

Contextual Factors influencing the South African Elite Sporting System: An 'open system' approach

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**Contextual Factors influencing the South African Elite
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An 'open system' approach**

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For Peer Review Only

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON AN ELITE SPORTING SYSTEM**Abstract**

Elite sporting systems are often descriptions of established practices with little regard for national contexts. This paper examined the influence of contextual factors on the elite sporting system of South-Africa. The contextual factors were evaluated through the lens of systems theory (Components: Economic, social, political, legal, and technology). A maximum variation strategy was used to select experts from SA and varied European countries and South African governmental stakeholders. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Deductive and inductive methods were utilised during the thematic analysis. The preceding Apartheid regime, the complexity of the 'quota system', and the prevailing social and economic environment were identified as the major contextual aspects penetrating the elite sporting system of SA. This study emphasised the importance of understanding the national contexts of elite sporting systems, as this information can provide input when revising policies differently in order to achieve international sporting success.

Keywords: Open system; Elite sport; Contextual factors; South Africa; Systems theory.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide changes in elite sport organisation over the past decade, created a growing interest from both researchers and policymakers alike, in evaluating how elite sport policies and systems were developed in different countries (Andersen, Houlihan, & Ronglan, 2015; Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Ingeve, Rommetveldt, & Rommetveldt, 2007; De Bosscher, Sotiriadou, & Van Bottenburg, 2013; De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & Van Bottenburg, 2015). Some of these studies focused on examining the determinant factors of successful elite sporting systems (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Digel, Burk, & Farhner, 2006; Green & Oakley, 2010). Complementary research focused on the historical, social, cultural and political perspectives concerning elite sports (Andersen et al., 2015; Bergsgard et al., 2007; Green, 2004; Houlihan & Green, 2008). The majority of these studies have recognised that sport operates within an ‘open system’, which refers to the permeable boundaries of elite sport with the *broader distal* environment (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Certo & Certo, 2009; Chelladurai, 2014). The *broader distal* environment represents contextual factors at the macro level which are inclusive of the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of a country (Digel, 2005; Chelladurai, 2009; 2014). Even though the literature on elite sport acknowledges that elite sporting systems are influenced by these conditions of a country, very few investigations further analysed the intricacies about what context is.

The context in South Africa (SA) is very specific, mainly due to the multi-cultural society, which is apparent from the vast amount of traditions, languages spoken, and cultures existent in the country (Mokgoro, 1998). Also, the country is faced with varying challenges

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1 ranging from high unemployment rates, poverty and persisting inequalities between racial
2
3 groups (Jacobs, De Bosscher, Venter & Scheerder, 2018). Nongogo and Toriola (2014)
4
5 further clarified that the South African country is thus multi-layered, and consists of a mixture
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7 of rival cultures, perplexing identities, and ideologies, which may sometimes be perceived as
8
9 perilous. Noted within the literature is that studies should aim to understand national specific
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11 contexts, as some countries contexts will either be supportive of an elite sporting system,
12
13 whilst others may enforce limitations on individual actions (De Souza, 2014; Ivarado, Honey,
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15 Greenhalgh, Pearman, Dowding, Cope, Long, Jayne, Gill, Kotze, & Randell, 2017; Pawson &
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17 Tilley, 1997). An investigation of an elite sporting system has to consider its surrounding
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19 context, as disregarding it would lead to a restricted and provisional depiction of the
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21 effectiveness of the system in its entirety when policies are reviewed (Pawson & Tilley, 1997,
22
23 2004). In addition, the effectiveness of policies will vary according to the dynamic interaction
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25 with the social and economic factors (Stead, 2008). The aim of this study was to contribute to
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27 the understanding of how contextual factors can influence the elite sporting system of SA.
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29 The research question guiding this aim was: To what extent do contextual factors influence an
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31 elite sporting system?
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40 Through theoretical analysis, systems theory was used as a lens to guide the
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42 investigation and evaluate the phenomena of inquiry. Systems theory defines systems as
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44 inter-related elements which work together as an interacting whole (Mazzei, Silveira Bohme
45
46 & De Bosscher, 2016). Additionally, 'systems theory provides a macro paradigm for the
47
48 study of social organisations' (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972, p. 459). Studying context is
49
50 imperative, as the environment influences the latter parts of a system (Mazzei et al., 2016). In
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52 this regard, systems theory was used in this study due to the inclusive manner in which it
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54 portrays the importance of the contextual reality of a system (Chelladurai, 2009, 2014; Kast &
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56 Rosenzweig, 1972). The understanding of contextual factors will aid in identifying whether a
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3 general 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Cloete & De Coning, 2011; De Bosscher et al., 2015) to
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5 elite sport policies can be used in the existing contextual environment of SA. This study
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7 assessed the country-specific context of a so-called emergingⁱ the country through the lens of
8
9 an 'open systems approach'.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Elite Sport Literature

19 In elite sport research, varying scholars have focused on identifying factors relating to
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21 the needs of successful elite sporting systems (Houlihan & Green, 2005; De Bosscher et al.,
22
23 2015), whilst others focused on the contribution of resources, education, mass media, science
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25 and talent identification in elite sport (Digel et al., 2006). Furthermore, the Olympics and its
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27 significance have also been identified as a popular theme in elite sport studies (Houlihan &
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29 Zheng, 2013). Additionally, researchers examined politics and the concept of path
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31 dependency concerning elite sports (Houlihan, 2005; Green & Collins, 2008). In terms of
32
33 environmental factors, Bergsgard et al. (2007) and Houlihan and Green (2008) evaluated the
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35 historical, social, cultural and political perspectives in relation to elite sport. A comprehensive
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37 framework namely; the SPLISS model (Sport Policy Factors Leading to International
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39 Sporting Success), has been identified in the elite sport literature as robust in terms of
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41 evaluating pillars and critical success factors in terms of elite sport policies. However, a
42
43 limitation was emphasised by scholars relating to the models' exclusion of contextual factors
44
45 in the analyses (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

51 How elite sporting systems operate are highly context specific and dependent
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53 (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Bolke & Robinson, 2009). Authors identified concerns in sport
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55 management research, in that evaluations on elite sport tend to seek similarities and ignore
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57 cultural specifications, ethnic and social differences, in search of making broad
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3 generalisations to all contexts (Henry, Mansour, Mahfoud, & Hung-Yu, 2005; Houlihan &
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5 Green, 2008; Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Grix, 2018). Elite sporting systems cannot be
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7 analysed in isolation of the contextual factors as this would not provide a comprehensive
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9 picture of the implementation (Digel et al., 2006; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Bolke &
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11 Robinson, 2009; Andersen & Ronglan, 2012; De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Bosscher, De
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13 Knop, & Vertonghen, 2016; Martins, De Bosscher, De Coq, Jacobs & Legg, 2019). The aim
14
15 of an elite sporting system should be to "find the right blend of system ingredients and
16
17 processes that will fit the context of history, economy, politics, and culture of a nation" (De
18
19 Bosscher et al., 2016, p. 84). Within elite sport literature varying studies have identified the
20
21 importance of understanding contextual influences, and continually recommend that these
22
23 aspects are included in evaluations on elite sporting systems (Digel et al., 2006; Blamey &
24
25 Mackenzie, 2007; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Bolke & Robinson, 2009).

2.2 Literature Review on Macro-Level Contextual Factors

26
27 A systems view is extremely valuable in depicting the social, cultural and economic
28
29 factors that influence the sporting system and the dynamic interactions it presents
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31 (Chelladurai, 2014). From a theoretical viewpoint, an open systems approach 'by including
32
33 context in evaluations can provide a *gestalt view* on a complex situation and increase the
34
35 prospects of applying appropriate actions' (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972, p. 462). Kast and
36
37 Rosenzweig (1972, p. 454) noted that 'academic disciplines take a narrow, partial systems
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39 view (not including context) and find comfort in the relative certainty which it creates'. Even
40
41 though contextual factors at the macro-level operate beyond organisations boundaries, they do
42
43 affect the operations (Chelladurai, 2014). All contextual elements external to an organisation
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45 or system are considered the environment, therefore, it is important to identify the external
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47 variables (Chelladurai, 2014).
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Certo and Certo (2009) assert that the broader distal environment (context) includes the following components: (1) Economic, (2) social, (3) political, (4) legal, and (5) technology. Furthermore, Certo and Certo (2009) defined these contextual factors as: (1) the economic component includes aspects relating to the economy and income, (2) the social component refers to demography and characteristics of the population (e.g. social values), (3) political eludes to the political factors of a country (e.g. democracy, politics), (4) legal factors are closely linked to the political component which refers to the laws and rules of the country, and (5) technology is associated with the production of goods and services. These broader distal environmental components as identified by Certo and Certo (2009) will be the underlying variables under investigation in this study. In this regard, comprehending contextual influences at the macro level will assist in the knowledge of 'what works for whom, and in what circumstances' (Pawson & Tilley, 2004, p.2). In the following section, the specific South African context will be briefly discussed to provide insight into the distal broad environment of the country.

2.3 The case of South Africa

The make-up of the South African population constitutes various racial-ethnic groups (Kane-Berman & Macfarlane, 2008) which are based on the social constructs evident in society. The South African population endured the Apartheid project for many years, which was an implementation strategy based on the ideology of separation centred on one's skin colour (Posel, 2011). During both colonialism and the Apartheid regime cultural subordination occurred, which led to African traditions, cultures, and knowledge slowly becoming undervalued through the implementation of Western culture, education and the introduction of Christianity (Esterhuizen, 2015; Rajput & Van Deventer, 2010). Society is determined by its social context, which includes the levels of social class, social structures and various social roles (Esterhuizen, 2015). Seekings and Nattrass (2005) stated that the

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON AN ELITE SPORTING SYSTEM

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3 racial discrimination of the past has shifted from that of race to social class. In contrast,
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5 Esterhuizen (2015) mentions that social class is determined by market relations, but due to the
6
7 systematic degradation of 'black' people in SA in all previous sectors, the social class
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9 differences are still evident by the significant inequalities existent between racial groups.
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11

12 The post-Apartheid government was tasked to transform SA and address all societal
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14 problems caused by the discrimination of the past, which explains the omnipresence of
15
16 government in all sectors, including that of sport (Beresford, 2012; Rajput & Van Deventer,
17
18 2010; Wolcke & Heymann, 2012). In the past few years, the South African citizens have been
19
20 frustrated with the slow rate of economic transformation resulting from the continued
21
22 inequality between ethnic groups which ranged from: (1) unequal and poor education, which
23
24 negatively affects marketability within industry and employee mobility, (2) lack of
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26 investment and empowerment in small/micro-enterprises and the informal sector, (3) existent
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28 wage gap between sexes and wage decline which leads to job dissatisfaction, and (4) large
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30 unemployment rates in the formal sector (Cronje, Ndebele, Matwasa, & Dimant, 2018;
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32 Rogerson, 2016; UN, 2002; Wolcke & Heymann, 2012; Yu, 2012). As demonstrated in this
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34 section, the literature on SA highlights the specificity of the country's context and illustrates
35
36 how very different it is when compared to other nations. The context of SA ultimately
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38 influences people's behaviour, events, and social conditions (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). For
39
40 these reasons, elite sport cannot be fully understood in the country without understanding the
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42 extent to which an 'open system' may influence the elite sporting system in the South African
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44 context.
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3. Methodology

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CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON AN ELITE SPORTING SYSTEM

This paper intends to examine the influence of contextual factors on the elite sporting system of SA, through the lens of an ‘open systems approach’ by using the components as identified in Certo and Certo (2009).

3.1 Study Design

The phenomena under investigation were examined by means of an exploratory approach with the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to examine how contextual factors influence the elite sporting system of SA. As systems theory was used as a lens to guide the study, the following contextual components, as suggested by Certo and Certo (2009) were used to deductively collect qualitative data, namely: (1) Economical components, (2) social components, (3) political components, (4) legal components, and (5) technology components.

3.2 Participants

A purposive sampling method was used through a maximal variation strategy, comprising only participants with an a-priori theoretical understanding on the phenomena of inquiry (Anney, 2004; Groenewald, 2004; Plowright, 2011; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The sample included 16 participants: five sport management experts from SA, five South African governmental stakeholders and six sport management experts from six European countries (Belgium, England, the Netherlands, Scotland, and Sweden). The sport management academics had a research background in the following fields of interest, namely; social, economic, cultural, historical and/or political factors with regard to (elite) sports. Academics were identified from the South African sport management literature and included experts in this study based on their understanding of the specific South African context. In addition, experts were identified from international (elite) sport studies because of their expertise on elite sporting systems and open system approaches. Herewith, the European experts served as a validation means regarding the contextual variables under investigation in this study.

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Furthermore, governmental stakeholders in SA were included on both provincial and national levels, due to their first-hand knowledge on the implementation of elite sporting systems within the South African context. All governmental stakeholders worked within the portfolio of elite sport in SA.

Semi-structured interviews took place either face-to-face (fourteen interviews) or through Skype call sessions (two interviews). To guarantee the integrity of research findings the 'safeguarding' of all participants' identities (Anney, 2004) were maintained with the distribution of consent forms which were all signed. This declaration stipulated to uphold the confidentiality of all participants, by providing code names to each expert (e.g. Expert 1). Ethics approval was granted for the research project by the research ethics committee (REC) (SU-HSD-003768).

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Interview protocol.

Before the commencement of the actual interviews, procedures on the trustworthiness of the interview protocol needed to be considered to establish rigor within the study (Anney, 2004; Groenewald, 2004). Firstly, a pilot study and an expert planning committee was carried out to understand the contextual variables of inquiry emphasised through the lens of the systems theory to structure the interview protocol. The debriefing with the pilot study participants (n=4) and confirmability with expert committee members assisted in (1) the precision of questions pertaining to the exploration of contextual factors, (2) the understanding of the associated variables, and the (3) choice of words used, which collectively contributed towards minor changes of the interview protocol.

The revised interview protocol was then used, which started with the explanation of the background and purpose of the study. Following the introduction, the funnel principle was applied, by starting with an open-ended broad question to induct any new contextual factors.

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An example of a broad question included: ‘Describe how contextual factors (at the macro level) could influence an elite sporting system?’. The interview then further progressed into the specific identified contextual components, e.g.: ‘Regarding social factors of a country, explain how it could influence an elite sporting system?’. Within each specific contextual question, various sub-probes and key concepts were allotted in a topical sequence if the subsections of each question were not fully responded to within the specific contextual questions. South African participants were asked to relate all questions to the SA context, whilst international participants were asked to describe the factors by Certo and Certo (2009) more broadly concerning its influence on an elite sporting system, as a means to validate the contextual variables.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis process started with an indwelling process through reading and re-reading the transcriptions to gain familiarisation with the data. Thereafter, the qualitative data was placed into the Nvivo.11 qualitative software to structure the findings, so that statements obtaining meaning could be explicated from the interviews. In addition, a thematic analysis was utilised to form themes within the Nvivo.11 software. The clustering of themes was executed by grouping the central contextual factors deductive from systems theory lens into various main themes. Additional main themes inductive from the data were categorised if different from the deductive themes. In addition, the coding development of sub-themes within the main themes was completed. Subsequently, a content analysis was ensued to identify the percentage of participants who referred to the different contextual factors, which indicated the dispersion of responses to the different variables. Lastly, an analytical summary was used during the entire data analysis process which was utilised to characterise differences between the data sets, produce typologies, and map connections between themes. This summary assisted in identifying the relationships and the influence contextual factors had on

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an elite sporting system, which is further described in the next section.

4. Results

In the following section, the findings pertaining to the various contextual components derived from the theoretical underpinning, and the inductive results will be illustrated to comprehend the influence of these factors on the elite sporting system of SA. The broader distal environmental factors as highlighted in the Certo and Certo (2009) indicated the following deductive main themes through the lens of systems theory, which is indicated by numbers (1-5 in italics). The emerging sub-themes inductive from the data are specified by alphabet characters (a-d). These included the following: (1) *Economic Components*: (a) affordability of sport; (2) *Social Components*: (a) demographic factors, (b) cultural factors; (3) *Political Components*: (a) historical factors, (b) quota / target system, (c) educational factors, (d) health factors; (4) *Legal Components*; (5) *Technology Components*, (a) type of school. All participants in the study have identified the influence of contextual factors on an elite sporting system: as emphasised by expert 1 ‘An elite sporting system without taking into account history, demographics, race, gender, affordability [individual and family affordability] and resourcing of particular sports codes in contexts, then we are subsequently living in a false paradise’ (Expert 1). In Table 1, a synopsis is provided of the inductive and deductive main themes, as well as the sub-themes and codes within, which influence the elite sporting system in SA.

[Insert Table 1 near here]

4.1 *Economic Component*

Experts in this study felt quite strongly about the link between the economy of a country and the elite sporting system by stating that ‘the economy is the engine which drives the agency of the system’ (Expert 3). Furthermore, it has been described, that ‘there's a direct

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3 correlation between levels of the economy of a country and the outputs of an elite sporting
4 system' (Expert 1). In an analysis identified by expert 4, the 'economic background of the
5 elite performers in Olympic sports was overwhelmingly skewed towards the upper-income
6 groups, for economic reasons'. In SA, the economy is unequally skewed between racial
7 groups due to the past of Apartheid. The 'majority of the South Africans live in poverty; and
8 because they're in poverty, elite sports serve the middle class and the wealthy' (Expert 1). The
9 reason for this is that it's 'overwhelmingly significant that elite sport is increasingly expensive
10 to do well in' (Expert 7). In comparison to other countries, 'socio-economic issues occur all
11 over the world but the difference in SA is that it comes with the Apartheid prejudice' (Expert
12 2). From a financial perspective in the SA context, respondents detailed the positioning of
13 economics in association with available resources, the status of quality education and the link
14 with elite sport:

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31 If you don't have money, you are not going to attend the best schools. And it is
32 known in SA that if you attend the best schools you are going to become the best
33 sportsman. This is a known fact. The best rugby, cricket, and netball players come
34 from the best schools. And why? Because the schools provide, access to excellent
35 coaching, facilities, a culture of sport, sporting excellence and access to education.
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42 Thus, athletes get a good education, but also a good sporting basis. (Expert 2).

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Herewith, only those who have access to available resources in SA can afford to send
their children to good schools, those who do not, even if they might 'have highly successful
children, cannot send them anywhere' (Expert 2). As a consequence, 'elite sports performance
is very much linked to family background' (Expert 9). This notion ties into the importance of
income and economics, which is illustrated below by participants, from a South African
perspective:

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I think that if we talk about the impact of the economy on a sport, something that matters directly is employment and income. In families where you have employment and you have a reasonable income, there is a chance for people to participate in sport. A lot of athletes are simply disqualified from sports because of a limitation in income. It has an impact on the high-performance sport, because your base of those to even just participate in the sport is much limited, compared to total populations elsewhere in the world (Expert 5).

A suggestion was provided by Expert 14 wherein it was identified, 'if we can inject funding in sport, place the right structures, and professionalise our sport, then it will have a huge impact on our society'. Similarly, participant 15 re-emphasised this by stating, 'if we all invest and everyone is given a fair opportunity, we can get all codes to professionalise and we can get coaches and athletes employed to do this, herewith, addressing the issues of inequality and unemployment at the same time'.

4.1.1 Affordability of sport. Expert 5, tried to illustrate a holistic picture with regards to affordability and the link with choice of a sport by asserting that; 'there's a whole range of elite sports types that are not suitable in that you have to have a very special resource allocation to be able to excel in those sports'. Realistically from this perspective 'there is only a certain percentage of children, and high-performance athletes that can afford it' (Expert 5). Furthermore, more globally, 'once you move to those sports that require expensive equipment, then it's rich countries who compete in sailing and rowing and cycling, it's not poor countries' (Expert 7). In clarification, the wealth of a country does not essentially mean a 'rich country, but the willingness of the governments of poorer countries to invest a higher proportion of the GDP in elite sport.' (Expert 7). Herewith, there is a need for the private sector to become more involved financially in all elite sports in SA because 'if you look at sports like rugby and cricket with big sponsorships, it's driving the sports' (Expert 2).

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4.2 Social Component

Social contextual factors are 'very much influenced by where you grow up, influences in your home, and the schools' (Expert 11). The challenge comes into play when 'people grow up in a very homogeneous community where their beliefs and thoughts are not challenged in any way' (Expert 3). In SA, 'the socially constructed understanding of what social worlds of people are, are currently fashioned around gender, redress, and even opening up for gay sports' (Expert 11). Concerning gender, the perspective was noted that 'it's not socially acceptable for females to do sport, it is perceived that they should be mothers of children and raise the next generation, but the boys or the males could. So in that way social situations, social circumstances are very much influencing the elite sports system and how likely it is, for instance, for kids especially females to do sport' (Expert 7). Due to the segregated past and lack of integration, 'the nature of relationships determine a lot of what happens in a team' (Expert 5). In this South African context, you then have 'the coach who is flying in from Scandinavia that may not be aware of those dynamics in the local football team; then certainly those things have a dynamic on elite sport' (Expert 5). In addition, 'we are lying if we say there is no social impact on elite sports' (Expert 6). All of these social aspects in elite sport 'dictate relationships, socialisation patterns, and prescribes how it manifests' (Expert 11). Therefore, it 'is crucial in how we shape elite sports policy' (Expert 8).

4.2.1 Demographic Factors. In SA, the population is situated at 'twenty-seven percent unemployment rates, a Gini coefficient that's the highest in the world, and someone is trying to be an elite soccer player as opposed to just putting food on the table, the choice is stark' (Expert 1). Furthermore, 'the youth unemployment rate is a big issue, thus the context is poverty and youth, so the discourse cannot be understood, without understanding how it manifests in context' (Expert 11). The social aspects are related to the fact that SA is a, 'completely unequal society, so the starting points for all athletes

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3 and coaches are fundamentally different' (Expert 2). A big problem is that the 'gap
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5 between rich and poor is gigantic, and then in terms of the mind as well, where people
6
7 are still thinking in a certain way and still seeing people of colour as being inferior'
8
9 (Expert 16). In SA, 'poverty levels matters greatly. There's a large number of the
10
11 population who cannot participate in 'normal' sport, purely because of resources or
12
13 circumstances' (Expert 5). Participants mentioned that 'the majority of South Africans
14
15 don't have good jobs, can't afford to send their kids to good schools. So they end up in
16
17 poor schools' (Expert 2). Correspondingly, a 'significant amount of top athletes are
18
19 coming from situations where they have nothing' (Expert 6). In this regard, 'a whole lot
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21 of athletes originate from disadvantaged communities, single parenting, and come from
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23 areas where substance abuse, gangsterism, and unemployment is rife' (Expert 12). In
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25 addition, expert 5 highlighted that:

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If we put the demography of SA through a lens by looking at poverty levels, and who is disadvantaged in terms of race and gender and geographical location, then a particular story emerges. These demographic statistics need to be imposed or superimposed over the development realities that we have in SA. It impacts directly on different sports types in different ways.

The specifics around young athletes are 'important to see how many youths are in your country, in order to determine how many are available to play sports at a high level' (Expert 8). The problem is that in rural towns in SA, 'the population numbers are too small to be geographically concentrated' (Expert 5). Moreover, 'statistics in terms of male/female, the girl child is disadvantaged with regards to demographic figures in terms of single parents and girls falling pregnant' (Expert 5). In addition, the demographical factors provide information as to how these factors influence an athlete and refer to the 'quality of life, that has very much to do with well-being; holistic well-being which is inclusive of physical, emotional, spiritual

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well-being, which is defined by your quality of life' (Expert 3).

4.2.2 Cultural Factors. In different countries, the cultural significance of sport is portrayed differently, meaning 'how people see sports, and what the value contribution of sports is' (Expert 8). In addition, cultural factors have 'an influence in terms of why people take up a sport, but it's also a marker as to why people don't take up sport' (Expert 2). The significance of this idea is that 'culture influences the propensity of kids to be involved in sport' (Expert 2). The differences in cultures are related to 'how people look at their body, the importance of the body, the importance of winning or the importance of co-operation' (Expert 8). Expert 4 states that the top sport in SA is 'rugby, which is both incredibly divisive in the country but also symbolic'. Expert 1 mentions, 'kids in African black townships grow up with a football, they don't grow up with a rugby ball'. Herewith, the emphasis should be placed on, 'why particular cultures are attracted to particular sports, and this revolves around the lack of availability, and the lack of other support structures' (Expert 2).

Through diversity, 'you get to know different religions and different cultures' (Expert 2). One respondent mentioned 'in SA, as a nation, we, are not we. In the fragmentation of populations within the South African context, culture plays a major role' (Expert 11). Expert 2, elaborated on the extent of this concern within SA by mentioning that, 'because of the diverse society, to perform well in a team you have to gel, you have to work together despite differences'. Therefore, teams have to work together even when people are 'not very fond of diversity, or cultural diversity' (Expert 10). Thus, cultural factors linked to the elite sporting system 'has a lot to do with acceptance and tolerance, which has an impact on your sporting performance' (Expert 3). Team dynamics because of diversity variances could expose itself to many disputes, therefore, training is pivotal to 'bridge these gaps by education programs for coaches and players by making them aware of these issues, and more holistically looking at different religions and cultures, respect them and also try and understand that the game is

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played on the field and not necessarily that your cultural beliefs have to be imprinted onto a team' (Expert 2). Furthermore, a suggestion was made to 'take benefit out of diversity instead of looking at it only as a negative factor' (Expert 10). Expert 6 reflects on this phenomenon by mentioning that 'it's difficult to put in practice, but the richness of diversity is rarely explored'. Therefore, cultural factors 'certainly has an impact and especially in countries where ethnicity is a sensitive issue' (Expert 4). Furthermore, expert 10 refers to diversity within the sport, and that it cannot solely be concentrated on the athletes but also by looking at the:

Involvement on different levels, like in administrative, managerial, or in the sports federations. I don't see that many people or sports officials, presidents of federations or coaches – coaches might be some, depending on what kind of sport – but people with influence in the sports federations coming from an ethnically diverse background.

4.3 Political component

4.3.1 Historical Factors. Sport in SA because of the history of segregation, 'is very fractured due to the historical basis of resources going to particular communities, particular schools, and that history cannot be wished away' (Expert 2). Respondents maintain that the history of SA 'also going beyond Apartheid, there's the history of early colonialism by Western European countries' (Expert 11). Furthermore, expert 2 highlighted the effects of such significant historical occurrences:

So because of the Apartheid system, you have a multitude of factors which play a role, And that's particularly, your social and economic status, which comes from a consequence of Apartheid. So you have racial issues, racial-ethnic issues, power issues, and political struggles. And it even plays up in the media, in sporting events, in positions and administration in the workplace.

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3 In conjunction, experts agreed that ‘if something has had an impact during so many
4 years, then it leaves traces’ (Expert 6). Thus, history plays a role in terms of, ‘what an elite
5 sporting system would look like’ (Expert 1). In SA, because of the past, you will find ‘a
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‘white’ person would be perceived as superior, and if you’re ‘black’ you’re perceived as
inferior, and it has psychological effects on later generations. Thus, we have sports people [in
SA], who still felt as if they were made to feel inferior within teams. And it comes from that
history’ (Expert 2). As a consequence ‘you have this infighting and gesturing with each other.
And this is, as a result of some of the historical issues, which directly impacts your elite
performance’ (Expert 2). The confliction of the Apartheid regime ‘affects who is in your team,
how you accept other people, tolerance level, and whether you’re fully emerged in a team
member’ (Expert 3).

4.3.2 Quota/ Target System. In SA, ‘history and politics are tightly intertwined,
wherein in many other countries, history is much less intense, and such a fraught subject
matter’ (Expert 4). Herewith, because of the inequality, the past ‘impacts on the elite sport on
numerous levels regarding the way policies have been intimated by the government e.g.
transformation policies’ (Expert 2). Expert 5 identified that ‘in the beginning, the sports
federations dealt with the Transformation Charter with difficulty and there was even some
resistance concerning development programs and transformation’. Consequently, ‘the
Apartheid system the inequalities had to be redressed’ (Expert 10). Due to the past, ‘we now
have the implementation of a target system [quota system] in an attempt to level the playing
field in terms of opportunities created for players of colour’ (Expert 2). The objective of
purposeful transformation within South African sport is imperative and ‘the positive is that it
has transformed sport, at least from a top-down perspective, how much it has transformed
sport from a bottom-up perspective still needs to be shown’ (Expert 2). Conversely, the effect
of being a player or athlete of colour ‘at a national level, where decisions have been made,

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3 players weren't shy to throw it at another player' (Expert 2). In return, the intricacies
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5 associated with the quota or target system defined by expert 2 is that:
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8 Target systems are different. Thus, you cannot blindly impose a target system
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10 without knowing the value of it and the problems associated with it. Because it
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12 impacts on your elite performance immediately, and it impacts on your team
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14 environment.
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17 4.3.3 Educational Factors. In the first instance, 'elite sport performance is very much
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19 linked to family background' (Expert 7). Herewith, 'sport-active parents bring about sport-
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21 active children, but if you're not a sport-active parent, where else than the education system
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23 would they get that' (Expert 10). As a consequence, 'the education system would directly
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25 impact the elite sports system' (Expert 2). In a 'sports club system, you only reach the ones
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27 who are applying or attending. But if you have physical education in schools, you will meet
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29 all the kids and get a chance to influence them as they pass through these classes' (Expert 7).
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31 It has been noted that 'physical education in schools could be seen as the first step into the
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33 elite sports system' (Expert 3). As a whole in SA, 'the profile of school sport, because of poor
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35 governance and poor schooling systems in SA are severe. Both lack of physical education and
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37 the lack of school sport in the afternoons is having a severe negative impact on elite sport'
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39 (Expert 5). At former model B schools (definition of schools previously in the townships),
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41 there was a 'non-existence of sport, and physical education did not even happen at most of
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43 these schools, thus how do you expect a pupil to excel in a sport if they don't have excellence
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45 within their immediate vicinity' (Expert 2). Therefore, within the schooling system, there is
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47 access to 'a massive pool of talent, but these talents just go nowhere' (Expert 1).
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51 Correspondingly, 'many top 'black' players who are playing in national elite sports, they all
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53 come from bursary systems from good schools. And how many bursaries can we provide to
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55 how many kids to attend a good school? Only a few. So we've missed ninety-five percent of
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3 the players out there' (Expert 2). Herewith, 'there are big holes in the pyramid, as those kids
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5 don't end up in the elite sport system' (Expert 5).

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8 4.3.4 Health Factors. Health and sports participation are very much connected and 'very
9
10 relevant, purely with respect to the levels of participation in your general population' (Expert
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12 5). Expert 11 highlighted the increase in, 'obesity rates, which is why people are physically
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14 inactive as it is the fourth biggest killer of non-communicable diseases'. Expert 5 mentions:

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17 Health is major. The top three killers are HIV/aids, malaria and TB. Thus, let's have a
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19 demographic profile of HIV, TB, and malaria in SA, let's look at which populations they
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21 impact upon. We have to look at the percentage of our population that's undernourished
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23 by the age of six or twelve. Do they stand a chance to end up in the portfolio of high-
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25 performance sport in ten or twenty years from now?

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28 Expert 14 mentioned that 'even now athletes are contracting HIV and Aids'. The
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30 challenges from a South African context is that 'there are many ways in which the health
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32 status of our population, for different target groups, different codes, age groups, or for
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34 male/females which various ways impacts negatively on the elite sport system. You can
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36 improve the health system to be able to improve that' (Expert 5).

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39 4.4 Legal component. Participants identified dishonesty as another deriding factor
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41 influencing the elite sports system due to a 'transparency issue' (Expert 5). Expert 4 describes
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43 this as the 'relative autonomy of sport where politicians were not held to account for the
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45 money, even if the money was spent wrongly'. Experts describe the policies of SA as 'a very
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47 good national sport and recreation plan. But the implementation is the problem. This is what
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49 we can focus on. It's not there' (Expert 5). A positive highlighted by expert 12 with reference
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51 to the legal aspects is that it 'creates a safety net in terms of contractual obligations that need
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53 to met'. Conversely, expert 12 indicates the negative feature of the legal aspects of
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55 governmental policies: 'The unnecessary "red tape" that binds the athlete in terms of access to
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3 services for athletes from Government/Federations/and the Olympic committee. It requires a
4 financial assistance request form which has to go through 3/4 people to be approved and by
5 the time it is approved the athlete has either been to or come from an event or cancelled
6 his/her appointment for a particular service because it was not responded to timeously’.

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12 Expert 13, indicated that ‘in our policies and our documents, we emphasise that
13 priority should be given to the previously disadvantaged’. Similarly, it was noted that ‘the
14 policies are written and positioned to add value to the social and economic environment’
15 (Expert 12). However, other participants noted that ‘the policies of SA looks great on paper,
16 but there is no political commitment to say we're making a change and we're making a shift’
17 (Expert 5). A reason for this challenge was identified due to the ‘investments because the
18 resources made available are not sufficient’ (Expert 15). Another problem highlighted was
19 that the policy processes consist of pivotal documents to guide implementation, ‘incidentally,
20 in the South African sports system we don't have an overall strategy, and we only have a
21 white paper and a plan’ (Expert 5).

4.5 Technology component

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37 Important for elite sport is the ‘availability of scientific methods and information and
38 access to those networks’ (Expert 1). In terms of scientific assistance, ‘the fact that one athlete
39 has access to medical testing, best-sporting facilities, the best equipment, places that athlete in
40 a better advantage’ (Expert 13). The technological aspect should be focused on ‘a sport
41 academy or high-performance centre with advanced technology to test and assist athletes with
42 preparation and training. These trends regarding the availability and access to such systems
43 are of direct consequence’ (Expert 5). Furthermore, participant 12 mentions: ‘Even though
44 this will benefit the elite sporting system immensely as it is what the 21st-century athlete
45 requires, this is highly underrated within SA due to cost constraints. We are light-years away
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in many of our elite codes due to lack of technology and being able to track athletes performances to provide factual data on his/her training or competitions’.

4.5.1 Type of school. Expert 4 denotes that ‘the type of school in many countries is very significant. It’s quite difficult for children who go to state schools to compete at the elite level, certainly in Olympic sports, because they tend to be quite specialised’. Expert 2 highlights the differences between the types of schools and the link between technological and scientific support within the SA context:

You're paying an exorbitant amount of fees, but what you're getting is a good education and access to everything. Fields on your doorstep, and physical education. After school, you have to go and do your sporting codes, twice a week. And this has been happening for many years. You've got the best fields, the best facilities, bowling machines, tackle bags, the latest equipment, you've got video analysis. You're exposed to excellence from a young age. And then from there you just get better and better. For someone from a poor school or a public school to get there, they have to go via a different route because they can't go via their school.

Overall regarding the influence of contextual factors on an elite sporting system Expert 1 noted ‘the assumption in terms of an elite sporting system as if it applies to every context is not true. Having a particular conception of what an elite sporting system would look like, aids comparability. As soon as you get down to the nuances of those categories, the context becomes important because the context is everything, and it's the driving force in terms of being able to make an elite sporting system successful within a particular context’.

5. Discussion

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In this paper, the theoretical underpinning of the systems theory lens through the components of Certo and Certo 2009, was used to explore the influence of contextual factors on the elite sporting system of SA. This study supported the arguments made by previous researchers who indicated that contextual factors are in proximity to policy programs and systems (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; De Souza, 2014; Pawson & Tilley, 2004; Westthorp, Prins, Kusters, Hultink, Guijt, & Brouwers, 2011), as sport operates in an 'open system' (Chelladurai, 2014). As aforementioned, varying studies on elite sport have acknowledged that national contexts do influence an elite sporting system, yet, very few studies evaluated the intricacies of what context is and how it influences elite sport. This study defined main themes and sub-themes relating to how macro-level contextual factors influence the elite sporting system of SA, which may be useful for other 'emerging' or 'developing' countries to explore. The major findings illustrated that because of the previous regime, transformation and 'quotas' which is quite a complex phenomenon, is currently the main driver of political discussions made by the South African government, to bring about equality and inclusivity in sport. Although the 'quota system' has received a large amount of criticism from the sporting environment, it has been acknowledged to provide opportunities to previously disadvantaged athletes at the top level of the performance chain. Associated benefits of the quota system in sport include ensuring diversity within sports teams, the attraction of diverse sponsorships, elimination of stereotypes, and reinforces role models in disadvantaged communities. In contrast to the benefits, the quota system has varying concerns in that it undermines talent, solely focuses on demographic representations, not all sport codes adhere to the requirements, and it produces adverse psychological effects on the players identified as 'quotas' (Dove, Draper, Taliep & Gray, 2016), which causes a divide within the elite sport environment. This divided 'environment' within elite sport leads to old-fashioned attitudes and perceptions, race

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3 stereotyping, racial conflict (increases barriers between racial groups and cultures), and a lack
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5 of integration between athletes and staff.
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8 The purposeful focus on race within South African sport which may not be as
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10 deterministic in other countries, and encourages homogeneous relationships, biased team
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12 selections, low levels of cultural acceptance, and a decrease in athlete's perceptions of their
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14 self-worth. Unequivocally, the dynamic interface between the social and political components
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16 of the systems theory lens indicates a paradigm, wherein the undoing of the segregation of the
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18 past and its influence on sport in relation to the social perspectives attached to it, is quite
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20 challenging and very difficult for the current sport government to eradicate in SA (Booth,
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22 1998; Nongogo & Toriola, 2014; Rademeyer, 2014). This may seem perilous, as it leads to an
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24 array of complexities in the reality of the elite sport environment.
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28 Also, the findings of this study alluded to the social and economic challenges facing
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30 the country, which deeply penetrates the elite sporting system. SA is described as an
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32 'emerging country' with a population size constituting 54, 8 million (Sanders, Phillips &
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34 Vanreusel, 2014; OECD, 2012; SRSA, 2012). Inhabitants are faced with very harsh
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36 constraints whereof fifty percent of the total population lives below the poverty line. Progress
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38 in the elite sporting system has been highlighted to be hindered due to the exposure of varying
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40 social and economic contextual components facing the country at large, such as extreme
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42 poverty, high prevalence of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, drug abuse, high crime
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44 rate, gender bias, lack of affordability of sport, poor nutrition, and inequality in all sectors. In
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46 the end, many talented athletes are confronted with these issues and are thus inaccessible to
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48 the elite sporting system. The specific perplexing contextual environment of SA accordingly
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50 limits equal access to opportunities, which is needed to progress in elite sport.
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55 The strong interface between the contextual factors and the elite sporting system of SA
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57 directly impacts on the prospects of attaining international sporting success. These social and
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CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON AN ELITE SPORTING SYSTEM

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3 economic contextual challenges can largely be influenced by the national government. Whilst
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5 social inequality in the country remains a significant factor, the need for detailed applications
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7 to the sport policies should be implemented as context shapes sport policies. Modifications to
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9 elite sport policies of SA are suggested, which includes the deductive contextual factors as
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11 identified by Certo and Certo (2009), and the inductive themes of this study's findings to
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13 realistically achieve the objectives outlined by the national government. A recommendation is
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15 proposed in that the contextual factors need to be incorporated in-depth within the overall
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17 operational strategies (policy frameworks) of the sports policies, and detailed in how
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19 implementers should apply it. Furthermore, funds to the elite sporting system should be
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21 matched for the comprehensive application of these factors in the implementation phase.
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26 Overall, these examples confirm the need to understand the history and the cultural
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28 background of countries when analysing elite sporting systems and policies. What these
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30 illustrations further allude to is the concept of 'path dependency', which ascertains that initial
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32 policy decisions can determine future policy choices, which is cited in Houlihan and Green
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34 (2008), but was introduced by Kay (2005). The deeply rooted implications of the policy
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36 formation in the past, thus, hinders the possibility of change in the present. There are several
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38 critical success factors which are important to attain international sporting success, however,
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40 the weight of the importance differs significantly between nations due to the predisposition of
41
42 the social, economic and cultural characteristics of countries (De Bosscher et al., 2015; 2016).
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44 The findings in this study are meaningful as it demonstrates that countries should 'bench
45
46 learn' from other countries by seeking methods to create effective and efficient elite sport
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48 policies. This is important as countries should not 'benchmark' the best practices of superior
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50 nations (De Bosscher et al., 2016) without considering the critical influence of the respective
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52 countries national contexts. In this regard, the ultimate aim should be to find a suitable
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CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON AN ELITE SPORTING SYSTEM

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3 amalgamation of processes and practices of an elite sporting system which best fits the
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5 context of a country.
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8 The limitation of this study includes only focusing on the exploration of macro-level
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10 contextual factors and how those aspects influenced the elite sporting system in SA. The
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12 study did not analyse the meso-level and micro-level factors concerning its influence on an
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14 elite sporting system, thus are recommended for future research. The theoretical contribution
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16 of this study with a focus on SA provided insights into the determinants of context for an
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18 'emerging' country, yet, these results cannot be generalised to other country contexts. Each
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20 country is unique and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be applied to every national context
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22 (De Bosscher et al., 2015; 2016). Even though an understanding was provided on what the
23
24 contextual determinants influencing an elite sporting system in SA were presented, the study
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26 did not provide pragmatic details on how policymakers should deal with these issues nor how
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28 the system can be effective in this given context. This provides an agenda for future research.
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35 **6. Conclusion, Implications and Future Directions**

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37 The premise underpinning this study was based on the idea that context matters,
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39 specifically when trying to understand factors influencing elite sporting systems and the
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41 attainment of international sporting success, in particular, that of categorised 'emerging'
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43 countries. What may be perceived as barriers at the macro level in one country, will not
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45 necessarily be the same in another, which are important deliberations especially when
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47 considering comparing nations at different developmental stages. The major conclusion of
48
49 this study indicated how the remnants of the Apartheid regime still largely impact the elite
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51 sporting system of SA. Which as presented causes varying complexities in the elite sport
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53 environment. Herewith, the findings of this study contributes to the field of sport management
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55 by underlining the importance of understanding context, and advocating for the consideration
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of a ‘total systems view’ in research when trying to discuss or analyse the properties of an ‘open system’ in evaluations on (elite) sports policies and its systems. Contextual knowledge of an elite sporting system can provide strategic input when trying to reorganise policies differently (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, 2004). This will aid in increasing effectiveness during the implementation phase of elite sporting policies, thus, debunking the notion of a ‘one size, fits all’ model (Cloete & De Coning, 2011; De Bosscher et al., 2015), which evidently cannot work within the South African contextual setting due to the discussed circumstances. Furthermore, the emphasis of national context needs to be applied rigorously in future studies with the application of theoretical underpinnings. These studies should investigate how country-specific contexts impact on elite sporting systems on all levels of analysis, and further provide solutions to which policymakers can apply.

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Footnotes

ⁱ Two economic measurement scales are used to classify South Africa as an ‘emerging’ country namely: the gross domestic product (GDP per capita) and the gross national income (GNI per capita) (OECD, 2012).

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Table 1: An 'open system' approach to thematic categories of contextual factors influencing the elite sporting system of South Africa

Deductive Systems theory Components Certo and Certo (2009)	Inductive themes From the data	Sub-Themes	Codes
1. Economic Component	Affordability of sport	(a) Socio-economic background of a family linked to elite sport	Skewed towards upper-income groups
		(b) Socio-economic inequality (c) Poverty rates	Differences between racial groups Elite sport for the middle and upper class (Differences in varying sports relating to costs)
		(d) Quality education, resources and elite sport	Good schools cost more money but provide excellence in quality teaching and provide a sporting basis for elite sport
		(e) Professionalisation of elite sport	Assist in alleviating inequality and unemployment
		(a) Socialisation (b) Gender differences	Social habitus Social role perspectives
2. Social Component	Demographic factors	(c) Unemployment	No choice but to seek work than do elite sport
		(e) Inequality	Different starting points for coaches and athletes in SA
		(c) Poverty	Disadvantaged communities, single parenting, substance abuse, gangsterism, teenage pregnancies and social well-being

			(Inaccessible for elite sport)
	Cultural factors	(e) Value of sport	Cultural attractions to certain sport types
		(f) Cultural tolerance	Historical past and ethnic diversity
3. Political Component	Historical factors (Apartheid regime)	(a) Segregated past	Racial-ethnic and power issues, and political struggles
		(b) Psychosocial complex	Superior/inferior skin colour
	Quota / Target system	(c) Top-down approach	To increase transformation in elite sports
	Educational factors	(d) Quality of education	Dual career and Physical education
	Health factors	(e) TB/ HIV/AIDS and obesity	Inaccessible population for elite sports
4. Legal Component	/	(a) Transparency issue	Relative autonomy
		(b) Sport policies	Implementation is problematic and no political commitment
5. Technology Component		(a) Importance of scientific methods	Accessibility
	Type of school (Scientific technology at top schools)	(b) Opportunities to excel	Platform to be successful at elite sports