



The Holistic Ecological Approach to Talent Development in Sport: *From Theory and Research to Practice*

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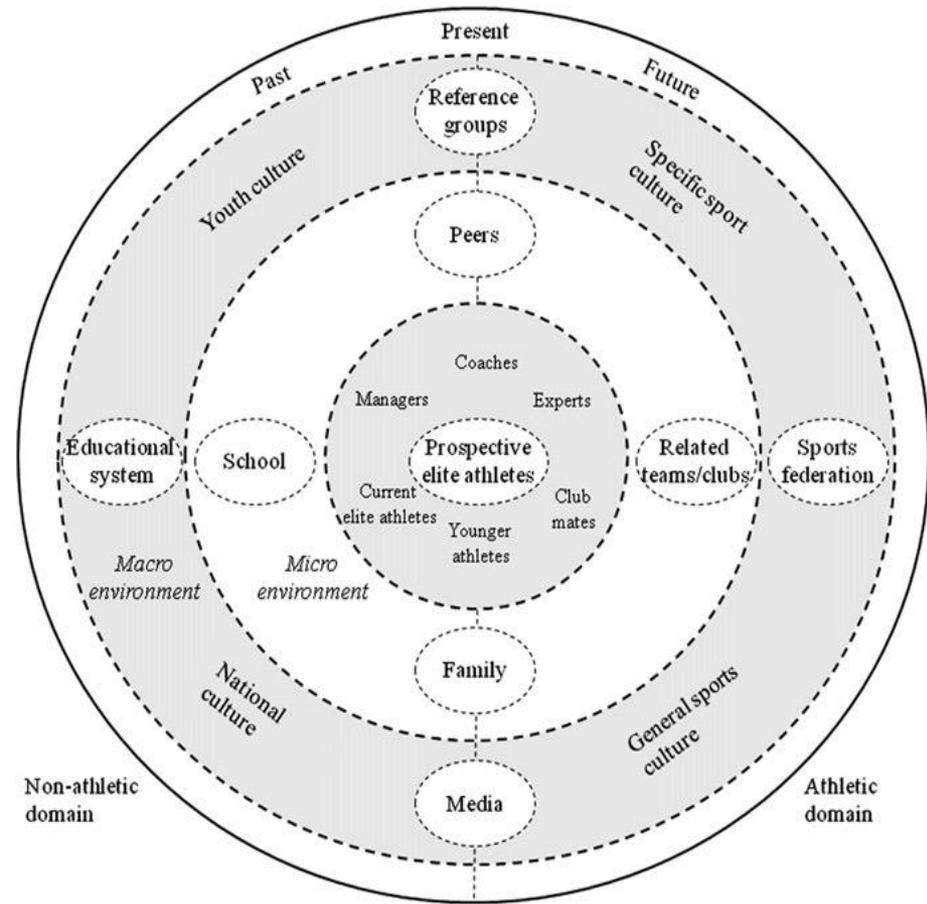
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Overview

- Athlete career pathways and the role of environment
- The Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA) focusing on Athletic Talent Development Environments (ATDEs)
 - What is the HEA?
 - The HEA working models
 - The HEA research approach, case examples, and summary
- The HEA applied principles and guidelines for optimization of the ATDEs
- What is next?





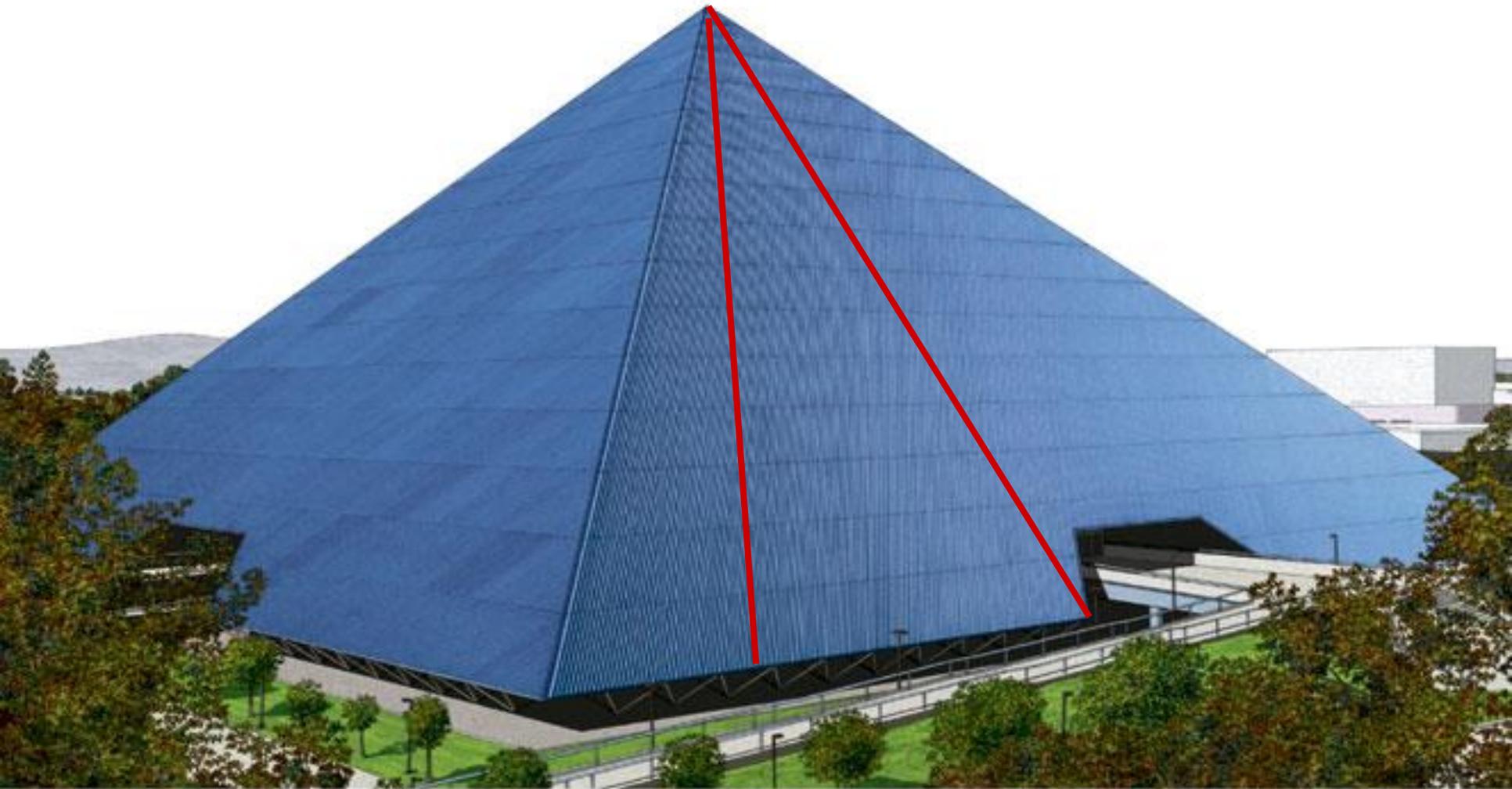
“It takes a whole environment to raise an athlete”

Is it easy to organize a harmonious athletic environment?

Quotes from an interview with 17 years old Swedish volleyball player, a student of the national elite sport school:

- “I’m going to practice, I have to practice, whatever you say, I need to study, but ooh no I have practice, that’s how it is, practice takes your whole life...”
- “... In the beginning of the educational year I wanted sport and school to mean the same, but **I moved here because of my sport**, so my sport means more to me, but school is more important, so it comes first, I know I am contradicting myself ...**school is number one, so I have told myself and so have all coaches and my parents told me ...but I moved here because of my sport ...I did not move here because it is a good school ...I chose to move here to get better at my sport.** But school is not unimportant, because you cannot live off this sport, therefore you need education.”

Athletic pyramid metaphor



California State University, Long Beach, Ca

The National Standards for Youth Sports Philosophy

“Every youth should be given the opportunity to grow and develop in sports, have positive experiences and not be left out or behind.”

Principle 1:
Place the Youth’s Interest
Before Yours

Standard 1: Equal Opportunity

Every youth has an equal right and opportunity to play, regardless of ability, age, gender, race, economic status or any other social discriminator.

Standard 2: Safety

Every youth has the right to play in a safe and non-threatening environment, free of injury or abuse.

Standard 3: Proper Equipment

Every youth has the right to equipment that is in serviceable condition, suited for the task and purpose, and his/her age and ability.

Principle 2:
Be a Role Model

Standard 4: Values

Every individual in youth sports must conduct him/herself in a manner that demonstrates the values of friendship, respect, excellence, sportsmanship and fair play.

Standard 5: Parental Involvement

Every parent or guardian must be pro-actively involved in their youth’s participation in sports.

Standard 6: Adequate Qualifications

Everyone who coaches or works in youth sports must be adequately trained and screened, with the relevant experiences and skills.

Principle 3:
Have Fun,
Winning Isn’t Everything

Standard 7: Positive Experiences

Every sporting opportunity must engage the youth and heighten their overall experiences.

Standard 8: Holistic Development

Every youth has the right to, and will be provided with holistic development in their sports participation.

Standard 9: No Harmful Substances

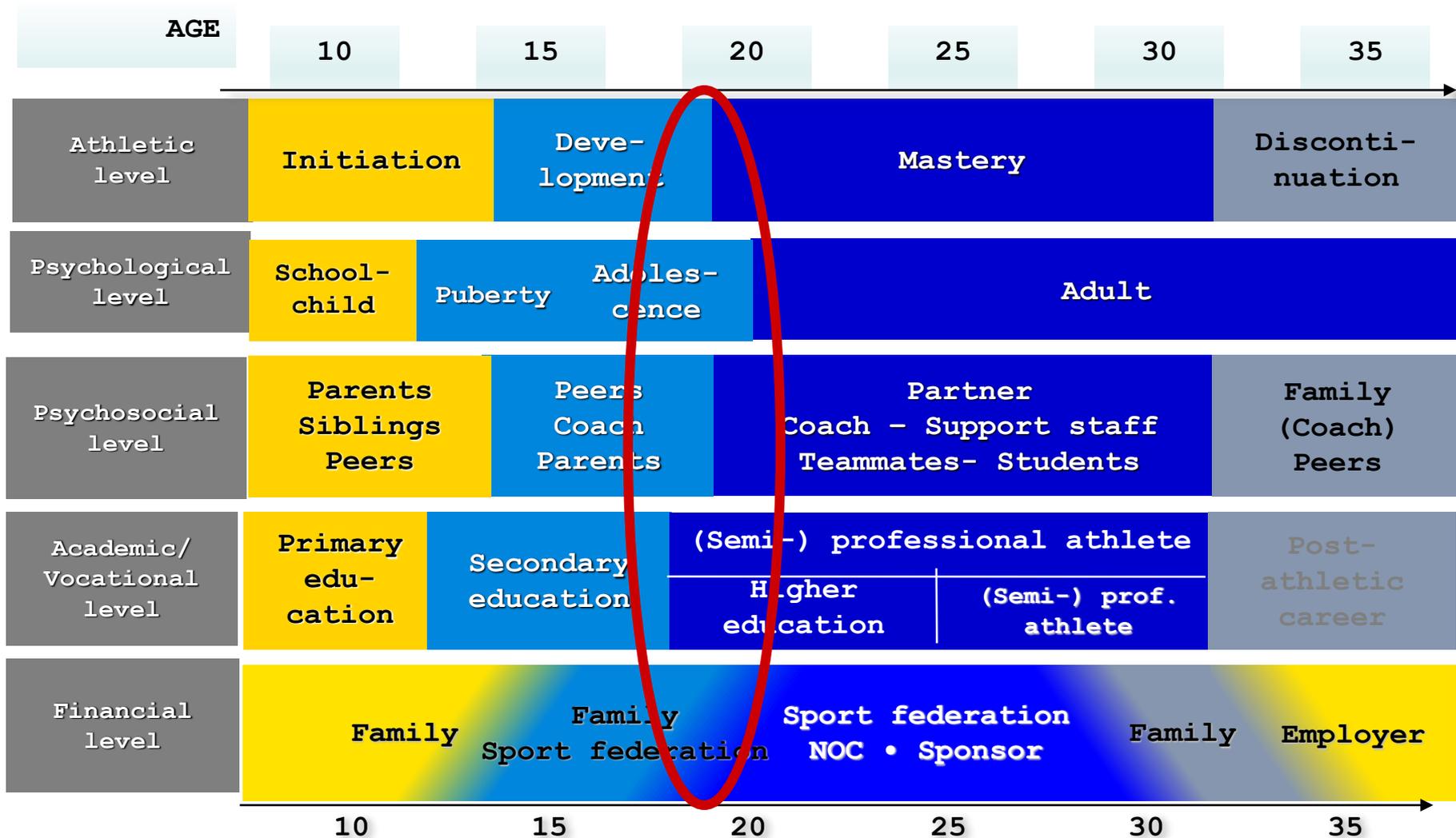
Every youth sports environment shall be free of alcohol, drugs, tobacco and any illegal performance enhancers.

Stakeholders

- Coaches and Sports Instructors
- Parents, Guardians and Educators
- Youth
- Sports Officials and Event/Competition Organisers
- Sports Managers and Administrators
- Media and Photographers
- Spectators and General Public
- Corporates and Organisations

Holistic Athletic Career Model

(Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013)



Holistic Perspective on Junior-to-Senior Transition (JST)

- Decisive transition
- Athletic demands complemented by non-athletic demands in:
 - studies (transition to higher education)
 - psychological development (e.g., identity formation; role experimentation, striving for independence)
 - psychosocial development (e.g., high importance of socializing, having friends and love)
 - financial development (role of parents, sport organizations, and sponsors)
- **About 20-30% cope successfully**
- The JST duration is 1-4 years
- Athletes' competencies and **external support** are key factors for successful coping

ROADS TO SPORTING EXCELLENCE

What are the pathways for young aspiring athletes in Singapore to develop into elite athletes?

ASPIRING ATHLETES

Schools

Co-curricular activities (CCAs) enable students to hone their skills in a particular sport and take part in inter-school competitions.

Singapore Sports School

Provides students with a more conducive environment for rigorous sports training, balanced with a flexible academic programme.

National Youth Sports Institute (NYSI)

Supports high performing youth athletes through coaching, sports science and athlete life management.

National Sports Associations (NSAs)

Develop aspiring athletes into elite athletes through structured training programmes. Promising athletes will be recommended to SSI for carding.

ELITE ATHLETES

Singapore Sports Institute (SSI)

Grants carding status to athletes. Provides elite athletes with spexGrants, as well as Sports Science and Medicine support. This includes Sports Biomechanics, Nutrition, Physiology, Psychology, and Strength and Conditioning.

- ActiveSG / Private Academies and Clubs
- MOE Junior Sports Academies

Provide structured exposure and developmental programmes to equip participants with strong foundational skills.

supported by

ActiveSG Centres of Expertise for Disability Sports

Offer accessible sports programmes and facilities to encourage sports participation among persons with disabilities.

- Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC)
- National Disability Sports Associations (NDSAs)
- Special Education (SPED) Schools
- Special Olympics Singapore

Equip persons with disabilities with the skills and opportunities to play sports recreationally and in a competitive setting.

- SDSC Developmental Training Centre
- NDSAs

Provide athletes with more intensive training to prepare for higher level competitions.

spexGrants

Cover training and competition costs, equipment and apparel.

spexScholarship

Pinnacle level of support for elite Singaporean athletes with the potential to win medals at Asian, World and Olympic levels. Includes financial support, education, career and personal development.

What is the HEA?

- The HEA is a rapidly developing approach in talent development research and practice
- Main idea of the HEA is to shift the attention **from the individual athlete's development to the environment** in which he or she is developing
- **Environment** is important for athletes' development at any stage of their careers but it is **especially influential when athletes are still young and immature**
- It is a common knowledge that some athletic environments are more successful than others in helping young talented athletes to grow into successful senior athletes and to create foundation for their long-lasting, healthy and successful athletic careers and life after sports
- Role of other people and organizations in athletes' development was in focus before the HEA. The HEA added a holistic perspective to understanding the young athletes' environment termed **athletic talent development environment (ATDE)**.

Definition of ATDE (Henriksen, 2010)

ATDE as a dynamic system comprising:

- an athlete's immediate surroundings at **the micro-level** where athletic and personal development take place,
- **the interrelations** between these surroundings,
- at **the macro-level**, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and
- **the organizational culture** of the sports club or team, which is an integrative factor of the ADTE's effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes

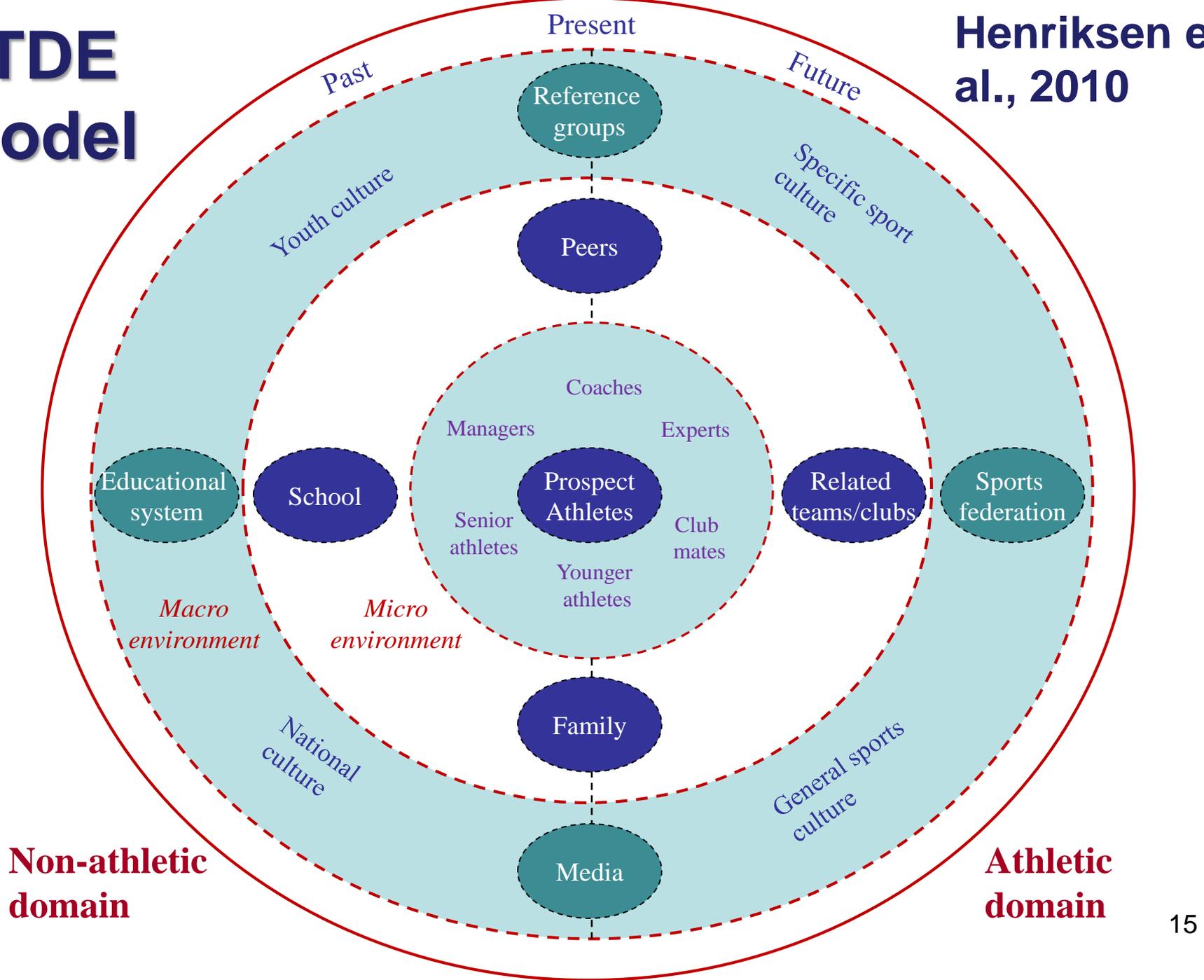
The HEA structure

- Definitions
- Two working models: Athletic talent development environment (ATDE) and Environment success factors (ESF)
- Research guidelines and case study examples
- Features of successful ATDEs (a summary of existing research)
- Applied principles and guidelines for ATDE optimization

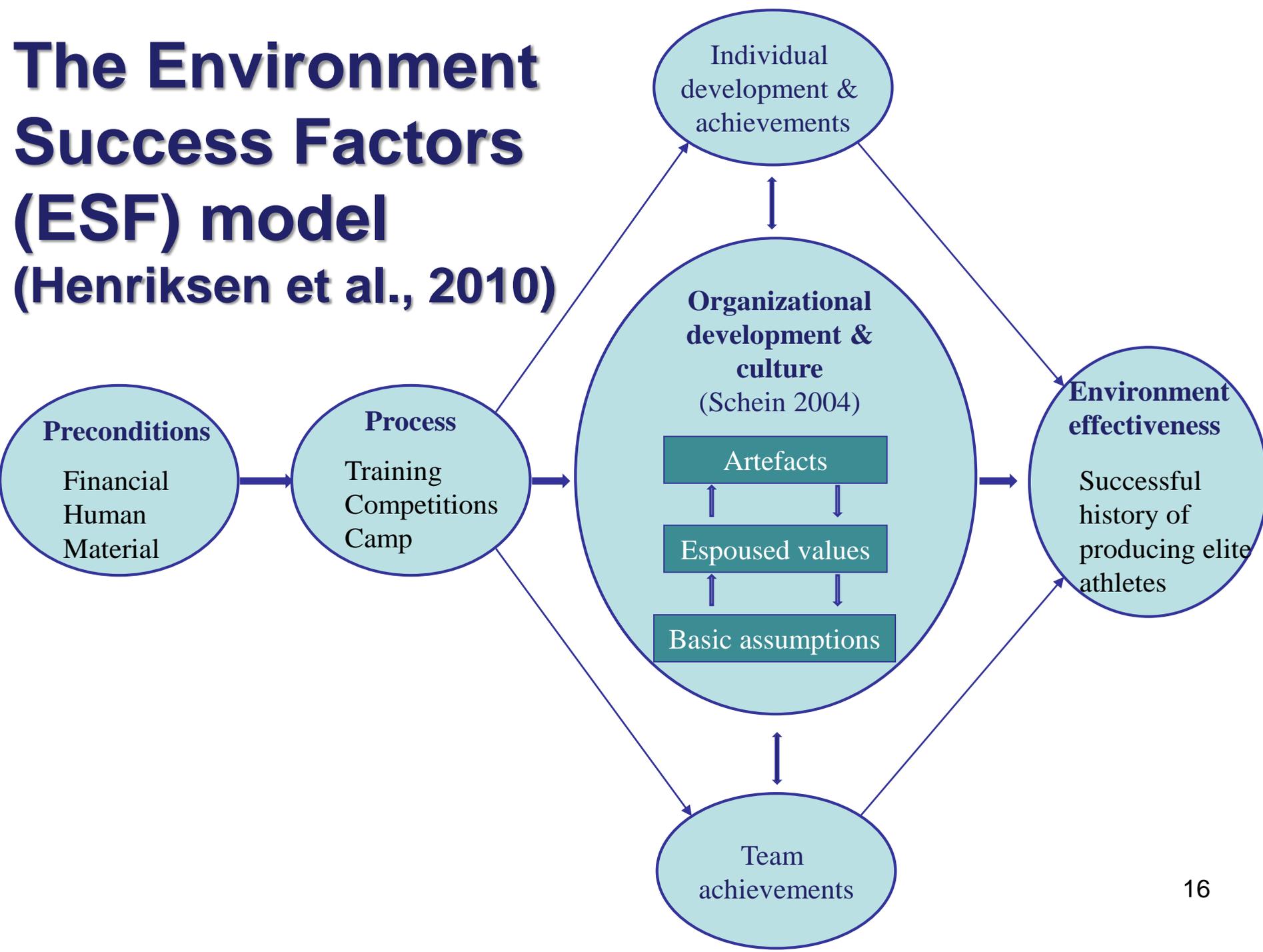


ATDE model

Henriksen et al., 2010



The Environment Success Factors (ESF) model (Henriksen et al., 2010)



The HEA research methodology

- **Case study design:** real life phenomena in real-life context and in real time.
- The two working models guide data collection through: (a) **interviews** with young athletes and key figures in their environment, (b) **observations** of the everyday life in the ATDE including informal talks to the members, and (c) **analysis of available documents**.
- Interview transcripts, observation notes and written documents are analysed to provide two comprehensive descriptions of the ATDE in focus: (a) **the ATDE structure**, and (b) **the ATDE's factors contributing to its effectiveness** in talent development
- During analysis, **the working models are transformed into empirical models** that capture the unique features of the ATDE and serve as a summary of the case.

The HEA models in use

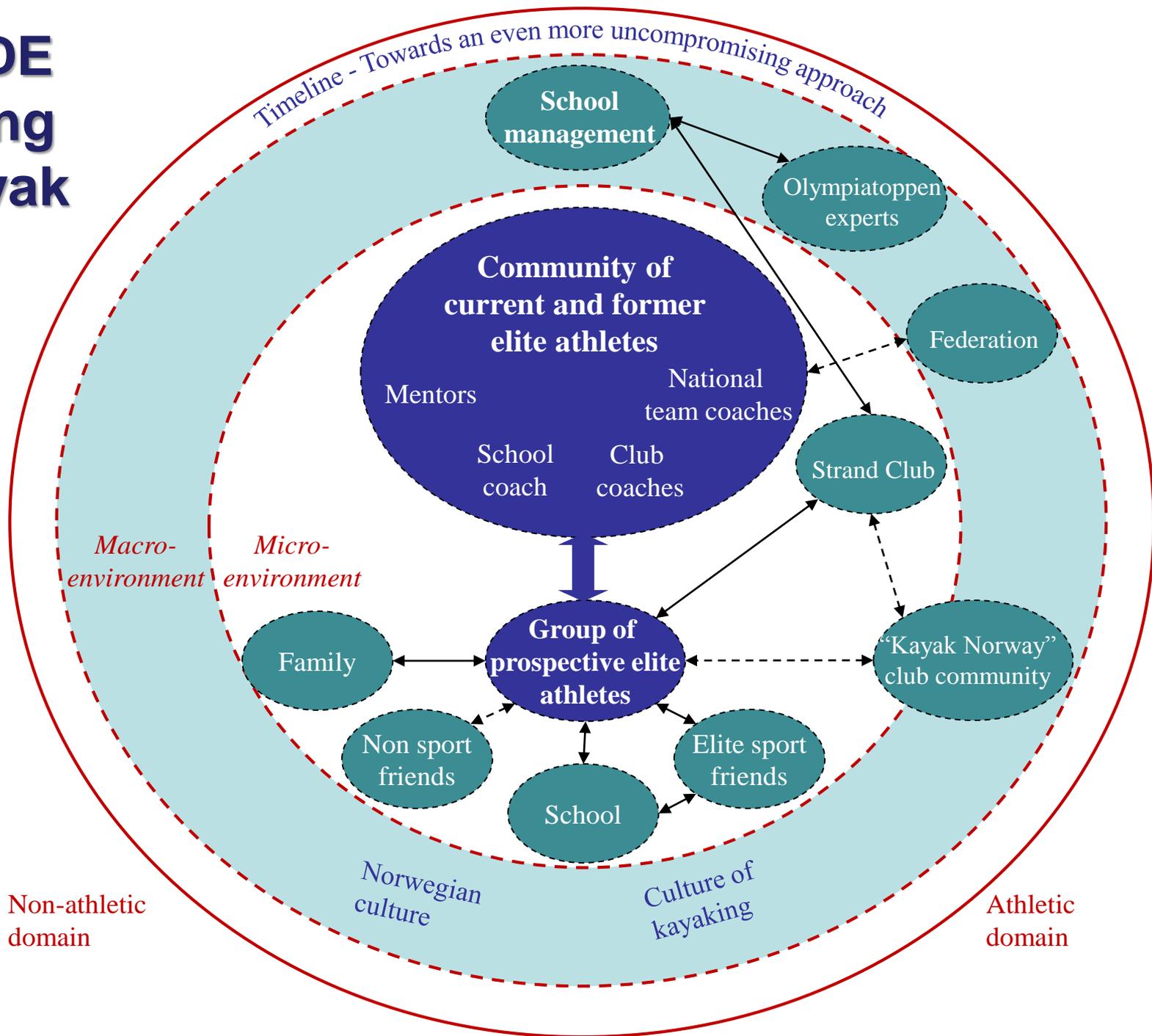
- The HEA exists for a bit more than a decade.
- First, it has been tested and developed through empirical investigations of a number of successful ATDEs environments:
 - **The Danish national 49'er sailing team** (Henriksen et al., 2010a)
 - **The IFK Växjö track and field club in Sweden** (Henriksen et al., 2010b)
 - **The kayak team of the Wang elite sport high school in Norway** (Henriksen et al., 2011)
 - **The AGF soccer team in Denmark** (Larsen et al., 2013)
 - Unpublished master's theses (e.g., Petersen, 2014; Pyrdol, 2013) that have investigated environments in karate, cycling, soccer, swimming, badminton - all in Scandinavia
- Second, the HEA models were applied to study one less successful ATDE in Denmark: **the Seaside golf team** (Henriksen et al., 2014)
- Third, the HEA expanded internationally and was used to study, for example, Canadian elite trampoline environment Skyriders (Seanor et al., 2017) and a Victorian Football League club in Australia (Pink et al., 2015; 2018).

Successful ATDEs in Scandinavia (Henriksen, 2010)



To identify common and unique characteristics among **three successful ATDEs in Scandinavia**

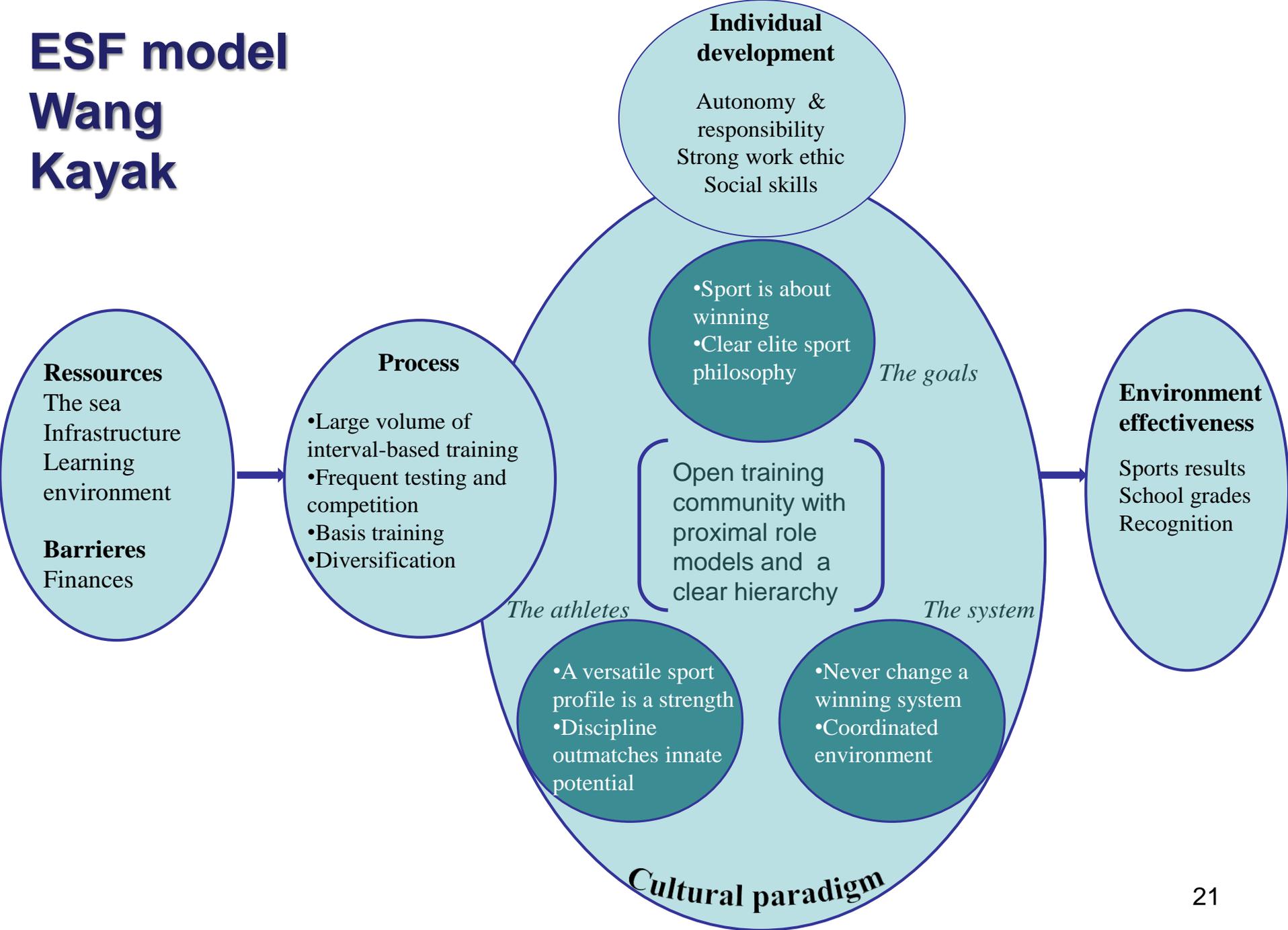
ATDE Wang Kayak



ESF model

Wang

Kayak

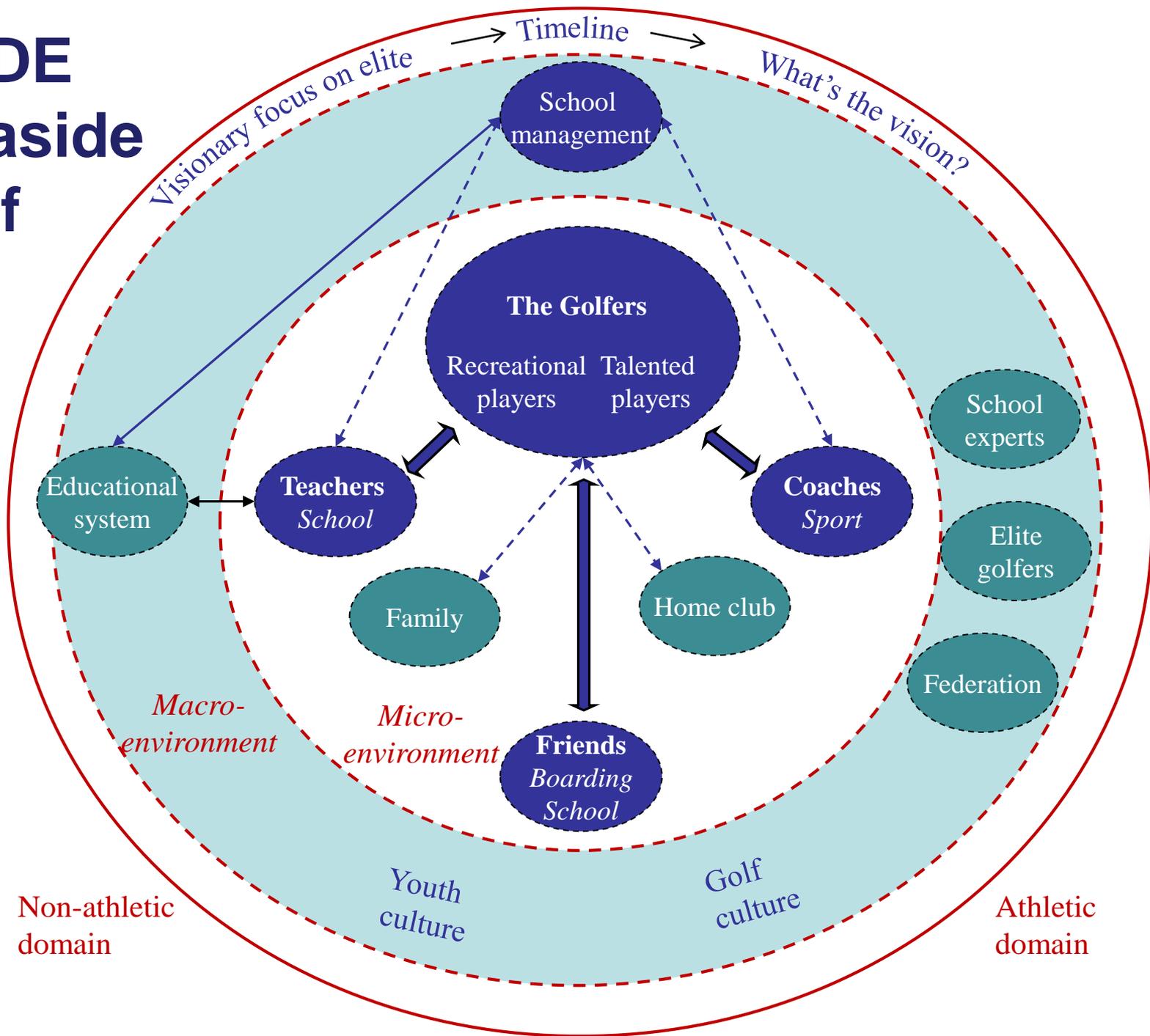


Shared features of successful ATDEs

- Training groups with **supportive relationships**
- Proximal **role models**
- **Support of sporting goals by the wider environment**; co-ordination of sport and education
- Support for the development of **psychosocial skills**
- Training that allows for **diversification**
- Focus on **long-term development** rather than on today results
- **Strong and coherent organizational culture (!)**
- **Integration of efforts** (e.g., club, school, parents, community, business, etc.).

What about a less successful ATDE?

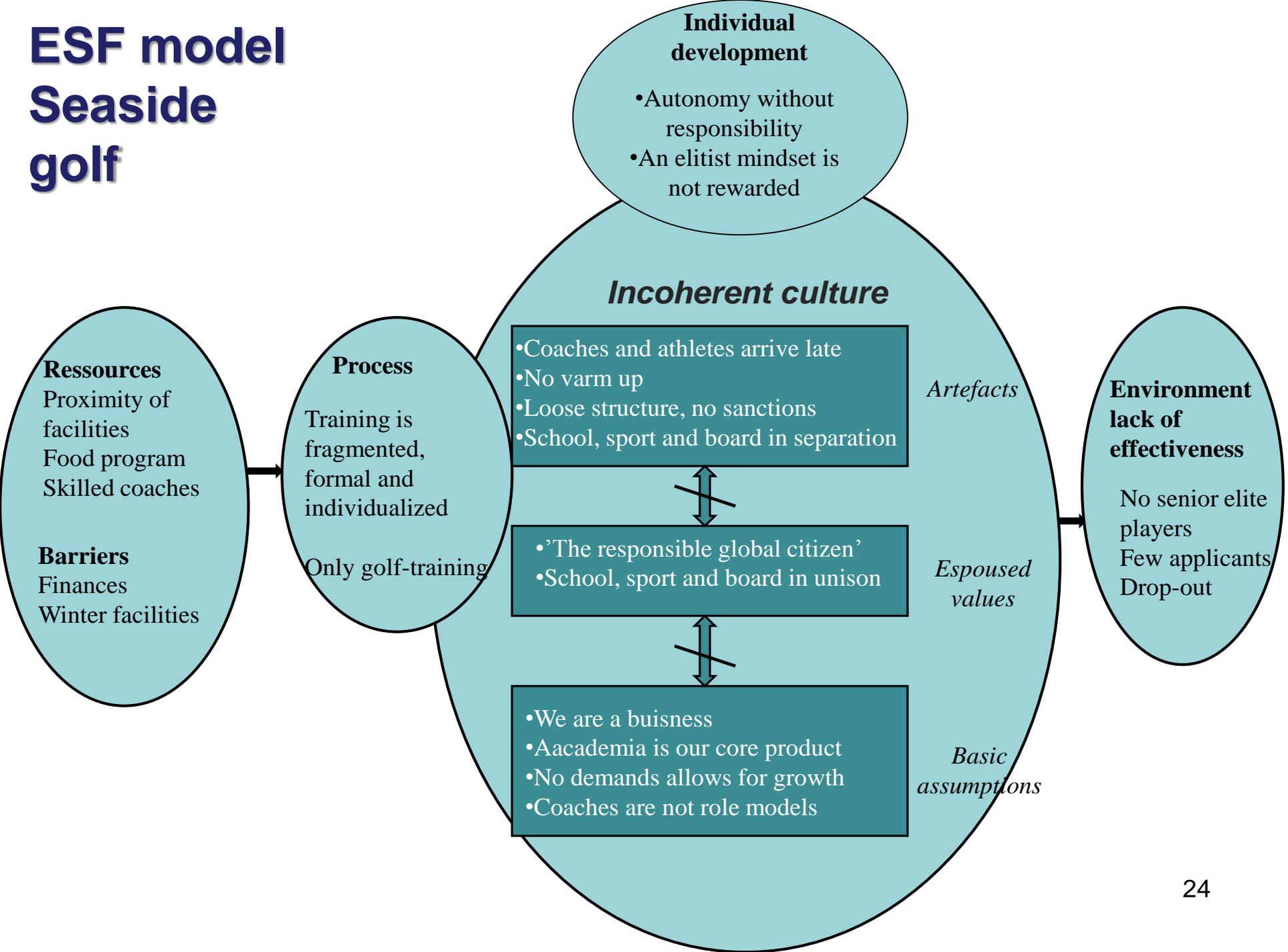
ATDE Seaside golf



ESF model

Seaside

golf



The HEA applied principles (for SPC)

- Conduct the interventions inside the athletes' **natural setting** rather than in the office
- **Involve the athletes' environment** (e.g., coaches, managers, teammates) in the intervention
- Aim to **optimize the entire environment** around the athlete or team (if necessary)
- **See the athletes as whole human beings** and to facilitate the development of a holistic package of psychosocial resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, attitudes, network) that will be of use for the athletes both in and outside of sport.

Guidelines to optimize ATDE

- Begin with considering the **current goals** of the ATDE: Do you think the ATDE is currently optimal to achieve the goals? If no, continue with the following:
- Look at the existing **connections between different components of the ATDE**: are these connections optimal? Compare with the ATDE working model: which connections are weak or non-existent? Consider how to establish them.
- Look at the ATDE's **preconditions**. Think about how to properly use the **resources** available and compensate for the **barriers**.
- Look at the ATDE's **processes**: Are the activities involved well serve **holistic development** of young athletes? What more can be done?
- Analyze the ATDE's **organizational culture**: What is the overall atmosphere in the ATDE? What key people in the ATDE communicate about what, how, and why they do? Are these consistent with what and how they really do? Does this culture serve well the current ATDE goals? If not, decide what aspect(s) of the culture is best to change.

Organizational culture change

- Possible resistance to change
- The HEA adopts Schein's (1990) stage like approach to a culture change:
 - **The unfreeze stage** is aimed at persuading the ATDE members that the change (although uneasy) is necessary for “the “survival” (more exactly – for reaching the ATDE goals)
 - **The change stage** is aimed at developing new cultural norms/values and learning relevant behaviors and skills
 - **The refreeze stage** is aimed at facilitating internalization of learned behaviors and skills that is turning espoused values into enacted values (or basic assumptions those are not questioned anymore).

Cultural leader at the ATDE

- **Cultural leader** is a person who has a power position in the ATDE and feels responsible and motivated to create, maintain (if necessary) to change the organizational culture
- The HEA stresses that in ATDEs a coach is often a cultural leader but not all coaches are aware about this
- Coaches introduce norms and values and then use a number of **cultural embedding mechanisms** (Schein, 2010) to reinforce the norms and values (e.g., what the coach regularly **pays attention to or control; how the coach react to critical incidents, allocate resources and rewards, select and deselect, use role models and set traditions/rituals**)
- The HEA suggests that sport psychology practitioners should work on increasing **coaches' awareness of their cultural leadership role** and help them to develop **relevant skills**

Applied cases published

Larsen, C., Alfermann, D., Henriksen, K., & Chistensen, M. (2014). Preparing footballers for the next step: An intervention program from an ecological perspective. *The Sport Psychologist*, 28, 91-102.

- The intervention was aimed at creating **a culture for goal directedness** at U17 team at a football academy in Denmark. Three stages were followed with a coach being actively involved by facilitating development and internalization of the goal setting skills (using the cultural embedding mechanisms)

Henriksen, K. (2015). Developing a high performance culture: A sport psychology intervention from an ecological perspective in elite orienteering. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 6, 14-23.

- The intervention was aimed at **creating a high (quality) performance culture** at the national orienteering team. Examples of values developed and then internalized in the team: “We make each other better”, “We discuss strategies and techniques among us”, “We talk to, rather than about each other”. One of the good strategies used: “the positive story of the day” emphasizing the values.

What is next?

- **The HEA has a high potential to shape athletes' career pathways** and facilitate successful and healthy athletic careers contributing positively to their life careers.

What more can be done:

- **The HEA models can be contextualized** in regard to various national and sport contexts/cultures
- **More case studies** of both successful and less successful ATDE are needed
- **More applied interventions from the HEA perspective** are needed to complement the HEA guidelines on how to maintain successful and “repair” the less successful ATDEs
- **Helping coaches to recognize and master their role as cultural leaders** (e.g., through including the HEA into coaching education)

Thank you!