

**THESES OF THE DOCTORAL (PhD)
DISSERTATION**

EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SPORTS
CONSUMPTION OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN
SLOVAKIA

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1. THE BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH

Research focusing on disadvantaged individuals does not form as comprehensive a body of work as studies examining populations with a favourable socio-economic background. Nevertheless, disadvantage remains a highly complex and pressing social issue in former socialist countries, including Slovakia, where it has been a growing challenge since the political transition, and one that still demands solutions. Disadvantaged children often grow up in families characterised by inadequate housing conditions, low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment rates, or marginal labour market status. These circumstances have a profoundly negative impact on the development, academic performance, health status, life satisfaction, goals, and future opportunities of children growing up in such environments (VARGA, 2014; RUCSKA & KISS-TÓTH, 2019; PERGE, 2021; BARABÁS & JÁVOR, 2021; PERGE & RUCSKA, 2024).

In recent years, research on disadvantaged children has become particularly relevant, as contemporary processes such as digitalisation, automation, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified and deepened existing social inequalities. For disadvantaged children and adults alike, participation in sports plays an important role not only in disease prevention but also in fostering socialisation, supporting social inclusion, and developing personal competencies that can prove beneficial in kindergarten, school, and later in the labour market. Increasing levels of physical activity through sport can lead to higher levels of well-being and life satisfaction, thereby partially compensating for the lower quality-of-life outcomes often associated with an unfavourable socio-economic status.

Disadvantaged settlements and families—both children and parents—are a priority area in various development strategies and policies of the European Union. Programmes and initiatives designed to mitigate disadvantage aim to enhance equal opportunities and reduce social and economic inequalities. Sport represents a powerful means of promoting the social integration of this target group and addressing health disadvantages.

The focus of my research is a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing the leisure and sports consumption of disadvantaged children in Slovakia. The study examines the leisure activities of disadvantaged schoolchildren aged 8–18, with particular emphasis on the frequency of participation in recreational sports, the popularity of different sports, motivation for sports participation, and the factors influencing engagement in sports (including elements

of primary and secondary socialisation). It also explores facilitators and barriers to sports participation.

A key research aim is to compare the leisure and sports consumption patterns of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils, in order to obtain an accurate picture of similarities and differences between the two groups. Such insights may contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors shaping the sports consumption habits of disadvantaged children. While children are the direct consumers of sports, parents are typically the purchasers. For this reason, the second target group of my study consists of disadvantaged parents. Here, the research seeks to map parents' socio-economic status, spending habits, and willingness to invest in health and sport, as well as their role in supporting their children's sports participation.

My objective is to analyse the social and economic factors that may influence sports consumption, examining how the socio-economic circumstances of families affect children's sports habits. To this end, the study investigates both disadvantaged children and their parents, particularly in relation to their willingness to spend on health and sports. Previous research highlights that families with unfavourable socio-economic backgrounds—and their children—face disadvantages in access to sport, healthy nutrition, healthcare services, and community programmes, all of which would otherwise support their health, quality of life, and development (O'BRIEN ET AL., 2024; KENNEWELL ET AL., 2022; SCHNEIDER ET AL., 2019; KOLARČIK ET AL., 2010).

The ultimate goal of this research is to lay the groundwork for a strategy to promote sports participation among disadvantaged children in Slovakia, based on both primary and secondary research findings, thereby supporting the work of national decision-makers. This topic is not only timely and relevant in contemporary Slovakia but is also essential for guiding future generations towards a healthier, more integrated, and more equitable society.

Key Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

C1: How do the leisure and sports consumption patterns of Slovak pupils differ between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups?

C2: Which factors influence sports selection among disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils?

C3: How does sports motivation compare between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils, and what similarities and differences can be identified?

C4: What are the sports participation habits of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents?

C5: How do the spending profiles of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents differ?

C6: Do the value systems of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents differ with regard to decisions on their children's choice of sport?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a difference in the leisure and sports activities of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils, with the latter expected to be more active in sports.

H2: The factors influencing sports selection differ between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils.

H3: The sports motivation of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak pupils differs.

H4: The frequency of sports participation among disadvantaged parents is lower than among non-disadvantaged parents, and their choice of sports is more strongly influenced by cost-effectiveness.

H5: The spending profiles of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents differ in both personal and child-related contexts.

H6: Disadvantaged parents prioritise accessibility and low cost when choosing sports for their children, whereas non-disadvantaged parents tend to base their decisions on the developmental and health-promoting aspects of the sport.

2. DATABASE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS USED

This research applies both primary and secondary research methods. A review of the relevant domestic and international literature was undertaken, focusing on the conceptualisation of disadvantage, as well as sport, leisure, and health—individually and in their interrelated contexts. This literature provided the theoretical foundation for the study. In addition, the following databases and search engines were used: KSH, Slovak Statistics, Eurostat, EU-SLIC, MATARKA, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. The classification of disadvantaged status follows the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (Directive No. 2013-12192/36264:2-914) and the provisions of Act No. 245/2008, § 2 p.–t.

Two questionnaires were employed in the primary research. The first, administered to children, investigated leisure and sports consumption habits, sports motivation, reasons for non-participation in sport, and health status. The second, administered to parents, examined their own sports habits, their support for their children's sports participation, their spending profiles, and their health status. A validated measurement instrument was incorporated into both questionnaires: the Hungarian adaptation of the short version of the WHO Well-Being Index (WBI-5) by SUSÁNSZKY ET AL. (2006), which was used to assess the quality of life of both disadvantaged children and their parents, as well as the impact of sport on quality of life.

From the supply-side perspective, a SWOT analysis was conducted to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the sports participation of disadvantaged children. This serves as a useful starting point for strategy development, as SWOT is an effective planning tool that supports the alignment of strategic goals with identified opportunities through prioritisation.

The structural diagram of the research outlines the process of the primary research, highlighting both its quantitative and qualitative aspects (Figure 1).

Literature Review		
Quantitative research Survey-method		Qualitative research Document analysis
Disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Children (n=519)	Disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Parents (n=567)	Sports strategy based on SWOT analysis
Leisure- and sports consumption	Socioeconomic aspects Spending profiles	SWOT analysis Basis of the strategy
Sports motivation, and their barriers	Values Sports selection of the children	Vision and objectives of the strategy
Wellbeing (WBI5)	Wellbeing (WBI5)	Means of implementation

Figure 1: **The concept and the methodological structure of the research**

Source: Own edition, 2025

It is also an important consideration that the central focus of my dissertation was on minors; therefore, the administration of the questionnaires was carried out with the consent of institutional leaders, teachers, and parents, and I also obtained research ethics approval issued by the University of Debrecen (GTK-KB 005/2024).

In order to identify potential errors, assess the clarity and interpretability of the questions, determine the need for modifications, and gather feedback on the questionnaire completion process, I conducted a preliminary pilot study with a smaller sample size prior to the main phase of data collection. Based on the issues identified in this pilot stage, I revised my questionnaires several times. In addition, to facilitate completion for teachers assisting in the process, I attached a detailed completion guide addressing each question block.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26, from which I produced descriptive statistics and conducted correlation analyses. For clustering disadvantaged children and parents, I adopted the methodological approach to cluster analysis applied by LAOUES (2023) in a study involving children with disabilities, given the alignment between the aims and conditions of that research and my own. Using the dataset, the optimal number of clusters was first determined through hierarchical cluster analysis, and the resulting cluster structure was then used as the basis for a k-means clustering procedure to define the distinct disadvantaged child/parent cluster groups.

2.1. The elements of the questionnaire for children

For the purposes of my specific research objectives, I developed measurement instruments in the form of questionnaires, which in my primary research examined the sports consumption needs and the main demand–supply characteristics among disadvantaged Slovak children aged 8–18 enrolled in public education.

Based on the above, the primary research methods and domains included:

1. Demand side (sports consumption behaviour):

Questionnaire survey for disadvantaged Slovak children (8–18 years old) in public education

- Socio-economic background
- Sports consumption habits
- Attitudes towards sport and sports motivation factors
- Perceived barriers to sports participation
- Attitudes towards leisure activities

Questionnaire survey for guardians of disadvantaged Slovak children in public education

- Socio-economic background
- Sports consumption habits
- Attitudes towards sport and sports motivation factors
- Perceived barriers to sports participation
- Attitudes towards leisure activities
- Sports-related spending profiles

2. Supply side (infrastructure and sports offerings).

The list of barriers to sports participation was adapted from the findings of previous studies (SANZ-REMACHA ET AL., 2019; GOMBÁS, 2017; LAOUES ET AL., 2021; LUKÁCS – LENTÉNÉ, 2022; COLLINS ET AL., 2014; KATO-NA, 2019; SOMERSET – HOARE, 2018; TINTORI ET AL., 2021). and included the following dimensions:

- Logistical barriers (e.g., “*I cannot get there.*”)
- Informational barriers (e.g., “*I am not aware of the options.*”)
- Financial barriers (e.g., “*It is for financial reasons.*”)
- Personal/internal barriers (e.g., “*I am not interested.*”)
- Social barriers (e.g., “*My parents do not support me.*”)

The examination of attitudes towards sport, physical activity, and a healthy lifestyle was also based on previous research, focusing on the following key aspects:

- Health and well-being (e.g., “*Maintaining health*”)
- Personal development and achievement (e.g., “*Acquiring new skills*”)
- Social relationships and interactions (e.g., “*Meeting new people*”)
- Recreation and enjoyment (e.g., “*Leisure activities, hobbies*”)

Both the parent and child questionnaires incorporated the Hungarian adaptation of the short version of the WHO Well-Being Index (WBI-5) validated for Hungarian conditions by SUSÁNSZKY ET AL. (2006). Its applicability among children was confirmed by SZABÓ (2016). This measurement tool assesses the general well-being of respondents over the past two weeks using five items, each rated on a scale from 0 to 3 (0 = not at all true; 1 = rarely true; 2 = often true; 3 = completely true).

2.1.1. Description of the Sample of the Children

The sample consisted of responses from 519 children, of whom 51.2% formed the subsample of disadvantaged children (DC; n=266), while 48.8% constituted the non-disadvantaged control group (NDC; n=253). The classification of respondents into disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups was based on the criteria currently in force in Slovakia.

The concept of disadvantage is defined in § 2, paragraph p of Act No. 245/2008 (ŠKOLSKÝ ZÁKON – SCHOOL ACT). However, in the academic literature, the term lacks a uniform operational definition, and in previous research it has been used to denote various socio-economic disadvantages, including poverty, structural exclusion, and low social mobility (KOVALČÍKOVÁ – DŽUKA, 2014; BAKOŠOVÁ, 2016; LINTNER, 2021).

The Slovak Ministry of Education (2013) refined the definition of disadvantage, interpreting it as a multidimensional construct determined by a combination of indicators. A child is classified as disadvantaged if at least two of the following factors are present:

- Inadequate family financial background
- Parental unemployment (at least one parent)
- Parents' low educational attainment (at least one parent lacking primary education)
- Inadequate housing conditions
- The child's mother tongue differing from the language of instruction at school

Table 2: The sociodemographic characteristics of the children (n=519)

Demographics	Category	Distribution
Gender	Male	33,5%
	Female	66,5%
Age	Early Childhood (8-9 years)	2,1%
	Prepubescence (10-12 years)	22,7%
	Early Adolescence (13-15 years)	39,2%
	Late Adolescence (16-18 years)	36,1%
Place of residence	Urban	22,2%
	Rural	77,8%
Father's educational attainment	Incomplete primary education	4,7%
	Complete primary education	11,3%
	Secondary education	66,7%
	Tertiary education	17,3%
Mother's educational attainment	Incomplete primary education	3,1%
	Complete primary education	11,9%
	Secondary education	61,0%
	Tertiary education	23,9%
Parents' employment status	Both employed	54,1%
	Only father employed	24,7%
	Only mother employed	8,8%
	Neither employed	8,1%
	Other (Maternity leave, Care allowance etc.)	4,3%
Housing conditions	Inadequate	5,9%
	Adequate	94,1%
Speaks the language of education	No	1,9%
	Yes	98,1%
Household size	2 members	2,7%
	3 members	18,6%
	4 members	38,3%
	5 or more members	40,4%
Monthly Net Income per capita	Below 300 Euro	56,7%
	Between 300 – 599 Euro	29,4%
	Between 600 – 899 Euro	11,9%
	Above 900 Euro	2,1%
Social background	Disadvantaged child	51,2%
	Non-disadvantaged child	48,8%

Source: Own edition, 2025

In this dissertation, the classification of children followed the criteria set by the Slovak Ministry of Education, meaning that a child was considered disadvantaged if at least two of the above indicators were simultaneously present (*Table 2*).

Based on the regional distribution of respondents in Slovakia, it can be established that 53.7% of the participants reside in the Trnavský kraj, while 46.3% live in the Nitriansky kraj. At the district level, within the Trnavský kraj, the highest proportions of responses were received from the Dunajská Streda District (22.1%), the Galanta District (18.9%), and the Trnava District (12.7%). In the Nitriansky kraj, the Komárno District (13.5%), the Šaľa District (15.3%), and the Nitra District (17.5%) were the most represented in the sample.

2.2. Description of the Sample of the Parents

For the parental sample, respondents were categorized according to the classification applied in the children's database.

Table 3: The sociodemographic characteristics of the parents (n=567)

Demographics	Category	Distribution
Gender	Male	29,6%
	Female	70,4%
Age	18-20 years	0,4%
	21-30 years	17,0%
	31-40 years	30,2%
	41-50 years	42,3%
	above 50 years	10,1%
Place of residence	Urban	25,6%
	Rural	74,4%
Father's educational attainment	Incomplete primary education	3,9%
	Complete primary education	10,8%
	Secondary education	61,4%
	Tertiary education	24,0%
Mother's educational attainment	Incomplete primary education	4,3%
	Complete primary education	9,7%
	Secondary education	58,7%
	Tertiary education	27,3%
Employment status	Both employed	60,1%
	Only father employed	23,2%
	Only mother employed	6,5%
	Neither employed	5,0%
	Other (Maternity leave, Care allowance etc.)	5,2%
Housing conditions	Inadequate	6,3%
	Adequate	93,7%
Speaks the language of education	No	2,4%
	Yes	97,6%
Household size	2 members	1,8%
	3 members	15,3%
	4 members	41,2%

	5 or more members	41,7%
Monthly Net Income per capita	Below 300 Euro	47,1%
	Between 300 – 599 Euro	32,0%
	Between 600 – 899 Euro	18,5%
	Above 900 Euro	2,4%
Social background	Disadvantaged parent	46,2%
	Non-disadvantaged parent	53,8%

Source: Own editing, 2025

3. THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE DISSERTATION

This chapter presents the results associated with my research objectives, questions, and hypotheses, and compares them with findings from other studies. I reflect on the most significant results that may influence the sports participation of disadvantaged children or contribute to their disengagement from sports.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovakian students in their leisure activities and sports participation, with non-disadvantaged students presumed to be more active in sports.

Marked differences were observed in the leisure activities of students in Slovak public education. Generally, leisure trends indicate that sedentary activities (such as watching TV, listening to music, going to the cinema or theater, etc.) dominate in both groups studied, more so than sports activities that promote physical activity. This finding aligns with previous research (BIDDLE & ASARE, 2011; MOSONYI ET AL., 2013; LAOUES, 2023; KOVÁCS & VELENCZEI, 2007; KINCZEL & MÜLLER, 2020; EUROBAROMETER, 2022; VANCAMPFORT ET AL., 2021). Additionally, the proportion of sedentary leisure activities is higher among disadvantaged children (MUR DE FRENNE ET AL., 1997; DREGVAL & PETRAUSKIENĖ, 2009).

In the aggregated sample of children, my results show that listening to music (94.30%) is an almost universal leisure activity. Much lower percentages were reported for watching TV (51.00%), visiting the cinema (44.30%), or reading (44.30%). Among passive leisure activities, a significant difference was found in cinema attendance (Sig. = 0.018): 39.1% of disadvantaged children preferred this activity, compared to 51.2% of non-disadvantaged children. It can be concluded that among passive leisure activities, those involving higher costs show a measurable difference, consistent with other international studies (YANG-HUANG ET AL., 2017; MOLLBORN ET AL., 2022).

Outside of school physical education classes, 62.8% of children participate in sports—61.3% of disadvantaged children and 64.4% of non-disadvantaged children. Although this difference was not statistically significant, the frequency of sports participation indicates that non-disadvantaged children engage in weekly sports activities more frequently than disadvantaged children. Across the entire sample, nearly half of the children (48.40%) engage in sports 2-3 times per week (2 times per week: 30.50%; 3 times per week: 17.90%). There is a significant difference between the two groups regarding frequency of sports participation

(Sig. = 0.000). More than half (54.4%) of disadvantaged children reported one of the three least frequent categories of sports participation in their free time (biweekly: 8.30%; once per week: 11.50%; twice per week: 34.6%), while 72.4% of their non-disadvantaged peers reported participating in sports 2-4 times per week. Furthermore, a substantially higher proportion of non-disadvantaged children (15.10%) reported engaging in sports more than five times per week, compared to only 6.4% of disadvantaged children who reported the same frequency.

The results confirmed the higher sports activity of non-disadvantaged children, and the limitations related to sport avoidance may also explain the lower participation of disadvantaged children. When examining the barriers to sports participation, the most inhibiting factors—such as financial constraints, lack of parental support, and the children's inability to access sports facilities—significantly restricted sports involvement among disadvantaged children to a greater extent.

For those children who reported engaging in sports during their leisure time, the organizational frameworks of their sports participation were also analyzed. The children predominantly practiced sports within sports clubs, leisure centers, or outside of formal school settings, with no significant differences observed between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups.

Furthermore, an investigation into the children's preferred sports and dominant choices revealed that 62.2% of the total sample engaged in team sports (e.g., football, basketball, volleyball), 41.4% participated in various outdoor activities (e.g., skiing, hiking), followed by 40.5% in other categories. The popularity of ball games and outdoor activities in recreational contexts has been corroborated by other studies (Laoues, 2023; Mosonyi et al., 2013; Kinczel, 2021), which demonstrated similar findings in Slovak samples, confirming the prominence of ball sports (BAKALAR ET AL., 2024; NEMEC ET AL., 2022) and outdoor sports (BENDÍKOVÁ ET AL., 2016).

Comparing the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups, significant differences emerged across all sport activities. Team sports and athletics showed higher participation rates among disadvantaged children, whereas outdoor sports, swimming, and other sports were significantly more prevalent among non-disadvantaged children.

Regarding children's sports consumption habits, there was a clear preference for recreational sports. On a 1–7 Likert scale assessing motives for participation, competition

scored among the lowest averages, while health promotion ranked highest, reflecting a strong demand and motivation for recreational sports.

Thus, this hypothesis was confirmed: the leisure and sports patterns of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students differ, although both groups are characterized by a predominance of passive activities, their preferred leisure pursuits vary. Non-disadvantaged children exhibited higher levels of weekly sports activity, and their favored sports differed.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Differences exist between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovak students regarding factors influencing their choice of sports.

Various factors influence sport selection. The aggregate sample indicated that 39.9% of students were primarily influenced by their friends, 33.9% by parents, 16.4% by physical education teachers, 11.8% by internal motivation, 9.2% by peer groups, 7.9% by coaches, 2.5% by siblings, and 1.2% by the media, with friends being the most influential (39.9%).

However, these influencing factors affected disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children differently. Within the primary socialization context—the family—parental influence played a significantly greater role in the sport selection of non-disadvantaged children (NDC = 42.7%, Sig. = 0.000), whereas the influence of siblings (Sig. = 0.165) and individual decision-making (Sig. = 0.525) were similar across groups. Multiple studies confirm that children from families with physically active parents are significantly more likely to participate in sports themselves (HERPAINÉ, 2021; PIKÓ, 2002; MIKOLA, 2004; BERKES, 2004).

Regarding the secondary socialization context—peers—responses related to friends and peer groups also showed a significantly stronger influence on the sport choices of non-disadvantaged children compared to their disadvantaged counterparts.

Concerning professional guidance in sports (physical education teachers and coaches), coaching influence significantly affected only the sport choices of non-disadvantaged children (NDC = 13%; Sig. = 0.000). Physical education teachers played an important role in both groups, as school-based PE is accessible to all, resulting in no significant difference in teachers' influence between the two groups. The positive role of PE teachers in encouraging sports participation has been highlighted in other studies as well (MORGAN & HANSEN, 2008; KOVÁCS & MORAVECZ, 2019; BERECZ ET AL., 2015).

Interestingly, contrary to the previous factors, the influence of the media emerges as the only case where the effect is significantly stronger (Sig. = 0.031) among disadvantaged children. These findings suggest that in the value systems of parents of disadvantaged children, sport is less prominent, thereby diminishing their influence on their children's choice of sport. Due to the isolation and exclusion experienced by disadvantaged children, the impact of peer groups is also less pronounced, and since they have limited access to sports club offerings, the influence of coaches is similarly reduced. Supporting their participation in sports clubs may provide a solution. Given the compulsory nature of physical education, the role of physical education teachers in sport selection can be leveraged. Considering the decisive role of the media, campaigns and promotional short films aimed at motivating, raising awareness, and reinforcing sport selection among children are recommended.

My second hypothesis was also confirmed, as the results indicated that the choice of sport among non-disadvantaged children is more strongly influenced by parents, friends, peer groups, and coaches than that of disadvantaged children. Moreover, the media plays a greater role in the sport selection of non-disadvantaged children compared to their disadvantaged counterparts.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The sports motivation of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged Slovakian students differs.

Examining sports motivation is essential for understanding the factors that encourage children with different socioeconomic statuses (SES) to engage in sports and that may support the development of long-term sports participation and the integration of sport as a lifestyle element. These factors provide important insights that can aid in targeting various groups and conveying marketing communication messages effectively.

Results for the entire sample (n = 519) revealed that motives related to improving physical performance were most prominent in students' motivations, namely "Improving my fitness" (mean = 5.43; SD = 1.83) and "Increasing my physical performance capacity" (mean = 5.41; SD = 1.89). Statements related to external appearance (mean = 5.37; SD = 1.94) and self-confidence (mean = 5.37; SD = 2.02) also emerged as leading motivators. Relaxation (mean = 5.27; SD = 1.81) and entertainment (mean = 5.85; SD = 1.94) held moderate motivating power. Interestingly, striving for health as a motivating factor ranked only sixth on the list (mean = 5.15; SD = 1.88). Meanwhile, the social functions of sports activities—

spending time with friends (mean = 4.58; SD = 2.21), making new acquaintances (mean = 3.42; SD = 2.07), and competition (mean = 3.94; SD = 2.36)—were among the least motivating factors.

Both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children similarly identified the following as motivators, with no significant differences found: improving fitness, good appearance, relaxation, health, entertainment, socializing, making new acquaintances, and competing.

However, differences in motivation between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children were also observed, as improving physical performance significantly motivated non-disadvantaged respondents to a greater extent (rank mean: DC = 153.06; NDC = 173.94; Sig. = 0.036). One possible explanation is that disadvantaged individuals engage in substantial physical activity through work, household chores, and commuting (Bácsné et al., 2022). Increasing self-confidence as a motivating factor was also more important for non-disadvantaged children (rank mean: DC = 152.90; NDC = 174.10; Sig. = 0.031). This finding aligns with KOVÁCS and NAGY's (2015) research, which showed that self-confidence and individual achievement are more strongly supported family values among non-disadvantaged children.

Significant differences were also found regarding avoiding overweight as a motivator, which was dominant among non-disadvantaged children (rank mean: DC = 153.15; NDC = 173.85; Sig. = 0.039). This result parallels the reasons underlying the physical performance pattern.

The hypothesis was partially confirmed, demonstrating that children share common motivational factors in sports, but some factors are evaluated differently depending on whether the children are disadvantaged or not. Improving physical performance, enhancing self-confidence, and preventing overweight significantly dominate among non-disadvantaged children compared to their disadvantaged peers.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The frequency of sports participation among disadvantaged parents is lower compared to non-disadvantaged parents, and the types of sports activities they engage in differ, with disadvantaged parents being motivated primarily by cost-effectiveness.

Examining parents' preferences for leisure-time sports reveals that more than half (56.80%) of parents engage in some form of sports activity with varying frequency. Comparing the samples of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents, it was observed that a significantly higher proportion of non-disadvantaged parents participate in sports (Disadvantaged Parents (DP) = 48.9%; Non-Disadvantaged Parents (NDP) = 63.6%; Sig. = 0.000). Differences were also confirmed among preferred leisure sports activities. A significantly larger share of disadvantaged parents selected cost-effective outdoor sports such as running, cycling, and walking, whereas non-disadvantaged parents more frequently preferred gym workouts, aerobics, and other categories (e.g., yoga, Gymstick). These findings align with international research demonstrating that leisure sports activities vary according to socioeconomic background (FORD ET AL., 1991; GILES-CORTI & DONOVAN, 2002; SCHOLES & BANN, 2018; RITTSTEIGER ET AL., 2021).

Since a lower percentage of disadvantaged parents engage in sports, their frequency of participation is lower, and their attitude toward sport is also less favorable, this value system tends to be transmitted to their children, who are consequently expected to have lower levels of sports activity—an observation supported by other studies (MÜLLER ET AL., 2019). Therefore, increasing the sports activity of disadvantaged children necessitates the involvement of their parents, with family sports days offering promising opportunities to achieve this.

This hypothesis was confirmed by the research, which demonstrated the lower sports participation and activity levels among disadvantaged parents with unfavorable SES and revealed that disadvantaged parents with lower discretionary incomes tend to choose more cost-effective sports activities.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): The spending profiles of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents differ both in relation to themselves and their children.

Parents' financial means, attitudes toward sport, and their own sports habits collectively influence the extent and form of their children's sports participation. Disadvantaged parents report significantly higher perceived burden from housing-related expenses compared to non-disadvantaged parents (Sig. = 0.000), corroborating findings from LAOUES (2023).

Expenditures on their children indicate that disadvantaged parents allocate significantly less to sports-related expenses for their children compared to their non-disadvantaged

counterparts (Sig. = 0.000). The most notable difference occurs in the lowest spending category, where 55% of disadvantaged parents spend between 0–15 euros monthly, compared to only 35.1% of non-disadvantaged parents. GYÖNGYÖSI's (2024) study among disadvantaged children also confirmed a pronounced demand for balls, weights, sports equipment, or membership in sports clubs among disadvantaged children—items more readily accessible to families with higher SES.

Significant differences also emerged regarding average monthly expenditures on clothing and food (Clothing Sig. = 0.000; Food Sig. = 0.000), with non-disadvantaged parents spending significantly more on their children's apparel and nutrition; the largest differences appear in the lowest and highest spending categories.

Regarding expenditures on children's medications and vitamin supplements, no significant difference was found in medication spending between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents (Sig. = 0.496), while non-disadvantaged parents spent significantly more on vitamin supplements (Sig. = 0.033).

In terms of their own expenditures, disadvantaged parents spent significantly less than non-disadvantaged parents on their own sports participation, clothing, nutrition, medications, and vitamins. Due to lower spending on both their children's and their own sports activities, disadvantaged families tend to prefer more cost-effective leisure sports (e.g., hiking, running).

This hypothesis was confirmed, as the study demonstrated that housing costs disproportionately burden disadvantaged parents, leading to lower expenditures on sports, clothing, nutrition, and vitamins for both their children and themselves. No difference was found regarding medication spending on children, as disadvantaged parents strive to meet these necessary needs.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Parents of disadvantaged children prioritize accessibility and low cost when choosing sports for their children, whereas non-disadvantaged parents base their decisions on the developmental and health-promoting aspects of sports.

My research also aimed to examine the beliefs underlying how parents seek to influence their children's choice of sport. The results from the entire parental sample confirm that the most prominent factors are taking the child's preferences into account (Mean = 5.95; SD = 1.77), as well as the perceived effects of sport on their health (Mean = 5.44; SD = 1.89) and development (developmental impact: Mean = 5.46; SD = 1.96; educational impact: Mean =

5.27; SD = 1.97). However, statements measuring the impact of available opportunities and accessibility on sport selection also received relatively high ratings, among which the possibility to engage in sport appeared more important (Mean = 4.88; SD = 2.08), while the financial aspects of sport activities also received above-average evaluations (Mean = 4.20; SD = 2.31).

When comparing the values of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents, significant differences emerged regarding the “sports background of siblings and friends,” which influenced the decisions of disadvantaged parents more strongly (siblings engaged in sports: disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 317.71; non-disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 255.05; Sig. = 0.000; friends engaged in sports: disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 300.01; non-disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 270.25; Sig. = 0.024). Economic or financial considerations also significantly influenced disadvantaged parents to a greater extent than non-disadvantaged ones (financially affordable: disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 331.89; non-disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 242.87; Sig. = 0.000). Conversely, non-disadvantaged parents were more motivated by the developmental impact of sport on their children (disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 264.90; non-disadvantaged parents’ rank mean = 300.40; Sig. = 0.006) when making decisions about their children’s sport choices.

The hypothesis was confirmed, as different factors motivate disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged parents in the selection of sport activities for their children. While disadvantaged parents predominantly consider cost-effective solutions, non-disadvantaged parents tend to decide based on the developmental and health-supportive qualities of sport.

Product development recommendations according to cluster groups based on the sample of the Children and the Parents:

Disadvantaged children were grouped into distinct clusters based on their value system, sport motivation, and factors limiting or hindering their involvement in sport. I associated characteristics and value orientations with these clusters and proposed development areas to promote and encourage sport involvement, as well as sport offerings tailored to their needs, summarized and illustrated in *Table 4*.

Table 4: Key characteristics of clusters identified in the Child group and the goals and recommended programs to promote sports participation

Clusters	Characteristics, values	Recommended intervention and development areas	Recommended sports supply elements
„Non-participants”	Less motivated to engage in sports activities No significant barriers to participation Characterized by a low value system	Motivation and interest enhancement through various experience-oriented sports events, demonstrations, and entertaining, visually engaging sport selection offers to foster the desire for physical activity. Awareness-raising through sports promotion campaigns. Development of general fitness, motor skills, and agility. Maintaining interest and motivation and fostering positive attitudes towards sports.	Provision of individual and team sport programs to accommodate diverse personality traits. Sport demonstrations featuring spectacular show elements, flash mobs, and sport-specific challenges. Integrated movement programs.
„Barriered”	Less motivated by the functional aspects of sports; main motivation is social experiences Barriers to participation are dominant Family and social domains are more prominent in their value system than sports, development, or fitness-related values	Emphasize the communal experience of sport programs and events in program design and marketing communication. Shared photos, selfies, promotional mobile walls, and short videos reinforcing the collective nature of sports participation. Family sport days offering enjoyable joint leisure activities for children and parents. Personality development and general conditioning through sports; skill development. Facilitate access to sport programs through information provision and transportation support	Introduction and incorporation of team sports. Team-based and group competitions such as “One Minute to Win It” skill challenges, and contests designed around shared completion of Ninja Warrior-style obstacle courses. Family olympics: joint family competitions and contests.
„Strivers”	Motivated to engage in sports where fitness, performance, and health maintenance are primary drivers	Sustain motivation and reinforce the fitness and health benefits of sport. Develop abilities such as endurance, relative strength, and joint mobility that improve fitness and support health status.	In addition to traditional sports offerings, introduce new types of movement programs and sports. Sport programs linked to fitness assessment methods. Functional fitness programs. New trends and movement forms; introduction to outdoor fitness parks and equipment. Endurance sports such as hiking, Nordic walking, and running.
„Determined”	The most motivated group, least hindered by barriers, motivated by both the functional and social aspects of sport	Provide information about available sport programs, as motivation is already present. Increase fitness and training levels; strengthen social cohesion through entertaining community sport offerings.	Provide a broad range of sport opportunities: individual and team sports, indoor and outdoor recreational programs.

Source: Own edition, 2025

The engagement of disadvantaged children who are currently disengaged from sport can be promoted through various approaches. It is crucial to emphasize the multidimensional aspects of sport in its promotion, highlighting not only its role in fostering community experiences but also its contributions to fitness, skill development, and prevention. Team

sports and collective competitions can facilitate the inclusion of disadvantaged children who have remained distant from sport. Organizing family sports days is also advisable to enhance parents' commitment and motivation toward sport, given the important supportive role families play in encouraging these children's participation in physical activities.

Since the research identified that among the barriers, financial constraints, lack of assistance, and difficulties in accessing sports venues were predominant, it is recommended that leisure programs be provided free of charge in disadvantaged communities by utilizing school sports infrastructure. The study further confirmed that children express a need for sports equipment; therefore, providing free sports gear and equipment can also encourage participation. Disadvantaged children are significantly less likely to attend sports clubs requiring membership fees; hence, programs supporting clubs and civil organizations that integrate disadvantaged children by offering free access to their activities would be beneficial. Additionally, sports camps organized by schools can promote community cohesion and integration.

The motivation of disadvantaged children facing barriers to participation can be enhanced through sport offerings that assist with transportation to venues and provide necessary sports equipment and gear.

Children classified in the "strivers" cluster are motivated and actively engage in sport, primarily due to its developmental benefits. For this cluster, the goal should be to increase the frequency of sport participation, as the research revealed that disadvantaged children generally participate less frequently than their non-disadvantaged peers. Given their valuation of the developmental and health-supporting aspects of sport, messaging should emphasize that more frequent participation yields additional health benefits, enhancing fitness and performance. To maintain motivation, it would be advisable to couple sport offerings with fitness assessments that validate these effects and further encourage continued engagement. For this group, the sport offerings should be expanded beyond traditional disciplines to include emerging trends and activities that improve endurance and fitness.

The "determined" cluster demonstrates high sport motivation and consciously choose sport for its functional and social experience. For these children, maintaining motivation through diverse sport offerings and effective communication about available programs is essential.

Parent clusters complement the child clusters well, as research substantiates the crucial supportive role parents play in their children's sport involvement. Understanding parents' core values and the factors influencing their children's sport choices—on which the clusters

are based—can aid in shaping parental attitudes toward sport, potentially increasing not only their children’s but also their own participation. Table 5 summarizes the main characteristics, value orientations, recommended intervention areas for promoting sport, and associated development suggestions for each parental cluster.

Parents classified as practical traditionalists can be influenced to support their children’s sport participation by emphasizing sport’s health-promoting nature and the benefits of family-based physical activity. Providing accessible, free local sport opportunities can further motivate this group to encourage their children’s involvement.

Parents with limited motivation are most likely to be engaged by highlighting sport’s developmental and educational functions, aligning with the goal of encouraging and supporting their children’s sport participation.

Development-oriented, health-focused parents can be persuaded through marketing communications that emphasize the health-protective and life-sustaining roles of sport, particularly messages centered on health-focused physical activities.

Maximalist, value-driven parents—whose core values include health, development, and success—can be motivated by framing sport as a key to successful life management during persuasive efforts.

Increasing sport participation among disadvantaged children and their parents contributes to social integration, compensates for disadvantages, promotes equal opportunities, reduces social and health inequalities, and fosters the creation of equal chances.

Table 5: Key characteristics of clusters identified in the Parental group and the goals and recommended programs to promote sports participation

Clusters	Characteristics, values	Recommended intervention and development areas	Recommended sports supply elements
Practical traditionalists	Represent a low value orientation. Their core values focus on health and family. Material and infrastructural factors play an important role in their child's sport selection. Accessibility practically influences the choice. They rate the dimension of learning and development below average	Emphasize the health-promoting aspects of sport and clarify its health benefits.	Organize family sport events, joint hikes, Nordic walking sessions, and competitions. Develop freely accessible leisure activity maps near their residence.
Low-motivation Group	Low value orientation, especially regarding learning and development dimensions. Less motivated and less conscious about their children's sport participation. This group is at highest risk of children missing out on communal sport experiences.	Raise awareness of sport values and foster motivation towards sport participation among parents. Strengthen positive parental attitudes towards sport via sport selection events and health-promoting campaigns.	Provide sport and experiential camps, day camps for children. Organize family sport and health days. Ensure inclusive programs.
Development-Oriented Health-Centered	Health dominates their value system. They prefer sport primarily for its health maintenance and development role. Learning and development play a decisive role in supporting their children's sport involvement, while the social environment (friends, family) is also important. They choose their child's sport with greater awareness and are less constrained.	Strengthen and maintain motivation by conveying the message of sport as a health-supporting and developmental activity. Provide health, fitness, and community team sports.	Develop health-preserving and life-enhancing sport offerings such as hiking, Nordic walking, cycling, outdoor recreation, and fitness programs.
Maximalist Value-Driven	Value-oriented, with health, development, and success dimensions being important. Their child's sport choice is influenced by multiple factors, including learning/development opportunities and professional recommendations. Committed parents approach sport selection in a complex manner and are willing and able to pay for services	Convince them by promoting sport as a key to successful life management.	Recommend integrated sports services possibly through collaboration with existing clubs at reduced or subsidized fees. Offer preventive, posture-improving movement programs, fitness-supporting recreational training, cyclic sports, and possibly hiking, excursions, and skiing opportunities.

Source: Own edition, 2025

Strategy to Support Sports Participation Among Disadvantaged Children

In the following subsection, I analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) related to sports participation of disadvantaged children from the supply-side perspective. This analysis provides a solid foundation for formulating the strategy. The

SWOT method is an effective strategic planning tool that facilitates situational assessment and helps align strategic goals with opportunities through the identification of priorities.

1. Strengths:

- The outstanding natural endowments for outdoor sports and the availability of related infrastructure (e.g., hiking trails in mountainous areas, ski resorts, cycling paths).
- Existing free-of-charge programs for disadvantaged children, supported by state, school, and civil organizations (such as camps, afterschool sports development programs, and state-funded membership fees for school sports clubs covering disadvantaged children's participation).
- The mandatory nature of school physical education, which ensures movement development opportunities for all children within the school framework.

2. Weaknesses:

- Barriers to sports participation for disadvantaged children include lack of sports equipment and gear, as well as transportation costs to sports venues, which contribute to their disengagement from sport.
- The poorer health status and higher obesity rates among socioeconomically disadvantaged children may reduce their sports activity levels.
- Parents of disadvantaged children generally have a lower socioeconomic status (SES) and educational attainment, resulting in less emphasis on sport and support for their children's sports involvement.
- Limited sports infrastructure in smaller and more disadvantaged settlements restricts participation and reinforces segregation.
- Access to recreational and sports professionals is also limited for disadvantaged children, further hindering their sports engagement.

3. Opportunities:

- Utilization of various grant sources for sports development, including Erasmus+ projects involving multiple countries that can enrich the offer with inclusive sports and lifestyle programs or camps.

- Cross-border initiatives (e.g., Interreg grants) enabling the development of leisure, tourism, and sports infrastructure, as well as joint sports competitions and recreational programs organized by civil organizations.
- Increasing state involvement in supporting sports participation among disadvantaged children and families to reduce social inequalities.
- Establishment of equal opportunity sports programs through close cooperation between local municipalities and schools, where schools provide infrastructure and expertise, municipalities contribute funding, and promote these programs via their communication channels.
- Integration of sports programs into other services for disadvantaged children and families, such as educational, cultural, or social initiatives.
- Promotion of sport and awareness of its health-protective role on digital platforms to foster positive attitudes toward sports participation.
- Encouraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at supporting sports infrastructure and opportunities in disadvantaged communities through donations of sports equipment, development of recreational areas, or facilitating transport to sports venues.
- Increasing sports activity among disadvantaged children and families contributes to overcoming social disadvantages, enhancing equality of opportunity, and reducing social and health disparities.

4. Threats:

- Utilization of various grant sources for sports development, including Erasmus+ projects involving multiple countries that can enrich the offer with inclusive sports and lifestyle programs or camps.
- Cross-border initiatives (e.g., Interreg grants) enabling the development of leisure, tourism, and sports infrastructure, as well as joint sports competitions and recreational programs organized by civil organizations.
- Increasing state involvement in supporting sports participation among disadvantaged children and families to reduce social inequalities.
- Establishment of equal opportunity sports programs through close cooperation between local municipalities and schools, where schools provide infrastructure and expertise, municipalities contribute funding, and promote these programs via their communication channels.

- Integration of sports programs into other services for disadvantaged children and families, such as educational, cultural, or social initiatives.
- Promotion of sport and awareness of its health-protective role on digital platforms to foster positive attitudes toward sports participation.
- Encouraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at supporting sports infrastructure and opportunities in disadvantaged communities through donations of sports equipment, development of recreational areas, or facilitating transport to sports venues.
- Increasing sports activity among disadvantaged children and families contributes to overcoming social disadvantages, enhancing equality of opportunity, and reducing social and health disparities.

The SWOT analysis highlighted the strengths related to the sports participation of disadvantaged children, which form the focus of the strategy. In developing the strategy, I defined its title, key messages, and the vision we aim to achieve by the end of the development process. The strategy's objectives were articulated across short-, medium-, and long-term planning horizons. For each objective, I identified the corresponding tools, assigned them to various intervention areas, and outlined the expected outcomes of the strategy.

Name of the strategy: „Opportunity for Movement: An Active Future for Social Equality”

Messages of the strategy:

- „Sport, Opportunity, Future – Promoting Equal Chances for Children through Movement!”
- “Sport Without Borders and Barriers!”

Vision of the strategy:

The vision of the strategy is to create a society in which all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have equal access to sports participation. By ensuring regular physical activity, children can experience the joy of movement and gain community engagement, while sport contributes not only to their physical, mental, and social well-being but also fosters personal competencies such as perseverance, helping others, and fair play, which support them in life beyond sport. As a platform of inclusion, sport offers

disadvantaged children opportunities to build self-confidence, develop their personalities, integrate socially, and adopt a healthier, more active lifestyle. Furthermore, by providing an inclusive environment, sport enables shared activities between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, facilitating the appreciation of sporting values and experiences, and fostering a more accepting and inclusive societal attitude. The vision prominently emphasizes ensuring equal access, sport-based education, the community-building role of sport, opportunity creation, and overcoming disadvantages.

Objectives of the strategy:

The objectives are structured across short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes.

1. Short-term objectives (1-3 years):

The establishment and achievement of short-term goals lay the foundation for the strategy's long-term success by generating quick results that motivate continued support. Following a situational analysis and assessment, the current state is presented, and prompt responses are formulated.

A short-term objective is to map the sports participation habits of disadvantaged children and their families, their sports motivation, and the barriers hindering their involvement. This was addressed in my research, revealing that the sports activity of disadvantaged children lags behind, with the main obstacles being transportation difficulties, financial constraints, and lack of awareness about available opportunities.

Providing accessible sports opportunities and expanding leisure-time sports offerings are crucial to increasing participation. Given the financial hardships faced by children and families, the launch of free or discounted sports programs in schools or community settings is necessary.

Raising awareness and shaping attitudes is also an objective, highlighting the health-protective, community-building, and enjoyable nature of sports, alongside providing information about leisure sports options to children, parents, and educators.

Campaigns promoting an active lifestyle, featuring role models such as well-known athletes, aim to motivate children to engage in sports.

Organizing sport selection and demonstration events, along with ensuring media coverage, serves to encourage participation in these programs.

2. Medium-term objectives (4-7 years):

The goal is to establish a support system involving local governments, schools, and sports clubs.

By engaging local authorities and educational institutions, a sustainable support model will be developed to ensure long-term, sustainable access to recreational sports services for disadvantaged children.

Cooperation agreements with leisure and sports clubs operating in and around disadvantaged areas will be implemented to involve disadvantaged children and their families in sports.

Development of recreational sports infrastructure is a priority, with existing ski and tourism infrastructure in Slovakia serving as a good example. Further development will focus on outdoor recreational facilities such as playgrounds, fitness parks, adventure trails, and forest recreation parks, particularly in disadvantaged regions to improve accessibility.

Renovation and construction of school sports facilities, including sports fields and gymnasiums, will enhance infrastructure not only for mandatory physical education classes but also for after-school recreational sports and summer sports camps (SCHAUB, 2010).

To promote social integration, various sports programs and events will be organized, where disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children and families can participate together, facilitating inclusion. These include inclusive family days, sports days, competitions, flash mobs, and sport selection days, welcoming children and families with and without disabilities.

Parental community engagement and involvement in regular sports activities are targeted to shape parents' values and attitudes toward sport, which in turn motivates children's participation.

3. Long-term objectives (8–15 years)

The long-term aim is that disadvantaged children and their families not only participate actively in sports presently but also integrate sport into their lifestyles, thus realizing the health investment effects over time.

Achieving this requires system-level changes, such as a state-supported initiative that sustainably finances programs and infrastructure development for sports participation among disadvantaged children and families. The objective is to create a sustainable sport financing system integrated into public funding.

Beyond encouraging recreational sports, integration into competitive sports activities is to be supported. Establishing and maintaining a sports scholarship system is a goal, inspired

by Hungary’s Sportsillag scholarship, to support disadvantaged and talented student athletes with outstanding sports achievements, facilitating their participation in competitions and providing a future vision in sport.

It is also intended that this sport strategy be embedded within education and social policy frameworks.

Sustaining a culture of sport and activity is a further aim: regular participation in recreational and competitive sports by disadvantaged students will yield long-term impacts, including social inclusion, reduction of social inequalities, opportunity creation through sport, and improvements in health and well-being.

The sport offer should include lifetime sports such as hiking, Nordic walking, cycling, and skiing, ensuring program sustainability. By providing family sport days and sport selection events that also engage parents and grandparents, multi-generational sports consumption is realized, facilitating the achievement of strategic goals related to sport accessibility for disadvantaged persons.

Furthermore, incorporating support for disadvantaged children’s sports participation into education through talent development, catch-up, and career orientation programs is an objective, where recreational sports programs are coherently integrated (MEZŐ – DORNER, 2024). Thus, sport can serve not only as a source of enjoyment and structured leisure activity but also contribute to further education and sports career development.

Finally, by establishing a mentorship network of athletes, coaches, and volunteers, the strategy aims to support disadvantaged students engaged in recreational or competitive sports in their learning, personal development, sport involvement, social integration, and ultimately their transition into the labor market.

Table 6: Scenes and tasks associated with the attainment of objectives

Scenes	Tasks
<p>Kindergartens and Schools</p>	<p>Provide multiple weekly free sports activities for disadvantaged children within the institution, based on available resources and needs assessments. Develop school and kindergarten sports infrastructure to support not only mandatory physical education classes but also extracurricular recreational sports activities. Prepare kindergarten teachers, physical education teachers, and coaches methodologically, with special emphasis on inclusive and adaptive physical education. Integrate multicultural and inclusive education, adaptive movement development methods, and inclusive sport into teacher training and continuing education programs.</p>

Sports Clubs and Civil Organizations	Develop and offer inclusive recreational and sport programs based on needs assessments. Implement sport programs and family sport days that encourage participation of disadvantaged children. Support disadvantaged children in sport participation by providing free equipment, sports gear, and scholarships.
Community and Youth Centers	Organize clubs, learning support and development sessions, and recreational sports activities for children of various ages. Develop a volunteer mentoring program involving university students, high school students, and athletes to support children's development. Provide free movement development clubs, sport camps, and sport day camps for disadvantaged children. Offer seasonal (summer, winter, weekend) program packages including hikes, camps, and recreational days. Provide free sports equipment and gear (e.g., balls, badminton rackets, roller skates) and offer equipment rental free of charge. Collect donations of sports gear and equipment.
Local Governments	Allocate grant funds and announce calls for proposals aimed at supporting disadvantaged children's sport participation (eligible applicants include sport clubs and civil organizations targeting or integrating this group). Children themselves may apply for funding to cover expenses related to practicing a sport (e.g., equipment, travel costs, entry fees). Announce grant programs aimed at developing recreational and sport infrastructure. Organize awareness-raising programs and workshops promoting sport and health-supportive attitudes.
Recreational spaces, -parks	Develop and modernize outdoor infrastructure such as fitness parks, playgrounds, forest recreation parks, adventure parks, nature trails, hiking routes, forest exercise trails, and bike paths. Regularly organize free community and sport events, family sport days, family performance hikes, and similar activities.

Source: Own editing, 2025

The success of the strategy can thus be measured by the extent to which the established objectives are achieved, and whether the attained results are sustainable and capable of further development in the future.

The aim of developing and implementing the strategy is to stimulate sports participation among disadvantaged children, improve equal opportunities for these children and their families, promote social inclusion, and provide compensatory opportunities. The objective is to establish a long-term sustainable and results-oriented sports support system.

The strategy contributes to positive changes in measurable indicators related to the sports participation of disadvantaged children, such as the number of children involved in sports, the increase in weekly sports activity, and shifts in attitudes.

Expected outcomes include improved access to sports and increased sporting opportunities for disadvantaged children and their families, with the removal of limiting factors. Through increased activity within the target group, improvements in their health status can also be anticipated.

Additionally, system-level developments resulting from the strategy's implementation are expected to enhance the effectiveness of education.

Through targeted awareness-raising campaigns and integrative programs involving disadvantaged children and their families, societal sensitization will be achieved, fostering a more accepting and inclusive environment.

4. NEW AND NOVEL FINDINGS OF THE DISSERTATION

This study represents the first comprehensive examination of the leisure activities, sports participation habits, sports motivation, reasons for non-participation in sports, and the five-item well-being dimensions among disadvantaged youth (aged 8–18) living in Slovakia. A comparative analysis was conducted between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students regarding their leisure and sports behaviors. It was identified that disadvantaged children exhibit lower frequencies of sports participation compared to their non-disadvantaged peers. Differences in leisure activity patterns are largely attributable to economic background, as disadvantaged children tend to prefer more cost-effective options in both leisure and sports domains. Furthermore, a passive leisure pattern characterized by sedentary activities was detected among the student population.

Significant and trend-consistent differences were observed between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children concerning sports motivation, factors influencing sports discipline choice, and barriers to sports participation. Among disadvantaged children, key constraints limiting sports involvement include financial difficulties, lack of parental support, and transportation challenges. The development of inclusive sports programs that address the specific motivational profiles of disadvantaged children can facilitate their engagement in sports and help bridge the activity gap between these groups.

Using cluster analysis, disadvantaged students were grouped according to their value orientations, leading to tailored recommendations for sports offerings. Four distinct child clusters were identified:

- **"Non-participants"**, characterized by low motivation and values toward sports, without major barriers to participation; engagement should be encouraged through motivation and experience-focused elements.
- **"Barriers-affected"**, whose sports participation is driven primarily by social experiences rather than the functional aspects of sport; family plays a central role, and obstacles are prominent; support can be provided through community-, family-, and experience-based sport programs aimed at overcoming barriers.
- **"Strivers"**, motivated by sport's functional benefits such as fitness, performance, and health maintenance; sustaining motivation requires reinforcing sport's health-promoting functions and offering both traditional and novel physical activity programs to support long-term engagement.

- **"Determined"**, the most motivated group with minimal barriers, valuing both the functional and social dimensions of sport; providing information and access to a diverse range of individual and team sports, as well as indoor and outdoor leisure activities focused on fitness and conditioning, is essential.

Classification into these clusters enables personalized interventions. Addressing the unique needs of each cluster can foster more effective support systems aimed at enhancing sports motivation, engagement, commitment to an active lifestyle, and positive outcomes.

Additionally, the validated Well-Being Index (WBI) questionnaire was administered to the child sample, and the data were analyzed relative to sports participation frequency. Results demonstrated that children with higher sports participation report greater well-being scores and realize more health benefits, thereby supporting the promotion of programs that encourage children's involvement in sport.

This dissertation also represents the first investigation into the sports participation, motivation, spending profiles, and value orientations of disadvantaged parents, aimed at understanding the background factors supporting children's sports involvement. Parental respondents were clustered based on their support for their child's sports participation and their value systems, facilitating targeted parental engagement strategies to promote children's sports involvement. Four parental clusters were identified among disadvantaged parents:

- **Practical Traditionalists**, influenced by the health-supportive aspects of sport and family-based sporting activities, who can be encouraged to support their children's participation.
- **Low-motivation Parents**, who respond best to emphasizing sport's developmental and educational functions, aligning with the goal of supporting their child's sports engagement.
- **Development-oriented Parents**, health-conscious individuals who can be motivated by raising awareness of sport's protective and life-enhancing roles.
- **Maximalist Value-driven Parents**, whose value system centers on health, development, and success, and who can be motivated by positioning sport as a key to successful life management and long-term child engagement.

The identification of parental clusters is crucial, as this and other research confirm the pivotal supportive role of parents in children's sports involvement.

Based on these findings, this study formulated, for the first time, a strategic proposal to the Slovak Government and policymakers to promote sports participation among disadvantaged children. The strategy outlines short-, medium-, and long-term objectives, accompanied by specific action plans for various implementation settings including kindergartens/schools, sports clubs, civil organizations, community and youth centers, municipalities, and recreational spaces such as parks.

This dissertation fills a research gap by examining the leisure and sports consumption of disadvantaged children in Slovakia, an area previously underexplored, particularly concerning the motivations, attitudes, and health behaviors of these children and their parents. The identified clustering criteria related to values, sports participation, and support provide deeper insights into the target group's needs, motivations, and spending profiles, facilitating more effective promotion of sports participation among disadvantaged youth. The results contribute to advancing inclusivity, enhancing the sports activity levels of disadvantaged children, and thereby supporting health promotion and the mitigation of social inequalities.

5. PRACTICAL APPLICABILITY OF THE FINDINGS

The research, through a comparative analysis of the sports habits of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in Slovakia, highlighted the lower levels of sports activity among disadvantaged children, their primary motives for participation, the barriers leading to sports dropout, as well as their health disadvantages. The clustering of the disadvantaged child sample and the identification of the core value systems of these clusters can facilitate the development of tailored sports offerings, integrated programs, and targeted marketing communication messages that motivate children to engage in sports or help sustain their interest and activity levels.

Given that children's sports habits and participation are also influenced by their parents' values, resources, and attitudes toward sports, the findings derived from the parental sample contribute to a better understanding of the parental background affecting the sports involvement of disadvantaged children. The groups formed through clustering disadvantaged parents, along with the corresponding sport-promoting programs and messages, can support the strengthening of parental support and increase sports activity and health status among disadvantaged families.

The developed strategy, with its articulated vision, short-, medium-, and long-term objectives, and implementation guidelines, can assist in increasing sports participation among disadvantaged children, overcoming their health disadvantages, and promoting their social integration.

6. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION TOPIC

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Candidate: Peter Zidek

Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Management and Business

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Articles, studies (6)

1. **Zidek, P.**, Bácsné Bába, É., Lengyel, A., Müller, A. É., Molnár, A.: A Multidimensional Analysis of Sports Participation Patterns Among Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Children in Slovakia. *Physical Culture and Sport, Studies and Research*. 109 (1), 58-68, 2025. ISSN: 1899-4849.
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Total IF of journals (all publications): 3,3

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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

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