operations of board members. This means that theories and principles need to be included in organizational changes, goal setting, operational activities, and performance measurements.

It is also important to state that constant tension and conflict between board volunteers and paid staff also appear in the division of leadership, competencies, motivation, and other segments (Chenhall et al., 2016). The skills, qualities, and characteristics required to lead effectively and collectively are under question (Shilbury et al., 2013). Voluntary involvement also complicates the issue of leadership within sport governance, which is discussed in the following section.

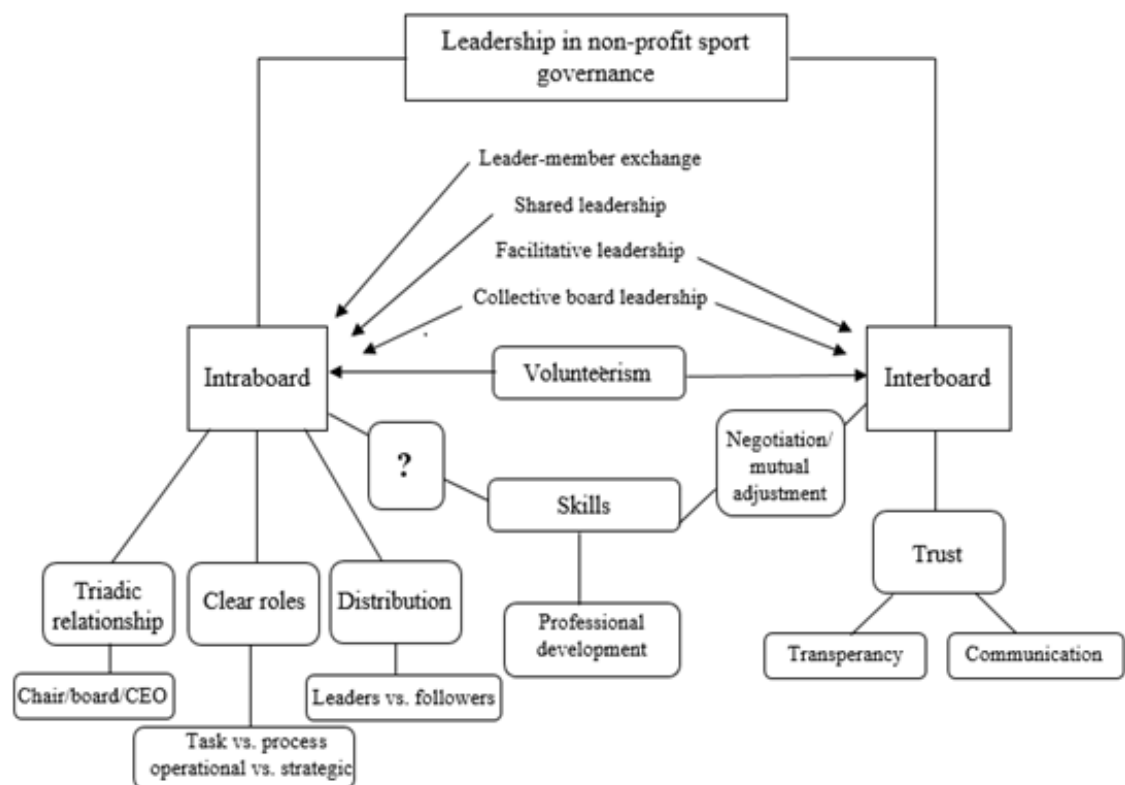
### **3.3 Leadership Issues in NSOs**

Effective leadership sets the direction and tone for the organization. O'Boyle et al. (2019) conducted a study exploring leadership in non-profit sport governance, and according to them, leadership skills can be assessed for new and existing board members, so the benefit of leadership development for boards should be explored. The authors adopt

an approach to the case study that includes interviews with three organizations and 16 participant board members and chief executive officers within the golf network in Australia to uncover key leadership topics in this domain. The ambiguity of leadership, distribution of leadership, leadership skills and development, and leadership and volunteering have emerged as key topics in the research. As a result, the authors present a Working Model of Leadership in Non-profit Sport Governance (Figure 7). The model was developed based on existing literature and new empirical evidence. The study opened many questions on leadership, such as the specific role of leadership on boards in non-profit sport organizations, which approach to leadership should be applied, etc.

**Figure 7**

*A Working Model of Leadership in Non-profit Sport Governance*



Source: O'Boyle et al., 2019

With this in mind, management's effect on leadership in sport organizations has become more pronounced over time, leading to what Ferkins et al. (2005) call “Shared Leadership”. They indicate the balance between the voluntary board structure and the highest management team of a sport organization and how this balance favoured paid management staff in the decision-making process. This remains a predominant research topic in sport governance as the complexity of shared leadership continues to develop, especially in New Zealand football (Ferkins et al., 2009).

Many stakeholders (sponsors, members, and society) also expect the previously mentioned effectiveness of shared board leadership in sport organizations, which is the topic of the following section.

### **3.4 Stakeholders in Sport**

Nagel et al. (2015); Ruoranen et al. (2016); Shilbury & Ferkins (2011) have pointed out the necessity for professionalization in sport organizations as one of the ways to achieve efficiency in running sport organizations and to serve the needs of stakeholders. Further, constant and dynamic environmental changes (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011) on the national and international levels of the sport have led organizations to seek a new governance structure. The results of the study conducted by Booth et al. (2015), who had 30 interviews with representatives of NSOs, some state sports organizations and local clubs, sponsors, national and state government authorities, and media representatives in Australia, revealed the key indicators of governance that most influence sustainability. The key indicators were identification, consultation and participation of stakeholders; access and timely publication of information; fair and ethical decision-making; corporate social responsibility and codes of conduct; responsibilities of the main board; competence/the director's experience and skills; and the roles of the board and management are differentiated and specified. Based on the information gathered from the interviews, they conclude that (1) sport does not appear to be a “special case” in terms of

governance compared to the wider business sector (including not-for-profits), and (2) there appears to be some indication that generic governance models are having a greater impact in Australian not-for-profit sport organizations. Stakeholders' (sponsors, members, society) expectations in sports are high and have become a key factor in the survival of sport organizations (Kikulis, 2000), continually seeking more efficient operation of non-profit sport organizations (Zollo et al., 2019). In the context of this research, sport stakeholders (clubs ) are primarily members of NSOs, whose expectations are focused on developing and promoting sports, acquiring funds, taking care of sport infrastructure, and achieving set goals. Frequent changes in boards of NSOs support the need for change. All the complexity of the sport system is shown in [Figure 8](#), which represents the internal and external stakeholders that NSOs operating in Croatia must respect. According to Washington and Patterson (2011), expectations from stakeholders, such as the state or umbrella organizations (e.g. National Olympic Federations) are often considered important for understanding professionalization from neo-institutionalist perspectives. Financiers or collective actors such as political institutions, but also evolutions in civil and economic conditions can cause changes in processes and structures, and influence the transition of non-profit organizations in general to business organizations (Maier et al., 2016). The functioning of NSOs is impossible without respecting all stakeholders, no matter their varying levels of importance.

**Figure 8**

*Internal and External Stakeholders in Sport in Croatia*



As the state in Croatia, through the Ministry of Tourism and Sport and the Croatian Olympic Committee, invests financial resources in NSOs, they expect the funds to be spent transparently and efficiently to achieve good sport results and to develop sport by respecting good governance principles. To fulfil stakeholders' expectations, it is necessary to reach high standards in governing. The following section presents how professionalization impacts a new course in sport governance.

### **3.5 Challenges of Professionalization in NSOs**

Due to the need to respond to the current organizational structures in a new



situation, orientation towards professionalization is the need for in-depth analysis of work and work monitoring, primarily due to increased levels of state funds for sports. Furthermore, as many studies have shown, sport contributes to the national economy and the development of society (see [Section 1.1](#)), and, due to this, advancing governance is necessary. According to Shilbury and Ferkins (2011), the abilities and increased organization can be a risk to the voluntary boards. Therefore, further exploration of this area can be challenging. Literature in the field of professionalization (Ruoranen et al., 2016) refers to the analysis of organizational changes as a whole (defining goals, activities, and performance measurement). The problem of professionalization in terms of positive and negative effects in sport organizations is also indicative (Ruoranen et al., 2016). Professionalisation in NSOs aims to improve the quality of work and ensure effective processes that will achieve the organisation's goals. In addition to the importance of NSO members for introducing professionalization, this approach also has many critical views, primarily because sport organizations are based on a voluntary culture, and their shift towards a business culture can be a problem. There is resistance to professionalization in organizations where volunteer values are deeply institutionalized and where the risk of cultural deinstitutionalization in a sport organization can cause conflicts (Nagel et al., 2015). A new perspective on professionalization was the idea that “professionalism” is the attitude of individuals to do a good “professional” job and that professionalization becomes a matter of organizational culture (Ruoranen, 2018).

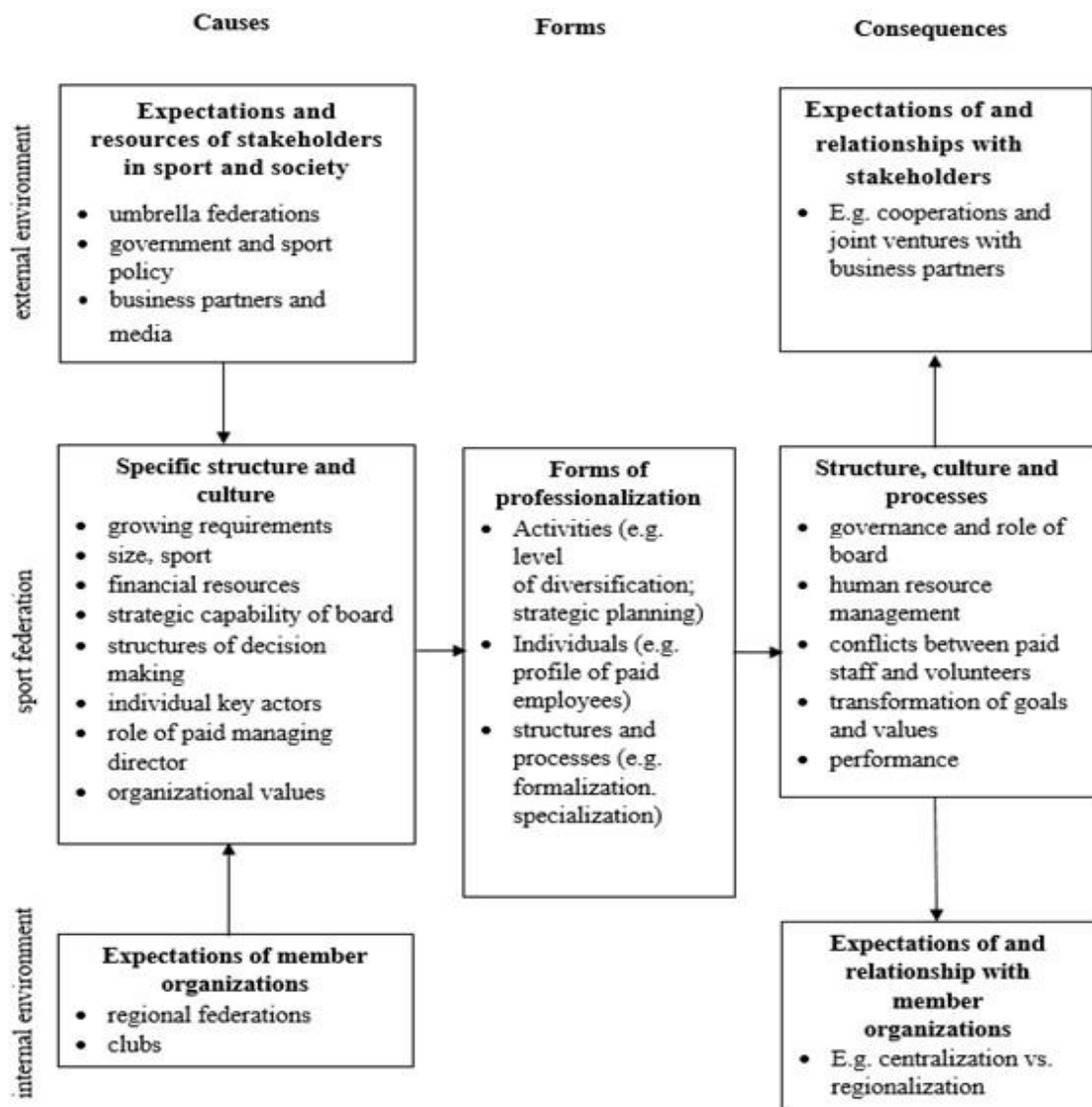
Ruoranen et al. (2018) conducted a multiple case study with interviews and documents from seven Swiss NSOs, investigating the causes of the professionalization of NSOs. They concluded that the causes of professionalization are largely similar across national societies: board conflicts, unclear decision-making competencies, and key person initiatives have noticeably driven professionalization, especially for the differentiation of strategic boards and executive headquarters, specialization, and paid

staff. Furthermore, the Swiss government, the Swiss Olympic Association, and sponsors (external environment) brought significant adjustments to NSO strategies, accountability, and commercialization issues. In contrast, the expectations of NSO member organizations (internal environment) had little impact on their professionalization in general.

Professionalization can affect how performance is managed in NSOs (Bayle & Robinson, 2007). A review of current studies indicates that sport organizations attempt to optimize efficiency and effectiveness through improved managerial skills (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010) and in this context, board performance has emerged as an interesting variable dependent on professionalization (Hoye & Doherty, 2011). Nevertheless, the need for efficiency and business orientation requires some changes. Scientific research related to the previous topic leads to a broader and more in-depth understanding of the complex process of professionalization in sport organizations ([Figure 9](#)) and the need to improve the existing framework (Nagel et al., 2015).

**Figure 9**

*Thematic Scheme of Sport Governance*

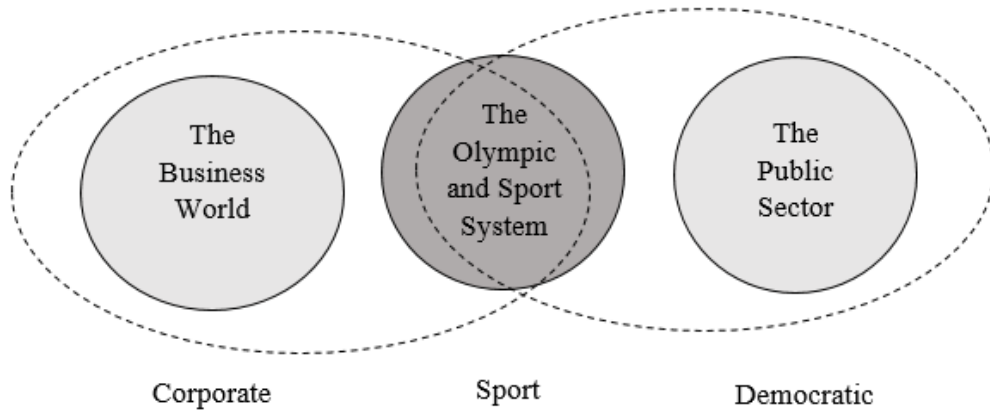


Source: Nagel et al., 2015

According to Naha and Hassan (2018), there is a consensus that sport governance should combine elements of corporate governance, as applied in the business world, and democratic governance, supported by the public sector. Sport organizations combine certain characteristics of for-profit organizations with those of public organizations. According to Henry and Lee (2004), sport governance is a cross-chapter of corporate and democratic governance (Figure 10).

**Figure 10**

*Sport Governance at the Intersection of Corporate and Democratic Governance (after Henry and Lee, 2004)*



Source: Chappelet, 2018

Furthermore, an important fact that should not be ignored is the influence of government sport policies that have their interests and impose obligations on umbrella organizations of a particular sport, i.e., NSOs. In recent decades, some governments (e.g., Canada, United Kingdom, Australia) have imposed professionalization processes on NSOs. In contrast, others (Switzerland) have made only minor impositions and relied more on NSOs for self-regulation (Lang et al., 2020). As mentioned above, the authors conducted a study aiming to analyze the context, operation, content and outcome of self-regulated professionalization processes to identify challenges and opportunities arising from these processes and to enable a comprehensive and long-term analysis of the professionalization process procedures of the Swiss NSOs.

On the other hand, the study conducted by Ruoranen et al. (2023) showed that professionalization also has a dark side, even when NSOs are concerned with the relationship between higher and lower levels of organizations and include the risk of the latter giving up. The authors state that more research is needed because the exclusion

contradicts the purpose of NSOs within the sports system and calls into question their legitimacy because, if member organizations were involved early in the development of the strategy and could actively contribute to the professionalization of the structures, processes and activities of NSOs, they could avoid significant challenges in the work of clubs (the dark side of the professionalization of NSOs).

Taking into account everything stated about the challenges of professionalization by the aforementioned authors in this section (the abilities and increased organization as a risk to the voluntary boards, organizational changes, the risk of cultural deinstitutionalization in a sport organization, and more in-depth understanding of the complex process of professionalization in sport organizations), the best option would be a combination of democratic and corporate governance for sport organizations. Since the role and obligations of boards, specifically in NSOs, are crucial in sports development (especially in the Republic of Croatia), modernization and professionalization are imposed as options. All sections of this literature review (3.1 - 3.5) point to important segments in the governance of NSOs as non-profit organizations. To achieve the research objectives of this thesis, the following section provides arguments on why it is necessary to go in that direction.

### **3.6 Arguments Highlighting the Need to Improve Sport Governance**

Some essential arguments mentioned in the previous chapters highlight the importance of improving sport governance in the near future. The first argument is that sport governance is such an important topic, as Cornforth (2012) noted, that the governance of non-profit organizations is under-theorized compared to that of for-profit organizations. The second argument is that a volunteer board traditionally governs non-profit sport organizations. According to Hoye and Cuskelly (2007), the boards of non-profit sport organizations face many challenges in performing their governing functions and responsibilities. The third argument is the changing nature of the relationship between

government and non-profit sectors: an increasingly demanding regulatory environment, the impact of government sport policy, the influence of globalization processes and increased competition, the expectations of diverse stakeholder groups, and the imposition of prescribed governance guidelines - all influence the governance of non-profit sport organizations (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). Finally, the importance of sport governance in achieving high levels of organizational performance has also become recognized by government agencies providing ongoing funding for sport organizations (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007).

In addition to all the above evidence, it is essential to emphasize that NSOs are the bearers of the development and promotion of their sports, so improving their governing structures (Houlihan & Green, 2009). It is of particular importance for the development of sport. The sport system governance must be transparent and effective. Král and Cuskelly (2018) researched the determinants and implications of transparency for NSOs by developing a model of transparency in NSOs. A positive effect of transparency regarding the collection of membership fees was confirmed. They also identified new barriers related to transparency, which are attitudinal and knowledge-based.

The democratic disposition of non-profit sport governance reflects the challenges embedded in democratic systems. This issue is more acute in sport governance as most volunteer directors are passionate about their sport, but do not necessarily have knowledge of governance or leadership (O'Boyle et al., 2019).

Changes occurring in sport require governing sport structures to act quickly. Since NSOs and state structures have a leading role in developing and promoting sport, the advancement of sport governance towards the professionalization of particular segments in the NSOs, or the application of some elements of the for-profit world become inevitable.

All the mentioned points need to be considered in terms of professionalization in sport organizations, especially NSOs, as a response to the challenges they face. As stated by Ruoranen et al. (2016), research in sport organizations is inaccurate in terms of professionalization, i.e., it is not known whether the analytical notions of professionalization correspond to those in practice. According to the authors, professionalization is seen as a professional attitude transformed into a federated culture of NSOs. There are different forms of professionalization: individuals (persons and functions), organizational structures and procedures (formalization, standardization), and activities (sporting, business, social) (Bayle & Robinson, 2007). Furthermore, according to the recommendation of Ruoranen et al. (2018), when studying professionalization in NSOs, it is necessary to take into account the opinion of volunteers because if the people working for NSOs do not have the appropriate attitude and will to do the job well, the adjustments made by an NSO can harm the same NSO itself, especially its image and effect as an agent of its members. This research is based on the opinions of the leading people of NSOs, mostly board members, who are volunteers.

### **3.7 Summary**

The chapter gives an overview of the literature on sport governance. The focus was placed on NSO boards, especially their responsibilities and performance, the good governance principles, the importance of leadership issues in NSOs, and relations with stakeholders in sport. Furthermore, it shows the complexity of problems in NSOs, which has challenged many researchers to examine the orientation towards professionalization as a response to current organizational structures. Finally, several arguments showing the need to improve sport governance were listed and explained.

Accordingly, [Table 2](#) outlines the literature review according to the topics used in this chapter, pointing out the methods, findings, potential gaps and future research. Most literature (articles, books, handbooks, reviews) refers to cases in Australia, New Zealand,

the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, France and Italy, whose sport governance systems resemble those in European sport.



**Table 2**

*Literature Review – Summary (According to Topics: Boards in NSOs, Good governance principles, Leadership issues in NSOs, Stakeholders in sport and Professionalization in NSOs)*

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Stenling, Fahlén, Strittmatter and Skille (2023)	- construct knowledge of the working processes of Nomination Committees in sport and analyze their potential to shape board composition	interviews with Nomination Committees of 64 Swedish national sport organizations	- Nomination Committee processes may be divided into six components - across these components, analyzes reveal three aspects particularly powerful in their potential to shape board composition: degree of formalization, network reliance, and transparency	- determine the validity of these elements as shapers of board composition, for example, through designs in which the identified components and elements are built-in as points of departure, and they suggest that these elements are shaping across several components
Shilbury, O’Boyle and Ferkins (2020)	- examine how an NSO board perceives collective leadership to govern collaboratively in a federated network of state/regional sport organizations	16 interviews were conducted with directors from Golf Australia, Golf Victoria, and Golf South Australia	- respondents offered a view of leadership that seemed to align with a leader-centric perspective, as distinguished from collective leadership - findings suggest that the concept of collective board leadership may be too new and does not yet resonate with directors in this study	- research related to collective board leadership - monitor the extent to which collective board leadership becomes known, understood, and accepted as a key process of board leadership

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Ferkins, Shilbury and O'Boyle (2018)	- examine the relationship between collective leadership and governance systems, specifically within the non-profit sport organization context, bringing together notions of collective board leadership and collaborative governance	situate ideas of collective leadership within the context of sport governance by bringing together notions of collective board leadership and collaborative governance	- recognizing prior theoretical contributions to sport governance scholarship - making explicit multiple levels of the sport governance system	- how can boards enable and enact collective leadership - how does collective board leadership impact governance systems across a federated model in a sporting code
Ferkins, Skinner and Swanson (2018)	- targeted a specific topic area (sport leadership)	overview of the articles	- sport leadership - new perspectives - urged scholars to consider new and innovative approaches	- gathering empirical and conceptual articles on sport leadership for seeking to understand new ways of leadership within sport organizations and sport systems around the globe
Ferkins & Shilbury (2012)	- explored what meaning board members of national sport organizations (NSOs) in New Zealand attach to the concept of "strategic capability"	the interpretive research paradigm qualitative methods (participant observation, interviews (16), and focus groups (4))	- greater board involvement to create a shared leadership situation would be desired for developing strategic function	- further investigation could "tease out" a better understanding of the need for balance between elements (conformance and performance) - the balance between what is considered to be a strategic focus versus an operational focus

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Ferkins and Shilbury (2015a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- explored theory development to explain the notion of strategic board capability</li> <li>- identify the factors and their relationships influencing the strategic capability of sport boards</li> </ul>	<p>review key studies in the non-profit, for-profit, and sport governance domains that call attention to board processes and empirical work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- six dimensions, drawn from the literature considered influential on strategic board capability, help conclude the holistic, all-encompassing nature of the board's strategic role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- determine the efficacy of the theory proposed in this paper</li> <li>- weightings of each component in determining the strategic capability of a board</li> <li>- new components</li> </ul>
Ferkins, Shilbury and McDonald (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- investigate current knowledge about the governance of sport organizations and apply this knowledge to questions of strategic board capability within NSOs to identify areas for future research</li> </ul>	<p>review substantial theoretical and empirical work in the area of sport governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- address critical environmental issues such as challenges to decision-making, the demands of multiple stakeholders, the changing environment, and board leadership</li> <li>- the evolutionary process of bureaucratization and professionalization has resulted in changing board roles and relationships with paid executives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the impact of the Chief Executive Officer on the board's strategic contributions and strategic activity of the board</li> <li>- more use of qualitative research methods</li> </ul>
Ferkins, Shilbury and McDonald (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how boards of national sport organizations might enhance their strategic capability</li> </ul>	<p>action research method - focusing on the case of New Zealand Football (soccer)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- greater board involvement in strategy advanced the board's ability to perform its strategic function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- test greater board involvement</li> <li>- how the present sport governance 'model' that draws on volunteers can be reconciled with the need for greater board involvement and increased responsibility and control</li> </ul>

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Shilbury, O'Boyle and Ferkins (2016)	- explore the utility of collaborative governance as a relevant theoretical underpinning upon which to base future sport governance research focused on the federal model of governance	integrative framework of collaborative governance from the public administration literature to identify relevant research questions	- the federal model of sport governance is the type of network well-suited to the adoption of a collaborative governance rule system - barriers and challenges that could inhibit its implementation	- to explore the utility of collaborative governance
Shilbury, Ferkins and Smythe (2013)	- explored sport governance practice from the lived experience of one informant spanning 30 years in the governance of two sport organizations (basketball and cricket in Australia)	a series of in-depth interviews with one research participant, supplemented by document analysis	- three related themes were identified and labelled, 'volunteer and cultural encounters', 'structural encounters', and 'adversarial encounters'	- directions invite scholars to think about future sport governance research as it relates to federated structures and how collaborative governance theory can sharpen focus in this domain
Hoye and Cuskelly (2003)	- examine the relationship between board performance and board-executive relationships within voluntary sport organizations in Australia	interviews with 21 executives, board chairs, and board members from seven voluntary sport organizations	- four elements of the board-executive relationship were perceived to be associated with effective board performance: included board leadership, trust between the board and the executive, the control of the information available to the board, and responsibility for board performance	- future analyzes of voluntary sport organization boards, and particularly board performance, should recognize the centrality of the executive - investigating the phenomenon of board-executive relationships within the context of other types of sport organizations and governance structures

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Tacon and Walters (2016)	- empirically examines which board roles national governing bodies consider most important and statistically compares large and small national governing bodies in the United Kingdom	the national survey of board-level, in-depth interviews and analysis of key organizational documents	- United Kingdom-based national governing body boards rate their financial and strategic roles as most important, while roles relating to the representation of stakeholder interests as less important - board members directly invoked the prescriptions of funders, or the text of governance guides, when constructing and enacting their board roles, whereas, at other times, their perceptions and actions appeared to be driven more by embedded 'logics'	- examine differences that exist among board members in those national governing bodies that receive public funding and those that do not
Houlihan and Lindsey (2013)	- examining and analysis of the nature and extent of change in the fortunes of British sport - developments in policy related to community, elite and school sport concerned mainly with the non-commercial providers and aspects	examining and analysis of the nature and extent of change in the fortunes of British sport	- highlighted is the unevenness in the extent and, more importantly, in the intensity or depth of change in sport	

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
O'Boyle and Hassan (2016)	- examine the issue of board composition within non-profit sport organizations operating in a federated governance structure in the Gaelic Athletic Association in Ireland	case study and interviews ( <i>n</i> = 10)	- the association heavily relies on the delegate system of board composition, potentially limiting its ability to appoint a board with a commercially orientated focus reflecting the professionalization and commercialization of the contemporary sport industry	- issues related to the incorporation of independent board members in hybrid or wholly independent compositions, such as appointment processes, remuneration for independent board members - explore how the adoption of a hybrid or wholly independent board model impacts upon overall organizational effectiveness and performance
Ingram and O'Boyle (2018)	- examine the current state of sport governance within an Australian context, particularly related to board structure at the NSO level	a qualitative method was adopted to study five Australian NSOs	- results showed significant challenges facing these organizations concerning board composition, independence, performance, and evaluation - these issues reflect pressures from government agencies and members of these organizations, amongst other stakeholders	- further study examining the delegate versus independent model of board composition and other issues that were salient as part of the reported emergent thematic structure

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Taylor and McGraw (2006b)	- study on the adoption of human resources management practices by state sport organizations in New South Wales, Australia	125 self-report questionnaires were posted to full member sport organizations	- no relationship between formal human resource processes and perceived effectiveness in the management of paid staff - no relationship was observed for volunteers - no significant relationship between the number of part-time employees or volunteers and the formalization of human resources management	- investigate the factors influencing the adoption of formal human resources management by some sport organizations but not by others
Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye and Darcy (2006)	- examine the efficacy of volunteer management practices in predicting perceived problems in volunteer retention in Australian Rugby Union clubs	two related studies (study one - focus groups study two - a confirmatory factor) 375 clubs	- the adoption of formal human resources management practices, such as Auxiliary Services Corporation, leads to better volunteer management	- the human resources management approach is not the most appropriate for managing sport volunteers; finding alternatives

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Word and Park (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- examine factors influencing the decision of managers to work in the non-profit sector and the unique characteristics of managers in the non-profit sector</li> <li>- relationship between human resource practices and volunteering outcomes</li> </ul>	data from the National Administrative Studies Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- intrinsic motivation is an important aspect of job choice motivation for individuals in the non-profit workforce to enhance work-life balance, advancement, and job security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- include more nuanced examinations of the differences which exist among non-profit organizations</li> <li>- more studies are needed to develop and test propositions regarding human resource's impact on non-profit organizations via the professional management of their volunteers</li> </ul>



<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Alfes, Anutes and Shantz (2017)	- how non-profit organizations can design and implement human resources practices enhancing desirable volunteer attitudes and behaviours	the ability-motivation-opportunity model as an organizing framework to summarize the current state of research on human resource and volunteering	- with regards to the source of support (i.e. other volunteers, the supervisor, the organization) that is most relevant in creating a positive climate for volunteering	- investigate whether the AMO model needs to be enriched by a fourth pathway to fully capture the different mechanisms induced by human resource practices in a volunteering context - research on the effect of human resource practices on individual and organizational outcomes is fragmented and disjointed - there is a lack of conceptual framing and theoretical anchoring that might help us to understand the potential for human resource practices to attract, engage, and retain volunteers - the majority of research to date has explored how individual human resource practices without questioning whether human resource practices may exert a synergistic impact on volunteers

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Chappelet (2018)	- discusses the need for a new approach to sports governance that combines aspects of both corporate and democratic governance	review of documents, laws and articles	- sport organizations and their governance are destined to combine elements of corporate governance with aspects of democratic governance - government involvement in regulating international sport and, consequently, national sport - integrity of sport, guaranteeing the 'responsible autonomy' of sport organizations	- study of benefits and drawbacks of conventions
Winand and Anagnostopoulos (2019)	- reference point for advancing research on sport governance	collection of works of sport governance research	- illustrating different approaches and perspectives, such as good governance principles, systemic governance, political governance and network governance	
Parent and Hoye (2018)	- impact governance principles and guidelines have had on sport organizations	PRISMA, PIECES, and Warwick grey literature and theses	- the link between board structure and organizational performance has been empirically proven - the link between other governance principles and organizational performance remains lacking	- need for both the international sport community and researchers to develop an agreed set of governance principles and language relevant to sport organizations

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Alm (2013)	- develop a new measuring tool in the world of sports governance	survey on various parameters in sports governance in the international federations	- various indicators and their gradings	
Chenhall, Hall and Smith (2016)	- how non-profit organizations manage multiple and conflicting identities - non-managerial logic and more business-like practices from the for-profit world	case study of a non-profit welfare organization in Australia	- non-profits might begin to manage emerging conflicts between different identities using a compartmentalization strategy, and, for a time, this may be successful in providing an effective ‘buffer’ between identities	- how non-profits can successfully identify the need to move from a compartmentalization approach towards other approaches to managing tensions over organizational identity
O’Boyle, Shilbury and Ferkins (2019)	- explore leadership within non-profit sport governance	a qualitative case study design (16 participant interviews from board members and Chief Executive Officers within the golf network in Australia)	- a preliminary working model of leadership in non-profit sport governance based on existing empirical literature and new empirical evidence	- how leadership skills can be assessed for new and existing board members and the benefits of leadership development for boards should be explored - investigate how contemporary leadership theories may inform a greater understanding of sport governance and leadership

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Booth, Gilligan, de Zwart and Gordon-Brown (2015)	- how generic governance models may influence sporting organizations in Australia	30 semi-structured interviews with representatives of NSOs, some State Sporting Organisations and local clubs, (four) corporations involved in the sponsorship of sport, national and state government sporting authorities and (four) media representatives	- sport does not have special characteristics than the broader business sector - specific models of governance have more influence in Australian non-profit sports organizations - the broader business sector (including not-for-profit)	
Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle and Giauque (2015)	- how sport organizations professionalize and what consequences this may have	reviews from previous studies	- specify the framework for the following research perspectives: (1) forms, (2) causes and (3) consequences	- impact of the professionalization on how performance is managed in NSOs

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Kikulis (2000)	- discussion and debate about the continuity and change in the governance and decision making of Canada's NSOs	literature review	- recognizing the coexistence of diverse institutional ideas in organizations enables managers to focus on these ideas and accompanying practices when it is appropriate - finding ways to assess if new institutional structures or - practices are appropriate and should be adopted or adapted	- opportunity for comparative research - differences in the institutional context or institutionalization/deinstitutionalization, different levels of organizations, structures and practices institutionalized at the societal level and at the organizational level
Zollo, Laudano, Boccardi and Ciappei (2019)	- relationship between non-profit organizations' governance and organizational effectiveness by investigating the mediating role of volunteers' organizational identity and their organizational commitment	300 respondents who volunteered in non-profit organizations located in 10 Italian provinces	- the role of organizational identity and volunteers' commitment as partially mediating variables on the relationship between non-profit organizations' governance effectiveness and organizational effectiveness	- conceptual model to test in different geographical contexts - functional approach to investigating the motivations that lead volunteers to respond to non-profit organization governance positively
Ruoranen, Klenk, Schlesinger, Bayle, Clausen, Giauque and Nagel (2016)	- explores the perceptions of practitioners and proposes a framework to analyze professionalization in national sport federations	expert interviews with six key people from the Swiss National Sport Federations	- confirm the development from mainly voluntary federations to more business-like organization	- further qualitative studies to validate the framework for analyzing professionalization

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Ruoranen, Clausen, Nagel Lang, Klenk, Giaouque and Schlesinger (2018)	- explores causes for professionalization in national sport federations	a multiple-case study employing a qualitative approach with interviews and documents from seven Swiss national sport federations	- causes for professionalization were widely similar in the national sport federations - conflicts on the board, unclear decision-making competences and initiatives of key persons have prominently triggered professionalization	- single-case studies would be useful to understand the mechanisms and eventual phases more clearly, to identify eventual barriers and avoid unintended consequences to, and support national sport federations' professionalization in an efficient manner
Ruoranen (2018)	- explores causes, forms, and intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in Swiss national and international sport federations based in Switzerland	case study with 12 Swiss national sport federations	- definition of competences between a strategic board and operative general secretary-an initial goal of professionalization - financial resources play an essential role in allowing professionalization to be brought about	- further qualitative case studies would be an excellent method to validate the framework for analyzing professionalization by testing national sport federations that differ in size, staff, sports, governance etc., but also more broadly selecting international sport federations and sport federations in other countries.
Lang, Klenk, Schlesinger Ruoranen, Bayle, Clausen, Giaouque and Nagel (2020)	- analyze the context, action, content and outcome of self-regulated professionalization processes to identify the challenges and opportunities arising from these processes.	single-case study is applied to enable a holistic and long-term analysis of a Swiss national sport federation's professionalization processes	- professionalization processes do not necessarily end after having produced an outcome. - the outcome can lead to a new professionalization process	- future studies should also analyze NSFs in different countries to distinguish between impositions for all national sport federations and organization - specific impositions between top-down and bottom-up implementation of professionalization processes

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Ruoranen, Nagel Lang, Klenk, Bayle, Clausen, Giauque and Schlesinger (2023)	- explores the dark side of professionalization in a Swiss national sport federations	analysis of interviews, documents, and secondary studies, case study with the Swiss Floorball Federation	- the dark side of professionalization became visible via the erosion of the values of the floorball community as a result of marketing activities and the national sport federation's orientation toward external relationships - the clubs consider the fact that the national sport federation's performance is inadequate in terms of representing their interests	- explore supportive professionalization from the perspective of member organizations
Shilbury and Ferkins (2011)	- examines the nature of experience-based leadership development practices within three of Australia's leading professional sport organizations	qualitative multi-case study approach, the thematic analysis of 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the senior executive of each case organization	- findings extend our knowledge of current leadership development and practices implemented in NSOs - highlight the importance of effective leadership within highly competitive sport markets, illustrating the benefits that an experience-based approach to leadership development within sport organizations can have	- explore more closely the relationship between the resourcing of human resources departments and effective leadership planning - expand on the type and diversity of sport organizations examined, and focus more closely on the role of women and leadership development in sport organizations - include a broader range of sport organizations - large and small, professional and community-based

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Bayle and Robinson (2007)	- facilitate understanding of national governing bodies' performance	case studies with 11 French national governing bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- framework form allows a clearer understanding of the performance of national governing bodies</li> <li>- suggests potential performance may differ from actual performance</li> <li>- actual performance is affected to different degrees by a number of factors and mechanisms in the national governing body context</li> </ul>	- analyze the role and management of other organizations in the network, as well as the headquarters of the national governing body
Ferkins and Shilbury (2010)	- investigate how boards of national sport organizations might develop their strategic capability	action research on the case of Tennis New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- board strategic capability is significantly impacted by the inter-organizational relationships</li> <li>- a multi-paradigm approach, in theoretical terms, is needed for a more robust understanding of the board's strategic function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- longitudinal study that tracks the outcomes of the newly established national-regional</li> <li>- relationships over several years is needed</li> </ul>



<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Hoye and Doherty (2011)	- review the focus and findings of the Nonprofit Sport Board Performance	review, overview, integrated model, finding gaps	- board performance varies according to the distribution of power within a board, the quality of the working relationship between the board and executive staff, the quality of leader-member exchange relationships among board members, board chairs and executive staff, the use of appropriate board member recruitment, selection and evaluation processes, and that greater task and social cohesion leads to higher perceived committee effectiveness	- use of quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed methods designs and corresponding analyzes that enable investigators to examine and better understand the various correlates of board performance
Naha and Hassan (2018)	- tension between the characterizations of sport as a commercial activity and as a mechanism for moral education and social development		- reinvention of the ethical standards of governance entails fresh challenges and the need for administrators to take up new priorities and responsibilities	- extent and nature of ethical concerns for the new directions in governance

<b>Author/ Year</b>	<b>Topic/Objectives</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Future research/gaps</b>
Henry and Lee (2004)	- relationship between governance and ethical management practices in the business of sport	literature review	- three types of governance therefore imply challenges to traditional forms of the management and politics of the sports industries requiring flexibility in organizational responses to changing environments and implying also a greater range of skills and competencies in respect of sports managers	

## **CHAPTER 4 Methodology**

This chapter presents philosophical paradigms, the system of beliefs and assumptions, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions, and the direction of the research. Based on the theoretical positions and the literature, the research questions were formulated, and accordingly, the research design and methodology were chosen and presented.

### **4.1 Research Philosophy**

The philosophical assumptions support the quality of the research project, influence how the research is conducted, and provide guidelines for conducting the research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Johnson & Gill, 2010). It is important because the researchers should be aware that their philosophical views can significantly impact what is being researched (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Philosophy connects theoretical ideas about the nature and reality of the world and provides an answer to how we can approach that reality (Lee & Lings, 2008). The philosophy considers objectivity, subjectivism, data and values, precise knowledge, and different experiences. All theories, experiences, ideas, and concepts are tools for launching actions. Among the five philosophies in business and management (positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism), pragmatism is the best basis for a research approach.

#### ***4.1.1 Pragmatism***

Pragmatism means concepts are only relevant where they support action (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). For pragmatics, research begins with a problem and aims to contribute to practical solutions. They also believe that it is possible to solve a problem with different types of knowledge and methods. Pragmatists consider human nature holistic, social, relational, complex, and temporal. Pragmatists share a specific view of the world through the processes that connect all sorts of entities relationally and recursively (Farjoun et al., 2015). Pragmatism refers to action and change and the

interconnectedness of knowledge and action. That is why it is a reasonable basis for research approaches that intervene in the world rather than watch the world (Goldkuhl, 2012).

Furthermore, according to pragmatism, the research question is the most important determinant of the research philosophy. Pragmatics can combine positivist and interpretive positions within the scope of research, depending on the nature of the research question. The purpose of interpretivists is to explore and create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts, which for business and management researchers means observing organizations from the perspective of different groups of people. In the case of this research, the board members of different NSOs were being investigated with the aim to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of individuals and activities in NSOs to increase efficiency in sport governance.

For positivists, on the contrary, this is a clear view because of the measurable, quantifiable data they collect (e.g., in an online questionnaire, the researcher establishes a list of possible responses as part of the design process and can then claim that their values do not influence the answers given by the respondent). The researcher who takes a positivist stance chooses the question to study, pursues the research objectives, and thus collects the measurable data suitable for statistical analysis. Sometimes, positivist research extends to other data collection methods and seeks to quantify qualitative data. Unlike the research philosophies of positivism and interpretivism, pragmatist research can integrate multiple research approaches and research strategies within the same study. In the context of this research, the results of interviews were used as the base for a questionnaire in the broader sample.

As positivist and interpretivist approaches are exclusive, pragmatism is an approach that suggests that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and conducting research to investigate reality and that a combination of different approaches

may provide a broader understanding of the researched topic. This thesis stratifies with the question of how the professionalization of NSOs can improve sport governance in Croatia by using both approaches.

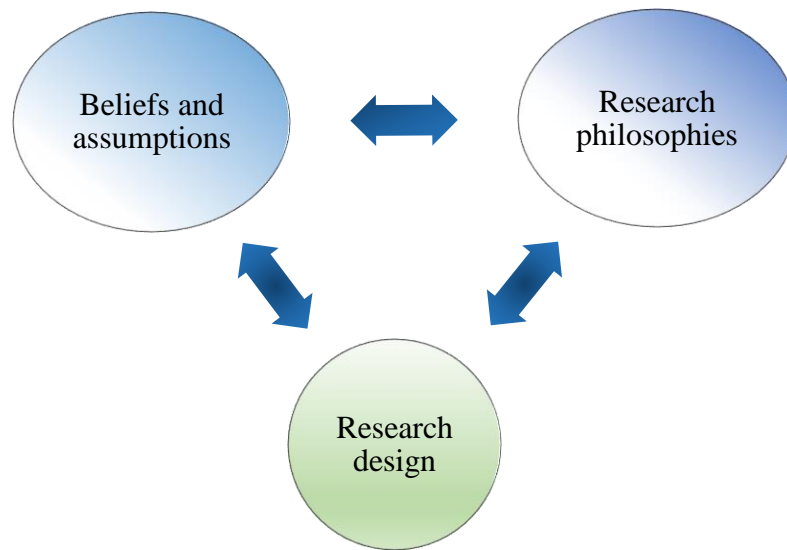
Researchers of pragmatic management can be compared to architects. As architects use all the materials and methods needed to build the building they envisioned on paper, pragmatists use any combination of methods to find answers to research questions. Pragmatists prefer to use a method or combination of methods that best enhance a particular research piece.

All the arguments presented led to pragmatism. This thesis raised questions about professionalization as an opportunity to improve sport governance. Pragmatism, according to the previously mentioned attitudes, seemed logical. It means that when researching pragmatically, the most important determinants of the research design and strategy are the research problem and questions (Saunders et al., 2009).

In this research, which examines the possibilities of professionalization in NSOs, the options of applying some aspects of the business world to non-profit sport organizations to increase efficiency are discussed. Defining which research methods should be used is necessary to know how these elements can be applied. [Figure 11](#) shows that the research starts with the researcher's beliefs and assumptions regarding the five philosophies and then creates the appropriate research design to undertake it. This explains and justifies the methodological choice, research strategy, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. Thus, one's values and assumptions become more explicit and show a match between one's own beliefs and the main philosophies used in business and management research (Saunders et al., 2019).

**Figure 11**

*Developing the Research Project – Bristow & Saunders Model*



Source: Saunders et al., 2019

The research philosophy explains the ontological and epistemological basis of research to inform about proper methodology (Blaikie, 2007; Burrell & Morgan, 2019; Saunders et al., 2009). Ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions reflect the research paradigm and then what the researcher researches (Creswell, 2013). Ontology refers to the question “What is reality?” and epistemology refers to the relationship between “the researcher and the researched”. Finally, methodology refers to “how” the phenomenon of interest is investigated (Blaikie, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Gill et al., 2010). The sources of knowledge for this research are people holding positions at the governing and operational level of the NSOs because the system's success depends on their capabilities and view of the governing system. The approach to knowledge about social reality was done by interviewing some of the actors and by conducting a survey of a larger number of actors in sport organizations. Therefore, the stated research philosophy is needed to explain this research's ontological and epistemological basis. The following sub-sections examine ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions relevant to this research.

#### ***4.1.2 Ontological Position***

Ontology (nature of reality) is a set of concepts and categories in the researched area and the relations among them. That is the way we see our research projects: assertions and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, assertions about what exists, what it looks like, what entities make it up, and how these entities interact with each other (Grix, 2002). In other words, ontology describes the properties of the studied world - what it consists of, who acts in that world and how people relate to each other (Bahari, 2010).

There are two opposite extreme views of looking at reality. Objectivism considers social entities as physical entities (realism), and subjectivism, where social reality is made up of the perceptions of social actors. The first position is realist/objectivist, meaning there is an independent reality beyond human consciousness and belief, where social phenomena are subject to laws and axioms that the researcher tries to discover. Another position is nominalist/subjectivist, which relies on socially constructed interpretations of reality by actors drawn from the multiple realities that experience social realities through their interactions (Bahari, 2010). In the context of this research, the subjectivist assumption is present in all aspects of hierarchy and legality in sport governance, i.e., in NSOs. This thesis examines board members' opinions on the possibility of professionalization to improve governance in NSOs. It is assumed that the perceptions of leading people in NSOs result from their values, beliefs and attitudes about the governing of NSOs. Therefore, the perceptions of the leading people of NSOs contain subjectivity. This means that this thesis aims to investigate problems in the governing of NSOs and examine which forms of professionalization (e.g., in leading governing functions as well as in processes) are acceptable in NSOs. The population that is part of the research in this thesis is the leading people in the most significant NSOs in Croatia. Governance is defined as a framework and the culture within which sport bodies set policy, deliver their strategic

objectives, and evaluate risks (Mrkonjic, 2016). The kind of structure in which sport organizations operate in Europe and Croatia are shown in [Chapter 1](#), [Sections 1.2.1](#), and [1.2.2](#).

The approach to this research is subjective. The research intends to determine and incorporate some new elements into the existing organizational structure by introducing some new features (professionals with specific competencies in boards and professionalized common processes. The following sub-section is about how we learn about the topic being researched.

#### ***4.1.3 Epistemological Position***

Epistemology is about gaining knowledge (Bahari, 2010; Grix, 2002) Epistemology is how we know what we say we know and how we come to that knowledge. According to Crotty (1998), knowledge theory is embedded in a theoretical perspective and, therefore, in a methodology, i.e., what constitutes valid, legitimate, and acceptable knowledge and how this knowledge can be communicated to others (Burrell & Morgan, 2019). As a branch of philosophy, epistemology in business research deals with sources of knowledge. In particular, epistemology concerns possibilities, nature, sources, and limitations of knowledge in the field of study.

It raises the question of whether we can objectively or neutrally know what exists in the world and thus gather the necessary evidence. In other words, is it possible to neutrally observe the social world, in the case of organizations, without being affected by what we see during the very act of observation? If we cannot, then the idea that truth is something that corresponds to the facts becomes tough to defend (Mcauley et al., 2007).

In epistemology, like in ontology, there are two approaches. Objective researchers look for the truth about the social world through observable and measurable facts. Subjective researchers are interested in different opinions that can help to account for different social realities. Epistemology is concerned about whether the meaning is



constructed out of the interaction of human beings, their practices, and their worlds (subjectivist approach) or if it is discovered outside an individual's human consciousness (objectivist approach) (Ahmed, 2008). According to Blaikie (2007), social phenomena need to be studied internally. In the context of this thesis, it is vital to begin the study of phenomena from within to understand how governing structures in NSOs perceive professionalization in NSOs as a means to improve system efficiency.

Considering all the arguments stated in [Section 3.6](#), and the need to direct future research in sport governance towards change and efficient functioning, a subjective approach was required. As the main objective was to improve the sport governance system, it was essential to find out what the governing structures in the NSOs think about possible changes that can be made to increase efficiency. Since professionalization is a concept that emphasizes efficiency and leads in the direction of processes like in for-profit organizations, it was necessary to see what elements or segments could be changed without breaking the existing stated structure (model of sport). The aspects of the for-profit sector which could be applied in non-profit sport organizations to increase their efficiency were also analyzed. Members of NSOs (clubs and athletes) and society have high expectations from the governing structure of NSOs. The answers obtained from the interviews helped to get better insight into the research problem and to create the questionnaire, which was further applied to a larger number of board members in NSOs. Different ways of gaining access to knowledge are key to the field of sport governance.

#### ***4.1.4 Axiological Position***

Axiology is a part of philosophy that studies judgments about value (Saunders et al., 2009). In other words, axiology assesses the role of the researcher's value during the whole research process and is primarily concerned with research objectives. Axiology refers to the role of values and ethics in the research process and addresses our values and those of the research participants. The role of the researcher's values at all stages of this

research process is important to make the research results credible.

This research triggers doubts about the effectiveness of the existing sport governance system. Furthermore, the belief is that professionalization in NSOs can contribute to greater efficiency in the field of sport governance meeting all the challenges and changes in sport, while also applying and respecting the existing structure of sport organization pyramid.

Before defining the methodology, it is essential to define approaches to theory development. Deductive and inductive as contrasting approaches, as well as abductive approach, are fundamental.

#### ***4.1.5 Inductive, Deductive, and Abductive Approaches***

Both inductive and deductive analyses are used in many practical projects. Deductive reasoning derives logically from a set of premises. The conclusion can be proper when all premises are true (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). A theory and hypothesis are developed with the deduction, and a research strategy is designed to test the hypothesis, which is not the case in this research. According to Thomas (2003), the primary purpose of an inductive approach is to allow research results to emerge from frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in the raw data without the constraints imposed by structured methodologies. According to Fortes (2023), abduction refers to the logical operation of explanatory reasoning from a particular set of assumptions and the formulation of a hypothesis, i.e., abduction is also called different reasoning processes, such as hypothetical thinking, imagination, intuition, and prediction, which is not the case in this research.

The research objectives of this thesis were to investigate the mindset of leading people in NSOs to get an idea about the current state of professionalization and whether NSO board members could be professionals with specific competencies. As it was necessary to determine the possibilities of professionalization of board members and the

common processes in NSOs and establish clear links between them and findings derived from raw data so these links can be transparent and defensible, the inductive approach was a logical choice.

## **4.2 Research Questions**

Starting with the researcher's attitude, i.e., own beliefs and assumptions, which is inclined to professionalization, using the problematization methodology (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), ways of arriving at research questions were established. It means spotting or creating gaps in existing theories, not challenging their assumptions. The areas of the literature on the topic of sport governance were used for formulating the research questions, which can facilitate the development of more interesting and influential theories in sport governance in future.

The central question that arose from this research problem was: In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance in Croatia? In addition, some sub-questions emerged from the central question above:

- a) Could professionals at the board level, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?
- b) Which positions at the board level need to be professionalized (e.g., the president)?
- c) What competencies are needed by the professionals entering the board level?
- d) Which common processes could be professionalized?

## **4.3 Research Methodology**

After defining the research problem and questions, setting the theoretical basis, and defining the research philosophy, a logical research methodology and design that sought to answer the research questions were chosen.

According to Ritchie et al. (2013), researchers' procedures depend on a range of elements, including their beliefs, the purpose and objectives of the research, the

characteristics of those who participate in the research, and the position and environment in which the researcher works. They mostly choose a research methodology, which can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed. Which methodologies will be used depends on the subject being explored and the researcher's preferences and knowledge.

The essential differences between the mentioned research methodologies are as follows (Williams, 2007):

Quantitative methodology - verification of theory and hypothesis, recognition of causal relationships

Qualitative methodology - describing and interpreting experiences, collecting new knowledge

Continuing with the previous features of particular methodologies for this research into advancing sport governance towards professionalizing, a mixed approach was used. To rely on only one approach, either qualitative or quantitative, would have been insufficient for this research because, in qualitative research, the sample was small, but its results served as the basis for the questionnaire in the broader sample. Researchers often combine both approaches to take advantage of one and neutralize the disadvantages of each (Sekol & Maurović, 2017). A mixed methodology was used in this research based on some methodologies' essential characteristics.

#### ***4.3.1 Mixed Methodology Research Design***

This research used a sequential exploratory mixed method design (Berman, 2017), where the qualitative component precedes the quantitative element (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In the field of sport governance towards professionalization, a multi-level research design is needed. According to Hollstein (2011), the qualitative approach is a heterogeneous research field that refers to various interviewing techniques with a low level of standardization (open, unstructured interviews, partially or semi-structured interviews, guided or narrative interviews) and the collection of documents or archival

data. Some methods based on different theoretical and methodological assumptions are used for the analysis. Qualitative approaches emphasize that making sense of action and meaning always involves understanding the other. In this respect, they take a stance similar to everyday communication, which also fundamentally relies on interpretation and understanding. The researcher has the privilege of reflecting on and reconstructing the situation, (Hollstein, 2011).

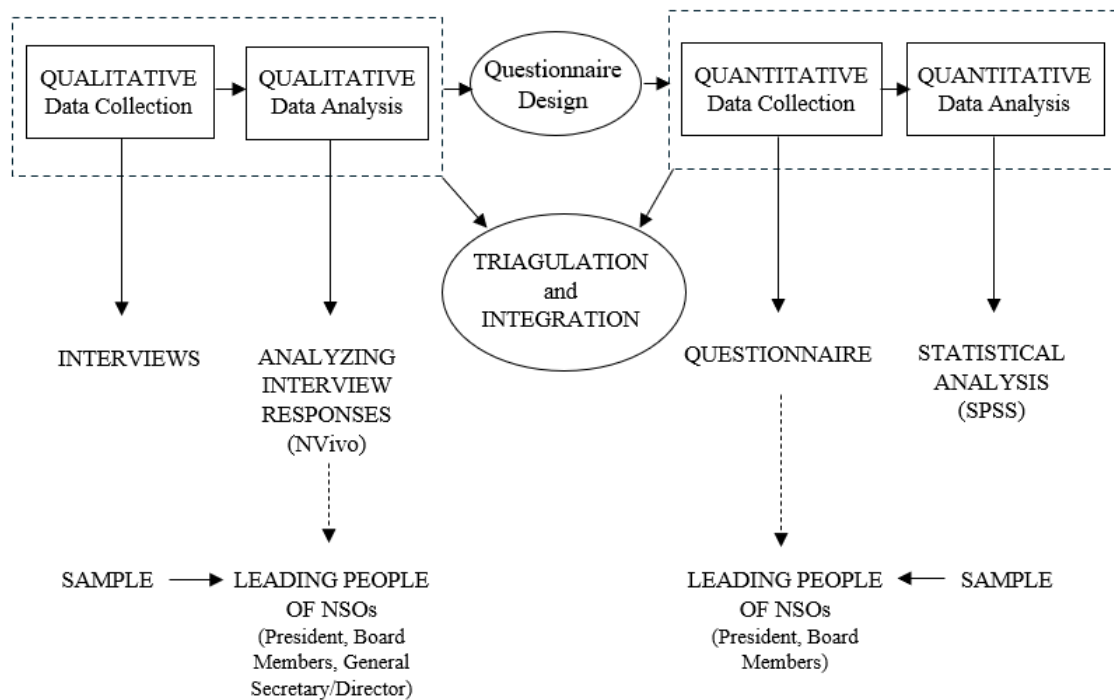
A review of studies on professionalization cited by Nagel et al. (2015) shows that qualitative analysis (interviews and case studies) was used in most studies. Almost all the research connected to professionalization in sport governance is qualitative.

The mixed method approach provides more detailed data (Nagel et al., 2015) and a holistic research approach. This research combined qualitative and quantitative methods to develop holistic insights into the elements that influence the professionalization opportunities of particular segments of NSOs. This design offers powerful tools for the complex system (Fetters et al., 2013) in which sport exists. On the other hand, mixed method research design, compared to purely qualitative or purely quantitative research designs, has some disadvantages, i.e., it is more complex and time-consuming, which was the case with this research. It lasted over a year, primarily due to the qualitative phase in which the interviews with the leading people of NSOs, which are the most important for the sport development in Croatia, had to be arranged according to the time that suited them. It is important to note that the topic of professionalization in NSOs is entirely unexplored in Croatia.

The diagram in [Figure 12](#) explains the steps of data collection adapted from the research methodology.

**Figure 12**

*Sequential Triangulation Methodology*



Adapted from Daly, 2009

The following sub-section explains the first phase of the research, the qualitative approach. It explains why the in-depth interview was chosen, the sampling strategy, the choice of sample size, the method of data collection, and the ethical issues to be addressed at this research stage.

**4.3.2 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research usually acquires knowledge of the underlying reasons and opinions, including the motivation and behaviour of the objects being studied (Ritchie et al., 2013). The characteristics of qualitative research include providing understanding and meaning and using the researcher as the primary instrument. Qualitative research also uses an inductive orientation in analysis, leading to richly descriptive findings (Merriam, 1998). According to Andrew et al. (2019), researchers employing a qualitative approach seek to include new methods, open-ended questions, and data in the form of interviews,

observations and documents, and text or image analysis to form conclusions about themes, patterns or interpretations. For this research, it was crucial to communicate with the main actors in the governing structure of NSOs to get an answer to the research questions. Governing structures in NSOs face more significant problems because of increasing demands for NSOs following legal regulations and changes. Their challenge is establishing a system that can meet their stakeholders' varying needs and expectations, both commercial and public, while maintaining adequate service and value to their association (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2014). According to Ritchie et al. (2013), the human interpretation of the world (phenomenon), as well as the interpretation of the researcher, are important. According to Creswell (2003), there are different ways of collecting qualitative data, such as documents and interviews, to arrive at a human perception of the research area.

The research started with qualitative research, which was inductive, thus creating opportunities to question existing ideas in sports governance. The main difficulties and problems arose from the data's credibility, the conclusions' objectivity, and the generalization of the research results. Accordingly, the questions asked had to be straightforward so that the participants could provide the questioned information.

The first step consisted of preliminary informal interviews with the leaders of umbrella sport associations (presidents and vice presidents) and the NSOs regarding the research problem to confirm the direction of sport governance research with a view towards professionalization. In this research context, the Croatian Olympic Committee, as the umbrella association of NSOs, provided better access to the leading people in NSOs. The key to success is flexibility and originality in testing. Since the field of professionalization in NSOs in any domain is unknown in this sport segment in Croatia, it was important to get the fundamental thoughts of important actors to continue the research and form good interview questions for future interviews. The insights from

informal interviews with three important persons and leaders in Croatian sport were used before starting the pilot qualitative study.

The guided interview approach with open-ended questions was used in this research. When this approach is used for interviewing, an essential checklist is prepared to cover all relevant topics. The general approach of the interview guide allows for in-depth examination but also ensures the interviewer the interviews within the parameters established by the research objectives (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Interviews can be of different types, depending on the subject of the research and the orientation towards achieving its goal (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Semi-structured interviews should facilitate the goal because they help the examiner seek further explanations and achievable clarifications by developing the discussion without losing the logical examination process (Bryman, 2008).

In this research, the choice was to understand the perceptions of all competent people deeply, their understanding of the meaning of professionalization in NSOs as a way to increase efficiency and to identify where the space for professionalization opens (functions that include specific competencies and processes that can be brought closer to the for-profit world).

Creating practical research questions for the interview process can be the most important component of interview design. Researchers wishing to conduct such an investigation should be careful about choosing questions that allow the examiner to become familiar with the participants' experiences and knowledge so they can obtain the best information from the interview. McNamara (2009) proposes several recommendations, creating practical research questions for interviews that include the following elements: (a) the formulation should be open (respondents should be able to choose their terms when answering questions); (b) issues should be as neutral as possible (avoid formulations that could affect responses, e.g., evocative, condemnatory



formulations); (c) questions should be asked one by one; (d) questions should be formulated clearly (this includes knowledge of terms specific to the programme or culture of respondents); and (e), be careful when asking “why” questions.

The interview questions were created based on previous research and literature in this research. In addition to presenting the study, the initial questions were designed to pave the way for conversation and enable competent people to provide the new insights and freedom offered in the semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2008). Conducting in-depth interviews is one of the most common qualitative research methods. It is a personal interview carried out with one respondent at a time. It is a purely conversational method and invites opportunities to get in-depth details from the respondent (Adams & Cox, 2008). The advantage of this method was accepted because it provides an excellent opportunity to gather precise data about people's beliefs and motivations. If the researcher is experienced in asking questions, the right questions can help collect meaningful data. If there is any need for more information, the interviewer asks sub-questions. When the in-depth interview is conducted face to face, it gives a better opportunity to read the respondents' body language and match responses (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

The advantages of face-to-face interviews are based on the amount of data that can be collected (Opdenakker, 2006). According to Adhabi and Anozie (2017), the researcher has time to get comfortable and clearly articulate the issues with the respondent, so the collected data quality is high. There is the ability to adhere to visual aids, meaning the respondent is more likely to understand the question and provide appropriate answers. The disadvantages of face-to-face interviews include cost and the fact that they are pretty time-consuming. They are also physically limited to one geographic region while placing the interviewee on the spot because they require immediate responses (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Face-to-face interviews were preferred in this research, excluding the participants from another geographic region or who were

away for business reasons.

According to Gray et al. (2020), Zoom has many advantages. Firstly, it does not require participants to have an account or download a program. Secondly, the electronic meeting invitation generated by Zoom has a live link that only requires a click to join the meeting. Thirdly, Zoom has screen-sharing abilities for the interviewer and participants, who can display documents like the research information letter or consent form for discussion. The interviewer can also display images, video clips, and other materials to launch a conversation. Finally, Zoom includes password protection for confidentiality and recording capacity to either the host's computer or Zoom's cloud storage. On the other hand, according to Gray et al. (2020), one of the disadvantages of Zoom is that it has time restrictions for interviews. Furthermore, technical difficulties may arise in setting up and conducting the interviews and uploading or using the recording. Still, the researcher can overcome these difficulties by becoming proficient in the chosen platform.

The selection of relevant interviewees provided a detailed comment on the governance structure within the NSOs. In this research, both types of meetings were recorded on the phone or by Zoom. Once the recorded material was transferred to the written form, it was revised to an acceptable (shortened) form and forwarded by e-mail to the interviewee for authorization. The research participants were informed after the interview that they could withdraw their interview from the research within two weeks after the interview. They received an e-mail notification with all the necessary information: the research's beginning and content and their rights concerning the research.

All documentation on NSOs' websites was also analyzed to gain insight into the framework in which the NSOs operate to gain some information before the interviews. Such documentation included NSO statutes, strategic documents, annual reports, personnel policies and procedures, etc.

Interviews were conducted with the 31 participants (the pilot and the main

qualitative research). All participants gave consent to participate in the research. Conversations were held with presidents, board members and the operatives. All interviews were conducted for over eight months. It took time for the interviews to be transcribed and analyzed.

An overview of the issues that reflect the understanding of the concept of professionalization in NSOs was made. Some of the questions were: e.g., What problems do they encounter? What do they consider to be the most significant shortcomings in the governing of NSOs? ([Appendix III](#)).

The phase of qualitative research started with the pilot qualitative study.

#### **4.3.2.1 Pilot Qualitative Study**

This sub-section presents the objectives and how the pilot qualitative study was conducted. The pilot qualitative study was the starting point and direction for conducting the main qualitative research on professionalization related to NSOs. Informal conversations rely primarily on questions from current experiences to understand or clarify what is being witnessed or experienced at a particular time.

##### ***4.3.2.1.1 Objectives of the Pilot Qualitative Study***

Starting from the objectives stated in [Section 1.5](#), the objectives for the pilot qualitative study were made as follows:

- to investigate the mindset of leading people (presidents, board members, general secretaries, directors) in National Sport Organizations, the Croatian Olympic Committee and the National Sports Council to get an overall idea about the current state of professionalization in National Sport Organizations
- to find out whether National Sport Organization presidents should be professional persons with specific qualifications to be able to carry out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and programmes and to define key qualifications that would be important for the governing of sport organizations (e.g., knowledge of sport,

governing competencies)

- to examine the form of professionalizing National Sport Organizations to contribute to efficiency in the context of increasing demands, i.e., whether the format in which National Sport Organizations board members, e.g., presidents (as board leaders) could be professionals or if some processes could be professionalized

Sampson (2004) pointed out that the role of a pilot study is only to test research instruments. As Ismail et al. (2018) say, a pilot study is a small-scale research project that should be done before the full-scale main research so the researchers can test the research process to help them decide how to conduct the main study properly. According to them, in a pilot study, the researcher can identify or correct the research questions and predict how long it will take to complete the main version of the study, where the main research is and where weaknesses are. The same authors noticed that a carefully organized and managed pilot study could improve the quality of research as the results of such studies could define further parts of the research process.

In this research, the pilot qualitative study was used to test the appropriateness of the questions and provide early suggestions for the sustainability of the research. Besides, it makes it easier for the researcher to obtain experience in creating in-depth, semi-structured interviews and develop a rapport with the interviewees (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The authors also refer to research with qualitative interviews, where there are gradual improvements in interview schedules and specific questions that pop up during data collection in main studies (Malmqvist et al., 2019).

To sum up all the authors` ideas, the objectives for the pilot study were:

- to practice the interview process,
- to test the length of the interview process,
- to test the quality of the interview questions
- to revise the aim, objectives, and research questions.

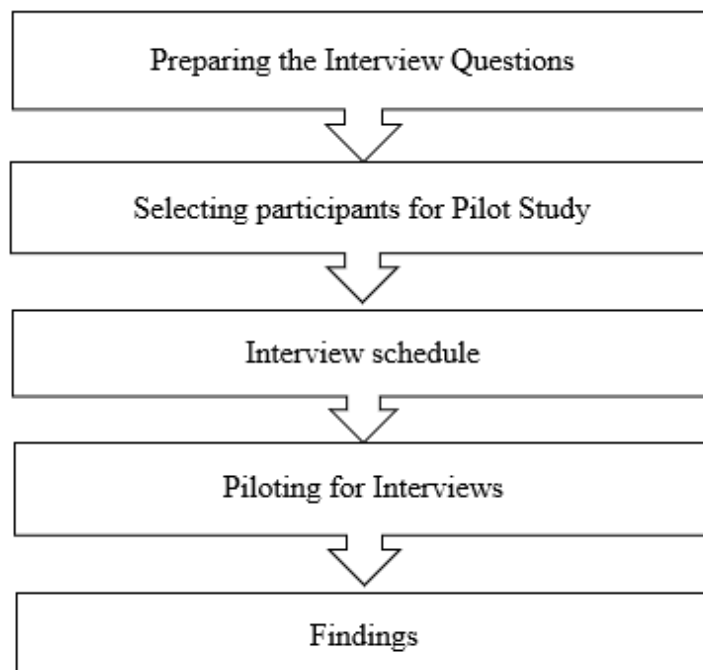
Preliminary interview findings must also be addressed in pilot study so the researcher can be acquainted with what may be expected in the final research process and obtain data analysis experience.

#### ***4.3.2.1.2 Conducting the Interview Process***

This part explains how to obtain necessary information regarding the pilot qualitative study objectives. [Figure 13](#) describes the process undertaken. The process consists of five steps. Each step assists in developing an appropriate interview guide for the main study; therefore, each step is discussed in the following sub-sections.

**Figure 13**

*Preparing the Interview Questions*



Source: Adapted from Majid et al., 2017

#### ***4.3.2.1.3 Preparing Interview Questions***

Following the central research question in this research, ‘**In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance?**’ (defined in [Section 4.2](#)),

interview questions were prepared as a reminder and guide through the interview. An introduction to possible professionalization in NSOs was planned, followed by about 12 questions, shown in [Table 3](#). The given topic covers the following themes: governing problems in NSOs, the role and competencies of volunteers in NSOs, the possibility of professionalization defining common processes in NSOs, and success metrics. In qualitative research, interviewing is a commonly used method of data collection. How questions are asked influences the information obtained (Smith & Noble, 2014). The validity and reliability of this pilot qualitative study were ensured by accurately presenting the data obtained from the interviews. Experts review the interview questions in this area to avoid researcher bias. Simple questions were prepared to avoid words that could introduce bias and avoid suggesting answers. According to Guba and Lincoln (1981), all qualitative research must ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### ***4.3.2.1.4 Selecting Participants for the Pilot Qualitative Study***

Seven participants in this pilot qualitative study hold leading functions in NSOs and Croatian sport. Hence, it relates to both volunteers – presidents and the members of the boards of NSOs (Olympic and non-Olympic sports) and paid staff – general secretaries and directors of NSOs. Two participants came from the Croatian Olympic Committee and five from NSOs (three volunteers – two are presidents, one board member, and four operatives – three are general secretaries and one director). According to Smith and Noble (2014), in qualitative research, choosing participants with experiences related to the topic explored is common.

In this pilot qualitative study, bias was reduced because the sample was selected to include representatives of all NSO groups, regardless of the researcher's preferences, to obtain qualitative information for the main project. Three participants represent team sports with high levels of successful results (Olympic and World Championship medals)

and have about 24% of registered competitors in the Republic of Croatia. Three participants come from individual sports, whilst two are from non-Olympic sports. Furthermore, three participants are also members of international institutions in their respective sports and umbrella organizations of European institutions. Accordingly, they were considered valuable pilot study participants because they have knowledge and experience in various governmental structures. As general secretaries/directors, in coordination with presidents, perform critical tasks for the functioning of their NSOs, they were valuable choices for this pilot qualitative study.

Pilot studies are usually done with a small number of participants, which means that the reliability of the findings may be limited. However, they indicate the likely size of response rates in the main database (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). According to Connelly (2008), existing literature suggests that a pilot study sample should be 10% of the sample size planned for the final study and, according to Guest et al. (2020), in qualitative studies, the whole research sample may consist of a minimal number of participants in homogeneous groups. According to Malterud et al. (2016), the predominant concept of sample size in qualitative studies is “saturation.” Still, they propose the idea of “information power” to guide the appropriate sample size for qualitative studies. Information power shows that the more information the sample contains, the fewer participants relevant to the research are needed.

In addition to the above, the sample consisted of seven people, over 20%, compared to the planned sample in the main research. It allowed covering all the groups of NSOs (so-called small and big NSOs, individual and team sports, and Olympic and non-Olympic sports), including operatives and volunteers.

#### ***4.3.2.1.5 Interview Schedule***

Interviews were held in the participants' offices during December 2021, with one interview being held at the beginning of January 2022. They lasted for about 45 minutes

each. All interviews were held as planned.

#### ***4.3.2.1.6 Piloting the Interview***

The interviewer sent the following documents to the participants:

- Participant Information Sheet - Appendix I
- Participant Consent Form - Appendix II

To ensure the reliability of this pilot qualitative study research, the interviews were recorded and conducted in Croatian. The transcripts were translated into English and sent to the respondents for control and confirmation.

Regarding the perspective of researchers, Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) explain that the nature of tools for collecting qualitative data, such as interviews, is often progressive. The second or subsequent interviews in the study should be of better quality than the initial ones as the interviewer gains insight into how to improve interview schedules and specific questions.

The audio-recorded interviews used in this pilot qualitative study allow data to be reconsidered, checking for new topics that may be important for the main research (Smith & Noble, 2014). Besides the known problems, new problematic issues on professionalization in NSOs were expected to be discussed.

#### ***4.3.2.1.7 Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. The process is based on an ongoing comparative method in which data is continuously compared through interviews, allowing the emergence of theoretical categories that describe patterns within the participants' perspectives (Chapman et al., 2015; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The application of the thematic analysis gave meaningful and practical findings, which were used for credible data analysis in main qualitative research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the first qualitative method because it



provides core skills for all other kinds of analysis. It is a flexible method and is not restricted to only one epistemological or theoretical perspective (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This thematic analysis creates the descriptions derived from data extracts where the participants' words are used to support their points of view (Creswell, 2013).

A six-phase framework was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Step 1: Become familiar with the data (reading the transcripts),

Step 2: Generate initial codes (organizing the data in a meaningful and systematic way – coding),

Step 3: Search for themes (overlapping between the coding stage and determining preliminary themes),

Step 4: Review themes (to see if the data support the themes),

Step 5: Define themes (final identifying of each theme and its relation to the main theme),

Step 6: Write-up (questions for the main research).

According to the pilot qualitative study findings, some changes had to be made in the research questions for the main qualitative research. Changing the interview introduction and better explaining the research context was necessary. Some additional questions cropped up during the pilot qualitative study (education of leading people in NSOs and success metrics for NSOs). All respondents agreed that the effectiveness of implementing the professionalization doctrine can be measured by the success of the processes (goals, aims, objectives, and outcomes). When the metrics and objectives are defined and transparent, quality of work is ensured. In the last question, whether professionalization is a success story for all NSOs, all participants responded positively. Some consider professionalisation necessary, and all believe it is the right topic.

The interview transcripts were reread after the pilot qualitative study was finished. The codes were created according to the respondents' answers. The interviews were

marked from R1 to R7. The results of the pilot qualitative study are presented in [Section 5.1](#).

#### **4.3.2.2 Main Qualitative Research**

The results of the pilot qualitative study gave the guidelines for the main qualitative research.

Furthermore, the pilot qualitative study confirmed the defined objectives and resulted in one more objective. The objectives are stated in [Section 1.5](#). One more objective related to the success metrics for NSOs was added, shown in the following sub-section. The success metrics for NSOs are a guideline to the governing structures of where the sport they lead should go, and their fulfilment is the main factor of their survival.

Finally, the central question, **“In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance?”** was confirmed, and the sub-questions that arose were tested. Two sub-questions were added to the central question.

The sub-questions to the central question are as follows (e and f were added):

- a) Could professionals at the board level, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?
- b) What changes need to be made within organizations to allow professionals to enter the board level?
- c) Which positions at the board level need to be professionalized (e.g., the president)?
- d) What requirements should be met by professionals entering the board level (presidents)?
- e) Which processes should be common for all NSOs?
- f) How to define success metrics for NSO?

The sample from the pilot qualitative study confirmed that the presidents of NSOs, as the most responsible persons and the general secretaries/directors, who are also

responsible for the functioning of NSOs, play one of the most important roles in creating and supporting the governance of NSOs, and was key to this research.

Following existing law in Croatia (Law on Associations), the president and the chief operative are, in most NSOs, the persons responsible for the functioning of their NSOs. The Law refers to financial and legal responsibility. The presidents and board members are decision-makers, while chief operatives implement their decisions. Since presidents are volunteers, they mostly rely on the main operatives. Therefore, their thoughts are the most important part of the given topic because they face all the governing problems. It also emerged that NSO professionalization can be applied to NSOs with at least two operatives. The reliability and validity ensured the quality of findings related to the topic of professionalism by respecting the four criteria (see [Section 4.3.2.2.4](#)).

#### ***4.3.2.2.1 Objectives for the Main Qualitative Research***

Starting from the objectives stated in [Chapter 1](#), the objectives for the main qualitative research were made as follows:

- to investigate the mindset of leading people (presidents, board members and general secretaries/directors) in National Sport Organizations to get an overall idea about the current state of professionalization in National Sport Organizations
- to find out whether National Sport Organization presidents and other board members should be professionals with specific qualifications to be able to carry out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and programmes and to define key competencies that would be important for the governing of sport organizations (e.g., knowledge of sport, governing competencies)
- to determine the form of professionalized National Sport Organizations which contribute to efficiency in the context of increasing demands, i.e., whether the format in which National Sport Organizations board members (e.g., presidents) could be professionals or whether certain common processes could be

professionalized

- to define success metrics for National Sport Organizations

#### ***4.3.2.2.2 Interview Questions – Data Collection***

After finishing the pilot qualitative study, the new research questions for the main qualitative research were made. The main qualitative research comprised 12 questions (Appendix III). The subject of this qualitative research and the central research question is **‘In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance?’** The given topic covers governing problems in NSOs, the role and competencies of volunteers in NSOs and the possibility of professionalization, the possibility for further education of presidents, defining common processes in NSOs, and success metrics for NSOs. These questions were relevant to the efficacy of sport governance.

#### ***4.3.2.2.3 Sampling Strategy and Sampling Size for the Main Qualitative Research***

When determining the sample, the guidelines were theoretical sources. According to Gentles et al. (2015), qualitative research should be based on selecting specific data sources from which data are collected to reach the research objectives. The sample size must be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their judgment when selecting population members for participation. Therefore, purposive sampling is more often used in qualitative studies. However, the researcher must be aware that a criterion defines the selection of a particular sample. When a specific criterion is followed for selecting the sample, it is called criterion purposive sampling.

This research used purposive sampling, meaning participants were selected based on particular criteria to achieve a specific purpose (Short et al., 2002). Specifically, this criterion was a participant having the leading function in an NSO. In this research, leading people in NSOs were expected to know and be familiar with the environment of the sport

organizations. A sample for the interviews comprised volunteers - presidents and members of boards from Olympic and non-Olympic sports, which hold significance for the development of sport in Croatia- and paid staff - general secretaries or directors of NSOs. The sample for the research was also selected according to the sport results, massiveness (number of clubs and registered athletes), Olympic status, number of employees, tradition, and finances. Thus, the validity of the research was ensured.

According to McNamara (2009), there is a point of diminishing return to the qualitative sample - because if the study includes more data, it must necessarily lead to more helpful information. A single occurrence of a piece of data or code is required to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely necessary for qualitative research because a single occurrence of data can be equally helpful in understanding the process behind a topic (Mason, 2010). This research contains interviews with presidents and board members as representatives of governing functions and some general secretaries or sport directors as representatives of an operational role.

A total of 24 participants in this qualitative research hold leading functions in NSOs. The research covered a total of 17 NSOs in Croatia. Three NSOs from the region, two from Slovenia and one from Serbia, were also studied. Of these, 12 were from NSO Olympic sports, and five were from non-Olympic sports. In addition, the two Slovenian NSOs represent Olympic sports. Furthermore, four NSOs represent team sports and 13 individual sports. The interviews included 17 volunteers (presidents, vice presidents, and board members) and seven NSO operatives (general secretaries and directors). This represents 41.44% ([Appendix V](#)) of the total number of registered members (clubs) in Croatia and 40.13% ([Appendix V](#)) of registered competitors. As the available literature suggests, a sample should be as broad as possible, considering all the mentioned NSOs with at least two employees employed in the NSO. Carrying out professionalization without professional staff would be pointless. The Croatian Football Federation is

professionalized and was not a research subject because comparison with other NSOs is unrealistic according to all criteria, and the Croatian Football Federation is quite different from other NSOs. The non-Croatian participants were selected as they come from the region with similar sport systems. Eight of the interviewed persons (33.33%) are engaged in European and world federations of their sports (noted in interview transcripts), either as board members or in executive positions in international federations. This is an essential remark because the problem of sport governance is also seen in the broader context. The mentioned persons and some other interviewees also referred to the issues of international NSOs in their sports. The data available from the Croatian Olympic Committee database (approved by responsible persons within the Croatian Olympic Committee) are taken from NSOs according to the number of paid operatives, NSO members, registered athletes, and international competitions per year ([Appendix V](#)).

According to Shaheen and Pradhan (2019), for qualitative researchers, one important question must be answered and related to selecting the research sample since limited resources and limited time force the researcher to evaluate samples and events carefully. Qualitative research has no strict rules regarding sample size. Guided by the given theme of improving sport governance through the professionalization of NSO, the sample that would be rich in valuable information was selected, considering the time frame and available information. The sample size should be large enough to adequately describe the phenomenon of interest and answer the research question. Simultaneously, however, a large sample size risks repeating the data. Qualitative research should identify sample sizes needed to avoid saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Criterion purposive sampling is used in information-rich studies that may reveal significant issues/weaknesses and provide areas for improvement. The predetermined criterion of importance forces the researcher to review and study all cases that meet it (Patton, 2007). Research synthesists often use this approach to understand all studies that

meet certain predetermined criteria comprehensively. Most research synthesists use criterion sampling for methodological rigour (Suri, 2011), which is also used in this research for the same reason.

This type of sampling was chosen to avoid bias in the research and because the NSOs can carry out professionalization with the following conditions:

- significance for the development of sport in the Republic of Croatia
- massiveness
- sport results
- a certain number of administrators
- tradition
- financial resources

Although the sample sizes used in qualitative research are not justified (Marshall et al., 2013), it is necessary to provide enough data, but not too much. According to Mason (2010), the most common samples are 20 to 30. To give validity to the research, the most important NSOs in Croatia were included.

#### ***4.3.2.2.4 Reliability and Validity of Qualitative Research***

Within the research, verification strategies that ensure reliability and validity are methodological consistency, sufficient sampling, and developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection, and analysis (Morse et al., 2002). According to the same authors, the purpose of a pilot study, if used in qualitative research, is to improve data collection strategies. Reliability and validity must be ensured at every step of the study regarding verification in qualitative research, thus securing the study's rigour (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A pilot study was conducted in this research to ensure that the elements mentioned above were essential for conducting the main qualitative research and to obtain information on where the main research project might fail, where the research protocols could not be followed, or whether the proposed methods or instruments

were inappropriate or too complicated.

The reliability of the qualitative research is based on consistency in applying research practices, reflected in the analysis and conclusions, and is aware of biases and limitations of research findings. According to Cypress (2017), human behaviour and interactions are never static, so reliability in any research is problematic because measurements and observations can also be wrong. The same author states that if reliability is used as a criterion in qualitative research, the study is “not good”. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), it is better to use the term rigour instead of reliability, so strategies for ensuring rigour must be incorporated into the qualitative research process and not evaluated only after the examination. They also say that qualitative researchers must be proactive and take responsibility for ensuring the rigour of the research study. Rigour and truth are always important for qualitative research because without rigour, research is worthless, becomes fiction and loses its utility (Morse et al., 2002). Due to the potential for subjectivity, the NVivo software was used in the main qualitative research of this thesis to achieve extreme rigour. According to Cypress (2017), validity derives from empirical concepts (laws, evidence, truth, reality, deduction, reasons, facts, etc.), and research refers to scientific discoveries' accuracy and truthfulness, so valid research should show what exists and what is correct, and a valid instrument should measure what it is supposed to measure. Likewise, the validity of this research referred to the opinions of respondents who are responsible persons for the functioning of NSOs and who can participate in introducing professionalism in NSOs.

#### ***4.3.2.2.5 Piloting the Interview***

Like in the pilot qualitative study, the interviewer sent the following documents to the participants:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Participant Consent Form



All the participants were asked for initial consent for the interview. Out of 24 interviews, 16 were face-to-face, and eight were held via Zoom meetings. The interviews were recorded following the protocol of which the interlocutors were informed. In agreement with the interviewees, 19 interview transcripts were prepared in English and sent to the interviewees for signature. Five transcripts were sent to the participants, both in their mother tongue and English, as agreed. The interviews were conducted from March to August 2022.

#### ***4.3.2.2.6 Data Analysis***

The qualitative data were imported into NVivo and analyzed. Qualitative data is characterized by its subjectivity and the fact that it provides comprehensive text-based information. Qualitative data analysis is the pursuit of the relationship between categories and themes of data, seeking to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. NVivo is an innovative piece of software designed for qualitative data analysis, significantly diminishing complexity and simplifying complex tasks, thus making the procedure relatively bearable (Hilal & Alabri, 2013), which is a characteristic of this research. Ingram & O'Boyle (2018); O'Boyle & Shilbury (2016); Parent et al. (2021) used NVivo in the initial coding phase of their research on sport governance, so the software NVivo for qualitative analysis, as a tool to help sort codes and facilitate the extraction of quotes and responses and to enable an easier discussion of the findings, was used. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were imported into NVivo 13. The first step involved a close analysis of the interview transcripts to understand how research participants talked about different issues related to codification. A frequency analysis of the most frequently used terms was made. Then, according to the research questions, they were grouped (nodes were formed), and parts of the transcripts containing the answers to those questions were pressed into them. According to the defined phenomenon/question, the open coding process was approached and the words or phrases that represented

answers to questions were marked. Each question was analyzed in this way. After the first phase, similar codes were grouped using axial coding into separate units. New categories and the connection between them emerged and led to new theories. For example, the first question asks for opinions on the biggest governing problems in NSOs: 14 different initial codes were obtained by open coding, which led to 10 categories through the axial coding process, enabling the creation of theme 1. Answers to questions that could be reduced to short answers (e.g., Is professionalization a solution for improving governance in NSOs?): were converted into the following codes: yes, no, maybe, I don't know.

As Kelle (2005) points out, that the implicit or explicit theoretical framework must be used to identify categories in empirical data. This model or theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of analyzing and modelling actors' strategies of action and interaction. Axial coding is the base of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach.

Codes were extracted from these answers (open coding), and similar codes were grouped from these codes, which served as the basis for further statistics and analysis. The NVivo software was also used to assist the initial round of coding and analysis to avoid the researcher's subjectivity.

The interview transcripts were encrypted for data protection (anonymity) and added to NVivo by being marked from R01 to R24. The respondents from Croatia were marked with C and the respondents from the region with R, while volunteers were marked with V and operatives with O. Each respondent's data from the question is saved in one node. According to Allsop et al. (2022) and Welsh (2002), the node is a feature in NVivo that allows the researcher to collect coded data in one place (coding container). The same applies to Q2, Q3, etc., so each node is aligned with a separate question. Thus, everyone's answers to Q1, Q2, and so on can be seen, allowing further access to coding. The coding results using the NVivo software provided the data and showed the direction in which quantitative research should go. The results of the main qualitative research are presented

in [Section 5.2](#).

### **4.3.3 Main Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research with a larger sample size was necessary to achieve more generalizable results. After analyzing the qualitative data, a survey questionnaire (quantitative method) was used. Quantitative research is more scientific, objective, fast, focused, and acceptable. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data can improve an evaluation by ensuring that the strengths of one type of data balance the limitations of the other type of data. It ensures that understanding is enhanced by integrating different ways of knowing. Combining the two types of data creates the benefit of the detailed, contextualized insights of qualitative data and the generalizable, externally validated insights of quantitative data. The strengths of one type of data often outweigh the weaknesses of the other (Flick, 2015). Adding quantitative data can confirm qualitative findings. Mixed methods offer greater flexibility in research design, allowing researchers to combine aspects of different studies to produce the most informative and valuable results.

The questionnaire was e-mailed to NSO presidents and board members. It contained information about their attitudes towards which parts of professionalization could be acceptable to NSOs by making specific claims. The questionnaire used quantitative data to confirm the findings of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews.

Finally, the linkage of the data collected by qualitative and quantitative methods yielded the research results. The following sub-section explains the survey in the context of this research.

#### **4.3.3.1 The Survey Approach – Data Collection**

Surveys are cheap, quick, and easy to analyze, but a researcher may have a lower response rate. A survey is a research method used to collect data from a predefined group

of respondents to gain information and insights into various topics of interest (Check & Schutt, 2012). They can have multiple purposes, and researchers can conduct them in many ways depending on the methodology chosen and the study's goal.

According to the literature on research methodology, there are two types of questions - open questions, which means that the respondents give answers in their own way, and closed questions, which means the respondents choose between the answers offered (Saunders et al., 2009). The same authors also state that there are types of closed questions that include:

- list of questions - the respondent chooses the answer(s) from the list,
- category questions - when the respondent's answer can only fit into one category about a behaviour,
- ranking questions - the respondent ranks the answers in order,
- scale questions - the respondent agrees or disagrees with statements about beliefs and likes or dislikes in terms of attitudes,
- quantity questions - quantity of a particular attribute or behaviour.

This research used the List questions and a five-point Likert scale to measure beliefs. The Likert scale serves as a method for measuring attitudes by summing the responses to a larger number of statements that are representative of the attitude being tested and to what degree the respondent agrees with the statement (Allen & Seaman, 2007)The questionnaire asked respondents to consider the degree of importance given by NSOs to a range of professionalization in governance issues. The data obtained from the qualitative analysis served as the basis for the Questionnaire.

A structured online survey questionnaire was developed considering all the questions, scales, and data. It was based on the literature review, research problems, research questions, objectives to obtain valid response results, and previous qualitative research. The Questionnaire aimed to avoid biased answers, to be easy and interesting to

fill in, and to be understandable to respondents. The qualitative research results served as the basis for creating the Questionnaire.

#### **4.3.3.2 Objectives for the Main Quantitative Research**

The objectives of this phase were similar to the objectives from the main qualitative research:

- to find out whether National Sport Organization board members should be professionals with specific qualifications to be able to carry out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and programmes and to define key competencies that would be important for the governing of sport organizations (e.g., knowledge of sport, governing competencies)
- to determine the form of professionalized National Sport Organizations which contribute to efficiency in the context of increasing demands, i.e., whether the format in which National Sport Organizations board members (e.g., presidents) could be professionals or whether certain common processes could be professionalized
- to define success metrics for National Sport Organizations

#### **4.3.3.3 Creating the Questionnaire**

The Questionnaire, created with a combination of List questions and the Likert scale, was used based on the results of the previous qualitative phase without suggesting the researcher's views. Furthermore, the research sample consisted of the leading people who make key decisions for the functioning of NSOs (board members). The attitude that guided the researcher was that as long the questions and answers made sense, the respondent must understand the question as the researcher thought it and could give the data the researcher wanted (Foddy & Foddy, 1993).

The Questionnaire covered six sets through 17 questions: governing problems, governing persons, governing persons' qualifications, educational programmes for

governing people, common processes in NSOs, and success metrics for NSOs. The Questionnaire was created using Microsoft Forms. The List questions offered the respondents the answers they could choose based on the results of all the interviews from the previous phase. For example, the results of the interviews showed the four biggest problems in governing NSOs, which were offered as possible answers in the Questionnaire. The List questions was defined clearly and meaningfully so that the respondent had all possible and straightforward answers and was not in doubt when choosing the appropriate answer. The list of answers was offered to the respondents, who could choose one or two, depending on the number of offered answers.

The Likert scale was used for most questions (12). The respondent could choose answers categorized into five categories according to the degree of agreement/disagreement with the written statement (agree, tend to agree, not sure, tend to disagree, disagree). The questions and statements in the combined questionnaire are set as variables. Answers (one or more) were offered in five questions (0 - the answer not chosen by the respondent; Yes - answer chosen by the respondent), and the rating questions are offered on the Likert scale with Min 1 to Max 5 (5 - *agree*, 4 - *tend to agree*, 3 - *not sure*, 2 - *tend to disagree*, 1 - *disagree*). Positive and negative statements were included so the respondent would carefully consider their answer when choosing the statement. The exact order of statements was used in all questions. It is important to note that the Questionnaire was created because the respondents were limited in time, given that NSO board members are volunteers. The aim was to receive as many answers as possible. Previously, all documents regarding NSOs available on their websites, including how NSO boards are formed, were studied.

#### **4.3.3.4 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size for the Quantitative Research**

Sampling is selecting a portion of the population in the research area, representing the whole population. The strategy is the plan to ensure that the sample used in the

research represents the population from which the sample is drawn. As stated in [Section 4.3.2.2.3](#), purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgment in identifying and selecting individuals, cases, or events that can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives. It is common in qualitative and mixed methods research. Due to their high levels of responsibility, this research phase sampled the governing people of NSOs, specifically presidents, vice presidents, and board members. The first phase (the main qualitative research) included general secretaries/directors who are also responsible for the functioning of NSOs. The second phase, quantitative, interrogated other board members' opinions. The questionnaire sample consisted of presidents and board members of 22 NSOs, five more than in the pilot study and the qualitative research. Over 90% of the interviewed volunteers from the qualitative phase are presidents of NSOs. The second phase (quantitative research) was extended to vice-presidents and other board members because decision-making is collective. Therefore, everyone's opinion was extremely important for the objectivity of the research.

The Questionnaire contained information about their attitudes towards professionalism by choosing the presented statements or agreeing or disagreeing with statements about their beliefs and likes or dislikes in terms of attitudes (Likert scale). The NSO boards in this research have between 5 and 19 board members. The theoretical sources and data from the Croatian Olympic Committee database were used when defining the research sample.

The mixed method technique was used to improve the research analysis. According to Sandelowski (2000), combining data analyses involves the interpretive linking of qualitative and quantitative data sets. The purposive sample selection criterion was similar to the previous phase: NSOs with great importance for sport development in Croatia based on results, number of clubs, and number of registered competitors. Unlike the previous phase at this stage, almost all NSOs involved have participated and been

awarded medals in the Summer Olympic Games since the foundation of the Republic of Croatia (1991). This pattern includes Olympic and non-Olympic sports, and individual and team sports (see [Appendix V](#)). The Croatian Football Federation is the only NSO in the Republic of Croatia that is professional in its work and is thus not a part of this research. This type of sampling was taken because NSOs with the required conditions can carry out professionalization with the conditions for it (stated in [Section 4.3.2.2.3](#)).

#### **4.3.3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Quantitative Research**

The evidence of validity and reliability are prerequisites to assure the integrity and quality of a measurement instrument (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Reliability refers to the measurement instrument's stability and persistence over time. In other words, reliability is the ability of measurement instruments to produce similar results when administered at different times. The reliability of the measuring instrument is a key factor in making the results of the study sound. Therefore, this research ensured the reliability of the measurement instrument used to gain rigour, making the research easily repeatable. If the research is reliable, it means if someone else repeats the same research with the same population, they should achieve the same results.

In this quantitative research, which is based on the results of previous qualitative research, the Questionnaire was designed. The researcher should ensure consistency of the answers to the questions (Mitchell, 1996). The approach to this research was using internal consistency, i.e., by comparing the data obtained from the participants in the research (members of NSO boards). Furthermore, as Mitchell (1996) states, a questionnaire should be created to connect the answers to each question with the other questions in the questionnaire. Therefore, it measures the consistency of answers through questions or questionnaire sub-questions. The same questions were grouped into topics, and a new question or sub-question was created from the previously offered answers, all to offer a possible solution to the problem.



Validity refers to whether the measuring instrument measures the behaviour or quality it intends to measure and how well the instrument performs its function (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). Validity is determined by a meaningful and appropriate interpretation of the data obtained from the measuring instrument as a result of the analyses. Whiston (2016) defines validity as getting data suitable for the intended use of measurement instruments.

In this research, the validity tests determined whether the expressions in the scale corresponded to the criteria of the purpose of the research. To give valuable results for the research, the measuring instrument must measure what it claims. In this case, whether the professionalization of NSOs is a possible solution for improving governance had to be determined. Using a valid measuring instrument ensures the validity of the findings obtained from the analyses. For quantitative research using measurable data points, data quality can be improved by choosing the suitable methodology, avoiding bias in the study design, selecting the appropriate sample size and type, and conducting appropriate statistical analyses. Furthermore, the research sample consisted of the leading people who make key decisions for the functioning of NSOs (board members). All the most important NSOs in the Republic of Croatia were included. SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) was used for data analysis.

#### **4.3.3.6 Conducting the Questionnaire**

The Questionnaire was sent as a pilot to nine addresses (presidents and general secretaries of NSOs, heads of the Croatian Olympic Committee) to check the clarity, content, and time needed to complete it. The sample included three people from the academic world with research experience and was a form of consultation for the next phase of the main quantitative research. After positive feedback from all respondents, the quantitative phase of the main research began. The results of this pilot were not analyzed in the context of the objectives of this research.

At this point, the main research began. The link to the Questionnaire, in agreement with the president or main operatives of the NSOs, was sent to NSO offices. Since it was impossible to know the vast majority of board members and due to limited time, the main operatives forwarded the Questionnaire to the board members of their NSOs. Basic information about the Questionnaire, which is a part of doctoral research, that it is anonymous and can also be filled in via mobile phone, was sent by e-mail. The research lasted 45 days. The Questionnaire was sent to 243 persons, and 104 (43.2%) NSO board members filled it out. It was sent successively, two at a time, to NSOs to get an insight into the number of respondents. Since the e-mails with the link to the Questionnaire were sent from the NSOs' offices, the forwarded confirmation was delivered backwards as proof that board members had received it. The data was collected for over 45 days in January and February 2023.

#### **4.3.3.7 Data Analysis**

This research used descriptive statistics from SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS is used for a wide range of statistical analyses, such as descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies), bivariate statistics (e.g., analysis of variance, t-test), regression, factor analysis, and graphical presentation of data. This statistical software performs comparative and correlational statistical tests in the context of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis for parametric and non-parametric statistical techniques (Ong & Puteh, 2017). It is also used in the research on sport governance. SPSS is a programme used by researchers in various disciplines for quantitative analysis. It is commonly used in sport management and governance research (Moshoeshoe, 2020; Parent et al., 2021). Parent et al. (2021) used SPSS to research sport governance by running descriptive statistics. Since the second phase was quantitative research, descriptive statistics was used to analyze the questionnaire results.

The results obtained in Microsoft Forms were transferred to SPSS. Furthermore,

frequency and descriptive statistics were used for the analysis because they are most suitable for analyzing the received data. They give an insight into the respondents' answers about the possibility of professionalization and measure the strength of agreement with certain statements that arose from the analysis of the previous phase. The results of the main quantitative research are presented in [Section 5.3](#).

#### ***4.3.4 Ethical Questions in the Research***

The research followed international and national ethical research standards, meaning subjects could not be affected, and principles such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and honesty are essential (Boyce & Neale, 2006). There are several reasons why following ethical norms in research is necessary. The standards promote research goals such as knowledge, truth, and error avoidance and ensure the researchers can be held accountable to the public.

As the interviewer conducted the interviews, the purpose of the research had to be explained, and each participant had to provide signed consent to participate in the interview (Allmark et al., 2009). Transcripts were made available to respondents to prevent abuse and to confirm their veracity.

A secure Sheffield Hallam University solution was used for the questionnaire. The data from the Questionnaire and the interviews were stored on the Q Drive in the Research Data Archive (SHURA). The data from the questionnaires were anonymized.

#### ***4.3.5 Triangulation and Integration***

Ensuring accuracy in reality and the meaning of the work undertaken was challenging for this research. A combined approach was applied to convey accurate and illuminating results. Pollio et al. (1997) point out that if both criteria are met, the research achieves the rigour and insight it seeks. The analysis had to be further strengthened by combining methods. In this thesis, it was essential to understand the issues related to the governing practices present in NSOs and how elements of professionalization could be

applied to increase efficiency. According to Sekol and Maurovic (2017), a questionnaire is used to determine whether the data collected by interview differs from the data collected by the questionnaires. Exploratory sequential design includes the use of qualitative and then quantitative research approaches. This thesis conducted the quantitative research so that the results of the qualitative research could be generalized. For this research, it was important to investigate the phenomenon of professionalization of certain segments in order to increase efficiency in NSOs. The qualitative and quantitative findings were then compared, and convergences and divergences were determined. Advantages of sequential studies include increased efficiency and more reliable effect size estimates, which is particularly important for this research and its practical implication.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter presents philosophical views that were important for the research, specifically the system of beliefs and assumptions, why the pragmatic choice is the right and logical option for choosing the suitable methodology used in this research, and the ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (valid, legitimate and acceptable knowledge), and axiological (assessing the researcher's value) positions. The approach to knowledge about social reality was done by interviewing some leaders and conducting a survey of a more significant number of actors in NSOs. The research problem formed the central research question and sub-questions. The chapter presents the research methodology (exploratory sequential design) that seeks answers to the research questions. The qualitative and quantitative methods were described separately. The pilot qualitative study gave the guidelines for the main qualitative research. Each part comprises approaches, sampling size and strategy, reliability and validity, data analysis, and ethical issues for the research. Triangulation and integration of data are also described.

## CHAPTER 5 Research Results

This chapter presents the pilot qualitative study results and the main qualitative and quantitative research results. The pilot qualitative study results indicated the changes and improvements that had to be made for the main research phase. Furthermore, the results of the main qualitative phase served as the base for quantitative research.

### 5.1 Pilot Qualitative Study Results

The pilot qualitative study from [Section 4.3.2.1.4](#) gave the guidelines for the main qualitative research. The pilot qualitative study limit was a small number of participants. Therefore, the full validity of the results could not be achieved.

Table 3 comprises the initial questions, the number of respondents who answered each question, the responses in codes, and the number of responses according to the codes.

**Table 3**

*Initial Questions, Codes, Number of Respondents*

Questions	Responses	Codes	Number of responses
01 What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs?	7	Lack of experts/inadequate education and competencies	2
		Variety of organizational structures	1
		Insufficient funds	4
		Legal framework	1
		Undertaking responsibility	1
02 How do these problems affect sport governance in your organization?	7	The current way of governing	1
		Incompetent people running NSOs	2
		Funding	2
		No response	2
03 Is it a problem that NSOs are governed by volunteers who are not paid for that job? Do you	7	Problem – compensation for engagement	4
		Not a problem	2

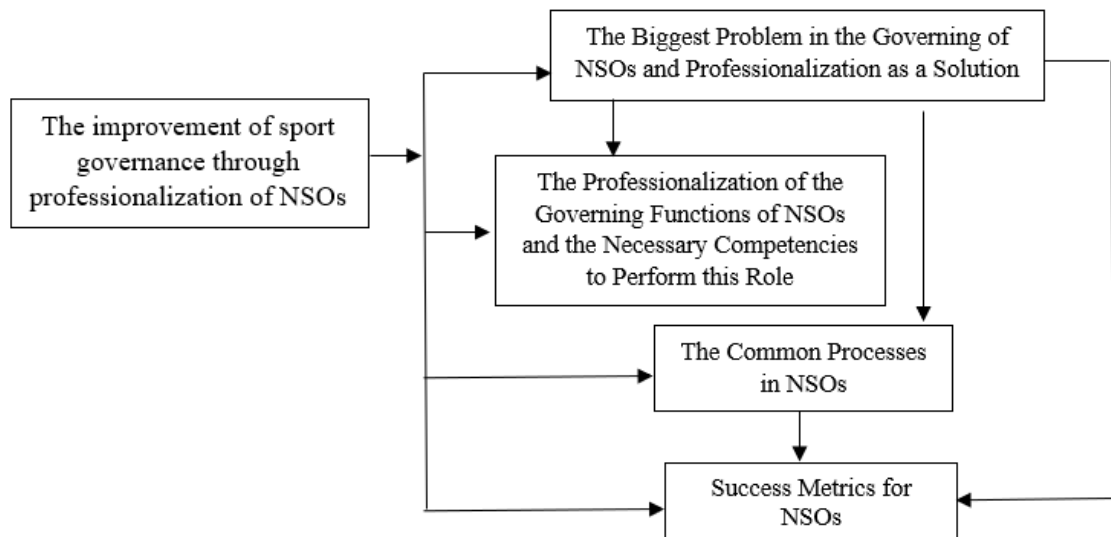
Questions	Responses	Codes	Number of responses
believe that, if paid, they would do a better job?		No specific opinion	1
04 Consequently, could professionals at board level, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?	6	Professionals could improve sport governance	4
		Volunteers are not critical	2
05 Do presidents or any other functions at board level devote all the time necessary to have a complete insight into the implementation of the board's decisions? What seems to be the obstacle of having enough time to lead in such a way?	6	No	1
		Yes - decisive cooperation between the governing and executive structure	5
006 Time seems to be very important for sports governance and the implementation of decisions, but what do you think about the required qualifications? Are qualifications also important and why?	7		
		Qualifications are important	7
07 What qualifications should board members have in order to lead effectively?	5	Governing skills	3
		Sport knowledge	3
		Difficult to define a set of competencies	1
08 Out of all those qualifications you've mentioned, can you rate them in order of importance?	7	Leadership skills	2
		Governing skills	1
		Sport and governance skills	1
		Management skills	1
		Sport knowledge and management skills	1
09 Therefore, should certain processes, such as the implementation decision process in NSOs be professionalized in order to increase efficiency? Which other processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized?	7	Available to the public	1
		The organization of competitions	2
		Sport administration	1
		Taking care of stakeholders	2
		Health care and anti-doping	1
		Financial management	1
		Human resources	1
Organization of the sport	1		

Questions	Responses	Codes	Number of responses
10 How would you define process success metrics?	7	Number of clubs	3
		Number of athletes	4
		Number of children	2
		Number of organized competitions/events	2
		Number of medals	1
		Visibility of sport	1
		Number of sponsors	1
11 The success of the implementation of the professionalization doctrine can, consequently, be measured by the success of the processes (goals, aims, objectives, and, finally, outcomes). Do you agree with that?	6	Yes	5
		Key Performance Indicator is a key	1
12 Therefore, can we come to the conclusion that professionalization is a success story of the entire NSO and not only the success of a board member per se?	7	Yes	7

The results from the pilot qualitative study confirmed that the topic is crucial for Croatian sport and NSOs as bearers of the development of Croatian sport and identified the final themes and their relation to the main theme. The main themes were: 1. The biggest problems in the governing of NSOs and professionalization as a solution, 2. The professionalization of the governing functions of NSOs and the necessary competencies to perform this role, 3. The common processes in NSOs, and 4. Success metrics for NSOs (see [Figure 14](#)).

**Figure 14**

*The topic of the Research – Main Themes and Connections Among Themes*



The process used in the pilot qualitative study gave adequate directions for the main qualitative research.

## **5.2 Main Qualitative Research Results**

[Figure 15](#) shows the main qualitative research phase results, which provide an overview of the 15 most frequently mentioned words. The first phase already showed the basic features of the investigated phenomenon.



**Figure 15**

*The 15 Most Frequently Repeated Words by the Respondents*



Table 4 shows the results of the coding process using NVivo software. It shows the codes that had already passed the axial coding stage, meaning that similar codes were grouped and new categories of codes were created. This phase helped to get as objective a picture as possible of how many respondents think that, for example, finances are the biggest problem in the governance of NSOs. It also shows the percentage of the same attitudes regarding the question asked. In the discussion phase, the findings of this research phase are explained in detail.

**Table 4**

*Results of the Coding Process Using NVivo*

Question/categories	Respondents	References	% response within a question
<b>01 What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs and how do these problems affect sport governance in your organization?</b>	24	24	100%

<b>Question/categories</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>% response within a question</b>
Ambition of people entering governing structures	1	1	4.17%
Four-year mandate	1	1	4.17%
Governing structure of the NSO Board	1	1	4.17%
Harmonize different understandings or views	1	1	4.17%
Insufficient funds	7	7	29.17%
Tax system	2	2	8.33%
Legal framework	2	2	8.33%
Not defined	2	2	8.33%
Person expertise	5	5	20.83%
Volunteers	9	9	37.5%
<b>02 Do you think professionalization is a good approach to problem-solving in your organization?</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>
Yes	20	20	83.33%
No. Only exceptions. Only high-budget federations.	1	1	4.17%
Maybe	3	3	12.5%
<b>03 Is it a problem that NSOs are governed by volunteers who are not paid for that job?</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>
Yes	14	14	58.33%
No	3	3	12.5%
Maybe	3	3	12.5%
I don't know	2	2	8.33%
The internal organization of the NSO	1	1	4.17%
Legislation	1	1	4.17%
<b>04 Consequently, could board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>
Yes	13	13	54.17%
No	4	4	16.67%
I don't know	1	1	4.17%
Maybe	6	6	25%

Question/categories	Respondents	References	% response within a question
<b>05 Do presidents or any other board-level functionaries devote the time necessary to have a complete insight into implementing the board's decisions?</b>	24	24	100%
Internal organization	6	6	25%
Maybe (depends on the person)	7	7	29.17%
No	13	13	54.17%
<b>06 Are qualifications also essential and why? What qualifications should board members have to lead effectively?</b>	24	24	100%
Leadership skills	3	3	12.5%
Governing qualifications	19	19	79.17%
Sport qualifications	18	18	75%
<b>07 Out of all the qualifications you've mentioned, can you rate them in order of importance, sports or governing competencies?</b>	24	24	100%
Governing qualifications	19	19	79.17%
Sport qualifications	18	18	75%
Leadership skills	3	3	12.5%
<b>08 Since sport is of specific importance to society, should special education programmes in sport governance be introduced and who should be in charge of its implementation?</b>	23	23	100%
Croatian Olympic Committee educational module	10	10	43.48%
Courses, seminars, workshops	3	3	13.04%
Exchange of experiences	3	3	13.04%
Expert schools or consultants	1	1	4.35%
Faculty of Kinesiology	1	1	4.35%
Ministry	8	8	34.78%
MBA education	1	1	4.35%
No	1	1	4.35%
Sport business education	1	1	4.35%
Sports programmes	1	1	4.35%
University studies	2	2	8.7%
Yes	2	2	8.7%

Question/categories	Respondents	References	% response within a question
<b>09 Is there a collision between the President and the General Secretary?</b>	20	20	100%
Yes	1	1	5%
No	19	19	95%
<b>10 Therefore, should specific processes, such as the implementation decision process in NSOs, be professionalized to increase efficiency - Which other processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized?</b>	23	23	100%
Accounting	4	4	17.39%
Already professionalized	1	1	4.35%
Audits	1	1	4.35%
Difficult to define	6	6	26.09%
Difficult to professionalize processes	1	1	4.35%
Digitalization	3	3	13.04%
Legal affairs	2	2	8.7%
Looking for examples from the other country	1	1	4.35%
Marketing services	2	2	8.7%
Medical services	1	1	4.35%
Organized competition	1	1	4.35%
Sport as a process	1	1	4.35%
Standard regulation	2	2	8.7%
<b>11 How would you define process success metrics?</b>	23	24	100%
Finance	2	2	8.33%
Infrastructure	1	1	4.17%
Number of athletes	9	9	37.50%
Number of clubs	8	8	33.33%
Number of competitions	3	3	12.5%
Organizational system	3	3	12.5%
Realization of plans	3	3	12.5%
Spectators	1	1	4.17%
Sport result	13	13	54.17%
<b>12 Therefore, can we conclude that professionalization is a success story for the entire NSO?</b>	24	24	100%
Yes	20	20	83.33%

Question/categories	Respondents	References	% response within a question
No	3	3	12%
Maybe	1	1	4.17%

The coding results using the NVivo software provided data and showed the direction of quantitative research.

### 5.3 Main Quantitative Research Results

This section presents the results of the main quantitative research, which was made based on the findings from the main qualitative research, to improve sport governance by professionalizing NSOs. This research uses an exploratory sequential design (the first phase of qualitative data collection and analysis is followed by the collection of quantitative data for testing or generalization of the initial qualitative results).

Table 5 shows the results of the data processed by SPSS. It shows the frequency of the responses (the number of people who gave answers and the percentage of the total number of respondents).

[Table 6](#) shows descriptive statistics for the questions using the Likert scale. It shows the mean and standard deviation.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of responses (number and percentage) using SPSS*

Questions/statements		Count N	Column %
What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs - Insufficient funds	0	29	27.9%
	Yes	75	72.1%
What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs - Persons expertise	0	60	57.7%
	Yes	44	42.3%
What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs - Legal framework	0	91	87.5%
	Yes	13	12.5%
What are the biggest governing problems	0	68	65.4%

Questions/statements		Count N	Column %
in NSOs - Volunteers	Yes	36	34.6%
	0	0	0.0%
Professionalization is a good approach to problem solving in your organization.	agree	56	53.8%
	tend to agree	40	38.5%
	not sure	4	3.8%
	tend to disagree	3	2.9%
	disagree	1	1.0%
The problem is that NSOs are governed by volunteers who are not paid for their job.	agree	22	21.2%
	tend to agree	56	53.8%
	not sure	9	8.7%
	tend to disagree	6	5.8%
	disagree	11	10.6%
Presidents or any board members devote all the time necessary to have a complete insight into implementing the board's decisions.	agree	12	11.5%
	tend to agree	52	50.0%
	not sure	8	7.7%
	tend to disagree	15	14.4%
	disagree	17	16.3%
Board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, could improve sport governance.	agree	40	38.5%
	tend to agree	44	42.3%
	not sure	14	13.5%
	tend to disagree	4	3.8%
	disagree	2	1.9%
Qualifications are essential for governing functions.	agree	50	48.1%
	tend to agree	43	41.3%
	not sure	6	5.8%
	tend to disagree	0	0.0%
	disagree	5	4.8%
What competencies should presidents have to lead effectively - Leadership skills	0	58	55.8%
	Yes	46	44.2%
What competencies should presidents have to lead effectively - Governing skills	0	27	26.0%
	Yes	77	74.0%
What competencies should presidents have to lead effectively - Specific sport knowledge	0	75	72.1%
	Yes	29	27.9%
What competencies should presidents have to lead effectively - Other skills (such as legal and financial knowledge)	0	74	71.2%
	Yes	30	28.8%
Since sport is specific to the field of society, special education programmes (courses, seminars, workshops) on the topic of sport governance should be introduced).	agree	71	68.3%
	tend to agree	27	26.0%
	not sure	5	4.8%
	tend to disagree	1	1.0%

Questions/statements		Count N	Column %
	disagree		
What kind of educational programmes would be suitable for the presidents or board members - Courses, seminars, workshops on the topic of governing sport organizations	0	60	57.7%
	Yes	44	42.3%
What kind of educational programmes would be suitable for the presidents or board members - Exchange of experiences (once a year meetings of presidents or board members in practicing governing)	0	69	66.3%
	Yes	35	33.7%
What kind of educational programmes would be suitable for the presidents or board members - University studies for governing in sport	0	100	96.2%
	Yes	4	3.8%
What kind of educational programmes would be suitable for the presidents or board members - Creating special modules for persons in charge for governing in sports	0	83	79.8%
	Yes	21	20.2%
Who should be in charge of its implementation - line ministry	0	75	72.1%
	Yes	29	27.9%
Who should be in charge of its implementation - Olympic Committees	0	43	41.3%
	Yes	61	58.7%
Who should be in charge of its implementation - Educational institutions	0	90	86.5%
	Yes	14	13.5%
Which processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized - Accounting, legal affairs and services	0	19	18.3%
	Yes	85	81.7%
Which processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized - Organized competition	0	57	54.8%
	Yes	47	45.2%
Which processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized - Medical services	0	89	85.6%
	Yes	15	14.4%
Which processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized - Digitalization	0	63	60.6%
	Yes	41	39.4%
Sport results are success metrics of NSOs.	agree	33	31.7%
	tend to agree	58	55.8%
	not sure	4	3.8%
	tend to disagree	3	2.9%
	disagree	6	5.8%
Massiveness (number of athletes and number of clubs) is success metrics of	agree	18	17.3%
	tend to agree	56	53.8%

Questions/statements		Count N	Column %
NSO.	not sure	18	17.3%
	tend to disagree	5	4.8%
	disagree	7	6.7%
Number of competitions organized in Croatia is success metrics of NSO.	agree	23	22.1%
	tend to agree	51	49.0%
	not sure	17	16.3%
Number of spectators on competitions in Croatia is success metrics of NSO.	tend to disagree	8	7.7%
	disagree	5	4.8%
	agree	9	8.7%
Financial stabilities of NSOs is success metrics of NSO.	tend to agree	44	42.3%
	not sure	16	15.4%
	tend to disagree	12	11.5%
Professionalization is a success story for NSOs.	disagree	23	22.1%
	agree	37	35.6%
	tend to agree	48	46.2%
	not sure	11	10.6%
	tend to disagree	4	3.8%
	disagree	4	3.8%
	agree	44	42.3%
	tend to agree	48	46.2%
	not sure	9	8.7%
	tend to disagree	3	2.9%
	disagree		

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics Using SPSS*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Professionalization is a good approach to problem solving in your organization.	104	1	5	4.41	0.783
The problem is that NSOs are governed by volunteers who are not paid for their job.	104	1	5	3.69	1.183



	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Presidents or any board members devote all the time necessary to have a complete insight into implementing the board's decisions.	104	1	5	3.26	1.307
Board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, could improve sport governance.	104	1	5	4.12	0.917
Qualifications are essential for governing functions.	104	1	5	4.28	0.950
Since sport is specific to the field of society, special education programmes (courses, seminars, workshops) on the topic of sport governance should be introduced.	104	1	4	4.62	0.628
Sport results are success metrics of NSOs.	104	1	5	4.05	0.999
Massiveness (number of athletes and number of clubs) is a success metric for NSOs.	104	1	5	3.7	1.032
Number of competitions organized in Croatia is a success metric for NSOs.	104	1	5	3.76	1.038
Number of spectators at competitions in Croatia is a success metric of NSOs.	104	1	5	3.04	1.336
Financial stabilities of NSOs is a success metric for NSOs.	104	1	5	4.06	0.984
Professionalization is a success story for NSOs.	104	1	4	4.28	0.743
Valid N (listwise)	104				

The results obtained by using SPSS, shown in [Table 5](#), provided the data used to analyze the findings presented in the following [Chapter 6](#) and were compared with the data from the qualitative phase of the research and [Table 6](#) presents the average deviation from the mean value of the given data sets and provides an additional explanation of the quantitative results.

## 5.4 Summary

This chapter presents the pilot qualitative study and the main qualitative and quantitative research results. The results of the main qualitative research served as the basis for the main quantitative research. Analytical tools were used to obtain results to achieve objectivity and accuracy ([Table 3](#) and [Table 4](#)), i.e., NVivo software was used for the main qualitative phase of the research, and SPSS ([Table 5](#) and [Table 6](#)) was used for the main quantitative phase. The above results were used to interpret and compare the research findings in [Chapter 6](#).

## CHAPTER 6 Findings

The findings of both research phases ([Table 4](#) and [Table 5](#)) are presented through the five themes ([Figure 14](#)): the biggest problems in the governing of NSOs and professionalization as a solution, the professionalization of the governing functions of NSOs and the necessary competencies to perform this role, education of NSO leaders, the common processes in NSOs, and success metrics for NSOs. A comparison of the findings of both phases shows convergences and divergences between them.

### **6.1 Theme 1: The Biggest Problems in the Governing of NSOs and Professionalization as a Solution**

The starting point of this thesis was to interview the main actors in NSOs to see what they consider the biggest problems in sports governance. As shown in [Table 4](#), the analysis based on 24 interviews showed six fundamental governing problems: volunteerism, insufficient funds, persons' expertise, the legal framework, the ambition of people entering governing structures and harmonizing different understandings and points of view. The answers to this issue were quite similar in the pilot qualitative study (seven participants).

Unlike in the main qualitative research, most respondents in the pilot qualitative study cited insufficient funds as the biggest problem in governing NSOs. Most respondents (37.5%) cite the voluntary basis of NSO staff as a problem, i.e., the need for professionalism and professionals. The president of one NSO, R08VC, states: "Today, volunteers in governing positions are becoming a bottleneck. People have their responsibilities, and working in an NSO requires full engagement. Today, presidents are responsible. Several laws make it so."

Some sports have reached a peak by having high levels of international success, so they search for changes like the popularization of the sport, so being in the situation to be given more funds for further development and widening the circle of interested young

people. R13VC points out:

“I am a representative of a sport that is very popular and has a lot of Olympic medals and other high international results. And we reached the maximum. If we want to move forward, we have to change something. We have one main task, and that is to go into professionalization.”

Due to the obligations that the people running NSOs must perform today, the approach to sport has notably changed. Moreover, the commitments towards the number of stakeholders have increased significantly. As the literature suggests, the issue of professionalizing NSOs in the Republic of Croatia and beyond is an inevitable path that will be taken in changing governance. Therefore, professionalization has become an important topic. The leader of a successful individual sport, R02VC, emphasizes the problem of governance:

“Sports are not governed by professionals when it comes to governing. Sport is complex, and at the volunteer level, the system works hard. All these processes in the NSO are complex and are not carried out at a high level.”

Observing the attitudes of NSO leaders, the problem of volunteerism or lack of professionalism is more highlighted by individual sports with a larger number of registered clubs and registered competitors (Olympic and non-Olympic). Professionals and professionalisation have been introduced into practice in many European NSOs (as mentioned by the respondents). However, the need for efficiency and business orientation requires rapid changes. Sport governance has become complex and requires much more engagement than currently exists.

According to the respondents, insufficient funds are the next problem in governing NSOs. Since the respondents are all from significant NSOs, even those who receive the biggest part of financial resources from the state, according to the respondents (29.17%), financing makes governing difficult. The president of one NSO of a team sport, R012VC, states:

“The biggest problem in governing is finances because they dictate who and how many people will work in the NSO. Given the unresolved financing system in the

Republic of Croatia, the NSOs have been narrowed with professional staff. They rely on volunteers and external collaborators. The NSO is primarily based on people affiliated with the NSO.”

NSO operatives face problems paying the bills and fulfilling other obligations towards stakeholders. They also depend on clubs without sufficient funds. It is best described by R004OC, an operative from a team sport:

“Finances are the key to everything – they automatically reduce the number of people and lower quality. If the state wants sports, it has to invest. We are witnessing sports dying, especially team sports. The sport requires activity. Sports clubs are dying, and there are no results if the clubs don’t work well. NSO still works, but the clubs don’t live. We used to go for medals in our sport.”

Building on the problem above (lack of professionals), the financial issues that are most cited by the leaders of NSOs of team sports are also linked to the lack of experts at all levels. Both are necessary for increasing efficiency in NSOs.

The resources mostly finance NSOs from the state budget of the Republic of Croatia (0.13% of the state budget). Related to the fact mentioned above, the success of sports in the Republic of Croatia and further maintenance of the achieved quality is questionable. Many studies consider only a few organizational factors (e.g., more and more tasks, financial resources, organizational values) that can promote or hinder the professionalization process.

Persons’ expertise is the next important problem that the interviewees pointed out. Considering the already mentioned challenges that NSOs face today, 20.83% state that this issue is crucial. As stated by R016VC, the president of a team sport: “For continuous and sustainable results, systematic planning, planned implementation and evaluation and correction in segments are necessary. To achieve it, motivated and quality staff and stable, safe and sufficient inflows are needed.”

The importance of personal expertise (qualifications) is a separate topic in analyzing the results. Still, the importance of this topic for the respondents was already emphasized as the biggest problem.

The legal framework (the Sports Act (2022) and the Law on Associations in the Republic of Croatia) is considered a problem by 8.33% of respondents. As R013VC, one of the presidents, states: “NSOs in the Republic of Croatia operate on two basic laws: the Law on Associations and the Sports Act. In fact, nothing has changed for over 50 years.”

Sport has changed significantly, while the Sports Act (2022) does not follow changes and represents a burden for sport development. One respondent mentioned the issue of the four-year mandate of the chairman and the board. One respondent stated the harmonization of different interests, while another pointed out people’s views and ambitions entering governing structures. R17VC states: “The problem of the four-year mandate, so what can be done during that period?”

The question of continuity, i.e., changes that could be implemented during this period, is also important for improving governance. Internal and external stakeholders related to NSOs and the harmonization of interests and goals represent a big challenge for the leaders of NSOs.

According to Geeraert (2016), sport governing bodies act on behalf of various sport stakeholders and government actors and are empowered to perform functions on behalf of members and a range of internal stakeholders. As R023VR, the leader of one NSO states:

“National Sports Federations in the country and on the international scene is a very complex job. In order to lead the Federation successfully, one of the problems is that it is very difficult to harmonize different understandings or views of a large number of people or groups. Everyone has their own interest and a middle ground must be found.”

As the literature on dispute governance points out, it was expected that more respondents would express the question of harmonizing different groups and satisfying the interests of various stakeholders.

Concerning the pilot qualitative study results in [Chapter 5](#), it is evident that some governing problems related to finances, personal expertise, and the legal framework

coincide with the same analysis in the main qualitative research. Unlike the respondents in the main qualitative research, it is important to point out that they did not mention the issue of volunteering (the lack of professionalization) in the pilot qualitative study as the biggest problem.

Since the topic of this thesis was to examine whether professionalism is a possible solution for improving governance in NSOs, it was interesting to find out whether professionalism is a solution. In this sub-section, the respondents' opinions were shown, and the topic was analyzed. After the respondents defined the biggest problems and followed the research topic, professionalism could be defined as a process by which any occupation transforms into a true profession of the highest integrity and competence.

As seen in [Table 4](#), 83.33% of respondents think that professionalization is a solution to governing problems, even a necessary solution. Considering the context of NSOs, 12.5% of respondents are not sure this would be a solution. One respondent believes that professionalization is not the solution. Some answers that reflect this question are provided here. Almost 50% of respondents shortly answered that professionalization is the solution. Other participants gave additional comments that are considered important for the analysis. R2VC, the president of a highly successful NSO of an individual sport, states: "Professionalization is definitely, from my experience, necessary. Starting with me, who does not have enough time to commit to the NSO fully. Those who govern should be present at least half the working time if we want results."

Most respondents' answers fully confirmed volunteerism's problems in performing responsible functions, which are analyzed in detail in the following sub-sections. R23VR, the president of one international NSO, also points out: "It is not possible to push through the plan and the programme and achieve top results without a professional approach."

R16VC, the president of one NSO, thinks that all of this depends on personal

integrity and motivation and says:

“To some extent, yes, but it all rests on personal motivation and integrity. You have volunteers who will do the job better than the highest paid professionals. And vice versa – you can pay the highest fees and get nothing as a result.”

Respondents also held other attitudes, believing that professionalism is possible only in NSOs with large budgets. As one president states in R20VC, “No. Only exceptions. Only high-budget Federations could afford it, where professionalism and big money are involved.”

Concerning the total number of respondents, this is a conditional answer. It still fits the thesis topic because it also examines which NSOs can begin the path towards professionalism. Since the sample in this research also comprises operatives, the opinion of R150C, an operative of the same NSO, is as follows: “We are professionalized in our NSO. I do not know how we would function and survive otherwise.”

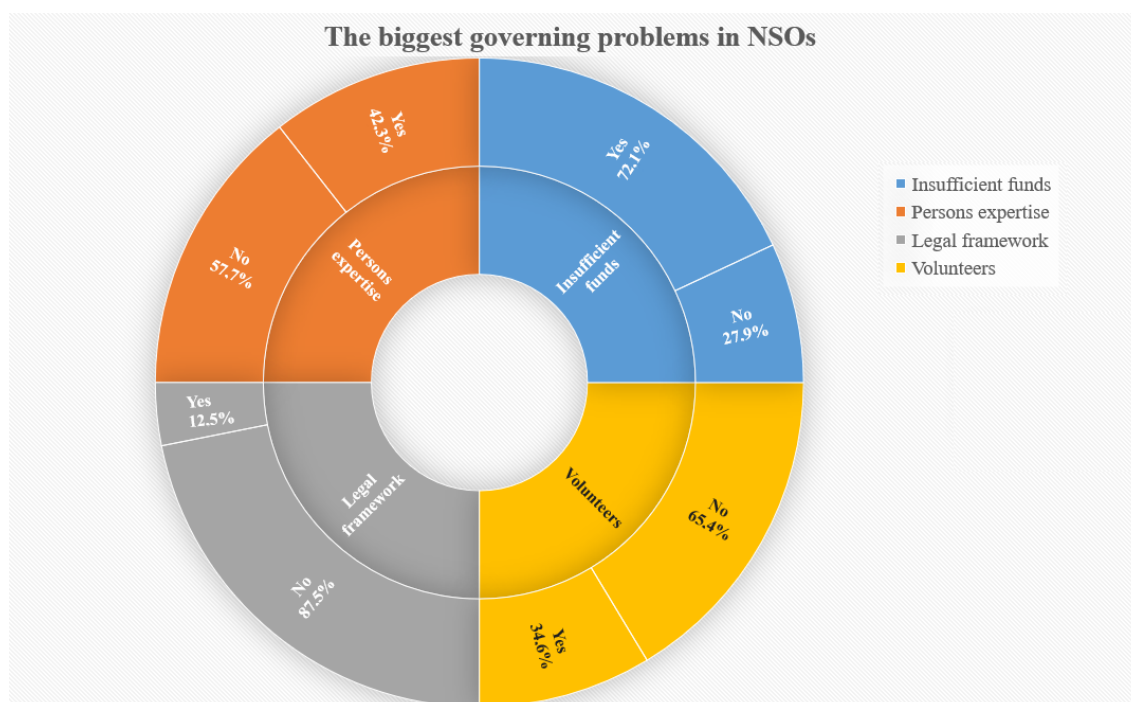
All the respondents’ points of view were a good introduction to further research on the possibility of professionalizing individual segments (governing functions and processes) in NSOs. The respondents’ attitudes are in line with the findings mentioned in the literature.

As stated in the main qualitative research results, NSOs play a role in organizing, promoting, and developing sport in Croatia, nationally and internationally. Due to their roles, NSOs have gained increasing importance in society.



**Figure 16**

*The Biggest Governing Problems in NSOs in Croatia*



The result of the quantitative analysis (Figure 16) shows that 75 out of 104 respondents (72.1%) agreed that the lack of financial resources, i.e., insufficient funds, is the biggest problem in governing NSOs. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, Croatian sport has achieved high results on the international scene. Regarding allocations from the state budget, Croatia is in the penultimate place in the European Union. The tax system is also unsuitable for sport investment and is currently being changed. Lack of financial resources was not mentioned as a problem by 29 respondents (27.9%).

The result of respondents to this question is not surprising. In contrast to the qualitative research, there is a significant deviation on this issue, i.e., seven of 24 respondents (29.17%) defined insufficient funds as the biggest problem. The reason for the deviation lies probably in the fact that the sample in the first phase was made up of either presidents or chief operatives, given that they are directly related to the functioning of the NSO. These respondents are often also legal representatives, so they directly face

other governing problems in NSOs.

The next problem in governing NSOs is personal expertise, which 44 (42.3%) cited as a big problem. Although not all respondents are responsible according to the current laws in Croatia, almost half of them think that personal expertise in governing NSOs is one of the main problems. Compared to the previous research phase, a smaller percentage of respondents (20.83%) consider personal expertise one of the biggest problems. The first phase stated it as a problem, but this phase of the research gave additional significance to this problem.

Volunteerism was mentioned as a problem by 36 (34.6%) respondents, with as many as 68 (65.4%) respondents who did not mention volunteerism as one of the main problems. In the previous research phase, 37.5 % of respondents (nine of 24) cited volunteerism as a major problem. This problem also turned out to be the most significant. This discrepancy probably stems from the fact that, in the previous phase of the research, the respondents were primarily presidents and chief operatives who faced a great deal of responsibility concerning decisions made because they also had legal responsibility.

The last proposed problem in governing NSOs is related to the legal framework. Only 13 respondents (12.5%) believe this is a problem. The legal framework and the existing organizational structure were this research's starting point and base. They do not prevent changes and the improvement of governance in NSOs. Even in the previous research phase, only two people (8.33%) expressed this as a possible problem. Some of them stated that NSOs function on a similar principle as business.

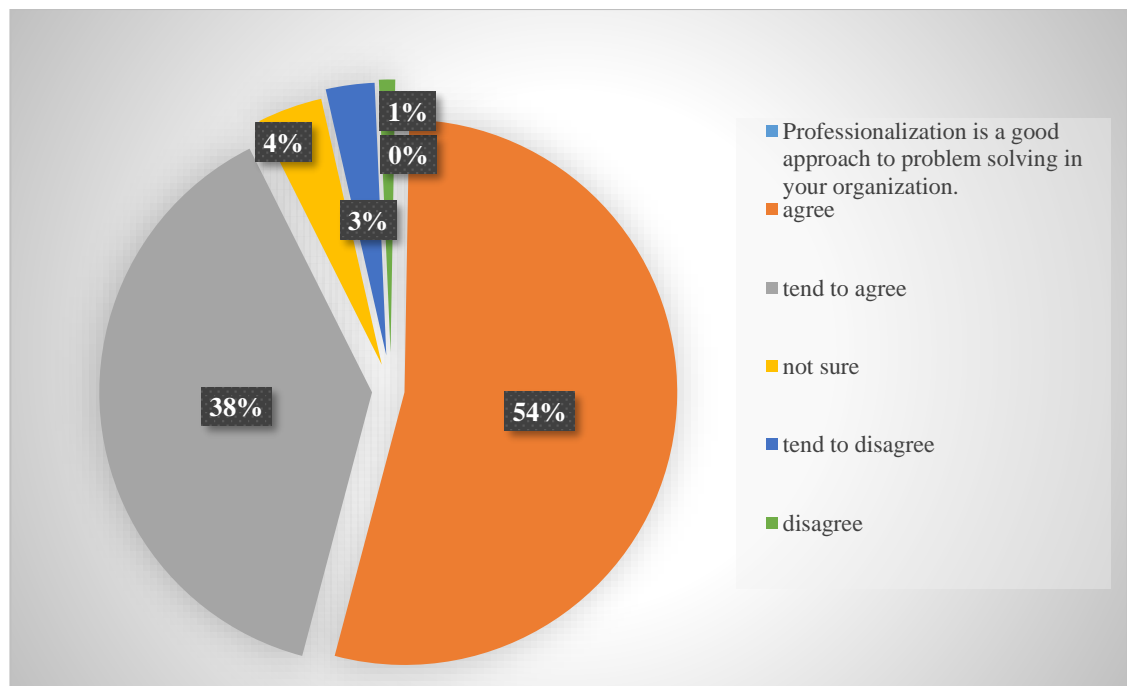
After defining the biggest problems in sport governance, the respondents were offered a solution: professionalization is a good approach to solving the problems in NSOs. The provided statement was scaled and shows that 53.8% of respondents agree that this is a good approach, and another 38.5% tend to agree, meaning 92.3% accepted this as a solution. The total percentage of those who tend to disagree and disagree is 3.9%,

showing minimal disagreement (Figure 17). Let us consider the results of descriptive statistics and the defined maximum (5) and minimum values (1). The mean value, i.e., the area around which most answers move, is 4.41 ( $SD = 0.783$ ), which is a high number in the positive part of the scale, which shows that respondents support professionalism as a good approach to solving problems in their NSOs. If we compare the results obtained in this phase with those of the previous phase, the results are almost the same, which means that the direction towards professionalism is right.

A small number of respondents (3.8%) do not think professionalization is the solution, i.e., are not sure whether the move towards NSO professionalization is good.

**Figure 17**

*Professionalization is a Good Approach – Frequency (Degrees of Agreement)*



Governing structures in NSOs are currently facing significant challenges. In this context, professionalizing NSOs seems to be a suitable strategy to meet these challenges and other current problems. Further analysis showed in which direction they should go.

The following section presents one of the segments of possible professionalization in NSOs.

## **6.2 Theme 2: The Professionalization of the Governing Functions of NSOs and the Necessary Competencies to Perform this Role**

This section analyzes the respondents' answers related to the key persons/functions in the NSOs that make key decisions related to the functioning of the NSO. NSO Assemblies appoint the president of the NSO, who nominates board members who, together with the presidents, are the main actors in the functioning of the NSO. Since one of the goals of this thesis was to examine the possibility of professionalization of leading functions in NSOs (e.g., the president as a leading person), the set of interview questions related to the topic is shown in [Table 4](#) as follows:

The question of whether NSOs are governed by unpaid volunteers is the problem that leads to the question of whether board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, could improve sport governance. It is arguable whether the presidents or any other board-level functionaries devote enough time to have a complete insight into implementing the board's decisions. Volunteers usually have other jobs, so it is questionable how much time they have to devote to work on NSO boards. All that leads to the question of which qualifications are essential, why, and consequently, what qualifications board members should have to lead effectively. Professionalization establishes acceptable qualifications, recommends best practices, and promptly helps board members oversee the complete implementation decision process.

The sample for these interviews was the most significant NSO representatives regarding success criteria in Croatian sport, plus a few representatives of regional NSOs. It is important to note that presidents and other board members in the Republic of Croatia are volunteers. The people who are part of this research are respected in their work (lawyers, businesspeople, university professors, successful Olympic athletes), and most

of them hold important positions in the international federations of their sport. It is also important because they know how NSOs function in Europe and the world. All of them can contribute to changes in the governing of sports, as stated at the beginning of this research, by using all the advantages of sports for the development of society. Furthermore, these persons do not receive compensation for their work but perform functions for which they bear financial and personal responsibility. Apart from them, the main (paid) operatives implement decisions made by volunteers. Chief operatives are most often proposed to board members by the president because the president and the chief operative, in most cases, are responsible for the work of the NSO.

The fact is that all NSOs (except the Croatian Football Federation) are run by volunteers (volunteer boards), and 37.5% of respondents see this as a problem. Considering that they make strategic decisions, R14OC, an operative in one NSO, states: “I would very much like the President to be a professional. There are NSOs in Europe that have professionals. I think it is inevitable. It would be good. The system would be more straightforward.”

Five respondents mentioned that the presidents of successful NSOs in some European countries and globally are professionals. Thus, R019VR, the president of one regional NSO, states:

“I think some measures yes. In the past less so. They used to accept people from business or from the state. It must be the consent of the NSO. Our International and European organization have professionals as Presidents. He does a very difficult and responsible job.”

In NSOs, governing structures make decisions having in mind the resemblance with businesses as stated by R3VC, the president of one NSO: “My opinion is that the Presidents to lead the NSO well, which means that they must be available and perform their role at the domestic and international level, must be present in the NSO. It takes time.”

There were other opinions regarding governing structures in Croatian NSOs.

Some respondents believe the current governing structure is good based on their positions and beliefs about how the function is performed. R001OC states: “People who have been in the sport for many years are usually chosen. Former athletes, those who led county federations... However, they distinguished themselves by volunteering in sports.”

In several NSOs in the Republic of Croatia, the title of the general secretary has been changed to the title of director (which is closer to the definitions of the main operatives in the businesses). Of course, the mentioned change entails a new approach and new competence requirements for the chief operative in NSOs. However, following the Sports Act (2022), boards in NSOs make decisions on the functioning of NSOs (strategic decisions), creating situations where NSO responsibilities are sometimes mixed. This research is directed towards functioning issues and further preservation of existing structures of NSOs. R016VC, the president of one NSO, sees the situation in the matter mentioned above in this way: “On one side, there are professional functions, and on the other, functions in governing bodies. Employees and professionals are paid for their work and are responsible for it. The Statute defines the primary and responsible function of the NSO.”

[Table 4](#) shows that 25% of respondents are unsure or do not think the current governing situation in NSOs is a problem. On whether responsible people devote enough time and if professionals would improve governance, as seen from [Table 4](#), 54.17% of respondents answered that they do not have enough time and that professionals, rather than volunteers, would still be a solution for improving governance. R18VR, the president of one regional NSO, also speaks about the complexity and seriousness of the governing system in NSOs:

“If they are professionals, they have time for it and respond. The sport system must change. It is not suitable for NSO officials to be volunteers. They do not have enough time as volunteers to do all the work that has to be done.”

The framework of the functioning of NSOs has changed significantly in the last

10 years, and obligations towards internal and external stakeholders are increasing, so questions arise about the competencies that presidents and board members should have to lead a successful and efficient NSO.

Performing a function within one NSO or other sport organization requires specific, general, technical, or social competencies. The view of a board based on competencies has already attracted the attention of scholars. Following the topic of this thesis, which refers to professionalism in specific segments of an NSO, this research questions the importance of competencies in the governing structures of an NSO, especially the president, and what qualifications are important for governing an NSO.

[Table 4](#) shows the respondents' answers on this topic. Sport qualifications are mentioned as important by 75%, but a higher percentage of respondents (79.17%) say that governing competencies are the key. The importance of competencies in governing (if leadership skills are added to governing skills) is pointed out by 91.67% of respondents. R002VC, a former top athlete, states: “It would be good to have competencies in that sport, but not necessarily. Governmental competencies are also necessary. We have professional competencies through expert committees and commissions. Expert committees should exist everywhere.”

Most respondents emphasized the importance of sport knowledge for governing NSOs precisely because of the vision of sport development but, as seen in [Table 4](#), not without governing competencies. It is important to note that almost all volunteer respondents came from the sport they are currently running, so these answers are logical. However, they also represent successful sports, so these arguments are in their favour. The way to governing functions in NSO, as R03VC, the president of one NSO, points out, is:

“The presidents must be from the sport they are running. What happens is that Assemblies or Executive Boards appoint people to the position of president from business or politics. That is not good. I think the president has to go through certain sports levels to understand it. They do not necessarily have to be top

athletes.”

It is important to note that this topic shows the extent of the complexity of running an NSO, which is also evident from the literature at the beginning of this sub-section. To conclude Theme 2, R05VC, a person responsible for governing in an NSO with national and international experience (one NSO president) quotes:

“You definitely need to have qualifications but also some experience in certain domains. The secretary and the President are functions whose qualifications are to be watched. Secretaries must have extensive knowledge to work in the NSO because of the nature of the work and the responsibilities they have to cover.”

It is also important to add that the work of leading people in NSOs mainly depends on the main operatives who implement their decisions. Since presidents and board members are volunteers and cooperate most closely with the chief operative, it was interesting to determine whether there is a collision in the performance of duties. The respondents' answers were entirely in the direction of good cooperation. Conducting interviews with presidents and chief operatives in each NSO to get a comprehensive picture of the NSO's work and possible problems was essential.

R14OC states:

“The General Secretary is engaged all the time. All problems come to operatives. The chief operative decides to a certain level. Then he communicates with the President when it comes to big competitions, the organization of the league, etc. The President and Vice-President are invited and they consult the Board Members.”

Furthermore, presidents themselves propose operatives they will work with, and the fact is, as R021VC, one president points out: “It mainly depends on the Presidents. They are hierarchically higher. I chose a General Secretary who has the necessary competencies and I teach him and mentor him continuously.”

It is also important to add the need for conjoint skills, as R22VC says: “Furthermore, communication, management, and leadership skills are necessary. It is hard to balance everything.”



The literature dealing with sports governance includes the topic of leadership and emphasizes the complexity of leading sport organizations. The pilot qualitative study results on this theme agree with the main qualitative research results.

In the main quantitative research, we see the problem of volunteers in top governing functions in NSOs. NSO board members, as has been repeated many times, make vital decisions for the functioning of NSOs and, particularly, for the functioning of sport organizations. It was essential to examine whether this is a problem, how volunteers are engaged, and whether board professionals would improve governance. The analysis results through the scaled approach show the following: 22 respondents, or 21.2%, fully agree, and 53.8% believe the problem is that NSOs are run by unpaid volunteers. Furthermore, 64 of 104 (57.7%) respondents believe that board members do not devote enough time to NSOs and do not have insight into how their decisions are implemented. According to these results, it is evident that the members of the governing boards tend to support the introduction of professionalism in governing positions. The final question of this topic is whether professionals, as opposed to volunteers, would improve sport governance. Of all respondents, 84 (80.8%) believe professionals should be on the governing boards. Furthermore, 14 of them (13.5%) are not sure or do not know if this is a good solution for NSOs, while six respondents (5.7%) tend to disagree or completely disagree with the notion that professionals could improve sport governance. As stated by some researchers, the decision-making and strategic abilities of the board are becoming a severe problem, and the conclusion is that the board members of essential NSOs in Croatia are inclined to this way of thinking.

The results of the descriptive statistics show that most results in this theme move from 3.69 to 4.12 with an *SD* from 0.917 to 1.183. The mean is 4.41. Considering the problem that NSOs are governed by unpaid volunteers, the mean is 3.69 (*SD* = 1.189). It means that the value is above the average and that opinions are divided on this issue.

Furthermore, regarding the question of whether board members devote enough time and have sufficient insight into the implementation of the decisions made, the mean is 3.26 ( $SD = 1.307$ ), which is slightly above the average, as is expected. It is the second lowest mean in the results of the Questionnaire. Regarding whether professionals instead of volunteers in NSOs would improve governance, the mean is 4.12 ( $SD = 0.917$ ), which is significantly above the average and is a logical continuation of the previous statements.

For 16.4% of respondents, who tend to disagree and disagree, volunteers governing NSOs are not a problem, while another 8.7% are unsure about this issue. Even 30.7% believe that volunteers pay enough attention to NSOs and have enough information to implement decisions. Since the respondents are people who hold governing functions in NSOs, it is not surprising that they consider themselves sufficiently engaged.

If we compare the results of this analysis with the main qualitative research, where representatives of NSOs were asked about the problem of governing by volunteers and if professionals in the governing boards could improve governance, the results were 58.33% and 54.17%, respectively. It can be concluded that the direction towards the professionalization of governing structures is generally more acceptable.

Boards often include members of clubs, former athletes, coaches, etc., who have knowledge of sport but often lack the competencies needed for decision-making. Qualifications are crucial for governing functions for 93 (89.4%) of respondents who answered affirmatively (agree and tend to agree). Only five (4.8%) respondents disagreed. Continuing the Questionnaire, the respondents were offered four options for the necessary qualifications for governing in NSOs: leadership skills, governing skills, specific sport knowledge, and other skills (e.g., knowledge of law and finance). The options mentioned were offered as a result of interviews from the previous research phase. For 58 (55.8%) respondents, leadership skills were not mentioned as the most important competency.

However, governing skills were stated by 77 (74%) respondents stated that governing skills are the most important skill for governing NSOs. Only 29 (27.9%) respondents mention specific sport knowledge as an essential competency. Therefore, not even a third of respondents think that sport knowledge is necessary for running NSOs. Respondents could choose two options.

It is important to point out that, concerning the qualifications required for governing, the respondents generally tended to view them as essential for governing NSOs. The mean is 4.28 ( $SD = 0.950$ ), the second most significant positive result.

In the main qualitative research phase, a sample of 24 respondents, 79.17% consider governing skills essential, but 75% consider specific sport knowledge almost equally significant for the governing function in NSOs. The quantitative phase of the research points to the need for governing competencies of NSO presidents, which leads to a business approach and a convergence of NSOs with businesses.

The new theme that emerged through the pilot qualitative study refers to the education of the leading people of an NSO to be able to perform their functions fully. The number of stakeholders in sport, both internal and external, which are important for the survival of a sport, has been increasing over the years. Since sport governance is a specific area, people who govern and make key decisions in NSOs should have certain degrees of knowledge to make quality decisions; thus, the question of educating such people in sports has arisen. In the first theme of this Main qualitative research, which refers to problems in sport governance, some respondents have already emphasized the issue of a person's expertise.

NSOs differ from other non-profit organizations because they are established to govern other sport organizations that provide services in their respective sports. An insight into the question of whether there should be any specific educational programmes for sport governance and who should implement them was given by some respondents.

The answers of the interviewees indeed indicated the need for educational programmes.

R13VC states:

“I think we need education for the sports business. These are management functions. It exists in the world. The biggest problem of sports is uneducated people. Athletes move to some positions without adequate training. Maybe the Croatian Olympic Committee should organize it.”

For example, NSO presidents most often represent the NSO and, as already stated, have great responsibility by law. Since the people occupying the positions with the most responsibilities are volunteers, the question of how to meet expectations arises. R016VC, a president of one NSO, lists the knowledge that is needed to perform the highest sport function qualitatively:

“This is a fundamental prerequisite if we want the sport to progress. Governance of sport organizations is an area that includes several completely different 'conventional' university studies: economics and management, law, international relations and kinesiology, so if we want to take the right step, an education programme in this direction should create a synergy of these four studies.”

Furthermore, R18VR, the head of a regional NSO, proposes the criteria which comprise a module that all NSO leading persons would have to go through when being elected for the position:

“I would create a model of education for sports officials. The Ministry of Sports, in cooperation with the Olympic Committee, should be charged for the education module. Every new official should pass the education. I think they lack knowledge, primarily financial.”

Almost all respondents point out the need for education in governing functions. The respondents mention different forms of education: seminars, workshops, etc. Some respondents also mention scientific institutions, like universities, that could oversee this education. The exchange of experiences and problems in sport governance seems very important, so R05VC, the president of one NSO, points out: “Although educational institutions deal with this, I think someone with governing experience in sports should share their experience with others.”

Concerning institutions that should educate leading people in sports, the Olympic

Committees' education module is mentioned (43.48%) most frequently, with the line ministry (34.78%) also noted by respondents. In the home country, this mostly refers to the obligations towards all institutions that the leaders have in exercising their leadership function. Here, we return to the topic of this thesis, which deals with professionalization in sport governance. As R002VC, one president states: "The sector is developing, and the potential is huge. It is even strange that they are not there."

Following all the above, the duties and responsibilities of NSO leaders are constantly changing. Sport development is their primary task, so the need for education, not only at the level of the country where the NSO exists but also in the broader context (European and world federations), is inevitable.

In Main quantitative research, organizing specific educational programmes is necessary for 97 respondents, i.e., 94.3%, who agree or tend to agree. They were offered types of educational programmes that would correspond to the demands of the work they perform in NSOs. There is no consensus among NSO board members about the type of educational programmes because 44 or 42.3% believe that courses, seminars, and workshops on this topic are sufficient. A one-year exchange of experiences of presidents or board members in governance was chosen as an option by 35 (33.7%) respondents, while 21 (20.2%) believe creating special modules for governing functions is necessary. Only 4 (3.8%) respondents think a particular study is needed for sport governance. Descriptive statistics shows that many respondents support the mentioned special educational programmes. The mean is 4.62 ( $SD = 0.628$ ), meaning this question has the largest number of respondents who think similarly on this statement.

Among the options offered regarding the provision of educational programmes, 61 (58.7%) believe that the Croatian Olympic Committee should implement them, while 29 (27.9%) of respondents would choose the line ministry to implement them.

In the main qualitative research phase, the segments of programme types and

implementers were combined, so 43.48% of respondents considered the Croatian Olympic Committee module for governing functions in NSOs the most acceptable option. 34.78% of respondents also mentioned the line ministry as a good option. The results of both main phases are similar.

It is important to note that the respondents believe specific education is necessary and understand that changes in sport require new knowledge and changes in governing NSOs. The obligations that NSOs have towards various stakeholders and the processes of NSOs will be discussed in the following section to show the similarity with the business world and point towards the process of professionalization as a means to improve sport governance. Considering the increasing obligations in governing NSOs, which include legal duties and obligations towards internal and external stakeholders in sport, the question of unique educational programmes arises not only at the level of NSOs in a particular country but also at the international level.

### **6.3 Theme 3: The Common Processes in NSOs**

As stated in the previous sub-section, an important area that needs to be investigated in the functioning of NSOs is the 'specific' processes, i.e., the respondents have been asked, for example, whether the decision-making process on implementation in NSOs should be professionalized to increase efficiency and what they think common processes in NSOs should be. The question turned out to be highly complex, which is presented in further analysis. Interesting categories emerged from the analysis ([Table 4](#)): accounting, audits, digitalization, legal affairs, marketing services, medical service, sport as a process, organized competitions, and standards regulation.

The largest number of respondents (as many as 26.09%) stated that it is difficult to define processes. The results of the pilot qualitative study only partially mirror this. This analysis showed the complexity of the sport system, the need for further research, and the need for professionalization to analyze previous themes that arose in the main

qualitative research. All sports (Olympic/non-Olympic, individual/team, etc.) have their own specifics. R010OC, a chief operative in one NSO, states: “They exist, but they are difficult to define. Some organizational processes and tasks are common to all NSOs and should be improved. But each sport has its own specifics.”

The following most common answer of respondents is related to accounting (17.39%). Accounting is very complex in Croatia considering all the legal regulations related to the business of non-profit organizations. Unfortunately, there are not enough people in NSOs who can follow all the regulations and ensure the transparent spending of state funds following the regulations by the existing law. Since the leaders of NSOs are volunteers and in most cases, represent NSOs, R18VR, the president of one regional NSO, defined the problem meaningfully:

“Probably the accounting part. It is a technique. Many accounts require control. For large NSOs it is not a problem, but for small NSOs it should be a joint service. I am not sure. We are all connected. We are connected to the European and the World Federations.”

Part of the problem in the functioning of NSOs is governance in sport, so the processes that need to be changed, improved, and even professionalized should follow these principles. The weaknesses of individual segments in governance should be detected through the analysis. The above answers also point to misunderstandings and ambiguities in the decision-making process. Coordination with different stakeholders in sports, the pyramidal structure of the sport organization system, and the diversity of individual sports show the existing degree of complexity, as R12VC, one NSO president, points out:

“Everyone should have defined regulations defining their Statutes and harmonizing the NSO with the Croatian Olympic Committee and its international federations and the compliance of clubs with the NSO. Process regulations should be standard. For example, the Ethics Commission, Health Commission, and Infrastructure Development Commission.”

Since all NSOs function in a similar way”, it was important to get an answer on

how processes could be defined to facilitate the functioning and progress of sport, take advantage of all possibilities, and alleviate shortcomings in sport governance. It is important to emphasize that the state allocates the largest part of the funds for the functioning of the NSO. Some question the whole situation and state that this depends on who the sport products are for. R018VR, the president of one NSO, states:

“Lots of processes. 90% of the process is shared. Who is the buyer of our item? The one who is a fan, persuasion through networks, finance, digital platforms for monitoring results and other things, organization of competitions (there are differences) and the like.”

Research on the topic of professionalism as a way of improvement implied, as already stated, the professionalization of processes in NSOs, seeking to improve the existing framework. R21VC, the president of a non-Olympic NSO, cites a solution that includes a quality control system that undergoes certification and states: “We have an ISO 9000 quality control system in our NSO and are probably the only ones who apply it. We introduced it five years ago. We have written down our processes in the NSO.”

This section analyzes the thoughts of the leading people on the topic of the process. Still, it shows a misunderstanding of the whole process or, perhaps, instead, the complexity in which NSOs function. Furthermore, it shows in which direction the sport system is going and how business orientation is inevitable to improve governance in NSOs further.

Starting from the definition that professionalization is the process of transforming activities towards the expertise of professionalism, based on the previous phase of the research, four types of processes that the respondents considered problematic and vital for improving the functioning of NSOs were singled out: accounting, legal affairs and marketing services as main processes, organized competitions, medical services, and digitalization.

The first type of process (accounting, legal affairs, and marketing services) is crucial for NSOs as non-profit organizations, as it is for for-profit organizations. The legal



frameworks in which NSOs and other sports at the regional and local levels exist are almost identical, and the people who lead these sport organizations also have great degrees of responsibility. Accounting, legal, and marketing services are crucial for the functioning of NSOs for 85 (81.7%) of respondents. To follow up on the previous topic related to the functions and competencies of the governing people, awareness of the change of direction in governing a sport organization is crucial. Given the demands of all stakeholders in sport on whom NSOs depend, this is logical.

In the main qualitative phase of the research, the largest percentage of respondents could not define these common processes, but still, 17.39% listed accounting services as those subject to professionalism.

Furthermore, the organization of competitions is one of the processes that 47 (45.2%) mentioned as a process that should be professionalized. Although organizing competitions should be something performed according to certain standards, it is evident that less than 50% of respondents consider it necessary. Many probably have experience organizing competitions, so they think they know enough about the process.

Digitalization as a process that facilitates the functioning of NSOs was offered as an option to the respondents, and 41 of them (39.4%) believe that this process is crucial and needs improvement. All NSOs, following the requirements of stakeholders and the Decree on Office Operations (2021), are obliged to digitalize processes, which is complicated for working in NSOs.

Medical services are another segment subject to professionalization because today, sport function in a more demanding environment and under the pressure of results, creating major problems. According to 14.4% of respondents, the formation of professional medical teams at the level of national selection is becoming necessary and should be professionalized.

The main qualitative and quantitative research phases on the issue of common

processes in NSOs that would be the subject of professionalization were demanding for the respondents. Since a significant part (26.09%) of them could not define common processes in the previous phase, in the quantitative phase, the processes offered were defined as an obligation of NSOs following existing laws. The professionalization of the functions discussed in the previous theme is impossible without the professionalization of the processes. This theme is essential for further research in the field of sport governance. Through the governance lens, this thesis aims to show how sport should be professionalized in response to communities that expect more from it.

#### **6.4 Theme 4: Success Metrics for NSOs**

According to the Sports Act (2022) and National Sports Program 2019-2026 (2019), NSOs are responsible for the development of their sports. The NSO leaders were also asked how they measure the success of the functioning of NSOs. Although it is evident what the survival of NSOs in Croatia depends on, in the context of the topic of this thesis, it was necessary to see how uniform the leading people of NSOs are in their answers.

As expected, NSO leaders put sporting results (54.17%) first when measuring performance. This measure is the most important because it leads to allocating financial resources to NSOs from the state budget and sponsors, as well as the possibility of exercising several other rights. Most importantly, the leaders of NSOs survive in their positions thanks to sport results. As R10OC, one of NSO presidents, states: “Sport results. I think that is the most important thing, that is why we exist and that only with the results will we receive funds and survive.”

Since there has been a crisis in team sports in Croatia for years (traditionally, medals at major competitions, such as the Olympic Games and other international competitions, were won commonly), the question arises as to whether sporting results is such a dominant criterion for the development of the sport. As R14OC, an operative of

one NSO of a team sport states: “Sport is changing, moving forward. How many spectators are at matches? How many people follow us?”

In addition to medals as success metrics, massiveness, in the sense of number of clubs (33.33%) and especially number of athletes (37.5%), is the next important criterion for the success of NSOs and, accordingly, for NSO leaders. Work done on founding clubs and popularizing sports, as stated by R13VC, the president of one NSO, is another benchmark: “NSO performance is measured by medals. We have been the most successful individual sport for the last ten years. Mass is another essential criterion. These are the two important benchmarks.”

Other factors are also mentioned as measures of the success of NSOs. The respondents refer to the number of organized competitions, the organizational system, and the realization of plans. The question of the measure of success leads to similar results in the main qualitative research as in the pilot qualitative study, as expected. Since there are no defined performance measures related to the organization of NSOs, measuring the satisfaction of many stakeholders in sport undoubtedly requires further development and changes in the governing system. Today, the sport system and NSOs depend on volunteers in the governing and professional areas, which, when the sport is becoming one of the most vital engines of social development in the world, cannot survive, making a paradigm shift necessary. All respondents mention the problem of volunteerism, especially in organizational affairs and the related issue of efficiency, and as R15OC, an operative in one NSO, points out:

“According to different factors: the organizational system (the Statute, documents, etc.), sports part (sport results, mass, infrastructure, etc.). All the world, including the successful Croatian sport federations, must have professionalism. They also rely on volunteers.”

The success metrics resulting from the previous phase's interviews were offered to the respondents through scaling. NSOs are recognized and financed accordingly. For professionalization in NSOs to be implemented, defining what makes NSOs successful is

necessary, i.e., establishing success metrics.

The results of the main quantitative research are as follows:

The sport results are considered the most important success metric for 91 (87.5%) of respondents who agree or tend to agree with this statement. In Croatia, they are also the basic criteria for being financed by the state, so this result is expected. The sample for this research consists of NSOs, which, when it comes to Olympic sports, are the most significant in achieving results (participants of the Olympic Games). Regarding non-Olympic sports, it also consists of sports with high levels of success in terms of results.

For 74 (71.1%) respondents, the number of registered athletes and clubs is logically significant for NSOs and society. In addition, this is also one of the criteria for financing. Of course, massiveness also provides a degree of contribution to the community.

The number of organized competitions in Croatia is also one of the measures of the success of NSOs. It is an important indicator of the success of NSOs for 74 (71.1%) of respondents, while only 53 (51%) of them think that the number of spectators at competitions is an important measure of the success of NSOs. Viewership of sports is important for its development, so this result is a possible subject for further investigation.

One of the most important measures of the success of NSOs is their financial stability, as shown by the opinion of 85 (81.8%) respondents. This number indicates that finances are a key problem in the governing and functioning of NSOs in Croatia.

Using the dictionary of descriptive statistics, the statements about the success metrics of NSOs range from the highest mean of 4.06 ( $SD = 0.984$ ) to the lowest of 3.04 ( $SD = 1.336$ ). As stated before, the financial stability of NSOs belongs to the statements with which respondents agree the most. The lowest number of respondents, with a mean of 4.05 ( $SD = 0.999$ ), confirms that sport results are a key measure of success. The number of spectators at competitions is a measure of success for NSOs and is the statement with

the lowest level of agreement, a mean of 3.04 ( $SD = 1.336$ ). Respondents have approximately similar opinions about the number of athletes and clubs ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.032$ ) and the number of competitions organized in Croatia ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.038$ ), which means that opinions are divided on this issue.

The results significantly differ when comparing the data with the previous research phase. Massiveness is a measure of success that coincides in both phases of research (about 70%). Other measures, such as sport results, are shown to be significant, although there is a significant difference in this regard. Respondents in the main quantitative research consider this measure of success significant (87.5%). In comparison, 54.17% of interviewees in the main qualitative research think it is only one of the measures of success for NSOs. If we look at other measures of success, the opinions do not match.

### **6.5 Theme 5: Professionalization as a New Approach in Governing NSOs**

At the end of the interviews in the main qualitative research, the participants were asked for a direct answer on whether the professionalization of NSOs to improve governance could be a success story for NSOs, and 83.33% of respondents agreed with it.

Given that the topic of this thesis is the possibility of professionalization to improve governance in NSOs, this topic confirms its importance among the respondents. As already stated, this research covers almost all successful Olympic and non-Olympic NSOs, plus three regional NSOs. Considering the complexity of the sport system and the way it functions, obligations towards stakeholders have increased. Furthermore, there is an increase in competitions, problems constantly occurring with doping, etc. Moreover, the sport is becoming increasingly complex and requires the engagement of teams that must follow the athletes. All the above indicates that sport governance has become increasingly demanding, and the question of who will take over leadership functions in

NSOs in future has arisen. Governing in NSOs is becoming more and more like governing in businesses, which respondents from the business world confirmed. The respondents' quotes on this topic best illustrate the problem and complexity of sport governance. Thus, R012VC, one president states:

“The only future of Croatian sport will be professionalization. Amateurism can no longer be the base. Sport has become a branch of industry. If we look at the world industry, sport is at the top in revenue. And that is the pinnacle of the economy.”

The problem of running NSOs by volunteers becomes an obstacle to developing sport and the need for a new form of organization in NSOs. R100C, an operative in one NSO adds: “The NSO should be like a business with all its characteristics. Volunteerism is not the solution.”

Building on the previous problems present in NSOs shows that specific knowledge is needed for leading NSOs. According to the respondents, knowledge of governing and sport is crucial. There are few people with these skills, so the issue of education in sport governance will be of great importance in the coming period. R13VC, one NSO president, pointed out the importance of education: “Absolutely. But with no education, that will not be possible. NSOs are run by people who come from sports without knowledge and education.”

Future research on this topic should undoubtedly include the issue of professionalism in governance in these challenging times for sport. In Croatia, NSOs, following the recommendation of the Croatian Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee, do not have professionals in governing positions. Following the findings obtained through the research in this area, an attempt should be made to change the NSO in sport because, as R02VC, one president notes: “Again, it is essential to introduce professionalism. It is challenging to lead an NSO voluntarily. We can set specific requirements, but to expect the best results, the NSO should be a professional organization.”

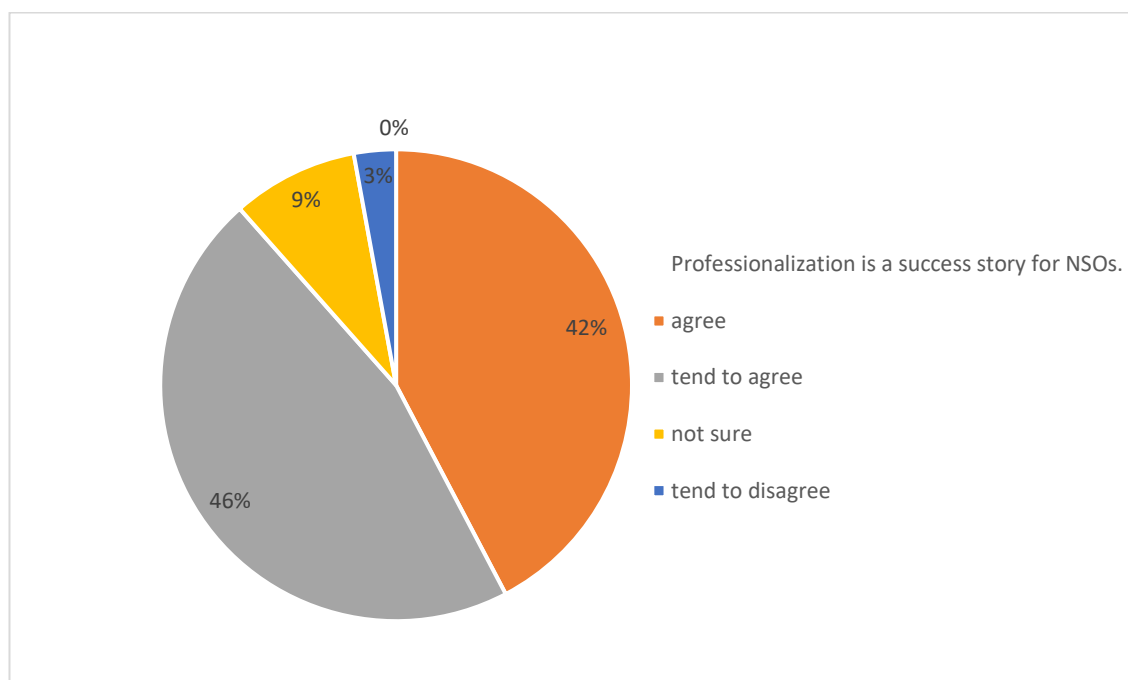
However, this research shows that 12% of respondents are unsure that the current way of governing NSOs should be changed, and R020VC thinks the current system is acceptable by stating: “No. The legal situation in which the NSOs are organized is currently good. Only coaches must be professionals if we want to succeed outside the borders of our country.”

All of the above requires significant organizational changes in NSOs. The respondents' attitudes shown in this research point out the problems of the tradition of volunteerism in sport. Strengthening managerialism in sport and changes in implementing new management instruments based on efficiency are necessary, and professionalization in NSOs seems inevitable. Many NSOs worldwide already employ paid professionals in leading positions of NSOs. It is a problem not only for non-profit sports organizations but also for other non-profit organizations that are important for the development of society.

At the end of the second phase of the research, a response to professionalism was proposed as a successful NSO story. Respondents' opinions on all previous themes indicate that the path to professionalism is unquestionable.

**Figure 18**

*Professionalization is a Success Story for NSOs*



As Figure 18 shows, 44 (42.3%) respondents agree that professionalism leads to the success of NSOs. If we add the 48 (46.2%) respondents with views which tend towards professionalization, we get the result that, of the 104 respondents, 92 (88.5%) support NSO professionalization. This result is expected because of the demanding environment in which sport organizations exist with stakeholders whose requirements must be respected. Since research on this topic is rare, and there are none in Croatia, this research indicates the usefulness of the topic of professionalization. The research covers almost all successful Olympic and non-Olympic NSOs. The descriptive statistics expresses professionalization as a success story for NSOs with a mean of 4.28 ( $SD = 0.743$ ).

Comparing the results with the previous stage of research, 83.33% of respondents opted for professionalism as a success story to improve the functioning of NSOs. The results are almost equal in both phases of the research.



Table 7 shows that professionalization is a good approach to solving problems in NSOs according to 92.3% of the participants, and the number of people who think professionals should be on boards is 80.8%, i.e., a correlation of .392. These results indicate that there is a significant relationship between variables/statements.

**Table 7**  
*Correlations between Variables*

Variable	Statistic			
	Correlation	Count	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.
Professionalization is a good approach to problem-solving in your organization.	.392	104	.216	0.544
<b>Professionalization is a good approach to problem solving in your organization.</b>	<b>Board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, could improve sport governance.</b>			
	N	%	N	%
agree	56	53.8%	40	38.5%
tend to agree	40	38.5%	44	42.3%
not sure	4	3.8%	14	13.5%
tend to disagree	3	2.9%	4	3.8%
disagree	1	1.0%	2	1.9%

Forms in which professionalism will be conducted should be explored and built in future. Based on the existing studies, we define the professionalization of NSOs as a dynamic process towards more rational functioning, guided by the goals of improving the organization's performance and ensuring its role as a service to its members. Due to the increasing influence of for-profit organizations, it is becoming evident that transforming sport organizations from a volunteer-driven to a more business-oriented one is starting. Some NSOs attempt, at the internal level, to include, for example, the employment of

paid managers and staff. Based on an extensive data collection from multiple NSOs, several scholars have proposed typologies to describe and predict their structural-strategic patterns.

## 6.6 Summary

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research through five key themes that emerged from the qualitative phase. For each topic, the main qualitative research findings are given first, then main quantitative research, and a comparison, i.e. convergence and divergence, is given. Table 8 provides a comparative view of the research findings:

**Table 8**

*Comparison of Main Qualitative Research and Main Quantitative Research Findings*

Number	Theme	Sub-theme	Main qualitative research	Main quantitative research
1.	The biggest governing problem and Professionalization as a solution	The biggest governing problem	Volunteers 37.5	Insufficient funds 72.1%
		Professionalization as a solution	83.3%	92.3%
2.	The professionalization of the governing functions of NSOs and the necessary competencies to perform this role	Professionalization of the governing functions of NSOs	54.17%	80.8%
		The necessary competencies to perform this role	Governing 79.17% and sport competencies 75%	Governing competencies 74%
3.	Education of NSO leaders	Necessary education	95.65%	94.3%
		Education providers	Croatian Olympic Committee 43.48%	Croatian Olympic Committee 58.7%
			Line ministry 34.78%	Line ministry 27.9%

<b>Number</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Main qualitative research</b>	<b>Main quantitative research</b>
4.	The common processes in NSOs	The type of process	Difficult to define 26.09% Accounting 17.39%	Accounting, legal and marketing services 81.7%
5.	Success metrics for NSOs	The most important success metrics	Sports results 54.17%	Sport results 87.5%
6.	Professionalization as a new approach in governing		88.5%	83.33 %

The findings show similarities in almost all key themes in both phases of this research and thus indicate the importance of the main topic, i.e. the importance of introducing professionalization in governing NSOs.

## CHAPTER 7 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of both research phases and compares those findings with the existing literature on sport governance. Starting from the main research question of this thesis: “In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance in Croatia?” [Section 1.5](#) defines the objectives of this research. The participants in the research were the leading people of the most significant NSOs in Croatia and three regional NSOs. Accordingly, the pilot qualitative study was conducted on a sample of seven people so that the interview questions could be tested and corrected. The main qualitative phase of the research was performed on a sample of 24 participants. The analysis of the results was the basis for the questionnaire for the main quantitative phase of the research, which was sent to 243 people and 104 (42.8 %) filled out the questionnaire. As in the qualitative phase, in the quantitative phase of the research, all significant NSOs were included, so only two NSOs (in Main quantitative research) whose athletes are Olympic medal winners for Croatia (since 1992) were not included because they were not available in the research phase. Those two NSOs do not have a significant number of registered clubs and athletes. For the data to be generalized and relevant, including as many participants as possible was important. The findings of both main phases of the research gave the answers concerning the main topic of this research and confirmed the stated objectives of this thesis ([Section 1.5](#)).

According to the Sports Act (2022), NSOs develop and promote sports following the National Sports Program 2019-2026 (2019) and defined tasks. This research starts at the top of the organizational pyramid, the NSOs. NSOs have a long tradition and still play a central role in sport organizations, promotion, and development, both nationally and internationally. The tasks of sport organizations include representing one or more sports, representing their interests to society, promoting competitive sports and organizing competitions, championships and sport events, and articulating the rules and regulations

governing them. In recent decades, the social, economic, and political influence of NSOs has increased in many countries. Legal obligations primarily give NSOs (and other sport organizations) many obligations and thus inevitably lead to changes that go toward professionalization. The interviews and questionnaire results show that the leading people are aware of the changes in the governing NSOs and understand that specific knowledge is needed to perform the above functions.

Service orientation, flexibility of membership forms, and quality governance are important instruments for the performance of sport organizations. They are associated with new task areas that apply modern forms of communication and media, so organizations' services can no longer be performed exclusively by volunteers but rather, to a certain extent, by paid employees. NSOs must obtain state funds in the context of changing priorities. They also cooperate with new partners, public and private institutions, and other stakeholders to receive further funds.

Based on all the above, one of the objectives of this thesis was to interview the main people in NSOs to see what they consider the biggest problems in sport governance.

The biggest governing problem in NSOs in the qualitative phase was the volunteers in NSO boards and personal expertise, unlike the quantitative phase, where insufficient funds were the biggest problem. The main quantitative research is more relevant because the sample was broadened to all board members, and a more significant number of NSOs (five more) and respondents were involved in the research. The pilot qualitative study also showed the same result. The leading people of NSOs do not have enough financial resources to enable the normal functioning and fulfilment of their obligations to all stakeholders and to regulate their sport following the Sports Act of the Republic of Croatia and the other laws related to the functioning of NSOs as non-profit organizations. However, due to changes in modern sport and society, NSOs are currently facing many challenges (Lamprecht et al., 2020; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). According

to Nagel et al. (2015), financial subsidies by the state and public bodies to national or regional sport federations can exert significant coercive pressure on local and national sport organizations. Furthermore, the literature deals explicitly with the issue of stakeholders in sports in the context of sport governance (Dowling et al., 2018; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015b; Naha & Hassan, 2018).

The question of volunteers or professional expertise as a problem from the main qualitative research phase seems logical because good governance requires dedicated and expert people. A significant part of the literature (Booth et al., 2015; O'Boyle & Hassan, 2016) focuses on human potential and the ability of the governing structures in NSOs, building on the findings of the first research phase.

Furthermore, professionalization is a good approach for solving the problems in NSOs for 83.3% of the main qualitative research and 92.3% of the main quantitative research, which shows a high degree of convergence.

Finances are a crucial factor in the professionalization of a sport organization. However, as Thiel et al. (2006) showed in their study, traditional organizational culture can be a significant obstacle to professionalization. Professionals and professionalization have been introduced into practice. This approach has many critical views, primarily because sport organizations are based on a voluntary culture, and their shift towards a business culture can be problematic (Nagel et al., 2015). The question of continuity, i.e., changes that could be implemented during this period, is also important for improving governance. This agrees with Clausen et al. (2018), who argued that professionalization is a dynamic process dependent on the size of the sport organization, with sport organizations becoming increasingly "*business-like through isomorphic change*". We can see how this professionalization (e.g., having a strategic plan) can help smaller NSOs reduce organizational problems (Parent et al., 2021). Because of their roles, NSOs have gained increasing importance in society. Shilbury and Ferkins (2011) specifically

mention the new tasks and challenges NSOs face. Because of this, quality, adaptability and orientation towards different stakeholders are important. The literature in this specific area is not extensive. According to Parent et al. (2021), NSOs and their member organizations are key actors within the sport system and have various relationships outside it (e.g., with the state, sponsors, and the media).

The findings about the professionalization of the governing functions of NSOs in both phases show a significant convergence in the opinions of the leading people of NSOs. Over 50% agree that the leading people should be professionals because presidents or other board-level functionaries do not devote enough time to fulfilling their duties in NSOs, mainly due to lacking time and being engaged elsewhere. They are not given particular tasks, and board members do not know their role. Some operatives in NSOs think that the engagement of the presidents and board members is inadequate because of long decision-making periods and the absence of cooperation with them. The existing literature questions volunteers in governance positions in sport organizations, mainly in the context of their role in boards and their competencies. The need to define the board's role is central to developing sport governance research and practice (Ferkins et al., 2005). Without clarity of what boards do, it is impossible to assess their effectiveness and contribution to organizations accurately (Huse, 2005). According to McLeod (2019), there are four main roles that boards perform: (1) setting and following the organization's mission; (2) enterprise planning activities such as developing financial policy and setting long-term plans; (3) appointing and monitoring the activities of the chief executive officer; and (4) managing community relations through activities such as fundraising and advocacy. Following on from the above, Hilb (2010) suggests that good board teams should consist of members representing all relevant functional competencies, team roles, demographics, and internal and independent members.

To continue this discussion, the question of competencies that board members

should have to lead effectively emerged. Acceptable qualifications and recommendations for best practices help board members oversee the decision-making process. Governing competencies were shown as crucial in both phases, i.e., by over 74% of the respondents. Nevertheless, sport knowledge was as important as governing competencies in the main qualitative research, while in the main quantitative research, only 27.9% of respondents agreed with it, due to a bigger number of respondents. Legal commitments primarily burden NSOs (and other sport organizations) with many obligations and thus inevitably lead to changes that go toward professionalization. Governing roles in the boards of NSOs mainly were taken by former athletes or coaches, but due to increasing obligations related to good governance in NSOs, this research (especially the main qualitative research) shows that they can no longer fulfil their obligations without additional knowledge and skills. This research has shown that leading people in NSOs have become aware of what the role they assume represents. All the changes that are happening in sport organizations, especially in NSOs as the umbrella organizations for a particular sport, show that although knowledge about sport makes it logical, governing competencies become more important for the execution of tasks in governing structures. The interviews and questionnaire results show that the leading people are aware of the changes in the governing NSOs and that they understand that specific knowledge is needed to perform the above functions. The view of a board based on competencies has already attracted the attention of scholars. A strategically capable non-profit sport board is determined by people who can make independent decisions (Mrkonjic, 2021). According to Ferkins and Shilbury (2012), board members should have the necessary skills to monitor progress towards a strategic direction or think and act with a 'big picture' mindset. Ferkins and Shilbury (2015a) offer six dimensions (drawn from the literature) that influence the board's strategic capability, which leads to the conclusion of the holistic, comprehensive nature of the board's strategic role (see [Section 3.1](#)). O'Boyle et al. (2019) conducted a study on governance in sport



organizations that raised many questions. One of them is the specific role of leadership in sport organizations, given their non-profit and voluntary status. All this indicates the complexity of this area. Respondents also mentioned leadership in this research. Erakovic and Jackson (2012) state that governance research often involves investigating issues that affect the entire organization, so surprisingly, the fields of leadership and governance have developed with limited interaction between them (see [Section 3.3](#)). The issue of leadership in sport organizations, i.e., the combination of volunteers and paid executors and the relationship between them, provides a rich research environment (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). As seen from the literature on governance functions in sport (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015a; Shilbury et al., 2020), people take these roles without being aware of their responsibility. Sport development is their primary task, so the need for education, not only at the level of the country where the NSO exists but also in the broader context (European and world federations), is inevitable. This leads to the next findings in this research regarding the importance of education. Over 94% of respondents pointed out the importance of education for board members. Approximately 50% of respondents say the Croatian Olympic Committee should organize education, although many state the line ministry. As the Croatian Olympic Committee is the umbrella organization for all NSOs in Croatia, it seems to be logical. This research gives suggestions to the Croatian Olympic Committee to consider that possibility. Considering the increasing obligations in governing NSOs, which include legal duties and obligations towards internal and external stakeholders in sport, the question of unique educational programmes arises not only at the level of NSOs in a particular country but also at the international level.

Examples of this are the national governance seminars organized during 2018 as part of the Play the Game project, where the leading people of an NSO showed encouraging positive engagement. They were eager to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to develop their sport organizations Geeraert (2018). Ferkins,

Shilbury, et al. (2018) emphasize that no concept has yet been presented to benefit the development of sport governance knowledge and practice. Some international federations and the International Olympic Committee have launched several programmes to train administrators of national sport governing bodies. For example, Olympic Solidarity's Executive Masters in Sport Organisations Management (MEMOS), i.e., educational programmes for training managers of National Olympic Committees and National Sports Governing Bodies from around the world could include a session highlighting the National Sports Governing Body's apical functions and the responsibilities of its administrators. Although the principles of good governance are constantly being imposed for NSOs, there is a need for more organized training for governing structures in NSOs, which should be a subject of reflection on international sport organizations, due to their role.

In addition to the functions, one of the objectives was to examine which common processes should be professionalized. Unlike in the main qualitative research, where most respondents could not define common processes, 81.7% found accounting, legal and marketing services as crucial in the main quantitative research. King (2016) highlights poor administration, financial failures, and the subsequent need for states to support national sports governing bodies and establish standards to improve governance. As stated by Nagel et al. (2015), one of the segments of professionalization is processes in NSOs. Starting from the definition that professionalization is the process of transforming activities towards the expertise of professionalism, based on the previous phase of the research, the types of processes that the respondents considered problematic and vital for improving the functioning of NSOs were singled out: accounting, legal affairs and marketing services as main processes, organized competitions, medical services, and digitalization. According to Shilbury and Ferkins (2011), underlying this change is a culture of increased accountability, particularly by organizations in countries where

government funding is essential to the continued viability of sport organizations, such as Australia and New Zealand (examples of two countries where government funding supports NSO activities).

Since sports results are the basic criteria for being financed by the government in Croatia, they are considered the most important success metric for 87.5% of respondents. The Croatian Olympic Committee has established success metrics and criteria by which it finances NSOs (sport results, massiveness, Olympic status). Funds for financing NSOs are allocated to the Croatian Olympic Committee through the line ministry, so logically, the stated criteria crystallized during the interview phase of this research. These criteria also guide the many stakeholders on which the functioning of NSOs depends. Sponsors also allocate funds to NSOs according to the same criteria. Still, they also add the importance of the number of competitions in Croatia and the number of spectators at the competitions (due to potential advertising or media attention). In for-profit companies, success is measured by profit, but in sport organizations, success is measured according to the abovementioned criteria.

Furthermore, according to Paragraph 2 of Article 5 of the Sports Act (2022), the categorization of sports is defined as a process of evaluating sports that results in deciding on the ranking of sports and their classification into categories. The decision on the ranking of sports and sorting into categories is made for each sport included in the nomenclature of sports of an individual umbrella sports association, with a division into team and individual, and for sports in the nomenclature of sports of the Croatian Olympic Committee in four categories. Sports categorization criteria and key performance indicators (the Sports Act (2022), Article 6):

(1) The categorization criteria of sports:

- representation of sports in the world and Europe
- massiveness in the Republic of Croatia

- sport status
- achieved sports results at the international level

(2) The key performance indicators:

- the number of national sports federations at the world and European level
- the number of clubs and athletes in a particular sport in the Republic of Croatia
- the share of athletes up to 18 years of age concerning the total number of athletes in a particular sport in the Republic of Croatia
- the Olympic status of a particular sport
- results at international sports competitions

Since according to the Sports Act (2022), NSOs are in charge of certain sports, it is evident from the results of both phases of the research that the success metrics stated by the leaders of NSOs largely coincide with the criteria for categorizing sports, which is one of the most important parameters for allocating funding from state funds. This also confirms to policymakers in Croatia that the line ministry is on the right way to evaluate the success of the governing of NSOs. The success and survival of governing structures in NSOs in Croatia are observed through the abovementioned measures. It is interesting, as Shilbury and Ferkins (2011) cite in their study, that sport is still “entertainment” for most of the population. However, its governance is no longer based on entertainment. The key success factor for sport governance is the ability to deliver increasingly professional functioning.

Finally, the most important finding about whether the professionalization of NSOs to improve governance could be a success story for NSOs was approved by all participants in the pilot qualitative study, by over 83% in the main quantitative research and over 88% in the main qualitative research, which shows that the current approach to governance is not good and must be improved. Although professionalization is imposed as a solution for better efficiency of NSOs, the literature that deals with the

professionalization of NSOs indicates that there are negative attitudes towards professionalization, i.e., that we are in an area where voluntary values are strong (Nagel et al., 2015; Ruoranen et al., 2016; Ruoranen et al., 2023). As previously stated, a small percentage of negative attitudes towards professionalization was expressed in both phases of this research. We define NSO professionalization as an organizational process of transformation that leads to organizational rationalization, efficiency, and business management, which is very close to the business world (Nagel et al., 2015). The results of this research coincide with findings from the literature and confirm the necessity for changes, specifically the movement towards professionalization of NSOs.

Winand et al. (2016) say that the existing theories and models from corporate and non-profit management have been the norm in sport governance. Furthermore, King (2016) noted that a 'skills and knowledge gap' has emerged over the last decade, where sport governance has changed from volunteer-run organizations to 'business-oriented' ones. Since research on this topic is rare, and there are none in Croatia, this research indicates the usefulness of the topic on professionalization. Nagel et al. (2015) developed a multilevel framework for analyzing the influence of internal and external factors on the causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in sport organizations. They considered it significant that the perspective of systemic professionalization is of particular interest for research because it allows us to determine whether professionalization processes result from internal or external causes. This research did not deal with the negative consequences of professionalization because the aim was the possibility of professionalizing NSOs to increase their efficiency. The demands of institutions, on the one hand, and of the members of NSOs, on the other, obviously introduce professionalization regardless of their actors' wishes. However, as Ruoranen et al. (2023) stated, NSOs have specificities as non-profit organizations and umbrella organizations of their sport, so it is necessary to design this process thoroughly.

## **CHAPTER 8 Conclusion**

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis that researched the possibilities of professionalization of National Sport Organizations (NSOs), which was the thesis's central question and overall aim. An overview of the literature that deals with key research areas from which the research questions were derived is also given. A pragmatic approach and sequential mixed methodology design were used to get the answers to the research questions and sub-questions. The findings of both phases of the research were compared, and accordingly, the literature from the field of sport governance, especially the one dealing with professionalization. The strengths and limitations are also presented as part of communicating the results. Furthermore, new research questions for future research in the field of sport governance emerged. Finally, contributions to knowledge and practice and applications in practice are presented.

### **8.1 Theoretical Overview of the Thesis**

Improving sport governance has been an important topic in the past decades because of financial, internal, and political issues and scandals (see [Section 1.1](#)), that provoke constant changes in sport organizations.

The overall research aimed to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of individuals and common processes in NSOs and to increase the effectiveness of sport governance. The main objectives of the research were:

- to investigate the mindset of leading people (presidents, board members, and general secretaries/directors) in NSOs to get an overall idea about the current state of professionalizing NSOs
- to determine the possibilities of professionalization of board members as a step towards strengthening the effectiveness of governing in NSOs
- to determine whether NSO board members (e.g., presidents) could be professionals with specific competencies to better carry out the tasks set out in statutes, laws, and

programmes

- to determine if some common processes in NSOs (accounting, organizing competitions, digitalization – information technology) could be professionalized to contribute to efficiency in the context of increasing demands in sport

One more objective was added after the pilot qualitative study:

- to define success metrics for NSOs

To achieve the stated objectives of the thesis, the theories of sport governance were investigated first. The theoretical basis, i.e., the relevant governance theories that could be applied in sports organizations, is described in [Section 2.1](#). Considering the complexity of the sport system in which NSOs exist, i.e., the numerous stakeholders (see [Figure 8](#)), the stakeholder theory was considered the most appropriate primary governance theory for this research. This theory balances economic, social, individual, and joint goals (Bennett et al., 2019). Good governance means meeting today's economic imperatives facing sport organizations and fostering efficiency in using resources through good decision-making since sport organizations do not have profit as their primary goal. Additionally, although it is not used in sport governance, Hilb's (2006) 'New Corporate Governance' theory, with four guiding principles based on a holistic approach: contextual factors in which the organization operates, a competent board team, effective human resource policies, and a holistic monitoring system at the board level, could also be applicable in sport organizations.

The Literature review (see [Chapter 3](#)) provides a background to professionalization, focusing on NSO boards, their responsibilities and performance, leadership issues, relations with stakeholders in sport, and the elements of corporate governance applicable to sport governance. The literature is processed through several critical areas for professionalizing sport governance, such as NSO boards - responsibilities and performance, good governance principles (an essential task of the

board in NSOs), leadership issues, stakeholders in sport, and challenges of professionalization in NSOs. Selected volunteer boards generally control NSOs (as is the case in sport organizations in Croatia) and are tasked with creating policies and directing and enhancing the organization's performance, but not on a day-to-day operational basis. The central question that arises from this research problem is: **In what way can the professionalization of NSOs improve sport governance?** (see [Section 4.2](#))

In addition, some sub-questions emerged from the central question above:

- a) Could professionals at the board level, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?
- b) Which positions at the board level need to be professionalized (e.g., the president)?
- c) What competencies are needed by the professionals entering the board level?
- d) Which common processes could be professionalized?

After defining the main and sub-questions, the methodology was defined. As this research begins with a problem and asks several questions about the possible professionalization of NSOs to contribute to practical solutions, pragmatism was chosen to deal with the problem of different types of knowledge and methods. This research used a sequential exploratory mixed methods design ([Figure 12](#)), where the qualitative component precedes the quantitative element. As already stated, the topic of professionalization in NSOs is entirely unexplored in Croatia. In this research, the leading people of the most important NSOs for sport development in Croatia (presidents, board members, general secretaries/directors) are expected to know problems and have abilities to solve them. Rigour in this research was ensured by the mixed methodology design used in both surveys (the main qualitative and quantitative research) and by the sampling strategy in both phases, i.e. criterion purposive sampling (the leading people of the most important NSOs for Croatian sports). Finally, methods, findings and conclusions are



explicit and will be public, unbiased and open to criticism.

## 8.2 Findings

The research started with the pilot qualitative study (see [Section 4.3.2.2](#)), which involved a small number of participants (seven leading people from the Croatian Olympic Committee and NSOs, both volunteers and paid operatives) through interviews. The results of the interviews were the first confirmation that the topic is crucial for Croatian sport and NSOs as the bearers of the development of Croatian sport. All respondents concluded that professionalization is necessary at all levels of NSOs. The pilot qualitative study allowed the practice of interview techniques and checked the adequacy of the research instruments. The interviews resulted in the final identification of themes and their relationship with the main topic, as shown in [Figure 14](#), modification of the interview questions for the main qualitative research, and finally, one sub-question arose (see [Section 4.3.2.1.7](#)):

- How to define the success metrics for NSOs?

The key themes arising from this research relate to the biggest problems in the governance of NSOs and professionalization as a possible solution (Theme 1), the professionalization of governing functions and the necessary competencies to perform these roles (Theme 2), the common processes in NSOs (Theme 3), success metrics for NSOs (Theme 4) and professionalization as a new approach in governing NSOs (Theme 5). They are of great importance for the theoretical and practical framework of the possible professionalization of NSOs.

The pilot qualitative study was used as a base for the main qualitative research (the sample of seven people). To ensure the reliability and validity of the main qualitative research and the quality of the results, a selected sample relevant to this research was used, and the interview protocol was adhered to. The sample consisted of 24 interviews with the leading people from 17 NSOs in Croatia and three regional NSOs (two from

Slovenia and one from Serbia) from individual and team sports (Olympic and non-Olympic). NSOs were selected according to the following criteria: significance for developing sport in Croatia, massiveness, sport results, number of administrators, tradition, and financial resources. The NVivo (coding) software for data processing was used to avoid subjectivity in the data analysis. The results of the analysis are shown in [Table 4](#).

The second phase was the quantitative research (Main quantitative research). The main qualitative research served as a basis for the Questionnaire - all the most important NSOs of Olympic and non-Olympic sports accepted participation in this research phase. Compared to the main qualitative research phase, five additional NSOs were included in the main quantitative research. To get as realistic a picture as possible, all members of NSO boards (243 persons) were included because they make decisions in NSOs. The results are based on 104 (42.8%) of the completed Questionnaires that were received. Presidents have legal responsibility, but all board members decide on any future changes in governing systems in NSOs. According to the criteria, as in the previous phase, the leaders (board members) of the most important NSOs in Croatia were the sample for the main quantitative research. Specific correlations among the data obtained in the Questionnaire were identified. SPSS was used for data analysis, and five themes were defined according to the sets of questions from the Questionnaire. Since the Questionnaire combines List questions and the Likert scale, Descriptive Statistics and frequency were used for analysis. Using statistics obtained from SPSS provided more precise data and specific correlations within the mentioned themes and gave directions for future research. The results of this phase are shown in [Table 5](#).

The analysis points to four fundamental problems in governing NSOs: volunteerism, insufficient funds, the expertise of people, and the legal framework in Croatia. Most respondents in the main qualitative research consider volunteers the biggest

problem and emphasize the need for professionalism and professionals. Respondents cited insufficient funds as the next big problem in governing the NSOs. Respondents, especially those from team sports, believe finances are the key to everything. The importance of personal expertise was also highlighted as one of the biggest problems. Furthermore, the legal framework (the Sports Act (2022), the Law on Associations and other laws in Croatia) should be adjusted to the needs of NSOs. The first objective related to the mindset of the leading people on the current state of professionalization in NSOs was achieved, and an answer was obtained to the central question about professionalism as a way to increase efficiency in sport governance in NSOs. Most respondents in both phases believe that professionalization is the solution to the mentioned problems.

Following the objectives of this thesis, which refers to the possibilities of professionalization of board members as a step towards strengthening the effectiveness of governing in NSOs, this research examines the importance of competencies in the governing structures of NSOs. It also points out the qualifications that are important for NSO governance. Professionalization of governing positions is necessary for most respondents in both phases. The largest number of respondents in both phases consider governing competencies to be the most important. Sport knowledge for governing NSO is also important for the vision of sport development, but, as can be concluded, not without governing competencies pointed out in the main qualitative research. Most respondents in the main quantitative research pointed out governing competencies as the most important. This theme leads to the next important topic related to governing structures. Since the most responsible positions are voluntary, the question arises regarding how to fulfil the expectations, how to perform a role with such degrees of responsibility and what kind of education is needed. As almost all respondents suggest, there should be education through workshops, seminars, courses, etc., to provide knowledge for people in governing positions which should be organized by umbrella

sports institutions (Olympic Committees or line ministries). The results in both phases are similar.

Professionalizing functions in NSOs does not make sense if the processes are not professionalized. The following objectives and the research question refer to common processes that should be professionalized. The first research phase showed that the question was complicated for most of the respondents in the main qualitative research, but still several processes, such as accounting, marketing, and digitalization, were mentioned as important. This served as the basis for the main quantitative research. This issue has become highly complex. As the result of the main qualitative research showed, the mentioned processes proved to be crucial.

The topic arising from this main qualitative research is the question of measures of success for NSOs. Over 50% of the leaders of NSOs put sport results first when measuring success because this measure is crucial for the survival of the leading people and for obtaining financial resources through the state or sponsorships. In addition to sport results as a success metric, massiveness (the number of clubs and especially athletes) is an important criterion for the success of NSOs and NSO leaders. Founding clubs and popularizing sports are also extremely important. The number of organized competitions, the organizational system, and the realization of plans should also be included as measures for NSOs' success.

Finally, the respondents confirmed that the professionalization of NSOs could improve governance and be a success story for NSOs. This research included all significant NSOs in Croatia. Since Croatian sport is a part of the European and world model of sport, it is important to get answers from the governance structures of the wider sport community so that all the specifics in sport governance can be used to create a unique model of sport governance that will be applicable whilst respecting cultural and other differences. This research has shown that there are many problems in the governance of

sport organizations and that a professional approach is necessary. Following the objectives of this thesis, all presented findings gave the outcomes that supported the main topic of the research, i.e. the professionalization of NSOs in Croatia is the way for improving efficiency in the governance of NSOs. It all leads to the idea of broadening the research to other countries in Europe and worldwide.

### **8.3 Strengths of the thesis**

Starting with the fact that NSOs, like other sport organizations, are governed by volunteer boards and face many challenges in fulfilling their governance responsibilities, the board members' expertise may also be the critical point. This thesis examines the voluntary role of boards in NSOs and the need to consider introducing professional boards or professionals in presidential functions, as in for-profit organizations. The sample in this research was the leading people, who represent all the most significant sports (in terms of results and massiveness) that strengthens this thesis. They are not only in the leading positions of NSOs in Croatia but also in the leading positions of European and International federations of their sport and know what governing problems NSOs face.

Furthermore, it was examined which processes are common and important for the functioning of NSOs and whether they need a professional approach. In general, more research is required to examine the volunteer approach to governance in sport organizations in the context of the importance of sport and its contributions to the development of society. This research aroused much interest in the governing structures of NSOs in Croatia. They propose that the research be extended to European and international federations of some sports.

### **8.4 Limitations of the Thesis**

Some limitations in the methodological design of the research on professionalization in sport organizations have been identified. Data needs to be collected at different levels. It is necessary to consider not only the forms of professionalization and the relevant structures of organizations but also the important characteristics of the

environment. The members (clubs) and other stakeholders, as significant actors who could play a key role in understanding the professionalization process in sport organizations, should also be considered. Ruoranen et al. (2023) showed that professionalization also has a negative side because it is necessary to include the lower level of sport organizations to contribute to professionalization actively. Only the leading people of the Croatian Olympic Committee (the umbrella sport organization in Croatia) and NSOs were included in this research, according to certain criteria of importance for the development of sports in Croatia. The limitations of the research mainly refer to all the unanswered questions that this research deals with. The process of professionalization, as a prerequisite for improving governance in NSOs, remained undefined and insufficiently researched due to its complexity.

The topic of NSO professionalization to improve governance in Croatia has not been researched before. In this context, the insight into the knowledge and opinions of the leading people in Croatian sport on this topic through the first qualitative research was obtained, so the broader population that governs Croatian sport (NSOs) could be examined in future. Due to the influence of sport in society, this topic is becoming extremely important in new research on sport governance worldwide. It was impossible to extend it to international NSOs, because of the limited research time.

### **8.5 Future Research**

The interviews in this research included almost all successful Olympic and non-Olympic NSOs and three regional ones. Given the complexity of the sport system and the way it functions, obligations to stakeholders have increased. Furthermore, the number of competitions is increasing, as well as the problems with doping that constantly arise. Since the sport governing is becoming more and more demanding, the question arises as to who will take over the leading positions in NSOs in future. Governance in NSOs is increasingly similar to governance in business, which is confirmed by the respondents

who come from the business world. The respondents' quotes on this topic best illustrate the problem and the complexity of sport governance. Many respondents believe that professionalization is the only solution for the future of Croatian sport. This research opens some topics related to sport governance:

- Is the current non-profit form of National Sport Organizations, considering all the changes in sport governing, sustainable for the future?
- Can volunteers be in top governance positions in National Sport Organizations and still take responsibility?
- How to educate sport governance staff?

To conclude, the research in this area should be continued following the guidelines given in this research.

## **8.6 Contribution to Knowledge and Practice and Application to Practice**

The research conducted within this thesis provided some contributions to knowledge and practice. Since application to practice is of great importance, it is included at the end of this section.

### ***8.6.1 Contribution to Knowledge***

Sport is an activity of utmost importance for the development of society (Lindsey & Adams, 2013). The positive social-economic characteristics of sport have been proven in many scientific studies (Feng & Humphreys, 2018; Kwiatkowski & Oklevik, 2017; SportsEconAustria, 2012). Changes occurring in sport require governing sport structures to act quickly. Since NSOs, along with state structures, have a leading role in developing and promoting the sport, advancing sport governance towards professionalizing specific segments in the NSOs (e.g., functions, processes) or applying some elements of the for-profit world becomes inevitable. Organizations are also known to be moving from a “board-oriented” volunteer ethos to the development of “corporate governance practices” (Shilbury et al., 2013). Such circumstances provide a rich environment for researching

and improving sport governing capabilities. This thesis has several contributions to knowledge.

Firstly, in [Chapter 2](#), governance theories are listed with examples of their use in literature and research in the field of sport governance. As stated by (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015b), the stakeholder theory of governance has not been significantly used in research on sport governance. This thesis specifically indicates that the complexity and many internal and external stakeholders ([Figure 8](#)) influence the survival of a sport organization with which governance structures have to deal with in their work and the fight for the survival of NSOs. Furthermore, the newly proposed and presented “New corporate governance” theory, which is accepted in complex systems and regarding the strategic role of the board (directing and controlling) in the current governance system of NSOs and other sport organizations, brings a holistic approach and four key principles (see [Section 2.3](#)). Considering the responsibilities that the leading people of the NSO boards have, the elements that Hilb (2010) proposes that boards should be applied to improve governance in NSOs.

Secondly, [Chapter 3](#) provides an overview of the literature in the field of sports governance between 2003 and 2023, as shown in [Table 2](#), by the topics mentioned in the same chapter. This review contributes to a better understanding of the problems of the governance system in non-profit sport organizations and points to the need for further research. This formed the base upon which the research questions were created. The contribution to knowledge is an attempt to organize and synthesize the literature on sport governance using a systematic approach by addressing a gap in the existing literature and conducting a study that fills that gap. This research builds upon previous studies by filling gaps in understanding and providing evidence-based information (competencies, processes, etc.) for improving sport governance in NSOs through professionalization. As Dowling et al. (2018) argue, despite the scoping and systematic reviews common in other



fields, there have been very few literature reviews conducted within this domain, and as its knowledge base continues to expand, there will be an increasing need to synthesize knowledge from other thematic areas relevant to the domain of sport governance. This thesis synthesizes the literature that is related to professionalization of sport organizations and contributes to a better resolution of the phenomenon that is investigated in this research, i.e. professionalization.

Thirdly, this thesis (as recommended by Parent et al. (2021)) uses qualitative and quantitative research, i.e., a research sequential design (see [Section 4.3.1](#)). This method has proven to be useful because qualitative research enables the collection of valuable data, especially in unexplored areas like the professionalization of NSOs, especially when the topic is insufficiently researched, so guidelines related to research questions are needed. Pragmatists see human nature as holistic, social, relational, complex, and temporal, starting from research questions. According to Goldkuhl (2012), pragmatism is a reasonable basis for research approaches that intervene in the world and not just observe the world. Furthermore, according to the pragmatism of the research philosophy, the research question is the most important determinant of research philosophy. [Figure 12](#), shows the exploratory sequential design used to achieve the best research results. The exploratory sequential design is defined by a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, followed by a quantitative method of data collection and analysis. The final stage links the data from the two separate data sets. Advantages of sequential studies include increased efficiency and more reliable effect size estimates, which is particularly important for this kind of research and its practical implication.

Fourth, this is one more research study whose main theme is the professionalization of NSOs. This research also provides the results on how the leading people in sport could improve sport governance and the performance of NSOs in challenging times. Most researchers (Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Nagel et al., 2015;

Ruoranen et al., 2016 ) mention professionalization in the context of the role of NSOs' boards and their strategic and decision-making abilities.

Considering the complexity of the sport system (see [Section 1.2.1](#)) and the way it functions, the obligations of NSOs and other sport organizations towards stakeholders (internal and external) have increased. This thesis is based primarily on stakeholder theory because the existence and functioning of NSOs and other sports organizations depend on their stakeholders. This research opens up several topics related to sport governance. It directs research towards the questions regarding the current non-profit form of NSOs, volunteers in top governing positions and educating sport governing staff ([Section 8.5](#)).

Therefore, this research's overall contribution to knowledge is to define aspects of the professional/business world that could be applied to the existing organizational structure of sport. This could increase the efficiency of governing structures and the ability to respond to challenges (e.g., introducing professional board members, success metrics, etc.).

### ***8.6.2 Contribution to Practice***

This research aimed to find the elements of professionalization (elements of for-profit corporations) that could be applied in NSOs, which are mostly non-profit organizations. The results of this thesis gave recommendations to NSOs, the Croatian Olympic Committee and sport policymakers in Croatia (the line ministry and the Government of the Republic of Croatia) according to the points of view of the leading people in NSOs who, following the new Sports Act (2022), are responsible for the development and promotion of sport.

It is important to emphasize that this research included the NSOs, which are the most significant ones for the development of sport in Croatia and to which the Government of the Republic of Croatia allocates the most significant part of financial resources through the Croatian Olympic Committee and the budget of the line ministry.

Furthermore, 40% of people who participated in the pilot qualitative study and the main qualitative research are engaged in European and International sports federations. Following the above, several contributions to practice are targeted at the actors who can change and improve the sport system in Croatia and beyond since Croatia is a part of the European and International model of sport.

The research results will give the leading people in NSOs information about what the leaders of some NSOs think on governing problems in NSOs and whether and which segments can be solved by professionalism. During the research, it was realized that the proposed topic is extremely interesting for the representatives of NSOs and that the problems NSOs have are mostly related to insufficient knowledge required to complete the aim and objectives of NSOs.

The leading people of the Croatian Olympic Committee will be acquainted with the thinking of the governing structures and the main operatives of NSOs and what needs to be changed in cooperation with their members to function better and achieve the strategic goals of sport development in Croatia. In these circumstances, professionalization seems to be a more acceptable solution. It is important to note that the Croatian Law on Associations does not prevent the professionalization of NSOs, which means there are no obstacles for presidents or board members to be professionals. Furthermore, the leaders of NSOs suggest that the Croatian Olympic Committee (see [Section 6.2](#)) should take on the role of educator in sport governance as there is currently no special education in the field of sport governance. Therefore, the Croatian Olympic Committee could take advantage of the opportunity to gather expert sport governance staff and work on an education module for governing structures in sport.

The National Sports Council, an expert and advisory body of the Croatian Parliament that oversees the development and quality of sport in Croatia, can suggest new guidelines for the governing structures of Croatian sport, following the research results,

that would increase the efficiency of the organizations that run it.

The line ministry can use the obtained information on the problems in the functioning of NSOs and the eventual direction towards professionalization and accordingly allocate the necessary financial and other resources to facilitate their functioning. The new Sports Act (2022) defined the criteria for financing NSOs in Article 37. The obligations and responsibilities (see [Section 1.1](#)) of NSO leaders are presented in the same Article. The success metrics were emphasized by all NSOs (see [Section 6.4](#)), so this research boosted the definition of convenient success metrics to ensure the achievement of these criteria. Consequently, the research results could help realize the goals of the National Sports Program 2019-2026 (2019) in Croatia through the line ministry and sport strategy, more manageable in terms of governance. It was stated that the criteria for categorization of sports, which are the basis for financing sports (defined by the Sports Act (2022)), mostly coincide with the success metrics defined by the leading people of NSOs in this research.

Since the Government of the Republic of Croatia has a great influence on sport and the functioning of NSOs and gives great support to sport, the research results will help it create new guidelines and changes needed to improve sport governance. The main quantitative research results showed that funding (see [Table 5](#)) is the biggest problem in governing NSOs and that more should be allocated to the sport system. Furthermore, the tax system, which is the responsibility of the Government, is also a factor that will enable sponsors to make larger allocations.

Although the research was conducted mainly in Croatia (with three interviewees from NSOs in the region as the exception), it would be helpful to present the results to the European Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee as the basis for some new considerations when creating guidelines and new agendas for international sports. This research is one small step in the research that needs to be expanded to

European and world NSOs.

Furthermore, the research results of this thesis give recommendations to sport policymakers in Croatia (NSOs, the Croatian Olympic Committee, the line ministry, and the Government of the Republic of Croatia) following the opinions of the leading people in NSOs who, according to the new Sports Act (2022), are responsible for the development and promotion of sport.

The results provide information on the biggest problems in governing NSOs and point to the fact that the professionalization of specific segments is the solution. It informs the Croatian Olympic Committee to consider changes in the recommendations given to NSOs regarding presidents (or other board members) being volunteers because the research results show that this is a problem. This element of the for-profit world could be applied to non-profit sport organizations.

The fact is that the sport system is changing, but very slowly. On one hand, there are numerous scandals and problems in sport organizations (see [Section 1.1](#)), while on the other hand, we can witness highly successful athletes looking for support from the sport governance system and desiring faster changes in their way of thinking and acting.

### ***8.6.3 Application to Practice***

Research on this topic has stimulated more specific actions related to the professionalization of NSOs. The topic is no longer taboo and began to be discussed in the sports public. During this research, the Croatian Olympic Committee has changed the previously suggested recommendation related to the professionalization of governing functions to NSOs. Furthermore, due to the increasing demands placed on NSOs, the Croatian Olympic Committee is developing an educational programme for General secretaries/Directors in NSOs. It is entitled Sports Administrator (through the Croatian Olympic Academy as an Adult Education Institution founded by the Croatian Olympic Committee), which, by the laws and the obligations of NSOs, aims to educate staff about

the processes that this thesis highlighted as key to professionalization. Sport governance is one of the topics covered in this educational programme. The author of this thesis will also be a lecturer in this educational programme. One of the research participants, the president of a significant NSO, publicly expressed the need for meetings of the leading people (presidents) of the NSOs to exchange essential information about their functioning. It is important to note that, on November 28, 2022, in Brussels, the Croatian Olympic Committee organized the first European conference on the project EVIS (Economic dimension of volunteering in sports). NSO representatives, university professors, and political representatives attended the meeting. The author presented the Case study: *Voluntary Dimension of Governing in Sport Organizations in the European Model of Sport*.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I - Participant Information Sheet

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – FOR INTERVIEWEES

1. **Title of Project:** The improvement of sport governance through professionalization of National Sport Organizations
2. **Legal basis for research for studies:**

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research>.

However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER24532070. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>.
3. The topic of this research is the research process in the area of sport governance - improving governance in National Sport Organizations. In this context, this research aims to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of particular individuals and activities in NSOs to increase efficiency in sport governance, so your participation in this research and your opinion on the topic are of great importance.
4. According to the facts above mentioned, participants in this research are the leading people in NSOs. So, it relates to both: presidents and members of the boards of NSOs as unpaid staff and paid staff - general secretaries and directors of NSOs. These are the people in the sports system who shape the governance on which the functioning of NSOs depends. The participants in this interview are Olympic and non-Olympic sport organizations' board members and other executives who are of the most significant importance for developing sport in Croatia.
5. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide if you want to take part in this interview. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you decide to take part. You can decide not to answer a particular question. You can still decide to withdraw without giving a reason (at the beginning, during and at the end of the interview). You can also withdraw your consent two weeks after the interview.
6. You will be required to talk about your experience with the position in NSO and your vision of governing sport.
7. According to the current situation regarding COVID-19, the interviews will take place through the ZOOM meetings or personally (in your office), depending on the situation.
8. The interview will last for about one hour. It will be recorded and the transcript will be sent to you for possible corrections and your signature. If needed, in case of some second condition of the research, you will be called again.
9. There are no risks in taking part in this research.
10. Your participation in this research will be of great value because your answers will contribute to further changes in improving sport governance.

11. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher and academic colleagues and researchers with whom I might collaborate as part of the research process.
12. The results of the research will be given to all the participants by e-mail stated in the Consent form.
13. Statement of confidentiality: The researcher guarantees that all the information provided by a participant will be used only for this research.
14. The researcher herself will be responsible for all information in the research.
15. A participant in this interview is aware that he or she may be recognized in any research output or manuscript because there are only a few people in higher positions of NSOs. Recognition is also possible due to the number of people interviewed. Their interview outputs may be connected to the official NSOs structures (publicly available names and positions) during the research period.
16. Data preservation: Data (interview outputs, analysis and manuscripts) will be kept in Sheffield Hallam University Research Data for ten years. Archive (SHURDA). Upon thesis completion, the researcher may apply for a two-year embargo on thesis and research data sharing to allow publication of the main findings.
17. The findings of this research could be used in practice or as a basis for further research in sports governance and a resource for academic papers, policy papers, or articles.
18. The whole research is likely to last for about one year.
19. You will be given a notice when this research is over and you will be able to discuss your participation in the research and the results.
20. A participant will be given, during the interview, the opportunity to ask further questions or seek clarifications.

**Researcher/ Research Team Details:**

Tanja Bilić Brenner, Researcher  
 Robert Wilson, Director of Studies  
 Dan Plumely, Second Supervisor (1)

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**DPO and Head of Ethics contacts:**

**You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:**

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g., if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Dr Mayur Ranchordas) if:**

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT

Telephone:

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

## Appendix II - Participant Consent Form

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** The improvement of sport governance through professionalization of National Sport Organizations

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

- |  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Name (Printed): TANJA BILIĆ BRENNER**

**Researcher's Signature:**

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**Researcher's contact details:**

(Name, address, contact number of investigator)

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.**



## Appendix III - The correction of research questions for the interview

### THE CORRECTION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

The topic of this research is the research process in the area of sport governance, improving governance in National Sport Organizations. In this context, the aim of this research is to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of particular individuals and activities in NSOs to increase efficiency in sport governance.

Sport is an activity of the utmost importance for the development of society and some of the positive social characteristics of sport are social inclusion, health improvement, community integration and safety. Positive economic characteristics have also been proven in many scientific studies.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Your participation in this research will be value because your answers as a participant will contribute to further changes in improving sport governance in Croatia.

Participants in this research hold the leading functions in NSOs and Croatian it relates to both volunteers – presidents, vice presidents and members of the boards of NSOs and Olympic or non-Olympic sports and paid staff – general secretaries and directors of NSOs. These volunteers are of the most significant importance in the development of sport in Croatia. These are the people of the sports system who shape the governance on which the functioning of NSOs depends.

According to the Sport Act (2022), The National Sport Organizations develop and promote sport in accordance with the National Sports Program 2019 -2026 (2019) they have defined tasks. Thats the reason why this research starts from the top of the organizational pyramid from the NSO.

Q1: What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs and how do these problems affect sports governance in your organization?

***Professionalization by definition is a process by which any occupation transforms itself into a true “profession of the highest integrity and competence”. That means, professionalization results in establishing acceptable qualifications, recommends best practices and helps board oversee the complete idecision process in a timely manner.***

Q2: Do you think that professionalization is a good approach to problem solving in your organization?

***Volunteers, like presidents or board members are not paid for performing their duty. The role of the president and board members is the decision making for functioning and the development of NSOs and sport in general. According to Association Act, article 19. the president is responsible for legal work of association.***

Q3: Is it a problem that NSOs are governed by volunteers who have such responsibility but are not paid for their job? Do you believe that, if paid, they would do a better job?

Q4: Consequently, could professionals at board level, instead of volunteers, improve sport governance?

Q5: Do presidents or any other functions at board level devote all the time necessary to have a complete insight into the implementation of the board's decisions? What seems to be the obstacle of having enough time to lead in such a way?

Q6: Are qualifications also important and why? What qualifications should board members have in order to lead effectively?

Q7: Out of all those qualifications you've mentioned, can you rate them in order of importance, sport or governing competencies?

Q8: Since sport is specific to the field of society, should special education programmes in sport management be introduced and who should be in charge of its implementation?

***This group of questions refers to the processes in NSOs and the possibility of their professionalization. It has already been mentioned what the tasks of NSOs are with regard to the Sports Act (2022) and National Sports Program 2019-2026 (2019), so the question for improving the process has also arisen.***

Q9: Therefore, should certain processes, such as the implementation decision process in NSOs be professionalized to increase efficiency? Which other processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized?

Q10: How would you define process success metrics?

Q11: The success of implementing the professionalization doctrine can consequently be measured by the success of the processes (goals, aims, objectives and finally, outcomes). Do you agree with that?

Q12: Therefore, can we conclude that professionalization is a success story for the entire NSO?

## Appendix IV - Questionnaire

### THE IMPROVEMENT OF SPORT GOVERNANCE THROUGH PROFESSIONALIZATION OF NATIONAL SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Dear Participant,

The topic of this research is the research process in the area of sport governance, improving governance in a National Sport Organization. In this context, the aim is to examine the possibilities of professionalizing the functions of particular individuals and activities in NSOs to increase efficiency in sport governance.

Sport is an activity of the utmost importance for the development of society in Croatia and worldwide. Changes occurring in sport require governing sport structures to act quickly. Since NSOs, along with state structures, have a leading role in the development and promotion of sport, the advancement of sport governance towards the professionalization of particular segments in the NSOs is needed. The current situation with coronavirus especially shows the necessity for changes in which governing structures have the leading role.

Your participation in this research is voluntary.

Your participation will be of great value because your answers can contribute to further changes in improving sport governance.

According to the facts above mentioned, participants in this research are the leading people in NSOs. So it relates to both: presidents and members of the boards of NSOs as unpaid staff and paid staff - general secretaries of NSOs. These are the people of the sports system who shape the governance on which the functioning of NSOs depends.

It is up to you to decide if you want to take a part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take a part. You can still decide to withdraw from the research two weeks after sending the filled Questionnaire back, with or without giving a reason.

Data from the questionnaire will be anonymized.

You will be required to talk about your experience, about the position in NSO and your vision of governing in sport.

You will receive the questionnaire on your e-mail address.

Access to the questionnaire will be limited to the researcher and academic colleagues who the researcher will collaborate with as part of the research process.

You will be given a notice when this research is over and you will be able to discuss your participation.

All participants will be given the results by email.

Findings could be used in practice or as a basis for further researches, as well as in academic papers, policy papers or news articles.

The whole research is likely to last for about two years.

The researcher herself will be responsible for all information in the research.

**Researcher: Tanja Bilić Brenner**

**Doctoral study at Sheffield Hallam University/Sheffield Business School**

**E-mail:**

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:**

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:**

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT

Telephone:

Personal data removed for confidentiality reasons.

**Legal statement:** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research> .

However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER24532070. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

**For the following questions or statements please click the answer which matches your view more closely.**

*For the following question about governing problems, please click the answer.*

**1 What are the biggest governing problems in NSOs?**

*(You can click a maximum of two answers.)*

- Insufficient funds
- Legal framework
- Volunteers
- Persons expertise

**2 Professionalization is a process by which any occupation transforms itself into a true “profession of the highest integrity and competence”. That means professionalization establishes acceptable qualifications, recommends best practices, and promptly helps board members oversee the complete implementation decision process.**

**Professionalization is a good approach to problem solving in your organization?**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

*For the following statements or questions about governing persons, please click the answer.*

**3 The problem is that NSOs are governed by volunteers who are not paid for their job.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**4 Presidents or any board members devote all the time necessary to have a complete insight into implementing the board's decisions.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**5 Board-level professionals, instead of volunteers, could improve sport governance.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**6 Qualifications are essential for governing functions.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

*For the following question about governing person qualifications, please click the answer.*

**7 What competencies should presidents have to lead effectively?**

*(You can click a maximum of two answers.)*

- Leadership skills
- Governing skills
- Specific sports knowledge
- Other skills (such as legal and financial knowledge)

*For the following statements or questions about educational programmes for governing people, please click the answer.*

**8 Since sport is specific to the field of society, special education programs (courses, seminars, workshops) on the topic of sport governance should be introduced.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**9 What kind of educational programs would be suitable for the presidents or board members?**

- Courses, seminars, workshops on the topic of governing sport organizations
- Exchange of experiences (e.g., once a year meetings of presidents or board members in practicing governing)
- University studies for governing in sport
- Creating special modules for persons in charge for governing in sports

**10 Who should be in charge of its implementation?**

*(You can click one answer.)*

- Line ministry
- Olympic Committees
- Educational institutions

*For the following statements about success metrics for NSO, please click the answer.*

**11 Which processes common to all NSOs should be professionalized?**

- Accounting, legal affairs and marketing services
- Organized competition
- Medical services
- Digitalization

*For the following statements about success metrics for NSO, please click the answer.*

**12 Sports results are success metrics of NSO.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**13 Mass (number of athletes and number of clubs) is success metrics of NSO.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**14 Number of competitions organized in Croatia is success metrics of NSO.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**15 Number of spectators on competitions in Croatia is success metrics of NSO.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**16 Financial stabilities of NSOs is success metrics of NSO.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**17 Professionalization is a success story for NSOs.**

- agree
- tend to agree
- not sure
- tend to disagree
- disagree

**Appendix V - List of NSOs according to number of: status, paid operatives,  
number of NSO members, number of athletes and number of international  
competitions**

	National Sport Federation	Status	Number of paid operatives	Temporary Contract	Number of NSO members	Number of registered athletes 2021.	Number of international competitions per year
1	Croatian Water Polo Federation	O	5	0	78	2,300	55
2	Croatian Football Federation	O	4	1	1,402	119,785	30
3	Croatian Basketball Federation	O	4	1	216	32,850	70
4	Croatian Handball Federation	O	4	1	298	11,093	33
5	Croatian Volleyball Federation	O	4	0	194	10,813	50
6	Croatian Athletics Federation	O	4	1	113	4,881	49
7	Croatian Karate Union	NO	4	0	176	3,563	24
8	Croatian Judo Federation	O	3	1	86	4,392	37
9	Croatian Swimming Federation	O	3	1	62	3,917	20
10	Croatian Sailing Federation	O	3	0	100	2,017	57
11	Croatian Shooting Federation	O	3	1	181	1,824	57
12	Croatian Tennis Federation	O	3	0	121	1,586	68
13	Croatian Table Tennis Federation	O	3	1	194	1,558	41
14	Croatian Boxing Federation	O	3	0	86	1,467	21
15	Croatian Rowing Federation	O	3	0	32	1,167	22
16	Croatian Ski Association	O	3	0	58	1,060	86
17	Croatian Taekwondo Federation	O	3	0	124	609	20
18	Croatian Bocce Federation	NO	2	0	352	4,295	21
19	Croatian Chess Federation	NO	2	0	229	3,954	17
20	Croatian Bowling Federation	NO	2	0	191	3,456	10
21	Croatian Golf Federation	O	2	0	22	1,430	13
22	Croatian Wrestling Federation	O	2	1	35	1,190	30
23	Croatian Canoe Federation	O	2	1	23	1,138	44
24	Croatian Gymnastic Federation	O	2	0	68	1,075	43
25	Croatian Automobile and Karting Association	NO	2	0	84	873	7
26	Croatian Diving Federation	O	2	0	85	426	11
27	Croatian Skating Federation	O	2	0	9	416	26
28	Croatian Motorcycle Federation	NO	2	1	55	412	14
29	Croatian Mountaineering Association	NO	2	1	339	0	1
30	Croatian Sport Fishing Federation	NO	1	0	468	2,059	11
31	Croatian Rugby Federation	O	1	1	22	1,314	14
32	Croatian Badminton Federation	O	1	0	29	1,127	21
33	Croatian Triathlon Federation	O	1	1	37	1,006	14
34	Croatian Hockey Federation	NO	1	0	15	955	10
35	Croatian Dance Sport Federation	NO	1	0	26	642	18
36	Croatian Skate Association	O	1	0	26	607	13
37	Croatian Archery Federation	O	1	1	44	604	15
38	Croatian Savate Federation	NO	1	0	27	527	12
39	Croatian Equestrian Federation	NO	1	0	70	501	12
40	Croatian Ice Hokey Organization	O	1	0	23	479	7
41	Croatian Cycling Federation	O	1	1	102	394	27
42	Croatian Fencing Federation	O	1	0	16	332	30



	National Sport Federation	Status	Number of paid operatives	Temporary Contract	Number of NSO members	Number of registered athletes 2021.	Number of international competitions per year
43	Croatian Aeronautical Federation	NO	1	0	53	332	12
44	Croatian Artistic Swimming Federation	O	1	0	12	256	4
45	Croatian Muay Thai Federation	NO	1	0	26	245	4
46	Croatian Weightlifting Federation	O	1	0	9	218	12
47	Croatian Open Water Swimming Federation	O	1	0	19	215	13
48	Croatian Federation of Sport Climbing	O	1	0	28	177	7
49	Croatian Diving Federation	O	1	0	8	152	11
50	Croatian Pocket Billiard Federation	NO	1	0	26	130	10
51	Croatian Biathlon Federation	O	1	0	6	116	22
52	Croatian Bob and Skeleton Federation	O	1	0	6	27	8
53	Croatian Kickboxing Federation	NO	0	1	107	3,573	2
54	Croatian Darts Federation	NO	0	0	138	2,453	7
55	Croatian Sea Sport Association	NO	0	1	290	1,764	10
56	Croatian Softball Federation	O	0	1	8	802	5
57	Croatian Wushu Federation	NO	0	0	22	641	3
58	Croatian Sambo Federation	NO	0	1	9	631	7
59	Croatian Bridge Federation	NO	0	1	19	603	5
60	Croatian Rock and roll Federation	NO	0	1	12	509	10
61	Croatian Baseball Federation	NO	0	2	10	492	5
62	Croatian Aikido Federation	NO	0	0	16	460	8
63	Croatian Orienteering Federation	NO	0	1	11	349	7
64	Croatian Armwrestling Organization	NO	0	1	17	338	4
65	Croatian Jet-ski Federation	NO	0	1	5	162	7
66	Croatian Squash Federation	NO	0	0	3	125	12
67	Croatian Luge Federation	O	0	1	5	102	4
68	Croatian Curling Federation	O	0	1	7	100	7
69	Croatian Body Building Federation	NO	0	1	24	75	8
70	Croatian Modern Pentathlon Organization	O	0	1	3	42	5
71	Croatian Waterski and Wakeboard Federation	NO	0	1	6	15	8
72	Croatian Cheerleading Federation	NO	0	0	12	394	2
73	Croatian Powerlifting Federation	NO	0	0	25	286	2
74	Croatian ju-jitsu Federation	NO	0	0	24	66	3
<b>Total</b>			<b>106</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6,884</b>	<b>249,944</b>	<b>1,415</b>
<b>Number of NSO members and number of registered athletes in 2021. - NSO covered by the interviews and questionnaire</b>					2,853	100,312	
<b>Percentage of total number of NSO members and registered athletes - NSO covered by the interviews and questionnaire</b>					41,44%	40,13%	

**Legend:**

O Olympic

NO Non - Olympic

NSOs covered by interview and questionnaire

NSOs covered only by questionnaire

NSO covered only by Pilot Study

*Note: COC allocates funds for a certain number of NSO employees' salaries according to criteria*

*Source. Database of the Croatian Olympic Committee*