

**Bogdan Kotnik**  
**Bojan Leskošek**  
**Mojca Doupona Topič**

**SPORT IDENTITY OF VOLLEYBALL  
PLAYERS (AN INTERCULTURAL  
COMPARISON)**

**ŠPORTNA IDENTITETA ODBOJKARJEV  
(MEDKULTURNA PRIMERJAVA)**

**ABSTRACT**

The objective of the article is to research the sport identity of volleyball players from various countries, and to find possible differences between these countries. The research embraces 10 Israeli, 11 Belarusian, 20 Austrian, 17 Slovenian, 9 Croatian, 12 Bosnian, 11 Serbian and 10 Australian male volleyball players who are members of their national teams. To collect adequate data a Sport Identity Questionnaire (Curry & Weiss, 1989) was used (in modified form). On each subscale of the questionnaire a component analysis with a Varimax rotation was performed. Differences between the countries in component scores were analysed by MANOVA and ANOVA. The biggest differences among the players from the different countries were found in the following components of a sport identity: others think sports are important to me, a fear of not being able to be in sports any more, better use of free time, and excitement/career building. These characteristics can be used as a frame of reference for coaches, athletes and other experts.

*Key words:* sport identity, volleyball, national team, intercultural comparison

*Corresponding author:*

Prof. Dr. Mojca Doupona Topič  
University of Ljubljana  
Faculty of Sport  
Gortanova 22  
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
e-mail: Mojca.Doupona@fsp.uni-lj.si

**IZVLEČEK**

Namen članka je bil raziskati športno identiteto odbojkarjev različnih držav ter poiskati morebitne razlike med temi državami. V vzorec smo zajeli 10 izraelskih, 11 beloruskih, 20 avstrijskih, 17 slovenskih, 9 hrvaških, 12 bosanskih, 11 srbskih in 10 avstralskih odbojkarjev, ki so člani državne reprezentance. Za zbiranje podatkov smo uporabili prirejeno obliko Vprašalnika športne identitete (Curry & Weiss, 1989). Na posameznih sklopih vprašalnika smo izvedli komponentno analizo z Varimax rotacijo komponent. Razlike med državami smo po posameznih komponentah analizirali z MANOVA in ANOVA. Največje razlike med igralci različnih držav so se izkazale pri naslednjih komponentah športne identitete: drugi mislijo, da je šport zame pomemben, strah da se s športom ne bodo mogli več ukvarjati, boljše izrabljanje prostega časa in razburljivost/kariera. Te značilnosti lahko služijo kot referenčni okvir za trenerje, športnike in druge športne delavce.

*Gljučne besede:* športna identiteta, odbojka, reprezentanca, medkulturna primerjava

## INTRODUCTION

A sport identity is an integral part of a person's self-identity and self-concept and gives the right value and meaning to people's sport careers and sport activities as such. Fundamentally, it is a sport identity that separates professional sportsmen from engineers, students etc. It depends on dedication, commitment, confidence and the value people attribute to sports activities (Tušak, 2003). Taylor and Taylor (1997) refer to other writers when claiming that a sport identity is, in the strictest sense, a cognitive structure and a self-scheme which leads and manages the processing of information connected with the self. Therefore, a person with a strong sport identity will probably interpret a certain incident – e.g. an injury – as holding much stronger implications for their sport activities than someone whose sport identity is relatively weak. In its widest sense, sport identity equals one's social function or professional self-image. In both cases it is the influence of an athlete's family members, friends, trainers and the media that determines the degree to which one identifies him/herself as an athlete. For those who are seriously involved in sport, their sport identity often represents a principal part of their self-identity (Taylor & Taylor, 1997). Sport offers enormous possibilities for the recognition and enforcement of an individual's identity. The identity of athletes becomes their sport identity only as much as the athlete identifies him/herself with it. In cases where sport is a person's main occupation, their sport identity becomes their predominant identity. However, a highly dominant sport identity is not necessarily a defining characteristic of just professional and top athletes (Taylor & Taylor, 1997). Plevnik (2004) suggests that sport identities may vary according to the status of different sports in certain societies and social identities. In Slovenia, the sport identity of skiers is at a considerably higher level than of athletes who participate in other less popular sports. Various researches also indicate that a powerful, exceptional sport identity has a positive influence on sport performances (Tušak, 2003). A fully formed sport identity of an athlete represents their reference and a powerful means of personal affirmation. Therefore, a sport identity is crucial for maintaining the high motivation for hard work and training which contributes to constant top sport results (Trstenjak, 1976). Research carried out by Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder (1993) shows that the sport identity and age of athletes develop a negative link which might result from various activities the athletes take part in after they finish their sport careers. Consequently, their exclusive identification with sport decreases.

### **Positive and negative aspects of a strong sport identity**

The consequences of a strong sport identity can be both positive and negative. A potential benefit of being an active athlete is the development of a self-identity and self-concept (Bajec, 2003). A strong sport identity is connected with the desired effects of sport activity (Masten, 2002). Werthner and Orlick (1986) claim there is a positive link between a predominant sport identity and successful performance in competition. Further, a predominant sport identity is related to highly articulated motivation and high competence in sport as well as physical strength and competence, and well-assessed physical appearance. Baysden, Brewer, Petitpas, & Van Raalte (1997) highlight the fact that athletes with a stronger sport identity who come from universities show a higher motivation related to sport than those with a weaker sport identity (Tušak, Tušak, & Barborič, 2002). Certainly, sport is not the only subsystem in society where the recognition of identity arises. However, there is no other system in modern societies that enables so many people access to a system of social value and recognition regardless of their creed, gender, age or social and educational status (Weiss, 2001). Research studies also report on the risks of a strong

sport identity. Top athletes are professional sportsmen. Therefore, their sport identity is their professional identity which can determine an athlete to such an extent that we can talk about an athlete's professional deformation (Kovačev, 1996). Peterson (1997) claims that athletes with an excessive sport identification face serious problems when injured and during the rehabilitation process. Athletes with a strong sport identity may also express negative reactions when faced with the end of their career and they have to adapt to a new situation. Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer (1996) write about a prematurely closed identity which is the result of an exclusive orientation to sport in late childhood or adolescence. The considerable hardships of training and living conditions are factors that contribute to a prematurely closed identity. Tušak (2003) believes that several problems are related to a strong sport identity as it may be the reason for athletes participating in sport activities to such a level that they put their physical health in danger (e.g. excessive training and active participation in sport events when injured).

Some influential research on sport identity was designed by Weiss et al. in their many studies (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2007; Curry & Weiss, 1989; Hilscher, 2003; Kessler, 2003; Weiss, 2001, 2003; Weiss & Curry, 1997). The research on sport identity was underpinned by the Sport Identity Questionnaire (Curry & Weiss, 1989) which in some studies was slightly adjusted to the sample of athletes and the level of their involvement in sports. The questionnaire includes different areas of sport identity (Personal Sport Identity, Social Sport Identity, Satisfaction Through Sport Participation and Sport Motivation) which explain several aspects of sport identity and provide answers concerning how important a sport identity is and how it influences an athlete. The authors (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2007) state that the importance of sport in an athlete's life can only be established when compared to other areas of their life. In terms of the importance in one's life, sportspersons put family in first place, then sports and friends. Other areas (profession, art/music, politics, ethnic or national belonging, religion/church) follow in this order but athletes attribute them with less importance. In a study encompassing 814 professional athletes, 690 amateur athletes and 473 up-and-coming athletes they stated: "Austrian competitive athletes see themselves as sportsmen or – women – which is also illustrated in their personal sport identity. In comparison with the others, the youngsters identify most strongly with their sport, but all the other athletes in unison use sport as an ego booster. There is one exception to this case: professional athletes do increasingly feel that their sport is more like a job than a need for self-affirmation" (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2007). Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss (2007) stated the following concerning Social Sport Identity: "More than half of the sportsmen or women think that other people see them as athletes. Active athletes do in fact have a higher personal than social identity, but nevertheless a good portion of them also thinks that their surroundings appreciate them as athletes as well. This combination between one's own personal sport identity and the ideas of others builds an excellent basis for the formation of identities". Authors (Weiss & Curry, 1997) have also established that Austrian female volleyball players characteristically experience less social recognition and less satisfaction through sports than their male counterparts. According to them, the reason was probably the conservative attitude of Austrians who largely do not support women's sport. Bergant, Hilscher and Weiss (2007) established that the motives encouraging athletes to engage in sport were associated with sport identity. In the category of the main motives (Fitness and Health, Competition and Career, Enjoying Sport and Social Contacts), the Austrian athletes surveyed in the abovementioned study ranked Enjoying Sport as the most important motive, followed by Social Contacts, Fitness and Health, and Competition and Career. Nevertheless, the study showed that the most pronounced motive of professional athletes was

Career. The authors also established: “In general, Austrian competitive athletes can be divided into two groups: on the one hand there are active sportsmen and women who do their sports competitively but fitness and the social aspects of sport are of greatest importance. On the other hand there are professionals who do their sports to earn money and as their career”.

The subject of our study was research into the sport identity of volleyball players. The study was based on studies of sport identity and motivation (Bergant, Hilscher & Weiss, 2007; Curry & Weiss, 1989; Hilscher, 2003; Kessler, 2003; Weiss, 2001, 2003; Weiss & Curry, 1997). These studies delved into the sport identity of competitors (Weiss & Curry, 1997) and athletes who more or less engage in sports: professional athletes, amateur athletes, as well as up-and-coming athletes (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2007; Hilscher, 2003; Kessler, 2003). Since these studies thoroughly investigated the notion of sport identity and the motivation of athletes practising sports at different levels, in our study we focused on a comparison of the sport identity of members of national teams from different countries and a comparison of our results with those from previous studies (athletes with different levels of involvement).

## METHODS

### Participants

The sample consists of 10 Israeli, 11 Belarusian, 20 Austrian, 17 Slovenian, 9 Croatian, 12 Bosnian, 11 Serbian and 10 Australian male volleyball players who play on the international level and have been listed as members of their national teams by selectors. The number of players from a certain country differs due to the fact that in some countries selectors invite more players to join the national team than elsewhere. For the purpose of this research, countries of the former republics of Yugoslavia were used (Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia) together with countries in other geographical areas. Austria was selected as our neighbouring Central European country. Belarus was chosen among the Eastern European countries and Israel represents the Middle East. Australia was included as a representative of other continents.

### Measurements

The data were acquired by the questionnaire, which covers five areas of research. It is composed of 20 socio-demographic variables, 6 variables that determine what other people expect of an athlete (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.79$ ), 13 variables which define how important sport is for an athlete ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ), 13 variables that measure the satisfaction experienced in sports ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ), and 15 variables that were included to reveal personal reasons for becoming an athlete ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). It was important to select the type of variables that would produce optimal results. The questionnaire was first composed by Curry and Weiss (1989). It was used with a five-point Likert scale (answers ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The measure obtained an acceptable degree of internal reliability in this sample, as reflected in the Cronbach statistics; the values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  are greater than 0.7.

### Data analysis

The data were analysed with the PASW Statistics 18 software. For every subscale of the questionnaire principal components were extracted from the correlation matrix; components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were rotated under a Varimax criterion. Scores on each extracted

component were computed using the Anderson-Rubin method. Differences among the countries were tested with MANOVA for all components together and separately for each one with a one-way ANOVA and non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. Differences between each country's mean and grand mean were computed with *deviation* contrasts.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution statistics of general variables for the entire sample of players

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Std. dev.	Skewness
age	100	16	36	25.1	24.9	3.99	.26
no. of workouts per week	69	4	12	8.0	7.6	2.44	.23
no. of workout hours per week	100	6	36	18.2	17.3	7.19	.56
no. of hours spent on commuting per week	100	1	30	7.5	5.5	6.50	1.59
no. of hours spent at competitions per week	100	2	50	10.3	6.6	9.03	2.24
athlete's self-assessment of how successful he is	100	1	5	4.0	4.0	.64	-.50
importance of family/relatives	100	30	100	92.2	98.8	14.1	-2.29
importance of his/her sports discipline	100	50	100	88.6	91.8	13.0	-1.14
importance of friends and acquaintances	100	10	100	78.0	83.6	22.1	-1.04
importance of faith, religion, church	100	0	100	41.6	33.5	34.6	.43
importance of ethnic and national associations	100	0	100	33.1	26.3	31.2	.65
importance of art and music	99	0	100	49.9	52.1	25.4	-.24

Basic distribution statistics are shown in Table 1. Since some variables are presented on a Likert's scale and some are asymmetrically distributed, both the mean and median are shown. Except for the *Importance of art and music* with one missing value and *no. of workouts per week* with 69 the data are complete.

Table 2: Means, principal component loadings and percentage of explained variance in analysis of the Sport Identity Questionnaire (Curry & Weiss, 1989) subscales

Item	Component loading					% expl.
	Mean	1	2	3	4	
v22 no one would really be surprised if I just stopped participating in sport	2.07		-.40			28.4
v23 many of the people I know expect me to continue participating in sports	3.98	.70	.30			26.0
v24 many people regard me as an athlete	3.95	.52	.49			
v25 it is important to my friends and relatives that I continue to participate in sports	3.53	.82	-.36			
v26 it would not matter to most people I know if I decided to give up sport	2.67	-.51	-.47			
v27 other people think that sports are important to me	4.13		.85			
v28 being an athlete is an important part of who I am	4.43		.72			18.4
v29 I am strongly committed to being good at sports	4.44		.69			18.3

Item	Component loading						% expl.
	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	
v30 during the past week I have made several decisions that were influenced by my participation in sports	3.75				.87		10.3
v31 being an athlete is something I rarely or never think about	2.30	-.43	.64				9.7
v32 improving my athletic skills is important to me	4.53	-.59	.43				9.0
v33 I often dream or daydream about sports	3.25	.36	.72				
v34 being a sports team member means more to me than just participating in sport	4.52			.81			
v35 I typically organise my day so that I can participate in sports	4.52	-.37	.38		.43		
v36 I would feel a great sense of loss if I were suddenly unable to participate in sports	4.06					.95	
v37 when I participate in sports, I do not care if I make mistakes	1.70	.76					
v38 I really do not know exactly what it means to me to be a member of my sports team	1.85	.73					
v39 I often plan far ahead to make time for sport	3.94		.41		.46		
v40 I rarely or never think about how I can become better in the sport in which I participate	2.06	.74					
v43 through sports I have discovered my inner strength	4.11	.69					21.4
v44 through sports I have learned to keep my body in good physical condition	4.56	.47	.44				13.7
v45 I feel that if I were not involved in sport I would not care as much about my health	3.45		.85				11.4
v46 sports provide me with valuable training in competition	4.36	.62	.32				10.9
v47 sports are not as much fun as they used to be	2.93					.90	10.0
v48 overall, I feel that I do not get enough out of sports to justify the effort it takes	2.60			.68		.42	
v49 through sport I have gained confidence in myself	4.13	.74					
v50 I feel that sport takes up too much of my time	2.91				.76	.38	
v51 I feel that sports have taught me how to set and achieve goals in my personal life	4.07	.79					
v52 I feel that sports have distracted me from more important activities	2.38		.36	.74			
v53 I feel that sports have encouraged me to make better use of my free time	3.15		.83				
v54 since I have been participating in sports, I have improved my ability to cope with the physical stress of everyday life	3.93	.44	.59		-.38		
v55 through sports I have learned to be more assertive	3.95	.42	.52				
v58 I participate in sports because I enjoy competition	4.44	.35	.47	.48			22.8
v59 I participate in sports because it is exciting	3.95			.88			14.0
v60 I participate in sports because I like to spend my time with others	3.63	.90					12.9
v61 I participate in sports because it relaxes me	2.86		.43	-.55	.34		12.8
v62 I participate in sports because I like being in a team	3.88	.91					9.2
v63 I participate in sports because my friends do	2.61	.31	.66				
v64 I participate in sports because it makes me physically fit	3.81	.69	.33				

Item	Mean	Component loading					% expl.
		1	2	3	4	5	
v65 I participate in sports because I enjoy winning	4.40			.74			
v66 I participate in sports because it makes me physically attractive	3.02		.43	.65			
v67 I participate in sports to experience camaraderie/team-spirit	3.58	.85					
v68 I participate in sports because I enjoy physical exercise	3.74			.49	.37	-.42	
v69 I participate in sports because I meet new people	3.40	.47	.59				
v70 I participate in sports because my family wants me to	2.12		.85				
v71 I participate in sports because I make money doing so	3.78					.90	
v72 I participate in sports because I want to make a career of it	3.87				.74	.34	

Principal component analysis was used to analyse the structure of each subscale of the questionnaire (Table 2). Only components with eigenvalues larger than 1 were extracted and rotated under a Varimax criterion. The following components and items defining them were identified:

- “Expectations of your sports’ participation” subscale: 1. *Others expect me to participate in sports*; 2. *Others think sports are important to me*
- “The importance of sport in your life” subscale: 1. *I don’t care about my sport performance*; 2. *Being a good athlete is important to me*; 3. *Being a team member is important to me*; 4. *Careful planning of my sports participation*; 5. *Fear of not being able to be in sports any more*
- “Satisfaction through sport” subscale: 1. *Self-confidence and goal-setting ability*; 2. *Health and stress coping*; 3. *Better use of free time*; 4. *Sport is time-consuming and distracting*; 5. *Sport is not much fun*
- “Personal motives for participation in sport” subscale: 1. *Socialising in a team*; 2. *Others encourage me to participate*; 3. *Competitiveness/physical attractiveness*; 4. *Excitement /career building*; 5. *Money*

Country differences in the means and medians of the component scores are presented by boxplots (Figure 1) and tests of their statistical importance (Table 3). Both parametric (ANOVA with a deviation contrast) and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis) were used. The proportion of explained variance of each component score was evaluated by an eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) coefficient.

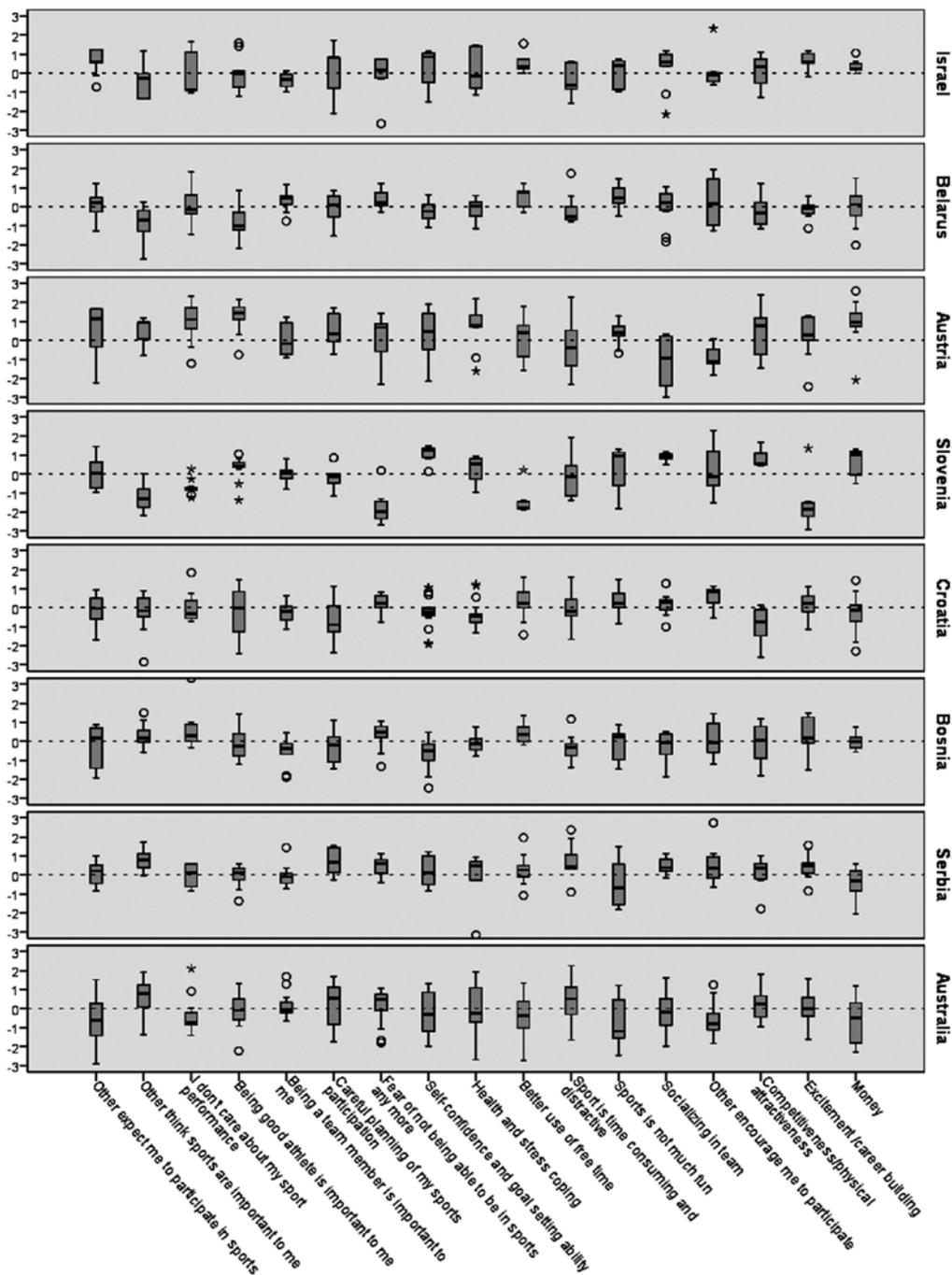


Figure 1: Boxplots for component scores by country

Table 3: Components' means, effect sizes, ANOVA and the Kruskal-Wallis test for differences between countries

	Country								Eta Sq.	ANOVA F p	K-W p
	Israel	Belarus	Austria	Slovenia	Croatia	Bosnia	Serbia	Australia			
Others expect me to participate in sports	-.23	.05	-.51	-.09	.64	.07	.53	.10	14%	.055	.079
Others think sports are important to me	.31	-1.17	.64	-.14	-.48	-.81	.54	.75	44%	<.001	<.001
I don't care about my sport performance	.58	-.70	-.47	-.08	-.03	.04	.98	.26	24%	.001	<.001
Being a good athlete is important to me	-.11	.30	-.04	-.21	.04	-.82	1.23	-.05	26%	<.001	.001
Being a team member is important to me	-.55	-.02	.12	-.26	-.40	.37	.74	-.03	13%	.065	.026
Careful planning of my sports participation	-.29	-.15	.24	-.74	.08	-.05	.51	.72	20%	.004	.009
Fear of not being able to be in sports any more	.29	-1.81	.20	.20	-.08	.34	.19	.44	43%	<.001	.001
Self-confidence and goal setting ability	-.73	1.07	-.24	-.31	.33	-.27	.41	.13	24%	<.001	<.001
Health and stress coping	-.11	.29	-.05	-.33	.26	-.13	.28	.07	9%	.281	.316
Better use of free time	.38	-1.50	-.38	.32	.55	.54	.05	.28	38%	<.001	<.001
Sport is time consuming and distractive	-.29	-.14	.39	.02	-.33	-.22	-.46	.70	12%	.100	.084
Sports is not much fun	-.16	.24	-.72	.38	-.03	.51	.53	-.46	22%	.002	.011
Socialising in a team	-.30	.91	-.19	.18	.28	.05	-1.25	.44	28%	<.001	<.001
Others encourage me to participate	.11	.27	-.63	.57	.07	.26	-.89	.49	26%	<.001	<.001
Competitiveness/physical attractiveness	-.08	.83	.18	-.96	.05	-.25	.52	.13	28%	<.001	<.001
Excitement/career building	.31	-1.71	.07	.17	.64	-.13	.26	.43	41%	<.001	<.001
Money	.04	.59	-.54	-.28	.37	.02	.89	-.46	23%	.001	.001

Legend: *Eta Sq.* – estimate of effect size (eta squared); *ANOVA F p* – significance (p-value) for ANOVA F-test; *K-W p* – significance (p-value) for the Kruskal-Wallis test; country means shown in bold are different from the grand mean at the 5% level.

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the sport identity of male volleyball players. The research problem consisted of establishing differences in terms of sport identity among volleyball players from different national teams. Compared to previous studies (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2007; Curry & Weiss, 1989; Hilscher, 2003; Kessler, 2003; Weiss, 2001, 2003; Weiss and Curry, 1997) that used an updated questionnaire by Curry and Weiss (1989), our study differs because the sample of athletes solely included members of national teams, i.e. elite athletes

only. To understand the differences among the countries in terms of sport identity, it is also necessary to define the quality range of the national teams involved. The national teams of the athletes participating in our study were classified as follows (FIVB World Ranking Men, 2007): Serbia – 6th, Australia – 23rd, Croatia – 40th, Slovenia – 45th, Austria – 54th, Belarus – 66th, Israel – 75th and Bosnia – 88th.

The athletes in our study were 25.1 years old on average, trained 18.2 hours a week (8 trainings) on average, and assessed themselves as '4 – successful' (Table 1) on a scale from 1 to 5. In terms of the importance of individual areas in the surveyed athletes' lives, the results show they put *Importance of family/relatives* in first place, followed by *Importance of his/her sports discipline* and *Importance of friends and acquaintances*. Other areas achieved lower average scores and were ranked in the following order: *Importance of art and music*, *Importance of faith, religion, church* and *Importance of ethnic and national associations*. The results confirmed those of studies by Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss (2007) where, using the same questionnaire, the authors established the same order of importance for athletes. Similar results were published by Kissler (2003) who established that those athletes who were engaged less in sports ranked *Importance of family/relatives* in first place. The second place was assigned to *Importance of friends and acquaintances* and the third place to *Importance of his/her sports discipline*. The difference was that top athletes only perceived their family to be more important than sports, showing that sport is very important to them.

As regards Social Sport Identity the analysis showed an extremely strong Social Sport Identity among all of the surveyed athletes which is demonstrated by the high average values (answers ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) in all variables of this area (Table 2), especially in *Others think that sports are important to me* ( $M = 4.13$ ), *Many of the people I know expect me to continue participating in sports* ( $M = 3.98$ ), *Many people regard me as an athlete* ( $M = 3.95$ ) and *No one would really be surprised if I just stopped participating in sport* ( $M = 2.07$  – reverse scored). Similar results were obtained by Weiss and Curry (1997) who also investigated the sport identity of volleyball players. They established that the surveyed American and Czech volleyball players had a higher Social Sport Identity than their Austrian counterparts. According to them, the most probable reason for this was that the American and Czech volleyball players were better recognised and accepted in their home country because volleyball was more popular in those two countries. A component analysis of the Social Sport Identity set yielded two components, namely *Others expect me to participate in sports* and *Others think sports are important to me*. The biggest differences among countries ( $\eta^2 = 44\%$ ) was found in the component *Others think sports are important to me*. Belarus (-1.17) and Bosnia (-.81) have the lowest means of scores for this component, while Australia (.75), Austria (.64) and Serbia (.54) have the highest (Table 3). The means of those five countries are also significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). This result could lead us to conclude that, in terms of quality (FIVB WORLD RANKING MEN, 2007), better national teams have higher average values for the variable *Others think sports are important to me* since Serbia and Australia were ranked first among all of the surveyed countries, whereas Belarus and Bosnia occupied the last places in the table. Austria also achieved higher average values than Belarus and Bosnia.

In the area of Personal Sport Identity, the analysis showed an extremely strong personal sport identity of all surveyed athletes, as proven by the extremely high average values for all variables (Table 2). Particularly high averages were seen in the following variables: *Improving my athletic skills is important to me* ( $M = 4.53$ ), *Being a sports team member means more to me than just*

*participating in sport* ( $M = 4.52$ ), *I typically organise my day so that I can participate in sports* ( $M = 4.52$ ), *I am strongly committed to being good at sports* ( $M = 4.44$ ) and *Being an athlete is an important part of who I am* ( $M = 4.43$ ). The surveyed athletes achieved higher average values in Personal Sport Identity than in Social Sport Identity, which is an issue that was already pointed out by Bergant, Hilscher and Weiss (2007) who wrote: “Active athletes do in fact have a higher personal than social identity, but nevertheless a good portion of them also thinks that their surroundings appreciate them as athletes as well”. The component analysis of the Personal Sport Identity set resulted in five components, namely: *I don't care about my sport performance*; *Being a good athlete is important to me*; *Being a team member is important to me*; *Careful planning of my sports participation*; and *Fear of not being able to be in sports any more*. The greatest differences among the countries ( $\eta^2 = 43\%$ ) were found in the component *Fear of not being able to be in sports any more*. Belarus (-1.81) had the lowest means of scores for this component, while Australia (.44) had the highest (Table 3). The means of Belarus are also significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). The link between Social Sport Identity and Personal Sport Identity was also visible in our result. Belarus thus achieved the lowest values in both factors where the differences between the states were the largest in both the Social Sport Identity set (*Others think sports are important to me*) and the Personal Sport Identity set (*Fear of not being able to be in sports any more*). Australia achieved the highest values in both factors mentioned above.

As regards satisfaction through sport participation, the analysis showed the high level of satisfaction of all surveyed athletes with their engagement in sport, as proven by the extremely high average values in all variables. Satisfaction was particularly high in the following variables: *Through sports I have learned to keep my body in good physical condition* ( $M = 4.56$ ); *Sports provide me with valuable training in competition* ( $M = 4.36$ ); *Through sport I have gained confidence in myself* ( $M = 4.13$ ); *Through sports I have discovered my inner strength* ( $M = 4.11$ ); and *I feel that sports have taught me how to set and achieve goals in my personal life* ( $M = 4.07$ ). The highest values were also observed in all of the abovementioned variables in the study by Weiss and Curry (1997). In their study, the highest average value on a scale from 1 to 8 was achieved by the statement *My participation in volleyball has provided me with valuable training in competition* ( $M = 7.07$ ). A component analysis of the Satisfaction Through Sport Participation set resulted in five factors, namely: *Self-confidence and goal setting ability*; *Health and stress coping*; *Better use of free time*; *Sport is time-consuming and distractive*; and *Sports is not much fun*. The biggest differences among the countries ( $\eta^2 = 38\%$ ) were found for the component *Better use of free time*. Belarus (-1.50) and Austria (-.38) have the lowest means of scores for this component, while Croatia (.55) and Bosnia (.54) have the highest (Table 3). The means of those four countries are also significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). As in the previous two sets, members of the Belarus national team achieved the lowest average values for the statement where the differences among the countries were the largest.

As regards the motives for participating in sport, the analysis showed that the most pronounced motive of the surveyed elite athletes was *Because I enjoy competition*. The second strongest motive was *Because I enjoy winning*, followed by *Because it is exciting*, *Because I like being in a team* and *Because I want to make a career of it*. The least expressed motives included *Because my family wants me to*, *Because my friends do* and *Because it relaxes me*. Bergant, Hilscher and Weiss (2007) wrote about the following four categories of athletes' motives “Fitness and Health”, “Competition and Career”, “Enjoying Sport” and “Social Contacts”, whereby the most pronounced motive of the international elite athletes was “Competition and Career” and of all the athletes in the study it was

“Enjoying Sport”. The athletes in our study put a great emphasis on the motives *I enjoy winning* and *I enjoy competition* which is comparable to the motives of the athletes in the abovementioned research as in both cases the motive includes taking pleasure in competition, winning and career. Other authors also describe the relationship between sport identity and competitiveness (Bajec, 2003; Tušak, 2003). In his study of psychological factors of success in a sports competition, Kotnik (2009) wrote that success at the Olympic Games depends heavily on an athlete’s competitiveness. Stronger competitiveness broadens the possibilities for a high sports result. A component analysis of all the motives in our study yielded the following five factors: *Socialising in a team*; *Others encourage me to participate*; *Competitiveness/physical attractiveness*; *Excitement/career building*; and *Money*. The division of motives differs from the division established by Bergant, Hilscher & Weiss (2007). The reason is that in our study the sample of international elite athletes was very narrowly selected. Nevertheless, there are differences among the countries. The biggest differences among the countries ( $\eta^2 = 41\%$ ) were found in the component *Excitement/career building*. Belarus (-1.71) has the lowest means of scores for this component, while Croatia (.64) has the highest (Table 3). The means of those two countries are also significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). Also in this set, members of the Belarus national team achieved the lowest average values in the component where the differences among the countries were the largest. The highest average of all of the surveyed countries in this component was achieved by members of the Croatian national team.

The research into the sport identity of volleyball players from various countries establishes certain characteristics of volleyball players who are members of national teams. Members of the Belarus national team differed the most from all other national teams surveyed in our study. In all the studied sport identity sets, they achieved the lowest average values in all components where the differences among the countries were the largest. In terms of other studied components, they also differed statistically significantly from the grand mean (of zero) more often than other countries. Obviously, the athletes from this relatively young country, where remnants of the socialist regime of the former Soviet Union are still present, do not identify with their athlete role to the same extent as athletes from the other surveyed countries (and other people also do not see them distinctly in this role), whereas sports enable them to socialise with the team. As regards the motives, they value *Competitiveness/physical attractiveness* more and *Excitement/career building* less than other athletes. They fear less than other athletes about not being able to engage in sport any more (Personal Sport Identity) and on average think less than other athletes that other people think sports are important to them (Social Sport Identity). They agree to a smaller extent that sports have helped them to use their free time better. In contrast to the Belarus national team members, members of the Serbian national team (who occupied the highest place in the FIVB ranking among all surveyed national teams) stand out from the other surveyed national teams in terms of the sport identity components that are typical of elite athletes. The highest average of all surveyed national teams was achieved in the component Social Sport Identity (*Others think sports are important to me*) and two major components of the Personal Sport Identity set (*Being a good athlete is important to me* and *Being a team member is important to me*). They achieve less satisfaction through sports participation than other surveyed athletes as their average value is slightly higher only in the *Health and stress coping* component and statistically significantly differs from the grand mean (of zero). Perhaps the reason lies in the fact, as established by Bergant, Hilscher and Weiss (2007), that for elite athletes sport is more of a profession than a source of satisfaction. This is also proven by the results concerning the motives

of members of the Serbian national team. Their main motive is *Money*. They achieve a significantly higher average than the grand mean (of zero) in this component. A significantly lower average from the grand mean (of zero) is also achieved in the motives *Socialising in a team* and *Others encourage me to participate* which shows they do not value socialisation and the encouragement of others like the other surveyed athletes but instead prioritise *Money*, *Competitiveness/physical attractiveness* and *Excitement/career building*. Serbia was also once part of a large group of socialist countries (Yugoslavia). Unlike Belarus (which separated from the Soviet Union by itself), Belgrade (in Serbia) was the capital city of Yugoslavia from which other countries separated. However, the Serbian nation preserved its unity and self-esteem which is also seen in competitions. Serbian athletes are known as great national heroes and the nation keenly identifies with them. This is of course also due to the excellent results of Serbian athletes. It is interesting that national team members of Australia, which is comparable with Serbia in terms of quality and where volleyball is also a very popular sport, achieve higher average values from the grand mean (of zero) in the components *Others think sports are important to me* and *Careful planning of my sports participation* which belong to Social and Personal Sport Identity. In terms of Satisfaction Through Sport Participation, they achieve a higher average from the grand mean (of zero) in the *Sport is time-consuming and distractive* component. In a way Serbia and Australia confirm the findings of previous studies (Bergant, Hilscher & Weiss, 2007) about a strong sport identity of elite athletes who, nevertheless, only experience an average level of satisfaction through sport. One country that differs from the other surveyed countries is Austria which is considered to be more conservative. The most recognised athletes in Austria are skiers and they also have a stronger sport identity than other athletes (Weiss, 2003). Athletes who engage in other sports and are less successful achieve lower degrees of recognisability and sport identity. Even if Austrian athletes achieve a high level of sport identity in all of the studied sets, the results of our study show that members of the Austrian national team have a slightly lower level of Social Sport Identity for the component *Others expect me to participate in sport* compared to members of other national teams, and a slightly higher level for the component *Others think sports are important to me*. In these two variables they achieved a significantly different average from the grand mean (of zero). In terms of Personal Sport Identity, they achieved a statistically lower average from the grand mean (of zero) for the component *I don't care about my sport performance*. In other variables within this set, they achieved more or less average values. In the Satisfaction Through Sport Participation set, they achieved lower average values than other surveyed countries only in the components *Better use of free time* and *Sports is not much fun* (reverse scored), which means they believe less than others that sport encourages them to use their free time better and that sport is not as fun as it used to be. In terms of the motives associated with participation in sport, their average values statistically significantly differ from the grand mean (of zero) in the components *Others encourage me to participate* and *Money*. To summarise, members of the Austrian national team believe more than their counterparts from other national teams that other people think sport is important to them. This is true as they care for their sports performance more than others. However, they agree less than others that other people encourage them to participate in sports or that they engage in sports for money. They agree less than the other surveyed athletes that sport is not as much fun and that they started using their free time better because of sport. The athletes from the other surveyed countries do not stand out in terms of the resulting sport identity components (nor in terms of quality). Bosnia is worth mentioning as it has found itself in a difficult situation after the war. Compared to members of other surveyed national teams, the Bosnian members achieved the lowest average values in two major compo-

nents of Social and Personal Sport Identity (*Others think sports are important to me* and *Being a good athlete is important to me*) which were also significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). This means that they identify with the role of athlete less than the other surveyed athletes. Moreover, other people associate them with this role to a smaller extent. Sport encourages them to use their free time better more than for the other surveyed athletes. Israeli national team members (representing the Middle East) achieved average scores on all of the sports identity components with the exception of the factor called Self-confidence and goal-setting ability with the latter showing the lowest means of scores. The average on this variable is further significantly different from the grand mean (of zero). Israel declared its independence in 1948. Prior to that, it had always been a dependent territory ruled by emperors of other countries, and constantly involved in wars over various territories. Even after the country achieved its independence, the fighting and protecting of borders and territories has continued. Israel has indeed succeeded in becoming a country with a strong economy, however due to constantly having to fight for survival and national identity there has been little space left for people to develop their own sports identity and self-confidence that would be a direct result of engaging in sports. It is more likely that Israeli people have learnt how to reach their goals as a result of living in rough circumstances and not as a result of engaging in sports.

The study showed some major country-specific differences. It confirmed the findings of authors who have also used this questionnaire in their studies. Some of the specificities, i.e. different components than in the previous studies, are a consequence of the narrowly selected sample of elite athletes in our study. The biggest differences in individual sets were demonstrated in the following components: *Others think sports are important to me*; *Fear of not being able to be in sports anymore*; *Better use of free time*; and *Excitement/career building*. The findings of the study confirm the already mentioned facts that higher ranked athletes in countries where their sport is very popular (e.g. Serbia) have a stronger sport identity than those who fail to achieve top results and are not so recognised in their home country (e.g. Israel). One fact that raises some concern is that high-ranking elite athletes increasingly perceive their sport as their profession and their important motives are money and career.

## REFERENCES

- Bajec, B. (2003). *Povezanost športne identitete z osebnostjo športnikov*. [Linking sport identity with the personalities of athletes]. Unpublished diploma thesis, Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport.
- Baysden, M.F., Brewer, B.W., Petitpas, A.J., & Van Raalte, J.L. (1997). *Motivational correlates of athletic identity*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, San Diego, CA.
- Bergant, S., Hilscher, P., & Weiss, O. (2007). Sport identity and motivation of Austrian competitive athletes. In D. H. Jütting, B. Schulze, & U. Müller (Eds.), *Proceedings book of the European Association for the Sociology of Sport conference Local sport in Europe* (pp. 57–63). Münster: European Association for the Sociology of Sport.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles' heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24, 237–254.
- Curry, T.J., & Weiss, O. (1989). Sport identity and motivation for volleyball participation: A comparison between American college athletes and Austrian student sport club members. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3, 257–268.

- FIVB World Ranking Men (2007). FIVB. Retrived June, 18, from [http://www.fivb.org/EN/Volleyball/Rankings/Rank\\_men\\_2007\\_07.asp](http://www.fivb.org/EN/Volleyball/Rankings/Rank_men_2007_07.asp)
- Hilscher, P. (2003). *Sportidentität und Motivation Österreichischer spitzen-, amateur- und nachwuchssportler/innen* [Sport identity and motivation of Austrian professional, amateur and up-and-coming athletes]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wien: Institut für Sportwissenschaft der Universität Wien.
- Kessler, I. (2003). *Sportliche Identität und Motivation im Laufsport*. [Sport identity and motivation of runners]. Unpublished diploma thesis, Wien: Institut für Sportwissenschaft der Universität Wien.
- Kovačev, A. N. (1996). Teorija družbene identitete in druge teorije medskupinske diferenciacije [Theory of social identity and other theories of intergroup differentiation]. *Anthropos*, 28(½), 117–132.
- Kotnik, B. (2009). *Dejavniki uspeha slovenskih vrhunskih športnikov na velikem tekmovanju* [The success factors of Slovenian top athletes at a big competition]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport.
- Masten, R. (2002). Identiteta in šport [Identity and sport]. In M. Tušak, & J. Bednarik (Eds.). *Nekateri psihološki, socialni in ekonomski vidiki športa v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport, 241–248.
- Murphy, G.M., Petitpas, A.J., & Brewer, B.W. (1996). Identity foreclosure, athletic identity and career maturity in intercollegiate athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 10, 239–246.
- Peterson, K. M. (1997). *The injury coping process for athletes: A qualitative examination*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, United States: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,.
- Plevnik, D. (2004). *Samopodoba in športna identiteta nogometašev*. [Self-esteem and sport identity of football players]. Unpublished diploma thesis, Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport.
- Taylor, J., & Taylor, S. (1997). *Psychological Approaches to Sport Injury Rehabilitation*. Gaithersburg, Maryland: Aspen Publishers, Inc.
- Trstenjak, A. (1976). *Problemi psihologije* [Problems of psychology]. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica.
- Tušak, M., Tušak, M., & Barborič, K. (2002). Razvoj in dejavniki športne identitete in uspešnost v športu [Development and factors of sport identity and success in sport]. In M. Tušak & J. Bednarik (Eds.), *Nekateri psihološki, socialni in ekonomski vidiki športa v Sloveniji* Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport, 249–256.
- Tušak, M. (2003). Samopodoba in športna identiteta [Self-esteem and sport identity]. *Šport mladih*, 11(92), 48–49.
- Weiss, O., & Curry, T. J. (1997). Sport identity and motivation for volleyball participation: A cross cultural comparison. In: Nardis, P., A. Mussionio & N. Porro (Eds.), *Sport, social problems*, Social Movements Roma, 296–303.
- Weiss, O. (2001). Identity reinforcement in sport. Revisiting the symbolic interactionist legacy. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 36(4), 303–405.
- Weiss, O. (2003). *Zapiski predavanj na podiplomskem študiju Fakultete za šport* [Lecture notes taken in postgraduate classes at the Faculty of Sport]. Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport.
- Werthner, P., & Orlick, T. (1986). Retirement experiences of successful Olympic Athletes. *International Journal of Sport Psychology* 17, 337–363.