



**SHARE**

## **COMPARATIVE RESEARCH**

Dual Careers and research on personal athletes' success stories

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## Dual Career

Dual Career arrangements are a relatively new concept in most Member States and sports. In those Member States where such arrangements have been in place for some time, there is often a lack of solid agreements between the sport system and either the educational sector or the labor market. In addition, there may be a lack of a legal framework or a sustainable governmental policy. To address these issues, guidance is needed to develop and improve the conditions required for sustainable dual career programs that offer tailor-made arrangements for talented and elite athletes throughout Europe, either in their capacity as student-athletes or employee-athletes.

Athletes often encounter challenges when attempting to combine their sporting career with education or work. The pursuit of excellence in a sport requires intense training and competitions at home and abroad, which can be challenging to reconcile with the demands and restrictions of the educational system and the labor market. Successful dual career arrangements require not only high levels of motivation, commitment, resilience, and responsibility from the athlete but also special arrangements that prevent talented and elite athletes from being forced to choose between education and sport or work and sport. Such arrangements should benefit athletes' sporting careers, enable them to pursue education or work opportunities, facilitate the attainment of a new career after their sporting career, and protect and safeguard their position as athletes.

The fundamental purpose of Dual Career (DC) initiatives is to facilitate the personal development of athletes beyond their performance on the field. An effective DC program will explore the athlete's identity beyond their sport and address their emotional wellbeing. This may involve providing practical support to help athletes achieve basic literacy standards, obtain school qualifications, and participate in courses on how to write a CV and job application. Other important areas of focus can include helping athletes learn a trade, acquire foreign language skills, develop basic computer proficiency, and even receive entrepreneurial support.

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## Dual Career of Elite Athletes in Greece

A career can be broadly understood as a lifestyle that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities through a lifetime (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2019; Rybaa, Ronkainenb, & Selännec, 2015). Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic throughout life (McIlveen, Brooks, Lichtenberg, Smith, Torjul, & Tyler, 2011).

A Dual Career is briefly defined as a career with a major focus on sport and studies or work (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Pursuing education commitments while competing in high-performance sports, however, can be a challenging task – the ever-increasing demands on performance in elite sports place high pressure on young athletes, who may often feel they are forced to choose between realizing their athletic potential or obtaining a satisfying education for a post-athletic career (Cosh & Tully, 2015).

The DC trajectory is non-linear and actually consists of a series of different stages and transitions (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2016). Within each developmental stage and transition, athletes experience demands and challenges of various types and levels that may impinge on athletic and personal development (Minoudis, 2018). In other words, their investment in sports shifts over time according to the context-specific social, psychological, and financial situations, educational commitments or work duties. This is an even more challenging task for non-professional athletes,



who often have to manage their sporting careers within limited cognitive, social, financial and temporal resources or not well-organized DC support structures.

Despite the widespread participation in sports during the last decades in Greece, especially before and after the 2004 Olympic Games, the existing legislative framework regarding athletes' educational careers combining with their sports progress remains unspecified. In addition, every year a new legislation seemed to come up affecting youth participation in Greece.

Significant privileges that characterized athletes' future educational career is under abolition nowadays.

To be more precise, the recent decision (686/2018) by the Greek Council of State restricts elite athletes from freely enrolling in any public higher educational institution, a departure from the previous practice. The decision was based on the constitutional principles of equality and meritocracy, which stipulate that all university candidates should be treated equally. The law allowing distinguished athletes to enter any university school free of charge only applies to those who have won first to third place in the Olympics or World Championships. Athletes who have placed fourth to sixth are required to pay a percentage increase, which varies depending on their ranking, for admission to any university department or the department of physical education and sport science. (Zafeiroudi, Patsiaouras, Dalamitros, Bekiari&Kouthouris, 2020).

Furthermore, an important support tool in the country was public sports schools that were created during the 80s and 90s and now are closed. After three decades of operation, in 2010 (at the beginning of the Greek economic/financial crisis) the government was phasing out sports schools as they cost too much and have been deemed by the Ministry of Education to be "counterproductive for sport and unconventional for education". According to the Ministry of Education, 12,060 students were studying at public sports schools. In addition, 2,036 teachers of physical education and other specialties were employed. The cost of this operation was about 25 million euros every year. Of this amount, about 2.4 million were spent on student needs like traveling and transportation. Relevant legislation, which prevents the development of an athlete's career in Greece, is the following.

The Greek sports law 2725/1999 art. 108 (as modified by law 3479/06, art. 13), clearly states that athletes' obligations include their maintenance in the same sports club until the age of twenty-three. In a different case, it was prohibited to participate in any competition for two consecutive years. This legislation leads athletes to quit their sport at an early stage, resulting in high dropout rates in competitive sports during the teenage years. Thus, the law seemed to protect primarily the rights of the sports clubs than the potential competitive career of an athlete. However, law 3479/2006 (art. 4), also provides the opportunity for training programs that could also be offered to amateur athletes based on an appropriate and well-founded argumentation and interpretation (Zafeiroudi, Patsiaouras, Dalamitros, Bekiari&Kouthouris, 2020).

A privilege of elite athletes that still exists, but it does not enhance the athletes' dual career processes is referred to below. Traditionally in Greece athletes that achieved high-level performance during Olympic Games or World championships (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> place) are still offered a (permanent) job in the public sector (e.g., central government, local government, health sector, education, army, etc.), according to their qualifications and preferences. In addition, as a privilege, high-level athletes are exempted from any military service, which nowadays is an obligation to male citizens (Zafeiroudi, Patsiaouras, Dalamitros, Bekiari&Kouthouris, 2020).



## Dual Career of Elite Athletes in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria there are a law of sport and regulation for the implementation of the law of sport named Physical Education and Sports Act (PESA) established in 2014 and amended for last time in January 2019. The regulation for the implementation of the PESA has been updated according to the latest law amendments and was adopted and set on power since April 2019. As stated in article 2 of PESA /par. 1,2 and 3/ the goal of physical education and sports is to improve the health and physical activity of the nation through regular exercise and sports of all ages; The creation of the necessary conditions for systematic practice of physical exercises and sports, as well as for raising the sports prestige of the nation, is a priority direction of the social policy of the state and the municipalities.; Physical education and sports shall perform educational, health, social, cultural and restorative functions. In accordance to Art. 7 in PESA, the basic directions of the national policy in the field of sports are approved by the Council of Ministers (CM), that as well annually provides the necessary funds for the development of the physical education and sports due to the State Budget Act of Republic of Bulgaria, where financing of the sports activity is stipulated. The next article recognize the Minister of Youth and Sports as the authority who directs, coordinates and controls the implementation of the state policy in the field of physical education, sports and social tourism. To support the Minister of Youth and Sports duties there is an established advisory unit - the Expert Council on Physical Education and Sports. Basically those are the bodies regulating the sports organizations and athletes' rights.

PESA recognizes three basic kinds of sports organizations in Republic of Bulgaria, as listed below.

1/ Sports Club. Voluntary associations of citizens, registered as non-profit legal persons, which develop and promote physical education and sport and carry out training and competition activities of one or more sports (Art. 11, par. 1 in PESA). Sports clubs must be registered as joint-stock companies - professional sports clubs, or as non-profit associations - professional sports clubs. After registration as a legal entity, the sports clubs are obliged to apply for membership in the respective federation within one month from their official registration (Art.10, par.6 in PESA).

2/ Sports Federations. Voluntary associations of sports clubs from one or similar type of sport, which coordinate the development, practicing and administration of the respective sport on national level and represent their members before the state and international sports organizations. (Art. 14, par.1 in PESA). It is an obligation of the sports federations to be granted a license by the competent state body. Together with gaining a sport license, the respective sports organization receives certain rights in the field of its sport, listed in Art 19 in PESA.

3/ National Sports Organizations. Voluntary associations of sports clubs and/or sports federations which coordinate their activities in a specific subject of activity in the system of physical education, sports and social tourism, and interact with the state and with the international sports organizations in forming and implementing the national sports policy. National sports organizations shall be registered as non-profit legal persons for the public benefit and participate principally in the development, implementation and reporting the results of the fulfilment of the National Program for the development of physical education and sports.

The professional capacity and qualification of the coaches is described and regulated by the Regulation № 2 on the professional qualification and qualification of sports and pedagogical staff.

The regulation was adopted in 2011 but amended in April 2017. This regulation provide the rules and requirements for the professional capacity and qualifications of sport education specialists



performing sport pedagogical and sport training activities and offering sport training services in the system of education and sport. The sport pedagogical specialists in the system of physical education and sport include the following positions – instructor, assistant-coach, coach, senior coach and head coach.

In a relation to the education system, career guidance, vocational education and training (VET) in Bulgaria, there are two bodies responsible for Vocational Education and Training (VET) - the Ministry for Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Ministry for Education and Science has the overall responsibility for the entire school system and is the main policy-making body with responsibility for the budget, and control over Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry for Education and Science are both responsible for adult education, often referred to as Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET). The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, work to assure and maintain the quality of the vocational education and training of young people and adults. It aims to do so according to the labour market needs, to develop the competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy. The Agency also cooperates with social partners in implementing coordinated policies for lifelong learning, continuing vocational training, and in introducing successful European practices. The main aim of Agency is to provide access to work related training for the unemployed, and expand the access to vocational education for all citizens, according to the needs of the labour market.

There is no regulation related to the Dual Careers of athletes. There is only intention and good will national documents as:

- National development program 2020: “Providing a dual career to talented athletes – quality education and sports training”;
- National program for the development of physical education and sports 2013 – 2016: The DC is mentioned as: “Development and implementation of flexible learning paths, allowing the realization of "dual career" - education and sport”.

The situation about distinguishing the different types of athletes is interesting. The criteria for distinguishing the types of athletes is whether they receive a financial reward for their sport activity or not. Amateur do not receive remunerations, while professional athletes receive remuneration on the grounds of a labour contract or due to their professional activity, in accordance to art. 13 in PESA. Additionally each federations has its own rules about distinguishing those two categories.

The situation of the professional athletes in Bulgaria is complicated because they are receiving very rarely any benefits and/or support from the state and its institutions (as sports salary, sports pension, tax release, medical insurance, an advantage for employment etc). And why this is happening rarely is based on the way how the Ministry of youth and sports is financing the sports federations. Every year each sport federation could apply with project, based on certain requirements, to receive governmental funding. According to the project application form each federation is entitled to ask for money for the so called monthly salaries for players, who has shown certain results in the previous year. The results are concrete as have a medal from European championships, World championships, Olympic games etc. Additionally if an important results by athletes achieved, the Minister could decide to give the athletes additional financial support. Usually the Ministry provide the possibility former recognized athletes to receive a sport pension. In general the sport federation and/or a sport club is supporting the athletes by /some examples/:





- If he/she participant in the national team for Davis cup/Fed cup there is a contract with financial commitment;
- If the sport club where the athlete is a member has a good policy, usually the athletes over 16 and above has contract, civil and work contracts -but those cases are very rare
- In some cases there are contracts between sport club and a athlete for financial support;
- If an actual professional player is competing but at the same time he is part of the military force, he is receiving monthly salary.

As a conclusion may be stated that the idea of Dual Career among athletes in Bulgaria is not so popular and there is lack of support at national level and/or local level towards DC of athletes. There are just a few positive example for efforts towards promotion of Dual Careers among athletes as the EU co-funded project coordinated by Bulgarian sport Club Dema - Tennis Clubs for Dual Careers (2021 – 2022) which created a training program to enhance and promote the DC among tennis players.

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### Research on personal athletes' success stories

The project team led by the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) elaborated questionnaires and conducted interviews with former professional athletes in different sports who are currently leading sports managers, sports coaches and officials. The aim of was to examine the personal experiences and stories of the former athletes.

- At what age were you first systematically involved in sports?
- Which sport did you practice and what was the highest distinction you achieved?
- Did your systematic involvement in sports result in a reduced performance at school?
- Did sports enable you to get admitted to university?
- Did you continue to be systematically involved in sports during your university studies?
- Were you facilitated by the university to continue being systematically involved in sports?
- Did the systematic involvement in sports during your studies lead to a delay in obtaining your degree?
- Did the characteristics that you adopted during the systematic involvement in sports (discipline, consistency) help you in completing your educational obligations?
- Did your systematic engagement in sports lead to financial security for the rest of your life?
- Is your professional employment related to your systematic practice of sports?
- Did the characteristics that you adopted during the systematic involvement in sports (discipline, consistency) enhanced your professional development?
- Did you continue the systematic practice of sport alongside your professional employment? Or was your involvement in sports significantly affected?
- Was your family supportive during your athletic career, and how much did that influence your course?
- Do you have a family? Children? Did the championship influence the creation of the family?
- Do you advise your children or would you advise your children to get involved in sports?



## Dual Career Interviews

The research tried to target different representatives in terms of gender (men and women), level of sports activity, age, physical disability or not and sport (team or individual).

- **“At what age were you first systematically involved in sports?”** - in the answers of the athletes, no differences were observed regarding the factors mentioned, gender, level and disability. It was observed that in team sports (volleyball, football) the start of systematic activity was around the age of 15, while in individual sports (swimming, athletics, wrestling), it was earlier around the age of 10.
- **“Which sport did you practice and what was the highest distinction you achieved?”** - as mentioned, participated athletes from team and individual sports, of all levels, school sports, amateur sports, professional sports with European, World and Olympic medals.
- **“Did your systematic involvement in sports result in a reduced performance at school?”** - most of the athletes answered that their performance at school was not negatively affected by their systematic involvement in sports.

Indicative answers were:

- No, I had a good program as an athlete and a student
- No, I didn't have a low school performance
- Apart from some absences I had it didn't affect my performance in school
- Not with me. A condition from my parents was that in order to be able to play football I had to be good at school.
- No, I had found the balance we should have between systematic involvement in sports and educational obligations

However, there were also the cases of high-level individual sports athletes who reported that:

- It certainly led to reduced performance in school.
- It largely led to a reduced performance at school because I had to combine training, tutorials, school, and foreign languages in 24 hours and it was something very difficult for me.
- **“Did sports enable you to get admitted to university?”** - there are many athletes, especially those of a high level, who, due to their high distinctions, managed to secure points for admission to the University
- **“Did you continue to be systematically involved in sports during your university studies?”** - according to the answers, almost all the athletes continued their systematic involvement in sports alongside their studies
- **“Were you facilitated by the university to continue being systematically involved in sports?”** - here the opinions differ, some of the athletes report that there was facilitation and support from the University and mainly personally from Professors, while other athletes report that the University did not facilitate the continuation of their systematic activity. In this question, we also observe differences in the answers between individual and team sports athletes.



More specifically, we see that athletes who participate in team sports such as football and volleyball where the games are on the weekend can be more consistent with their academic obligations, while on the contrary athletes in individual sports such as track and field are forced to be absent for long periods of time within the academic period in order to participate in international competitions or preparations.

The absence of any central management and cooperation of Federations and University Institutions for the separate management and facilitation of these athletes was observed.

- **“Did the systematic involvement in sports during your studies lead to a delay in obtaining your degree?”** - in continuation of the previous answers and in this question, there were athletes who reported that there was no delay in receiving the degree. Indicative answers were:

- No, I complete my studies in exactly four years
- Not at all

However, there were also the cases of high-level individual sports athletes who reported that:

- Of course, it led to the delayed receipt of the degree. The competitions in my sport are frequent and require systematic training so I don't have the time I would like to spend on reading and studying.
- 1000 out of 100 led to a delay in receiving the degree

- **“Did the characteristics that you adopted during the systematic involvement in sports (discipline, consistency) help you in completing your educational obligations?”** - all athletes' responses were positive.

Indicative answers were:

- My involvement in sports gave me the discipline, persistence and patience that each of us needs in life to achieve our goals
- Yes of course, they helped me a lot with my educational obligations
- I think the key point was the organization and consistency to succeed and complete my studies alongside the championship
- Yes, they are supplies for university and for life and for work

- **“Did your systematic engagement in sports lead to financial security for the rest of your life?”** - unfortunately, none of the athletes responded positively. Even the high-level athletes with world-class distinctions indicated

- I have achieved a significant financial boost, however, as the financial situation is today, I will have to continue fighting to have similar achievements
- No financial security, but it provided me with a very good financial living for that time and above all it provided me with acquaintances that later helped me in my life
- Not especially in athletics, it's too difficult

- **“Is your professional employment related to your systematic practice of sports?”** - many athletes answered that their professional activity after completing their systematic involvement in sports is directly or indirectly related to sports, stating that they are e. g. coaches or technical managers.





- **“Did you continue the systematic practice of sport alongside your professional employment? Or was your involvement in sports significantly affected?”** - most athletes reported that they stopped their systematic involvement in sports when their professional activity began. An athlete who continued her sporting activity alongside her professional one indicated:
  - Yes, I continued, but at times my systematic involvement in sports was negatively affected.
- **“Is there any supply - education that you think if you had it would help you for a better professional career?”** - many athletes answered that they don't think there is any supply-education that will help them later in their professional career. However, there are quite a few who mention that learning other foreign languages would be useful, something they could not have due to the reduced free time during their systematic involvement in sports.
- **“Was your family supportive during your athletic career, and how much did that influence your course?”** - all athletes reported that their family was supportive throughout their systematic involvement in sport, and all recognized the importance and necessity of family support for an athlete.

Indicative answers were:

- My family supported me from the beginning and I owe them a lot
  - My family was very supportive. I had both their moral and financial support
  - My family has been very supportive and I consider family support essential for a successful career
  - My family is extremely supportive in every step I take, they are always supportive in my endeavors
  - Yes, my family supported me a lot at the beginning of my career.
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- **“Do you have a family? Children? Did the championship influence the creation of the family?”** - the older athletes reported that they have a family and some of them also have children, stating that the systematic occupation may have led to the delay in the creation of a family and a child. The younger athletes believe that the systematic involvement in sports will not negatively affect the creation of a family. But there was also a different answer, “I have a family, I don't have children and certainly the championship has affected in my case that, I don't have children”.
  - **“Do you advise your children or would you advise your children to get involved in sports?”** - all athletes answered positively to this question. However, it is worth mentioning some indicative answers regarding the distinction they make in the participation of their children in sports and in high-level sports – championships
    - I would advise my children to be involved in sports not necessarily in championships, because through sports you learn basic principles of life that can help and guide you in whatever profession you do in life. I wouldn't necessarily lead them to the championship because it's something demanding, soul-destroying and special. I would certainly be happy if they chose it.
    - Yes, I will show the way of sports. However, the championship is something different and I will leave this choice to the child.



- I would advise my children to be involved in sports, but championships are not for everyone, it is a difficult decision
  - I would advise my children to get involved in sports, I think it is necessary for them to get involved in it, of course, the championship is another chapter that if it is to come by itself then it should come, we don't need to force situations
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### Conclusions

The findings from the conducted interviews indicated that the dual-career program is in its early stages, and that concerted efforts from all participants are necessary to advance the program. The primary issue identified was the vague boundaries surrounding the employment aspirations of athletes during and after their sports careers. Stakeholders' offerings were limited to seminars, sport-specific education opportunities, and some financial support, which were also constrained due to the financial crisis in Greece and low incomes in Bulgaria.

The research highlights that Greece has legislation in place to regulate educational support for elite athletes. However, these laws are outdated and insufficient to address the issue at hand. Therefore, new strategies must be developed to tackle the new / modern challenges faced by athletes in terms of their training conditions, their education and the development of a future professional activity. Bulgaria is behind Greece in term of legislation and regulations to support the educational development of elite athletes.



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