

# **DISTINCTION BETWEEN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND VIRTUE-BASED QUALIFICATION – FOCUS ON ARISTOTLE'S SUPREME VIRTUE: THE JUSTICE**

**Abstract of PhD Thesis**

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## **Introduction**

Qualification can be observed in countless areas of life, sport is no exception. Sport organizations can also be qualified based on different criteria. The dissertation presents a non-traditional approach, which has been very important socially for thousands of years, yet in many cases it is pushed into the background and not given enough attention. This novel approach is the virtue-based qualification, within this the justice as the supreme virtue of Aristotle. In order to qualify sport organizations, it is important to differentiate between them, based on the telos also from Aristotle. The essence of the distinction is the goal, the essential nature. During the dissertation, the distinction will be made according to the operational nature between sport organizations. Accordingly, competitive and non-competitive (recreational) sport organizations will be examined separately on the basis of virtue and on the basis of justice.

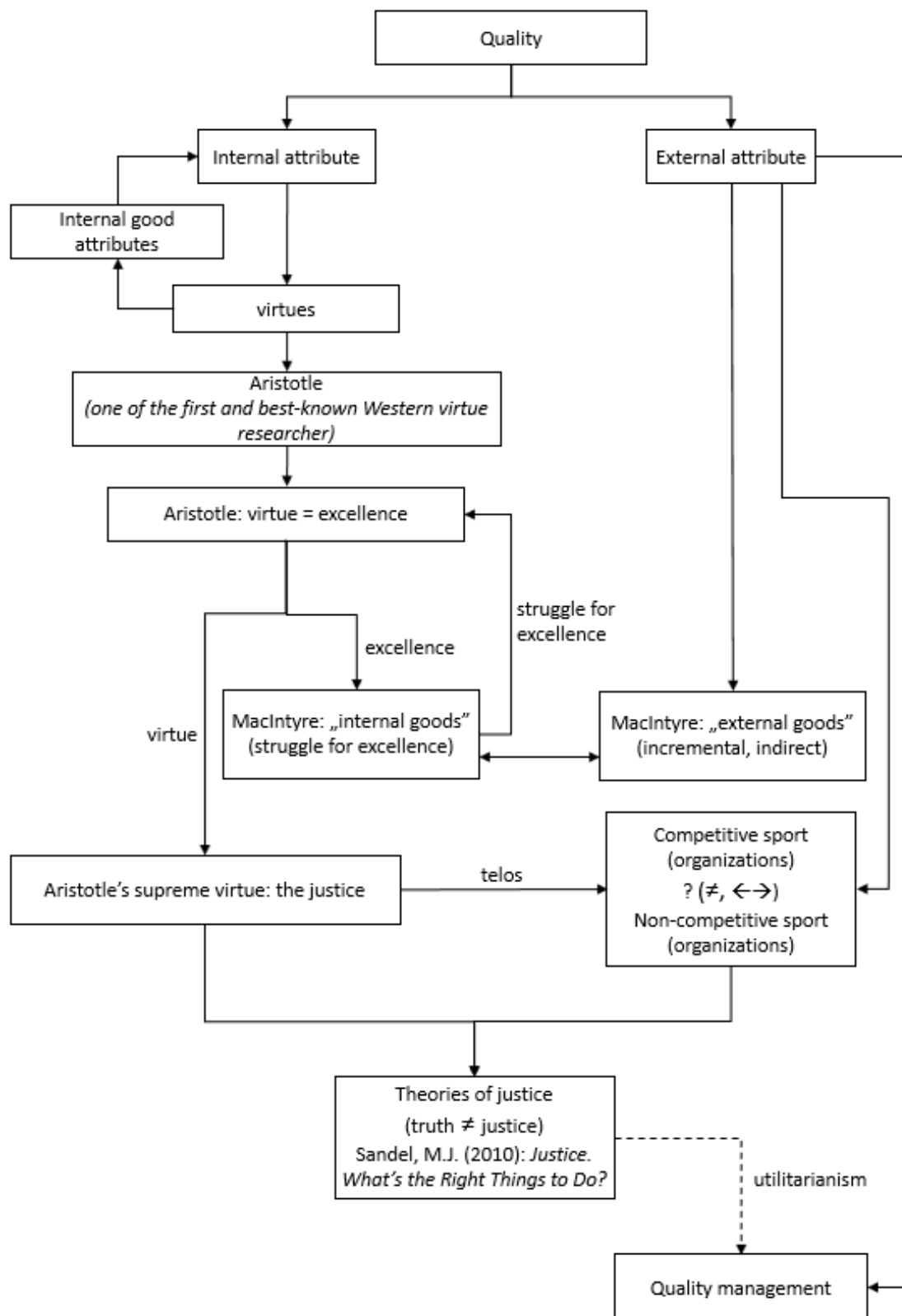


Figure 1: Flowchart of my doctoral dissertation research

## **The goal of the dissertation**

The aim of the research and the dissertation is to present: sport organizations can be distinguished by telos. It is also important, the virtue-based thinking is possible not only in theory but also in practice. Moreover, it is not only possible, but priority, as is the issue of justice. I certify justice through various theories of justice and these come to the front depending on the sport organization's operational nature.

## **Research methods**

The research covers the differentiation of sport organizations according to the nature of their activities, virtue-based qualification and within this, the justice. The dissertation examines five hypotheses of three research questions. All research questions and hypotheses are examined with the appropriate research methods. During the research, in addition to document and literature processing, I also conducted primary research. During the data collection I used partial data collection, full data collection was not expected due to the COVID19 pandemic. I selected two primary research methods, one was the interview, used in the qualitative field research, where I identified the main guidelines, retaining the semi-structured nature as an option, with clarification questions to the interviewees, if necessary. The other practical research method was the questionnaire surveys with tabular (matrix) questions, online self-administered questionnaire, closed (to be decided) and open (to be explained) questions. Questions and statements, within I selected the Likert scale to facilitate choices and to quantify and compare the obtained results (Babbie 2003). The research involved sport organization leaders and athletes as well. The first research question is based on the telos of sport organizations and on this basis, the distinction between the operational nature of (competitive and non-competitive) sport organizations. I also use the literature as a basis for examining this issue (part of this also based on my previous publications). Nor is it an easy question within a sport organization to decide what counts as competitive and what counts as non-competitive (recreational) sport. Do sport organizations operating in a "similar market" think the same about the operational nature of a sport organization? I asked a classically competitive sport organization (Vasas SC) and also in its market a classic non-competitive sport organization (EMMI SE), whether my conjecture about

their competitive and non-competitive nature is confirmed. In addition, I also examined two historical Budapest university sport organizations with similar roots (MAFC and BEAC), where they would classify themselves and why.

The second research question is dealing with the virtue-based qualification approach. The aim of my theoretical research is to be able to apply qualifications based on virtues also in practice. To do this, first of all we must find such aspects, which in addition to theory, also have a place in the practice. In other words, is justice really an important social and sporting issue? I asked both sport organization leaders and athletes what do they consider to be the most important (depending on their operational nature) for a competitive and a non-competitive sport organization. What could be the greatest values and virtues at a competitive or a non-competitive sport organization? Do respondents identify the value with virtue? If yes, does justice appear as the most important (as the Aristotle's supreme) virtue? If so, will it appear in the same form at the competitive and non-competitive sport organizations?

The third research question deals with the sport organizational justice. Here, the starting point is the same: I accept the justification for the first research question, that it is important to differentiate on the basis of the sport organization telos. With that in mind, there may also be justice at sport organizations. Its applicability and prioritization depend on which theory of justice we choose and justify. In addition to the research of the sport organization libertarianism and utilitarianism, I certify through interviews and questionnaires that the emergence of the idea of meritocracy, and thus (through the transitive relation) the Aristotelian excellence-based distinction, is more relevant at competitive sport organizations, than non-competitive sport organizations. The latter put rather into practice the theories of egalitarianism, fairness, and handicap.

Research questions and hypotheses of the dissertation:

Research question 1: *How to differentiate sport organizations based on their operational nature considering issues from the theoretical telos to today's sport organization practice?*

*Hypothesis<sub>1</sub>*: In the sport organization practice, a distinction can also be made between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations on the basis of their operational nature.

I can accept the *first hypothesis* of the dissertation if respondents in the research are able to make definite differences between competitive and non-competitive sports – accordingly, also between the telos of competitive and non-competitive sport organizations.

Research question 2: *Does virtue-based qualification have a right to exist in the sport organization practice?*

*Hypothesis<sub>2</sub>*: Virtues, which are based on the internal good attributes of quality, are important for sport organization leaders and athletes as well, and its greatest values and virtues include Aristotle's supreme virtue: the justice. Even if its judgment and appearance depend on the operational nature of the sport organization.

I can accept the *second hypothesis* if virtues, which are based on the internal good attributes, appear in the answers. In addition, if justice appears verbatim or by firm reference to as one of the greatest values and virtues of sport organizations. It is important for the acceptance that under virtues, which are based on internal attributes, the internal good, virtuous attributes are meant (MacIntyre's internal goods relevance which struggle for excellence I also mean internal good attributes as opposed to the incremental and indirect external goods).

Research question 3: *Can the appearance of justice be demonstrated in practice at sport organizations and is there the right that different theories of justice exist here?*

*Hypothesis<sub>3</sub>*: Justice is important in the life of sport organizations.

I consider the *third hypothesis* of the research to be acceptable if respondents say that justice (although to varying degrees) plays an important role in the life of the sport organization leaders and athletes.

*Hypothesis<sub>4</sub>*: There is a relevant difference between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations, the former focuses on the meritocracy (and through the

transitive relation on the Aristotelian excellence-based distinction as well) while the latter focuses on the egalitarianism.

I can accept the *fourth hypothesis* if the respondents say there is a significant difference between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations. The difference is given by the former focusing on meritocracy (and thus on the Aristotelian excellence-based approach) while the latter focusing on the egalitarianism's theory of justice (for both sport leaders and athletes).

*Hypothesis5*: The libertarianism's and the utilitarianism's theories of justice must also be interpreted in accordance with the telos of the sport organization.

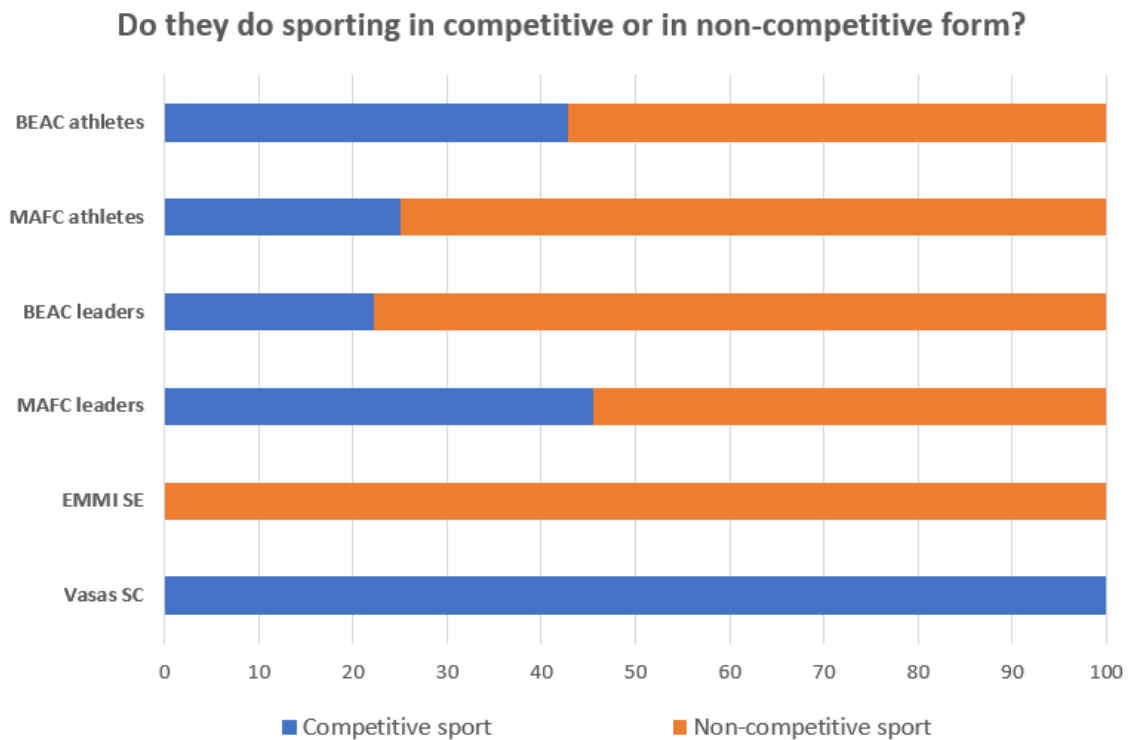
The last, *fifth hypothesis* of my doctoral dissertation can be accepted if libertarianism and utilitarianism, as theories of justice appear in sport organization life – however, their appearance and evaluation may differ due to the competitive and non-competitive sport organizational telos.

## **Results**

In the *first research question*, it is difficult to make a difference between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations in several cases. Nevertheless, there are also sport organizations that can be clearly selected based on the telos. In addition to the theories in the literature, the distinction is also difficult from the practical point of view. It is by no means obvious, what counts as competitive and what counts as non-competitive sport. The theory can be based on declared key elements of the literature, however, practical classification may be individual-dependent and may include subjectivity. Is it possible to draw a sharp line between the two examined types of the operational nature? Is it possible to clearly define a club as a competitive sport organization or as a non-competitive sport organization?

The distinction was based on the nature of the operation. On the basis of the telos (of Aristotle), i.e. the essential nature and purpose (Aristotle 1997), it is possible to distinguish competitive and non-competitive sport organizations – even if there is no exclusivity and there are overlaps between the two types of operation. It also shows, it is not always clear to a responsible respondent (sport leader or athlete) to define the

operational nature of a sport organization. Thus, in accordance with the obtained results during the study, I can only partially accept the *first hypothesis*.



*Figure 2: Distinction between competitive and non-competitive character, in percentage for sport organizations and athletes*

*(in case of Vasas SC and EMMI SE, the same was indicated by the leaders and the athletes, therefore the sport leaders and athletes of Vasas SC and EMMI SE are not mentioned separately in the figure)*

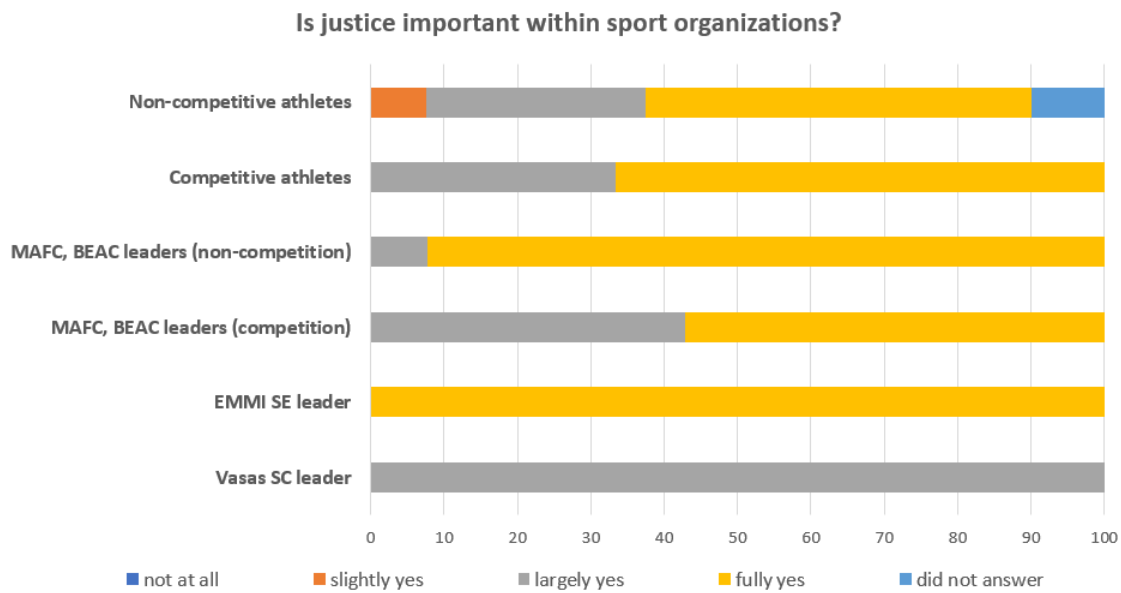
The *second research question* examined the existence of a virtue-based qualification. The virtue-based approach is truly novel; however, it may play a role in interpreting quality. Not only because, according to the accepted definition, it can also apply to attributes (Dankó 2001), but also because quality is the differentiation of one thing from another (Anttila and Jussila 2020). Why should not this (qualitative) differentiating factor be the virtue-based approach? The virtue-based approach is not a usual qualifying category; however, it still has a practical appearance, in fact: based on



the research it also has relevance. Both sport leaders and athletes see virtues important and valuable, thus also the virtue-based approach, which can provide a new perspective in the field of qualification – keeping in mind the internal good attributes and virtues. It is also true that it is difficult to distinguish between value and virtue in today's practice. Nevertheless, during research, the virtue-based thinking has emerged as the most important element from both the leaders and athletes, and thereby it can be accepted as a starting point for the qualification. The answers to be explained also confirm this: among the sport leaders and athletes, justice was mentioned literally or with a definite reference as the core values and virtues of a sport organization.

The *second hypothesis* is acceptable and valid, because different answers confirmed: virtues based on the internal good attributes are among the greatest values of the sport organization for both sport leaders and athletes in practice as well – with the struggle for excellence for the internal (good) attributes (MacIntyre 2007). Within virtues also justice plays a key role, even if its judgment and appearance depend on the operational nature of the sport organization. As a result, different principles and different theories of justice can be accepted according to their sport organization telos.

Justice examined in the *third research question* also plays an important role for both sport leaders and athletes. The approach to justice can differ, mainly through interpretation and the telos-compatible theory and theories of justice, that we want to follow. On this issue, I accept again: different sport organizations exist with different telos. Although the operational nature of the sport organizations can be assessed in different ways, however, there was a consensus on the importance of sport organizational justice. Their appearance may differ: they depend and are accepted on which theory of justice we follow.

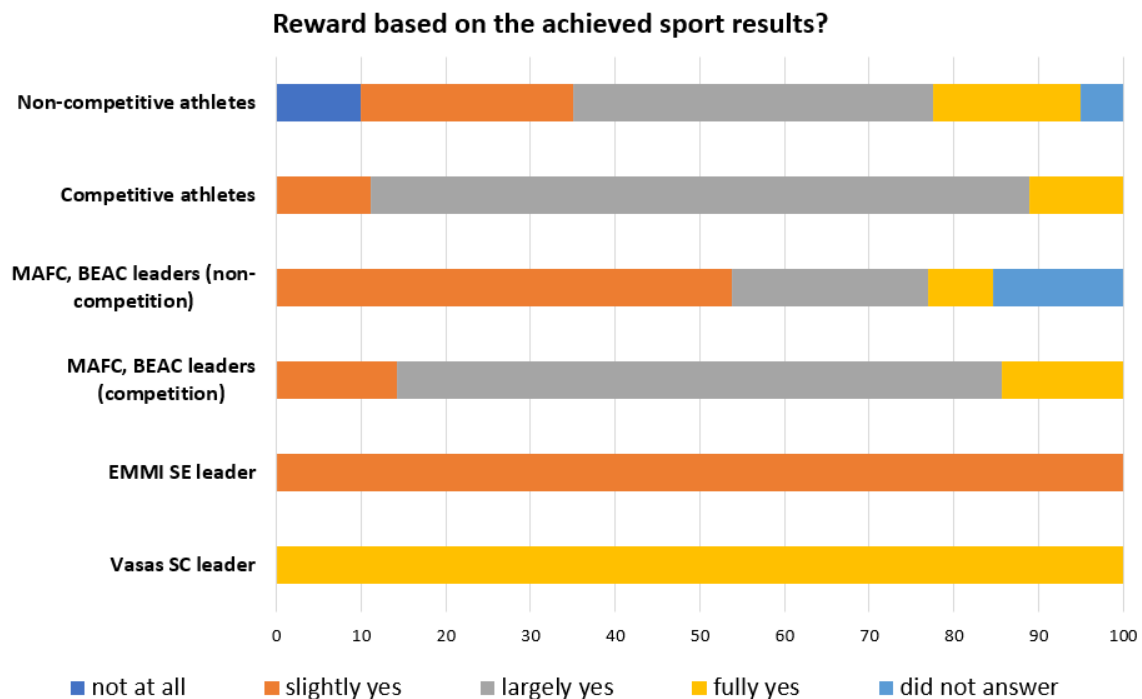


*Figure 3:* The importance of justice within sport organizations, broken down into sport organizations

It is clear from the answers that the issue of justice is important and has a priority role in the examined sport organizations, in most places the *fully yes* answer dominates. Therefore, the further examination of the issue of justice is reasonable. This finding is also supported by the fact that none of the 77 respondents indicated that justice within a sport organization is *not at all* important. I interpret justice on the basis of various theories of justice. I have examined the following theories of justice, which are based on the differences between the sport organizations' operational nature (competitive or non-competitive sport organizations): meritocracy, Aristotelian excellence-based distinction, egalitarianism, fairness, handicap, utilitarianism and libertarianism. In the course of the examination we can see that the *third hypothesis* is definitely acceptable. The issue of justice is not only socially important, but the majority of the respondents also say that justice is important in the life of the sport organizations as well. Moreover, the dominance of the *largely yes* and the *fully yes* answers were observed from both the competitive and the non-competitive sport organizations' leaders and athletes.

The nature of sport is characterized by rivalry, which, in addition to competitive sports, also appears in non-competitive sports. Accordingly, this is how I had to examine

my *fourth hypothesis*: the relationship between the rewards and the achieved sport results. Despite the common “competing” and rivalry feature, I can also accept the *fourth hypothesis* of my dissertation, as I have found that there is a relevant difference between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations in terms of accepting theories of justice. It has turned out from the answers of the respondents: a significant difference between the examined operational nature of sport organizations is, that in the case of the competitive sports the meritocratic (and through the transitive relation the Aristotelian excellence-based distinction) justice theory (which based on the achieved sport results) is primarily expected by sport leaders and athletes. In accordance with the telos of the competitive sport organization, it is also stated in the literature (Nádori et al. 2011). In the case of the non-competitive sports, the focus is on the egalitarianism theory of justice, which based on equality for both sport leaders and athletes. In non-competitive sports, the practical implementation of the fairness and handicap theories of justice are easier to accept and support – as a more characteristic feature of a non-competitive sport organization.



*Figure 4: Opinion of sport organization leaders and athletes about the relationship between reward and the achieved sport results*

The *fifth hypothesis* of my doctoral dissertation examined the utilitarianism and the libertarianism theories of justice, which can also be observed in the life of sport organizations and can be a basis for serving justice (Zimányi and Géczi 2018/a). At the validity of these theories' attention should be given to meet the sport organizational telos, which is a basic requirement (Zimányi and Vermes 2016). This means that utilitarianism prevails differently at a competitive and a non-competitive sport organization: the principle of the greatest happiness by Bentham (1996), the higher pleasures of Mill (1979); as well as the libertarian free will, the unlimited market, and the other components of the theory. The *fifth hypothesis* of my dissertation is also acceptable: the utilitarian and libertarian theories of justice (like other areas of life) also appear in the life of the sport organizations, however, the meaning of utilitarianism and libertarianism depend on their operational nature. The aspiration of maximizing utility and happiness in competitive and non-competitive sports is different. In the former, the achieved results on the sports field can cause happiness, while in non-competitive sports, the community building, the recreation, and the maintaining health can mean it all. The same is true when evaluating Mill's higher pleasures: in competitive sports, the best possible achieved results and placements on the sports field can mean the "higher pleasures". While in non-competitive sports "higher pleasures" can mean the (objective and subjective) levels of relaxation, recreation, health and the community building, the atmosphere. All this is confirmed by the received answers from the research. Similarly, libertarianism in competitive and non-competitive sports means something different. The issue of the free will is more limited in competitive sports – since it can also be a livelihood for an athlete, if we consider her/his sporting activity not only as a motivational issue, but also as a gainful profession (Földesiné 2002).

## **Conclusions**

It can be stated in the *first research question*: in accordance with the principle of the telos, a distinction can be made between competitive and non-competitive sport organizations. However, the difference does not always appear – or, based on subjective judgment, there may be differences between and within sports departments. Accordingly, the determination of exclusivity of the operational nature at sport organizations is not

always justified. The definition also depends on the mission and vision of the sport organization, the purpose, the way of preparation and individual or team motivation. From the received answers, it turned out that the spirit of “competing and rivalry” appears primarily in the competitive sports, however, nor is it exclusive in non-competitive sports, because the nature of sport is also characterized by “competition”.

Conclusion of the *second research question* is that you can find the idea of virtue-based quality in the thinking of sport leaders and athletes. That is, virtue-based qualification also has a place in sport organization practice – even if the respondents do not always mean the same under the values and virtues of a sport organization as it is described in the literature review. Instead of virtues based on internal (good) attributes, sport leaders and athletes have repeatedly focused on “external goods”, practical values, problems, and also practical (means: manifested only in the achieved results) excellence. At competitive sport organizations, the importance of the achieved results also appears as the most important value, while in non-competitive sport organizations, among other things, maintaining health, recreation, community building, and creating a good mood is important. The responses revealed that the virtue-based approach to the internal attributes of quality is important for sport leaders and athletes as well – within this, justice may be one of the greatest values and virtues of a sport organization. However, the justice as the supreme virtue of Aristotle does not appear in practice in the same way in all cases.

The *third research question* was dealing with the sport organizational justice. Justice is an important issue for society, not only at the time of Aristotle, but also today, and thus, as a social subsystem, it is also important in the world of sports. The *third hypothesis* revealed that justice is also important both for sport leaders and athletes, however, the picture of the justice is not always the same. Individuals mean different things on justice which depends to a large extent on the mission of a sport organization – namely from the telos of the operational nature.

On what basis is the existence, operation or decision of a sport organization just? According to the literature review, the *raison d'être* of (moral) justice depends on which theory of justice we follow. However, one basic condition must be met: telos must comply, only those theories of justice can be applied that do not run counter to the purpose of competitive or non-competitive sports (and related declared and realized values). On

what basis is something just, what and why do we deserve it? To justify the latter, I called various theories of justice for help (Sandel 2012). We can conclude: the selected and examined theories of justice cope with practice as well, however, their appearance is telos-dependent. The principle of egalitarianism is reflected differently in competitive and non-competitive sports, it can not be used in determining the final result, because in this way “competing” would lose its essence (Zimányi and Géczi 2019/b). Whichever theories of justice we are talking about (in utilitarianism the principle of the greatest happiness by Bentham and the higher pleasures of Mill, libertarianism, Aristotelian excellence-based distinction, meritocracy, egalitarianism, and the issues of equity and handicap), in addition to social processes, these theories of justice play an equally important role at today's sport organizations as well. The dissertation presented the possible sport organizational justice in practice with the help of the listed theories of justice.

Examining the *fourth hypothesis*, it was proved that the role of meritocracy is more relevant at the competitive sport organizations, as opposed to the non-competitive sport organizational thinking. Accordingly, for similar definitions and assumptions (as well as the transitive relation), the Aristotelian excellence-based distinction is also a more typical characteristic of the competitive sport organization, against to the non-competitive sport organizations and operational nature. In the latter, the idea of egalitarianism dominates more (similarly to fairness and handicap).

Examining further theories of justice, during the examination of the *fifth hypothesis* it was proved: the ideas of utilitarianism and libertarianism can also appear in the life of sport organizations. The manifestations of these theories also depend on the operational nature – that is, they appear differently according to the telos of the competitive or non-competitive sports (for example, maximizing utility and happiness at a competitive sport organization refers more to the achieved results, while at non-competitive sport organizations maximizing utility and happiness is more focused on maintaining health, recreation, and good community atmosphere).

## List of own publications

*List of own publications related to the topic of the dissertation:*

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