

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Dual Career Environments for Elite Athletes in Switzerland, Denmark, and Poland

Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this qualitative study was (a) to provide an overview of the provided dual career opportunities for elite athletes in Switzerland, Denmark, and Poland; (b) to deepen our understanding of how the cultural context influences the development of dual career programs and trajectories of dual career athletes.

Methods: In each country, four semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in dual career were used to discuss benefits, obstacles, and best practices of the national dual career settings and programs. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and content analyzed in a deductive-inductive way using Schein's (2010) cultural framework. Official documents about dual career programs and the national elite sports systems served as a further data sources.

Results: Besides the differences in higher educational support for athletes and availability of career programs, we observed that Swiss, Danish, and Polish stakeholders expressed divergent values and attitudes about how dual career should be organized. These values, which are based on different basic assumptions about dual career, were found to be linked to the ideologies of the respective welfare regimes. Consequently, divergent trajectories were proposed to dual career athletes as the desired way how to combine elite sport and education. Based on the results of our cross-cultural comparison, we assert that culture is not only an influential but also a constituting factor in the development of dual career opportunities.

Conclusions: We propose a cultural-sensitive approach towards the dual career of athletes and to consider national ideologies and welfare systems when implementing European dual career guidelines (2012) in national contexts.

References:

EU Expert Group (2012). EU guidelines on dual careers of athletes: Recommended policy actions in support of dual careers in high-performance sport. Brussels: European Commission Sport.
Schein, E. H. (2010). Organizational culture and leadership (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Author's biography

Andreas Küttel (1979), a former ski jumping World Champion and member of the Swiss national team, holds a master degree in sports science from the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zürich. He has been living in Denmark since 2011 and conducted his PhD at the Department of Sports Sciences and Clinical Biomechanics in Odense from 2013-2017.