



**REVIEW PAPER**

**KEY FACTORS FOR QUALITATIVE REALISATION OF  
DUAL CAREER IN PERSPECTIVE OF THE SPORTS  
LEADERSHIP**

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**Abstract**

*The Murjani Sports Gymnasium (MSG) is the only specialized sports education institution in Latvia which provides high school education and simultaneously the realisation of high-performance sports career. Despite the fact that this educational institution has about 400 students/athletes in seven sports, crucial part of the Latvian national teams in these 7 sports contains of the current and graduated students of the MSG. Therefore, the aim of this study is to evaluate the dual career maintenance i.e. situation in Latvia, by particularly assessing the key factors of qualitative dual career realisation. In this matter, based on the literature research the key factors to maintain qualitative dual career were selected. Additionally, the sports leadership evaluated the importance of these factors in dual career realisation. In particularly, five national sport federations' presidents and the Deputy State Secretary-Director of the Sports Department at Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (MES) were asked to evaluate the dual career system in Latvia and to give suggestions for development which has significant meaning in dual career system improvement and development in the Latvian sports industry. The results of the interviews with the sports leadership indicate that all determined key factors proposed by the scientists that influence qualitative dual career realisation play an important role. It could also be surely concluded that dual career maintenance i.e. athletes' support system is in its very early stage of development and the work on the dual career systems' progression must be intensified. Furthermore, based on the research results it would be possible further to develop a more accurate model for the enhancement*

*of the qualitative dual career realization in Latvia and put forward recommendations for improvement of the dual career structures in Latvia.*

**Keywords:** *dual career, sports, education, high-performance sports, sports leadership*

## **Introduction**

In dual careers the focus is set on link and interaction between the sports career and the education process (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova and Wylleman, 2014) to ensure successful and simultaneous transitions in both athletes' careers. Thus, sport and education are identified as central components of a dual career.

In particular, the dual career and its realisation or assurance in school age is in sport science a research object since the 1980s (Teubert, 2009). While a large number of scientists have studied the overload of new athletes in school and high-achievement sport, only a few have focused on the coordination or collaboration of these two structures, namely school and high-performance sport (Teubert, 2009).

Moreover, in the latest time the interest in dual career has grown strongly by producing recommendations, models and guidelines on the dual career realisation and improvement in its structures. Thus, these scientific models and recommendations should attain all involved stakeholders and their consciousness in this dual career system. The most important stakeholders or drivers of dual career development and promotion are the athletes themselves, coaches, teachers, sports and education systems, sports federations, government, society et. al. Moreover, based on data from the European Union conducted research study "Study on Minimum Quality Requirements for Dual Career Services" (2016), the importance of qualitative dual career maintenance or realization persist in the interaction between all stakeholders. Therefore, qualitative dual career structures offer potential and opportunities for positive development. According to this EU study there are real operational steps: (a) the participating organizations evaluate their willingness and support for dual career development and support; (b) new opportunities for international cooperation (c) encouragement of existing dual career cooperation, (d) establishment and enhancement of the dual career monitoring and/or evaluation system(s). In this matter, were selected the leaders i.e. presidents of the national sports federations and the leader in the sports field from the national government to collect their professional opinion about the quality of the dual career in Latvia. In particular, *the interview content covers five topics: (a) leadership; (b) policy, legislation and governance; (c) funding; (d) recognition and agreements; (e) measuring impact.*

Furthermore, the realization of the dual career can be successful if clear and open communication and information on the rules and decision-making process is provided. Besides, if the clear communication and transparency is required then analyse of the environment plays a crucial role as well. When studying the influence of the environmental factor on the dual career, it is necessary to distinguish between external or macro-environmental and internal or micro-environmental effects. Macro-environment as an essential factor in the process of personalization includes:

- society – economic, political, cultural, climatic, ecological, geographical, hygienic environment and its factors that directly interact with personality throughout one's life;
- social conditions – social, material and mental – that in one way or another influence personality and its development. Additionally, particular importance has the daily life, well-being, traditions and customs of a certain part of the society (Masteralexis, Barr, Hums, 2005; Abele, 2009; Krona, 2011).

The microenvironment is related to the social environment surrounding the athlete's daily activities. Family, childhood experiences, peers, friends, school or study environment as well as media have traditionally provided the greatest impact on the micro-environment (Abelkalns, 2013). Likewise, the scholars Henriksen et al. (2010) divided the micro- and macro environment in his athletic talent development environment model - ATDE. The ATDE model consists of micro and macro levels in sports career and in other non-sports fields, which comprises education and private life. The main purpose of the ATDE model is to help create the necessary conditions and support for young athletes to make the transition from junior to high achievers in adulthood (Henriksen et al., 2010).

The successful transition from junior to high achievers in adulthood is well researched field of leading scholars in this field like Stambulova, Alfermann (2009) and Wylleman, Lavallee (2004). Contributing factors to dual career development are traditionally recognized drivers / stakeholders at the micro level, such as coaches, coaching staff, family, and more. (Cote, 1999; Cote et al., 2007). In contrast, Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004), as well as Stambulova, Stephan and Jarphag (2007), from a comprehensive perspective discovered new factors at the macro-environmental level: national culture and national sport system. Macro-environment describes the social environment that influences but not forcibly interacts with young athletes.

Hence, the coordination of these two dual career structures – sport and education – is less scrutinised in the students'/athletes' school age. In this particular research the sports leadership's professional opinion as

stakeholders from the macro environment were examined and their evaluation about the dual career's systems development in Latvia were compiled.

To sum up, the tasks of this study is to evaluate the importance of in literature research selected key factors for maintaining qualitative dual career in perspective of the sports leadership in Latvia. To conduct this study, six semi – structured interviews were held to evaluate the dual career maintenance i.e. situation in Latvia, by particularly assessing the key factors of qualitative dual career realisation.

## **Material and Methods**

Research data were collected in two ways; the investigation and analysis of the scientific literature sources, as well as EU and national regulations, and a semi-structured interview with the experts in the sports field. Expert judgment is a qualitative research method and gives an objective and reliable insight into the phenomenon being studied, as experts impart the knowledge in this field (Albrehta, 1998, Kristapsone, 2008). According to this definition, the expert's selection was based on their academic and work experience. Concretely, all selected experts have obtained an academic degree and they have at least 5 years' experience in the sports sector as a governmental body.

Within this empirical study, a semi-structured interview with pre-prepared questions and free answers was used. This type of interview firstly allows the researcher to ask additional questions during the interview and obtain detailed information if necessary, secondly, free answers reduce the interviewee's response to certain answers (Kropļijs, Rascevska 2004; Geske, Grinfelds 2006; Kristapsone 2008); obtaining objective information. Interviews are an important research method, which involves obtaining information through close social interaction between the respondent and the researcher. This is a time-consuming process as it has to be done with each respondent individually.

In this case 6 interviews were held with six male sports leaders - five national sport federation presidents and the Deputy State Secretary-Director of the Sports Department at Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia. The average duration of these interviews reaches 40 minutes. The individual interviews were documented in audio form, then described for factor analysis. In the factor analysis the determined factors were selected on the on the basis of the EU Minimum Quality Requirements for Dual Career Services (2016), which was developed by Professor of Sport Sciences at the University of Applied Sciences Amsterdam under the guidance of Dr. Cees Vervoorn. In particular, the interview questions cover

following topics: (a) leadership; (b) policy, legislation and governance; (c) funding; (d) recognition and agreements; (e) measuring impact. Following, the interviewed experts' responses about the dual career qualitative realization in Latvia in all previous mentioned fields were collected and analyzed in terms of factor analyse. Finally, the final factors were evaluated in two categories which were elaborated by the authors of this research.

## Results

Related to the aim and objectives of this study the key factors to maintain qualitative dual career in Latvia were evaluated. In this matter, the results were categorized based on the responses of six semi-structured interviews which were conducted with sports leadership in Latvia.

Again, based on the EU Minimum Quality Requirements for Dual Career Services (2016) the key factors or main topics for the maintenance and /or realization of dual career in Latvia were pre-selected. The responses of the six semi-structured interviews were evaluated by means of the factor analyse and so were selected the final key factors: age of the athlete; structure of the educational system; support system of the dual career; integration in the labour market after the graduation or discontinuation of the dual career; monitoring; provision of physical environment and infrastructure.

Moreover, the interview questions provide information about the developed key factors or criteria for the maintenance and /or realisation of dual career. (Table 1)

**Table 1**

### Interview questions

Leadership	Whether dual career is part of an explicit organisational strategy and vision.
	Whether programmes for dual career exists to implement strategy.
	Whether strategies for dual career is accompanied by a dialogue with stakeholders.
	Whether early awareness of arrangements for dual career is created with athletes and stakeholders.
Policy, Legislation and Governance	Dual career is embedded in the national or regional policy.
	Whether the policy cycle is implemented according to responsibilities, implementation, evaluation and monitoring.
	Whether agreements are in place between sport and the education domain.
	Whether agreements are in place between sport and the labour market.
	Whether agreements are in place between education and the labour market.
Funding	Whether such agreements lead to functional partnerships.
	Are there any projects or financial investments planned by the Ministry of Education and Science in the next few years for the development of dual career paths in any form of athletic support in education?
	Whether an educational bursary system is in place.

**1 Table continuation**

Funding	The presence of scholarships for individuals for studies, counselling, coaching and help in entering the transition to the labour market.
	Institutional support for the implementation of programmes for dual career.
Recognition and agreements	The presence of a general or a sport-specific classification system for talented and elite athletes;
	Whether a classification system is organised at national level.
	Do you have events, handouts, materials, etc., for your interest groups to highlight the importance of dual careers?
	Is dual career also a topic in your international sports federation?
Measuring impact	The registration of talented, elite and post-elite athlete.
	The existence and implementation of a monitoring cycle.
	The existence of quality indicators for success, based on academic and/or sporting performance.

First, in frames of the answer about leadership and policy, legislation and governance following key factors could be elaborated: age of the athletes and structure of the educational system. Primarily, the age of the athletes when they carry out their dual career is related to their sports. As the MSG is the object of this research, then the age of the dual career athletes / students was selected by determined sports peculiarities and the regulations of the national sport federations. Secondly, the MSG is the only high school with national regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in Latvia where is a clear structure of the educational system to combine it with high performance sport and so to fulfil a dual career. Following, the questions about funding were related to the key factor: support system of the dual career. Herewith, to have a support system and recruit people to maintain a dual career structures it is crucial to have a solid financial base. Nonetheless, funding is one of the main requirements to have a support system of dual career but not the only component for support system in dual career. In addition, to interview questions about the recognition and agreement allowed evaluating the key factors: integration in the labour market after the graduation or discontinuation of the dual career, as well as, about the provision of physical environment and infrastructure. Finally, based on the expert response about the measuring impact the situation about the monitoring in dual career could be viewed.

In general, according to the interviewed experts the realization and maintenance of dual career in Latvia is very insufficient. Only the key factors about the age of athletes and structure of the education system is clear and could be positively evaluated. However, the education system for dual career athletes / students is only assured in the MSG, where about 400 students are obtaining the high school diploma / graduation. It allows to determine the rarity and selection of the dual career opportunities for high

school students. To continue, the all other key factors were evaluated as absent or insufficiently provided as well.

Overall, to have development in dual career structures in Latvia and observe some positive changes in near future it is necessary to carry out some actions or processes. In this matter, the opinions and assessments of the interviewed experts / leaders were divided in two categories or action plans: (a) preventive actions for dual career development (b) involvement of stakeholders in the process of dual career realization.

**Table 2**

## Preventive actions for dual career development in Latvia

<b>Key Factors</b> (modified by EU study Minimum Quality Requirements for Dual Career Services, 2016)	<b>Categories</b>	
	<i>Preventive actions for dual career development</i>	<i>Involvement of stakeholders in the process of dual career realization</i>
<b>Management and support system of the dual career</b>	The Ministry of Education and Science, as well as, national sport federation do not have a main strategy or vision for the dual career structures and implementation. However, there is understanding about the importance and necessity of dual career and it is emphasized in the National Sports Policy Guidelines.	The national sports federations have not carried out yet any activities to inform all stakeholders about dual career relevance and issues. The importance and strategy of dual career in its realization is not sufficiently discussed and analyzed among the leadership and all interest groups involved. This communication needs to be improved in the near future.
<b>Structure of the educational system</b>	Generally, dual career cooperation agreements are not concluded at national level. However, sports federations and MES cooperate with Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LASE) to prepare young professionals for the professional career in the sports field / domain. Yet, dual career cooperation agreements are successfully concluded between national sports federations and international sport federations. Nonetheless, these agreements are concluded in insufficient number.	The greatest responsibility for dual career realization and success have the athletes themselves. In addition, it can be concluded that there is an insufficient support from the MES, national sports federations and other driving forces /stakeholders who are involved in the dual career realization processes.

**2 Table continuation**

<b>Support system of the dual career</b>	<p>For development of a support system of the dual career are necessary a appropriate financial base.</p> <p>The Latvian Sports Federations Council (LSFC) provides scholarships for athletes to combine their sports careers with higher education.</p> <p>The bulk of the interviewed leaders of sports federations emphasize that the amount of scholarships is not sufficient for successful dual career.</p>	<p>The LSFC is at the moment the most active finance provider in the dual career system in Latvia.</p>
<b>Provision of physical environment and infrastructure</b>	<p>The MSG physical environment and infrastructure is not fulfilling the European standards.</p> <p>To improve this situation is necessary to find necessary finances to improve the physical environmental, especially, sport / training centres and education buildings.</p>	<p>Mainly the governing bodies should ensure an appropriate environment / infrastructure for sports and educational domain in dual career.</p>
<b>Monitoring</b>	<p>The main essence of dual careers is that their goals are not fully perceived at national government level and there is a lack of regulations, guidelines and other informative documents, as well as, activities and programs to improve this situation.</p> <p>Dual career monitoring and athlete register do not have an appropriate structure. There are records only about the athletic success / results.</p>	<p>Dual career guidance systems should be re-designed with the creation of a team of competent people who understand the specifics of sport and the globalization and digitization of sport.</p>

On the one hand, these pro-activities or fulfillment of these categories could allow conducting a stable dual career structure in Latvia. On the other hand, to reach a clear a qualitative dual career realization in Latvia there should be clearly defined responsibilities and duties of all involved stakeholders.

## Discussion

In order to develop a dual career structures in Latvia, especially in the MSG, the following key factors need to be addressed and fulfilled:

- age of the athlete
- structure of the educational system
- support system of the dual career
- integration in the labour market after the graduation or discontinuation of the dual career
- monitoring
- provision of physical environment and infrastructure

The results of this empirical research according to the theoretical part of this paper allow interpreting and evaluating which key factors of qualitative dual career realization are executed in a sufficient or positive level and which factors are insufficient or poorly realized in Latvia.

Hence, weaknesses or key factors that are not optimally provided in the dual career realization in Latvia include dual career system support, athletes and graduates' integration in the labor market, monitoring and provision of physical environment and infrastructure.

To change the poor situation in the dual career realization in Latvia the driving forces i.e. sports leadership like presidents of national sport federation and representatives of the MES should determine what dual career opportunities and improvements in Latvia would be necessary or desirable and which supporting systems should be provided to increase the motivation of athletes to commit their lives to high performance sport and simultaneously complete self-realization in the academic field and afterwards in the labor market.

For further development there should be not only some established guidelines or regulations and carried out some round table discussions on dual career but also there should be set specific common goals and responsibilities as well as tasks for sports and education leaders to have clear structures and good governance to maintain a qualitative dual career realization in Latvia.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the evaluation of the key factors for qualitative dual career realisation in the perspective of sport leadership reveal the actual situation in Latvia and what kind of improvement and orientation would be necessary for further development. Furthermore, this research discloses the perspective of the driving forces in the macro-environment. Stakeholders from the micro-environment like athletes themselves, coaches, teachers, parents, friends etc. should assess the key factors for qualitative dual career

Realization in Latvia as well. This would allow having a holistic view on this phenomenon and creating common ground of interests of all involved parties. Also, clear communication on main aims and vision would foster the quality and successful realization of dual career in Latvia.

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