

Title: Factors Contributing to the Quality of the Transition out of Elite Sports in Swiss, Danish, and Polish Athletes

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Sports: Wide variety

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Main Theme: Transition

Secondary Theme: Culture

Aims: The aim of the study was to compare the athletic retirement experiences of athletes from three different countries across Europe (Denmark, Switzerland, and Poland), and to explore the influence of factors on the quality of the transition. The countries were chosen due to their similar levels of success in elite sport but their multiple differences, including differences in athletic career support, welfare systems and the support and opportunities provided for athletes' dual careers. The first objective was to examine cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Method: Participants in the study included former elite athletes from Switzerland (n=231), Denmark (n=86), and Poland (n=84) from 35 different sports completed the athletic career termination questionnaire. A number of individual characteristics were collected, including their educational status at the time of their athletic retirement, what percentage of their income was earned within the sports context, length of employment outside of their sports context, their confidence in transferable skills and athletic identity. Athletes were also asked questions around reasons that may have influenced their decision to retire from

competitive sport, support received during transition, and their perceived adaptation to life after their sports career in a number of different areas (e.g., difficulty getting a job).

Results and Practical Implications: Results suggest that the national elite sports system, including the dual career opportunities available to athletes, had a significant influence on athletic career retirement experiences. The majority of the athletes in the study made the decision to retire from their sport voluntarily, and perceived their [emotional adaptation](#) (e.g., identifying with the new role outside elite sports) and their [social adaptation](#) (e.g., renewing social networks) as most challenging during the adaptation period. In addition, athletes highlighted that individuals within their private environment (e.g., parents, friends, partner) were more supportive of their next steps in their lives compared to people within their former elite sporting environment. This suggests that stakeholders in sport may benefit from working closely with the athlete and those within their private circle to support the best possible transition from sport. Results also found large differences between educational level at the time of retirement. Higher educational support for elite athletes in Switzerland was found to be much less, meaning that they often combined their sport with part time jobs, which meant their athletic identities were lower, and they experienced a 'less demanding' retirement. The study offers a number of practical implications for each different national context. Assisting athletes to explore alternative roles outside elite sport might help Polish athletes to perceive their career end as less negative. For Danish athletes, especially those who earned a substantial amount of money through their sporting commitment, may benefit from sports psychological support that would help the athletes to deal with the social and emotional adaptation difficulties during the transition. Swiss athletes could profit from more flexible [study programs](#) on higher education so that studies and elite sports are better combinable. In conclusion, the study highlights the major differences between dual career support systems across cultures and the impact this has on athletic retirement experiences. Future research should also look to use a cross-cultural



perspective to explore the experiences of different transitions within the athletic career (e.g., transition into university).

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