



## Review



## FEPSAC Position Statement: Athletes' dual careers in the European context

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this FEPSAC Position Statement is to summarize current knowledge about athletes' dual careers (DCs) in the European context and propose recommendations for future DC research, practice, and policy. Inspired by the European Union's Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (European Commission, 2012), researchers, practitioners, and policy makers collaborated over the last decade to create the European DC discourse as a context-informed and negotiated body of DC knowledge. In this paper, we proceed from analyzing this body of knowledge using recent review papers and European DC psychological research projects to formulating seven postulates summarizing DC research findings on factors influencing athletes in their striving for DC excellence. These factors include (1) context, (2) pathways and transitions, (3) challenges, (4) resources and coping, (5) support and empowerment, (6) student-athletes' mental health, and (7) DC development environments. In the final section, we acknowledge the contributions of European DC discourse in serving athletes in their pursuit of DC excellence and European DC culture. We also provide a critical discussion on DC knowledge gaps and, on behalf of FEPSAC, offer recommendations for DC research, practice, and policy in Europe.

## 1. Role of FEPSAC and the European Commission in promoting athletes' dual career research and practice

It is an interesting coincidence that athlete career research in sport psychology was initiated in Europe around the same time as FEPSAC was founded in 1969. Initial studies (e.g., Halldén, 1963; Mihovilovic, 1968; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982) focused on athletic retirement and problematized athletes' adjustment difficulties and compromised mental health after athletic career termination. Although the term 'dual career' (DC) briefly defined as "a career with two major foci on sport and studies or work" (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015, p. 1) didn't exist at that time, pioneering authors pointed out that having education and/or vocational experience could facilitate athletes' post-sport career adaptation. In a systematic review of athletic retirement research embracing the period between 1968 and 2010, Park et al. (2013) summarized 126 studies from all over the world (45 studies were European in origin), and

revealed education, career planning, vocational and life skills, and athletes' broader (other than athletic) personal identity among factors facilitating successful transition to a post-career trajectory. Therefore, before DC research began to flourish, its preconditions were for a long time created within athlete career research (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

A turning point in development of the athlete career scholarship in Europe was the 9th European (FEPSAC) Congress held in Brussels (Belgium), during which the Career Transition Special Interest Group (CT-SIG) was created to organize career transition symposia at major international congresses, conduct joint research projects, and publish together. The CT-SIG cooperated with the FEPSAC Managing Council (MC) to issue two FEPSAC Position Statements on "Career Transitions" (1995) and "Career Termination" (1997), as well as a FEPSAC monograph "Career Transitions in Competitive Sports" (Wylleman et al., 1999) followed by *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* Special Issue on

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Career Transitions (Wylleman et al., 2004). These publications promoted the holistic view of athletes' development with relationships between athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic-vocational levels, and paved the way for DC research and DC support philosophy (see Stambulova, 2016; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016).

Reviews of athlete career research and assistance through a cultural lens (Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014) revealed that career scholars internalize research topics from their relevant sociocultural contexts. Therefore, it is not surprising that DC research in Europe accelerated after the European Commission (EC) highlighted that, in the diverse and multicultural European context, we need to consolidate the efforts of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to support elite athletes in combining sports and education or work. The term 'dual career' was first introduced in the White Paper on Sport (EC, 2007) as a means of safeguarding "athletes' moral, educational, and professional interests" as well as their smooth "integration into the labor market at the end of their careers" (p. 6). The next logical initiatives of the EC were organizing the European Union (EU) Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (further: EU DC Guidelines) issued in 2012 and followed by a decade of DC remaining among the key priorities for EC research funding within Erasmus + Sport program. These actions spurred multidisciplinary DC research in Europe, with sport psychology being at the front line with several big European projects (forthcoming), DC symposia at each recent FEPSAC Congress (e.g., FEPSAC, 2015, 2019, 2022), the *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* Special Issue "DC Development and Transitions" (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015) and an invited review of the European DC research (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) published in the Special Issue of *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* on the 50th anniversary of FEPSAC (Ntoumanis & Strauss, 2019).

As more than a decade has passed since the EU DC Guidelines set up an agenda for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to work together to create what we now call European DC discourse (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019), FEPSAC takes a lead in consolidating existing knowledge and providing a vision for the future. Rationales for the consensus achieved are based on the solid author line, significance of the DC topic, existing body of research finding, and a need to delineate the gaps and new directions (Meyer, 2023). The aim of this Position Statement is to summarize current knowledge about athletes' DCs in the European context and, on behalf of FEPSAC, propose recommendations for future DC research, practice, and policy.

## 2. European DC discourse: major sources of DC knowledge

European DC discourse is defined as "a historically constructed and shared body of DC knowledge ... providing DC stakeholders in Europe with common grounds to understand each other, communicate, and cooperate on different levels" (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019, p. 74). This discourse originated at the EU level and then expanded in both top-down (e.g., 2004 as a Year of Sport and Education in Europe; the White Paper on Sport, 2007; EU DC Guidelines, 2012) and bottom-up initiatives (e.g., EAS—the European Athlete as Student network and pilot DC projects, see Capranica et al., 2015), embracing communication among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers across Europe. The research part of European DC discourse is multidisciplinary, with its major foci on the psychological, managerial, sociological, and legal aspects of European athletes' DCs. Below we introduce DC review papers published in the last five years and European DC psychological projects conducted in the last decade as major cumulative sources of DC knowledge.

### 2.1. Recent reviews of DC research

Table 1 introduces four recent reviews of DC literature—Stambulova and Wylleman (2019), Palumbo et al. (2021), Tessitore et al. (2021), and Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, Praet, et al. (2022b)—chronologically, with a brief overview of their aims, the number and characteristics of the

included studies, and their major contributions. All four reviews are systematic but have different perspectives in summarizing DC literature. Stambulova and Wylleman focused entirely on European psychological research, addressed the diversity of the investigated topics, and critically appraised the knowledge base from the stance of the cultural praxis of athletes' careers (Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). The other three reviews focused specifically on student–athletes' migration (Palumbo et al.), student–athletes' parents (Tessitore et al.), and student–athletes' mental health (Kegelaers et al.) and embraced DC literature from around the world with European studies forming a part of the whole puzzle. All the reviews made substantial contributions in summarizing the conceptual, theoretical, methodological, empirical, and applied aspects of the included studies with impressive total samples of DC stakeholders: 9883 student–athletes and 553 entourage members (Stambulova & Wylleman); 691 DC migrants (Palumbo et al.); 1151 student–athletes' parents (Tessitore et al.); and 58710 student–athletes (Kegelaers et al.). Authors of all the reviews reflected on gaps in the literature (e.g., DC in sport and work) and established agendas for future research.

### 2.2. Major European DC psychological projects

Over the last two decades European DC projects were conducted mainly by two types of consortiums consisting of researchers and practitioners from different European countries. The earlier kind is multidisciplinary and more closely related to the EAS network (see, e.g., Capranica et al., 2015), while the later is more psychological in nature and more closely associated with FEPSAC (with all researchers being FEPSAC individual or group members and some being former or current FEPSAC MC members). Four major psychological DC projects within the Erasmus + Sport program are listed chronologically in Table 2 with their titles and timing; the countries involved; aims; and major conceptual, theoretical, methodological, empirical, and applied contributions.

The four projects—Gold in Education and Elite Sport (GEES), Be a Winner In elite Sport and Employment before and after athletic Retirement (B-WISER), Ecology of Dual Career: DC development environments across Europe (ECO-DC), and Dual Careers for Mental Health (DC4MH)—are logically related to each other and share whole-person and whole-environment approaches, as well as foci on DC athletes and DC support, competency and empowerment perspectives, context sensitivity, and quality evaluations—all crystallized in comprehensive research and applied outcomes (see Table 2). These outcomes directly address challenges formulated by the EU DC Guidelines (2012) about ensuring DC support services and structures (# 8); the high qualification and competency of support providers (# 9); developing frameworks for DCs in sport and education (# 10) and DC in sport and work (#12); joint efforts to support athletes' mental health, and offering educational programs focusing on life skills, injury prevention, and healthy living (# 21); cooperation between sport training centers and educational institutions (# 27); and dissemination of DC knowledge (#32), among others.

It is important that international collaboration within the projects allowed researchers to negotiate definitions of key terms; test existing instruments and create new ones; consolidate and distribute solid DC applied work experiences, frameworks, and tools across European countries. Publications based on the overviewed projects have substantially enriched European DC discourse (e.g., De Brandt et al., 2018; Defruyt et al., 2019, 2021; Henriksen, Storm et al., 2020b; Korhonen et al., 2020; Linnér et al., 2019, 2020; Mejias et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Nikander et al., 2020; Perez-Rivases et al., 2020; Smismans et al., 2021; Storm et al., 2021), and more publications inspired by these projects can be expected in the future.

The overview of major sources of DC knowledge revealed that: (a) a number of DC publications increased dramatically over the last decade, especially in Europe; (b) the DC term is well-established and has been used during the past decade in all European and in many non-European

publications; (c) European DC research is context sensitive and informed by holistic developmental (Wylleman et al., 2020) or/and the holistic ecological (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) approaches; (d) DC quantitative research contributed to development of several DC-specific instruments, and is complemented by qualitative and mixed-methods studies enhancing DC knowledge among relevant stakeholders; (e) various research designs (e.g., cross-sectional, longitudinal, case- and cross-case studies) ensured the diversity and complementarity of DC studies; and (f) dissemination of DC research findings and applied

experiences provided a good basis for further development of the European DC discourse.

### 3. European DC discourse: summary of research findings

In the EU DC Guidelines, DC athletes are viewed as whole persons with their DCs embedded into lifelong careers (EC, 2012, p. 6):

**Table 1**

An overview of recent reviews on athletes' dual careers.

Reference	Review type and included studies	Major contributions
Stambulova and Wylleman (2019)	State-of-the art critical review of European DC research 42 journal articles (all European), 2015–2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledged contribution of nine previous review-type papers (e.g., Aquilina &amp; Henry, 2010; Capranica et al., 2015) and is built up as a continuation of Guidotti et al., 2015 review of European DC research.</li> <li>• Provided mapping synthesis of included papers with foci on European contexts addressed, characteristics of athlete and entourage samples, theoretical frameworks, research designs and methodologies used.</li> <li>• Provided a narrative synthesis using major research themes identified in DC studies: pathways, transitions, demands, personal resources/competencies, support networks, DC development environments, barriers, coping strategies, athletes' health, lifestyle and wellbeing, benefits and costs, and retirement in sport and work.</li> <li>• Summarized major conceptual, theoretical, methodological, empirical, and applied contributions of included studies.</li> <li>• Offered a critical discussion grounded in the cultural praxis of athletes' careers paradigm followed by an extensive agenda for future DC European research and practice.</li> </ul>
Palumbo et al. (2021)	Systematic review of international research on student–athletes' migration and transnational DCs 12 journal articles (9 with European participants), 2010–2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarized included studies in terms of publication timing, aim of the study, outgoing and incoming country, samples, and major findings.</li> <li>• Offered typology of migrant student–athletes with six types: <i>mercenary</i> (motivated by economic reward), <i>settler</i> (or immigrant), <i>returnee</i> (back home after completing their DC sport and studies), <i>nomadic cosmopolitan</i> (motivated to experiencing different cultures), <i>ambitionist</i> (aspired for professional sport career and better DC conditions than at home), and <i>exile</i> (migration for personal or political reasons).</li> <li>• Provided a mapping synthesis of the included papers in relation to the migrant typology.</li> <li>• Revealed that most DC migrants move to the USA.</li> <li>• Showed that in Europe the transnational mobility of DC athletes is facilitated by ERASMUS program.</li> <li>• Advocated for further development of international partnership between institutions and programs to support growing migration of student–athletes.</li> <li>• Critically discussed existing paradox between growing DC migration and a lack of relevant research and support to DC migrants.</li> </ul>
Tessitore et al. (2021)	Systematic review of international research on DC parents and their role in supporting DC athletes 14 journal articles (8 European), 1999–2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a mapping synthesis of included papers in terms of contexts, sizes of parents' samples, age and sport characteristics of DC athletes related to the parents, and data collection methods.</li> <li>• Identified major themes illustrating DC parenting experiences, including “approach to both sport and education”, “stressors and coping” (at the individual level) and “relationships with the athlete, the sport, and academic environments” (at inter-individual level) and provided a narrative synthesis of research findings related to the themes.</li> <li>• Promoted an important role of DC athletes' parents in further development of European DC culture and advocated for developing educational programs for DC athletes' parents, addressing the athletes' needs and parents' needs to empower parental support.</li> </ul>
Kegelaers et al. (2022b)	Systematic scoping review on mental health of student–athletes 159 studies (21 European), 1990–2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarized included studies in terms of publication timing, contexts, samples, designs, methodologies, and major contributions.</li> <li>• Revealed that quantitative studies prevailed with 93 distinct measures used. 101 studies focused on mental illnesses (e.g., eating disorders, depression, anxiety), 36 studies on positive mental health (e.g., well-being), and 22 studies investigated both.</li> <li>• Showed that prevalence rates of mental illness among student–athletes were diverse across studies, and no consensus was found across 31 studies regarding mental health outcomes of student–athletes compared to control groups (e.g., student-non-athletes).</li> <li>• Classified factors associated with mental health outcomes (n = 49) into demographic, generic, sport-specific, and DC-specific.</li> <li>• Revealed that most of the 16 intervention studies (e.g., mindfulness-based) reported positive impacts on student–athletes' mental health.</li> <li>• Advocated for future contextually sensitive research grounded in the holistic developmental and ecological perspectives with foci on variety of factors (e.g., gender) to inform mental health support programs within the DC contexts.</li> </ul>

Note: review papers in Table 1 are presented in chronological order.

**Table 2**  
An overview of major Erasmus + Sport dual career psychological projects.

Title, years, consortium	Aims/objectives	Contributions
<p><b>GEES</b> Gold in Education and Elite Sport 2015–2016 17 research or elite sport organizations from: Belgium France Italy Poland Slovenia Spain Sweden The Netherlands United Kingdom Coordinators: Vrije Universiteit Brussel and INSEP</p>	<p><b>Aims:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify DC competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes) required by student–athletes (12–25 years old) to maximize their capability to successfully prepare, manage and finalize their DC education-and-sport pathway.</li> <li>2. Identify competencies of DC support providers (DCSPs) to facilitate athletes' DC development.</li> <li>3. Identify, develop, and evaluate applied tools that student–athletes and DCSPs can use to enhance their competencies.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Conceptual:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Definitions of elite student–athletes, DCSPs, DC competencies, and DC scenarios.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Implementation of the holistic athletic career model.</li> <li>•DC competence framework (DC competencies list and 4-factor DC competence wheel for athletes).</li> <li>•DCSPs competence framework (competence list and 6-factors DC competence wheel for DCSPs).</li> <li>•Seven DC scenarios typical for student–athletes and six challenging scenarios for DCSPs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Methodological:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•DC Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A)</li> <li>•DC Competency Questionnaire for Support Providers (DCCQ-SP).</li> </ul> <p><b>Empirical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Generic and specific profiles for perceived importance and possession of DC competencies in student–athletes (N = 4196).</li> <li>•Generic and specific profiles of perceived importance and possession of DC competencies in DCSPs (N = 512)</li> <li>•Scenario-specific and transferable competencies profiles for student–athletes and DCSPs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Applied:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Over 30 applied frameworks or tools to optimize DC competencies.</li> <li>•Comprehensive recommendations for student–athletes and DCSPs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B-WISER</b> Be a Winner In elite Sport and Employment before and after athletic Retirement 2016–2017 13 research or elite sport organizations from: Belgium Germany Italy Slovenia Spain Sweden Coordinator: Vrije Universiteit Brussel</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> To provide EU Member States with empirical data, conceptualizations, competence profiles, tools, and evidence-based practices relevant to, and enabling them to create the optimal environment to enhance elite and former elite athletes' employability and employment during three specific career stages.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To study stakeholders' perspectives on athletes/former athletes' employability and employment.</li> <li>2. To study athletes' perceived employability challenges, barriers, and competencies at three periods of their careers: when still active in sport, just retired, and in the first employment after retirement.</li> <li>3. To create and test a toolbox for career practitioners to help athletes/former athletes to develop employability competencies.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Conceptual:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Definition of athletes' employability competencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Implementation of the holistic athletic career model.</li> <li>•Conceptual competency framework to optimize athletes' employability.</li> </ul> <p><b>Methodological:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey for “elite sport and employment” stakeholders. about practices, benefits, and costs of employing active or former athletes.</li> <li>•Survey focusing on athletes' employability challenges, barriers, and competencies at three periods of their careers (see objective 2).</li> <li>•Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE).</li> </ul> <p><b>Empirical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Stakeholders' practices, roles, challenges, cooperation, and effectiveness measures related to ‘elite sport and employment’ (N = 169).</li> <li>•Barriers faced and competencies required for active and former elite athletes across the three career periods (N = 954).</li> <li>•Employers' perceptions on the value of hiring athletes (N = 65).</li> </ul> <p><b>Applied:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Developed and tested toolbox for career practitioners with 10 evidence-based tools implemented in workshops in six countries.</li> <li>•Online source <a href="http://www.dualcareertools.com">www.dualcareertools.com</a> helping athletes and support providers to evaluate their competencies.</li> <li>•Network of “elite sport and employment experts”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ECO-DC</b> Ecology of DC: DC development environments across Europe 2018–2019 7 research and applied organizations from: Belgium Denmark Finland Slovenia Spain Sweden UK Coordinator: Liverpool John Moores University (UK)</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> Develop a comprehensive understanding of the dual career development environments (DCDEs) across Europe and provide guidelines for the development and optimization of DCDEs supporting talented elite athletes in their pursuit of sport and academic excellence.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To identify and classify DCDEs across Europe and define criteria for their effectiveness/efficiency.</li> <li>2. To identify factors contributing to the DCDEs' effective functioning through in detail studies of selected DCDEs across Europe.</li> <li>3. To develop and test the DCDE monitoring tool.</li> <li>4. To provide Guidelines on optimization of DCDEs.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Conceptual:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Definition of DC development environments (DCDEs).</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Implementation of the holistic ecological approach</li> <li>•Taxonomy of DCDEs in Europe.</li> <li>•Two working models: (1) DCDE model to describe the environment, and (2) DC-environment success factors (DC-ESF) model to analyze factors contributing to the DCDE success in supporting student–athletes.</li> <li>•DCDEs' ten essential features framework.</li> </ul> <p><b>Methodological:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Design of DCDE case studies.</li> <li>•DCDE's Monitoring Tool (DCDEM).</li> </ul> <p><b>Empirical:</b></p>

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Title, years, consortium	Aims/objectives	Contributions
<p><i>DC4MH</i> DCs for Mental Health 2021–2022 10 research or elite sport organizations from: Belgium Denmark Italy Slovenia Spain Sweden Coordinator: Vrije Universiteit Brussel</p>	<p><i>Aim:</i> To optimize mental health (MH) services within European Dual Career ‘elite sports and education’ organizations.</p> <p><i>Objectives:</i> To develop recommendations and tools centered around:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MH structures in DCDEs</li> <li>MH monitoring</li> <li>MH literacy</li> <li>Psychological resilience building</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Seven case studies of DCDEs across all the countries involved.</li> <li>•DCDEM generic profile based on student–athletes’ (N = 329) and DCDEs’ stakeholders’ (N = 287) evaluation.</li> </ul> <p><i>Applied:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Guidelines on optimization of DCDEs in the European context.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conceptual:</i> defining MH as a DC resource and outcome.</p> <p><i>Theoretical:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Combination of the holistic developmental and ecological perspectives.</li> <li>•MH promotion framework for DCDEs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Methodological:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•DC4MH survey with a new subscale on DC experiences.</li> <li>•Design of case studies on MH structures in DCDEs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Empirical:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•European and national data on student–athletes’ MH and factors involved (N = 1146).</li> <li>•Comparison of MH among DC athletes, student-non-athletes, and athletes–employees (N = 1785).</li> <li>•Seven case studies of MH structures in DCDEs across Europe.</li> </ul> <p><i>Applied:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•MH literacy quiz and two related workshops.</li> <li>•Set of exercises to build DC competencies and resilience.</li> <li>•Recommendations on using the MH promotion framework for DCDEs.</li> </ul>

Note: European DC projects in Table 2 are presented in chronological order.

In the context of sport, a DC encapsulates the requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop, and finalize an elite sporting career as a part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education and/or work as well as other domains which are of importance at different stages of life, such as taking up a role in society, ensuring a satisfactory income, and developing an identity and a partner relationship.

Most DC studies explicitly (or implicitly) address DC benefits and potential costs. The benefits of DCs were briefly reviewed in the EU DC Guidelines (e.g., health-related, developmental, social, employment-related) and were later summarized as DC athletes’ “*winning in the short-run*”—namely, finding an optimal balance between sport, studies, social, and private life, while maintaining their health and well-being—and “*winning in the long-run*” by expanding personal identity and preparing for athletic retirement and graduation (Stambulova et al., 2015). DC costs may include sacrifices to social and private lives, potentially high (un)necessary stress leading to burnout, mental ill-health, injuries, impaired performance, and/or DC pathway dropout (e.g., Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, Praet, et al., 2022b; Linnér et al., 2021a, 2021b; Sorkkila et al., 2018, 2020; Stambulova et al., 2015; Wylleman et al., 2017).

DC research creates an understanding on how to maximize the benefits of DC and minimize its costs in supporting athletes in striving for DC excellence. ‘DC excellence’ is defined as sustaining a healthy, successful, and long-lasting career in sport in combination with education and/or work. In this definition, ‘healthy’ means DC resourcefulness and adaptability; ‘successful’ means searching for and maintaining an optimal DC balance; and ‘long-lasting’ involves smooth DC transitions, including the one from DC in sport and education to DC in sport/exercise and work (Stambulova, 2022). Below we outline the pursuit of DC excellence in the form of seven postulates supported by international (mainly European) research findings on DC: (1) context, (2) pathways and transitions, (3) challenges, (4) resources and coping, (5) support and empowerment, (6) mental health of student–athletes, and (7) DC development environments (DCDEs).

### 3.1. European DC context

*Postulate 1: The broadest factor influencing the pursuit of DC excellence is the sociocultural and relevant DC context(s) to which student–athletes belong. Contexts create both opportunities and limitations.*

European DC context is multilayered. All-embracing is *the EU or continental layer*, characterized by club-based sport, school-based education, and market-based work with integrated efforts of sport and education and/or work stakeholders needed to create DCDEs to support DC athletes. Within the ECO-DC project, DCDE is defined as “a purposefully developed system that aims to facilitate athletes’ investment in combining their competitive sporting careers with education or work” (Morris et al., 2021, p. 136). At the EU layer, several documents were issued to promote the idea and benefits of athletes’ DCs; provide minimal requirements for DC systems in EU countries; stimulate networking, research collaboration, and applied work exchanges within and between European countries; and initiate creating European DC culture (e.g., EC, 2007; 2012, 2014, 2016; Henry, 2013).

At the *national DC layer*, European policy documents stimulated national governments to define what types of DCDEs are needed in the country, how DCDEs are organized and managed, and how to evaluate their effectiveness. National DC policies might facilitate and/or place limitations on development and functioning of DCDEs. Aquilina and Henry (2010) provided a four-fold taxonomy of DC (sport and education) policies in Europe: (a) *state-centric* with higher education institutions being regulated by government to provide support to student–athletes (e.g., France, Spain); (b) *the state as a facilitator*, fostering formal agreements between educational and sporting bodies (e.g., Belgium, Sweden); (c) *national sport federations/institutions as intermediaries* acting on behalf of student–athletes to provide support (e.g., Greece, UK); and (d) a *‘laissez faire’ approach* with no formal structures in place (e.g., Italy, Slovenia).

Further analysis of the national DC systems in EU Member States was provided in a managerial “Study on the Minimum Quality Requirements

for DC services” and resulted in development of DC quality framework with four ‘principal dimensions’ or ‘orbits’ surrounding a DC athlete: entourage, stakeholders, national governments, and the EU (EC, 2016). The analyses within this study confirmed the diversity of DC systems within Europe. This means that some DC athletes have more external resources (e.g., support) and fewer barriers in following their preferred DC pathways than others, who may have more limited options. Thankfully, barriers existing at the national layer (e.g., low coordination) can be compensated at the DCDE contextual layer, characterized by internalizing different cultural patterns (e.g., national culture, youth/study culture, general/sport-specific culture) into the philosophy of DC support teams. Within the ECO-DC project, eight types of DCDEs were identified in Europe, including sport-friendly schools, elite sport schools/colleges, professional and/or private sport clubs, sport-friendly universities, combined DC systems, national sports programs, defensive forces programs, and players’ union programs (Morris et al., 2021). Diversity of DCDEs is beneficial for DC athletes, as it provides opportunities for various DC pathways. Besides, mobility within the EU facilitates athletes’ transnational DCs.

### 3.2. DC pathways and transitions

*Postulate 2: Depending on the context(s) and on athletes’ personal preferences, several DC pathways are available with transitions within and between pathways.*

Morris et al. (2021) linked the types of European DCDEs identified in the ECO-DC project to the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2020) and revealed that DCDEs facilitate DC athletes’ athletic development at developmental and mastery career stages, academic–vocational development at secondary/upper secondary/higher education levels, and at the beginning of their working careers with no DCDEs supporting athletes at the initiation stages of their athletic careers and primary education. Therefore, within national DC systems, European athletes may follow different DC pathways depending on the types of DCDEs available. Along the way, DC athletes go through three major DC transitions: from secondary to upper secondary education at national elite sport schools or similar (e.g., Stambulova et al., 2015); from upper secondary to higher education, often coinciding with junior-to-senior athletic transition (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Defruyt et al., 2020; Wylleman et al., 2020); and upon higher education graduation to DC in sport and work (e.g., Torregrossa et al., 2015).

Athletes act as active agents in constructing their careers, and therefore DC pathways also depend on athletes’ own preferences usually based on their appraisal of sport and academic importance/success. As DC athletes admit, it is impossible to constantly invest one hundred percent into both sport and education, and accordingly, three categories of DC athletes termed “students doing sport”, “athletes trying to study”, and “student–athletes searching for an optimal DC balance” with shifts in between were identified (Ramis et al., 2023; Stambulova & Harwood, 2022). *Students doing sport* could dream of athletic success, but over time found these dreams unrealistic; they invested more of themselves in education and maintained their engagement in sport for social reasons or for the love of the game. This category of DC athletes follows “educational (or vocation)-oriented” pathway or “convergent pathway with a focus on education” (e.g., Cartigny et al., 2019; Mateu et al., 2020), with more female athletes following this path because of lower levels of sport professionalization and prospects compared to males (e.g., Ekengren et al., 2020; Tekavc et al., 2015). *Athletes trying to study* see sport as their passion and education as a need, so in their pathway, they focus more on sport training and competitions, while doing just enough to maintain their studies. This pathway is termed “sporting” or “sport-oriented” or “convergent with a focus on sport” (Cartigny et al., 2019, Chamorro et al., 2016; Mateu et al., 2020). The third category contains *student–athletes searching for an optimal DC balance* defined as “a combination of sport and studies that helps student-athletes achieve their

educational and athletic goals, live satisfying private lives, and maintain their health and wellbeing” (Stambulova et al., 2015, p. 12). This pathway is termed “convergent”, “parallel”, “life spheres-balanced” or “DC-oriented” (Cartigny et al., Chamorro et al.; Mateu et al.; Torregrossa et al., 2015). After compulsory school education, athletes might continue along the DC path, but might also select full focus on sport or a “linear” pathway, and thus compromise their preparation for athletic retirement (e.g., Torregrossa et al., 2015). The same categorization of DC athletes and their pathways might also be related to DC in sport and work, although studies on such pathways are lacking.

DCs might unfold within one national DC system or be transformed into transnational DC pathways if athletes decide to move to other countries to pursue sport and studies/work (De Knop et al., 1999). Mobility within the EU might facilitate such a pathway, but athletes who take it experience DC transitions complicated by cultural transitions. Relevant research (Bon et al., 2022; Ryba et al., 2015, 2016) revealed that European athletes can migrate within the EU mainly to get better conditions for their sport and DC, but they also might continue their education in their home country. Migration to the USA is aimed mainly at getting an athletic scholarship at a university/college and possibly continuing in professional sports and/or exploring the world and gaining broader life experiences (see Palumbo et al., 2021).

### 3.3. DC challenges

*Postulate 3: To succeed in their DC pathways and be “winners in the short-run”, DC athletes should deal with concurrent challenges in different spheres of life and learn how to prioritize them and use coping resources efficiently.*

An overview of challenges athletes face following a DC pathway from the perspective of the holistic athletic career model is presented by Wylleman et al. (2020). Within DC pathways, especially in the transitions involved therein, student–athletes face demands (appraised as challenges/stressors) in all six levels of their development outlined by the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2020). At the *athletic level*, adolescent DC athletes experience junior-to-senior transitions with major challenges related to higher (than that expected of juniors) levels of training and performance standards, potential moves to a new group/team and/or transitions to a new coach, increased travel load, and elevated internal aspirations and expectations of significant others. At the *psychological level*, student–athletes are involved in the process of psychological maturation, constructing their personal identity and dealing with potential role conflicts (e.g., between athlete and student roles), becoming more autonomous in decision making, maintaining motivation, and future planning as major challenges. At the *psychosocial level*, DC athletes need to solve a paradox between being social (i.e., developing friendships, pursuing romantic relationships, and creating support networks) and having limited time for a social life due to their DC pursuit. Often during their adolescent years, DC athletes also move away from home and begin independent living, requiring skills needed to organize their lifestyle (e.g., recovery, food, finances). There are many challenges at the *academic/vocational level*—especially when DC athletes move to university—and include selecting a subject of study, adapting to higher degree of freedom and personal responsibility (than at school), following the requirements of various courses, and passing exams, to name just a few. At the *financial level*, a major challenge for student–athletes is to negotiate or earn financial support to stay on the DC path. At the *legal level*, DC athletes need to deal with limits placed on their autonomy before reaching adult status and be aware of and use the resources available to them because of their elite student–athlete status (e.g., study/sport training flexibility).

Concurrent demands occurring at different levels of development require that DC athletes learn how to prioritize demands on their time, efforts, and finances to distribute resources accordingly. Within the GEES project (see Table 2), combinations of coinciding demands

creating difficult situations or periods working as barriers in the DC path were termed *DC scenarios* (De Brandt, 2017). Seven such scenarios were identified based on experiences of DC support providers (DCSPs). These scenarios were briefly termed: “exams” (conflict between exam and competition schedules), “study plan”, “miss significant days of study”, “relocation”, “injury”, “social life”, and “money”. Between 54 % and 85 % of European student–athletes (N = 3247) confirmed that they experienced these scenarios in their DC paths (Wylleman et al., 2017).

Further research on scenarios of student–athletes (Linnér et al., 2021b) led to an empirical taxonomy and an updated definition of DC scenarios. Four types of DC scenarios have been identified: (a) maintain sport and studies with several shifts in daily life; (b) maintain study when sport should be prioritized (e.g., important competitions); (c) maintain sport when education should be prioritized (e.g., finalizing degree project while continue to train/compete); and (d) maintain personal life (e.g., combining romantic relationship or relocation with sport and studies). Derived from this taxonomy, *DC scenarios* are defined as “pre-transition situations constituting a combination of student–athletes’ circumstances that compromises their DC balance. DC scenarios are characterized by coinciding commitments across developmental levels, and student–athletes need personal resources, support, and coping strategies to maintain their optimal DC balance” (Linnér et al., 2021b p. 53).

### 3.4. DC resources and coping

*Postulate 4: Student-athletes’ personal resources are a key factor for successful DC coping, autonomy, and maintaining responsibility for their DCs.*

In dealing with various DC challenges, athletes not only use but also gain personal resources, and being resourceful usually means adapting and coping efficiently. Within the GEES project, student–athletes’ personal resources (i.e., strengths) and coping strategies (i.e., resources in action) were conceptualized as DC competencies with an emphasis on DC knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes (Wylleman et al., 2017).

European experts developed a list of 38 competencies that were included in the relevant survey, and 3350 student–athletes across Europe answered the survey about the perceived importance, possession, and need to develop DC competencies in general and in relation to seven DC scenarios (De Brandt et al., 2018). The final list of DC competencies included 29 items divided into four groups: *DC management* (e.g., self-discipline, time management); *career planning* (vision of where to go in life); *emotional awareness* (e.g., emotional regulation skills); and *social intelligence and adaptability* (e.g., asking for help, maintaining relationships). Major *transferable competencies* student–athletes used to cope with several DC scenarios included the ability to prioritize what needs to be done, dedication to succeed in both sport and study, willingness to make the sacrifices and choices needed to succeed in DC, self-discipline to manage DC demands, future planning, and the ability to use time efficiently. Research revealed that the more/higher degree of DC competences student–athletes possess, the better they cope with DC demands and scenarios (Brown et al., 2015; Linnér et al., 2019; Stambulova et al., 2015; Wylleman et al., 2017, 2020).

Upon academic graduation and in the transition to a vocational career, *employability competencies* are becoming centralized, with many of them overlapping with DC competencies. Within the B-WISER project (see Table 2), four groups of such competencies were identified based on 945 survey responses from European athletes: *career and lifestyle management*, *career communication*, *career resilience*, and *career engagement and flexibility* (Smismans et al., 2021).

Important personal assets in DC success include motivation and identity that are reflective of the DC pathways athletes follow (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022). Research (Aunola et al., 2018; Haslam et al., 2021; Healy et al., 2016) revealed that prioritizing sport is served by

stronger athletic motivation and identity but renders DC athletes vulnerable in terms of athletic identity foreclosure and possible mental health problems upon retirement. Prioritizing studies leads to higher academic and lower sport motivation, with an emphasis on the student’s identity within the DC athletes’ personal identity structure. Athletes searching for the optimal DC balance show high value and motivation for both sport and education and rely on resources provided by both athletic and academic identities to help them find the optimal DC balance. In offering useful strategies to find such a balance, researchers recommended that student–athletes make shifts in prioritizing sport and studies; combine planning for the competitive sport season and the academic year; develop support networks (family, peers, coaches, teachers, and counselors) and communication skills to get help when needed; and work on DC competencies to become more autonomous and self-efficient (Stambulova et al., 2015; Stambulova & Harwood, 2022; Wylleman et al., 2017, 2020).

### 3.5. DC Support and empowerment

*Postulate 5: DC social and professional support should be complementary to DC athletes’ personal resources, respond to their current needs, and empower them to meet future challenges.*

To follow a DC pathway, athletes invest their personal resources (e.g., time, efforts, competencies) to deal with DC challenges, but they also highly value external support—both informal from their entourage (e.g., family, peers), and professional (e.g., DCSPs) from DCDEs or DC assistance programs. Creating support networks, maintaining relationships, and asking for help when needed are among athletes’ important DC competencies (De Brandt et al., 2018). Progressing through a DC pathway (from combining sport with school, then university, and further with work in the post-athletic career), athletes are becoming more mature and resourceful, and thus more autonomous and self-responsible with external support playing increasingly a complementary role, for example, in managing DC scenarios (Linnér et al., 2021a; Linnér et al., 2019; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Therefore, what athletes expect from support providers is a strong belief in the value of education, a whole-person approach, understanding of what DC athletes go through, and help in eliminating barriers and in developing their DC competencies (Knight et al., 2018; Wylleman et al., 2017, 2020).

Important for DC athletes’ development and mental health is that DCSPs do not ‘overperform’ by being too controlling, protective, extremely demanding, or communicating too-high expectations in terms of sport/school/DC success (Ramis et al., 2023; Sorkilla et al., 2018; 2020; Tessitore et al., 2021). Focusing on DC parenting research, Tessitore and colleagues emphasized parents’ enthusiasm in supporting their athletes, readiness to make “family sacrifices in emotional, logistic, and financial aspects” (p. 6); all of which are often combined with a lack of information on the sport, academic, and DC services, making it crucial for parents to connect with professional academic and sport staff.

Professional DC support is a rapidly developing trend in Europe stimulated by EU DC Guidelines and promoted through European DC projects (see Table 2). As pointed out in the EU DC Guidelines, the “design of DC programs should meet athletes’ individual needs, taking into account their age, sport specialization, career stage and financial status, with the athletes themselves taking increasing responsibility as they progress through their careers” (EC, 2012, p. 5). DC assistance programs are usually imbedded into athletes’ age-related DCDEs and provide support to them from the secondary education to university graduation and the beginning of the vocational career with related transitions involved (see Torregrossa et al., 2020). Experts within the GEES project defined a DCSP as “a professional consultant related to an educational institution and/or an elite sport organization—or certified by one of those—who provides support to elite athletes in view of optimizing their DC” (Wylleman et al., 2017, p. 108). Furthermore, major groups of DCSP competencies were identified (Defruyt et al.,

2019), namely: *advocacy and cooperation, reflection and self-management, organizational, awareness of DC athletes' environment, empowerment, and relationship competencies*. Keeping in mind that DCSP is still not an established and regulated profession within the European context, it is not surprising that many novices in the field experience difficulties in supporting DC athletes (e.g., in developing DC competencies), but also in working continuously on their own professional competencies, thus requiring mentorship and further education (e.g., see case example in De Brandt et al., 2022).

Authors of many DC studies and review papers discuss the professional philosophy of DCSPs and the related features of efficient DC support, such as being holistic, evidence-based, context sensitive, empowering, competence-driven, recognizing athletes' multifaceted identities, and meeting DC athletes' needs (Linnér et al., 2021a; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Storm et al., 2021; Torregrossa et al., 2020; Wylleman et al., 2017, 2020). The recent *dual career assistance (DCA) framework* (Linnér, 2021) integrates personal, interpersonal, contextual, and environmental factors to assist DCSPs in helping DC athletes create and maintain an optimal DC balance, deal with DC scenarios, and strive for DC excellence.

### 3.6. DC and mental health

*Postulate 6: In the pursuit of DC excellence, positive mental health is one of the key athletes' resources, but it is also among DC outcomes and areas of social and professional support. Athletes' mental-ill health is a DC barrier which can be prevented or treated.*

The visibility of athletes' mental health topic has increased dramatically in recent years, including a focus on DC athletes (Henriksen, Schinke, et al., 2020a; Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, Praet, et al., 2022b; Moesch et al., 2018; Reardon et al., 2019; Schinke et al., 2017). In a review of student-athletes' mental health research (Kegelaers et al.), 49 different factors associated positively or negatively with mental health outcomes were identified based on the analysis of 159 studies demonstrating the complexity of mental health phenomenon. Positive mental health (see Keyes, 2014) related to subjective (i.e., emotional) and psychological (i.e., sense of meaning and self-actualization) well-being (Lundqvist, 2011), is an important resource for DC athletes in coping with DC demands and scenarios. But at the same time, good mental health is also a positive outcome of DC development when student-athletes are able find and maintain an optimal DC balance (Stambulova et al., 2015, 2021). Alternatively, overly high levels of stress in sport, studies, private and/or social life, global events like COVID-19 pandemic, unhealthy lifestyle/habits, and low time/stress management competencies, may lead to student-athletes' mental ill health expressed in the forms of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and burnout (Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, Praet, et al., 2022b; Pons et al., 2020; Sorkkila et al., 2018, 2020).

The FEPSAC Position Statement on mental health disorders in elite athletes and models of service provision (Moesch et al., 2018) raised the visibility of the topic in Europe, introduced context-specific models of service provision in six countries (Great Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Sweden), and provided detailed recommendations addressed to various stakeholders in terms of mental health literacy education, reducing mental ill health stigma, monitoring athletes' mental health, and intra- and interdisciplinary cooperation between the service providers (e.g., sport psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and sport scientists, see also Reardon et al., 2019).

The FEPSAC recommendations were adopted in the DC4MH project (see Table 2), aimed at optimizing mental health services within European DCDEs. The research focused on how to help DC athletes maintain well-being and prevent mental disorders by monitoring DC athletes' mental health and the factors involved, working on their mental health literacy and resilience, and providing well-being interventions—all informed by organizational foundations (e.g., local mental health

policy) and aimed at creating a safe and healthy DC climate. All these aspects are integrated into the *mental health promotion framework for DCDEs* to be further tested and implemented across Europe (Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, & De Brandt, 2022a).

### 3.7. DC development environments

*Postulate 7: Striving for DC excellence is a dynamic process of mutual accommodation between DC athletes and DCDEs: student-athletes use environmental resources to sustain the optimal DC balance, but they also contribute to the success of their environments in promoting DCs as a way of doing sport in a socially responsible manner and "winning in the short- and long-run".*

Within the ECO-DC project (see Table 2), the holistic ecological approach initially created to guide the studies of athletic talent development environments (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) was expanded to explore DCDEs and factors influencing their effectiveness in supporting DC athletes. The new developments included two working models—the DCDE model and the DC-Environment Success Factors (DC-ESF) model—complementing each other in that the former guides a description of a DCDE and the latter directs attention to the set of factors that interplay to influence the DCDE's effectiveness (Henriksen, Storm et al., 2020b). With DC athletes at the center, the DCDE model consists of micro- (e.g., coaches, teachers, peers) and macro- (e.g., national sports system and education structures and related cultures) levels, three domains (i.e., sport, studies, and private life), and the outer layer outlining the past, present, and future of the DCDE, emphasizing its dynamic nature. An important role within the DCDE model is assigned to the *DC support team*, which works on integrating different components of a DCDE into a holistic structure. The DC-ESF model considers the environment's preconditions (e.g., human resources and facilities) and illustrates how the daily processes (routines)—designed in accordance with the philosophy of the DC support team—affect student-athletes' holistic development, with a focus on DC competencies, thus ensuring the DCDE's effectiveness (i.e., the student-athletes' athletic and academic achievements, wellbeing, and satisfaction).

Seven case studies of DCDEs across Europe were informed by the new working models and resulted in empirical models of focal DCDEs (e.g., Henriksen, Storm et al., 2020b; Korhonen et al., 2020; Linnér et al., 2020; 2021a; Nikander et al., 2020). A cross-case analysis that followed, resulted in ten essential features of successful DCDEs (Storm et al., 2021). Five of these features describe DCDEs' *holistic structure* and consist of a dedicated DC support team; integrated efforts (from DCDEs' various levels and domains); stakeholders' understanding and support; role models and mentorship; and access to expert (e.g., psychological) support. Other five features embrace *shared DC philosophy* characterized by a whole-person approach; an empowerment approach; flexible DC solutions; care of DC athletes' mental health; and an open and proactive approach to the development of the athletes' environment.

Furthermore, these ten features were used as a basis to create a DCDE monitoring survey to explore European DC athletes' (n = 329) and support providers' (n = 287) views of their DCDEs. The European DCDE monitoring profile revealed that all mean scores in evaluations of both groups of the participants were no lower than 4.5 points (from 7), with the lowest score related to the integration of efforts across DCDEs; intergroup differences were visible in terms of flexible DC solutions and care of DC athletes' mental health, with more positive evaluation from the support providers (Kuettel & Torregrossa, 2019). A majority of DCDE studies focus on how environments support DC athletes with less explicit (although visible and important) findings related to how athletes 'pay back' and help through role modeling, narratives, and peer mentorship to promote DCs and their DCDEs (e.g., Henriksen, Storm et al., 2020b; Linnér et al., 2020, 2021a).

#### 4. Promoting DC excellence and European DC culture: future challenges for DC research, practice, and policy

As shown above, the European DC discourse promotes and serves athletes as they strive for DC excellence. It also contributes to the development of European DC culture, defined as a coherent set of values and assumptions promoting sport within education (e.g., destigmatizing athletes in higher education), education within sport (e.g., DC approach integrated in elite sport culture, and links between sport, education, and employability competencies), and sport and education in relation to the business community in Europe (Capranica et al., 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). DC researchers, practitioners, and policy makers contribute to these processes from their relevant and complementary perspectives at all layers of European DC context. Due to support of the DC research and practice at the EU layer (EC, FEPSAC), European DC research is currently at the forefront of worldwide DC scholarship. This is visible in the growing number of European DC publications, in novel content created and distributed, but also in strengthened national DC discourses in research, practice, and policies reflective of national cultural contexts and DC systems. Within European DC discourse, policies and practice stimulate new research, and research informs evidence-based practice (e.g., DC support programs) and policies. One example is the [Swedish National Guidelines for Elite Athletes' Dual Careers \(2018\)](#), informed by European and national DC research as well as by best practice.

Although our focus is mainly on positive trends and achievements within the European DC discourse, critical appraisals of what is achieved and what should be done are also important. Authors of the four reviews (Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, Praet, et al., 2022b; Palumbo et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Tessitore et al., 2021) introduced earlier in this paper (see also [Table 1](#)) identified many gaps in the literature. Some major examples include: skewness of research to DC in sport and education and a continued lack of systematic research on DC in sport and work; no research on athletes in early specialization sports and their DCs at primary school; marginalization of research on gender differences and DCs of minorities (e.g., athletes with disabilities and transnational or immigrant athletes); underestimation of the role of DC athletes' parents and other entourage members (e.g., peers and coaches) in supporting DCs; unclear job profile of DCSPs leading to difficulties organizing their formal education and possibly certification, and lack of national level DC policy documents across Europe, to name just a few. Departing from this brief critical analysis and keeping in mind that FEPSAC has been positioning itself as a DC stakeholder, we complete the Position Statement paper with recommendations for future DC research, practice, and policy in Europe.

##### 4.1. FEPSAC dual career research recommendations

On behalf of FEPSAC, we recommend researchers to:

- Continue all existing lines of European DC research initiated over the last decade (e.g., DC competencies, DCDEs, DC for mental health) using whole-person, whole-career, and whole-environment perspectives. Follow the spirit of cultural praxis in combining theory/research, practice, and DC athletes' context (with related policies).
- Promote the conceptualization of DC excellence, integration of holistic developmental and ecological perspectives, context-sensitive research and practice, resource/competency, and support/empowerment approaches.
- With an inspiration from [McKay et al. \(2022\)](#) consider developing classification framework of DC athletes using both athletic and educational/vocational parameters.
- Stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration and projects within European DC discourse.
- Encourage DC scholars to rely on a variety of theoretical frameworks to complement the widely used holistic athletic career model

(Wylleman et al., 2020) and athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2016) by, for example, the push–pull, anti-push–anti-pull framework (Fernandez et al., 2006), the career construction theory (Savikas, 2005), the cultural transition model (Ryba et al., 2016), the scheme of change for sport psychology practice (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011), the meta-model of adaptation in sport (Samuel et al., 2023), and new frameworks on a transition environment defined as “a dynamic and temporary system that bridges the two settings that an athlete is transitioning from and to” (Henriksen et al., 2023, p. 6), among others.

- Promote various research methodologies and designs with primary foci on longitudinal research to monitor DC athletes' development, performance, injury occurrence, and mental health as well as theory/research-based intervention studies.
- Cover ‘blind spots’ or grey areas following the whole-career perspective in DC scholarship by studying DC at primary school (no studies yet although requested by the [EU DC Guidelines, 2012](#), pp. 38–39) and DC in sport and work.
- Study diverse national and transnational DC pathways and categories of European DC athletes depending on their age, gender, ethnicity, sport level, educational level, ability/disability, socio-economic or migration statuses, emphasizing benefits and costs of following different DC pathways as well as support needed and provided, especially for equity-deserving groups of DC athletes.
- Promote the DC concept and frameworks among other performance domains in which an early start is considered necessary to reach an elite level (e.g., music, ballet, circus).
- Follow the outliers of the DC4MH project (see [Table 2](#)) in monitoring, safeguarding, and promoting mental health at DCDEs. Promote the relevant new Erasmus + Sport project [MENTiS \(2023\)](#) aimed at strengthening mental health initiatives within European high-performance and talent development sports organizations, including community-based interventions targeting the athletes' entourage (i.e., coaches, parents, staff).
- Continue to investigate DC scenarios and major DC transitions (especially to the university level and to DC in sport and work) focusing on DC competencies and support as key coping resources. Strengthen crisis-transition research targeting individual DC athletes and DCDEs, use lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and its influences on sport and DCs (Pons et al., 2020; Stambulova & Henriksen, in press).
- Continue considering the DC excellence pursuit as athletes' journeys from one DCDE to another. Accordingly, further promote ecological DC research by studying healthy/successful and unhealthy/less successful DCDEs based on findings of the ECO-DC and DC4MH projects (see [Table 2](#)); adapting the transition environment working models (Henriksen et al., 2023) to studying DC transition environments and interorganizational collaboration within DC contexts; encouraging research on DC role modeling, mentorship, and creating positive narrative resources to promote European DC culture.
- Move forward applied DC research by testing applied potentials of the dual career assistance framework (Linnér, 2021), the mental health promotion framework for DCDEs (Kegelaers, Wylleman, Defruyt, & De Brandt, 2022a), DCDE and DC-ESF models (Henriksen, Storm et al., 2020b), essential features of successful DCDEs (Storm et al., 2021), and transition environment conceptualization and related models (Henriksen et al., 2023).

##### 4.2. FEPSAC dual career practice and policy recommendations

FEPSAC encourages DC stakeholders in Europe to:

- Create evidence-based and context-informed DC support programs helping athletes search for an optimal DC balance, and to be healthy, competent, and responsible for their careers.

- Develop academic exchange programs facilitating transnational DCs within Europe.
- Strengthen multidisciplinary cooperation to clarify DCSPs' status and necessary competencies, develop a DCSP's job profile and relevant education at national and European levels; based on these consider establishing European certification of DCSPs.
- Work on improving collaboration between DC athletes' parents, academic and sport staff. Empower DC athletes' entourage members by national and European level networking and education on DC and mental health literacy.
- Encourage DC practitioners to support athletes' pursuit of DC excellence by helping them anticipate and be prepared to solve DC scenarios and cope with transitions; make DC choices creating optimal challenges to avoid high risks, potential crises, burnout, dropout, and mental ill-health; develop personal resources and expand their identities; adapt to necessary and reduce unnecessary stress; and develop proactive/preventive mindsets to bridging their pasts, presents, and futures.
- Promote interdisciplinary and interorganizational collaboration in the DC context aimed at optimizing DCDEs and facilitating athletes' DC transitions.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of best practice experiences within European and national DC discourses.
- Encourage development of national DC Guidelines across Europe informed by European and national DC research as well as best practice examples.
- Stimulate social dialogues at and between the different layers of the European DC context to strengthen European DC culture in supporting athletes' pursuit of DC excellence.

By this Position Statement, FEPSAC resonates with the EU DC Guidelines' call to "... monitor key developments in the field of DCs at national and European levels ..." (# 36, p. 39) demonstrating that it is time and there is enough material to update the EU DC Guidelines. FEPSAC calls for further integration of efforts among DC researchers, practitioners, and policy makers across Europe to facilitate athletes' pursuit of DC excellence and therefore contribute to "winning in the short- and long-run" for all.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Natalia Stambulova:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Methodology. **Paul Wylleman:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Validation. **Miquel Torregrossa:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing, Methodology. **Saša Cecić Erpić:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Francesca Vitali:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Koen de Brandt:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Anastasiya Khomutova:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Alexis Ruffault:** Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Yago Ramis:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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