



Dual career pathways of transnational athletes



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Transnationalism, as part of the globalization processes, has transformed the lifestyle and the course of athletes' careers. This presents previously unexplored challenges encountered by student-athletes in combining athletic and academic pursuits. In this article, we propose a conceptual framework for the taxonomy of transnational dual careers (DC).

Design and method: Narrative inquiry from the life story perspective was used to elicit and analyze career narratives of six transnational athletes (3 male and 3 female), generating about five interview hours per athlete. The developmental transition from secondary to higher education was chosen as a key transition to classify the DC pathways. Additional insights into DC mobilization across international borders were gleaned by employing the typologies of sport migrants developed in the sport labor migration research. **Results:** Three patterns of transnational DC were discerned from the narratives based on the direction of geographic mobility and the core migration motive underpinning the storyline. Within the present dataset, the taxonomies are: (1) Within EU mobility: the sport exile DC pathway; (2) Mobility to the U.S.A.: the sport mercenary DC pathway; and (3) Mobility to the U.S.A.: the nomadic cosmopolitan DC pathway.

Conclusions: The identified transnational DC paths are not exhaustive, and highlight possibilities of individual development, unfolding through the matrices of social structures in a given location. Further research with a diverse set of transnational athletes is needed to test and expand the proposed taxonomy.

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In today's globalized world, the transnational migration of athletes has been increasing in a variety of sporting contexts, becoming a significant aspect of athletes' lives (Maguire & Falcous, 2011; Ronkainen, Harrison, & Ryba, 2014; Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013a). Ryba and Stambulova (2013) define transnational athletes as mobile subjects whose athletic and non-athletic development spans international borders. In this paper, we focus on mapping the dual career (DC) pathways of transnational athletes, considering how the sport-related transitions impact and overlap with non-sport-related transitions that are experienced concurrently in geographic mobility. Since the academic transition from secondary to higher education often coincides with the athletic transition from junior to senior sports, and

is therefore pivotal to successful development of both careers, we chose to categorize transnational DC pathways through this life transition.

The concept of DC refers to the challenge of combining a sporting career with studies or work, which remains a source of concern for most high-performance athletes. This issue has recently been acknowledged by the European Commission in an effort to promote sport development in a socially responsible manner (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). One section of the EU Guidelines deals with DC of transnational athletes calling for the "cooperation between national sport training centers and educational institutes from different Member States in order to support the development and availability of dual career policies for student-athletes from other Member States" (pp. 35–36).

The European, club-based sporting system, differs from the North American, school-based one, which better facilitates the dual careers of student-athletes through the institutional policies and

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structural conditions. Previous research findings suggest that the unique nature of collegiate sport system in the U.S.A., where athletic scholarships are available to obtain a university degree while participating in sport at a high level, is very attractive for foreign student-athletes (e.g., Bale, 1991; Chepyator-Thomson, 2003; Love & Kim, 2011). Yet as Petitpas, Van Raalte, and Brewer (2013) recently summarized, a range of transitions occurring when student-athletes move away from home to participate in collegiate sport intersect and may create difficulties in athletes' lives. Petitpas et al. emphasized that intercollegiate athletes, who tend to devote much of their time and energy to sport, often display a high level of identity foreclosure, struggling to make career decisions and life choices reasonably and responsibly. Indeed, within the globalized culture of elite sport, athletes frequently prioritize athletic careers to the detriment of their academic achievements (e.g., Brandão & Vieira, 2013; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Cosh & Tully, 2014; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Ryan & Thorpe, 2013; Vuolle, 1978). Moreover, the research has shown that increased pressure associated with combining an academic and sporting career successfully, especially when a lack of DC support is available, may lead to athletes' premature retirement from elite sport (Aquilina, 2013; Wylleman & Reints, 2010).

This article is based on the data gathered for the research of transnational athletes' career development and transitions in the Nordic¹ countries. Participants in the reported study experienced DC alongside the transnational mobility; therefore, we were interested in exploring further this period of their development when educational, athletic and cultural transitions coincided. The overall project has been conceptualized within a cultural praxis of athletes' careers framework, recently articulated as a set of challenges for career researchers/practitioners to approach career theories, research, and assistance as cultural praxis (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013b). These specific conceptual and applied challenges include: (a) a merge of the holistic lifespan and holistic ecological perspectives in career research and assistance, (b) reflexive situatedness of career projects in relevant sociocultural contexts, (c) an idiosyncratic approach with specific attention to diversity in career patterns/trajectories, (d) an increased attention to transnationalism in contemporary sporting culture, (e) multicultural and transnational consulting, and (f) participatory action research implying collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and athlete-participants. This research is an attempt to meet some of these challenges by unearthing culturally specific meanings of main career concepts from the perspective of transnational athletes, which subsequently guided our interpretation of their career decisions and life choices.

Transnationalism, paths of development, and cultural transition

From theoretical and experiential perspectives, transnationalism refers to living everyday life across numerous physical and discursive borders (i.e., geographic, linguistic and socio-political), being simultaneously embedded in multiple cultural locations and social networks, and having a fluid mobile identity (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1992; Vertovec, 2001). The transmigrants' experiences of living in two or more worlds quite simultaneously highlight the fact that transnational engagement is not limited solely to public sphere activities. As Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999) emphasized, transnational activities include family members residing in more than one country, who maintain steady

relations with each other across borders providing economic, social and emotional support. Therefore, it is important to understand transnational athletes as agentic individuals, who make decisions and take actions "within a field of social relations that links together their country of origin and their country or countries of settlement" (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, p. ix).

Transnational DC pathways encompass several normative types of transitions: athletic, academic/vocational, psychological, social and cultural. Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) holistic lifespan perspective emphasizes the importance of considering the interconnectedness of the variety of transitions in the broad context of athlete development in order to better anticipate transition outcomes. For the purpose of this study, developmental path is defined as "a process of transformation through participation in cultural practices" (Rogoff, 2002 as cited in Richardson, 2012, p. 90). Socialization experiences of young athletes are interlocked with everyday practices, which are inherently cultural, supplying youths with meanings for the "ways of knowing, striving, feeling, and acting with respect to [them]selves and others" (Bruner, 1994, p. 52). From the cultural developmental psychology perspective, individuals actively construct their life projects, but the possibilities for their career trajectories to take shape are intertwined with their situatedness in a particular socio-cultural landscape (which structural matrices can be both supportive and constraining of agency). As Richardson (2012) argues, there is a tendency in vocational career discourse to overemphasize personal choice, discounting the cultural forces that limit individual options. In a similar vein, Cosh and Tully (2014) recently raised questions about elite athletes' agency in decision-making about sporting and educational commitments, providing the accounts of student-athletes' discursive construction of time as an external barrier to integrating sport and education, which frequently resulted in sacrificing academic outcomes. Hence, we believe that athletes continuously make choices about how they spend their time and effort, but these choices are realized in interactions with such socializing agents as family and peers, as well as framed by social expectations and (sub)cultural norms of a certain group or society.

In the case of transnational athletes, whose athletic and non-athletic development unfolds in a fluid, shifting, and often culturally ambivalent social field beyond national borders, an increase in the complexity of transitions underpinning a career pathway must take place. While athletes' development admittedly encompasses the athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational domains described in the Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model, central to understanding a transnational (career) development is the cultural transition against and alongside of which a range of simultaneous transitions takes place in DC mobilization of transnational athletes.

Building on Schlossberg's (1981) ideas about lifetime transitions in human development, Ryba (2013) conceptualized a cultural transition as a psychological process of conceptual transformation of meanings and reconstruction of subjectivity. The way people experience and interact with the world is fundamentally cultural (Bruner, 1990). Cultural transition opens a new realm of experience and understanding. The processes underlying the transition prompt shifts in psychological functioning (e.g., identity formation and decision-making), transforming individual subjectivity and position in social relations/networks. A number of vocational career researchers suggested that life transitions "really happen" only when narrated and given meaning (e.g., Peavy, 1998; Savickas, 2001). In other words, it is not objective events but the perceptual dyad of emotional and cognitive processes involved in the individual's construction of experience that changes the self. In line with this theoretical position, we propose that cultural transitions intensify transformative processes of the (relational) self by

¹ Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway constitute a group of countries known as the Nordic countries.

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