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## LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES OF TOP-LEVEL SOCCER PLAYERS' IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

### PROSTOČASNE AKTIVNOSTI VRHUNSKIH NOGOMETAŠEV V OTROŠTVU IN ADOLESCENCI

#### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to examine the leisure time activities of top-level soccer players ( $N = 182$ ) in childhood and adolescence, as well as to explore the latent factor structure of the variables used. There is evidence that a certain lifestyle in leisure time reveals specific aspects of a particular subculture (Bourdieu, 2002; Hradil, 2005). The members of subcultural groups (in our case: soccer players), who are living in a special social environment, have their own specific behavioral traits in their leisure time. With a sample of 182 active and former top-level soccer players, we attempted to explore these leisure time activities by using a modified questionnaire in connection with different leisure time theory approaches (Schulze, 1992; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). The respondents replied to 21 questions, composed of a five-level Likert scale, which accounted for typical leisure time activities. The results of descriptive statistics show that the soccer players were strongly focused on activities in connection with soccer during their leisure time in childhood and adolescence. By applying factor analysis, we examined the composition of the latent factor structure of the items used. Six factors accounted for 54.22% of the total model variance before extraction (Principal Axis Factoring) and rotation (Varimax) and for 37.07% of the total model variance after extraction and rotation. The internal consistency of the hypothetical leisure time model was verified using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Based on the obtained factors, we found specific activities of soccer players in leisure time. In childhood and adolescence, soccer players were mainly focused on soccer and career development, as well as on casual leisure activities like listening to music, watching TV and videos, and reading magazines, newspapers, etc.

*Keywords:* leisure lifestyle, factor analysis, soccer

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#### POVZETEK

Glavni namen pričujoče študije je bil preučiti prosti čas nogometašev ( $N = 182$ ) in ugotoviti latentno faktorsko strukturo dejavnikov prostega časa nogometašev. Poseben življenjski slog v prostem času kaže na specifičnost posebne subkulture (Bourdieu, 2002; Hradil, 2005). Člani teh subkulturnih skupin npr. nogometaši živijo v posebnem družbenem okolju in imajo svoje specifične značilnosti obnašanja v prostem času.

Na vzorcu 182-ih tako bivših kot aktivnih vrhunskih nogometašev smo s pomočjo prirejenega vprašalnika po Schulze (1992) in Elkington & Stebbins (2014) preučili prostočasne aktivnosti nogometašev in sicer v obdobju mladostništva. Anketiranci so odgovorili na 21 vprašanj Likertove petstopenjske kriterijske skale, ki so predstavljale dejavnosti prostega časa nogometašev v mladostništvu. Rezultati deskriptivne statistike kažejo, da so bili nogometaši proučevanega vzorca v prostem času v mladosti močno usmerjeni v nogomet. S faktorsko analizo smo nato preverili vsebinsko povezavo posameznih spremenljivk, ki so vezane na aktivnosti v prostem času. Dobljenih šest latentnih faktorjev pojasnjuje 54.22 % celotne variance modela pred rotacijo (Varimax) in ekstrakcijo (Principa Axis Factoring) ter 37.07 % celotne variance modela po rotaciji in ekstrakciji. Cronbach alpha vrednost  $\alpha = 0.78$  je potrdil notranjo konsistentnost operacionaliziranih spremenljivk modela prostega časa. Na podlagi dobljenih faktorjev eksplorativne faktorske analize smo ugotovili specifične aktivnosti nogometašev v prostem času. Nogometaši so bili v obdobju mladostništva pretežno osredotočeni na nogomet in z njim povezan karierni napredek, pa tudi na bolj zabavne aktivnosti v njihovem prostem času (poslušanje glasbe, gledanje televizije in videa ter branje revij in časopisov itd.)

*Gljučne besede:* način preživljanja prostega časa, faktor-ska analiza, nogomet

## INTRODUCTION

Sports determine the leisure time behaviour of many people, not only in Europe (Gratton & Taylor, 2000) but throughout the world (Houlihan, 2008). Furthermore, mass sporting events (city marathons and big cycling events) enjoy a high level of popularity with a huge number of active participants (Hallman & Breuer, 2010; Rauter, 2014). Besides taking an active part in sport in leisure time, there is also the possibility of watching sports events as a spectator in the stadium (Hinch & Higham, 2001) or as a TV viewer at home or at a local pub or restaurant (Coakley, 2007; Dawson & Downward, 2009).

The disposition or (better) the habitus of an individual for sports results from different economic, social, and cultural reasons (Bourdieu, 1984). A particular derived sports-oriented disposition may contribute to the physical development of the individual. According to Bourdieu (1984), this certain habitus has been transmitted from early childhood onward, through primary and secondary socialization processes. As Stempel (2005) indicated, there is a large body of scientific research regarding Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1984) in connection with active or passive sports participation (Curtis, McTeer, & White, 2003; Engström, 2008; Kahma, 2012; Scheerder, Vanreusel, Taks, & Renson, 2002; Thrane, 2001; Wilson, 2002). These studies are based on the findings on how different types and levels of sports, for example luxury or proletarian sports are defined as a special kind of cultural capital. Due to prior the knowledge, taste, and disposition of each individual and his consequential class affiliation, these above-mentioned types of sports could have a social class-excluding character. Stempel (2005), for example, confirmed differences in sport participation due to class affiliation.

However, leisure time activities in childhood and adolescence have been analyzed through various reviews pertaining to this field of research from different perspectives. For instance, research focused on the health aspects of children and adolescent sport activities in leisure time (Jose & Hansen, 2013; Smith, Hannon, Brusseau, Fu, & Burns, 2016), as well as on socio-cultural aspects (Scheerder, Taks, Vanreusel, & Renson, 2005). In this connection, sociological surveys also investigated the influence of parents on children's sport participation (Burrmann, 2005; Doupona Topič & Kajtna, 2011; Downward, Hallmann, & Pawlowski, 2014). However, little attention has been paid to the leisure time lifestyle of athletes in competitive sports or to the leisure time lifestyle of top-level soccer players.

For instance, MacCosham, Patry, Beswick, and Gravelle (2015) examined the relationship between the leisure time lifestyle of amateur athletes in competitive sports and their dropout rate. However, the development of one's own talent in soccer represents a demanding as well as a challenging task for each individual accompanied with a huge number of hidden dangers and unknown facets, such as rigorous training with early specialization in childhood and the corresponding drop-out problem (Capranica & Millard-Stafford, 2011; Malina, 2010).

We could assume that the social circumstances for leisure time activities of young prospective soccer players are distinct from those of typical children or teenagers who are not engaged in competitive sports. Thus, there is a consensus that young talented soccer players lack time for leisure time activities due to the demands for school and soccer exercise sessions as well as soccer competitions.

A particular lifestyle in leisure time indicates the specificity of the cultural capital of certain subcultures (Bourdieu 2002; Hradil, 2005). Members of these subcultures (particular social

groups) live in a special social milieu with a certain regularity of behavior (Hradil, 2006). In fact, there are many different ways of spending time in leisure activities, and this is what led to our initial interest in the leisure time activities of top-level soccer players'. In particular, we were interested about the extent to which top-level soccer players' have been focused on soccer or other sports (Haugaasen, Toering, & Jordet, 2014) in leisure time during childhood and adolescence.

Opaschowski (1990), for instance, explained the behavior of individuals in leisure time in a multidimensional way. One of his interpretations of leisure time is the "theory of selective processes". This theoretical approach determined, similar as did Bourdieu (2002) and Hradil (2005), the actions of an individual in leisure time as a result of his biographical development. Elkington and Stebbins (2014) explained similar social behaviors for leisure in the field of sports with their "serious leisure theory". They claimed that serious leisure can become the central component of an amateur athlete's lifestyle. However, Elkington & Stebbins (2014) distinguished mainly between "casual leisure activities", such as playing, relaxation, TV watching, etc., and "serious leisure activities" in which the individual launching him/herself on career-centered activities in terms of gaining new knowledge, skills, and experience in leisure time.

In our specific case, we can therefore assume that our sample of top-level soccer players should be strongly action-oriented toward soccer or other sports topics in leisure time during childhood and adolescence due to their biographical development and due to their membership in a particular social group of talented young soccer players.

The main purpose of this research was to identify factors that constituted the leisure time activities among top-level soccer players by seeking biographical parallels among the subjects regarding their activities in leisure time during childhood and adolescence. This is aimed at understanding which internal connection of different leisure time activities (items) exists inside obtained factors in order to enable a categorization of different leisure time-types.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Subjects and procedures

The study included 182 active and former male soccer players aged between 18 and 46 years ( $M = 25.6$ ). The soccer players had played during the period from the years 2000 to 2012 in one of the following age categories of Slovenian Soccer National teams: U-16 (16 years and younger), U-17 (17 years and younger), U-18 (18 years and younger), U-19 (19 years and younger), U-20 (20 years and younger), U-21 (21 years and under), and the senior national team.

In the retrospective questionnaire, typical questions ( $N = 21$ ) about leisure time activities (Schulze, 1992; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014) were mostly used in order to identify soccer players' engagement profile in leisure time for their childhood and adolescence. Hereby six specific questions were asked, which scrutinized leisure time activities in connection with soccer or other sports. The questionnaire design type was composed of closed-ended questions with a five-level Likert scale. The format of the items of the Likert scale was set from "minimal (1)" to "substantial (5)". The participation in the survey was voluntary and the retrospective questionnaire was completed in writing personally or by online survey; 166 participants answered the questionnaire personally (collectively or individually under the same conditions), and 16 participants answered via the online survey.

The research by questionnaire was carried out between October 2014 and March 2015. The online survey was active from February 2015 to May 2015. The study followed the ethical guidelines and rules for research with human subjects at the home university of the authors and was approved by the Ethical Committee of the faculty. All information obtained in the questionnaire was and will remain confidential and used for research purposes only.

### Statistical Analyses

The data were processed using IBM SPSS statistics for Windows 22.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA). Analysis included descriptive statistics with mean value ( $M$ ) ranking and 95% confidence interval ( $CI$ ) for the mean, as well as inferential statistics with exploratory factor analysis.

The Principal Axis Factoring method with Varimax rotation was applied to discover the latent structure of leisure time activities in the sample. Only factor loadings higher than 0.3 were reported in the results. The number of extracted factors was determined by the size of an individual factor's eigenvalue, which exceeded or was equal to 1 (Kaiser-Guttman criterion). The internal consistency (items) of the hypothetical leisure time activity model was verified by the calculation of Cronbach's alpha.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics of the soccer players' responses in connection with their leisure time activities in childhood and adolescence are presented in Table 1.

The results of ranking the responses by their means show a very clear picture. The main activity in soccer players' leisure time was "dealing with soccer" ( $M = 4.83$  in the 95-percent confidence interval ( $CI$ ): 4.76 to 4.90). Followed by the item "meeting with friends who were soccer players' or athletes" ( $M = 4.39$ ;  $CI$ : 4.28 to 4.50). "Attending sport events" ( $M = 3.84$ ;  $CI$ : 3.70 to 3.98) was also a quite important leisure activity for the soccer players.

In general, these results are consistent with our prior assumption about the strong content-related orientation of our sample on soccer or other sports topics in leisure time, due to their biographical development and the interpretations of leisure time in terms of the "theory of selective processes" (Opaschowski, 1990). Moreover, the results are also consistent with previous literature on this topic; the analysis shows that soccer players' tastes and preferences are controlling the orientation of behaviour in leisure time (Bourdieu, 1984).

As we would expect, "serious leisure activities" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014) in which the individual is launching himself on professional career-centred activities seemed to be not so important for top-level soccer players. In this regard, the results reveal that variables like "reading professional literature or books, dealing with politics, learning foreign languages, attending cultural events" are more commonly ranked at the bottom of the scale of popularity (Table 1).

### Results of factor analysis

The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (0.75) showed a middling adequacy of the indicators selected in the hypothetical model. Bartlett's sphericity test (0.0) indicated that the performance of the factor analysis was adequate ( $P < .05$ ). The internal consistency of the leisure time model was verified by the use of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Six factors of leisure time activities (selec-

Table 1. Soccer players' leisure time activities in childhood and adolescence

Item	Dealing with politics		Playing an musical instrument		Painting		Attending cultural events		Reading professional literature or books		Hiking / excursions		Learning foreign languages	
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %
minimal (1)	152	83.5	135	74.2	97	53.3	57	31.3	47	25.8	38	20.9	26	14.3
poor (2)	16	8.8	27	14.8	40	22.0	77	42.3	75	41.2	60	33.0	59	32.4
medium (3)	8	4.4	13	7.1	28	15.4	40	22.0	43	23.6	49	26.9	66	36.3
high (4)	5	2.7	5	2.7	14	7.7	8	4.4	15	8.2	29	15.9	19	10.4
substantial (5)	1	0.5	2	1.1	3	1.6	0	0.0	2	1.1	6	3.3	12	6.6
Total replies	N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182	
Mean	1.28		1.42		1.82		1.99		2.18		2.48		2.63	
95 % CI	1.17–1.39		1.30–1.54		1.67–1.98		1.87–2.12		2.04–2.31		2.32–2.64		2.47–2.78	
Rank	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>7</b>	

  

Item	Playing billiards, darts or cards		Learning		PC or console gaming		Reading magazines or newspapers		Travelling with parents		Watching and analyzing soccer matches on TV and video		Dealing with other sports	
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %
minimal (1)	37	20.3	11	6.0	29	15.9	15	8.2	13	7.1	13	7.1	11	6.1
poor (2)	42	23.1	46	25.3	42	23.1	42	23.1	28	15.4	37	20.3	23	12.7
medium (3)	62	34.1	87	47.8	50	27.5	82	45.1	68	37.4	57	31.3	54	29.8
high (4)	28	15.4	32	17.6	44	24.2	34	18.7	58	31.9	43	23.6	55	30.4
substantial (5)	13	7.1	6	3.3	17	9.3	9	4.9	15	8.2	32	17.6	38	21.0
Total replies	N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 181	
Mean	2.66		2.87		2.88		2.89		3.19		3.24		3.48	
95 % CI	2.49–2.83		2.74–3.00		2.70–3.06		2.75–3.03		3.04–3.34		3.07–3.41		3.31–3.64	
Rank	<b>8</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>13</b>		<b>14</b>	

  

Item	Getting together with friends who are not soccer players or athletes		Watching television or videos		Tracing soccer careers of other players' in the media		Listening to music		Attending sports events		Getting together with friends (Soccer players or athletes)		Dealing with soccer	
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %
minimal (1)	4	2.2	4	2.2	4	2.2	2	1.1	2	1.1	1	.5	0	0
poor (2)	26	14.3	22	12.1	23	12.6	15	8.2	14	7.7	3	1.6	0	0
medium (3)	51	28.0	57	31.3	38	20.9	51	28.0	42	23.1	17	9.3	10	5.5
high (4)	64	35.2	64	35.2	59	32.4	64	35.2	77	42.3	64	35.2	11	6.0
substantial (5)	37	20.3	35	19.2	58	31.9	50	27.5	47	25.8	97	53.3	161	88.5
Total replies	N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182		N = 182	
Mean	3.57		3.57		3.79		3.80		3.84		4.39		4.83	
95 % CI	3.42–3.72		3.42–3.72		3.63–3.95		3.65–3.94		3.70–3.98		4.28–4.50		4.76–4.90	
Rank	<b>15</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>19</b>		<b>20</b>		<b>21</b>	

Note. Absolute Frequency (f), Relative Frequency (f %), Number of total replies (N), 95 % Confidence Interval (CI) for the mean with lower and upper Confidence limit

tion of factors with eigenvalues that exceeded or were equal to 1) were determined by the use of exploratory factor analysis (Table 2 and Table 3); the factors contained and accounted for 54.52% of the total model variance (Table 2) before extraction and rotation and 37.07% after extraction (Principal Axis Factoring) and rotation (Varimax).

Table 2. Eigenvalues and the share of explained variance of an individual factor and the cumulative share of variances of all factors

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Factor Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Factor Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Factor Variance %	Cumulative %
1	4.07	19.37	19.37	3.45	16.42	16.42	1.74	8.28	8.28
2	2.18	10.40	29.77	1.58	7.50	23.93	1.55	7.38	15.66
3	1.51	7.19	36.95	.93	4.45	28.38	1.38	6.59	22.25
4	1.45	6.88	43.84	.84	4.00	32.38	1.31	6.23	28.48
5	1.16	5.50	49.34	.54	2.58	34.96	1.03	4.89	33.36
6	1.09	5.18	54.52	.44	2.11	37.07	.78	3.71	37.07
7	.99	4.69	59.21						
8	.90	4.30	63.51						
9	.84	4.02	67.53						
10	.84	3.98	71.50						
11	.74	3.54	75.05						
12	.73	3.49	78.53						
13	.64	3.03	81.56						
14	.60	2.83	84.40						
15	.59	2.78	87.18						
16	.55	2.64	89.81						
17	.54	2.55	92.37						
18	.46	2.20	94.56						
19	.41	1.95	96.51						
20	.37	1.76	98.26						
21	.37	1.74	100.00						

Note. The share of explained variance of an individual factor and the cumulative share of variances of all factors are presented before and after extraction (Principal Axis Factoring) and rotation (Varimax).

The results of the factor analysis revealed that the first factor (F1) obtained, explains 8.28% of the total variance model. Because of his content-related composition, we named the first factor “Sports- and Entertainment-type”. The factor (F1) consisted of three variables (reading magazines or newspapers, playing billiards, darts or cards and listening to music) that describe typical “casual leisure activities” (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). Moreover, the factor also consisted of three variables (getting together with friends, who were soccer players’ or athletes, attending sports events, dealing with other sports), which demonstrate a strong action-orientation on soccer and other sports due to their biographical development (Opaschowski, 1990) and due to their membership in a specific subculture (Bourdieu, 2002; Hradil, 2005).

The second obtained factor (F2) was also named after his content-related composition. We gave him the name “Nerd”. The factor consisted of variables like “learning, reading professional literature and books, hiking/excursions, travelling with parents and learning foreign languages”. The “Nerd” factor explains 7.38 % of the total variance model and is well connected to the “serious leisure activities” dimension (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014) in which the individual is launching himself on professional career centred activities. In this connection, we must stress that descriptive statistics revealed that “serious leisure activities” have not been as popular as others in top-level soccer leisure activities (Table 1).

Table 3. Factor structure of soccer players’ leisure time activities

Items and factors (F)	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
<b>F1 “Sports- and entertainment-type”</b>						
Getting together with friends (Soccer players’ or athletes)	.48					
Reading magazines or newspapers	.43					
Playing billiards, darts or cards	.54					
Listening to music	.35					
Attending sports events	.46					
Dealing with other sports	.45					
<b>F2 “Nerd”</b>						
Learning		.54				
Reading professional literature or books		.44				
Hiking /excursions		.36				
Travelling with parents		.57				
Learning foreign languages		.50				
<b>F3 “Artistic-cultural-type”</b>						
Attending cultural events			.51			
Playing a musical instrument			.63			
Painting			.34			
Learning foreign languages			.31			
Dealing with politics			.45			
<b>F4 “Analytical-type”</b>						
Watching and analyzing soccer matches on TV and video				.73		
Tracing soccer careers of other players’ in the media				.52		
Listening to music				.33		
Attending sports events				.31		
<b>F5 “Media-type”</b>						
Watching television or videos					.53	
PC or console gaming					.63	
<b>F6</b>						
Reading professional literature or books						.44
Attending cultural events						.34

Note. Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation. Factor loadings below 0.3 were suppressed.

The third obtained factor (F3) described an “Artistic-cultural-type” of a soccer player, who is “attending cultural events, playing musical instruments, painting, learning foreign languages and is dealing with politics”. This factor explains 6.59% of the variance.

The fourth factor (F4) obtained explains 6.23% of the total variance model. The factor consisted of variables, such as “watching and analyzing soccer matches on TV and video, follow soccer careers of other players’ in the media, listening to music, attending sports events”. According to the semantic composition, we named this factor “Analytic-type” due to his mainly analytical orientation in leisure time. Here, we would assume that top-level soccer players who are implementing such activities in leisure time are mainly oriented toward soccer and other sports because of their membership in a special social milieu with a certain regularity of behavior (Hradil, 2006). This behavior inspires interest for gaining as much information as possible about a certain topic in terms of the “theory of selective processes” (Opaschowski, 1990).

The fifth obtained factor (F5) described the following characteristics of soccer players’ leisure time activities: “watching television or videos”, “PC or console gaming”. Such activities are in line with the “casual leisure activity” theory of Elkington and Stebbins (2014), and we named the factor “Media-type”.

The sixth and last obtained factor (F6) explains only 3.71% of the total variance model. Due to reasons with regards to the content, we decided to exclude factor (F6) from the naming process. This factor described no clear and precise content-related composition and is reiterated in other factors’ already obtained variables.

## CONCLUSION

In our study, we successfully identified the specific elements of leisure time activities in the childhood and adolescence of top-level soccer players in line with different leisure time theories (Bourdieu 2002; Hradil, 2005; Opaschowski, 1990). These aforementioned theories are underlining a specific lifestyle in leisure time, in particular social groups.

Unfortunately, not all theoretical methods for exploring leisure activities always guarantee a simple practical benefit. Top-level soccer players are indeed a specific subcultural group that has its own social mechanisms. We could assume that all top-level soccer players are in a literal sense “goal-oriented” or “career-oriented” in terms of “serious leisure theory”. However, our study also reveals a “casual leisure mentality”, which underlines the recreational component in the leisure time of professional soccer players.

However, young soccer players represent a certain subculture, and we found structural behaviour traits inside soccer players’ practical dispositions regarding their leisure time activities in childhood and adolescence. These behavioural traits demonstrated a logical internal composition and helped us to categorize different leisure time types of soccer players.

Finally, such a categorization model of leisure time types of soccer players could be helpful for practical issues in the work on and off the soccer field with young talented soccer players. In relation to a holistic approach for talent and personal development, soccer coaches in charge should know what kind of leisure time types in soccer players could exist in order to improve social interaction and to prevent drop out (Capranica & Millard-Stafford, 2011; Malina, 2010). Moreover, knowing about the preferences and tastes (Bourdieu, 2002) of young soccer players



in leisure time enables those in charge to navigate the general career development of a young player in the desired direction.

To this end, our study supplies a theoretical background for further research to confirm the abovementioned findings.

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