

Individualism as a determinant of successful diplomats through the engagement of stereotyped sportspersons

Milan Jazbec¹

ABSTRACT

The first part of the paper discussion commences with skiing, which has the dimension of a national myth in Slovenia and elaborates the stereotype that Slovenes are not successful in collective sports, but in individual ones. We examined this issue with presentation, comparison and commenting all facts in selected individual sports vs. collective sports (skiing vs. football, swimming vs. basketball and athletics vs. handball). Generally speaking, Slovenes are in sports above all individuals.

The second part of the paper contemplates the individualism of diplomats and sportspersons. This characteristic enables outstanding sportspersons, who are celebrities, to appear therefore occasionally as ad hoc diplomats. They de facto represent their own countries, promote friendly relations in concrete cases or generally, as a universal value, and also negotiate, if tasked with this. However, they are not diplomats; they just behave like them, since they are successful individuals.

KEY WORDS: diplomacy, sport, individualism, myth, stereotypes

POVZETEK

Prvi del opisuje smučanje, ki ima v Sloveniji razsežnost nacionalnega mita, predstavljen pa je tudi stereotip, da Slovenci niso uspešni v kolektivnih športih, ampak v individualnih. To vprašanje smo preučili s predstavitvijo, primerjavo in interpretacijo vseh dejstev v izbranih individualnih športih v primerjavi s kolektivnimi športi (smučanje in nogomet, plavanje in košarka, atletika in rokomet). Na splošno so Slovenci v športu predvsem individualisti.

Drugi del prispevka razmišlja o individualizmu diplomatov in športnikov. Ta lastnost omogoča izjemnim športnikom, ki so znane osebnosti, da se občasno pojavijo kot ad hoc diplomati. Dejansko predstavljajo svoje države, spodbujajo prijateljske odnose, v konkretnih primerih ali na splošno, kot univerzalno vrednoto in se tudi pogajajo, če se to od njih zahteva. Vendar niso diplomati; samo obnašajo se kot diplomati, saj so uspešni posamezniki.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: diplomacija, šport, individualizem, mit, stereotipi

¹ ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Milan Jazbec, PhD, Professor of Diplomacy at the University of Ljubljana and Ambassador of Slovenia to North Macedonia. Email: milan.jazbec@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

»It was winter and the land was wide covered with snow.«
 Fran Levstik, *Martin Krpan*²

In this paper we discuss on a general level the correlation between sportspersons and diplomats, understanding them as individualists. Our aim is to find out if outstanding sportspersons also perform as diplomats, as well as what the similarities and differences between them are, when sportspersons also appear or are at least perceived as diplomats, after achieving outstanding results that bring them into the public eye and in the focus of international attention.

To come to that test, we firstly have a closer look at a stereotype of Slovenes, stemming from the time of the former Yugoslavia, saying that they are individuals and hence good in individual sports and not in team (collective) sports. Here we start from the origin of skiing and its importance for Slovenes and their national character, which constructs the perception of Slovenes as individualists and not collectivists. This importance has nowadays reached practically a mythological dimension.

From this point of view, we illustrate in the first, more detailed part of this contribution our main thesis, which states that Slovenes are not successful in collective sports; they are successful in individual sports. We could also use more popular and broadly accepted wording, and say that Slovenes are skiers, not football players. This thesis will be examined, while presenting, comparing and commenting on facts in selected individual sports vs. collective ones (primarily skiing and swimming vs. football and basketball; we take into account additionally also athletics and handball). The time frame of this comparison covers the last two decades of former Yugoslavia (from 1970 onwards) and the time span of independent Slovenia (from 1991 till 2008 – almost two decades as well). To this we attach our additional thesis, which says that after the independence of Slovenia, Slovenes have been more successful in collective sports than in individual sports. Since Slovenia is an EU member from spring 2004, we will try to evaluate briefly if this frame has had any additional effect on the subject discussed. The here

2 Fran Levstik wrote his story *Martin Krpan* in 1858 with the ambition to show to his Slovene colleagues how one should write a story as a literary (fictional) piece. *Martin Krpan*, though being most probably based on a real person, is today also considered a myth, which should give Slovenes self-assurance and sovereign behavior.

researched timeframe concludes with the year 2008, when Slovenia was presiding over the European Council.

Complementary to this, we will have a look at our research interest with the question of whether geographical, historical, psychological and political circumstances have, or have had, any effect on the formulation, existence and change of the aforementioned stereotype. Finally, we would try to see if possible changes with regard to the degree of success of Slovenes in sporting, influence possible changes of this stereotype.

In the second part of this contribution, we compare outstanding sportspersons as a whole, in contrast to the approach in the first part, in a generalizing manner, in their role as promoters of their countries with that of diplomats, performing, to a certain extent, basically the same activity. They both promote and represent their countries. We try to draw parallels between sportspersons and diplomats as well as to try to find out some main similarities and differences. For a broader insight into trends, we would include also the concepts of sport diplomacy and celebrity diplomacy. There, we would try to see if individualism lies at the heart of those activities and of their significance.

From the methodological point of view, we use methods of presenting facts, commenting on and generalizing them as well as comparing them. We exercise this on a general level and do not enter into specific theorizing on myths, stereotypes and diplomacy, since we try to find out and articulate trends without the ambition of going into extensive detail and collecting huge amounts of data. A few tables are used to present and illustrate findings also visually. We measure the degree of success in sport with outstanding results in the international arena. In the second part, we primarily rely on the method of comparison (between sportspersons and diplomats). There we will have a look at the relation between sport and celebrity diplomacy from one point of view and with mainstream (political) diplomacy from another point of view. We presuppose that they complement each other to a certain extent. Slovenia has been chosen as a research subject matter because it is widely known for successful skiers and since it was the first new EU member of the 2004 enlargement to preside over the European Council.

MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES AND THEIR SOCIAL BACKGROUND

When Fran Levstik wrote his famous story, Slovenes were skiing already for more than two centuries and were also engaged in the diplomatic profession for more than three centuries.³ Skiing, which was at that time primarily a means of travel and light transportation during heavy winters, was for the first time put down, described and elaborated by Janez Vajkard Valvasor.⁴ That sport was at that time reflecting an individual effort to get along in harsh times. We think that at least from that time individualism has been shaping a certain part of the Slovene national character, which was also partially transferred to stereotypes about Slovenes, including those that refer to sports. Here we see a possible basic link between sports and diplomacy – namely, both areas, in spite huge organizations behind each protagonist, leave him/her at the final act on his/her own, primarily in an arena, exposed either to broad public attention or to the diplomatic environment. It is our strong belief that both successful sportspersons and diplomats are primarily individualists, while huge machineries behind them take care about organizational, financial, policy etc. details. Those machineries are either highly complex support teams of various experts from areas like medicine, psychology, bioenergy, therapy, public relations, etc., or complex bureaucratic organizations, which provide diplomats with policy instructions and advice as well as with financial, technical, security, promotional, etc., support. Only they enable them to reach high in international competitiveness. But, at the end of the day, individual skills and similar characteristics appear as the crucial determinants.

Until the mid-20th century, at least in former Yugoslavia, skiing remained a rather unknown and undeveloped as well as an unpopular sport (with the exception of Slovenia). It became more known and was slowly gaining in popularity with the emergence of radio and TV, but still tradition, skill and facilities (in particular premises for ski jumping) were needed. Highly spread in Slovenia, it is no wonder that

3 The first known Slovene diplomat, Sigismund Herberstein, originates in that time (1486–1566). He was a highly successful diplomatic envoy – an *ad hoc* one (meaning also individualist) in the service of three consecutive Habsburg monarchs (Caesars Maximilian and Karl as well as King Ferdinand) (cf. Čačinovič, 1998 and Jazbec, 2009: pp.247–272).

4 The interdisciplinary work of Count Janez Vajkard Valvasor (1641–1693), a masterpiece *Slava vojvodine Kranjske (The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola)* was published in 1689 in Nuremberg, with the original title *Die Ehre dess Herzogthums Crain*. In this work of four volumes he systematically presented and elaborated data, impressions, findings and folk heritage as well as his own drawings of the countryside, cities etc., all of which he gathered traveling around the country for years. Due to his achievements, Valvasor was elected to membership of the British Royal Society in 1687.

skiing formed part of the national identity. Therefore, it always has been part of myth, gradually transformed into stereotype.

We build our contribution from understanding myths as to a certain extent being composed of various stereotypes as an important part of common belief. Both myths and stereotypes are used to form a significant part of the national character (mentality). They arise from the social context and are influenced as well as encouraged by it. In our understanding and for the purpose of this contribution, “myths are the symbolic tales of the distant past (...) that concern cosmogony and cosmology (...), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social action and values” (Magoulick, 2012).⁵ Myths are important for identity building, in particular as a partial compensation for (absent) history (Južnič, 1993) and are also connected with literature. Some heroes from literature could get mythical dimensions (Lah and Inkret, 2002, p.6). And a stereotype would be a common belief, which a certain group or part of population shares about another group or part of population: “A stereotype is a fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people” (Cardwell, 1996).⁶ This belief to a certain extent and from certain points of view may reflect reality (truth about that group or part of population), but has been exaggerated and generalized for the description/characterization of the whole population, mostly in a manipulative, negative and also misleading way. Additionally, a stereotype has been transformed into a classification used to describe such a group or part of the population on a general level, without having the ambition to describe it correctly and comprehensively. Stereotypes, “Both negative and positive, [they] are acquired from everyday social environments, beginning in childhood, and often without any awareness” (Benet and Gaines, 2010, p.436). An important characteristic of stereotypes is that they are very often implicit and tend to perpetuate themselves.

While contemplating myths and their backgrounds, we should have a glance at the nature of individual and collective sports, followed by a closer look at the differences among Slovenes and Serbs (who were the biggest and most influential nation in former Yugoslavia).

Individual sports demand from the performer – an individual – continuously exercised hardworking behaviour. No improvisations are

5 For more on myths see Hansen, 2002, Leeming, 1990 and Lévi-Strauss, 1995.

6 For more on stereotypes see McGarty, 2002, and Stangor, 2000.

allowed, since they cost you the result immediately – you are, as a consequence, out of the game. There is hardly any space for sudden inspirations. Rationalism prevails, since you are working alone and purely on your own. Social interaction practically does not exist; you cannot rely on anybody apart from yourself. Practically speaking, there is only one way to reach the end. The pace should be steady, with a possible speed-up towards the end.

Collective sports are, on the contrary, dynamic; the social framework is complex and changeable, full of interaction and surprises. There is always (enough) space for improvisation and exercising inspiration – one could even say this is a precondition for successful performance and its outcome. The end result depends on various actions and activities, including mistakes. Because of all of this, changes in the team during the match are necessary. Reserve players are on hand; you can always seek to and try to choose the best team combination. Thus, there are many different ways to reach the end and win. They depend upon tactics, the pace, on combination and inspiration. All these factors constantly change. The closer the end is, the more important is it to produce the combination that will surprise the counterpart and bring better result.

Within this sport framework we intend to evaluate the successfulness of Slovenes in former Yugoslavia and during the later period. We will complement this sport framework with some dwelling on national characters of Slovenes and Serbs to have the opportunity of better understanding the topic discussed.

Generally speaking, there were (and indeed still are) obvious differences in the national characters of Slovenes and Serbs, which were (are) supported primarily by historical and geographical backgrounds. Serbs lived for few centuries under strong Ottoman influence, while Slovenes almost a millennium under strong German/Habsburg and briefly also under French influence. These differences could be illustrated by an example from Slovene political history and anthropology from the early 20th century. The Slovene researcher Albin Prepeluh (Zver, 1990; see also Jazbec, 2006, p.46) presented and elaborated the “western” and “eastern” patterns of political culture, using Slovenes and Serbs as examples, respectively. He focused himself on presenting and analysing selected elements that influence the social and political behaviour of both nations. His elaboration is used here to offer a better

inside view on the differences that support the creation/emergence of myths and stereotypes. The presentation of his findings follows in the next table.

Table 1: A comparison between Western and Eastern types

“Western Type” (Slovenia)	“Eastern Type” (Serbia)
Politically differentiated and socially segmented space	Politically consolidated space
Autonomy	Centralism
INDIVIDUALISM	Unification (“the myth of unity”)
Relative or negative attitude towards state	Fetishization of state (“loyalty”)
Ideological differentiation	Less obvious ideological differentiation
Social democracy	Communism
Democratic self governance of people	Adherence to dictatorship

Prepeluh developed his categorization as a result of different historical, political, economic, cultural, geographical etc. circumstances, in which the nations concerned lived throughout their history. It is our opinion that this has also influenced, *inter alia*, the inclination towards various and different sport options.

REALITY IN THE SPORTS ARENA

After elaborating a few elements and aspects, which to our mind have strongly influenced myths and stereotypes about Slovenes in the area of sport, we move on and present a selection of facts and figures about the results achieved⁷ by Slovenes in the sports mentioned here. These sports, as listed in the beginning of this paper, are as follows: skiing and swimming (individual ones) as well as football and basketball (collective ones).⁸

7 As a criterion we take high results, achieved in the international arena (the Olympic Games, the World or the European Cup and similar), both individually or as a member of national or club teams.

8 To catch a broader glimpse of the here-elaborated topic we also include illustrations from athletics and handball.

Firstly, during 1970s and 1980s Slovenes, appearing as members of the Yugoslav national team, represented a strong international power in skiing, alpine skiing in particular. Among the most well-known skiers were Bojan Križaj,⁹ Jože Kuralt, Boris Strel and Rok Petrovič as well as Mateja Svet. Slalom was their favourite discipline. In ski jumping, Ludvik Zajc, Bogdan Norčič and Primož Ulaga stood out. Among swimmers two names stood out, namely Borut and Damjan Petrič (brothers). It must be mentioned here that skiing was extremely popular during this period and still is treated almost as a national sport in Slovenia. The majority of Slovenes ski regularly worldwide, not only at home.¹⁰

As far as football is concerned, during the same period three names stood out, namely Branko Oblak,¹¹ Danilo Popivoda and Vili Ameršek (Olimpija). There are more names when speaking about basketball. To name the most important, they would be: Ivo Daneu,¹² Borut Bassin, Vinko Jelovac, Aljoša Žorga, Peter Vilfan (Olimpija), etc. There is no Slovene team in collective sports that would stand out in this period. The sport club Olimpija from Ljubljana participated with its football team in the Yugoslav first league, but never managed to win neither the league championship nor the cup championship. Its results were primarily average, a few times close to the top, but a few times also quite close to the bottom. There were a few seasons when there was no Slovene representative in the first Yugoslav football league. Rather similar were the results of the Olimpija basketball team during this period. It managed, however, to win the championship in the season 1969/70,¹³ prior to the World Basketball Championship 1970, which was organized in Ljubljana. The Yugoslav team won the Championship (Ivo Daneu was the best player in the Yugoslav team), which inspired basketball in Slovenia (as well as in Yugoslavia) tremendously.

9 He was the only one capable of challenging and also defeating the famous Swedish skier Ingemar Stenmark (they managed to develop a strong friendship). Križaj was selected to give the opening speech on behalf of sportspersons at the opening of the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984.

10 Also, Slovenes adopted the stereotype that they all ski (judging at least from the general media picture). This is, of course, not true, the author included.

11 Branko Oblak played at various German and Austrian teams from 1975–1987. With Bayern he won the German League in 1979/80. In 1972 he played at the farewell match of Pele in Rio de Janeiro. At the World Championship in 1974 in Germany he was selected to the all-stars team of the Championship.

12 Ivo Daneu was the best player of the World Basketball Championship in 1967 as well as the best sportsman in Yugoslavia in the same year. In 2007 he was accepted to the FIBA Hall of Fame (www.halloffame.fiba.com – 29 September 2012). He ended his career in 1970, being a member of the Yugoslav national team 209 times and won, apart from gold at the World Championship in 1970, also silver three times at European Championships and twice at World Championships as well as bronze once at the European Championship.

13 Olimpija also won the Yugoslav basketball championship five times in the early years.

Secondly, during the 1990s and later, fewer Slovenes and with less success have been presented in elite skiing. We could name Jure Košir as well as Špela Pretnar, Urška Hrovat and Tina Maze in alpine skiing (again primarily slalom), but also Franci Petek, Primož Peterka and Rok Benkovič in ski jump.¹⁴ In swimming Peter Mankoč, Sara Isakovič as well as Alenka and Nataša Kežzar (sisters) stand out.

As far as football is concerned, the Slovene national team qualified for the European Championship in 2000 in Belgium/Netherlands (among 16 best teams) and for the World Championship in 2002 in Japan/South Korea (among 32 best teams), both being huge and unexpected success. Also, a few clubs achieved noticeable results in the European Champions League (in 1999 Maribor qualified) and in the UEFA Cup (various teams gained attention while participating in both league's qualifications). Practically the same is true for Slovene basketball club teams and the national basketball team. They achieved good results in the European Championship League (Olimpija in 1996/97 achieved 3rd place in the Final Four) and the Cup League (Olimpija won in 1993/94) as well as in the Adriatic League (various Slovene teams play important role traditionally), and also at the World and European Basketball Championships. These clubs are primarily Union Olimpija, Celje Pivovarna Laško, Slovan, Krka, etc. Among individual players several stand out, who also play (or have played) in the NBA League, like Marko Milič (the first Slovene ever in the NBA – Philadelphia 76ers in 1997), Primož Brezec, Radoslav Nesterović and Beno Udrih as well as Sani Bečirovič, Jaka Lakovič and Uroš Slokar.¹⁵ We face the intensive development of both football and basketball throughout Slovenia during the second period. As it was with skiing during the first period, football in particular (as well as basketball) has become highly popular in Slovenia during the second period. At the beginning of the new millennium, Slovenia witnessed a de facto football-mania. This presents a new phenomenon in Slovene sport history as far as collective sports are concerned and football in particular (the latter is even more striking, keeping in mind our main thesis).

Additionally, there were no Slovenes who played any role in athletics during the first period. The same goes for handball teams (and individual handball players). There has not been a single handball team

¹⁴ Additionally, we could also name Dejan Košir, world champion and vice champion in snowboarding.

¹⁵ Of course we have to point out Luka Dončić, a top Slovene basketball star, who stands out now in the NBA and Aleksander Čeferin, the UEFA President, coming from Slovenia, just recently elected for his second term.

from Slovenia that played in the first Yugoslav handball league. Slovene handball players appeared only exceptionally and temporarily in the Yugoslav national team or in successful teams from other Yugoslav republics.¹⁶ However, there was a huge number of handball teams throughout Slovenia, but they hardly reached past regional level.

However, the circumstances changed significantly in the second period. There is a handful of names that stand out in athletics, both women and men: Brigita Bukovec¹⁷ (women hurdles 100 m), Brita Bilač¹⁸ (women high jump), Jolanda Čeplak¹⁹ (women 800 m), Brigita Langerholc²⁰ (women 800 and 1500 m), Alenka Bikar²¹ (women 100 and 200 m), Matic Osovnikar²² (100 m), Primož Kozmus²³ (hammer throw), Gregor Cankar²⁴ (long jump) and Jure Rovnan²⁵ (pole vault). As far as handball is concerned, the Slovene national team achieved huge success by winning the silver medal at the European Championship in Ljubljana in 2004. Furthermore, it is the only Slovene sport team that ever took part at (even) two Olympic Games: in Sydney 2000 (eighth place) and in Athens 2004. Apart from the national team also Celje Pivovarna Laško (men) and Krim (women) stand out significantly in European Champions League (both won once).

A COMPARISON OF SPORT ACHIEVEMENTS

We start our comparison, as already presented, with the general proposition that during the period of former Yugoslavia, Slovenes were successful in individual and not in collective sports, while after gaining independence and achieving statehood, success in collective sports ap-

16 Like in many other collective sports (basketball, football, water polo etc.), Yugoslavia played an important role also in handball.

17 She won the silver medal at both 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and at the European Championship in Budapest in 1998.

18 She originates from Germany and is married to a Slovene sportsman Borut Bilač (athletics – long jump).

19 She won the gold medal both at the European Championship 2002 and at the European Indoor Championship in 2002 (also setting the indoor world record) as well as the bronze medal at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. However, she was disqualified and banned from professional sports in 2007 for drug abuse.

20 She won fourth place at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the silver medal at 2001 Mediterranean Games (Universiade).

21 She won bronze at the 1997 Mediterranean Games, silver at the European Championship in 2000 and gold at the 2005 Mediterranean Games.

22 He won bronze at the European Athletic Championship in 2006 and seventh place at the World Championship in 2007 (the first white sprinter at the World Championship final in the last 20 years).

23 He won silver at the World Championship in 2007 and gold at the Olympic Games in Beijing 2008 (and also silver in London 2012).

24 He won bronze medals at the Mediterranean Games in 1995 and 1997 as well as at the World Championship in 1999.

25 He has participated at three Olympic Games so far.

peared and grew while it decreased in individual sports (yet remained present). In the following table we present this starting point.

Table 2: A comparison of success in individual and collective sports

	Sport	
	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>
	Skiing (swimming) /athletics/	Football (basketball) /handball/
YU	+ (+) /-/	- (-) /-/
SLO	+ (+) /+/	+ (+) /+/

When we take into account some facts from an additional pair, namely athletics and handball, and support the main finding, our impression changes slightly. Slovenes did not have any outstanding athletes during the Yugoslav period, but Yugoslavia also had hardly any (which barely changes the image of Slovenes being successful individualists). Slovenes practically had neither any outstanding handball teams nor individual players (which also does not change that part of our general finding). However, these supportive data strengthen our findings for the second period significantly. Slovenes remain successful individualists (though not that much from a quantitative point of view), but become also successful in collective sports.

At the next step in our comparison, we would try to find out what determines and influences the spirit of individualism in Slovenes, and how this influenced changes in success.

Four determinants are taken into account, namely:

- geography,
- history,
- psychology, and
- political environment.

During the main part of their *history*, Slovenes were part of two big multinational states, the Habsburg Empire and Yugoslavia. If we understand the former as a general reflection of a primarily German influence, it lasted all together for almost a millennium.²⁶ The influence

²⁶ From 1809 till 1813 Slovenes were, however, part of the French (Napoleonic) Empire. It presented different a national, cultural, political etc. influence, but it was, again, a big multinational entity.

of the latter lasted for seven decades. After thirteen years of independence, Slovenia gained EU membership in 2004, which would again mean being part of a big multinational entity. Since this has been so far a rather short period (four years only),²⁷ it would be difficult to measure its influence exactly and with high validity. Nevertheless, we think it would be at least interesting to speculate about it and try to notice any possible changes.

The geographical position of Slovenes has, of course, not changed. Slovenia is a primarily hilly country, with lots of mountains and numerous valleys;²⁸ its landscape is covered with forests (well over 60%). This encourages a high level of individualism and does not stimulate collectivism (which is also physically much less possible than in the plains). Still, as an EU member, Slovenia is since January 1, 2008 part of the Schengen area. This means that Slovene citizens can travel around the majority of the EU without any (border) limitations and with only a personal identity card.²⁹ This at least compensates for the otherwise narrow perception of physical (but also of psychological) aspect. When contemplating geographical aspects and their perception, this represents a huge change.

History changes with the passing of time, of course. This effect is primarily cumulative. Slovenes added to their Slavic origins after centuries of German experience also the Yugoslav as well as their own experience (the period of independence). Statehood has for sure influenced this accumulation significantly and enriched it from a specific point of view, which so far has neither been known nor experienced by Slovenes. The EU framework furthermore enriches this historical experience with new stimuli. Still, since geography has delivered to Slovenia the status of a crossroad of nations and cultures, throughout much of Slovenian history survival has been the driving force of behaviour. With the emergence (ten days war) of the independent Slovene state and later also with its EU membership, this changed significantly. At least relatively speaking, we could say that Slovenes (more precisely, Slovenian citizens) have solved the question of their survival.³⁰

27 As already noted, our observed period ends in 2008.

28 This is one of the main reasons why there are over 20 (sometimes very different) dialects in the Slovene language.

29 In addition to this, there is also the single currency, which Slovenia shares since January 1, 2007. This strengthens the freedom of traveling and has also a significant psychological meaning (not only a highly practical, financial one).

30 Achieving this half a millennium after the Slovene language, which is now one of the official EU languages, was founded, is an unprecedented result. Primož Trubar, the founder of Slovene language, was born in 1508 and published the first Slovene book in 1551.

Consequently, also *psychological* aspects witnessed an important evolution. The minimization of the ‘survival’ issue, an extension of geographical area, and the dispersion of social pressure, along with a much lower level of social control compared to what has been traditional, have most probably influenced and culminated in a different social positioning of the individual. Perhaps, this has also resulted in the weakening of social pressure and the enhancement of possibilities of interaction. This could also encourage possibilities and abilities of creating or producing a better team spirit (collectivism),³¹ which rests on capable and efficient individuals.

The political environment that frames Slovenes has changed considerably. The evolution faced by the process has gone from monarchy (the Habsburg and early Yugoslav one) to dictatorship (a later proclaimed royal dictatorship in the first Yugoslavia and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” during the communist/socialist second Yugoslavia, which during much of the later period remained an ideological phrase) to parliamentary democracy (first within independent Slovenia and then within the EU). The complexity of this change is in particular illustrated by the complexity of the EU. It would be our guess that all this could have stimulated potentials and capabilities of the individual and of his/her inclination for easier socializing, including in sports.

In the next table we try to present the already elaborated evolution of the four discussed determinants in three different political settings, including the years spent in them.³²

Table 3: A Comparison of Determinants

	YU (72)	SLO (13)	EU (4)
Geography	■	■	⊕
History	■	⊕	⊕
Psychology	■	⊕	⊗
Political environment	■	⊗	□

31 We understand collectivism in this essay as a team-building spirit within the sport framework. However, we must make this distinct from communist/socialist collectivization, which was fostered in Yugoslavia immediately after the WW II.

32 We try on a general level to present the process of this change and its intensity. Hence, in our opinion there is no need for a legend to decode the general message of this Table.

The most obvious and intensive is the change of political environment (it is also the easiest to measure). Psychological changes are the most complex and hence also the most difficult to measure. Hence, they could be measured by various indirect variables. Historical factors change above all through their accumulation, while the geographical factor does change indirectly. Generally speaking, this offers more opportunities to dwell further, and in much more detail, on the topic discussed.

There are several questions that could be drawn from these findings. Let us point out at least two groups of them.

Firstly, does this influence also change the impressions or stereotypes about the population concerned, in our case about Slovenes? If yes, does this influence from one point of view affect also changes in stereotypes about Slovenes from others (how they perceive Slovenes) or from another point of view also about Slovenes by themselves (how they perceive themselves)? Furthermore, how does this affect the creation and evolution of myths about Slovenes?

Secondly, how could one understand both individualism and collectivism? Does the former present a runaway from the state, from institutions and politics? Does the latter present a way in which the state tries to manipulate the individual and society? How does the EU integration framework affect individualism and collectivism, in our case in sports in particular? Has the political frame in any way affected the creation of the myth about Slovenes? Or it is just a matter of historical tradition and geographical position? Could we research these aspects in sports alone or are they inseparable from the broader social context?

To wrap up our brief discussion, we could notice the fast and intensive change of the political environment, complemented by a most probably subtle and complex psychological change (being at least at its beginning), also as a consequence of the slightly changed geographical perception and enriched historical accumulation. It would be difficult to disagree with the impression that this all must have influenced the way Slovenes express and exercise individualism and collectivism, particularly in sports.

DIPLOMATS AS INDIVIDUALS

Diplomacy could be understood through various meanings, like organization, activity, skill, profession, technique and foreign policy.³³ Diplomacy is being exercised by a diplomat, who is a person, authorized and qualified to pursue it. Following different understandings and interpretations of diplomacy one also speaks about different characteristics of diplomats, such as being tactful, direct, reserved, introverted, honest, always keeping in mind their positive as well as negative perception in public.³⁴ Diplomats as holders of this profession are members of a diplomatic service or organization; they are compared to, and basically also are, bureaucrats, who have to follow the exact rules of the organization.³⁵ Diplomats work by instruction, which may be general or concrete. But, at the same time, they are also individualists. Whatever the precise instruction is, they always have a certain manoeuvring space to add to its execution a personal touch. Each brings to the profession a certain dose of new aspects which add to the profession as such, as well as influencing the way they themselves perform and are efficient. A personal touch is something highly important for this profession. One could claim that diplomats are individualists.³⁶ This is particularly obvious while speaking about senior diplomats, primarily ambassadors, when they are on their duty abroad.

Throughout the historical development of diplomacy, one can notice the obvious importance of individualism. In the period of early diplomacy, one could speak about diplomatic envoys, who were engaged in a certain task, with a mission to fulfil it and to return after its completion to the sovereign. During the period of classical diplomacy this practice of so-called *ad hoc* diplomacy remained highly important, although at a later stage countries started to form foreign ministries and to establish permanent missions in the receiving states.³⁷ During the period of modern diplomacy, multilateralism appeared and grew significantly in momentum and importance, but the importance of diplomats as individualists remained.³⁸ One could also say that from one point of view, the

33 Compare Barston, 2006, Benko, 1997, Berridge, 2002, Bohte and Sancin, 2006, Feltham, 1994, Jazbec, 2009, Nicolson, 1988 etc.

34 Compare Bohte and Sancin, 2006, pp.31-35, Feltham, 1994, pp.27-28, Nick, 1997, pp.13-24, Nicolson, 1988, pp.55-67, Petrič, 2010, pp.307-341 etc.

35 For more on diplomatic organization see Jazbec, 2009, pp.125-178.

36 Compare Jazbec, 2006, pp.83-92.

37 Compare Mattingly, 2008, and Carter, 2008.

38 We stick to the periodization of diplomatic evolution in four phases, namely the early, the classical, the modern and the postmodern (Jazbec, 2009, pp.31-46). The latter is significantly marked by special envoys, which is an individual tasking.

period is outstandingly marked by envoys of various kinds, like special representatives, *ad hoc* emissaries, while from another point of view that the level and rank thereof are permanently increasing.³⁹

During the late modern diplomacy period, in the second part of the 20th century, we also witness a significant stratification of diplomacy into various special diplomacies, like economic, cultural or scientific, and lately also environmental, celebrity and sport diplomacy.⁴⁰ We understand this trend as a reflection of the tectonic changes in the structure of the international community, produced by its globalising, which brings new issues to the diplomatic agenda, together with demand for new kinds of specialists.⁴¹ At the same time, it also offers a manoeuvring space for persons from non-governmental areas to start performing some of the diplomatic tasks or functions in various environments, while using their own personal prestige, influence and popular charisma. There is an impression that this strengthens the presence, importance and frequency of individualism as a characteristic of the diplomatic profession. This impression is even stronger when we look at *ad hoc* envoys, originating from popular fields, like music, film, sport, advertisement etc. Whatever their origin is, they are to a certain extent perceived as diplomats, although they are not. But they use some skills, which traditionally adhere to diplomats, so their original charisma is more powerful, while adding to it the diplomatic image. Apart from understanding diplomats as individualists, this also shows us the importance and prestige of the diplomatic profession, which is many times mystified, being at the same time not fully known and understood (what at the same time does not decrease its public attractiveness). While the diplomatic profession is still to a certain extent mystified, also myths and other works of literature are becoming a research matter of diplomatic analysis.⁴²

This train of thought brings us to the concepts of sports diplomacy and celebrity diplomacy.⁴³ We could understand both of them as the use of charismatic and successful persons, who are asked to be engaged in dealing with issues of a global importance, like climate change, illness-

39 There are many former heads of state who act as special representatives for various tasks and stand for their former reputation, image and persuasiveness.

40 This evolution also marks steady transformation towards postmodern diplomacy (Jazbec, 2009, pp.44–46).

41 For more on diplomacy and its changes in the era of globalization see Jazbec (2009, pp.53–56) and Riordan, 2003.

42 We could list some of such classical literary achievements, like the Slovene national story Martin Krpan (Jazbec, 2015) or the British bestseller Harry Potter (Neumann and Nexon, 2006) or masterpieces from the early modern era (Hampton, 2009).

43 For the first see Defrance and Chamot, 2008, and for the second Cooper, 2008.

es, poverty etc. In both cases, there is a huge impact, naturally, on individuals, on concrete persons, who are famous for their outstanding results and where there is the widespread perception that they achieved those results by themselves, as a result of a personal, individual struggle and effort.⁴⁴ An additional perception is that those persons, since they are so popular, could be also efficient in pursuing various tasks, where one would primarily need charisma and not necessarily other skills (like negotiation, professional approach and techniques etc.).⁴⁵ Sport and celebrity diplomacy is also understood as a means by which huge sporting, musical, or similar events bring together politicians, who are then able, in a relaxed and more personal environment, to strive for results which are out of reach in a formal, tense, sometimes also conflictual atmosphere.

Consequently, sportspersons and celebrities could find themselves in two different roles and positions. From one point of view, they, for their achievements and attractiveness of their profession, bring together high-level stakeholders and decision-makers. And from another point of view, they are the people who strive to reach for a solution, to bring two parties together, to bring attention to a problem or an issue, which with their help becomes more acceptable or at all acceptable. As already noted, we deal with them here in the latter meaning. As outstanding individuals, they attain immense popularity and possibly also increased influence; therefore they are engaged as envoys, as de facto diplomats. They would not be able to get such tasking without being successful, and they could not be successful in their professions without possessing huge individual potential. From one point of view, depending on the circumstances, they perform as a medium, bringing together diplomats and politicians to discuss issues, while performing their job, in a relaxed, creative, friendly, informal atmosphere, created by joint effort and enthusiasm. They use their influence, prestige, power to animate, to create such conditions, again, as individuals. And from another point of view, they are promoters of issues, drivers of processes, actors in the international arena, to a limited extent, diplomats.

We would say that in both cases their activity refers directly and generally to three diplomatic functions, the first, the third and the fifth; namely a) representing the sending State in the receiving State, b) ne-

⁴⁴ Of course it is widely known and understandable that for example a gold medal winner from the Olympic Games would not be able to achieve this by him/herself alone, without huge team. But the public perception is of one person, that concrete person and not the team.

⁴⁵ Cooper (2008) examines the cases of Bono, Bob Geldof, Audrey Hepburn and Angelina Jolie.

gotiating with the Government of the receiving State, and c) promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State (...).⁴⁶ This wording should be understood, as said, generally and partially also in symbolical sense. They represent their state in the international community, and not directly and necessarily in the receiving State; they negotiate, when they do, with a given government or institution to achieve a given aim, and not exactly with the government of the receiving State, and they promote friendly relations between states and people as a general, universal value, which is not related only to the relations between two states. But they perform the diplomatic functions of representing, negotiation and promoting. And they do this, or, better, they were asked to do this, since they have charisma, influence, prestige, since they are supposed to be listened to. This would not have been the case if they had not been outstanding individuals.

A COMPARISON ON THE DIPLOMATIC PARQUET

This brings us in the second, as already mentioned and obviously primarily generalized part of our contribution, to the comparison between sportspersons and diplomats, both understood as individuals. As already mentioned, too, we focus in this contribution on Slovene sportspersons, who by stereotype should be individuals, and use them as a back-up for our generalization.

To be able to draw some final conclusions from our research, we take a look at some characteristics of both diplomats and sportspersons, as we understand them. They both represent their countries – diplomats as professional members of the diplomatic service, which is a part of public administration, and sportspersons as members of national teams at various international competitions. Their formal relation to their state is generally the same, but varies in different aspects, mainly referring to their appearance, behaviour and area of responsibility. Diplomats represent their state because of their employee status in the diplomatic service and sportspersons because of their outstanding achievements in the sports arena.

We try to point out similarities as well as differences between them to be able to see how individualism appears and functions in their performance. This, the second comparison, takes place on the diplomatic parquet, while the first one took place in the sports arena (Table No.

⁴⁶ Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Article 3.

2), though we think that both fields are or at least could be similarly slippery and demanding. We present it in the following table.

Table 4: A Comparison between Diplomats and Sportspersons

Diplomats	Sportspersons
Individualists	Individualists
Outstanding results	Outstanding results
Generally visible achievements and hidden failures	Clearly visible achievements and failures
Less clear messages for broader public	Clear messages for broader public
High frequency of media appearances	High frequency of media appearances
Identification with states	Identification with states
Identification with governments	Identification with people
Directs representatives of governments	Indirect representatives of countries
Instructed frame of expression	Open frame of expression
Employment status in the diplomatic service	Status in the national team achieved by outstanding results

We could say there are many similarities between diplomats and sportspersons as far as their individualism is concerned. However, these similarities differ a) in the way they enter either the diplomatic service (the employment issue) or the national team (qualifications in each case), b) how limited the frame of their behaviour as members of those organizations is (diplomatic service: strict rules of behaviour; national sport team: relaxed rules of behaviour), c) the frame of expression on behalf of the organization (diplomats per instruction, sportspersons basically per their own impression), and d) the public visibility of their results (diplomats: sometimes achievements are not immediately recognizable and may even be hidden on purpose, while failures are as a rule hidden for political reasons; sportspersons: both achievements and failures are immediately visible).

In any case, the opinion prevails that they are both highly profiled individualists, which enables them to be successful. We would also believe that in the Slovene case this individualism generally originates from the geographical, historical, psychological as well as political environment, which is reflected partially in stereotypes about Slovenes as sportspersons, too. To be able to claim this for the Slovene diplomats as well, one should undergo another research effort.

Diplomats, chosen by random or consistent choice, represent their countries and are a reflection of their societies (including being the result of the four determinants from Table 3).⁴⁷ In this regard they also cannot avoid possessing identities that enable stereotypes. Here we also see a social and psychological connection between sportspersons and diplomats. They, diplomats, cannot avoid such stereotyping enabling identity regardless of the fact if they ski, swim or play football or not. As diplomats, they primarily work per instruction, which would also mean that, while exercising their duty, their individualism comes to the surface and influences the exact mode of their behaviour (which should not necessarily be something wrong). They are – both sportspersons and diplomats – under the same psychological and social pressure, while exercising their duty. Sportspersons do it in public, diplomats away from the public. Nevertheless, their work is for both of them, in spite of high pressures and expectations, a high-level routine, maybe also because they are individualists.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of our presentation was to find a possible link between sportspersons and diplomats, both being understood as individuals.

In the first part we elaborated on the stereotype that Slovenes are not successful in collective sports, but in individual sports. We have tried to examine this with presenting, comparing and commenting facts in selected individual sports vs. collective sports (skiing and swimming vs. football and basketball). Together with an additional pair, we followed three levels of comparison (primarily skiing vs. football, additionally swimming vs. basketball, and as support athletics vs. handball). An important part of our research has been the additional thesis that says that after the independence of Slovenia, Slovenes have been

⁴⁷ Digol (2010) speaks in her analysis of diplomats in the post-communist countries about four factors as well, three of them the same as ours in Table 3 (historical, geographical and political) and the fourth one different (cultural).

more successful in collective sports than in individual sports. Here, we tried also to take into account the EU membership of Slovenia and its possible effect on the researched topic.

Our findings could be summarized in three main conclusions, as follows:

- a. During the first researched period (former Yugoslavia) Slovenes were successful in individual sports (skiing and swimming /men primarily/, but absent in athletics) and not in collective ones (football, basketball and handball), although they had a few outstanding individuals in collective sports (except handball).
- b. During the second researched period (the Slovene state) Slovenes showed a certain decline in individual sports as far as the number of outstanding skiers and the superiority of their results is concerned (but a high number of successful women skiers appeared) and basically the same level of successfulness in swimming, but an outburst in athletics. However, they demonstrated an unprecedented success in researched collective sports (both in team results and in number of successful individuals in these sports).
- c. The supporting pair of sports (athletics and handball) has contributed significantly to our research results. It has cemented the image of Slovenes as individuals and helped us notice the emerging success in collective sports. The latter is a new phenomenon, both with regard to the number of sports and number of outstanding individuals in these sports.

As far as the first part is concerned, we could form the following main conclusion, namely, that Slovenes are successful in individual sports, but have also appeared as successful in collective sports, where also exceptional individuals stand out. To be even more concise on the general level and taking into account both periods (four decades altogether), we would try to say that Slovenes are above all individuals, whatever the sport.

This could be seen both from traditional success in individual sports and from newly emerging success in collective sports. The former – however – witnesses structural development and change (fewer outstanding skiers with less outstanding results in the second period, but still clearly present, as well as the increased appearance of highly successful women in the second period; the same level in swimming and

the unprecedented outburst in athletics), but remains to be strong, while the latter stands out again for remarkable individuals and, what is new, for team results. They are – as individuals – successful in those collective sports where Slovenes traditionally were not successful. Therefore, it seems that individualism still creates the overall image and transforms it further into the researched and generated stereotype.⁴⁸

In the second part we tried to find – and we think we did – a correlation between diplomats and sportspersons, both understood as outstanding individualists. This, we believe, enables sportspersons to appear occasionally as *ad hoc* diplomats, being engaged in various tasks out of their usual scope and area. While doing this, they de facto represent their own countries, they promote friendly relations in concrete cases or generally, as a universal value, and they also negotiate, if tasked with this. But they are not diplomats; they just behave like them, since they are successful individuals. Here they bring additional manoeuvring space to diplomatic activity, which diplomats, being official, formal representatives of their states and governments, for the very same reason can not.

We have focused our attention in this research on Slovenes, since they have been already in former Yugoslavia stereotyped as individuals, being successful in individual sports, such as skiing and swimming. We also tried to show that this stems from their history and refers also to their long tradition of skiing and diplomatic activity (what is both sometimes mythologized). The main limitation that occurs in our research is the fact that we focused on a complex and complicated topic, internally very structured. The difference in form and style of our approach in the two parts highlights this. But we also think that it is much easier to generalize facts and trends if this is backed up with thorough empirical support. At the same time, this offers much food for thought for similar future contemplation. The issue of stereotypes has been present throughout the discussion, although hardly ever in the first front. In any case, stereotypes basically work from the background and in a multilevel, complex manner.

⁴⁸ This picture could be additionally supported by the examples of Rajmond Debevec (shooter in various disciplines) and Petra Majdič (cross-country skier). He won gold at 2000 Winter Olympic Games and is a multiple medalist at numerous events and disciplines (including cross bow), but particularly stands out in both research periods for his participating at seven Olympics (twice in the Yugoslav team and five times in the Slovene team; including bronze from the London 2012 Olympics, where he participated for the eighth time and won three medals). She stands out for winning silver at the 2007 World Ski Championship and numerous victories in the World Cup during the last decade and a half at least.

Whatever the overall findings of our research effort are, we could say that myths and above all stereotypes form an important and yet inevitable part of daily discourse and social interaction, no matter what the current circumstances and the time period in which they appear are. The prevailing opinion that sportspersons and celebrities could perform as diplomats might as well be a kind of myth, stemming both from the difficulties and mystification of diplomatic tasks as well as from the necessity to involve in their fulfilment highly successful individuals from other areas.

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