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MOTIVATION FOR A DUAL-CAREER: ITALIAN AND SLOVENIAN STUDENT- ATHLETES

MOTIVACIJA ZA DVOJNO KARIERO: ITALIJANSKI IN SLOVENSKI ŠTUDENTI ŠPORTNIKI

ABSTRACT

Italy and Slovenia have no structured measures in place to provide educational services for elite athletes in higher education. Thus, this study aimed to understand motivations for a dual career of Italian and Slovenian student-athletes in relation to gender, age (≤ 24 , >24 yrs), and type of sport (i.e., individual sports, team sports). Ninety-eight Italian (females: $n=23$, age: 22.1 ± 1.5 yrs; males: $n=75$, age: 24.3 ± 2.9 yrs) and 216 Slovenian (females: $n=103$, age: 21.5 ± 3.0 yrs; males: $n=113$, age: 21.3 ± 2.3 yrs) college student-athletes were administered the 39 items of the SAMSAQ-IS (i.e., 30 items of the original SAMSAQ plus nine items of the Italian version SAMSAQ-IT) questionnaire. A MANOVA verified differences ($p < 0.05$) between the groups. A three-factor model with acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients (SAM=16, $\alpha=0.85$ items; AM=14 items, $\alpha=0.78$ items; CAM=18 items, $\alpha=0.85$ items) emerged. Two items (i.e., 19, 39) were removed because of a low threshold of acceptability. No difference regarding gender was identified. Regarding CAM, effects were found for Nation ($p < 0.0001$), Nation x Age ($p=0.0005$), and Type of Sport x Age ($p=0.0033$). For AM, differences were found for Type of Sport ($p=0.0256$), and Nation x Type of Sport ($p=0.036$). No difference emerged for SAM. Despite the lack of institutional support, Italian and Slovenian student-athletes remain highly motivated for a dual career, independently of gender. The findings indicate that SAMSAQ-IS could be a valuable tool for promoting an important contribution to the development of policy actions in the area of sport and education at national and European levels.

Key words: academic career, sport career, policy actions

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IZVLEČEK

Italija in Slovenija nimata strukturiranih ukrepov za izobraževalne storitve za vrhunske športnike v visokem šolstvu. Zato smo v tej raziskavi poskušali preučiti motivacijo za dvojno kariero italijanskih in slovenskih študentov športnikov glede na spol, starost (≤ 24 , >24 let) in vrsto športa (individualni ali ekipni športi). 98 italijanskih (ženske: $n = 23$, starost: $22,1 \pm 1,5$ let; moški: $n = 75$, starost: $24,3 \pm 2,9$ let) in 216 slovenskih (ženske: $n = 103$, starost: $21,5 \pm 3,0$ let; moški: $n = 113$, starost: $21,3 \pm 2,3$ let) višješolskih študentov je izpolnilo vprašalnik SAMSAQ-IS z 39 vprašanji (tj. 30 vprašanj iz izvirne različice vprašalnika SAMSAQ in 9 vprašanj iz italijanske različice SAMSAQ-IT). Z analizo MANOVA smo preverili razlike ($p < 0,05$) med skupinama. Dobili smo 3-faktorski model s sprejemljivimi koeficienti Cronbach alfa (SAM = 16, $\alpha = 0,85$ vprašanj; AM = 14 vprašanj, $\alpha = 0,78$ vprašanj; CAM = 18 vprašanj, $\alpha = 0,85$ vprašanj). Dve vprašanji (19. in 39.) smo izločili zaradi nizkega praga sprejemljivosti. Razlik med spoloma nismo opazili. Pri CAM smo ugotovili učinke za Državo ($p < 0,0001$), Državo x Starost ($p = 0,0005$) in Vrsto športa x Starost ($p = 0,0033$). Pri AM so bile ugotovljene razlike pri Vrsti športa ($p = 0,0256$) in pri Državi x Vrsta športa ($p = 0,036$). Pri SAM ni bilo razlik. Kljub pomanjkanju institucionalne podpore so italijanski in slovenski študenti športniki visoko motivirani za dvojno kariero, ne glede na spol. Ugotovitve kažejo, da bi lahko bil vprašalnik SAMSAQ-IS dragocen pripomoček pri spodbujanju razvoja ukrepov politike na področju športa in izobraževanja tako na nacionalni kot evropski ravni.

Ključne besede: akademska kariera, športna kariera, ukrepi politike

INTRODUCTION

Sport practice was recently included in the European Union's strategic agenda to promote understanding and integration among nations and cultures (European Commission, 2007). While participating in sport is strongly encouraged, intensive training and competition levels create several challenges for youth elite athletes when it comes to combining their sport and educational qualifications (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003; Capranica & Millard-Stafford, 2011), often leading to dropping out from sport so as to prioritise education in preparation for future job opportunities (Amara, Aquilina, & Henry, 2004), or to less time being devoted to schoolwork (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004; Gatmen, 2012), which determines academic underachievement and threatens future employment (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003). Because the transition from sport into the labour market tends to equalise the educational qualifications of athletes (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003), the European Parliament has embraced several policy actions to promote the dialogue between sport and education bodies in order to establish 'dual career' (i.e., a combination of sport and education) pathways for student-athletes (European Commission, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2011). In fact, relevant differences in dual careers can be found in Member States (Aquilina & Henry, 2010), ranging from state-centric regulations (i.e., France, Hungary, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal and Spain) to laissez-faire/no formal structures (i.e., Malta, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia). In particular, the Italian and Slovenian education systems offer elite athletes few special rights that derive from their student-athlete status (Guidotti & Capranica, in print).

To raise awareness at the national level, to create a favourable environment for European student-athletes and to contribute to the exchange of good practices in the area of dual careers, a European Expert Group "Education & Training in Sport" has been designated to develop European Guidelines on the Dual Careers of Athletes. In particular, research on relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluating the international dimension of dual career programmes is envisioned to safeguard the development of young athletes (European Commission, 2013).

Sport and academic achievements both need consistent motivations, which are related to the academic and athletic identities of student-athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2005). Although sport is an important cultural component for both female and male athletes, women have fewer opportunities to pursue professional athletic careers compared to men (International Olympic Committee, 2004; 2012; Pfister, 2010, International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2012; Guidotti & Capranica, in press). Therefore, women are more likely to have a higher academic motivation and lower career athletic motivation than men (Doupona Topic, 2005). When considering the recent international actions to empower women's sport careers (International Olympic Committee, 2012; European Women and Sport, 2012; International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2012), questions concerning the relationship between motivation and student-athletes still need to be examined (Shuman, 2009).

Based on the principles and assumptions of the expectancy-value, self-efficacy and attribution theories, the 30-item Student Athletes' Motivation toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ) has recently been validated and used in the United States (Harrison, Rasmussen, Connolly, Janson, Bukstein, & Parks, 2010; Rasmussen, 2009; Shuman, 2009; Alexander, 2008; Willis, 2005), the United Arab Emirates (Fortes, Rodrigues, & Tchantchane, 2010), and Italy (Guidotti, & Capranica, in print). Due to significant dissimilarities in sport and educational policies for student-athletes among countries, the questionnaire's structure varied between

the studies, corroborating the notion that this instrument is sensitive to various socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, an Italian version of the SAMSAQ (SAMSAQ-IT) has been proposed (Guidotti & Capranica, in press). However, these studies investigate nationally specific samples of student-athletes.

Since universal knowledge about 'athletes in general' seems insufficient to explain the behaviour of athletes from different cultures (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009), a need for cross-cultural studies has emerged. Therefore, the present study aimed to understand motivations for a dual career of Italian and Slovenian student-athletes in relation to gender, age, and type of sport.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experimental approach to the problem

The local Institutional Review Board approved this study. The 30 items of the SAMSAQ (Gaston-Gayles, 2005) and an additional nine items from the Italian version of the SAMSAQ (SAMSAQ-IT; Guidotti & Capranica, in print) questionnaires were included in the SAMSAQ-IS questionnaire (Table 1). In particular, student-athletes were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement based on a six-point scale, ranging from very strongly agree (6) to very strongly disagree (1). Further, demographic questions related to age, gender, and type and competition level of practised sports were also addressed. A preliminary study ascertained equivalence in meaning for the Italian and Slovenian contexts. Therefore, the SAMSAQ-IS was considered appropriate to be administered to Italian and Slovenian student-athletes. To verify potential effects between the variables, for the main study the sample was categorised according to Nation (i.e., Italy, Slovenia), Gender (i.e., female, male), Age (i.e., ≤ 24 years, > 24 years), and Type of sport (i.e., individual sport, team sport).

Athletes may have different academic and athletic interests and motivation related to their future career choices (Mahoney, 2011). In line with the literature on SAMSAQ (Gaston-Gayles, 2005), the SAMSAQ-IS hypothesised a three-factor structure representing the motivation toward elite sport (i.e., Student Athletic Motivation – SAM = eight items), motivation to pursue a professional sport career (i.e., Career Athletic Motivation – CAM = five items), and motivation toward academic-related tasks (i.e., Academic Motivation – AM = sixteen items), respectively.

Subjects

Ninety-eight Italian (females: $n=23$, age: 22.1 ± 1.5 yrs; males: $n=75$, age: 24.3 ± 2.9 yrs) and 216 Slovenian (females: $n=103$, age: 21.5 ± 3.0 yrs; males: $n=113$, age: 21.3 ± 2.3 yrs) collegiate student-athletes participated in this study and provided their written consent. They were involved in individual (Italian: 37%; Slovenian: 72%) and team (Italian: 63%; Slovenian: 28%) sport disciplines.

Procedures

Assessments took place individually under the supervision of an investigator. Participants were informed that the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, were ensured there were no right or wrong answers, and were assured the confidentiality of their responses.

Statistical Analysis

To verify the applicability of the three-factor model an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA; Oblique Rotation; Maximum Likelihood Extraction) was conducted. According to the literature (Costello

& Osborne, 2005), the following criteria were adopted: i) the minimum presence of five items for each factor; ii) if an item loaded on a single factor, only values >0.40 were taken into account; and iii) if an item loaded on two factors, a 0.32 threshold of acceptability was set for both values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). To evaluate the internal consistency of items on each SAMSAQ-IS subscale, reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) were computed and the results were compared with the American model (Gaston-Gayles, 2005).

Items loading on two factors were used when computing composite scores for both factors (Gaston-Gayles, 2005). Thus, for each subscale the mean and standard deviation were calculated and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed for each factor to evaluate differences ($p \leq 0.05$) for Nation, Gender, Age, and Type of Sport. Since a large sample size can lead to significant results for marginal differences, effect size measures (ES) were calculated (Cohen, 1988) for all significant findings with values (negative or positive) of 0.2, 0.6, 1.2 and >1.2 indicating trivial, small, moderate and large ES, respectively. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (17.0; SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL).

RESULTS

The SAMSAQ-IS ($\alpha=0.85$; explained variance=41%) showed a three-factor model (SAM = 16 items; AM = 14 items; and CAM = 18 items) with acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients for the three subscales (Table 1). In particular, two items (i.e., 19, 39) were removed because of a low threshold of acceptability (i.e., a value < 0.40 on a single factor, or values < 0.32 on two factors), and eleven items loaded on two factors (i.e., CAM and SAM: items 8, 13, 15 and 20; CAM and AM: items 12, 24 and 32; SAM and AM: items 27, 28, 35 and 36).

Table 1. Factor loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis and reliability estimates of the SAMSAQ-EU (SAM-IS: Student Athletic Motivation; AM-IS: Academic Motivation; CAM-IS: Career Athletic Motivation), which includes 30 items from SAMSAQ (Gaston-Gayles, 2005) and 9 items from the harmonized version for Italian student-athletes (SAMSAQ-IT; Guidotti and Capranica, in press).

Tool	Item	Text	SAM-IS	AM-IS	CAM-IS
SAMSAQ	Item 1	I am confident that I can achieve a high grade point average this year (3.0 or above).		0.41	
SAMSAQ	Item 2	Achieving an high level of performance in my sport is an important goal for me this year.	0.53		
SAMSAQ	Item 3	It is important to me to learn what is taught in my courses.		0.66	
SAMSAQ	Item 4	I am willing to put in the time to earn excellent grades in my courses.		0.53	
SAMSAQ	Item 5	The most important reason why I am in school is to play my sport.			0.55
SAMSAQ	Item 6	The amount of work required in my courses interferes with my athletic goals.			0.44
SAMSAQ	Item 7	I will be able to use what is taught in my courses in different aspects of my life outside of school.	0.60		

Tool	Item	Text	SAM-IS	AM-IS	CAM-IS
SAMSAQ	Item 8	I chose to play my sport because it's something I'm interested in as a career.	0.33		0.48
SAMSAQ\$	Item 9	I have some doubt about my ability to be a star athlete on my team.	0.53		
SAMSAQ	Item 10	I chose (or will choose) my major because it is something I am interested in as a career.	0.59		
SAMSAQ	Item 11	Earning a high grade point average (3.0 or above) is not an important goal for me this year.			0.53
SAMSAQ	Item 12	It is important to me to learn the skills and strategies taught by my coaches.		-0.34	-0.32
SAMSAQ	Item 13	It is important for me to do better than other athletes in my sport.	0.41		0.52
SAMSAQ	Item 14	The time I spend engaged in my sport is enjoyable to me.	0.67		
SAMSAQ	Item 15	It is worth the effort to be an exceptional athlete in my sport.	0.42		0.59
SAMSAQ	Item 16	Participation in my sport interferes with my progress towards earning a college degree.			0.61
SAMSAQ#§	Item 17	I get more satisfaction from earning an "A" in a course toward my major than winning a game in my sport.		0.42	
SAMSAQ	Item 18	During the years I compete in my sport, completing a college degree is not a goal for me.	0.58		
SAMSAQ	Item 19*	I am confident I can be a star performer on my team this year.			
SAMSAQ	Item 20	My goal is to make it to the professional level or the Olympics in my sport.	0.45		0.53
SAMSAQ\$	Item 21	I have some doubt about my ability to earn high grades in my courses.		0.59	
SAMSAQ	Item 22	I am confident that I can make it to an elite level in my sport (Professional/Olympics).			-0.50
SAMSAQ	Item 23	I am confident that I can earn a college degree.			0.61
SAMSAQ	Item 24	I will be able to use the skills I learn in my sport in other areas of my life outside of sports.		0.58	0.51
SAMSAQ\$	Item 25	I get more satisfaction from winning a game in my sport than from getting an "A" in a course toward my major.	0.62		
SAMSAQ#§	Item 26	It is not important for me to perform better than other students in my courses.		0.74	
SAMSAQ	Item 27	I am willing to put in the time to be outstanding in my sport.	0.61	0.34	
SAMSAQ	Item 28	The content of most of my courses is interesting to me.	0.64	0.40	
SAMSAQ	Item 29	The most important reason why I am in school is to earn a degree.			0.65

Tool	Item	Text	SAM-IS	AM-IS	CAM-IS
SAMSAQ	Item 30	It is not worth the effort to earn excellent grades in my courses.			0.59
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 31	Within an academia environment, I find it more challenging to face difficult tasks.			0.61
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 32	For me studies are important to achieve knowledge and skills.		0.58	0.51
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 33	For me, it is important to train seriously to improve my performance.	0.62		
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 34	The achievement of a degree is important to enrich my knowledge.		0.74	
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 35	In sport, I find stimulating those situations requiring high performances and being difficult to perform.	0.61	0.34	
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 36	Situations that allow me to test my capacities stimulate me.	0.64	0.40	
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 37	Difficult situations bother me.			0.65
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 38	For me it's important not to make mistakes.			0.59
SAMSAQ-IT	Item 39*	It's important for me to obtain a degree because it will help me to find a job.			
SAMSAQ-IS		Alpha	0.85	0.78	0.85
# absent in SAMSAQ					
§ absent in SAMSAQ-IT					
* absent in SAMSAQ-IS					

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of scores for the three subscales of SAMSAQ-IS in relation to Nation, Gender, Age, and Type of sport.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the SAMSAQ-IS scores.

	SAM-IS		AM-IS		CAM-IS	
	ITALIAN	SLOVENIAN	ITALIAN	SLOVENIAN	ITALIAN	SLOVENIAN
Gender						
Female	4.3±1.6	4.4±1.6	4.2±1.6	4.3±1.6	3.9±1.7	4.1±1.6
Male	4.4±1.5	4.4±1.7	4.5±1.4	4.2±1.5	3.8±1.7	4.2±1.6
Age						
≤ 24 years	4.4±1.5	4.4±1.7	4.4±1.6	4.2±1.5	3.8±1.7	4.1±1.6*
> 24 years	4.4±1.6	4.6±1.6	4.5±1.5	4.4±1.5	3.8±1.7	4.4±1.6
Type of Sport						
Individual sport	4.3±1.6	4.4±1.7	4.2±1.6*	4.2±1.6	3.8±1.7	4.2±1.6
Team sport	4.5±1.5	4.4±1.6	4.5±1.4	4.3±1.5	3.8±1.7	4.1±1.6

* difference ($p \leq 0.05$) with respect to their compatriot counterparts.

A preliminary analysis ascertained no difference for gender and thus the data were pooled. Regarding CAM, a main effect ($p < 0.0001$, $ES = 0.24$) was found for Nation with Slovenian student-athletes showing higher values (4.2 ± 1.6 pt) than their Italian counterparts (3.8 ± 1.7 pt). Nation \times Age ($p = 0.0005$) and Type of Sport \times Age ($p = 0.0033$) interactions emerged. Post hoc analysis maintained differences ($p = 0.0102$, $ES = 0.19$) for the Slovenian student-athletes only, with higher values for >24 -year student-athletes (4.4 ± 1.6 pt) than for their younger counterparts (4.1 ± 1.6 pt). Further, only <24 -year athletes maintained a difference ($p < 0.0001$, $ES = 0.12$) between individual (4.1 ± 1.6 pt) and team (3.9 ± 1.6 pt) sports. For AM, a main effect ($p = 0.0256$, $ES = 0.13$) was found for Type of Sport with those student-athletes competing in individual disciplines showing lower values (4.2 ± 1.6 pt) than their team sport counterparts (4.4 ± 1.4 pt). A Nation \times Type of Sport ($p = 0.036$) interaction emerged. Post hoc analysis maintained differences ($p = 0.0011$, $ES = 0.2$) for the Italian student-athletes only, with higher values for team sport student-athletes (4.5 ± 1.4 pt) compared to their counterparts competing in individual sports (4.2 ± 1.6 pt). Finally, no difference emerged for SAM.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The SAMSAQ-IS has proven to be a valuable tool for ascertaining European student-athletes' motivation for a dual career in countries with no structured sport-education measures in place (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). In particular, understanding athletes' motivation levels for both their studies and sport careers could help educational and sports bodies provide effective services to support and encourage them in simultaneously pursuing educational objectives and promoting the development of student-athletes (European Commission, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2011, 2013). The main findings of the present study indicate that the Italian and Slovenian student-athletes are highly motivated for a dual career, independently of gender. Despite the lack of institutional support, these student-athletes showed mean scores similar to those reported for American student-athletes (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Rasmussen, 2009; Shuman, 2009) who receive full support from their colleges. Further, the lack of differences in motivation for elite sport denotes that the Italian and Slovenian elite athletes are fully committed to sport. Conversely, differences emerging in motivation for academic-related tasks and in motivation to pursue a professional sport career open new perspectives relative to improving effective services to support elite athletes.

The Italian and Slovenian academic systems do not provide additional services to ensure a flexible agenda for elite student-athletes (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Radtke & Coalter, 2007). Given that the SAMSAQ tool has been developed for American college student-athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2005) who benefit from specific academic support (Gatmen, 2012), significant cultural differences have determined a substantial cross-cultural variation in the model's factorial structure (Su and Parham, 2002). In fact, discrepancies with respect to the original model were expected (Rasmussen, 2009; Harrison et al., 2010; Willis, 2005; Shultz, 2007; Shuman, 2009; Fortes et al. 2010; Guidotti & Capranica, in print). The addition of the nine items to those included in the original version of SAMSAQ resulted in improvements to the tool reflecting the three constructs of academic motivation, athletic motivation, and career athletic motivation of the Italian and Slovenian student-athletes. Clearly, future research should aim to verify the validity of SAMSAQ-EU for monitoring the educational needs of young European elite athletes in contexts with different policy systems (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Shuman, 2009).

Having fewer opportunities to pursue professional athletic careers (International Olympic Committee, 2012), female students are expected to have higher academic motivation and lower

career athletic motivation scores (Gaston-Gayles, 2005). Conversely, in the present study the lack of gender differences did not substantiate such previous findings. One could speculate that the general development of women's sport in western countries may have reduced differences in gendered sport.

The Italian and Slovenian student-athletes showed a similar motivation for academic-related tasks and motivation for elite sport, indicating that these athletes are determined to perform both in the classroom and on the field. Compared to traditional students, student-athletes face additional challenges and energy demands in achieving good academic and sport performances (Shuman, 2009; Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Gatmen, 2012). Athletic responsibilities at the elite level could in fact parallel those of full-time jobs, hindering student-athletes from taking full advantage of the educational resources available (Gatmen, 2012). A substantial time commitment and physical energy dedicated to sport could detract from the amount of time and mental energy student-athletes can devote to academic pursuits, negatively influencing their achievement over time. In the present study, the Italian team sport athletes showed significantly higher academic motivation than their Slovenian counterparts involved in individual sports. This difference may be ascribed to the Italian sport system which strongly relies on military sport organisation supporting mainly athletes involved in individual sports. In practice, athletes recruited into the army not only fully dedicate themselves to their sports but also have a future military career ensured at the end of their athletic career. Although in Italy team sports are the most practised and also comprise a professional level (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano, 2010), players can only rely on financial support during their competitive life. Thus, team sport athletes might perceive it vital to earn a degree to ensure their future career, especially considering the strong competition to reach the professional level. While college athletes might perceive themselves as being unprepared for non-sports-related careers (Gatmen, 2012), outstanding athletic achievements might help former athletes obtain professional positions in sport as sport managers, coaches, physical trainers and sport commentators (Capranica et al., 2008; Guidotti & Capranica in print). Therefore, sport-related degrees might represent a good option for acquiring an academic education to support former athletes' future engagement in the labour market.

An athlete's ultimate goal is to pursue a professional sport career. At around 24 years of age successful athletes have in fact already achieved elite performances which offer better opportunities to pursue/continue a professional sport career. In particular, the Slovenian student-athletes revealed a higher motivation for professional sport that was especially evident for athletes older than 24 years of age involved in individual sport. Unlike in Italy, individual sports (mainly winter sports) represent the most distinctive part of building the self-image of the modern Slovenian nation (Starc, 2005). Slovenia is a small country with 2 million inhabitants, whereas Italy has a population of 58 million, with 22 percent of it regularly involved in sports (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano, 2010). Thus, it might be speculated that Slovenian athletes perceive they have greater chances of emerging than their Italian counterparts.

Several important lessons can be learned from this pioneering cross-cultural study on the motivation of European student-athletes for a dual career, which could contribute to the development of policy actions in the area of sport and education at national and European levels (European Commission, 2013). Certainly, information on student-athletes' motivations regarding education and sport achievements should be used alongside that deriving from their sport activity and athletic identity in different European socio-cultural contexts.

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