



Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

**Going 'Legit': Sports Legitimacy and the Case of
Minifootball**

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Preface

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Christos Anagnostopoulos for his continuous support and helpful advice during the research process. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the helpful minifootball interviews who provided me their time, attention and assistance: Tira Thassy, Zorica Hofman, Filip Juda, Dávid Tibor, Jakub Stefek, Mark Staines and Rico Chermont. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge my family for being there for me and for offering their support and patience during the degree and thesis period. This would not have been possible without you.

Abstract

Some sports are more accepted than others. But what does it mean for a sport to be accepted, and how does this happen? How can an ‘emerging’ sport – such as minifootball – emerge? In this thesis, I offer five pillars of acceptance or, perhaps more accurately, legitimacy: diffusion, institutions of governance, cultural embeddedness, economic industry, and linkages to other sports. By coding interview responses with leading figures in minifootball institutions across five themes, I try to understand how the lessons of sports legitimacy can guide those sports still considered to be ‘alternative’ or ‘emerging.’

I find that minifootball institutions pursue each of these pillars in various ways: diffusion by reaching out to existing small field football communities and league organizers; governance by expanding the membership and number of minifootball institutions; culture through amateurism and community; industry (although to a more limited extent) by seeking revenue through membership fees; sponsorship and governmental support; and linkages through cooperation with similar sports institutions and by seeking recognition within formal communities of sports. Each of these builds the legitimacy of the sport. This thesis contributes to the literature by introducing the organizational perspective and offering a new framework for understanding the legitimacy of non-mainstream sports.

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1.0 Introduction

It is clear that some sports are more accepted than others. But what does it mean for a sport to be accepted, and how does this happen? How can an ‘emerging’ sport – such as minifootball – emerge? In this thesis, I offer five pillars of acceptance or, perhaps more accurately, legitimacy: diffusion, institutions of governance, cultural embeddedness, economic industry, and linkages to other sports. By coding interview responses with leading figures in minifootball institutions across five themes, I try to understand how the lessons of sports acceptance can guide those sports still considered to be ‘alternative’ or ‘emerging.’

1.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I provide the background to the research, research question and structure of the thesis. The background to the research discusses how emerging sports tend to go through their legitimation process, presenting the contribution of the minifootball case study as a fitting example of institutional development. The research question aims to find answers to the ways minifootball attempts to prove its legitimacy through the framework of five pillars (namely diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages). Finally, I briefly outline the structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter.

1.2 Background to the Research

By nature of falling outside of the mainstream, alternative sports are often overlooked by leading journals of sports research. However, alternative sports enrich the palette of the sports world. Many are becoming more prominent and even seem to be entering the mainstream. By studying the five pillars of legitimacy that I present here, we can also better understand the legitimacy of all sports. Sports legitimacy is not assured on a permanent basis and, while mainstream sports may not focus as much on ‘proving themselves,’ some are more in need of doing so than others.

More specifically, minifootball presents a useful case study because it has been studied for other purposes but not brought into the context of sports legitimacy. As an emerging sport, minifootball has been played internationally and, thus, there are regional and global bodies established around the sport which are operational and yet still early in their formation. This offers a unique opportunity to study a sport from the perspective of its institutions in that

formative early period as they navigate challenges which are novel to them but common to many non-mainstream sports around the world.

1.3 Research Question

This thesis, after constructing five pillars of sports legitimacy, asks the following: *How is minifootball pursuing greater legitimacy in the realms of diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages?* Based on this question, the thesis aims to use minifootball as an exploratory case study to better understand sports legitimacy in the context of ‘alternative’ or ‘emerging’ sports. Its objective is to use semi-structured interviews to explore minifootball’s development as a sport from the perspective of sports federation leaders across the five pillars.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter One has introduced the topic, given background to the research, and outlined the research question. Chapter Two offers the theoretical framework, in which the research focuses on introducing conventional definitions of a sport, and then widens the scope by adding sports legitimacy and social reality into the context, showing existing literature on minifootball along with the research gap that this thesis tries to fill. Chapter Three presents the research methods that this thesis employs, including the justification for examining federations and the benefits and limitations of conducting research using semi-structured personal interviews. Chapter Four shows the results of the interviews, regarding each topic within a pillar of legitimacy. Chapter Five critically discusses the findings and underlines the most relevant information gained by the interviews. Chapter Six concludes the thesis, by summarizing its main findings, sets up contributions to the literature, draw recommendations to the sector, and gives out suggestions for future research.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction and Purpose

In this chapter, I provide the theoretical framework for the thesis. First, I lay out conventional definitions of a sport as a first step towards understanding sports legitimacy, applying those definitions to minifootball. Next, I place sports legitimacy in a broader context to demonstrate that there is a social reality beyond strictly functional definitions, drawing on existing literature to put forward my own notion of five pillars of sports legitimacy, which will serve as the basis for thematic coding of the research interviews later on. Finally, I show how there is a literature on minifootball that exists when approaching the subject from a broader context, but that it does not touch on the issues relevant to this thesis. In so doing, I define a gap that needs to be filled in the literature.

2.2 Conventional Definitions of a Sport

For many decades, the sports literature has defined what makes a ‘legitimate’ sport based on functional aspects of the activity. These can be arranged into four categories: (1) pursuit of victory, (2) play, (3) physicality and (4) physical skill, which I present below and apply to the case of minifootball.

Harris (1980, 57) recognizes that all sports have some “rather salient goals,” such as the pursuit of victory, which is achieved through strategic efforts. On the other hand, he acknowledges that there is also an element of play. Loy (1968, 1-3) defines play as free (voluntary) activities undertaken with an uncertain outcome and no specific productive aim. In other words, the act of playing itself does not create material products even if some people may profit from the activity.

In minifootball, the explicit aim for each team is to win by scoring more goals than the other team. In the case of a draw, there are often extra efforts taken to determine a winner through penalty kicks for an individual game or, if for a qualifying tournament, through comparative performance statistics. Therefore, the pursuit of victory is clearly present – at least as an aspiration – through team formations, defensive and offensive tactics, team movements with

and without the ball and the different positions that the players take on. Thus far, we can describe minifootball as a sport.

Likewise, we can observe that minifootball is being *played*. Contrary to gladiator competitions in Ancient Rome, participation in minifootball is voluntary. Many of the players are amateurs who do not seek profit or have any obligation to participate. There is no product being crafted beyond the recreational value of the game. Although a sports game can be used for financial purposes by monetizing broadcasting rights or selling tickets, for instance, minifootball does not create an object to be sold. In this sense, the activity is still a form of recreation entered into by choice.

Furthermore, the play involved in minifootball is physical. This fits with Paddick's definition of physicality (Paddick 1975, 17), which he considers a subclass of play. Thomas (1976) frames sports as "physical activity for fun." Being that it is a contact sport, players may meet each other in direct physical contact. They are engaged in athletics, running around the field. Ball control, stamina, speed, physical attributes are important factors for an effective minifootball player. There are different complex skills that could be included, such as coordination abilities regarding handling the ball with different parts of the body.

Meier (1981, 94) adds that a sport must feature "the additional characteristic of requiring physical skill and prowess to be demonstrated by the participants in the pursuit of its goal." Physical skill is different from physicality in that it requires some element of experience and practice, not only raw ability. For instance, a boxer might be very strong in terms of their physicality strictly in terms of strength, but physical skill is actually being able to throw a decent punch. In minifootball, as in association football, players need to be able to make the *right* kind of contact with the ball and coordinate with each other. Being physically fit is not enough; one needs *technique*.

2.3 Sports Legitimacy and Social Reality

Minifootball certainly passes the requirements of the functional definitions of a sport, yet the main focus of this thesis is to explore a broader meaning of what entails a sport. The process of gaining acceptance and legitimacy is more *socially*-based, and as such, may be approached by social science methods.

Social legitimacy is context-based. There is no perfect threshold after which a sport has 'enough' players or spectators to be considered 'real.' Such a consideration depends upon what we are measuring legitimacy against. For instance, legitimacy might be compared within one sport over multiple years, or between specific sports. We would not seek to create a strict threshold definition, for example, of two million fans in the stadium per year. Still, to state that a sport might meet only the functional requirements is not enough; the concept of sports has grown beyond that. As we will see, many other scholars speak about legitimacy through *social reality* rather than being 'technically a sport' in the strictly functional sense. This can be used to understand what 'sportness' means in the contemporary context.

Loy (1968) believes that sports have an institutional aspect, later supported by Meier (1981) even though the latter fails to include this in his definition, in which one doesn't need to focus on each individual of a team to inspect its characteristics, as it is possible to treat it as one singular unit. This social structure shows integrated cultural patterns, including different values and norms, hierarchical structure and knowledge.

Sports are social institutions and, by the nature of being social, a positive link can be assumed to exist on the whole between the legitimacy of the sport and those players, officials and institutions supporting it. Just as those actors support the sport, they also are supported by it in various ways. When a sport becomes more popular, the level of competition is likely to rise. As it takes on an economic life – such as sponsorships, ticketed events, merchandise, and broadcasting rights – the capacity of its supporting organizations also grows. On the other hand, when the factors of legitimacy for a sport diminish, so too do the clubs and players that make up its base.

2.4 Five Pillars of Sports Legitimacy

I present five criteria for legitimacy – which I will refer back to as the five pillars – that move beyond the functional and into the social, as I find the functional definition of a sport insufficient for analysis from a broader, social point of view. These are labelled as diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages. After inspecting the literature, I have not found evidence for a comprehensive framework that I could use for this type of analysis, as it usually targets the presented categories individually or in different terms. In my paper, as a

part of my work, I chose to offer this more comprehensive approach as a scholar, inspired by what already exists in the literature, but going beyond it. These ‘five pillars’ are not meant to be considered perfect, as in many cases, certain topics are too complex to be able to be examined by only one category alone. These pillars may not be exclusive, but still hold up to their purpose. By using thematic coding for the interviews, I initially added an ‘other’ category for questions that seemed worthy of discussing, but at the end the results that I identified were able to fit well into these five pillars, thus indicating that the pillars are sufficient for the purpose while acknowledging that another scholar might reinvent or improve upon them to great benefit. Sustaining the right to accept its limitations, this chosen framework managed to be an effective tool for the purposes of my research and may be considered by other scholars in their own work if they find it suitable too.

It should be said that progress among these five pillars do not always function in a positive way. For instance, sports embedded within a culture may respond negatively to an influx of new supporters who are outside of the culture if they feel that their connection to the sport has been diluted. The influx of money could bring about corruption or distract from intrinsic – rather than extrinsic – motivations. These are pitfalls of ‘going mainstream.’ However, these five pillars can be treated as valuable factors of legitimacy on the whole.

2.4.1 Diffusion

Diffusion means an increase in the number of followers, spectators, amateur players, or professional players in a sport, both in their total numbers and in their geographic reach. This is at once concrete in that there are absolute numbers which can be measured but arbitrary because there is no global definition for a ‘legitimate’ sport based on those metrics. In other words, we can say that diffusion is a series of metrics without universal standards. Therefore, we can speak about diffusion as something that is *sought* rather than *attained*.

The more participants or followers there are in a sport, the more legitimate the institution becomes reputationally. Institutions are built for their constituents. Therefore, it is self-evident that the institutions behind a sport have supporters to legitimize their existence. Practically-speaking, diffusion also increases the market opportunity for a sport (another factor of legitimacy). Likewise, when a sport becomes more widespread internationally,

there is an increased opportunity to compete in international competitions which, in turn, further legitimize the sport.

Sato (2013) describes globalization as a process of expanding outward. It means that a sport that is originally part of the national culture grows beyond borders and reaches new territory. This phenomenon is mostly traceable through British colonies, where the English managed to spread their games basically across the globe. However, there are examples for different diffusions, such as the case of judo in which the sport managed to grow beyond Japan through a globalization process.

Sports diffusion tends to be seen as a unidirectional process, mainly sourcing from the British Empire towards the colonial world. This may hold true to a certain extent; however, each sport deserves to be analyzed individually, and if we follow that approach, we see a more diverse pattern. If we take polo, lacrosse and different martial arts (as judo, Jiu Jitsu and capoeira) we see that the direction of diffusion in sport is quite complex, and as such, preconceptions about the topic may produce too many exceptions to the rule for the unidirectional approach to be warranted (van Bottenburg 2010).

For instance, polo originated as an upper-class activity since, from the beginning, it was a dangerous sport for the privileged classes. As a horsemanship honing exercise, it was popular among military officers. Polo spread from the Asian mainland to Persia and India along the Silk Road. Later, British cavalry officers and tea planters formed the first polo club in 1859, together with Indian players (Parrish 2018). As van Bottenburg (2010) notes, there is a phenomenon known as *reverse diffusion*, or the spread of sports from economically weaker and peripheral countries towards more powerful countries. The flow of people and the effect of media are all tendencies and factors that demonstrate the concept of sport diffusion and influence the interpretation of values and practices in sport.

The global spread of a sport is also a prerequisite for reaching the potentially highest level of recognition for a sport, namely the Olympic Games. When discussing what makes a sport *Olympic*, Reid writes: “There is also an expectation in common usage that Olympic sport is international. American football is certainly a sport, but too regional to be Olympic” (Reid 2016, 67).

The different dynamics of diffusion are apparent through the spread of masters swimming. As the wealthier segments of society spent more on their own wellness and fitness, masters swimming programs had a target group and benefactor to start growing. Through competitive events, it has gained popularity as competitors started their own local clubs. As the leading economic benefactor of the sport, the United States was the main focal area for the development of masters swimming. Yet gradually, as masters swimming grew within the country, it diffused across borders as well. After being recognized by the International Swimming Federation (FINA), the bottom-up process of diffusion turned into a top-down one as FINA provided financial assistance for national masters swimming initiatives (Hastings et. al. 2005).

Globalization is also a process of the sport itself becoming influenced by that very expansion. Sports can take different routes in this process, and some may take their specific local version of the original activity. This can be seen in the case of rugby, American football and Australian football as well as cricket, baseball and softball. During the institutionalization and codification phase though, sports can take a more unified and globally accepted form.

Minifootball is played throughout the world. While published data on the number of players is hard to come by, it can be presumed that the sport has at least a presence wherever there are leagues and federations. As of late 2018, the committees of the World Minifootball Federation were comprised of members more than 20 countries while more than 30 countries are ranked within the European Minifootball Federation alone.

2.4.2 Governance

Contrary to political governance, which attempts to meet broader social and political goals by strategically implementing intervention and control (Dowling et. al. 2018), sports governance takes on a different meaning. In the context of sports, governance means setting coherent rules, regulations and standards that provide organization. They can also lend credibility to the results of a competition and resolve disputes. Leagues provide a structure for teams or individual players to compete against each other on a regular basis. Federations sit above leagues institutionally, organizing broader tournaments, working on behalf of the sport and/or managing resources for the sport's development. Federations may be subnational, national, international in their scale.

The regulations that are provided by structures of governance help to differentiate a game from a sport, allowing for the training of referees or other similar officials. From the athlete's perspective, governance institutions can also create tiers of competition so that the athlete can compete at higher levels, which carries a level of prestige. They can promote a narrative of a sport as embedded within certain cultural histories or values. They can form formal relationships with other sports institutions. And they can promote the business of the sport.

To take an example, as Judo grew and developed into a sport as a social and institutional construct, so too did the need for standard rules. As a result, governance followed through codification, creating clearly stated and written regulations regarding the sport itself. Judo has become the same activity all over the world. Following suit, the governing body made an effort to ensure that Judo maintained its growing position among global sports (Sato 2013).

In games, team members are randomly selected, whereas in team sports, members become a part of a social construct in which they can operate. Even if athletes leave their organization, the organization would find other players to substitute in their position to maintain the structure and continuity. Membership in such an organization in a sense shows evidence of governance. Games may not necessitate that its participants take specific positions and act as a part of the team, while in team sports, every player has their assigned role within the system (Loy 1968).

In accordance with Henry and Lee's (2004) definition, *systematic governance* means to focus on the competitive, cooperative and compromise-seeking relationship between policy makers and business organizations. This definition involves adjustments on behalf of both sport organizations and stakeholders, while *organizational governance* is managerial behavior through normative and ethical directives. Within this latter type of governance, values and norms play a major role in conducting business in sport and offer a guideline for managing sport organizations.

Minifootball has an established institutional structure comprised of federations at the national, regional, and global level that organize competitions independently and with the

support of institutions outside the sport of minifootball, such as the partnership between the European Minifootball Federation and Erasmus+.

2.4.3 Culture

Sports can become an expression of local pride and therefore a part of local identity or even tribalism. However, they can also express identity with a nation. In Japan, Judo, karate, and sumo wrestling have become a part of Japanese culture, just as Muay Thai has risen in the context of Thai culture and capoeira in that of Brazil. In the United States, baseball is often regarded as *the* national pastime, and oil wrestling is a sport of pride in Turkey. In Central Asia, buzkashi represents nomadic cultures that extend beyond national borders to exist at the same transnational level as nomadic culture itself.

During colonial times, football was used in Algeria as a tool for expressing nationalistic ideas and resistance against colonial powers to gain domestic and international awareness of its struggle. After gaining independence, sport (and particularly football) served as an instrument for projecting ideology. Thus, football represented amateurism and development through major sport facilities and taking part in major sport competitions (Amara and Henry 2004). While Algerian football was used as a tool for resistance against systems of power, the low participation rate of Norwegians in golf before 1980 demonstrates the notion of maintaining the upper class through the symbol of exclusivity within a sport (Tangen and Istad 2012).

Whether through national cultures or subcultures, embedding a sport within a wider culture can help give it a more durable sense of legitimacy. Culture is an important factor towards gaining – and especially keeping – supporters because when something is culturally embedded, it becomes more deeply ingrained in the person. A sport that can reach the level of identity is likely to have more staying power than a shorter-term trend. As shown above, this has always played a role in major sports. These sports have managed to further develop a culture *within* the sport.

Glocalization, or adapting a global cultural product through local preferences, can be observed in investigating the growth of golf in Norway. While the global etiquette surrounding golf culture has been successfully transferred to Norway, the perceived

exclusionary aspect has not followed suite. As a Nordic country, social democratic development lead to collectivism and voluntarism as important values of the Norwegian society. As such, the existing norms of the local culture remained perceptible in golf as well (Malcolm and Tangen 2015).

Globalization played a major role in culture, since it led to a cultural shift as players and leagues began to place more emphasis on the competition aspect of sporting life rather than on the recreational aspect of it. The ways to win more games became more important than the pursuit of joy within them. In the case of Judo, that lead to a change from pure competition sport towards entertainment as the sport grew, it followed with more spectators that needed to be served, becoming ‘a spectator sport’, as the International Judo Federation officially states. Step by step, an activity previously conducted for its own sake has been replaced by the mentality of ‘victoriousness’ within the activity. As the competitive approach took root, it led to attract a spectator base, which then ultimately had to be maintained and satisfied (Sato 2013).

Amateurism and professionalism co-exist in polo as national federations do not define a common rule regarding the professional status of the sport. As they address the issue independently, players can make money in such leagues where it is allowed and, in their home clubs, play for major events. This has been highlighted, for example, by Parrish (2018) in the case of Argentina.

Minifootball taps into a widespread global cultural phenomenon of playing football informally on a small field, adding its own rules and formality. Yet unlike other sports that promote an ambition of professional competition for their players, minifootball has been described by institutions such as the European Minifootball Federation as decidedly amateur. This culture of being accessible may be what has opened the sport to younger audiences.

2.4.4 Industry

Sports are set up around an infrastructure of money. There are the prizes paid out to players from competitions, wages and salaries, endorsement deals, broadcast fees, and ticket sales.

As long as there is money to be made within a sport, it has the resources to become more popular and more widespread over time. Some scholars (e.g., Smart 2007) have argued that the very definition of a sport is a *competitive entertainment business*.

Sport has indeed become an entertainment business, and athletes who are well rewarded by this are aware of it, and act in a way that it remains lucrative for all involved participants (such as broadcasters, retail companies and advertising sponsors). Global business is so embedded in sports that nowadays being associated with a famous sport brand, team or athlete and sport events or competitions can lead to advantages in regard to business competition vis-à-vis other companies (Smart 2007).

Business played a major role in the development and forming of basketball as a sport. The game started to meet the needs of the markets and masses of viewers who had a need to be entertained. The characteristics of the game gradually shifted towards business-like features as the need for them appeared and grew significant (Maguire 1988). Likewise, as the popularity and volume of masters swimming competitions grew, corporations became interested in sponsoring and funding them. In exchange, these corporations appeared to utilize the marketing and advertising value of those events and make significant profit through sales (Hastings et al 2005).

While a sport does not need to be established on a professional level, some money must be spent to organize events and to support dedicated personnel to promote, regulate, coach, and participate in a sport. With an increase in revenue, there is a greater incentive for athletes (and owners) to invest in competition and become more professional. Endorsements can also help a sport penetrate culture, and broadcasting allows a sport to become a way of life. Yet neither is as likely to take place as often or as substantially without financial incentives on which to base business cooperation.

Sponsorship in institutionalized sports is an integrated part of the industry itself. There are direct sponsors, who have a closer relationship with the sponsored sport teams (e.g., municipalities for their local teams, universities to their collegiate teams, etc.). This depends on the culture in which the specific sport club operates. Indirect sponsors include sport retail companies and sports journals, according to Loy (1968).

Globalization served as a tool for the growing needs of the industry. To follow Sato's example (2013), as judo became global, everything that comes with global had an effect on it. Since there has become a global audience around judo, it was eligible for efficient sponsorship and broadcasting rights sales to meet its demand on the market. This commercialism around modern sports are thus an embedded phenomenon around globalization. All in all, the 'episteme' (Foucault 1970) of judo has fundamentally changed through its 'sportification' process.

Capital moves similarly in sport as in global business in a way that risks are avoided and profits are sought through the most efficient means. As such, the global business of sport tends to gravitate towards less developed regions of the world as cheap labor, relatively few regulations and support from the ruling class that directly or indirectly benefits from the profits all offer factors that reduce risk and increase profit potential (Hastings et al 2005).

Economical operation within sport has become increasingly important. In Danish football, the traditional win-optimizing strategy turned to complement with growing awareness of financial accountability and sustainability. (Storm 2011) This is especially true since the introduction and adaptation of financial fair-play initiatives by UEFA in the last couple of years. Balancing sporting and economic success offer an extra perspective when observing the increasingly business-focused orientation of the sports industry.

If we take minifootball as the main focus of this study, we can see that although there are sponsors involved in the industry, the sport itself in general operates on a non-profit basis, and it doesn't target to generate profit. Regardless of its aim to offer professional conditions, minifootball is considered to be an amateur sport.

In suggesting that we "dispense with both words," Suits effectively redefined amateur as "an event or activity valued for itself" and professional as "an event or activity valued not only or even primarily for itself but for some further payoff that the event or activity is expected to provide" (Suits 1988, 9).

Minifootball is at the very least at the early stages of becoming an entertainment business, As its major events have recently enjoyed broadcasting in multiple countries. Sponsors are already involved in the sport, although both broadcasting and sponsorships are still limited.

2.4.5 Linkages

Some sports are byproducts of – that is, invented on the basis of – other sports. From football, sports such as minifootball, futsal, and beach soccer have emerged. In fact, we can see the link by observing that the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) governs not only association football but futsal and beach soccer as well. There are even multisports such as the triathlon, which incorporates swimming, cycling and running.

For an alternative sport, linkages to mainstream sports can offer a tool to gain wider awareness and a more easily obtained understanding of skills and rules. The alternative sport could serve as a gateway for the mainstream sport, as a supplemental off-season sport, or even as an alternative avenue to professionalism for those unable to attain the highest ranks of competition. This increases the avenues that a sport can use to promote itself and its cultural narrative.

Regarding the exportability of sports, or their ability to shift from counter culture into the mainstream, Hastings et al (2005) suggests that, aside from masters swimming, sports such as skateboarding and snowboarding might take a similar route as each has become part of the commercial mainstream from their previous counter cultural significance.

Even if one sport is without linkages to other sports, it can participate within the realm of alternative sports – which is a category larger than itself. Groups such as extreme sports have sponsorships, competitions, and governance structures. For sports with limited capacity, this can be a permanent or an intermediate step in its development.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has the power to decide whether a sport is worthy of being included at the winter or summer Olympic games. Because of the prominence of these games for reasons listed within this thesis – namely their popularity, governance, cultural embeddedness, broadcasting and sponsorship rights, and connection to so many sports – the power of the IOC to list or delist a sport carries great weight.

Loy (1968) describes how the Olympics functions as the ultimate governing body in the form of an international sport federation that transcends sports and even, unlike FIFA, families of sports. In discussing Olympic sports, Reid (2016) points out the additional

expectation towards sports that they need to be international in their reach. The IOC has been able to push leading institutions in wrestling, for instance, to make specific reforms by threatening to delist them from the international games. While wrestling might not have ceased to be a sport without the IOC ‘blessing,’ it would have been degraded in certain key ways. And in the case of emerging sports, being listed provides new broadcast audiences and creates an incentive for players, coaches, institutions, and even governments to invest in the sport for international competition.

There is a direct link between minifootball and other sports. Minifootball can be seen as derived from association football, and has an even closer relationship with futsal, which also uses a smaller field with fewer players. There are even minifootball officials who simultaneously assist in organizing futsal competitions. These similarities are helpful because they present minifootball with a natural pool of potential players. Although association football has greater prestige, when teams are distinctly successful in this ‘alternative’ sport, association football fans may take notice as they already have a context for understanding the game. However, the hierarchy between the ‘main’ and ‘alternative’ sport appears to be firmly fixed in place.

2.5 Literature on Minifootball

While a literature on minifootball exists, that scholarship is rather limited. Published minifootball journal articles that are written or indexed in English primarily focus on university programs from a coaching or health perspective. For example, Babkin and Fedchouk (2012) write about female minifootball training at Russian universities. Yakimovich, Burlykov and Proshkin (2014) examine 42 young male adults at Kalmyk State University to determine the effects of short-term minifootball participation on health indicators.

Petrenko et. al. (2012) describe the specific challenges of minifootball training for university students. In a more recent study, Tamozhanskaya and Shkola (2016) survey 56 Ukrainian female university students from the perspective of health conditioning, recommending a year-long program. Turning to Vietnam, Huong, Nghia, and Thuan (2017) collected questionnaires from 750 students at Vietnam National University to understand motives for using artificial turf fields.

The challenge and the opportunity for the thesis is that none of these minifootball-specific studies listed above adequately addresses the five dimensions. While Xiao, Wang and Wang (2011) appear to examine the development of minifootball as an institution in nine universities in Baoding City, China, the article is only accessible in Mandarin. Perhaps the one exception is Gavrielatos (2010), which studies the amateur nature of urban minifootball in a Greek setting.

More importantly, the perspective of federations is entirely absent from the research identified. This is crucial because federations are institutions more able to speak to the strategic development of the sport. They are able to establish a vision and set a long-term agenda. This thesis attempts to fill the gap in the literature on sports legitimacy for minifootball in general as well as offering a perspective into the national federations and international federation that govern and guide the sport.

3.0 Research Design

3.1 Introduction and Purpose

This chapter explains the rationale for focusing on minifootball federations and specifically with leadership at the strategic level within those federations. In the interview methodology, I describe my specific approach to conducting semi-structured interview. Lastly, I acknowledge the limitations of this particular type of research, emphasizing a need for humility in drawing broader conclusions from the findings of the thesis.

3.2 Why Study Federations

While players have a useful perspective from the front lines of minifootball, players are not necessarily aware of the broader surroundings of the sport and its development – their role is to participate in the sport rather than to strategize and organize around its future. The focus of the thesis rests more at the organizational level because the questions are more strategically-oriented, emphasizing the current and future agenda from those in an organizational leadership position to influence it.

In identifying research subjects, I worked through official websites and social media accounts of known federations. I also benefited from several personal referrals from one federation to another (i.e., snowballing) or from speaking initially with administrative personal. The European Minifootball Federation (EMF) was especially helpful. Hungarian language knowledge facilitated conversations with two of the interviewees.

3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

This thesis uses semi-structured interviews to explore five notions of sports legitimacy within minifootball and, in so doing, adds information not otherwise available in the literature. Given that not much is not discussed about the development of the sport in the literature, semi-structured interviews make it possible to ask open-ended questions based on the five pillars of legitimacy that I put forward as a framework in this work, recoding answers which fall outside of the intended pillar. These questions are intentionally broad to create opportunities to further develop the research through follow-up questions based on specific

topics that I was unaware of before, opportunities to gain particularly useful insights, or knowledge that can put other answers into perspective.

I use semi-structured interviews with senior leaders of minifootball federations as opportunities to ask identical initial questions while enabling more context-driven questions on specific points. The questions, though formalized, operate as *themes*. The decision to use personal interviews rather than questionnaires is based on the fact that the personal interaction drives more valuable qualitative data. The social obligation of interviewing a subject is based on the norm that a meeting typically takes more than 30 minutes while a questionnaire might be answered in only five. Since the population of federations is too low for mass outreach where response rates may be limited, I aimed to gain as much information as possible from each interview. Respondents in this case have the opportunity to wrestle with the framing of the question itself, not only their informational response to it.

In her study, Beth Leech (2002) writes about different interview methods. She argues that previous knowledge about the topic that one wants to examine is as important as the questions one would like to ask. The reason for that is the fact that prior knowledge leads or even predetermines the questions that one may ask and how they are framed. Regarding unstructured interviews, she writes that they are less formal and structured. They are more conversational instead, and permit comparison between interviews to test hypotheses. Leech emphasizes the importance of gaining rapport and putting respondents at ease. The interviewer should seem professional and generally knowledgeable but less so on the specific objective of the interview itself. It is preferred to use informal language such as “talk with you” rather than “interview you.” More sensitive topics should be asked last.

On semi structured interviews, Barriball and While (1994) offer some important points as to why personal interview can be a useful form of data collection. They highlight that this method overcomes the risk of not receiving enough answers in surveys as personal interviews have higher response rates. Besides that, the interviewer can explore more than just the data received from a written survey (e.g., background, attitudes, further details). Interviews include examining verbal and nonverbal signs from the perspective of the respondent, that can add additional information about the validity of the answers which may lead the interviewer finding signs of inconsistency. Meeting in person ensures that the interviewer actually talks with the right person and not with an assistant. Face-to-face

contact with a researcher can also motivate the respondent to offer more information. Asking for details or elaboration, more valuable and more complete information can be gained from the respondents.

Certain suggestions can lead to further facilitate the flow of the interview. It is important for example to make sure that the interviewer clarifies every uncertainty such as ambiguous language. It also helps to emphasize the most important topics you gain from the interview by suggesting that such topics remain the focus of the respondent's answers. One should be careful that the interview can put the respondent into a position in which they seek to make themselves socially accepted, and that would frame their answers accordingly. Differences between the parameters of the interviewer and respondents can make social desirability more complex. In some cases, the interviewer may be intimidated by the respondent (such as by their status). Using interactive methods can reduce barriers between the two.

During the course of the interviews, I did not encounter information in an 'other category,' meaning information that is relevant to the underlying topic of sports legitimacy but not to one of the five themes. This acted in small measure to validate the selection of the five pillars, which is a novel framework created specifically for this thesis.

3.4 Thematic Coding

According to Evans (2017), thematic coding is a popular qualitative research method within the constructionist and realist paradigms of social sciences. It is about recognizing themes and patterns in the dataset, and it is present throughout the whole data processing, while keeping the research questions in mind, as guidelines of selecting these suitable themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) points out, that the themes should hold importance in accordance with the research questions and lay out a pattern throughout the dataset. Usually a theme would turn up many times in a dataset.

For the purposes of this thesis, I employ thematic coding to understand the interview responses. In cases where an answer to a given question is more relevant to another theme, I recode it and present the most pertinent information in the findings in the following chapter according to the thematic code rather than necessarily in the sequence asked.

Because legitimacy is defined based on five pillars, those pillars form the five thematic codes. They are defined to include *diffusion*, cultural embeddedness (simplified to *culture*), institutions of governance (simplified to *governance*), economic industry (simplified to *industry*), and *linkages*. Diffusion refers to an increase both in the quantity and geographic reach of players and fans. Culture describes a sport becoming an expression of local or national identity or embedding unique elements of culture that transform the sport into a subculture of its own. Governance, in a strictly functional sense, consists of rules, regulations and standards. Given that we are looking instead into the social aspects of legitimacy, I treat *institutions of governance* as those institutions that set these rules, regulations and standards while promoting the sport more broadly. Industry is based on the notion of sports as a competitive entertainment business, ranging from ticket sales to sponsorships. Linkages are the connections between one sport and its counterparts, whether through culture or through formal associations such as the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) or International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The interview questions are the following, categorized by the five themes that were previously designed for the research, and adding some additional inquiries later placed after initial questions as asked so as not to influence earlier answers. In some cases, important or interesting topics were occasionally discussed, or further inquiry took place to understand some of the information received.

General:

- Generally-speaking, what is your organization hoping to achieve for the future of minifootball?

Diffusion:

- How does minifootball aim to spread, both geographically and in the number of players and fans? What have you seen in terms of results so far?

Governance:

- How is minifootball governed, and are there plans in place to increase the number of federations or leagues?

Culture:

- Could you speak about the culture of minifootball and how it might be different from other sports? Is “amateurism” a major part of minifootball culture?

Industry:

- Where does the money come from to sustain minifootball, and is there a vision to change that at all?

Linkages:

- How does the relationship between minifootball and sports like football and futsal play a role in its development? What about international sports organizations such as GAISF, FIFA or the IOC?

Additional questions covered interesting and relevant areas that were influential in informing the research, some of which were not anticipated at the start. They reflected different topics, and the answers were coded according to the appropriate theme as needed. Participants were also given an opportunity to speak freely about any topic not addressed in prior questions at the end to draw out unanticipated information.

3.5 Limitations

Limitations to the interview methodology include the possibility of making tacit assumptions based on impressions of the participants, which may lead to subjective interpretations. In other words, an interviewer may interpret answers unduly influenced by their own particular mindset. Additionally, there are limitations in using a ‘snowballing’ approach as a method of seeking introductions to new respondents by following a trail of contacts that stems from one original source.

The snowballing effect risks not hearing from those with divergent perspectives. Initially, I did not anticipate the relevance of counternarratives – those who had departed from the types of organizations that I studied to form their own. Because those voices are not represented in the research (as the related issues that arose were discovered late in research process), I

try to be careful not to overstate any account related to the splintering-off of minifootball organizations.

Ultimately, since this research involves a small population (i.e., minifootball federation leaders), the number of interviews conducted are understandably lower. This is acceptable given the exploratory nature of the research and that reaching statistical significance is not the intent of this research. Access to respondents was also impacted by varying degrees of availability and willingness to participate from among that population, including linguistic factors and the existence of a major minifootball event that took place at the same time that research was ongoing. This carries the risk of an unknown selection bias in those who were willing to speak to a researcher. This thesis should therefore be presented as an initial exploration into the subject that can inform future research.

3.6 Participant Profiles

This section outlines the profiles of the participants who were interviewed in the course of conducting this research. Each consented to speaking on the record and was provided with an early transcript of the work, however I acknowledge as a researcher that there may still be information misrepresented in the findings presented in this thesis due to misunderstanding and/or the low quality of some of the audio recordings.

Audio recordings helped to convey the information originally presented and act as an archival record. Those recordings have been collected and maintained in all but one interview in which case the quality was not sufficient to understand without using handwritten notes from the interview itself.

Participant #1:

Since 2013, Filip Juda has been President of the World Minifootball Federation (WMF), which has nearly 100-member organizations and organizes the biennial WMF World Cup. He previously involved in Czech and European minifootball leadership. The 28-minute interview was conducted in English on August 24, 2018 and recorded via Skype. Juda provided additional correspondence by email several weeks later to provide additional information about several questions asked.

Participant #2:

Zorica Hofman joined as Secretary General of the World Minifootball Federation (WMF) in 2018. She previously spent 11 years in Serbian American Football leadership and then two years as Secretary General of the International Federation of American Football (IFAF). The 39-minute interview was conducted in English on September 7, 2018 and recorded via Skype.

Participant #3:

Dávid Tibor co-founded the Hungarian Minifootball Association, known in Hungarian as Országos Minifutball Szövetség (abbreviated as OMFSZ), in 2015 and was elected president of the European Minifootball Federation in 2017. The 25-minute interview in the Hungarian language was conducted in-person in Székesfehérvár, Hungary on September 28, 2018 and recorded using a mobile device.

Participant #4

Jakub Štefek became the Chief Operating Officer of the European Minifootball Federation (EMF) in 2018. He previously helped organize the 2017 EMF EURO competition in Brno, Czech Republic and was team leader of the Czech national team. Štefek has also coordinated the Mini4EU competition. The 28-minute interview was conducted in English on September 13, 2018 and recorded via Skype.

Participant #5

Tíra Thassy became General Secretary of the Hungarian Minifootball Association, Országos Minifutball Szövetség (OMFSZ), in 2017. She was previously a legal consultant for the European Minifootball Federation (EMF). The 39-minute interview in the Hungarian language was conducted on October 5, 2018 in Budapest, Hungary and recorded using a mobile device.

Participant #6

Mark Staines became president of the Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU) in 2017. He previously had a run as an award-winning minifootball player in the early 2000s. The 21-minute interview was conducted in English on September 28, 2018 in Székesfehérvár, Hungary and recorded using a mobile device.

Participant #7

Rico Chermont is the founding president of the Brazilian Minifootball Federation, known in Portuguese Federação Minifootball Basil (and abbreviated as FMB), which was created in 2017. The 51-minute interview was conducted in English on September 19, 2018 and recorded via Skype.

4.0 Research Findings

4.1 Introduction and Purpose

This chapter presents the research findings summarized from interviews with federation leaders. Throughout the chapter, I present the findings by each of the five thematic codes separately, dividing the content by category first and then showing the results from each respondent. This is intended to help a picture emerge within each theme (or pillar) for consideration in the discussion presented in chapter five. I used thematic codes for the interviews to determine which questions to ask.

While information was not always aligned with the intended focus of the question, all information fell within the five thematic codes used and is presented as such. In other words, some of the information had to be moved around to fit in its appropriate context. Therefore, what follows are 35 short summaries describing the finds across five thematic codes (diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages) from the perspective of seven different respondents who represent the level of strategic leadership within institutions of minifootball.

4.2 Findings on Diffusion

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #1: Filip Juda

According to Juda, the World Minifootball Federation (WMF)'s goal is to open more offices to attract more players to play on an organized, yet amateur level. They seek to grow more popular so that they can attract more people. Minifootball players are not icons who could be followed except when it's an international event (like Euros, and World Cup) which tends to attract more attention and attendance. Former professional football players also generate more interest.

There are currently two million players in minifootball, but Juda believes that the WMF can increase this amount. Minifootball is already present on five continents. Fans are not the main focus of the WMF but rather amateur players who are involved in the sport. That said, minifootball is trying to make football more popular by their official events, serving as a

“marketing tool” for big field football. Having more international events organized helps the WMF draw more spectators. Some minifootball federations have also signed contracts with football federations related to marketing.

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #2: Zorica Hofman

Hofman notes that minifootball has federations on each continent and that the recent general assembly in Kiev grew the WMF in terms of its members. The WMF has continued to make progress since, experiencing growth in membership. There will also be more competitions, such as the U-21 for youth competitions and women’s competitions, as well as the continental cup in Tunisia in December, which is experiencing huge growth in participation as well compared to most recent year.

Besides that, they want to grow minifootball. Hofman expressed personal interest in developing minifootball for women. Next year in Australia, the WMF will hold the World Cup not only for men but for women as well. Hofman is working to involve more women as players. She sees this vision as relevant not only to players, however, but also in the board and management structure.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #1: David Tibor

According to Tibor, for most of the sports the greatest challenge is to promote themselves to be exercised by the most possible people. Minifootball is an interesting category in that regard as it is technically the most popular amateur sport and played by the most people in Europe. Thus, for them the main task is not to introduce and publicize their sport, but to provide higher quality and more organized competitions for already existing communities, groups of friends, and leagues that play on small field through the respective national federations in Europe. This is a general goal.

Geographically the EMF is currently counting 33 members. There are still many “white spots” on the map, according to Tibor, and the EMF would like to reach the goal of exceeding 40 within several years.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #2: Jakub Štefek

Štefek reports that minifootball diffusion was strongest in former Yugoslav countries, Central Europe (e.g., Hungary and the modern-day Czech Republic), Romania, and Slovakia. In Western Europe, there are strong associations in Great Britain and Ireland which are improving and growing rapidly. Štefek says that the EMF is talking with other countries in order to have all European states included in the future of minifootball. They have recently added new members, namely national associations in Albania, Azerbaijan, and Switzerland.

Regarding the fan base, Štefek implied that the most successful and well-structured countries have the strongest group of followers, particularly the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania. The ultimate goal is to have all countries' associations under EMF umbrella, and thus under the WMF as well.

EMF & Hungarian Minifootball Federation (OMFSZ): Tíra Thassy

Thassy explains that the EMF plans to add additional countries as members of their organization. She positions the fundamental strategy of the EMF as to host the European Championship or any major event in a large city so that minifootball can reach out to more people, potentially involving more enthusiastic fans as well (which she identified in the Euro 2016 in Székesfehérvár). That competition was held in the city center stadium, which routinely was nearly at full capacity with over four thousand attendees. Some, according to Thassy, were unable to attend because it was so popular. Minifootball events are normally free of charge, as they don't ask for entry-fee. The EMF is active on social media to boost their popularity.

Thassy notes that the Euro 2017 in Brno was around 75% full with respect to attendance. During the Euro 2018 in Kiev, the level of attendance was much lower. Part of this may have been due to the fact that there was a fee for attendance, but a broader array of challenges not discussed explicitly were cited as relevant for the lower turnout.

Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU): Mark Staines

Staines explains that the GMBFU started as the English Federation but had to change to the Great Britain Minifootball Union and therefore they have opened to organize minifootball for national teams from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Still, for the time being, they are concentrating chiefly on England because in Staines' views, although it's a very popular sport, people don't understand the term of minifootball throughout the United Kingdom. In the UK, minifootball is seen as an activity for children, so the GBMFU works to promote more leagues and participation in 6-a-side, 7-a-side, as well as 5-a-side to build a stronger foundation for competing on the international stage in the future. They want to help people get into the sport from all aspects of life and Staines is optimistic about that prospect.

In England, Staines describes 5-a-side football is popular – particularly in London – as there are a number of teams that play regularly. The GMBFU intends to spread into other parts of the country. For instance, they have a Manchester-based association that is trying to spread the word in northern cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool. Staines hopes that the more they grow, the more people they will have to participate everywhere throughout the United Kingdom.

The GBMFU started in July 2017 as an association, and now has four leagues set up, with the support of the largest sports university in the UK. As a result, they will build student leagues. They have sponsorship from a construction company called Falco Construction, and through that they will set up business leagues as well. The GBMFU attempts to get many people involved in minifootball, and in return, they are becoming more well-known among those communities regarding their activities.

Staines notes that the English minifootball team had a successful performance at the Euros in Kiev, reaching the semi-finals. He considers this level of performance to be a great achievement for England, especially since they only lost to the world and European champions. The English people were reportedly following closely on social media. Staines mentioned that people are messaging and sending emails to his association more frequently to participate in the sport.

Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB): Rico Chermont

According to Chermont, Minifootball Brazil (FMB)'s headquarters is based in Rio de Janeiro but has people who work together with them in other states too in order to invite players and teams to be affiliated with them. FMB supports local actors to develop regional tournaments. The winners of these tournaments (for example, in Sao Paulo, Paraná, etc.) qualify for the national tournament. The champion of the national tournament earns the right to play in the Pan-American and World competitions. Employees of the Brazilian Minifootball Federation discuss their projects with the presidents of the leagues and the owners of the teams and the benefits they gain if they are affiliated with FMB. Additionally, FBM has a channel on a Brazilian live streaming platform called "mycujoo.tv" that broadcasts the games.

Regarding numbers, Chermont claims that this January, they opened the affiliated projects including around 16,000 players and aims to have 70,000 players by the end of next year. In four years, they have set an ambitious target of one million players in Minifootball Brazil. They have plans for business and university cups, organizing six-seven tournaments for the upcoming year.

In Brazil, Chermont estimates that around 95% of players play 7-a-side football, so, in his view, the federation needs to create a new market for 6-a-side, promote it and provide a future for minifootball. Youth development is reported to be important in that regard, and also organizing competitions for universities. FMB created leagues for 6-a-side, but also invited 7-a-side leagues to play in association with them.

Minifootball is new in Brazil, more than in Europe. According to Chermont, many people play it under the label of amateur soccer, but they are not familiar with the term, rather with "foot seven". Chermont notes that they have to inform people that minifootball is the same as what many children play at a young age (5-6-years old). Spreading the word is a difficult task for FMB.

4.3 Findings on Governance

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #1: Filip Juda

The WMF's organizational structure is reportedly well-established, as they have several levels of governance, with the president, five vice presidents (for the five continents), and committees for different areas. The WMF incorporates continental federations under its umbrella. Minifootball is present in almost 100 countries, but it aims to grow, both in players, and at the executive level.

Juda believes that minifootball could become an Olympic sport in the next 16-20 years, as FIFA still wants to prevent the top-ranking football event from entering Olympic competition. Futsal has similar ambitions regarding the Olympics, and it is a similar sport to minifootball even though there are important differences too. Former professional football players may attend the Olympics with these alternatives even if not formally carrying the banner of minifootball in the process.

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #2: Zorica Hofman

According to Hofman, the main goal of the WMF is to become a recognized sport by the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), formerly known as SportAccord, and later on, by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). At a recent general assembly meeting, the Federation elected a new WMF board, as now they have all the executive committee members to proceed. Executive committee members are all presidents of national or continental federations.

Each national or continental federation president describes having a strategy on how to increase numbers in their respective territories. Many countries, such as Norway, are contacting WMF directly with wish to form federations and become members. Hofman points to three paths to growth – national and continental federations that want to spread their network, people who contact WMF and want to form a federation, and contacting companies interested not only in sport but also the business opportunity in forming a federation.

The WMF has a president and an executive committee (EC) elected by the general assembly. Crucial decisions are undertaken in consultation with the general assembly, of which Hofman is the general secretary. There are committees reporting to the EC as well – such as the referees committee, the technical committee, the tournament committee, and the media committee – each with specific duties. The organization’s statute has been changed to mandate gender inclusivity on the board, a move taken to promote diversity in sports management. Hofman hopes that WMF’s initiative will encourage broader involvement in the leadership of the sport.

The Federation is working on education, such as offering referee courses and coaching courses. By pursuing this path, they’ll have better referees and coaches who can travel and give lectures to other federations. Antidoping tests and rules will be introduced on national and international levels, which was not there before. She considers it as a big step forward in this sport.

Hofman sees the Olympics is the ultimate goal of almost any sport, but she has worked there and understands it to be a lengthy process. If minifootball is unable to become a recognized sport, then she does not see that vision as realistic. For now, the WMF is primarily focused on gaining recognition at the GAISF level. Being a recognized sport helps to gain governmental funds through national federations. It offers the prospect of pursuing the Olympic Games. And it raises the popular standing of the sport through its existence and recognition.

Originally, futsal maintained a separate organization until FIFA took them under their wings. Because of the resources behind FIFA, there can be great pressure to take such an offer even when leagues are hesitant. Such a decision would be decided by the general assembly and executive committee, as Hofman pointed out. But she did explain that the example of futsal shows how joining FIFA can come with certain challenges. Although the general pool of resources is much larger, smaller sports may be treated as lower priority and might not necessarily find themselves with greater capacity after such a transition.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #1: David Tibor

Tibor notes that one of the most important aims for minifootball is becoming an internationally respected and registered sport and claims that there is a greater chance that the sport will be able to achieve recognition from international bodies such as GAISF in the coming years.

In Hungary, there are many cities where championships are being organized under the wing of the Hungarian Minifootball Federation. However, there are also many cities where championships that are organized for small field football are taking place without formal membership. This can be seen in many other countries, even in the most developed minifootball countries such as the Czech Republic and Romania, with over 50,000 registered players. In this regard, competitions are spreading.

The EMF features countries with advanced, well-organized minifootball programs – namely Romania, the Czech Republic, and Turkey. The federation has increased in recent months, with new members from Albania, Azerbaijan and Moldova showing highly-organized structures. Moldova will become the 34th member. Members of the EMF include non-profit organizations, associations and federations. In Europe, every country has at least one non-profit organization that organizes minifootball. As members, they come together for the general assembly, where the main decisions are made and the most important tasks and goals are discussed.

There is an elected executive committee (EC), with the president, vice-president and general secretary comprising the current leadership. They have a tournament committee responsible for event organization, a referee committee for game management and a disciplinary committee that addresses setting rules and fines. There is also a legal and ethical committee. Specific responsible individuals within the ECs take on different responsibilities, like marketing, online media, law, business development, IT structure, as so on. Thus, the work of the EMF is delegated to federations within the broader organization.

Tibor described the EMF Euros in Kiev as a very successful event. And at the EMF Champions League in Slovenia, there were 76 teams competing from 20 countries altogether. Additionally, the Mini4EU event was held in Székesfehérvár, Hungary which featured diverse groups based on age, gender and cognitive ability.

Tibor's vision for growth is to have a more pronounced presence in social media, and to be able to provide more valuable content for the players. Tibor noted that game videos are edited and processed within the same night after weekly matches in Turkey so that players can retrieve them on their respective Instagram and Facebook accounts, which they can share with anyone. This phenomenon is reportedly "amazingly popular" and has sponsorship deals behind it. Tibor finds it very important that the players not only feel themselves great on the field, but also receive content that they can share to be proud of in front of their friends and family.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #2: Jakub Štefek

Regarding the organizational structure of the European Minifootball Federation, Štefek notes that the EMF is under the WMF, and there are different levels depending on the country or association. In the Czech Republic, there is the national team, and the Superliga including teams from different regions, and every region has leagues. For example, in Prague, there is a league with 1000 teams on 8 levels (highest one is the Premier League) It is different from region to region. Players from the regional leagues can go to play in the Superliga, the highest club competition in the country which is also televised. From there they can go to the national team.

At other organizations, there are national cups once a year, or the winners of the regional leagues play against each other in a super final tournament. It is different by country, depending on the history and tradition of how minifootball is played there. In England, the popular form of minifootball contains goals with 3x1 meter breadth. In some countries, games are played with dasher boards.

The EMF's main product is 6-a-side, and the difference between countries makes this sport interesting in Štefek's point of view. It is not problematic however, because on the international level at EMF, every country is aware how minifootball is played, by which rules, how large the goals are, and how many players has to play. With the new associations, there might be some problems with sliding tackles, but in general, there is no misunderstanding and no country is disadvantaged based on their culture, as this form of minifootball is played in every country.

The highest authority is the general assembly, which consists of all the members of the federation. The leadership has seven people including the president, vice-president. Štefek claims to be outside of this structure as COO. They have six committees, covering areas like development, legal, tournament, referee, and others. All committees have directors that lead their respective groups.

Štefek believes that minifootball must be recognized as a sport, and this is the greatest task for WMF and for Filip Juda. It's a long-term vision, but Štefek is encouraging of Juda's efforts, noting that it would be "a fantastic achievement." If one takes how many people play minifootball in the world, Štefek sees that minifootball ought to be granted the opportunity to be treated as an Olympics sport.

In the future, the EMF would like to strengthen their existing events or products, such as the European Championship, Champions League, and they are thinking about Europe League as well, and Region Cup that starts next year. Another goal is to strengthen cooperation and support towards the national federations and synchronize the rules and activities on national levels throughout Europe.

EMF & Hungarian Minifootball Federation (OMFSZ): Tíra Thassy

Given that some countries have had greater success in organizing events than others, the EMF would like to promote collaboration between members. There are examples in some countries that has one national championship, while having different minifootball organizations as well. For the future of minifootball, it is necessary to have those organizers on board that can reach out to the most possible people. Most members still haven't handed in their founding documents. This doesn't mean that the EMF would seek to expel them, but not meeting requirements makes many things more difficult when it comes to formal cooperation between members.

At the national level, there is the Hungarian Minifootball Federation, which has more than 20 member associations. They are in contact with regional and local championship organizers, as they plan to integrate as many as possible championships. They are welcoming new league organizers who seek to join them. The National Minifootball

Federation in Hungary organizes two leagues: the super league, which consisted of 6 regional qualifiers and a final this year, and the league cup, which brings together the champions of those 22 leagues. The main prize of both is that the winners can attend in the EMF Champions League in September at the expense of the federation. Also, based on the results in the two competitions, the first five teams from the super league and the first three teams in the league cup qualifies to participate in the Champions League.

On the European level, they are searching for and expecting new countries to join as new members. Last time they added Albania, who was already present on the Euros in Kiev, brought a team to the Champions League, so Thassy claims that minifootball life has started well there, and their leader is very sympathetic too.

The “Mini4EU” project was quite successful, so they handed in their application towards the EU for next year as well. It would have a slightly different system, including different European cities to hold the qualifiers, and to host the common final probably in Hungary again. As it was voted on the recent general assembly in Kiev, European Championships will only be held in every second year from now on, so it won't be held next year, but World Cup in Australia will be, and EMF is considering a cup to hold for neighboring countries, or with a bit more teams a “Nations Cup.” They are planning to start a European business cup next year, which would bring together the winners of the different nations business cups, which Turkey is most likely to host.

The Olympics is represented mainly by professional athletes, even if not in every sport. Thassy doesn't see a real chance to achieve it for minifootball, and she doesn't think it's a goal for them. Even big field football is not the most popular sport on the Olympic Games, as there is the World Cup and Euros instead. She thinks that most of the people turns the TV on or goes to the venues for sports other than the Olympics. There is a World Championship however for non-Olympic sports, and such goals could be viable and reachable for minifootball. From the Hungarian aspect, teqball is an example, which would like to become an Olympic sport, and has been building up for 4-5 years, but it is an awfully long process that could take up to 20 years. They have professional players, and they represent a more exciting and different alternative that might be compatible with Olympics. She doesn't think that, alongside big field football, minifootball should be at the Olympics.

Last January, the EMF had an election that led to some internal challenges. Consequently, several actors within the EMF joined forces with the organizers of Leisure League, a large sports organization, to found the Socca Federation. They operate more like a company – their main task is event organization, and they approach minifootball primarily as a business. Nonetheless, by Thassy’s account. This creates a dynamic in which certain members are “sitting on two chairs.”

There is still a lot to learn for minifootball, according to Thassy, and it would like to improve, too. The main goal for the EMF is to reach out to more people earlier to get them involved. In the Czech Republic, minifootball is a recognized sport, and that is the primary goal at every single state. That way, the EMF’s reputation would increase. Romania is another strong example, as they are on the way to have minifootball recognized as an independent sport, and they have the largest base of players in their league, with above around sixty thousand certified members. To reach that, in a way it is easier for them as they are a larger country, but that’s what makes it challenging to hold a championship organized by the same standards in every city.

Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU): Mark Staines

At the moment, the GBMFU has four leagues operating, with plans to establish a student league in the near future. There are also plans for establishing leagues for different nationalities, for example for the large Somali population there would be Somalian leagues, and also Romanian Leagues on the same basis. There are reportedly 6.9 million attendees at minifootball games in the UK, although that number may overrepresent those who attend frequently. The GBMFU is working to spread awareness of international events among current players. They are paying money to local associations for pitch time and to get into leagues.

The GBMFU tries to affiliate as many amateur leagues as possible, and this number is growing. Its vision is to have every league under their banner, where everyone would be represented equally. The problem is that there are leagues that are more financially orientated than others. As it is a business for them, it is understandable that they are not interested in the social aspect the federation provides. The GBMFU has social aims such as

reducing crime and increasing health programs for weight loss through minifootball. Staines believes people will increasingly approach the Union rather than they having to approach the people from a marketing perspective.

Two of the largest leagues in the UK were approached by Staines, and he describes both as impressive what GBMFU tried to build, but prices were too prohibitive to pursue serious partnerships. For instances, having a national tournament hosted at one of their facilities would have cost fifty thousand pounds. As a new association, GBMFU was not able to afford that, and would not have done so as a not-for-profit organization capable of instead giving back to its communities.

GBMFU currently has no committees – just board members. They have people scattered around the UK that want to set up minifootball communities with social media sites. They are looking to build individual areas, which would come together into a national association over time. It is difficult, since there are around 2000 different minifootball leagues played weekly within the UK. Trying to approach each of them is a difficult task, but Staines believes that this also represents the potential to create the largest association in the world of minifootball.

Learning from any established association from any sport is great for GBMFU, according to Staines, as it is only 15 months old and thus quite a new organization. He sees a need to bring more people into their association, as now just a group of few people are making decisions. Other organizations have board meetings on a regular basis, so the GBMFU might consider similar meetings, with ten to twelve people in leadership, rather than only two or three.

Staines believes that it would be reasonable to have minifootball become an Olympic sport, since as he puts it, minifootball is the most popular sport in the world participation-wise. It's an amateur sport, so in the future he claims it would make sense to have it on the Olympic Games.

Based on Staines' opinion, minifootball has connections within FIFA, but as a standalone sport, being too involved with FIFA is not desirable.. At the same time, if FIFA came for minifootball, Staines thinks there would not much room for action, given the influence FIFA

holds. In his opinion, if minifootball denied an offer, they would sell it to a rival association through the FA of each country, which would become too powerful, and WMF/EMF would not be able to deal with it. He thinks minifootball needs to create a link with FIFA and protect their associations with it, as having FIFA on board would provide a major support for the sport.

Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB): Rico Chermont

The Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB) was founded in September 2017, with the aim of unifying the sport in the country, as there were five-six different federations for small field football before. They are now working for 5, 6 and 7-a-side, and also indoors soccer. They have a lot of job to do, like development, organizing national competitions and leagues, working with their national team. Brazil participated in the minifootball World Cup in Tunisia last year, played friendly matches in Canada, and this July, took part of the Pan American Cup too in Guatemala.

As Chermont notes, PAMF (Pan American Minifootball Federation) has 13 members, the strongest ones are Mexico with 550 thousand players, and USA, where indoors soccer shines mostly. There is also Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala. By 2019, they expect to have 16 nations included in PAMF. Chile is more developed too, as their president has 6-7 fields to provide. All in all, PAMF is strong, but not as much as EMF, as compared to their 2 years of existence, the latter is 8-9 years old.

Minifootball Brazil is officially registered with the Brazilian government. It has a president (Chermont), with four directors, the founders of FMB. They have different tasks, like communication, compliances, and administration. Committees are formed too, and in charge of arbitration, women soccer, communication and marketing, and competitions. Each committee includes two or three people.

Brazil will attend in the next World Cup in Australia 2019 as well. Bringing together the leagues, players and clubs is the main challenge for them. The team has reportedly become better, and next year besides the World Cup in Australia in September, they will also attend on the World Minifootball Indoor Soccer competition in Mexico in May. They plan to offer better training for their national team players.

Chermont argues that is important for minifootball to become (a recognized) sport, there are 5 continental federations with 70-75 countries in WMF, so they are progressing with the quantitative requirements, and that markets surrounding minifootball need recognition as well. He is not certain whether minifootball suits the Olympics, as he is not sure they would have enough countries to compete. Hosting country can choose a sport to be included on their specific Games, so did Brazil with beach soccer in Rio 2016 for example. It could be one way to achieve it for minifootball. He would like it if they joined the Olympic program one day, he is unsure of the probability though.

According to Chermont, FIFA likes minifootball and sees it partly as a marketing tool to invite the audiences to the stadiums. Other than the central football nations (like England, Germany and Spain), football is struggling with getting viewers on the matches. As minifootball approaches the family as a sport, this marketing idea could work. On larger competitions, outside of the stadiums, it is like a festival in the fan zones, and they provide small-field football opportunity for the public, so it can be considered – as Chermont puts it – a theory working in practice.

4.4 Findings on Culture

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #1: Filip Juda

Juda asserts amateurism as an integral part of minifootball culture. People are not playing minifootball for their career, so they can and usually do have jobs besides playing for minifootball teams. That culture of amateurism extends into fees as well. According to Juda, “fees are not so high that the players are not able to pay.”

Many associations also offer free games for children under age 15 or 18. He explains that the players can build a great social experience from participating in minifootball. In this sport, Juda takes the broader approach that not only the result matters, but team and cohesion that are integrated into the culture of the sport.

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #2: Zorica Hofman

For Hofman, it is most important for minifootball not to be confused with football or futsal, as WMF is an individual and separate sport organization from FIFA. Finding a way to be different – and to be recognized by people as such – is the core task from her perspective.

Hofman, who has extensive experience in American football in Europe, finds it hard for minifootball to be compared with American football. Even though she claims that the structure is almost the same at every non-profit sport organization, and the goal is the same, namely to reach the Olympics, minifootball is not a recognized sport yet. Both are largely amateur sports, and according to Hofman, minifootball is played as a popular past-time activity by amateurs played in all parts of any country, and the federations are trying to organize them under their roof.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #1: David Tibor

Tibor notes that, as far as amateur players are concerned, in regard to health maintenance and the importance of exercise, everyone can play minifootball. It is played by teams on many levels.

According to the EMF's goals, minifootball is an amateur sport, in which most of the players sacrifice their time and in many cases their money to be able to play, thus the humility and attachment are different than in professional football, where players are being "pampered." So as Tibor notes, simply due to its amateur nature, minifootball is a lot cleaner, the motivation is much more unequivocal: only those people come who want and love to play. He claims that amateurism is a major part of minifootball, and he considers it as a value, since the sport is clean.

The other is the set of rules, and conditions: Minifootball is played primarily on AstroTurf and grass (of course in winter, the parquet version works too) on a field that is larger than in handball (at least 24 x 44 m), and the goal is 4 x 2 meters big. This difference (bigger field and bigger goal) makes the game more enjoyable. This is how it's played in Europe, and the rules are similar to big-field football. In Tibor's opinion, the difference between minifootball and futsal is huge, almost every rule is different, this is perhaps a more dynamic and pulsating game, where tougher tackles and collisions are allowed. Additionally, there is no

absolute time, they measure it differently, and he believes that those who like small field football would always enjoy a minifootball match, and he experiences that both amateurs and ex-professionals love to play with these rules and conditions.

Tibor foresees that minifootball has the potential to become a fully independent and competent sport institutionally, and maybe in the long run to be exercised even on professional level. It is a very enjoyable sport both to play and watch, it is vendible, and he believes that this development still has a lot of potential in it.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #2: Jakub Štefek

Štefek refers to the EMF as a family, as minifootball is an amateur sport, involving friendships and a generally positive atmosphere. This unique atmosphere should be preserved in his opinion, and not changed by approaching UEFA/FIFA in the future.

Minifootball reportedly has the second largest base regarding their members in the world. Minifootball has a one-on-one element, it is played in Brazil on the streets, it is played globally. As part of the management of the Czech national team for four and a half years, Štefek is in the sport for a while and claims that the uniqueness of minifootball – which he loves and wants to stay unchanged – is that they are like a family. Players can talk openly and relate to each other on a closer level than in many other sports. Štefek seeks that as the greatest value in the minifootball community, expressing hope that it remains a strong advantage in order for minifootball to make progress and move forward together with all of its federations, associations and leagues.

Amateurism is not something that he sees as part of every level of the sport, as there has been a process of professionalization in the structure and the organization of all of their events. They want to be professionals in that regard. The rule on international level forbids players with existing or extracted within one-year contracts from participating. Štefek stops short of commenting whether that is right or wrong, but the “good way of amateurism” on their international events creates a less strict atmosphere compared to high-profile large football events. The atmosphere of amateurism is still positive and relaxed and reflects fair play.

EMF & Hungarian Minifootball Federation (OMFSZ): Tira Thassy

Thassy asserts, given that minifootball is an amateur sport, the culture is very different from professional sports. In Hungary for example, she notes that most minifootballers know each other in person to some degree so that, while there is a competitive spirit, the overall atmosphere is friendly. There tends to lead to a great flow of player transfers between teams, as they don't necessarily play at one team because the conditions are better there but because their friends on and off the field moved there, so they are willing to follow friends by playing with other clubs.

At the national team level, it is also unique that almost everyone has a job, which is difficult to coordinate within a sport, especially considering the need to travel. Every player attends the main events (World Cup, Euro Cup) at the expense of their annual leave from work. Among EMF employees, the common goal of minifootball brings them together. Thassy believes that the friendly communities that have developed are not necessarily common at other sport federations.

There is a rule that anyone, who has a professional football contract, or lives only from football, or had a valid professional contract in the last 365 days can't play in any EMF events. Unfortunately, this year's Champions League witnessed a Moldovan team that had three professional players, and thus the team had to be disqualified. Thassy sees this as problematic towards the other 70 teams, as the goal of such an event is not to be a new platform for professional athletes.

In Hungary, in 11-a-side football the first two divisions are considered to be the professional level. In futsal, as it is a half professional, half amateur sport, those qualify as professionals who are considered to be professionals according to their player certificates. On any minifootball competition, they ask for the data of players, and then get them checked through the Hungarian Football Federation's database. Then they send their official certificate of analysis to EMF. Other countries have different regulations, and it is a challenge for the federation to come up with a common solution that could filter out professionals from the system.

According to Thassy, the goal of minifootball is not to rival with the UEFA or FIFA with regard to professionalism. The main point of this sport is that it is played by people after work or school, and those who play on pro level, would stay professional (big field footballer), and those who dropped out from professional football (either for lack of talent or diligence or couldn't afford to continue their career) are representing the starting point of minifootball itself.

Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU): Mark Staines

Staines thinks that minifootball is basically a small version of 11-a-side football but that in some countries there is a substantial 5-a-side population already in place. In the general understanding, minifootball is seen as 5-a-side with one extra player, but he believes that the two sports work with completely different setups, and 6-a-side football is more similar to 11-a-side football culturally instead. He sees minifootball as a very strategic game, while 5-a-side is considered “rapido football” in the Latin American countries.

Staines recognizes that the context is different in each country but sees amateurism as a unifying aspect of the minifootball culture. According to him, in most countries, minifootball is recognized as its own sport and separate from football. In the UK, it still comes under the football category, as they can't get the FA to recognize minifootball as a separate sport. Personally, Staines would like to see more professional players being involved with minifootball, even if not *currently* employed professional players as a rule in place forbids them to play on international event unless they have been out of contract for at least twelve months. He believes that they should be allowed to play as soon as their contract expires as their profile is high and they would lend that same popularity to the sport of minifootball.

Former professionals help with the promotion, standard, and coaching of the teams, such as in the Champions League in Slovenia with a number of ex-professionals from Eastern European countries. Staines thinks that they stand out, and play high quality football, even after reaching forty or fifty years of age. He believes that minifootball needs this. If someone like Cristiano Ronaldo were to retire after a few years, he should be invited to play for a minifootball team if the interest is there.

Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB): Rico Chermont

Chermont explains that minifootball is part of the culture in Brazil as it is played by children, adults, and former football players. This builds on Brazil's broader culture of football, which has fields and clubs throughout the country. In Chermont's opinion, minifootball is well-suited for amateur players by bringing them closer an inclusive and accessible version of the sport.

Chermont sees the sport as more than a game but rather about respect and physical well-being, and that this is built into its cultural fabric. Chermont emphasized the amateur focus of minifootball culture while acknowledging institutions are often run by those with experience in professional association football.

4.5 Findings on Industry

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #1: Filip Juda

Juda notes that the financial support in minifootball depends on the country. Partly, the private sector sponsors the sport, like companies that are close to sports and sports culture (retailers of sports equipment, betting companies, the bank sector and breweries). Public support helps in financing minifootball as well. The minifootball federations receive their income through membership fees, and different kinds of business systems (e.g. booking pitches, funding a player to travel).

On the local level, players and teams sign up and pay for registry fees. On the national level, it is administered through the national associations. On the international level, it works similarly but sponsors play a more important part. In minifootball, they don't charge ticket fees for more local competitions to attract more viewers, but at international events, sometimes they do. Broadcasting rights have brought in some cash flow in recent years in some countries.

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #2: Zorica Hofman

Hofman spoke briefly on the topic of the industry side of minifootball, raising the point that it's useful to have a primary sponsor to cover the costs of a major event as they are essentially selling a product (e.g. World Cup) for them (e.g. Nike, Adidas, Reebok). Marketing agencies are also interested in minifootball. Now that they have a product, they have something to sell, and sports sponsorships often function at the event-level rather than at the level of the team or league.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #1: David Tibor

Minifootball today is mainly supported by dedicated sponsors, but Tibor figures that it is becoming bigger business-wise too for larger companies. This year, Nike has been one of the major brand sponsors of the EMF, providing balls, clothes for the whole referee squad and organizing team, and many other forms of in-kind support for the three major events. He believes that they can be proud that more and larger sponsors have taken an interest in minifootball, and sees it as a great business opportunity as minifootball has become organized in associations all over Europe – that the sport can reach plenty of people to make sponsorship worthwhile due to its popularity.

The EMF collects annual membership fees paid by the national federations. The events usually do not charge money, but there are different accreditation packages where hotels are paid depending on the event. All in all, the primary source of revenue comes from membership fees and sponsors.

Tibor notes that there are examples in which TV channels have paid for broadcasting rights, such as in Spain and Ukraine during the EURO 2018 competition. Currently, it is the rare exception, but Tibor thinks that as the level of quality and the enjoyability of the minifootball broadcasts rises, there will be a greater opportunity to ask for money in return.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #2: Jakub Štefek

Štefek notes that national associations are the main engine for minifootball. This year, Erasmus+ funding helped launch the “Mini4EU” festival in Székesfehérvár, Hungary. This

is the first time they had this kind of funding. He was pleased to be able to bring Nike as a partner to the EMF, providing equipment for officials and referees and better deals for associations and national teams. He found it an important goal to seek strong strategic partners for EMF to get support and help developing in the financial aspect as well.

EMF & Hungarian Minifootball Federation (OMFSZ): Tíra Thassy

The EMF collects membership fees, which may be reduced in the future. This year, the EMF was able to obtain EU funding for the “Mini4EU” event. Besides that, sponsorship is a source of income for the EMF.

In the Hungarian Minifootball Federation, state funding is provided at around 5-10 million Hungarian forints (presently 15,400-30,800 euros) a year. This is still modest but assists with travel. They also monitor tenders and receive revenue from sponsorships. Besides that, entry fees (as in the super league) help out too.

Few countries in Europe can ask for money in exchange for broadcasting rights, like Slovakia during the Euro 2018. In Hungary, the federation maintains a strong relationship with Channel M4 (the state-backed sports channel), but it was not on the agenda to ask for money, as OMFSZ’s goal was to spread minifootball for the most people and fortunately they were partners in that. In case the matches were not broadcasted live, they showed the recorded ones later repeatedly. In some countries, it is more rational to seek payment for broadcasting rights. In Hungary, Thassy finds it to be more of a long-term goal for now.

Finding a major sponsor is a long-term goal for both the national (Hungarian) and the European federations, beside keeping a lookout for potential tenders, as there are many that could contribute to organizing great events and courses (such as the referee course this year). The EMF currently has sponsors, like Nike, or one for the AstroTurf, but the latter one is primarily a discount for the use of the material.

Thassy claims that Turkey has a great video system, and an interesting website. They installed cameras at each of their fields and they record all of the matches and they have a whole crew to edit them and provide highlights of the funniest moments, or best goal

celebrations. It is an immediate feedback for the players, as they receive these for their social media or e-mail, and if they share them, they also improve the popularity of the sport.

Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU): Mark Staines

According to Staines, currently the GBMFU can't apply for government funding until July 2019 due to necessity of two years of accountancy. After that it will become possible. Currently GBMFU reportedly obtains the resources itself and through the sponsors. The future goal by EMF and WMF is to have minifootball recognised by Sport Accord, and almost everywhere it means that the government would fund the sport association, and would recommend it to become the national governing body of the sport. This is where GBMFU aims to head, but until then it plans to set up leagues to receive the needed amount.

Estonia, and similar countries charge a roughly 10 Euro registration fee per player every year. In the UK, Staines approached a large operator to charge their players 50 pounds per year, and they wouldn't get their players to pay that amount. It is very difficult for them to charge any fees because players would not pay it. The FA is in a monopoly position regarding football in the UK, so GBMFU is trying to work with FA and arrange a relationship with them. In the future, they will have a women's team, men's team and U-21 team under FA, and therefore the FA will support them and maybe they could get membership fees from their players that way. Currently however, he doesn't find it possible.

Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB): Rico Chermont

About affiliated projects, Chermont notes that they collect for an annual fee paid by leagues, clubs and players, and in return they can enjoy benefits, like being part of the system, the "Mycujoo" channel, the uniforms, balls, structure. This is a one-off type income. It works as a registration fee. It is around 4-5 dollars a year, and in return, the player receives his/her profile in the system. It works similarly with clubs and leagues, just with different prices.

Sponsors help the national team and the tournaments with travel costs, and with general funding. Minifootball Brazil plans to become self-sustainable, as they have sufficient number of players, and as a result they don't need sponsors. The amount, which is collected annually from those players, is sufficient for the federation to operate for now.

The Brazilian Volleyball Federation offers a compelling example to learn from, according to Chermont, as they built up their sport from scratch, and transformed it into a national passion. They have one sponsor, Banco do Brasil, that helps out volleyball. Minifootball Brazil would be happy with that as well.

4.6 Findings on Linkages

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #1: Filip Juda

Linkages with football are important for minifootball in Juda's opinion, as they can be used as a marketing tool in both directions. Although the WMF has not entered talks with FIFA, the minifootball federations in some countries have signed memoranda of understanding between the national football federations and national minifootball association with the aim of spreading the popularity of football itself through helping each other. The target is to solve two parts of a problem facing football. The first part is that association football is losing spectators at the stadiums. The second part is that they are losing a number of players. Thanks to this cooperation, minifootball is bringing more people to the stadiums. As minifootball players are almost universally fans of football, a mobile application has been developed to capture that interest, promoting of potentially interesting football games in the nearby area for minifootball fans to visit.

There is no official partnership with futsal, but Juda claims that minifootball doesn't see any other sport as zero-sum competition. Winter tournaments can be mutually useful with futsal. Minifootball seeks to be integrated in the football family. Youth development, including tournaments organized for children are part of the strategic co-operation between the two.

The decision of whether to consider a formal relationship within the FIFA organization would depend on the terms and conditions, according to Juda. Yet the World Minifootball Federation is presently working independently and such a move does not seem to be on the agenda.

World Minifootball Federation (WMF) #2: Zorica Hofman

Hofman sees linkages with football and futsal as challenges for minifootball. She thinks however that It is something minifootball can make benefit of, if they accept it as a challenge. Hofman notes that minifootball as a new sport with young people involved in it, is learning even about structure itself. She is there to help with that process, to help them “get up on their feet.”

Tasks involve structuring different commissions, making rules of “how it’s supposed to be.” This is the first step that minifootball is taking from other sports, to have rules, regulations, and everything necessary to form a well-functioning governing body. Thus, there are many lessons to be learned from older sports. She thinks that the marketing operation is working very well in minifootball, and they’re making progress on the international level, including the adaptation of anti-doping regulations.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #1: Dávid Tibor

Tibor claims that, in terms of linkages, technically the Hungarian Football Federation integrates all those disciplines that the UEFA does, so besides big-field football there is beach soccer and futsal. He notes however that overlap exists as there are some minifootballers who play in possibly all other branches. He thinks there is a strong relationship and cooperation among them, but the minifootball federation is an independent one, it does not belong under the Hungarian Football Federation, and he thinks it is fine like that, and they would like to preserve their independence.

Maintaining strong relations with the football federation is claimed to be beneficial in every minifootball country, but it is not indispensable. There are examples for relatively less connections with the football federation and more independence and it works fine, and for quite tight relationships too. He thinks it depends on the people, if one federation’s leadership sees the partner in the other’s, they form a stronger cooperation.

It is very important for Tibor, and it is part of their charter and their daily work that they attempt to be an independent sport federation, which would on the other hand be happy to cooperate either with FIFA or UEFA. But they wouldn’t like to be assimilated and would

like to stay independent over the long run. Minifootball's independence however is not threatened, as UEFA and FIFA made a strategic decision before 2010 that they only support futsal, as minifootball is very similar to it, thus these issues are not concerning them. Cooperation and coordination are on the agenda, merger and assimilation aren't.

The Olympics could be a long-term goal or vision in Tibor's point of view, as there are many steps to take on that road ahead. Step one is to become an acknowledged sport at SportAccord, once that is done, in the long-term he believes that minifootball may well succeed with the Olympics, too.

Regarding which sports minifootball could learn from, Tibor noted that there are many great examples of how other sports made successful initiatives. He specifically cited the ironman circuit, which grew out of the triathlon. This has become such a strong brand that it almost exceeded the triathlon itself. In motorsports, he pointed to Formula 1, an older but similar competition and path to growth.

According to Tibor, there is no cooperation in youth development with football, since it starts originally from the small field football, as children are naturally not allowed to play on the big field. Thus, as long as it is not decided who would become a footballer, and who would keep football as a beloved hobby, which is around the age of 18, there are already existing youth development systems in football that builds players up and holds the basics of minifootball too. Out of those who would keep football as a hobby, he claims that many would prefer minifootball over amateur big-field football. In his opinion, they should provide an opportunity for them.

European Minifootball Federation (EMF) #2: Jakub Štefek

Country by country, linkages are different, according to Štefek. In some associations, there is a separate minifootball association, while in others it remains within 'big football.' Partly that diversity makes the situation interesting for him. He finds it hard to give an overall picture, as somewhere the cooperation is better, somewhere the relationship is a bit competitive.

In some countries, futsal grew substantially, and now it's getting back from the main stage and instead minifootball is booming. For the EMF, it is important not to fight each other, but to find the best place for minifootball, and to use their best knowledge and experience to keep their positions and make them stronger and stronger. Minifootball's primary idea and aim has to be to develop regardless what happens around it. They respect all kinds of sports and all kinds of football, and if their relation is not going anywhere from the other side, there is nothing minifootball could do. For their "karma and mentality," Štefek finds it best to concentrate on themselves. The goal is to bring minifootball as a big value to the fans, and to the TV viewers, which sometimes already happens on their events. He sees that there is surely a potential in minifootball.

Štefek thinks that they use the existing linkages for their advantage, even when it is not a positive one, because in his opinion, minifootball could learn best from negative things. In some teams, famous former football players are now playing minifootball, which is very good for minifootball's PR. That is the way in his opinion, as they need to get the best out of everything, and if it is not a positive situation or issue, they need to learn and turn it into their advantage.

Without reaching politics, Štefek notes that finding sponsors, getting a structure and bringing people both half and full-time on board, bringing in professionals to be able to better support the federations and associations which would mean better service and support to the players are areas minifootball could learn from others. As they are there for the players and not the other way around, their satisfaction and trust are the most important in Štefek's opinion. He presumes that without players, there would be no associations, and without associations, there would be no EMF. They reached a point where they need professionals on board who love and understand the sport and effective at making decisions too. That way development and progress could be great.

EMF & Hungarian Minifootball Federation (OMFSZ): Tíra Thassy

Thassy perceives minifootball as different from both football and futsal. She believes it is the most dynamic one among them, as it has a smaller field but a relatively substantial goal, besides much more activity happen in a game.

Most of the minifootball players in their respective country participates either in football or futsal as well. Futsal can provide the tactical elements, and football helps gaining the necessary stamina for minifootball. It is needed on an amplified grade, as those short periods (2-4 minutes) that one set of players spend on the field are extremely tiring, as everyone has to “give it all” there. The size of the ball and the goal is one size larger in minifootball than in futsal.

With regards to youth development, it is beneficial for minifootball that football and futsal develop players from early ages, while currently minifootball starts earliest in the U-19 category. Football helps with its popularity, but Thassy believes that minifootball can create its own identity. To help with that, they introduced the referee course, as minifootball has different rules from both football and futsal.

Also, minifootball is amateur, and it has the largest base of players, as most people in their free-time choose minifootball instead of big-field football or futsal. It has a great company that could contribute to achieve great things in the future. In terms of marketing and sponsorship, Thassy thinks that minifootball could learn from any sport.

Having minifootball under FIFA’s wing is a matter of negotiations, and “as they say, money talks.” Thassy doesn’t think that they would like to give it entirely either to FIFA or UEFA, as they are differently constructed systems, but every help is useful what such large organizations could offer, either from marketing, sponsorship, referees and observers perspective. In the long-term, she finds it imaginable that something similar could happen, and there is openness for that. Obviously, a deal like that could be achieved or not by clarifying the conditions.

Being a recognized sport is important for gaining state funding, but also for example, the EMF is organizing the EMF Euros and WMF World Cup, instead of European Championship or World Championship. In case one has a recognized separate sport, it is easier to have a broader access to funding, sponsorship and people. It is also necessary to meet certain requirements to reach that status, which is usually a several year-long process, but once met, that also provides proof of quality. First, the members should achieve that, and thus EMF could too. Currently, the WMF is working on that project, to meet the conditions towards GAISF (previously Sport Accord) in regards of professional and

organizational requirements. Federations have to exist for a while prior to becoming recognized representatives of a sport.

Great Britain Minifootball Union (GBMFU): Mark Staines

Regarding linkages, Staines does not find it important to be associated with futsal, as even though it achieved quite a bit since its foundation, it is still not a major sport and has yet to reach television tv audiences worldwide. Whereas big football does have the popularity, and the tv audiences, last year the minifootball world cup in Tunisia was watched by over 100 million people worldwide. They received video messages by players from Chile, Brazil and from different countries. He finds it helpful to create that link, and he hopes that as these players retire from their game, they come into minifootball.

Staines repeats that minifootball needs those linkages for the profile, to bring people in and spread the name of minifootball around the world, so in that regard the connection is positive. At the same time, if minifootball wants to separate itself from 11-a-side, then it doesn't want to be too associated with them, as minifootball is a sole, separate sport. There is a fine line, and it needs to be balanced.

In some countries, the FA and the minifootball association have a direct link, where the FA supports the latter. In the UK, they work with Manchester FA, and going forward they'll work on the national scale of the FA and create a link there, maybe using connections that other countries have in support of strengthening their connections with the English FA. After that connection is made and strengthened with the FA, Staines thinks there is no limit on how far it could go. They govern 11-a-side football on all levels and ages, but people are dropping away from 11-a-side football to play minifootball all the time, between 100-200 thousand players a year, so GBMF needs to reach out to them.

Brazilian Minifootball Federation (FMB): Rico Chermont

About linkages with other sports, Chermont stated that minifootball is played by amateur players, who are not interesting to sponsors. If (ex-)soccer players, are involved with minifootball, it helps to talk with sponsors, and bring the public into the stadiums. In Brazil, CBF is the national football federation. FIFA is in official connection with 5-a-side, also

known as futsal, with beach soccer, and with 7-a-side in regards of children's football. Minifootball is officially 6-a-side, and FIFA doesn't work with it.

From Chermont's perspective, if minifootball wants to build a better structure then it must learn from big-field football, as they are professionals, and minifootball wants to be almost-professional. Chermont believes that being in touch with FIFA is thus very important for the WMF and minifootball in general. Maintaining a strong relationship with them can help the negotiations with leagues, clubs and sponsors too.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction and Purpose

This chapter provides thematic analysis based on interpretation of the information gathered in the research interviews presented in Chapter Four. Minifootball federations demonstrate diffusion through the global popularity of the sport. They are also tapping into the existing opportunities that minifootball has as a football-family sport. With respect to governance, federations do face challenges to consolidate leadership but are focused on professionalizing the institutions that support the sport. Amateurism and hospitality seem to be common threads in terms of culture and, as alluded to earlier, minifootball is able to embed itself culturally within global football culture. Industry may be the greatest challenge for minifootball given its amateur focus, but the ways in which minifootball finds funding are presented. There is a need for official sports recognition in order to be eligible for resources from government ministries, which could happen through the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF). And while there does not appear to be a strong short-term prospect of Olympic competition, partnerships are already being formed with institutions supporting similar sports.

5.2 Diffusion

Diffusion was previously defined as an increase in the number of followers, spectators, amateur players, or professional players in a sport, both in their total numbers and in their geographic reach. It refers to the process of spreading in both geographic and quantitative terms. Through the diffusion process, as a sport becomes more global, it can form the core meaning and goal of a sport accordingly, in order to meet the increasing requirements that popularity comes with. I initially expected that minifootball federations are focused on spreading awareness of the sport and participation within it and that the World Minifootball Federation aims to incorporate new countries to expand its geographic scope.

Minifootball is already a global phenomenon. The aim of the sport is to include as many countries as possible. Currently, it exists in approximately one hundred countries worldwide and spread around all five continents. The continental federations alongside and under the world federation working on including all possible countries under their wings. There are certainly white spots on the map, but their growth is steady and, in some instances, existing local structures exist that can be incorporated or affiliated by the national federations. In

many cases, it is a multi-directional process, as people can approach WMF with the aim of joining in or registering a new minifootball federation, but WMF is also searching for potential partners. The business sector can initiate for-profit leagues as well, as many want to play on a more organized level.

Minifootball is reportedly one of the most popular amateur sports in Europe, and possibly in the world. It is played by millions of people throughout the globe, whether on the streets of Rio, or on one of the many astro-turf fields of Prague. Minifootball has few limitations to who can participate in it, regardless of age, gender, profession and, for many, level of physical ability.

In a way, minifootball institutions are tapping into a market that already exists organically. That extent may vary between countries and continents, but small field football is available in some form at every parts of the world. However, the generic game – namely playing football on a smaller field – is more widespread than the specific brand of the sport of minifootball.

Players can participate in ‘small field football’ by playing 5-a-side, 6-a-side, or 7-a-side, indoors or with dasher boards, with small goals, and so on. Minifootball is 6-a-side, a with specific set of rules and conditions. The general aim of minifootball institutions is thus to ‘spread the word’ and gain familiarity within the different small-field football communities. One of the main tools for that is providing increasingly higher quality minifootball tournaments at the local level and, more prominently, at the national, regional and global level. The same can be said for leagues as well.

Some countries have registered members while others have a base that remains largely unaffiliated, in which case the main goal has been to capture that interest through leagues and nurturing relationships with local sports facility owners. This outreach can be challenging for minifootball institutions, even in those countries where minifootball is more developed. There are plenty of leagues and organizers disinterested in affiliation, and it is not always easy to find the optimal partner in terms of quality and capacity for further outreach. Also, some organizers are more profit-oriented, which may not align well with the aims of the minifootball federations, as they are officially non-profit organizations. There is

also a rivalry for the minifootball market with the Socca Federation, a recent separate association that some consider an offshoot of the WMF.

Broadcasting of minifootball events is already happening and playing a role in spreading awareness of the sport, but it could be expanded before its current modest level. A couple of countries have managed to have their matches broadcasted either on national or local television channels. This helps to advertise minifootball and show that it can be displayed on the same mediums as more traditional sports. It is also a convenient way of gaining popularity for the sport through spectators who may become supporters, fans or active players.

5.3 Governance

Governance has been defined not only as setting up rules and conditions for the game but building, strengthening and expanding institutions that can make and execute decisions or further development of the sport. There are different types and levels of governance. The organizational structure has levels stretching from local to national up to continental and global federations. On this topic, I initially expected that minifootball federations were working to expand the number of governance institutions, such as teams and leagues, as well as the number of federations. That emphasis on institutional expansion was confirmed by the findings.

Leagues and federations are not always sole actors in their geographic territory (as shown in the case of the Great Britain Minifootball Union), as there are many other institutional entrepreneurs on the market. Since minifootball is a very popular game globally, it makes sense that there are several event providers to offer competitive playtime for the players. Minifootball has to find a path forward in handling these diverse actors, either by affiliating them, cooperating as part of a sports ecosystem or providing a comparatively better and more satisfying opportunity to play. This can be difficult, especially when these organizers are already established in their communities, and some are even providing greater prizes for the winners.

The Socca Federation presents a competitive challenge at the international level for the World Minifootball Federation, a type of splintering off which can be expressed when

leadership struggles are irreconcilable, as it leads to what has been described as member federations “sitting on two chairs.” This is an interesting issue that, in a sense, confirms the legitimacy of the existence of minifootball. On the other hand, disruptive power dynamics and rivalry can hurt the development of the sport.

There are plans to resolve the issue of competitive institutions however, in the long run, this may be solved by one institution outcompeting or outlasting the other. Alternatively, as minifootball enters the realm of recognized sports, one institutional system may be favored by those broader institutions that confer recognition. This may be a common symptom of a forming and developing sport in general, and even professional sports can reflect such processes. This has been witnessed in the reported formation of a European Super League from among the top grossing association football clubs in 2021 as an alternative to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) structure.

Minifootball is dealing with six-a-side with specific rules and conditions, even though other types of small field football exist and are predominant in certain areas of the world (such as five-a-side and seven-a-side football). Many players, however, are likely unaware of the formal name, structure, rules, and institutions of minifootball itself. Establishing the brand of minifootball is thus more of a priority for the federation than having to deal with building up an entirely new sport from scratch.

Formal recognition by GAISF as a separate sport is beneficial for minifootball, as that way it can be funded through government sponsorship. Besides that, it provides the sport the added reputation and acknowledgement that helps negotiating with sponsors and with broadcasters. It is a basic prerequisite towards becoming an Olympic sport as well. It would also make the respective federations the official representatives of minifootball, which could be a decisive factor in the race for players or teams with other organizations, or tournament organizers.

The level of league organization varies in terms of quality, so prioritizing those most active successful leagues could help to derive best practices in other leagues and federations around the world. The aim of any minifootball federation should be to affiliate the best event organizers, and that way standardize its process and set a level for the other members as

well. Providing a quality experience for their players remains a top-level priority for minifootball.

In many countries, the national federations are still operating on a quasi-official basis, as they have yet to provide their official founding and/or registration documents. This is problematic considering legal considerations and the aim to promote a vision of minifootball as an organized, professional sport among formal sports institutions. Without the necessary papers, the operation of those federations is legally problematic in the future, as some actions necessitate them – including for governmental sponsorship which often mandates operations for a certain number of years prior.

5.4 Culture

Cultural embeddedness in a sports context means a long-term basis of active and passive followers of a sport, depending on how embedded it is within society. Most sports develop a culture of their own, but within the broader culture of a society. Sports may become embedded in mainstream national cultures, subcultures or transnational identities, such as in the case of the Nomad Games popular in Central Asian countries.

I initially expected that minifootball federations will identify a distinct sports culture built around the amateur, accessible nature of the sport but that this informality may diminish participation in formal leagues beneath the federation level. This expectation was sound. However, it does not appear that minifootball is actively looking for opportunities to embed itself within the various identities or lifestyles of the countries in which it operates beyond tapping into football culture more generally.

Global football culture provides not only a base of potential players but also offers a cultural context for the sport. As there is a common base for all these sports from the “football family,” it provides players for all of them, as there is great amount of transferability of skills and knowledge among them. While all these sports, including minifootball originates from its big field equivalent, there is also room to create its own identity, as the progress of its development shows evidence for it.

Amateurism is actively a stance of minifootball, so organizing around that is somewhat different than in other sports. It is an integrated part of the culture of minifootball, with all its benefits and possible challenges. The atmosphere and passion is reportedly among it's major benefits, opening up to the consumer side of the sport market is more difficult, as teams and players can hardly reach such high status among the supporters as professional football stars.

Amateurism can be positioned in contrast to the downsides of the business orientation of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and eleven-a-side football. Since it is played by amateur players, their passion and honest enthusiasm can project a quite positive attitude of minifootball towards the outside world. In contrary to the huge salaries and perks professional football players can receive nowadays, not to mention the astronomical amounts top football stars tend to earn, minifootball players often sacrifice their free-time and money in order to participate in their sport. As minifootball's slogan "You play" has been emphasized by respondents a couple of times, it signals that those involved in this sport are there for the game, not for money.

Friendly, familial culture within the community of minifootball has been mentioned by several interviewees as one of the main advantages that minifootball possesses. That friendliness creates a social fabric for the sport that welcomes new members. This is present both on the sports and the executive level and has been called the "main engine" for working efficiently. That hospitable approach helps set and reach common goals for minifootball institutions.

While that friendliness is challenged by the splintering that has also occurred, those who remain in the mainstream institutions of minifootball have described the separations as ultimately constructive in the sense that the departing parties were less integrated into the shared institutional vision than many others in federations. It is hard to find a fine-line between the two, but it may hold some insight that in a non-profit organization, there are more altruistic goals that drives its members, compared to a profit-oriented organization, where the number one aim can be expected to be financial gains through the entertainment business of the sport.

5.5 Industry

Industry has been defined as the revenue-generating activity that surrounds a sport and shapes it in its pursuit of profit. The entertainment business of a sport can ensure sustainability of the teams and competitions while allowing athletes and teams to have more influence in business competition as well. The size of economic activity in a sport varies depending on the nature of the sport (e.g., its popularity, the economic status of its regions of influence, whether it is professional or amateur, etc.). Regarding industry, I initially expected that minifootball federations struggle to generate significant revenue within a sport that features a culture of amateurism, and that constituent leagues may struggle to find the resources for competitions. The interviews offered some insights but it was difficult to tell the extent to which there is a *struggle* to sustain the sport although there are certainly still financial constraints.

Players are often willing to sacrifice time and resources for recreation rather than expecting associations to invest in them as sources of profit, at least according to the federation leadership interviewed for the thesis. As minifootball is admittedly non-profit (at least on behalf of WMF and its the federations that fall under its umbrella), finding the resources to maintain it involves voluntarism and asking players for registration fees. Minifootball as an amateur sport can focus mainly on organizing events and spend most of its resources on such activities due to its amateur nature.

The inclusivity of the sport may help it align with funding priorities, such as in the case of disability inclusion at the Mini4EU event. Minifootball could benefit for an association with international development's empowerment programs. It has already set a route for strengthening its diversity by planning to include more women in minifootball, both on the field organizing the World Cup in the future for them too, and the executive level, as it targets to have more women on board in the federations. It projects a forward-thinking image that shows the dedication of involving different aspects of society in this sport. This can open up new financial resources for social impact-minded programming.

Depending on the country, membership fees, and/or registration fees remain the primary sources of income for minifootball. Federations tends to collect them from league organizers or on a continental/global level from member minifootball organizations. Becoming a

member of a certain federation may hold different benefits aside from the ability to play in the leagues – such as broadcast access in the case of Brazil and Turkey. It is a sustainable way of maintaining a steady level of interest events by the organizers and for others involved in making minifootball possible.

Corporate-sponsorships (e.g., Nike) and corporate discounts (e.g., for astroturf) are available in minifootball, but primarily for events, as those are platforms of advertising for these companies. Having more of these sponsors in the future is a key for the growing of the sport. As its popularity rises, so will the likeliness of gaining new partners that are willing to fund minifootball.

Broadcasting is rare currently, especially as a financial resource, but in the future, minifootball may gain enough awareness among sport loving people that it would worth giving out money for television channels to receive the broadcasting rights for major minifootball events. This would both help in gaining awareness of the sport and in providing an alternative source of revenue.

5.6 Linkages

Linkages have been defined as relations with other sports and sports institutions, whether they are closely connected and have the same origin, or somewhat distant but guardians of sports legitimacy in one form or another. These linkages between sports can be formal (e.g., contracts or agreements or formal competitions like the Olympic Games) or informal (e.g., consultations, meetings or informal cooperation).

Regarding linkages, I initially expected that minifootball federations would see the connection to association football and futsal as a way of attracting new players due to the similarity of the game, but that amateurism limits genuine interest in becoming an Olympic sport. I did not anticipate the emphasis on the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) as a legal guardian of sports recognition.

Minifootball means six-a-side football officially, even if some federations welcome other types of small field football as well (like seven-a-side football in Brazil). Five-a-side football can appear in minifootball as futsal and as a complementary indoor winter sport. While on

the official minifootball competitions, there are specific rules and conditions for six-a-side, on the organizational level, some minifootball federations may still deal with other versions of the game.

Many amateur players play multiple sports besides minifootball, such as big field football and futsal, so similar sports do not necessarily present an either/or ('zero sum') type of competition, but rather may be considered complementary in nature. Also, former professionals can be included if they have been retired for more than one year, as there are quite a few examples for that on the high levels.

In fact, minifootball's similarity to big field football is part of why there is a low resistance to participation. As football is a well-known and popular sport, most of its alternatives can reach their target group too. Also, children in football up to a certain age play on smaller fields with fewer players in a team (potentially seven-a-side) and attend indoors tournaments in the winter season. Minifootball brings these sports together in some way, and through the development process, one aspiring football player becomes familiar with these alternatives of big field football. Around the age of eighteen it will be clear for a football player whether football (futsal, beach soccer) will become a career opportunity for him/her or to stay on as a recreational player. For the latter, minifootball is reportedly a popular alternative.

The GAISF decides whether a sport becomes internationally accepted as an official, recognized sport. This is a process minifootball is going through with the support of the World Minifootball Federation, and it could help the sport gain recognition with national governments, receiving funding from the part of the state budget allocated for sports and recreation.

Being on the Olympic program is a long-term goal for most of the respondents regarding minifootball. It would hold potential for reputational, industrial, diffusion, and recognition benefits. It is reportedly the major goal for many sports, since it is considered the eminent platform for most sports, and the most prestigious collection of sporting events worldwide. Perhaps the only real competitor might be the FIFA World Cup, and it is the rules of FIFA that prevent big field football players from participating in the Olympics as a whole. This regulation would create an opportunity for minifootball in the event that former football

players can attend the Olympics under the auspices of minifootball without violating FIFA rules.

Minifootball appears to maintain strong relations with FIFA. There is cooperation between the two, as FIFA sees minifootball as a marketing tool for football that could help bring back people to the stadiums where fan attendance has diminished. The federations interviewed were content to operate independently on their own for now. Given the example of futsal within the FIFA system, there is a concern that minifootball could lose financial control if part of a wider sporting umbrella. It is unclear how much of a choice minifootball would have in terms of an offer. All in all, most respondents thought the decision of joining or staying separate would depend on the circumstances and the potential benefit the offer holds for the sport.

5.7 Other

Despite asking open-ended questions in each interview, the interview respondents did not provide information relevant to sports legitimacy that fell outside of the five thematic codes. Therefore, while the five pillars of sports legitimacy that I present in this thesis – diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages – are not based on an established formulation that exists in other scholarly works (at least not as a collective), the framework seems to have been sufficient for the purposes of this research.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction and Purpose

This chapter summarizes and concludes the first five chapters of the thesis, recounting the purpose and main contributions of the research, the basic theoretical framework, the research design and the key findings that are discussed in the discussion section. I frame the contributions in light of gaps in the literature, and then offer recommendations for minifootball federations based on interviews with other federations. Finally, I acknowledge several fruitful areas for further research relevant the topic of this thesis but outside of the scope of the specific questions that I explored here.

6.2 Summary of the Thesis

This thesis put forward a framework consisting of five pillars of sports legitimacy, namely diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages. I addressed the question of how minifootball pursued greater legitimacy by coding interview responses from those working at the level of strategic leadership for multiple minifootball federations. By exploring minifootball as a case study, I sought to derive insights into sports legitimacy more broadly.

This paper was structured into six chapters. Chapter One dealt with the introduction of the theme, provided background to the research and presented the research question. Chapter Two outlined the theoretical framework, establishing and going beyond the conventional functional definitions of a sport, and broadening the term by placing it into the social reality in which legitimacy is negotiated. I then offered a framework inspired by the literature but offering a comprehensive framework that was previously absent from the literature. I also identified a gap in the minifootball scholarship, showing that minifootball was the subject of academic research in many countries and contexts but that, at the same time, there was a need for new primary research for the questions raised in the course of this thesis.

Chapter Three laid out the research methods used in the process of making and designing the semi-structured interviews as well as the interview subjects consulted for evidence in the research. That chapter also explained the justification for looking to federations as a level of analysis and listed a variety of limitations that must be understood to know the boundaries of what can and cannot be concluded from the findings that I collected. The interviews

sought to explore the topic by open-ended questions regarding the five-pillar framework of sport legitimacy to provide space for the respondents to speak freely and expand more on topics discussed in order to better understand complex phenomena and gain perspective by adding follow-up questions. This chapter briefly outlined the role of thematic coding in the research.

Chapter Four presented the results gained by the interviews in the realm of the five pillars of sport legitimacy according to the thematic codes that I used in reviewing recordings and notes from the interviews. Those findings were examined analytically in Chapter Five, where I curated the insights most useful to understanding the broader topic of sports legitimacy in the case of minifootball. This chapter, in turn, offers a conclusion and summary, draws linkages between the research contained here and the broader sports literature, and look ahead to new opportunities for research on this and similar topics.

6.3 Contributions to the Literature

This paper provides several approaches that make a contribution to the sports literature in several ways. First, minifootball has not been adequately explored from the organizational perspective in previous literature, so this study attempts to explore that territory beyond the context of youth coaching and athletic performance. Minifootball also offers a fresh case study to observe non-mainstream sports and their development, including their achievements and future visions.

The five pillars that I propose in this thesis can serve as a novel framework that can be adapted or otherwise improved upon to understand sports legitimacy from a more comprehensive perspective, especially in comparing the development and institutional strategies of different sports (while recognizing its reliance on somewhat subjective analysis from the researcher). The fact that the open-ended questions did not produce answers outside of the five coded themes suggests that the five pillars (diffusion, governance, culture, industry and linkages) may be sufficient in and of themselves.

6.4 Core Insights

In the case of minifootball, there is already a vast and global base of players to support minifootball institutions in developing the sport. After all, minifootball is thought to be one of the most popular amateur sports in the world, and thus the federations main goal is to find ways to engage these players and teams, or already existing leagues, providing them with high-quality events and opportunities to join the organisation. In a way, being part of a larger “football family” helps minifootball as it finds itself in a setting in which the public already has a basic understanding of the general principles of the game. The product minifootball can offer for its target group seems to be in high demand, which shows promise for the growing popularity of the sport.

There is diversity in terms of how well-established national minifootball organizations are, but the body and structure of leadership on the continental and global level appears to be coordinated effectively. International federations plan to grow the number member organizations while national federations plan to increase their outreach to players and leagues in their respective countries.

While the rules-based governance of minifootball is stable, some legal issues are still present regarding official founding documents of some federations and unifying the approach to amateurism among the national federations. Referee courses and diversity initiatives are showing signs of continuing progress of organisational development in the sport. Becoming an officially recognized, standalone sport and setting up standards for league organizers are among currently active projects of the minifootball federations.

The main characteristics of minifootball culture according to the results are the friendly, family-like atmosphere around the sport, both in terms of players and organizational leadership, and the apparent commitment to amateurism. Linkages to broader football-family sports and football culture help reduce barriers to spreading awareness of minifootball, and having former well-known professionals joining in can and has raised the profile of minifootball competitions as well. Minifootball appears poised to grow into a distinguishable, recognized sport.

The revenue that sustained minifootball is sufficient to organize high-quality events and leagues for the players and teams, although not yet enough to sustain a substantial entertainment business. The core methods are collecting membership fees from federations and registration fees from players and teams. Sponsors are available that are tied to advertise themselves through sports, mainly for the major minifootball events – although this may often come in the form of in-kind contributions rather than through financial sponsorship. Due to the amateur nature of the sport, gaining more sponsors and finding other forms of revenue (such as selling tickets and broadcasting rights) remain a challenge, or at least at an early stage of development. Becoming a recognized sport would help in terms of having access to state funds more easily, which have already been used for competitions where there was a social aim in addition to that of sports competition for its own sake.

Minifootball has close ties to football-family sports. There are tactical and athletic similarities to big field football and futsal, even though minifootball has developed its own unique characteristics. Minifootball federations showed eagerness to become part of the Olympic Games in future years as a grand achievement for the sport. However, its intermediate vision is to gain recognition from the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), which would help many open up ministerial athletic funds in a number of countries to support the sport. On the global level, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) represents both an opportunity and a risk, in terms of the potential that cooperation and co-existence holds, and the threat of being captured institutionally under the larger organization's umbrella and funding priorities, which are likely to vary from those of the minifootball federations based on the futsal experience.

6.5 Recommendations for Federations

The federation interviews revealed certain needs or existing best practices on which I base the following seven recommendations in this section. These could further the interests of minifootball federations and, in certain instances, those of growing sports federations more widely.

Recommendation #1: Bring informal players and leagues into the fold.

Federations should seek out casual football players not already served by an organized activity or who play other informal forms of football. This can be done by connecting with local facilities and league organizers, including for similar sports such as futsal.

Recommendation #2: Plan for intra-organizational challenges.

Federations should recognize and plan for potential leadership competition to deepen their organizational resilience. On a global level, they can hold conferences to discuss differences in visions, particularly between seeking profit and sustaining amateurism within the sport.

Recommendation #3: Register federations and leagues legally where possible.

While there are many partnerships through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with football-family institutions, these can only be entered into by organizations that are legally registered. If the GAISF recognizes minifootball, that may also open doors to state funding.

Recommendation #4: Make it a habit to document and publish best practices.

Establishing a monthly blog or newsletter to highlight successful league or federation organizers and their strategies can help engage and inform others making similar efforts. The WMF is best suited for this role through its vice presidents from different regions.

Recommendation #5: Design for inclusivity.

Make sure that there are initiatives in place, however informal, to promote inclusivity and a hospitable culture among players from different backgrounds, abilities, genders, ethnicities and languages. This will help the sport both organically and through state-funded programs.

Recommendation #6: Create an outreach system that is efficient and transferrable.

There should be a 'Minifootball Outreach' database within each federation of universities, school administrators, media outlets and government sports ministries as strategic partners in the sport, making an effort to invite them to national competitions and awards ceremonies.

Recommendation #7: Treat educational institutions as partners in growing the sport.

There are many high schools and universities that may be open to trying minifootball using existing facilities, simultaneously providing access to facilities and future players. National federations should look to these as 'farm teams' that may offer low-cost practice facilities.

6.6 Further research

In the course of the research for this thesis, four areas emerged where future research could help understand important topics in the sports literature. First, comparative studies of participants in small field football that (a) are or (b) are not a part of formal leagues could help to explore what makes the difference in engaging new fans and players. Second, given that research exists on minifootball that focuses on school-age and university populations, research could be directed towards academic institutions that already offer nascent or developed small field football programs to determine the characteristics of programs that would be most likely to provide players and resources to sports organization (and their motivations for doing so). Third, the emergence of broadcasting within minifootball suggests that federations may benefit from a stronger understanding of how other non-mainstream sports organizations successfully (or unsuccessfully) enter into broadcasting contracts as, not only as a form of revenue and/or as a form of marketing. Finally, the topic of sports integration and inclusivity from a gender, race and disability perspective has not yet been explored in reference to financial support from governmental institutions. It may be that minifootball and other non-mainstream sports can gain some measure of sustainability through inclusivity, and that this inclusivity may be easier to achieve while in an earlier stage of development. These questions could be explored from the perspective of national and intergovernmental grants for athletics competitions and programs.

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