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**DUAL CAREER IN PERFORMANCE SPORTS:  
REALITIES FROM THE NATIONAL CONTEXT**

**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS**

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**Keywords:** dual career in sports, professional athlete, pupil, student, athletic career, educational career, professional career

## **Introduction**

Performance sports have experienced great expansion in today's society, being appreciated as a complex phenomenon with important functions for human development. Harmonious physical and psycho-social development is the result sought after when practising sports, which is an essential component in the construction of a society. The benefits of athletic participation, with important positive effects for the individual, which are accounted at a social level, have led to the growing interest of society in the promotion of sports. This has generated changes in perceptions towards athletic activity and in the structure of the motivation for practicing sports or other leisure time activities. The European Union recognizes and supports the role of sports in education, considering that 2004 was named the year of education through sports.

Sports has gone through a professionalization process, as professional athletes are more oriented towards records and profit, they are led by the idea of obtaining benefits, thus becoming over-qualified in sports and having little ability for other occupational spheres. Thus, the issue of integrating athletes in the labour market after withdrawal from the athletic career arises.

Athletes are confronted with the challenge of combining the professional athletic activity with the educational or professional one, an action integrated under the umbrella term "dual career". This approach has only recently come up in the European Union and it has arisen even later in Romania. The duration of a career in performance sports is determined, but it is important for athletes and those involved in sports to be aware of this fact and to prepare the transition from the world of sports to the post-athletic life.

During the careers of athletes, as emphasized by Taylor and Lavallee (2010), the main objective of coaches, sports psychologists, and managers is to help them maximize their competitive performance. However, this is a system that has the potential of neglecting the issue of athletes that withdraw from their professional career and are faced with the transition to another career and lifestyle (p.542). Athletes often end up exiting the competitive activity without a professional capital that is adequate to labour market demands and have great difficulties in occupational insertion.

Most athletes begin their careers at young ages, when a future in sports offers perspectives for success, and end their career along with the diminishing physical qualities, if there have not been any other reasons for withdrawal from activity. A small percentage of those involved in athletic performance end up being top athletes, winning earnings to help ensure a decent living. The others, actually most athletes, end their careers without other sources of income to help ensure a decent living and, most times, without thorough professional training through theoretical and practical studies.

The relevance of the subject stems from the context of today's society, of the sports system that is confronted with deep transformations. Our study has aimed to frame a clear image of the phenomenon of a dual career, to identify the attitude of athletes towards education and sports, the perception of coaches regarding support for dual career in athletic and educational performance, as well as the aspects regarded as support elements in the barriers to the realization of a dual career and in the withdrawal from professional competitive activity. The research is

exploratory, using theoretical information from literature and empirical information registered by the application of questionnaires and by the process of interviews, in a methodical approach that is appropriate to the specificities of this undertaking. The complex character of this subject has entailed a mixed research approach, both quantitative and qualitative.

The purpose of the study has been to explore the complex process of a dual sports career, by describing the specific phases, identifying the factors that influence the management of educational and professional training activities undertaken in parallel to the sports, as well as the management of the phase of withdrawal from competitive activity followed by the transition from a sports career to a post-athletic career.

This research can constitute an important undertaking in identifying the difficulties faced by professional and performing athletes in Romania and the NW region of the country, when they are obligated to manage the discipline of an athletic activity with the requirements of study and professional activity, an action identified as the dual career in sports. The successful intertwining of the two activities creates the premises for labour market insertion after withdrawal from competitive activity and for socio-professional reintegration of the social actors involved in the phenomenon.

The thesis was structured in three parts summing 9 chapters, preceded by introduction. The first five chapters have a theoretical character, while the following present the research, personal contributions, conclusions, and proposals. The first chapter, entitled “Aspects regarding physical education and sports” aims to be a historical recount of physical education and sports, underlining their significance, as well as their role in human development and the evolution of society. Moreover, the main concepts used within the thesis are presented, using references from the literature. Chapter 2, entitled “Professional athletic career”, structures relevant aspects from the literature regarding performance sports, the motivation of participation in sports, the transfer of athletes between clubs and the moment of withdrawal from sports life. Chapter 3 - “Professional career”, discusses aspects of the professional career, as well as the phases of building a professional career. Chapter 4 - “Support measures regarding dual career in performance sports” - illustrates aspects of the national and international acknowledgement of support measures destined for young people involved in performance sports in parallel to the educational and academic activity, the withdrawal from the athletic career and transition towards post-athletic life. The main factors intervening in the process of athletic, educational development, as well as professional training, are presented in chapter 5 - “Dual career management in performance sports.” Considering the importance of time management in the course of the activities that a professional athlete must undertake (sports, study, etc.), we have deemed useful the presentation of relevant aspects regarding time management in chapter 5. The second part refers to the “Pilot research for data collection regarding the dual career in sports” and includes chapter 6 - “Pilot research: verifying data collection tools”. Part III of the thesis regards personal research regarding dual career in performance sports and has been structured into three chapters. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 present three studies: Study I. the phenomenon dual career in performance sports from Romania, study II. Sports career phases and transition from athletic activity to the post-athletic phase, Study III. Project for raising awareness and promoting dual careers in sports. This part was allocated for empirical research and illustrates the contribution to the realization of the argumentative undertaking of the subject: organization and course of the research, analysis of registered results, discussions, conclusions. The final section

of the thesis features general conclusions, proposals, limitations of the research, references and addenda.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **ASPECTS REGARDING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS**

A short review of the evolution of physical education and sports shows that they have existed under different forms in all historical periods, and physical exercises manifested in human activity are found in any activity. The presence of physical exercises in the lives of nations ever since the beginning of history points to their universal character. The history of physical activities “teaches us about changes, as well as the past stability, and this helps us understand the present and take reasonable decisions for the future” (Hoffman, 2005, p.179). The physical education and sports activities have gone through glory and regress during history.

In Romania, the idea of practicing sports has gone through changes after World War II. According to the dominating ideology before 1990, it was framed through slogans, such as “sports for the people”, “sports as a factor preparing for work and defence”, “first at sports, first at study”. Sports clubs, sports associations at all levels and for all social categories are created in this period. For many young people, performance sports became a means of escaping the social constraints of the period and of ensuring a decent living. Currently, sports have become professions, jobs asking for sacrifices, but also offering equal satisfactions.

Practicing physical activities was considered an alternative contributing to the quality of life, “physical and mental health through sports is one of the most important strategies, with real chances of reducing the negative effects of the “information” drug (TV, Internet, etc.), of vices (alcohol, tobacco, coffee, sweets, self-medication) or of strong drugs (heroin)” (Tudos, 2000, p.9), and they were considered as a profitable investment in the short and long term. The perspectives and benefits of sports, in general, and performance sports, in particular, have been approached from different angles with pros and cons. Sports instils values and attitudes that can be transferred from the sports arena to the daily and professional life, but, in time, it can generate an educational risk by limiting the time allocated for education in a period when, according to specialists, “the child and his development needs must constitute the first preoccupation as opposed to athletic accomplishments” (Bocu, 2010, p.195).

One of the definitions of sports is “a racing activity made up of an array of motor actions differentiated by type of sport, undertaken in an institutionalized or independent framework, thus seeking the improvement of morpho-functional and mental possibilities, materialized in performances obtained in competitions as a record, own overtaking or an overtaking of competitors” (Dragnea & Mate-Teodorescu, 2002, p.14).

In performance sports, a dual career refers to a period when individuals combine a sports career with an educational or professional one. The term “dual career”, as emphasized by the communications of the European Commission, has been recently introduced in Europe, in order to emphasize the specific challenges faced by elite athletes when combining athletic and educational requirements. The notion of dual career for athletes “refers to the challenge of combining a sports career with education or employment” (Ryba, Aunola, Kalaja, Selänne, Ronkainen, Nurmi & Zourbanos, 2016, p. 2). Stambulova (2010) understands dual career as a “process of coordinated actions by which an athlete develops athletic and academic

competences, thus contributing to his/her psycho-social and psychological development” (apud Ābelkalns & Geske, 2013, p. 50).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PROFESSIONAL ATHLETIC CAREER**

At the end of the 19th century, a series of organizational structure, as sports clubs, is formed in Romania. After 1990, the idea of sports has gone through changes, along with the acceptance of the idea of performance sports. The law of physical education and sports is implemented, which, for the first time in the history of this activity, regulates their place and role in society, the forms of organization, their statute as private law social structures (federations, clubs or sports associations), thus recognizing sports as a factor of civilization and social integration.

The athletic environment is one of the most favourable environments for performance activity. According to Epuran, Holdevici and Tonița (2001), “athletes express best the most important reason of their activity: the need for performance or accomplishment” (p.39). The reasons for athletic participation, regardless of the type of sports, are varied, but “most of them are tied to the fact that practicing sports offers the most powerful and diverse satisfactions” (Epuran & Holdevici, 1980, p. 22).

Organized sports, governed by rules and norms, offer the social framework for the movement of individuals, thus constituting a lever for growing mobility. The transformation of athletes and, especially, elite ones to stars contributes to the view of sports as a “route of growing social mobility” (Hatos, 2002, p. 70). The opening of borders after 1990 has led to the migration of Romanian and foreign athletes. Elite athletes, coaches, specialists in the field, have sought opportunities for affirmation and winning. While Romanian athletes harnessed their potential abroad, Romanian sports clubs started importing foreign athletes to compensate for the loss of elite and to increase competition standards.

Withdrawal from competitions is an inevitable part of an athletic career for any person involved in a performance activity. It can take place at any stage of an athletic life and often entails difficulties, regardless of the reason, such as age, incompatibility between educational training and sports career, injuries, family, etc. The end of a sports career is a phase that can also entail difficulties at an occupational level, such as the lack of a professional career, lack of professional qualification, the choice of a less adequate professional career, as well as a decrease of income” (Cecic Erpic, 1998; Wylleman et al., 1993; Werthner & Orlic, 1986 apud Hatamleh, 2013, p. 341), loss of athletic identity and self-esteem (McKnight, Bernes, Gunn, Chorney, Orr & Bardick, 2009).

The duration of a career in performance sports is determined, but it is important for athletes and those involved in sports to be aware of this fact and to prepare the transition from the world of sports to the post-athletic life.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PROFESSIONAL CAREER**

A career can be seen as a “succession of different options facilitated by lifelong personal development” (Babarović & Šverko, 2016, p. 430). A sports career can be defined as “athletic participation roles registered within an athletic subculture that individuals can choose during their lifetime” (MTS – Centru de Cercetări pentru Probleme de Sport [Research Center for Sports], 2000, p. 140)

The planning of the educational and professional path at high school level is defining for “supporting pupils in better understanding the specific tasks of professional evolution with which they will be faced in the present and the future” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2015, p. 380). The transition from middle school to high school is considered by specialists as a period when pupils start analyzing certain occupational domains, forming certain expectations regarding different jobs and developing their aspirations. Career planning follows the “process by which individuals evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, foresee opportunities for professional development and establish objectives and plans by which they will point their own careers to the direction desired” (Osoian & Zaharia, 2012, p. 150). The “career development” concept refers to the “enlargement, improvement, perfecting of a career as a result of psychological processes of learning and training, leading to a change in the general personality and especially in the vocational-professional personality” (Zlate, 2004, p. 383).

The strategy of a professional career path guided by the individual through his capacities, supported by organizations through policies and programs backing a career rise, is positively, constructively oriented and it has representative valences for the professional identity of a person.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SUPPORT MEASURES REGARDING DUAL CAREER IN PERFORMANCE SPORTS**

European sports policies are based on internationally known principles, regulated by the European Charter of Sports, the Code of Sports Ethics, the Anti-Doping Convention, the White Charter of Sports, Communications of the European Commission, of the European Council, etc. The Council of Europe underlines the importance of dual career in sports emphasizing the need to ensure quality education in parallel to the athletic training of young athletes of the highest level (European Commission, 2011, p.5). Dual career should enable athletes to prepare also for a professional career meant to ensure labour market insertion after withdrawal from performance sports and “the diplomas obtained in sports could represent a good alternative to obtain an academic education supporting the occupational future of retired athletes on the labour market” (Lupo, Tessitore, Capranica, Rauter & Topic, 2012, p. 54).

The EU Member States have different positions regarding support policies for student athletes, according to the data summarized in the table.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Support measures</b>
United Kingdom	- scholarships for talented athletes from ages 16 to 25; - “a performance and life skills program” comprising a series of mentorship and

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	workshop sessions;
	- the opportunity to train with a sports specialist while they prepare for a post-athletic career
	- programs to develop high performance sports
Austria	- does not impose limits in accepting athletes within universities, offers flexibility regarding the study program
	- elite athletes are supported by universities by supplying different support services for a dual career (sports scholarships)
Ireland	- a restrictive educational system for elite athletes, limited flexibility for the recovery of classes and fulfilment of study requirements
	- a conservative educational system, which is partially receptive to partnerships with the sports federations, oriented for supporting elite athletes

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Romania is aligned to the European tendency regarding the dual sports career. The National Institute for Sports Research in Bucharest has translated the *EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes* (elaborated by the European Commission) within the project entitled *Regional Center for Dual Career of Athletes - DC4AC*, a project co-financed by the European Commission in the ERASMUS + Sports program. The *EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes* contain guidance for the main factors of dual training, as well as correlated actions. The Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan is framed in this orientation and approaches the educational, social, economic aspects of sports, public health, social inclusion, volunteering, financing, social protection of athletes, emphasizing the role of sports in society. Even so, the initiatives to support dual sports careers in Romania are not well known and publicized. Mainly, they are focused on the next phase after withdrawal from competitive activity, namely labour market insertion.

The legislative framework for support aimed at pupil and student athletes ensures differentiated help to professional athletes, limiting the access of athletes that are not members of national and Olympic teams to certain benefits, even though they are also involved in a strict regime (according to the data from the table).

<b>Regulations</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Observations</b>
OMEC 5159/1998 Law 69/2000 Law of National Education 1/2011	- exemption from course attendance, in proportion to the level of performance - extended or open exam sessions for higher education depending on the level of performance	- course recovery without additional teaching - no correlation of teaching activity and competitive calendar, centralized athletic training
Order 4799/2010	- special exam sessions for the baccalaureate exam	- (occasional) overlapping between the exam session and international competitions
Government Decision 1004/2002	- enrolment in higher education without admittance exam for athletes with international performances - ensuring tuition-free or tuition places in higher education for athletes with international performances	- differentiated and restrictive access in relation to the international performances

Law 69/2000	- lifelong annuities for athletes that obtained medals in the Olympics, World Championships, European Championships, Olympic events, after withdrawal from the sports career	- restrictive character, only for Olympic athletes - the situation of performing athletes at the end of the sports career remains an unsolved issue
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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DUAL CAREER MANAGEMENT IN PERFORMANCE SPORTS**

The analysis of dual career in sports is a process that cannot be reduced to only two actions - sports and study - without quantifying the factors intervening in the development of a dual career. The main influential factors for the development of a dual sports career (to which we will refer) are the family, the educational institutions, the sport, social networks, and time.

Family, the basic make-up of society, one of the basic social connections in ensuring the continuity and affirmation of human beings, is the natural environment for the child's development. The family, as an environment for socialization, education and communication, "has always been the first school of childhood" (Hălăuțescu, 2016, p. 59). The decisive role in the training and development of young people is played by institutionalized education. But, without generalizing its role, it plays this role along with the family (in the first years of life), the group of friends (in the teenage years), as well as the community, church, and mass-media (during lifetime). In today's society, education is one of the fundamental dimensions, being "the condition and progress of humanity" (Cucuș, 2000, p. 45). The desire "mens sana in corpore sano", mental and physical health, expresses the fundamental convictions of today's society, supported by the fact that 2004 was declared the year of education through sport in Europe. Sports offers an environment where young people can be educated, taught how to compete, it is a means of developing positive relations for the promotion of personal development. The athletic environment is comprised of "the sum of relations within the group of the athlete, the relations with the coach, with the leadership of the department and the sports club, as well as with those open to the great family of sports, determined by joint trainings, training camps, competitions" (Alexei, 2006, p. 93). The support offered to the athlete, "received from all the members of his/her entourage is the key allowing him/her achieve a balance between education, sports and social development" (Caput-Jogunica, et.al, 2012, p. 21).

Dual career management also involves efficient time management allocated to activities during a day. Time management means "conscious control over the time spent on different types of activities, thus boosting the efficiency and quality of result of an activity" (Kirillov, Tanatova, Vinichenko & Makushkin, 2015, p. 193). Individual time management is influenced by a series of familial, educational factors.

## **PART II - PILOT RESEARCH FOR DATA COLLECTION REGARDING THE DUAL CAREER IN SPORTS**

### **CHAPTER 6**

#### **PILOT RESEARCH FOR DATA COLLECTION REGARDING THE DUAL CAREER IN SPORTS**

The research subject requires the use of mixed research methods for collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The pilot research includes two studies: verifying questionnaires and verifying the interview plan.

The purpose of the pilot study regarding the verification of questionnaires has been to test the data collection tools for the identification of questions that could be misunderstood or understood differently by subjects, the order of items in the questionnaires, the response form in case of closed questions, but also regarding the duration of the questionnaire. The objectives of the verification of the questionnaire were: to verify the question plan and the succession of questions; to verify the framing of questions so that there are no difficulties in understanding and answering them; to verify the duration of the questionnaire.

The participants in the pilot study were athletes and coaches fulfilling all criteria: they are registered with sports clubs at different sports; they are active; amateurs or professionals; a minimum age of 18; Romanian citizens. The criteria for the coaches: registered as coaches, Romanian citizens. 15 subjects participated in the pilot study, 10 were athletes and 5 were coaches, who were not included in the final research sampling.

The research methodology for the pilot study was the sociological inquiry by survey process. The pilot study took place in January 2016. The participation of subjects in the pilot study was possible as a result of a voluntary participation agreement.

Testing the questionnaire for data collection regarding the opinions of athletes took place at a date and time agreed upon together with the participants in the study. The structure of the questionnaire had items following three main topics: athletic activity, educational activity or professional training and the management of a dual career in sports. The questionnaire is comprised of 48 items, closed questions with pre-codified multiple answers (2-10 answer options), open questions and demography questions to identify the characteristics of social actors.

The testing of the questionnaire for data collection on the opinions of coaches took place within a focus-group. The structure of the questionnaire for coaches had a total of 25 items, open, closed, and demographic questions, meant to identify the perception of subjects regarding the phenomenon of a dual career in sports and the evolution of sports in Romania, aspects regarding the athletic and competitive activity, conditions for performing performance sports, knowledge of the legislative framework and the elements for athlete support, as well as the knowledge of the factors that intervene with the management of competitive activity in parallel to education and professional training. The last part of the questionnaire refers to the programs and services deemed to be of a real support for sports people in dual career management. The final questions refer to demography.

During this phase of research, we eliminated errors in understanding the meaning of questions, by verifying and rephrasing them where it was deemed necessary. For some closed questions, some options were completed or partially withdrawn. A wide and complex array of

possible answers was covered, facilitating their completion. Vagueness was identified in the presentation of a question, which was modified. The changes contributed to the completion of the two sets of questionnaires destined for athletes and coaches and the elimination of errors in filling in the answers. The objectives of the pilot study were fulfilled.

The pilot research regarding the verification of the interview guide entailed a phase of planning and verification of the semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide was chosen, comprised of 4 main categories of topics and 25 secondary topics, aiming to identify the phase of a sports career, withdrawal from competitive activity and transition towards post-athletic life.

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the data collection tool regarding the identification and approach of the topics aimed at the phase of dual career and retirement, so that it covers the experiences of the subjects, as well as the verification of possible difficulties in communication due to the vocabulary. The objectives of the verification of the semi-structured interview guide were: the verification of the interview plan and the succession of the topics; the verification of the ways to approach the topics and the framing of questions so that the opinion expressed is not influenced, that it does not produce difficulties in understanding when talking about the respondents' life histories; verification of the interview duration.

Two athletes retired from professional activity and located in Oradea were interviewed in the pilot study. The subjects who participated in the pilot study were not included in the final research sampling.

The pilot study to test the interview guide took place in January 2016. The subjects were contacted over the phone for an initial approval for voluntary participation in the study. The date, time and location for the interview were decided by the subjects, thus facilitating the possibility to choose a suitable environment to express themselves. The participation of subjects in the pilot study was possible as a result of a written voluntary participation agreement.

Aspects regarding the framing of questions were emphasized in this research phase, with minor interventions to rephrase them, which will be adapted depending of the discussant. An aspect pointed out by one of the subjects was the discussion on a topic deemed sensitive regarding the causes for withdrawal from the sports career, an approach that was adapted depending on the attitude of the subject. A topic was introduced, with the purpose of registering the opinions of subjects regarding the need for support actions in dual career management and withdrawal from the sports career, with concrete proposals. By going through the specific phases of the study, the interview guide was completed and the main topics were completed with a new category. Consequently, the interview guide has 5 main topics and 25 sub-topics. The objectives of the pilot study were fulfilled.

**PART III - PERSONAL RESEARCH REGARDING DUAL CAREER IN  
PERFORMANCE SPORTS  
CHAPTER 7  
STUDY I. THE PHENOMENON DUAL CAREER IN  
PERFORMANCE SPORTS FROM ROMANIA**

Intensive athletic participation and scholarly discipline generate challenges when athletes must combine education and professional activity. The complexity of the studied phenomenon

justifies the use of sociological inquiry with survey process. The research phase for the study regarding the management of dual career took place between January and June 2016.

The main purpose followed by this study was to build a bird's eye view of the realities of dual careers in sports in a national context, by emphasizing aspects intervening in the accomplishment of athletic and scholarly performance regarding the course of professional and educational programs in parallel to athletic development and improvement, thus framing an image of the concern and approach of dual career in sports. The general objective is to analyze the period in the lives of professional and elite athletes when they combine the athletic activity with the educational one and/or professional training, integrated under the concept of dual career, with effects in the transition towards post-athletic life.

The hypothesis of the research was based on the idea that the overwhelming focus towards an athletic career influences the concern towards study, thus negatively impacting educational performance and professional training.

The participants in the study on dual career in performance sports were grouped in two categories of subjects: athletes and coaches. The cumulative characteristics established for the athlete subjects: registered with a representative sports club from NW Romania (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj counties); participants in the national competitive system; amateurs or professionals; a minimum age of 18; Romanian citizens. The cumulative characteristics established for the coach subjects: involved in the activity of representative sports clubs from NW Romania (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj counties); Romanian citizens. The statistic population investigated included a number of 300 athletes and 92 coaches, distributed on Olympic and Non-Olympic sports.

The administration of questionnaires, done during February and June 2016, was preceded by a preparation phase when the managers of the sports clubs included in the sampling were contacted in order to get approval for the participation. After the written agreement, visits were scheduled to administer the questionnaires. Due to organizational reasons, questionnaires were prepared both in a hard copy form and in an electronic form. The questionnaires were anonymous. The time frame to fill in the questionnaires was an average of 40 minutes.

## **Results**

The analysis of the registered data emphasizes relevant aspects regarding the management of dual career in performance sports and the implications in the athletes' activity. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the demographical and athletic profiles of the subjects. Inferential analysis (associations - chi squared; t-test test) was applied to identify relations between variables, respectively to compare samples extracted from the investigated population.

Out of the total of athlete subjects (N = 300) participating in the study, 57.7% (N=173 subjects) were male and 42.3% (N=127) were female, with an average age of 23.29 years ( $\pm 4.711$ ). The registered data showed a higher proportion of subjects performing in the top tier of performance. Out of the total of coach subjects (N = 92), 25% were female and 75% (N=127) were male, with an average age of 43.36 years ( $\pm 11.361$ ).

### **Dual career in performance sports from Romania**

The phenomenon of "dual career in sports" was perceived differently by subjects (athletes and coaches). The accounts of (athlete) subjects cover a great variety of answers, from ones apparently without any connection to reality, suggesting what they live, "*the sports career is first*", "*international competitions*", to complex approaches like "*the ability to manage your*

time, resources to obtain higher performance both from an athletic point of view and from an educational and professional point of view” or the reality of management of dual career in Romania - “a professional athlete cannot have a dual career, meaning both sports and school or a job, s/he cannot perform in both environments”. For 56.9% of athletes, the notion of “dual career in sports” is not unknown, but the definitions attributed to the concept do not reveal the fact that the action is fully understood, while 43.1% admit that they do not know the significance of the concept. There is also a category of subjects who declared that they are familiar to the phenomenon, without making any additional statements. Their percentage is relatively high, considering that 44% of the total of (athlete) subjects declared that they knew the notion, but did not detail any definition. Consequently, one can state that the percentage of athlete subjects who have attributed a definition of the concept of dual career in sports was actually 12.4%.

Most of the (coach) subjects of the total that stated they are familiar with the concept of dual career in sports (77.2%, N=71), frame the concept as being “two activities performed at the same time, sport, school and professional activity”, with different nuances of the definition. Not all coaches chose to express their point of view and to define the notion of dual career in sports, thus 22.8% (N=21) did not mention any answer, while 10% of coaches show that they do not understand the phenomenon, based on the structure of the definitions, although they sustain the contrary. As a result, in the case of coaches, the percentage of affirmative responses is not quite real, being under 67%, which reduces the number of coaches who understand the concept of dual career in sports correctly.

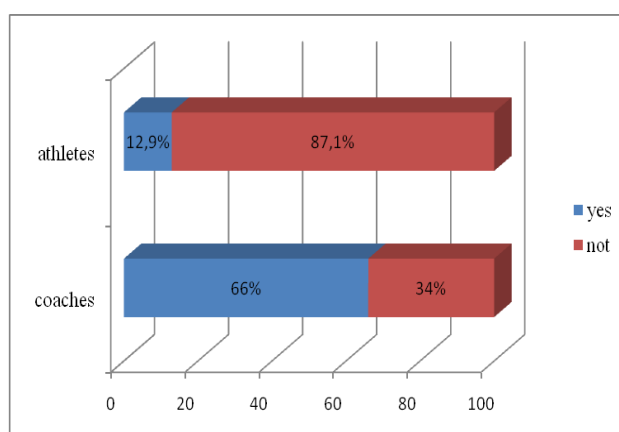


Figure 9 - Comparison of knowledge on the concept of dual career in sport

The phenomenon of “dual career in sports” was perceived differently by subjects (athletes and coaches). A higher degree of knowledge by coaches compared to athletes was registered ( $\chi^2=12.28$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

### Performance sports

Most of the (athletes) subjects - 56.7% - state that they were preoccupied both by education/professional training and by an athletic activity. This answer could be a desirable one, if we corroborate it with the objectives considered to be important, where athletic performance is placed on the first place with a majority percentage (90%). The preoccupation for the construction of a successful athletic career is more enhanced in male subjects ( $\chi^2=16.92$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), while the female subjects pay attention both to athletic activity and the professional, educational preparation. Even so, the difference between female subjects is significant ( $\chi^2=12.633$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.002$ ), suggesting that elite athletes give more importance to elite athletic

activity. The top-tier athletes place the sports career on the first place in the hierarchy of priorities, as opposed to the second-tier athletes ( $\chi^2 = 9.02$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.011$ ). Education, professional qualification are secondary objectives for athletes, as they aim to focus on these aspects after withdrawal from the athletic career (64.3%).

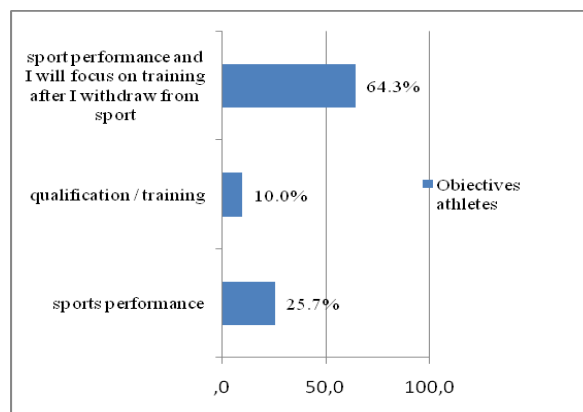


Figure 12 - Goals tracked by athletes

Male athletes who were selected for the national team tend to give more attention to performance activity, compared to the athletes who were not selected. For female subjects, the focus on sports career is more obvious in the case of those selected for the national team, the results indicating significant differences ( $\chi^2=8.998$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.011$ ). The main objective followed by male subjects was the development of an athletic career, compared to the female subjects ( $\chi^2=10.80$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.004$ ).

Table 57 – The objective hierarchy selection in the national team by gender

Gender	Item	Answer	Have you been selected in the national team?		$\chi^2$	p
			yes	not		
M	What is your most important goal?	sport performance	34,0%	30,4%	3.174	0.205
		qualification / training	4,3%	11,4%		
		sport performance and I will focus on training after I withdraw from sport	61,7%	58,2%		
F	What is your most important goal?	sport performance	16,9%	16,1%	8.998	0.011
		qualification / training	4,6%	22,6%		
		sport performance and I will focus on training after I withdraw from sport	78,5%	61,3%		

The probability for top-tier (athlete) subjects to be selected for the national team is higher, compared to the second-tier subjects ( $\chi^2=8.93$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.003$ ).

Most coaches (91.3%) state that they have guided athletes to pay equal attention both to athletic and to the educational activity, as well as to family and social life, while athletes (49,7%) state the contrary, that they were guided to focus on athletic activity as their main preoccupation. Statistically significant differences were registered regarding the orientation of activities in this approach ( $\chi^2=66.65$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The perception of (athlete) subjects within team sports to be encouraged by the coach mostly towards athletic activity is higher, compared to the subjects from individual sports, as they registered preoccupation for sports and educational activities ( $\chi^2=15.75$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The athletes selected to the national teams stated that they were



encouraged by coaches to focus mainly on athletic development, with the maximization of athletic performance as a main objective, which is a statistically significant relation, both in the case of male subjects ( $\chi^2=7.37$ ,  $df.=2$ ,  $p=0.025$ ), as well as in the case of female subjects. Top tier subjects ( $M=2.78\pm 1.02$ ) allocate significantly less time to educational training, compared to the second-tier subjects ( $M=3.05\pm 1.19$ ). Statistically significant differences were registered –  $t(298)=-2.05$ ,  $p=0.04$

### **Educational activity**

The (athletic) subjects accuse the educational system as regards “*the elaboration of very loaded curricula, requirements that are difficult for pupils and students involved also in performance sports*”. Although the knowledge presented in the courses is appreciated by 43.3% of subjects as “very” important for their training, the absences from courses mainly due to athletic activity (99%) cause the assimilation of information process to be done with lapses because the recovery of classes entails “copying courses from colleagues” (63.7%) or “individual training” (24%), with no additional teaching of the lost lessons.

Top-tier (athlete) subjects place less emphasis on professional and personal development, compared to the second-tier subjects ( $\chi^2=15.05$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). At the same time, the female subjects place more emphasis on the education and professional training compared to male subjects, who present a smaller probability as regards the interest for study ( $\chi^2=17.73$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). The attitude of female subjects towards school is confirmed also by the statistically significant relation -  $\chi^2=11.74$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.001$ , registered between the variables of gender and passing the baccalaureate exam, where females register a higher probability. Male subjects grant less attention to educational training ( $N=173$ ,  $M=1.87\pm 0.85$ ), compared to female subjects ( $N=127$ ,  $M=1.51\pm 0.68$ ), the difference between groups being statistically significant ( $t(298)=3.94$ ,  $p=0.00$ ).

The team sports athletes perceive the issue of the necessary time for sports as having negative influences on educational performance, compared to the athletes in individual sports ( $\chi^2=11.54$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.021$ ). This context can generate pressure, as they can face drop-out, especially in the case of team sports, compared to individual sports ( $\chi^2=9.80$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). The second tier subjects ( $N=124$ ,  $M=2.85\pm 1.21$ ) state the involvement in an athletic career influences educational training in a higher proportion compared to the top-tier subjects ( $N=176$ ,  $M=2.51\pm 1.04$ ) –  $t(298)=-2.60$ ,  $p=0.01$ .

### **Dual career management in performance sports**

The opinions of coaches - 54.3% of them - show that the right time for an intervention regarding the support for the two activities should take place “during transition from juniors to seniors”, when the athlete has consolidated his/her will for performance and athletic preference. Considering that at this moment (depending on the type of sports), the athletes are high school graduates (or are close to graduation), we consider that this is a late stage for the preparation of a dual career. In this context, a question arises, namely whether the coaches truly support the development of both activities?

Out of the total of (coach) subjects, 77% are not familiar with a means or a legislative regulation to support athletes in combining a sports career with an educational/professional training one effectively, while 23% of them refer to these aspects. Information is either not presented or is not associated as means of supporting young people in athletic and professional training. For 93% of the (athletes) subjects, support measures are unknown, as only 7% of them refer to certain regulations.

Most athletes (90%) blame time and characterize it as “*insufficient, in general there is not enough time for both activities (sports and school), then fatigue, stress intervene, as well as a lack of energy for everything that must be done*” Along with the issue of time, in certain situations, the financial effort that athletes must face is also a relevant factor.

An aspect underlined by coaches was the lack of interest of athletes towards “*preparing their own future*”, a lack of interest manifested both as regards athletic preparation and as regards school, which is supported by the familial environment with the mentality of parents who do not see possible “*a combination of athletic and education efforts*”. The list of problems invoked by coaches refer to aspects regarding lacking financing or infrastructure problems, etc. Injuries due to fatigue or intensive training without adequate healing, lacking specialists, the attitude of teachers, who “*disagree with an athletic career*”, can be barriers for athletes close to abandoning the sport.

Most athletes declared that they are not supported when they undertake athletic training programs in parallel to educational ones. Athletes from team sports perceive the support for combining athletic activity with studying to a lesser extent, compared to athletes from individual sports ( $\chi^2=14.33$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.006$ ). Even so, coaches appreciate that athletes are not supported enough in this direction to a greater extent than athletes ( $\chi^2=95.10$ ,  $df.=4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

#### **Support factors for the development of athletes involved in dual careers**

92% of (athlete) subjects consult mainly with their families when faced with important life events. 16% of them appreciate that the relationship with the coaches is positive and they trust them enough to appeal to their guidance. The influence of the group of friends regarding life attitude, scholarly and athletic performance is appreciated by 12% of (athlete) subjects. The subjects need the support and guidance of parents (6%), of the school (17%) when choosing professional training options. The development of a professional career in an upward trajectory requires a higher degree of commitment, which is assumed by 57% of athletes regarding the responsibility of preparing the transition from an athletic life to a professional career.

#### **Withdrawal from athletic career and preparation for post-athletic life**

Dedicated to athletic activity, oriented or not by coaches in this direction, athletes do not consider that they are prepared enough for a possible withdrawal from activity - 76.3% An important part of athletes (65%) did not intend to relate to the moment of withdrawal from the athletic career as the age when they cannot perform successfully in sports (the average age of subjects was 23.39 years) or because they do not know what to do “*they have not thought yet at withdrawal from sports, they do not know what to do in this direction*”. Out of the total of (athlete) subjects, 26% of them have attended or are currently attending higher education institutions, 4% have obtained diplomas from qualification courses, and 5% undertake professional activities, as they are employed part-time. The same opinion is shared by coaches regarding the lack of preparation of athletes for retirement, 78.3% of whom support this idea.

Professional trust given by the assimilated competences, necessary to follow a professional career after withdrawal, increases with growing age, based on life experience ( $\chi^2=31.78$ ,  $df.=3$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Even so, most subjects (76.3% of athletes and 78.3% of coaches) consider that Romanian athletes are not trained adequately so that the transition from a sports career to professional activity will take place without difficulties. Female subjects assume a higher responsibility regarding their training for socio-professional integrating, compared to male subjects ( $\chi^2=9.44$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). Second-tier subjects consider that it is the athlete’s duty to be responsible for socio-professional integration after withdrawal from the sports career

( $\chi^2=9.07$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), while top-tier subjects state that it is the duty of the federation to be preoccupied by the training of athletes regarding socio-professional integration after withdrawal from the sports career ( $\chi^2=11.49$ ,  $df.=1$ ,  $p=0.010$ ).

### **Measures to prepare athletes for withdrawal and transition from a sports career**

Coaches have stated that services, such as “*practice in professional training*” (23%), “*educational counselling and information*” (21.7%), “*counselling and information regarding employment*” (17.4%), “*career planning counselling*” (17%), “*vocational guidance*” (12%) and “*personal development courses*” (8.7%) can be useful for athletes that are close to withdrawing from competitive activity. During transition, the significance of information as a strategic potential in today’s society was emphasized by (coach) subjects with proposals, such as: “*Counselling services regarding professional career development in parallel to a sports career*” (42%), “*organization of presentations of information regarding possible careers for athletes*” (20%). Also, “*the organization of meetings between athletes and employers*” can become a support component for athletes (16%); “*designating a liaison for companies to ensure employment opportunities*” (8%), “*planning the moment of withdrawal from the sports career*” (7%) or “*monitoring vacant jobs and presenting offers to athletes*” (7%) are framed into possible measures proposed by coaches regarding a more effective transition.

### **Conclusions**

The study of a dual career in sports answers to a need to understand and study more thoroughly this phenomenon in Romania, as well as the relations that can support the combination of sports and education/training activities, in order to be able to prevent the risks of abandoning sports or school or issues of labour market insertion after withdrawal from the sports career. The significance of the concept “dual career in sports” (apparently) seems to be known by coaches and athletes, but the definition attributed to the term reveals that the phenomenon is understood incorrectly, which deems appropriate certain measures to promote and raise awareness of the importance of combining sports and study in a balance, thus confirming the premise of the study.

During their careers, the main objective followed by athletes and coaches is to maximize performance, to reach athletic excellence, which encourages athletes to place educational activity and professional training in second place, especially in the case of top-tier athletes, or to place them on the same place with athletic activity, which is the case for second-tier athletes. The tendency to focus mostly on athletic performance distracts attention from the importance of preparing athletes close to retirement for a transition towards another phase of their lives, and this is the case especially for athletes that have not have successes allowing for a decent living (obtaining lifelong annuities). The hypothesis that athletic dedication limits the time for educational training, thus endangering professional training, is confirmed, emphasizing differences in preoccupation depending on the level of excellence and gender.

The Romanian legislative framework regarding the development of a dual career is not favourable. The existing regulations are not well-known by athletes and coaches, as they are either not presented or they are not assimilated as means of support. The preoccupation for the management of dual career could start in tandem with the consolidation of the desire for performance and continue during the entire educational and athletic development process, aiming for athletic success, as well as educational performance.

The study develops a theoretical framework that can contribute to the elaboration of strategies to approach dual career in performance sports that could allow for a consolidation of

athletic and educational commitment, thus preventing athletic or educational abandoning determined by a choice in careers, a path that can ensure transition to a post-athletic life and socio-professional integration without difficulties.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **STUDY II SPORTS CAREER PHASES AND TRANSITION FROM ATHLETIC ACTIVITY TO THE POST-ATHLETIC PHASE**

An athletic job is accessible for everybody, but it is short-lived. For many professional athletes, the combination of an athletic career and education or a job can be a difficult challenge. They must balance the discipline of sports and study or professional activity.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the phases of an athletic career, signalling the difficulties faced by Romanian athletes on their path to athletic performance, in the phase of withdrawal from competitive activity and transition towards a post-athletic life. The general objective aims to analyze the phases of training, development, end of an athletic career and the transition towards a different life style, assumed by social actors involved in the phenomenon of dual career in sports.

The following assumptions (hypotheses) were the basis for this study:

- The dedication of young people mainly to performance sports leads to a neglect of other important life aspects, such as: education, preparing for a future career, social life;
- Neglect of other life aspects by young people dedicated to performance sports can generate difficulties in the transition towards post-athletic life and employment;
- The determining factors of withdrawal from the athletic career can influence the transition towards another life stage.

Retired athletes, Romanian citizens, were included in the study. The counties, homes of the subjects, were Bihor, Sălaj and Maramureş counties. The cumulative characteristics established for the subjects: retired athletes, who had been involved in the national or international competitive system during their activity, amateurs or professionals, located in the NW part of the country, Romanian citizens. The “snowball” method was used to establish the sampling. 21 subjects were interviewed in total.

The interview was the method used for this study. Content analysis was used to analyze the data registered during the interviews. The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder, then they were transcribed, followed by the analysis. A semi-structured interview guide was used for the interview, which had been verified and analyzed during the pilot study.

The interviews took place during February-March 2017. The subjects were offered a consent form regarding voluntary participation at the beginning of each interview. The subjects were informed about the fact that they can give up the study at any point, without motivating their withdrawal and without any consequences. The duration of the interview was between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on the storytelling of the subjects and the complexity of their athletic careers.

#### **Results**

Athletic participation happened in different forms for the interviewed subjects, depending on the predominant socio-cultural context. The first steps in sports sometimes started from young

ages, “*as child’s play that became serious*”. However, for the subjects that came from families with tradition in sports, the involvement in athletic activity was seen as a normality. Most children end up practicing sports after selections organized in schools by specialized staff or they were steered in this direction by their parents. The beginning is motivated by child’s play, “*they were playing a lot in the courtyard, in the near-by park*”, or by the desire of success, recognition, fame, by satisfactions, appreciation, by a means of escaping the daily life or family problems, by the idea of an alternative to the tendencies of the modern world and a useful means of spending leisure time. The possibility of building a better future was acknowledged especially before 1989, when sports would ensure a higher social status and represented a means of climbing the social ladder, of enjoying a decent living compared to the rest of the population.

For the subjects that chose to move towards professional activity, a part of the time and energy would be channelled in this direction. The identification as an athlete sometimes begins very early. Although athletic participation can begin in a fun way, the challenge of overcoming one’s limits and the desire for success makes athletes grant more and more importance to the preparation and development of a successful athletic career. Thus, the sport becomes the central element of subjects’ lives, becoming the main preoccupation, followed by school or other aspects of life.

During an athletic career, the subjects pass through different phases of transitions, from initiation to withdrawal from competitive activity. Transition does not take place only when retiring to post-athletic life, it also takes place when promoting to higher ranks, when passing towards a superior age category or when transferring towards another athletic structure. In this phase, athletes go through a process of adaptation to a new environment, which is sometimes different from expected. The main decision factor of athletic transfers is the financial aspect and the training conditions ensured when moving up in the athletic career. Differences in gender were registered as regards athletic transfers, so that female subjects registered stability, especially if they were married, as they preferred to stay with the team/club from their home.

The offers from athletic clubs come with a series of benefits mentioned by the subjects, which consist of ensuring income, accommodation, meals, athletic/effort benefits, food supplements to support effort, professional athletic training, etc. Once in the athletic elite, subjects talk about compensations that can ensure a decent living, but there still is the issue of those who cannot reach high performance. When discussing athletic benefits, there were differences between “before and after 1989”. The conditions ensured before 1989 allowed the athlete to live off of sports without retirement issues.

The choice of an athletic career channels the focus on athletic activity to the detriment of other aspects of social lives, with important damage done to education, professional training or family life. Participation in the training program and the competitions means giving up on other (age appropriate) activities, it means sacrifice. The things that were given up were more or less experienced, depending on the career moment, but, with time, they are not perceived as dramatically as they had been before.

Once the athletic career has been chosen, sports becomes the subjects’ main activity, as all their life is focused towards obtaining performance. In case of top-tier subjects or those selected for the national teams, there is a tendency to focus more on athletic development, compared to the subjects who had not reached this accomplishment. Most subjects consider that the practice of athletic activity influences the educational performance, given that the time dedicated to it is limited, considering the fact they do not find support for a balance between

study and athletic training. The subjects that were interested in a career tried to combine study and sports with university or post-high-school courses, while the subjects focused on the athletic career limited to graduating high school, but they had a longer period as professional athletes.

After 1989, along with the diversification of education, the variety of specializations, the growing number of university options, the creation of post-high-school institutions, the option of professional qualification becomes more accessible. The dynamics of the labour market, the lack of certainty in the athletic environment due to the fact they athletes do not receive support for labour market insertion after withdrawal as during the communist period, as well as the access to information and higher education, lead to more active preoccupation of athletes for their future profession.

Athletic participation is defined by the life cycles and situations, such as age, loss of physical/motor capacity, difficulties in maintaining the athletic shape at the level of competitive requirements, lack of balance in the coaches' decisions to include athletes in the first team, these are factors that have led to a decision to withdraw from competitive activity. The most frequent reasons invoked by the subjects as possible causes for temporary withdrawal at one point in their path towards acknowledgement are medical aspects due to injuries. Difficulties in communication, sometimes reaching conflicts between athletes and coaches, representatives of the clubs and federations, have also played an important role in the athletes' decisions to retire from their athletic careers. The context generated by a limited support from the state after 1989 has led to the retirement of a big number of athletes, which was the cause for an end to the athletic career. Family situation, the presence of children in their families have been other reasons for withdrawal.

The experiences of educational and athletic activity, the duration and perspectives of the two careers make athletes choose between training options that can offer more safety for the future, considering educational commitments more important. In case of interviewed subjects, there were differences by performance, gender, level of training, regarding the way in which they accepted the decision to withdraw from competitive activity and to manage the process of adapting to the social, educational or professional life. The top-tier subjects are more dedicated to the athletic life, they pay less attention to other aspects of their lives, are less prepared for athletic retirement and the start of a career, and the experience of adapting to a new life can be traumatizing. The female subjects are more disturbed by situations beyond their control, as they experience their forces retirement dramatically. If the withdrawal intervenes due to a situation allowing athletes to remain in sports, the transition to a career can seem natural, without difficulties in adapting. In case of subjects for whom the impact of withdrawal is not as intense and who abandoned competitive athletic activity in favour of educational performance, their socio-professional integration is not as problematic, given that they harness the abilities accumulated from the competitive environment to the occupational activity. The transition from athlete to another role is more difficult in case of athletes with a strong athletic identity. Ensuring financial resources is a problematic aspect for athletes withdrawn from competitive activity, case in which the subjects must get even two jobs in order to earn an income fit for a decent living.

The main support factor in the withdrawal of athletes from the athletic career and the post-athletic transition is the family. The analysis of the information provided by the subjects does not reveal an involvement of club leadership or of the coaches to support athletes in their transition towards a new phase of their life and in labour market insertion.

Lacking support from the athletic institution for employment, the subjects deal with difficulties in labour market insertion, considering that their CV presents athletic experience for the most part, with less or no professional experience in other fields.

### **Conclusions**

The athletic career, which has a limited duration given by the age limit, with difficult competitive demands in order to access the top tier and with a high risk of injury, diminishes or compromises other aspects of athletes' lives to a great extent, thus jeopardizing training for a future career and the transition to the labour market.

Withdrawal from the sports career is a phase with important social and occupational changes in the lives of athletes. The voluntary or forced character of the withdrawal from the sports career indicates the manner in which the transition towards a non-athletic role will be felt by athletes, both at the physical, social, psychological levels, as well as at the career level. The transition process, adapting to a life beyond athletic performance, can be perceived differently, either as a difficult and traumatizing experience or as a natural one.

Difficulties in adapting are greater when the decision to withdraw cannot be controlled and in case of less attention paid to professional qualification. For athletes remaining in sports after withdrawing from the competitive arena, the transition and career transition can be natural, without difficulties in adapting. The level of professional training and the planning of withdrawal from competitive activity can facilitate the socio-professional reintegration of athletes, becoming the foundation for labour market insertion and adaptation to other social roles. The support given by athletes by the family after retirement represents the main support in adapting to their new life style.

The hypotheses of the study were confirmed.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **STUDY III PROJECT FOR RAISING AWARENESS AND PROMOTING DUAL CAREERS IN SPORTS**

The analysis of data registered as a result of the study on dual career management in sports and the study regarding the phases of the professional career, withdrawal from competitive activity and post-athletic transition have underlined the importance of informing athletes regarding the support that they can get when developing an athletic career in parallel to an educational or a professional training program, as well as regarding the need to elaborate support projects in the development of two careers.

The course of the project aimed to promote the concept of dual career in performance sports by informing athletes about this phenomenon and presenting the support available when combining athletic and educational activities with possible consequences. The main objectives of the study were: to identify the degree of awareness of the concept of dual career in performance sports; to identify the extent to which athletes know the support available in dual career management; to estimate the usefulness of the awareness campaigns.

The course of the project included the elaboration of the informative guide, scheduling meetings with high school student athletes from grades 9 to 12 in Oradea, data collection and analysis. The organisation of the awareness campaigns was preceded by a preparation phase when the coaches of local athletic clubs in Oradea were contacted and asked for their approval

for voluntary participation. The date, time and location for the interview were decided depending on the schedule of the participants.

A short presentation of the information mentioned in the informative guide was done during these actions. The informative guide was distributed to participants and, by the end of the meeting, a section with questions would be filled in by them. The awareness campaigns for dual career in sports took place in June 2017. The meetings were organized in groups of 10-15 participants.

The subjects, 50 participants, were high school students (9th to 12th grade), registered with the local sports clubs in Oradea. The methods used in the study were the focus group, as a means of presenting the information, debate on the informative guide, collecting participants' opinions, and survey with the data collection tool.

The concept of dual career in sports is unknown to the subjects, considering that only 8% of them have stated that they are familiar with the term, while, for 92% of them, it is a novel aspect. For 72% of the subjects, support does not represent a known aspect or the means are not perceived as support elements in the combination of athletic and educational activities, while 28% of them are informed in this regard. Out of the total, 94% of participants consider that awareness campaigns are useful, while they are not relevant for 6%.

The analysis of results indicates the same tendency manifested in the research on professional athletes over 18, regarding the limited knowledge and lack of correct understanding of the concept of dual career in performance sports. Considering that study programs from athletic schools do not have subjects approaching the phenomenon of dual career in sports and that coaches are focused on achieving athletic performance, information remains the task of the athletes.

Actions to inform athletes can become important elements for the planning of a future athletic, and professional career, a process that requires the involvement of the main factors participating in the athletes' lives - the educational, athletic, and family institutions. The coach and the teacher as trainers of the student athlete contribute the most in their development.

### **General conclusions and proposals**

The research regarding dual career in performance sports in Romania is insignificant, while it focuses mainly on talented and top-tier athletes in Europe. The conclusions of the study have emphasized the need to understand the importance of balance as a main principle in athletes' lives and the appreciation of specific competences with which athletes can operate in order to combine sports and education successfully in a dual career strategy. Athletes, athletic and educational authorities require a conscious effort in order to build dual career development plans allowing for the progress of athletes on both sides, with a planning of post-athletic life.

The conclusions of the study sketch three athletic development models, namely one that emphasizes sports more than education, with a remarkable athletic career, a second where athletes try to value both sports and education, with less performance in athletic activity or in professional training, and, finally, a third category made up of athletes praising the professional perspectives to the detriment of the future in sports.

### **Proposals**

This research can be a starting point for a national and holistic approach of framing the overall picture on the phenomenon of dual career in professional and top-tier sports, with longitudinal studies examining the influence and impact of development factors regarding the



dynamics of professional athletic career in the socio-economic, cultural context of each type of sports.

An important factor that could contribute to better awareness of the importance of education and sports could be the introduction/implementation of the concept of dual career in the curricula of sports high schools, in skills upgrade courses for coaches and within coaching schools.

Signing collaboration agreements between athletic organizations and educational institutions to harmonize athletic and educational obligations, the modular organization of courses, establishing course recovery programs for student athletes in high school or university, so that there is a correlation between educational activities, the centralized training programs and the competition calendar, are essential aspects in supporting the dual career.

Another proposal is elaborating projects/support programs for student athletes in high school or university that are adapted to the athletic culture, to discipline and to the level of performance, by which they are encouraged and guided to plan their educational, professional training, and athletic development paths ever since the beginning of their athletic career and during it.

A final proposal is the setting up of local multifunctional centers that integrate athletic development at high standards of educational and professional performance in a balanced system, with specialists from sports, medicine/health, nutrition, recovery/rehabilitation, psychology, educational, professional and legal guidance/counselling, etc.

#### **Limitations of the research**

The (quantitative) approach of the study regarding dual career management creates certain limitations tied to the way in which the information is presented, as follows:

- the means to fill in the survey (by the subjects themselves) can generate the social desirability effect with the risk of providing subjective answers or incomplete answers;
- The scope of the study, limited to the NW part of the country, limits the generalization of theories at the national level;
- The transversal character of the study does not allow for conclusions regarding causal relations.

The (qualitative) approach of the study regarding dual career in sports and transition from athletic to post-athletic activity presents the following limitations:

- the retrospective character of the told experiences and the reinterpretation of past experiences can generate long-term memory errors;
- the storytelling of life experiences can generate the social desirability effect with the risk of providing subjective answers or incomplete answers.

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