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Beyond barriers:
Fostering social inclusion through dual career for student-athletes with disabilities

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Chapter 1

Dual career of student-athletes with disabilities: Challenges and benefits.

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the basic conceptual principles of the dual career model for student-athletes with disabilities and provides ideas for its better understanding and future optimisation. The chapter is structured in three sections. First, a brief state of the art on social inclusion and its relation to adapted sports will be presented. This will be followed by an analysis of the potential of a dual career for sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities, and how it can contribute towards their personal, academic, and sporting development. Subsequently, the benefits derived from the implementation of the dual career in this population will be presented, and lastly, recommendations will be offered for the eventual application of this model in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Dual Career; Student-Athlete; Disability; Adapted Sport; Higher Education.

1. Introduction.

There are an estimated 87 million people in the European Union with disabilities, equivalent to 15% of the European Union population (European Commission, 2022). Potentially, these individuals have a decreased chance to develop a professional sports career than the non-disabled person. The practice of sporting activities is a right included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 30 states that it is the responsibility of Member States to encourage and promote the participation of people with disabilities in sports at all levels (United Nations, 2006). Likewise, the European Union establishes the need to create access to "sports for all", including the support that is necessary so that people with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with others (European Union, 2010).

High-level disabled sports are in the process of expanding. As an example, in the last two decades, participation in the Paralympic Games has significantly increased from 3,259 athletes in Atlanta 1996, to 4,403 in Tokyo 2020, equivalent to a 35.1% increase. Despite its short history, high-level adapted sports have made a significant headway in the overall process of social progress and global awareness of the inclusion of athletes with disabilities in modern elite sports. However, there is an underlying need to provide student-athletes with disabilities with equal opportunities to achieve future professional success based on a university education, without prejudice to their competitive sports career. This requires the creation of a dual career structure that supports student-athletes with a disability (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

2. Social inclusion and disabled sports. Recent evidence, existing needs, and gaps.

People with disabilities are undoubtedly among the most vulnerable at risk of social exclusion (Rezaul, 2015). Social exclusion can be defined as the multiple and changing factors that result in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices, and rights of modern society (Gladstone, 2001). This includes the practice of sports.

Social exclusion is a multidimensional reality that is linked to many aspects, such as social status, education, health, income, or access to welfare services (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997). From a social perspective, inclusion should not be thought of as the antithesis of exclusion, but as a dimension of positive social development that must be reconciled with objectives of promoting social welfare and the development of individuals at different levels. Among the causes that may lead to social exclusion, we find reduced opportunities to access higher education, unequal access to the labour market or a lack of participation in social activities such as sports (Labonté et al., 2012). The struggle to achieve full inclusion has been one of the main objectives of the social model built in the European Union. The Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 encouraged member states to develop initiatives and promote good practices that would contribute towards the knowledge and development of new policies to combat discrimination based on disability, and sports have been the focus of such policies in recent years. The European Commission's European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 established the need to encourage participation in sports and other cultural activities by people with disabilities, through ways that facilitate their access, such as Braille language or equivalent resources depending on the type of disability (European Commission, 2010).

Sports are currently some of the most significant socio-cultural phenomena. Their importance transcends geographical borders and serves as a link between different cultural sectors. Sports are some of the main channels of social integration (Höglund & Bruhn, 2022).

They have been successfully used for the inclusion of special populations at risk of exclusion, such as immigrants, elderly persons, and youngsters living in poverty, or people with disabilities. In this sense, sports have proven to be effective tools for achieving social inclusion of the latter, as they provide them with the opportunity to showcase their talents and skills and to challenge the stereotypes associated with their condition (Bantjes et al., 2019).

Four pathways have been identified to achieve social inclusion (Bailey, 2005):

- *Spatial*: Social inclusion is achieved through proximity and the reduction of distances, physical and social.
- *Rational*: Defined in terms of the sense of belonging and acceptance within a community.
- *Functional*: Related to the improvement of cognitive and motor skills.
- *Empowering*: Promoting the greatest possible autonomy without risk.

Sports can contribute to the process of inclusion of people with disabilities by: Reducing the barriers that prevent access to spaces for shared sports practice (spatial); generating a feeling of belonging to institutions (sport clubs, university teams, etc.), which allow people with different backgrounds to share a common interest (relational); providing the opportunity to develop their abilities and skills within the framework of sports practice (functional); and developing social support networks that increase community cohesion and support for the individual (empowering).

Adapted sports are defined as that which use resources other than the usual ones to enable athletes with physical, intellectual, or sensory disabilities, to practise their chosen sport safely (Martínez-Ferrer, 2010). One of the characteristics of adapted sports is that they are phenomena that require a multidisciplinary intervention by professionals with specialised knowledge. They also require the creation of

specific ecosystems to achieve equal access, integration, and well-being for sportspeople during their practice of sports (Sherrill, 1996).

There are three hindering elements to the practice of adapted sports: a) individual; b) social; and c) environmental (Martin, 2013). Individual barriers are those that refer to physical limitations and limits that are self-imposed by the disabled athletes themselves (Haslett et al., 2017). In many cases, they are caused by the lack of assistance or by not receiving adequate guidance. Social barriers are associated with the lack of preparation of the members of sports organisations to adapt to the specific needs of disabled athletes (Swartz et al., 2018). With respect to environmental barriers, they refer to the general absence of elements that enable the mobility of people with disabilities and the lack of civic sense to reverse this situation.

Overcoming these barriers provides important benefits to athletes with disabilities. First of all, it allows them to improve their personal health by enhancing their physical and mental well-being (Groff et al., 2009). It also allows for personal development through increased self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as improved autonomy, providing important cognitive benefits (Mocha-Bonilla et al., 2018). At the social level, the practice of sports can lead to better integration into communities through membership in clubs and participation in sports competitions (Pierre et al., 2022).

Sports are as much a pillar of social inclusion as education or employment. In our societies, the access to higher education, obtaining a paid job, or the practice of a high level of sports without restrictions, are factors that foster social inclusion (Asis-Roig, 2018). The way in which these areas are conceived is of particular importance in the fight against exclusion. Traditionally, barriers have existed in these areas that directly limited the participation of people with disabilities; or indirectly when their access was discriminated against because they had features that did not correspond to those of an archetypal athlete, student, or worker.

3. The potential of dual career models for disabled athletes.

The concept of a dual career refers to the challenge of reconciling a sports career with education or work, which is a source of concern for most elite athletes. In 2007, the European Commission declared the dual career as one of the key principles in the White Paper on Sport (European Commission, 2007). This issue has been considered by the European Union, in an effort to promote the development of sport in a socially-responsible environment (European Commission, 2012).

In this regard, the European Union addresses the great importance of improving the learning and education of athletes, through their university education to develop their skills and competencies outside the world of sport. The initial ethical idea of the growing interest of the EU in the education of athletes is linked with the fact that education is a human right, and sportsmen and sportswomen, as human beings who have served the community through sport and have been useful to society, deserve to be helped to benefit from this right at all stages of their lives (Schweiger, 2014). In order to ensure the entry of professional athletes into the labour market at the end of their careers, the dual career model has been implemented with significant success in higher education institutions across Europe since then (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). Based on these foundations, the dual career must evolve to be expandable to other sectors of the population, such as athletes with disabilities, with the appropriate specific adaptations.

The degree of professionalisation that sports have reached today implies that an athlete must assume a discipline of training and preparation for competition that will last, on average, between five to ten years (Wylleman et al., 2004), with an approximate dedication of 30 hours per week (Jonker et al., 2009). During this time, elite athletes will invest a large part of their time and resources in achieving their sporting goals (Aquilina, 2013). However, despite these efforts, most athletes only subsist on their income derived from their sporting ac-

tivity, which is largely limited (Martínez-Abajo et al., 2021). For these reasons, supranational, state, and regional institutions, are increasingly concerned about promoting policies to support the dual career, i.e., those measures by which an athlete can effectively combine the development of a sports career in parallel with an academic career (Geranisova & Ronkainen, 2015), in order to achieve a holistic development that will allow him/her to achieve a successful insertion into the labour market after retirement (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015).

As Debois et al. (2015) argue, the athletic career is not a linear path to excellence, but a trajectory with ups and downs in which athletic development is strongly linked to social, personal and/or academic development, whose mutual interaction can condition athletic success. Under this paradigm, an athlete's career should be understood and approached from a holistic perspective (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), placing the subject within and outside the sport context, with demands and needs, sometimes simultaneous, at different levels of his or her life development (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). At this point, the dual career has a highly significant relevance as an anchoring element between both realities, either during the athlete's integral development in his or her athlete-student role, or in the transition to post-sports life (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015).

Scientific research has barely focused on promoting a dual career for athletes with disabilities (Magnanini et al., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023). Publications or studies on this subject are practically non-existent, which defines it as an unexplored field, although one on which there is an urgency to act. In adapted sports it is necessary to develop sports skills that are on a par with those of their non-disabled counterparts. This means investing many hours of hard work and training to achieve the level of performance required to compete at the highest level. This results in these athletes having greater needs arising from their abilities, and therefore showing a greater risk of social exclusion, as they are unable to reconcile their demanding sporting life with academic training to ensure a secure future.

The development of elite disabled sport has been remarkable and must be placed in a broader context of progress and social integration (Thomas & Smith, 2009). The dual career is a necessary step forward in this process. Top-level sportsmen and women possess valuable personality traits and attitudes such as commitment and leadership, which can add value to their university experience. These skills can materialise in a higher performance of the student-athlete in his/her academic progress (Stambulova, 2016). The dual career is also a challenge for universities, and for their obligation to offer teaching and learning models that are up-to-date according to the current needs of an increasingly inclusive society.

Disabled athletes are a heterogeneous group in terms of kind and degree of impairment. In the field of sports, they are grouped into the categories of physically disabled, visually disabled, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled, and people with cerebral palsy (DePauw, 2012). This variety of ranges implies an added effort to provide student-athletes with disabilities with tailor-made support programmes that meet their needs and help them achieve their goals within the dual career. The teaching-learning process must be supervised and monitored by expert staff who are adequately trained for this task. Universities should put in place the necessary structures - physical and organisational - to remove any barriers to university life for athletes with disabilities (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). They should also design protocols and good practice guidelines that establish a framework to avoid randomness and uncertainty. Lecturers should be trained to detect and act on the unique situations that their student-athletes with disabilities bring to their attention. They should also encourage other students to participate in initiatives aimed at their inclusion. The wider university community should work together to build a positive learning ecosystem that helps to create a safe and welcoming environment. All things considered, the dual career is a holistic endeavour that involves all these agents directly or indirectly.

4. Benefits of the dual career in the social integration of disabled persons.

The benefits of dual career have been a widely studied topic in scientific literature. Wylleman et al. (2013) highlighted the positive relationship between the development of athletes at the sporting level and in other areas such as psychosocial, professional, economic, or vocational-academic ones.

Among the advantages described, the increase in the rate of employability is perhaps one of the most notable (Tekavc et al., 2015). The development of a sports career at a high level can enhance academic and employment success. Barriopedro et al. (2016), found that former top-level athletes that followed this model showed a higher level of education and insertion in the labour market than the average of the general population, although this did not imply a measurable wage difference. In a subsequent study, Barriopedro et al. (2018) found that a dual career facilitated entry into the labour market, especially if this had been followed during the time of best performance during the sports career. Among the explanations for this fact, it stands out that those athletes who had followed a dual career model developed an improved capacity for planning and a greater capacity for adaptation, while at the same time, they had a consolidated social support, which gave them an advantage in the job search (Torregrosa et al., 2015).

At the psychological level, the dual career has a positive impact on sport identity (Van Rens et al., 2019). This type of identity is understood as the perception that athletes have about themselves, based on the link they have created with the sport they have practised for a large part of their lives, and the degree of importance of this dimension with respect to other vital areas (Pallarés et al., 2011). Athletes who study a university degree can develop a multidimensional identity that enriches them as individuals and allows them to better face the moment of their retirement, and the subsequent active search for employment, with a better perspective (Moreno et al., 2020). This is relevant, as there have been documented cases of athletes who,

after finishing their sports career, have suffered identity crises that negatively conditioned their post-sports development (Lally, 2007). Combining competitive sports with academic training fosters the development of a less rigid personality that grants them with a greater freedom when planning the future, and fully develops in the labour market (Vilanova & Puig, 2017). In this way, a greater commitment during the dual career can generate a higher level of awareness in the athlete about his or her capabilities beyond sports, which may help avoid future identity confusion that hinders his or her transition to post-sports life (Park et al., 2013).

Another benefit is that the dual career prevents the early dropout from sports and school failure (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015). It has been found that belonging to the dual career increases the commitment of student-athletes to this program, which is especially important in athletes who transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education (Defruyt et al., 2020), and which is also increased in the case of receiving some type of institutional scholarship (Gavala-González, 2019).

As for the effect on academic performance, there is no consensus among researchers on this issue. Previous approaches have drawn attention to the fact that development in high-level competitive sport is associated with poor academic performance (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Similarly, another work pointed out that studying for a university degree can distract athletes from their sporting goals and lead to a decline in their competitive performance (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). On the contrary, another study found the positive impact of competitive sport practice in obtaining a good academic record, to the point that the population of athletes has a higher level of education compared to the general population (Jonker et al., 2009).

Along with these, other benefits of a dual career on the athlete have been documented, such as the fact that it favours decision-making both in and out of sports (Harrison et al., 2020), provides an escape route from competitive stress (Moreno et al., 2020), helps to broaden sociability (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003), helps to expand so-

ciability (Stambulova & Samuel, 2020), promotes a balanced lifestyle (Stambulova et al., 2015), improves personal well-being (O'Neill et al., 2013), and can increase the contribution of athletes to the progress of society at large (Isidori, 2016), among others.

Regarding the benefits of the dual career for student-athletes with disabilities, this is a largely unexplored area in the scientific literature.

5. Dual career implementation strategies for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are less likely to have access to university education than non-disabled students (Reed et al., 2015). Access to higher education is significantly relevant, as it improves the employability of people with disabilities. According to Adams and Holland (2006), for people with only a secondary education, non-disabled people have 23% more chances of obtaining a job. However, this gap is reduced to 15% among people with a university degree. This means that disabled people who have successfully completed their higher education are more likely to find employment and have a stable situation.

However, possessing a university degree does not guarantee the employability of graduates. The reality is that the labour market more often demands skills outside of those required specifically for an industry or job. These are interpersonal skills, leadership, ethics, autonomy, or proactivity. The combination of knowledge and skills forms the basis of the employability of university students. The benefits of sport, especially for people with disabilities, are directly linked to the development of these professional skills, which increase employability opportunities (Reina et al., 2018). Sport has a positive impact on improving academic performance, increasing social relationships, optimising time management, increasing proactivity, or developing better teamwork skills (Khan et al., 2012), with these added values being significantly more beneficial to students with disabilities.

In recent years, the presence of students with disabilities in universities has gradually increased thanks to support programmes and favourable legislation (Yssel et al., 2016). Students with disabilities must adjust to the new challenge of university life and the upcoming challenges of this stage, just as the rest of students. However, student-athletes with disabilities must also manage these adaptations along with the demands of their sporting careers.

To achieve the effective inclusion of student-athletes with disabilities in higher education, the idea that the university is a space to value and seek diverse ways of thinking and perceiving must be promoted. University campuses should be welcoming and should adapt programmatically and attitudinally. A culture of mutual exploration and adoption between teachers and students should be fostered.

Some positive strategies for strengthening the relationship between teachers and students with disabilities are:

- Implement cooperative learning or group work to enable students with disabilities to fully participate.
- Adjust the learning methodology in an individual and effective manner.
- Give a voice to students with disabilities to express their needs, limitations, and difficulties.
- Highlight their strengths and potential to create self-empowerment.
- Provide teachers with adequate training programs and resources.
- Advise lecturers to be aware of their own attitudes towards diversity.

In addition to lecturers, it is important to create other support duties within the university staff to guide students with disabilities. According to Sameshimma (1999), the most common reasons for failure in higher education for people with disabilities are: a) a lack of specialised experts to mentor and motivate disabled students to fulfil their potential; b) a lack of role models that students can aspire to emulate. In relation to the former, experts should be specifically

trained to supervise student athletes with disabilities. They should be familiar with each individual case and ensure communication between the athlete, the university, and his or her club or coach to create stable environments.

Regarding the need for role models, student-athletes with disabilities who study in higher education institutions can be a source of inspiration for other students with disabilities or for the rest of the university community. Sport is one of the main channels for transmitting positive values to a society and its individuals, and specifically, disability sports further enrich this promotion of good values through the example of its athletes (Grenier et al., 2014). The International Paralympic Committee's current World Para-Athletics Strategic Plan notes that the increased exposure of athletes with disabilities promotes values such as courage, determination, inspiration, and equality (International Paralympic Committee, 2019), and these athletes could create a positive impact on their societies. They are valuable role models who inspire other citizens to improve and progress in their daily lives. In this context, athletes with disabilities have a greater capacity to bring about change in their environments through their example of sacrifice and effort to overcome adversity (Batts & Andrews, 2011). In this sense, the promotion of the dual career for student-athletes with disabilities can be a very effective way towards greater social inclusion.

6. Conclusions.

In summary, the joint integration of stakeholders and universities can help towards the creation of a collaborative structure whose mission is to create effective, solid, and lasting support for student-athletes with disabilities, to develop their talents both in sports and academia, respecting their needs and adaptations. The promotion of dual careers in this population group can inspire other students, with or without disabilities, through the transmission of positive

values and attitudes. Sacrifice, persistence, overcoming adversity, or self-improvement, are personal qualities that are particularly prominent in athletes with disabilities, which can enrich the functioning of a university classroom. At the same time, the presence of these athletes on campus can contribute towards their social inclusion. University staff will become aware of the treatment of diversity, and may eventually improve their training to adapt their methodologies in a more inclusive manner. Higher education institutions may be prompted to remove their physical and organisational barriers to create environments that do not limit the presence of people with disabilities. All these synergies may help create universities ready to face the challenges posed by the European Union in terms of social inclusion and adapted sports. The success of the disabled athletes' dual careers will not only help them build a more stable and secure future, but will also make them role models to inspire other young disabled athletes to follow in their footsteps.

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Chapter 2

Barriers to dual career for people with disabilities.

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Abstract

The dual career of the student-athlete is an excellent strategy to favour the transition at the end of the sporting life and to provide better and greater opportunities at this stage. Despite the proven benefits of the dual career model for student-athletes, its implementation is not without obstacles, both in the sporting and educational spheres. In this respect, it is important to address the barriers faced by this group to prevent them from dropping out of sporting careers and studies. Moreover, the perception of these barriers can be increased in the case of student-athletes with disabilities, as they must face additional limitations due to their condition and their lack of inclusion within the system them. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to analyse the barriers faced by this group during the dual career, with the aim of increasing knowledge and understanding of the state of the issue, favouring the design of policies and programmes adapted to their needs.

Keywords: Disabled; Sport; Para-athlete; Para-sport; University.

1. Introduction.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest, particularly from public authorities in the European Union, in developing initiatives, strategies, and policies that promote dual careers through direct grants and support for research in this field (Isidori et al., 2017). In 2012, the European Commission published a set of guidelines for Member States to promote national policies on dual careers in the high-performance sector (European Commission, 2012). In the recent call for proposals for the Erasmus+ Sport programme, dual careers were also at the forefront of funding research projects by universities, public authorities, and other organisations (Capranica et al., 2021). As a result, previous scientific achievements in this field have increased considerably, and the horizon of knowledge has broadened significantly (Guidotti et al., 2015), with the aim of connecting both the sport and education systems at the European level, as they are still strongly disconnected in this territory (Migliorati et al., 2018).

However, despite the growing importance given to the dual career of the student-athlete in recent years, and the fact that the Council of Europe establishes the protection of student-athletes with disabilities as one of the main challenges in interventions, previous research focused on this group of people is scarce (López-Flores et al., 2021; Magnanini et al., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023), thus hindering the acquisition of new knowledge about the main barriers faced by this population to ensure success in the sport and educational contexts. This is reflected in the limited data available, which indicates that people with disabilities participate in sport activities and attend university courses significantly less than their non-disabled peers (European Commission, 2018), and that sport policies aimed at developing the career paths of disabled athletes are significantly less advanced than those of non-disabled athletes (Patatas et al., 2018).

In this regard, there is a lack of specific development models for athletes with disabilities, except for the one proposed by Balyi et al. (2013), which emphasises the need to raise awareness of para-sports.

In this sense, recent studies support a holistic approach based on the extensive experience of non-disabled athletes, complemented by lessons from the specific context of para-sports, which allows the implementation of successful pathways for athletes with disabilities in terms of support models, learning, organisation, and structuring of educational experiences (Isidori et al., 2017; Patatas et al., 2018). This approach should consider the set of socio-cultural and contextual factors involved in the para-sport system (Patatas et al., 2021), and the partnership between the different stakeholders who, at different levels, are responsible for the success of dual careers, as they facilitate the coexistence between sport and university studies (Magnanini et al., 2022). For this group (students with disabilities), success in obtaining a university degree can be decisive for their financial and employment empowerment, both in terms of lifetime earning capacity and labour market insertion (Fuller et al., 2004).

For this reason, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the barriers of the dual career for student-athletes and, more specifically, for people with disabilities.

2. Barriers to dual career.

Despite the multiple benefits of the dual career for the student-athlete detailed in the previous chapter, a series of barriers and limitations are also present that can impede its correct development. One of the main barriers is the inability to adequately combine studies with the demands of high-level competition (Stevens et al., 2013), as high-performance sports training demands from its practitioners exhaustive daily training routines, physical recovery sessions, respect for rest times, and abdication of social and family commitments (Soares et al., 2016).

This can be exacerbated by the lack of flexible structures to adequately integrate both processes (Fuchs et al., 2016) and is most evident in the case of student-athletes with disabilities (Vaquero-Cris-

tóbal et al., 2023). This can negatively influence both academic and athletic performance (Papanikolaou et al., 2003), especially during the first year at university, which is enhanced by the additional stress of changing educational stage and an increased workload (Gómez et al., 2018).

Another limitation is motivated by financial issues (Condello et al., 2019). Although a significant number of athletes in these programmes receive some type of institutional scholarship (Morris et al., 2021), these scholarships are usually linked to good academic and sporting results, which generate additional stress on the student-athlete (Gavala-González et al., 2019). In the absence of these or other sources of income, it is usually the family members who assume these expenses (González & Torregrosa, 2009), depending on their purchasing power (Li & Sum, 2017).

With regard to the internal barriers of the athlete, it is worth highlighting their stress management with respect to different internal and external factors (Park et al., 2013), especially at times of increased sporting or academic demands (e.g., competitions and exam periods), which may trigger the abandonment of the dual career programme (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015). In this circumstance, student-athletes generally opt for the sport dimension, as most of these subjects consider themselves to be athletes rather than students (Cartigny et al., 2020; Cosh & Tully, 2014), so encouraging balance between sport and other aspects of life, such as work or studies, may help to prevent early sport dropout as well as identity crises (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Warriner & Lavallee, 2008).

In addition to the barriers detailed above, student-athletes with disabilities face additional barriers due to their condition, encountering difficulties in reconciling sport practice with studying or working, especially when the disabled athlete is a high-performance or high-level athlete (Reina-Vaillo, 2018), as well as fewer opportunities to participate, compete and be trained (Duarte et al., 2020). Therefore, in the case of student-athletes with disabilities, in addition to the difficulties related to the compatibility of their sport and

academic careers, they often must cope with the lack of inclusion of the system towards them (European Commission, 2018; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021). Moreover, they perceive barriers more acutely than their non-disabled peers, so specific measures need to be put in place to ensure their success (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

2.1. Barriers in the sport context for athletes with disabilities.

Regarding the sporting context, the biographical trajectories of people with disabilities differ from those without disabilities, due to the fact that the timing of transitions is not necessarily aligned with age (Heller & Parker Harris, 2012), and a delay is expected as a result of infantilisation and lack of recognition in the social world (Soláns, 2014). In this regard, an important factor is whether the disability is congenital or acquired, as this will vary the progression considerably throughout the different stages of sports training, depending on a number of factors such as the chronological age and maturational state of the subject in which the disability was contracted, the process of adaptation, and accommodation to the deficit with respect to the previous stage, previous sporting experiences, and social support, among others (Mendoza-Laiz et al., 2018).

Similarly, regarding specific resources and programmes for this population, at the European level, although trained professionals exist who are fully dedicated to sports, in the case of sports and athletes with disabilities, there is a lack of adapted resources and programmes (European Commission, 2012). Furthermore, another added disadvantage is the lack of programmes for detecting sports talent with disabilities at an early age in some European countries (Reina-Vaillo, 2018), as well as sports policies aimed at developing the professional careers of para-athletes (Patatas et al., 2018).

This lack of support is also reflected in the financial sphere. Using football as an example, if one compares the investment in this sport for disabled people in recent years, this amount is still comparati-

vely much lower than that received by non-disabled sportsmen and sportswomen. This is mainly due to less funding through sponsorships, whereby disabled footballers have to balance the demands of full-time work outside their sport and high sporting performance to achieve excellence, and the fact that most elite disabled footballers do not have full-time contracts (Whittingham et al., 2020).

In terms of gender in sport, female athletes with disabilities face several disadvantages as compared to their male counterparts with disabilities, due to both gender and disability (Deegan, 2018; Güven et al., 2019). Some of these include less structural or social support for women with disabilities relative to men with disabilities (Culver et al., 2022), lack of financial support (Clark & Mesch, 2018), less adult support to participate in sports (Wickman, 2015), or negative experiences with male coaches who inappropriately addressed their gender and/or disability (Alexander et al., 2020). All of these factors can pose a challenge for female athletes when constructing their identities (Culver et al., 2022), although other authors such as Pérez-Tejero and Ocete-Calvo (2018) highlight that these differences are motivated by women's own context, and not by the disability itself.

In relation to some of the stress factors for athletes with disabilities, geographical and logistical barriers for the athlete stand out, such as the difficulty of getting to the training venue, the lack of disabled parking, and distance, among others (Arnold et al., 2017), mainly for those who need a wheelchair to move or have significant limitations in this regard, with transport being an important limitation (Crawford & Stodolska, 2008). This is also coupled with the lack of adequate sports facilities in terms of accessibility for this group (Crawford & Stodolska, 2008; Whittingham et al. 2020). In addition, this increase in logistical complexity is associated with an increase in transport costs, especially if transport must be adapted for people with high needs, particularly affecting team sports (Reina-Vaillo, 2018).

Another of the limitations to be addressed mainly affects team sports. Specifically, in the case of athletes with disabilities, there are greater difficulties in terms of managing the different personalities

of the members of a team, with communication between teammates with different disabilities sometimes being difficult, causing a lack of connection or support (Arnold et al., 2017). Furthermore, as compared to non-disabled athletes, the number of athletes available to carry out an activity of a collective nature is smaller (Reina-Vaillo, 2018).

Finally, with regard to the personal and environmental barriers of the athlete with disabilities, the attitude of families towards their disabled relatives becomes fundamental (Reina-Vaillo, 2018), detecting a greater presence and involvement of parents in sporting activities when their child has a disability, which influences the practice of the sport (Shapiro & Malone, 2016). Therefore, family support is essential in the early stages and, in the case of some of the more severe disabilities, throughout sporting life (Mendoza-Laiz et al., 2018), with parents playing a vital role, and in some cases, bearing the economic burden derived from sport practice (Tekavc et al., 2015). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that parents of athletes with disabilities tend to be more critical than those with non-disabled children, as they have more difficulties in managing the emotional-motivational levels of their children when faced with failure (Ferrari, 2019).

2.2. Barriers in the educational context for athletes with disabilities.

In addition to the limitations detailed above in the field of sport, athletes with disabilities also face additional barriers in the educational context. In this regard, the fourth goal of the Resolution on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/L.1, United Nations [UN], 2015) seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Failure to take these rights into account greatly limits participation in education by students with disabilities and has an impact on the social situation of persons with disabilities in general (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021).

However, although in recent years the presence of students with disabilities at universities has gradually increased thanks to support programmes and favourable legislation (Yssel et al., 2016), the Education 2030 Framework for Action (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2015) underlines that there is still a wide disparity in terms of access.

In the case of athletes with disabilities, previous studies have highlighted the problems these people have in achieving academic success due to the limiting barriers they encounter in society itself (European Commission, 2018; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021), which increase the difficulty in successfully finishing dual careers. Among the main aspects analysed, we find those associated with educational legislation on inclusion issues (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021).

Another barrier mentioned refers to physical barriers in educational facilities and travel to and from them. Even though 77% of university institutions state that one of the ways in which they support students during their studies to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion, is to ensure accessible activities and facilities (European University Association, 2019), 21% of students with disabilities reported physical impediments to use the educational institution (Fuller et al., 2004). Furthermore, in relation to the above, one of the barriers that student-athletes with disabilities perceive to a greater extent than their non-disabled peers is the limitation posed by the university's remoteness from home and the training venue (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

Currently, 92% of European university institutions report addressing student disability and 87% report supporting students during their studies to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion, through guidance, counselling, and mentoring services (European University Association, 2019). However, student-athletes with disabilities rarely receive assistance in balancing sport and studies (López-Flores et al., 2021), and students with disabilities report little support during post-secondary education (López-Flores et al., 2021; Myers & Parker, 2018; Ridell et al., 2002).

On the one hand, among the barriers related to teaching staff, the professors' lack of knowledge of the theoretical and methodological bases, legal frameworks, and policies for the inclusion of people with disabilities stands out, which in turn generates a feeling of powerlessness and frustration (Black et al., 2014). In the same vein, students with disabilities allude to the lack of attitudes and willingness of academic staff to provide adaptations (Leyser et al., 2000), as well as calling for greater communication with professors, better institutional coordination, promotion of multidisciplinary work, and a greater alliance between the university and the sports federation in the case of those immersed in the dual career (Magnanini et al., 2022; Reina-Vaillo, 2018).

On the other hand, for students with disabilities, the perception of their classmates and the subsequent acceptance and support of individual differences are important for their satisfaction and educational success (Moriña & Carnerero, 2020), so the analysis of beliefs and attitudes towards disability is considered fundamental for the inclusion of these students (Glenn, 2018). In this regard, the creation of inclusive learning environments would benefit all learners, not just those with disabilities (Fuller et al., 2004), as all students are different in terms of their personal characteristics and social circumstances, and providing equal access to equivalent resources does not necessarily lead to equal outcomes (Mahlangu, 2020). To this end, there is a need for academic and non-academic staff to have knowledge on disability issues, with a greater focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and attention to the views and experiences of disabled students and their organisations (Myers & Parker, 2018).

Finally, and regarding student-athletes with disabilities, it would be advisable to develop personalised educational programmes based on their specific needs and to give greater recognition and value to their sporting practice within the educational institution (Magnanini et al., 2022).

3. Conclusions.

The dual career model for student-athletes is gaining ground and evolving continuously within the European Union. However, this progress has not been as fruitful in the case of athletes with disabilities, and there is still a lack of sufficient prior research to analyse the specificities of this group.

Despite the aforementioned, it can be concluded that these individuals face, in addition to the usual barriers present in the dual career of non-disabled student-athletes, a significant number of obstacles due to their condition. This situation necessitates not only referencing the existing general research on the non-disabled population, but also delving into the specific characteristics of this population to attempt to bridge the existing gap regarding their participation in sports and educational spheres.

A profound understanding of these barriers will facilitate the development and establishment of appropriate policies to enable the successful pursuit of the dual career of student-athletes with disabilities. This will also promote a better understanding among all stakeholders, encouraging their collaboration and involvement in these matters.

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Chapter 3

Inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education.

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Abstract

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education from different perspectives. In the introductory part, the concept of inclusion, considering the biopsychosocial model of disability, will be theoretically addressed. In the second part, it will be demonstrated how, in accordance with international legislative documents, individuals with disabilities must be guaranteed the right to access quality higher education on an equal basis with others. In the third part, it will be highlighted that despite the formal recognition of the right to education at the legislative level, available data indicate the persistence of inequalities between individuals with and without disabilities. Finally, in the fourth and fifth parts of the chapter, some guidelines for the full inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education will be summarised.

Keywords: Students with Disability; Higher Education; Inclusion; Special Educational Needs.

1. Introduction.

The 1994 Salamanca International Conference marked the inception of a new phase in the journey towards establishing a truly inclusive society. The Declaration it produced not only reaffirmed the universal right to education based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations [UN], 1948), but also argued that the education of individuals with disabilities is fundamentally a societal matter. It recognized that not only those with specific conditions but every individual "has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 8) that the educational system must consider. Every person should be entitled to attend mainstream schools, which, by adopting an "inclusive orientation, represent the most effective means to combat discriminatory behaviours, thereby fostering welcoming communities and building an inclusive society" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 9).

The Salamanca Declaration revisits the Special Educational Needs (SEN) notion introduced in the 1978 Warnock Report, which advocated for integrating individuals with disabilities into mainstream schools in the United Kingdom. However, it expands the meaning of SEN, an idea that the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education echoed when it introduced the Index for Inclusion in 2000 to "support the inclusive development of schools" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, pp. 108-109). The index acknowledges the utility of SEN, employed to characterise any learning difficulty, in identifying and supporting struggling students. It does, however, emphasise the impending need to move beyond this term, which may inadvertently label students from whom regular achievement is not expected, or may become a barrier to "the development of profoundly inclusive practices in schools, addressing the majority of students" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, pp. 112-113).

To arrive at a definition of inclusion that serves as a reference framework for both students with SEN and those with typical learning capacities, the index suggests replacing the SEN notion with the concept of "barriers to learning and participation" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002,

pp. 113-116). It views these barriers not solely because of an inherent deficit, but as challenges that arise from the student's interaction with the educational context: from relationships they establish with peers and adults and the content and teaching methodologies they encounter. From this perspective, utilising resources to support learning and participation is inherently tied to enhancing the quality of social interactions, and falls under broader support strategies. According to the Index for Inclusion, educational inclusion entails recognizing that school inclusion is an aspect of broader societal inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). A cyclical relationship exists between schools and society, wherein an educational environment that promotes the participation of all students paves the way for an inclusive culture, which in turn facilitates the reduction of any learning barriers.

Adopting a healthcare reference framework is essential for inclusion to become the predominant perspective of welfare policies. That would allow for a departure from the traditional definition of disability as a pathological state arising from intrinsic bodily features that can only be managed through medical interventions. The shortcomings of not only the biomedical model but also the socio-political model—which purports that any disturbance originates purely from social and cultural roots—are surpassed by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), devised in 2001 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Embracing an integrated approach, the ICF presents a bio-psycho-social model of individual functioning. According to this model, health status emerges from the interplay between internal factors—biological constitution—and external ones—living environment. Within the milieu where the human body operates, which is affected by physical and environmental impacts, we find intertwined external variables—relationships, roles, cultural attitudes—and internal ones—self-esteem, identity, and motivation. Disability, defined as "a health condition in an adverse environment" (WHO, 2001, p. 17), is a state anyone may encounter at certain life stages.

The ICF designates "barriers" and "facilitators" as environmental factors that, through their absence or presence, "hinder functioning and create disability" or "enhance functioning and reduce disability" (WHO, 2001, p. 214), respectively. This confers upon society the onus of establishing either disability-inducing or well-being-promoting environments. The concept of "barrier" is reiterated in the 2002 Declaration from the European Congress on Disability held in Madrid. Countering socio-environmental obstacles, the Madrid Declaration states the imperative nature of an "inclusive society for all" (European Center for Peace Development [ECPD], 2002, p. 4) to ensure that individuals with disabilities are granted their fundamental human rights as acknowledged by international conventions, the Treaty of the European Union, and various national constitutions. As Caldin elucidates, the Madrid Declaration asserts, "non-discrimination means equal rights, not equal treatment or response. Differences can be approached diversely, ensuring the same rights in the most appropriate and targeted manner for each individual in regular contexts" (Caldin, 2019, p. 260).

Inclusive education requires interventions that monitor and counteract barriers (both access and pedagogical), ensuring equal participation opportunities. Granting equal opportunities for all students is a prerequisite for designing an education and training system that can be labelled as inclusive. The inclusive proposal is part of a broader endeavour to secure a genuine right to active participation in formative processes, aiming to provide learning fully tailored to every individual's needs. This resonates deeply with the UN's orientations, as it advocates for education geared towards the holistic development of one's personality, including, among other things, fostering respect for human rights, cultural identity, and the physical environment. In line with this, Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contends that persons with disabilities should have equal access to primary, quality, and free education, and secondary education within their communities; a reasonable accommodation should be provided based on individual needs;

persons with disabilities should receive the necessary support within the general education system to facilitate their effective education; effective personalised support measures should be provided in environments that maximise academic and social progress, consistent with the goal of full integration (UN, 2006).

According to the UNESCO, "Educational inclusion is a process that tries to respond to the diversity of students by increasing their participation and reducing their exclusion within and from education. It is related to the attendance, participation, and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised" (2009, p. 13).

These themes are also echoed in the Agenda 2030 document, where it is asserted that by 2030, every woman and man should be guaranteed equitable access to quality and economically advantageous technical, vocational, tertiary - including university-level - education (UN, 2015). Inclusive education at the university level needs to be grounded on several supporting principles: welcoming, participation, equality, valorisation of differences, and the training of educators. The latter should increasingly focus on an inclusive pedagogy that can effectively design high-quality teaching-learning pathways tailored to each individual.

2. Legal frameworks.

In the international sphere, many institutional documents recognize the right to education for persons with disabilities. By way of example, we can mention, in sequential order, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to education without distinction (UN, 1948, Art. 26), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1975) and the Standard Rules on the equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which emphasise that primary, secondary, and tertiary

education must be equally accessible to persons with disabilities (UN, 1993, Art. 6).

Within this framework, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) undoubtedly deserves special mention. Approved on December 13, 2006, and ratified by as many as 181 countries, the Convention represents the most important document on the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as a historic event, the extent of which will only be possible to assess in the coming decades that testify to a commitment to a process of change towards a more inclusive society (Bickenbach, 2009; Griffo, 2009).

In principle and content, the Convention is similar to the Standard Rules on Equalising Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. However, whereas the latter document is a declaration without binding authority, the Convention has clear legal implications. It should directly affect political projects concerning persons with disabilities, especially in countries that ratified the Optional Protocol. In both cases, no reference is made to special rights. Instead, the need is affirmed to restore, to persons with disabilities, the ownership of the rights they enjoy as human beings and citizens to whom society must respond regarding equal opportunities (Baratella & Littamè, 2009; Griffo & Mascia, 2019). As stated in Article 1, the general purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity, as well as to enable their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, in all contexts of life (UN, 2006).

In particular, paragraph 5 of Article 24 unequivocally states that States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities can access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education, and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. States Parties shall ensure reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities (UN, 2006).

The European Union, likewise, with the launch of the Bologna Process in 1999 and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), has equipped itself with a series of legislative mechanisms aimed at sharing objectives, curricula and organisational rules that are increasingly oriented towards removing inequalities and guaranteeing equal access, as highlighted in numerous documents.

It should also be noted that with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2010, the European Union has made a *de facto* political commitment to respect the principles and obligations of the Convention.

In addition to the international and European documents, many nations have enacted national laws and specific regulations to guarantee the right to education for persons with disabilities. These laws may vary from country to country, but align with international standards.

By way of example, we limit ourselves here to mention:

- The Framework Law for Assistance, Social Integration and Rights of Handicapped Persons (*Legge-quadro per l'assistenza, l'integrazione sociale e i diritti delle persone handicappate)*, promulgated in Italy in 1992, states that persons with disabilities have the right to access education at all levels, including higher education. In addition, the law provides for support measures, such as personal assistance and adaptation of learning environments and materials.
- The *Disability Act* is a crucial law enacted in Ireland in 2005 that requires public authorities, including educational institutions, to take measures to ensure that services are accessible to people with disabilities. That may include providing support services, and modifying buildings and facilities to make them accessible, and adopting practices that enable inclusive participation.
- The Organic Law 4/2007 (*Ley Orgánica 4/2007*), promulgated in Spain on April 12, establishes the right of all people to receive

an education without discrimination on the grounds of gender or any other nature, including disability, and promotes equality of opportunity in higher education.

- The National Education Law (*Legea Educa iei Na ionale*), promulgated in Romania in September 2011, establishes the principles of inclusion and equality in education and contains specific provisions for inclusive education and access to higher education for students with disabilities.

  The Law 38/2004 (*Lei da Igualdade da Pessoa com Deficiência*), promulgated in Portugal in August 2004, enshrines the right to education for people with disabilities and requires educational institutions, including universities, to take measures to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

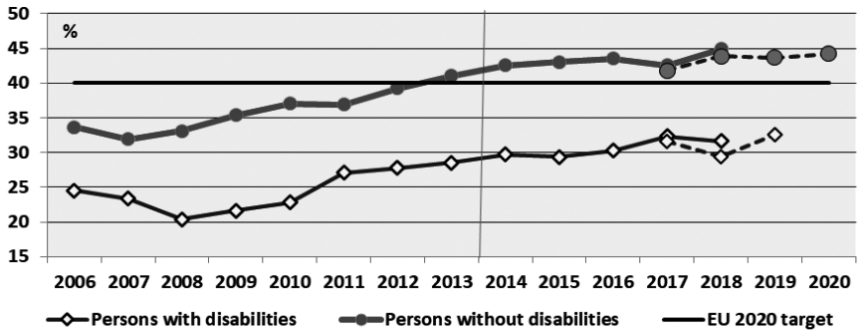
3. Data.

It is important to note that the earlier documents and conventions provide an essential basis for promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in education. However, their actual implementation can vary significantly from country to country. Therefore, it is essential to monitor and support national efforts to ensure adequate access to education for persons with disabilities. In this regard, the collection of statistical data is particularly relevant.

Generally, the data collected in recent years at the European level show an encouraging positive trend. Indeed, as can be observed in Figure 1, between 2008 and 2020, there was a steady increase in the percentage of people with disabilities aged between 30 and 34 who completed tertiary education or obtained an equivalent qualification. The figure also allows a comparison to be made both with people without disabilities and with the 40 per cent target set at the European level.

Figure 1

Evolution of the share of persons who have completed tertiary or equivalent education by disability status. EU, Age: 30-34.



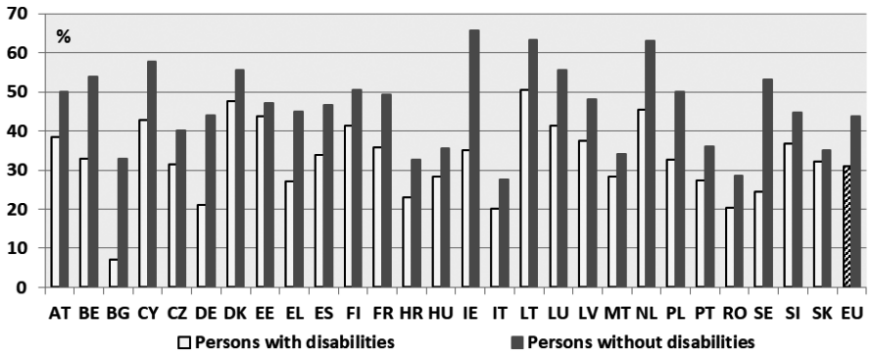
Source: Grammenos (2022).

However, considerable differences emerge between European countries. It is worth noting that the percentage of European citizens with disabilities aged between 30 and 34 who completed tertiary education or obtained an equivalent qualification in the years 2018 and 2019 varies between about 7% in Bulgaria and about 50% in Lithuania, with an overall fluctuation of as much as 43 percentage points (Figure 2).

Moreover, the trend data should be interpreted in the context of an overall increase in European citizens who have completed tertiary education. If we look again at Figure 1, the same positive trend can be observed for citizens without disabilities.

Figure 2

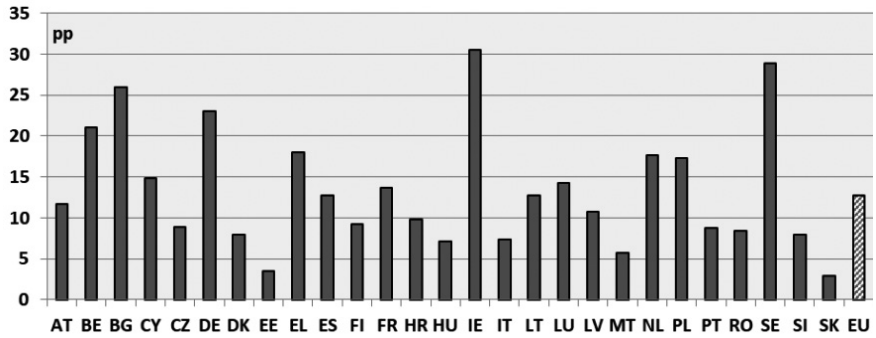
Percent of persons who have completed tertiary or equivalent education by Member State and disability status (age: 30-34). Mean 2018-19.



Source: Grammenos (2022)

Figure 3

Education gap between persons with and without disabilities. Mean 2018-19.



Source: Grammenos (2022).

Therefore, despite the positive trend, the data show the worrying persistence of a significant gap between European citizens with and without disabilities aged between 30 and 34 who completed tertiary education or obtained an equivalent qualification in 2018 and 2019. Overall, the gap at the European level is about 12.5 percentage points, but significant differences emerge between European countries. In fact, in the most virtuous countries, such as Slovakia and Estonia, the gap is less than 5%, while in Ireland and Sweden, it is around 30%. (Figures 2 and 3).

Regarding the types of disabilities, some studies suggest that physical disabilities are the most represented (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Furthermore, as was to be expected, the percentages vary according to the level of disability. Indeed, while the percentage of people with moderate disabilities who completed tertiary education or obtained an equivalent qualification is around 33%, the rate drops to 22% for people with severe disabilities (Grammenos, 2018).

4. The inclusion of students with disabilities within the European higher education system.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is of paramount importance, reflecting not only the broader societal values of equity and justice, but also the evolving ethos of academic institutions. In alignment with their global counterparts, European universities have increasingly recognized the significance of fostering an inclusive environment for everyone, according to the Universal Design principles (Universal Design for Learning - License to Learn [UDLL], 2016). This recognition stems from an understanding that universities are microcosms of the diverse communities they serve and that every student, irrespective of their abilities, brings a unique perspective that enriches the academic tapestry.

In the academic landscape, students with disabilities encounter a spectrum of experiences, ranging from empowering opportunities to formidable challenges. The current transformative phase in higher education has ushered in a series of progressive policies, robust support structures, and dedicated funding mechanisms, all aimed at facilitating the inclusion of these students. These initiatives symbolise the positive strides towards creating an equitable academic environment.

However, the journey has its challenges. Within the confines of university campuses, students often find themselves navigating challenges such as limited accessibility to the curriculum, inconsistent institutional support, and physical infrastructures that may not always be accommodating. These challenges are further magnified when students embark on fieldwork or practical experiences integral to their courses. Issues such as inaccessible transport systems or a lack of extended institutional support in external environments, can pose significant barriers.

For example, the medical and sports education field presents its unique challenges. Policies governing this field sometimes inadvertently cast disability in a restrictive light, viewing it as a potential risk or burden. Such perspectives necessitate adaptations to meet both legal and educational standards, but they can also inadvertently curtail opportunities for students with disabilities, potentially limiting their aspirations in the medical profession.

European universities have been at the forefront of implementing best practices to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities. Here is a synthesis of guidelines based on the literature (Simón et al., 2022):

- *Holistic approach to inclusion:* Universities should adopt a comprehensive approach to inclusion, understanding that it is not just about identifying barriers and providing solutions. Instead, it involves various factors, including the continuous reflection

among practitioners, inter-departmental discussions, and ensuring rewarding experiences for all stakeholders.

- *Academic and professional guidance*: Universities should provide robust academic and professional guidance services for students with disabilities. This includes not only academic counselling but also professional mentorship. Such guidance should be tailored to the unique needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they are well-prepared for academic and professional success.
- *Promotion of self-advocacy*: Encouraging students with disabilities to advocate for themselves is crucial. This can be achieved by providing them with the necessary information and resources, fostering an environment where they feel empowered to speak up about their needs and concerns.
- *Cultural accessibility*: Beyond physical and academic accessibility, there is a need to ensure cultural accessibility. That means making cultural heritage and resources easily understandable and accessible to everyone, including those with intellectual disabilities. Using easy-to-read guidelines and materials can be instrumental in this regard.
- *Infrastructure and environment*: The physical environment of the university, including buildings, transport systems, and field sites, should be designed or modified to be accessible. That includes not just ramps and elevators, but also accessible public transport and fieldwork sites.
- *Training and awareness*: Continuous training for staff and faculty about the needs of students with disabilities is essential. This training should shift attitudes, dispel myths, and promote a more inclusive mindset.
- *Collaborative approach*: Inclusion efforts are most successful when they involve collaboration between various stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrative staff, and external partners. This collaborative approach ensures that all the main perspectives are considered, and solutions are holistic and practical.

5. Conclusion: A general guideline to include students with disabilities.

In general terms, we could say that we should bear in mind the following (Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad [CERMI], 2017):

- Be clear about their condition as a person over and above their disability, always respecting their dignity.
- Naturally, treat the person with respect, speak directly to them, not to the person accompanying them, and in a normal tone of voice, taking care to avoid prejudice and overprotection.
- The appropriate treatment of people with disabilities also includes respecting reserved parking spaces on public roads and private car parks.
- Before helping a person with a disability, ask naturally if they need it and how you can do it; the best person to inform about their needs is the person themselves.
- Avoid paternalism towards people and facilitate their decision-making.
- Individual differences, personal aptitudes, level of autonomy, etc., mean that each person has different levels of functioning, even if they have the same type of disability.
- Focus on the person's abilities and not on their limitations. A positive view of people with disabilities will help us to put ourselves in their shoes and maintain a quality relationship.
- Unless our relationship with the person with a disability is one of friendship or professional in nature (health, rehabilitation, etc.), we should not inquire into diagnosing the illness or impairment that causes the observable disability.
- Promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities will improve their self-esteem and how the rest of society perceives them. It is essential to highlight the person above all else, in order to consider what they expect, needs, feels, likes, etc. Therefore, it

is necessary to promote and encourage them to express their points of view and to recognize that people with disabilities have opinions, capacity, and the right to participate.

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Chapter 4

Implementation of educational adaptations.

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Abstract

Many research studies have highlighted the need to promote inclusive policies and practices for the benefit of all students. However, despite the existence of legislation on equal educational opportunities, many higher education institutions are still not prepared to respond to the needs of students with disabilities, to promote their inclusion and personal development. Among the barriers that these people must face, we find physical barriers, negative attitudes from some teachers, and the use of teaching methodologies that do not favour inclusion. Faced with such constraints, we argue that higher education institutions should implement policies and practices that provide a differentiated pedagogy that allows for the use of strategies and methodologies that result in an effectively inclusive education. The three fundamental axes of the intervention, for the promotion of equality and success in higher education, will have to be found at the institutional level, in educators (especially in their training), and in the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: Higher Education; Inclusion; People with Disabilities; Pedagogy.

1. Introduction.

Almost thirty years have passed since the publication of the Salamanca Declaration, and even today, we are aware of some difficulties in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education institutions. Thus, despite many different initiatives to eliminate or neutralise emerging disability barriers, their entry into higher education is still marginal. The difficulties experienced, resulting from limitations, tend to translate into delay in studies and a greater risk of dropping out (Emmers et al., 2020). On the other hand, although students with disabilities have equal access to higher education in some countries, there are not always measures to ensure equity during their academic development. In other words, access for students with disabilities to higher education does not guarantee their permanence and success (Martins et al., 2018).

The inclusion process depends on various participants, such as parents, teachers, operational assistants, their peers, and other professionals who operate in the most diverse roles, as well as on the most diverse circumstances, such as adequacy of equipment, materials, methodologies, curricula, adjustments in the process of teaching and learning and assessment, among others (Lourenço & Pereira, 2022).

Even though professors play a central role in the process of educational inclusion, many do not feel prepared in pedagogical terms, and have difficulties including people with disabilities in their classes, revealing that they do not know what to do or how to adapt the content to promote the inclusion of these students (Moriña, 2017). Some studies highlighted by the same author underline the lack of preparation of higher education professors to deal with the inclusion of students with disabilities, warning that this could be due to the fact that such curricular contents are not covered in their initial training or, if so, they occur superficially. On the other hand, they highlight the existence of little ongoing training related to this topic, and the low adherence of professors to the few actions that are taking place. Therefore, the inclusion of students in higher education classes

still faces some problems, and many professors consider that they do not feel prepared to promote inclusive education. In this sense, this chapter aims to reflect on the need to implement educational adaptations, and points out some pedagogical guidelines that could help institutions, and especially professors, particularly those who understand that they feel less prepared to promote the inclusion of these students.

2. Promoting a differentiated pedagogy.

The affirmation of equality between all human beings, regardless of their nuances of colour, religion, race, age, sex, etc. and the particularities or limitations specific to each person (congenital or not) is enshrined in all international declarations, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This same affirmation of equality is enshrined in the Magna Carta of the EU member states and other democratic countries. In fact, they tend, precisely out of respect for the principle of equality, to enshrine measures of positive discrimination against particularly vulnerable people.

It is within this culture equality that governments, especially European ones, tend to shape their educational systems and, at the same time, their systems for the safety and promotion of the well-being of children and young people. This requires a committed family environment and context and, in the case of people with disabilities, for the most part, an increased effort. However, the effort for inclusion must be made by all families to promote inclusive values and sensitivity to disability, as Corti and Cantero (2012) point out.

Inclusion in higher education is increasingly recognized as fundamental for promoting people's educational paths, not only for their own benefit, but also for the positive impact of integration on society (Collins et al., 2019). Students with disabilities face additional challenges when seeking to improve their lives through education. However, they are often disadvantaged and excluded due to their disability.

Thus, inclusion in higher education is a significant topic with short, medium, and long-term implications.

However, the term inclusive education remains somewhat obscure, lacking conceptual clarity and focus, despite having received considerable attention from institutions and researchers. For the purposes of this reflection, we define inclusive education as occurring when all individuals, regardless of exceptionality, are entitled to the opportunity to be included in the regular classroom environment whilst receiving the necessary support to facilitate access to the environment and information (Shyman, 2015).

Two models have been highlighted within the scope of the term inclusive education for students with disabilities: the medical model and the social model (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). The medical model understands disability as an individualised problem, focusing on what is wrong with the individual and not on what the person needs. This model proposes to correct the problem through therapies or special help and diagnostic labels. For its part, the social model is contrary to this approach, as it does not see disability as a personal tragedy, an abnormality, or an illness to be cured. Thus, it states that people are disabled by barriers that exist in society. This model focuses on removing barriers and deficits in the environment that restrict the life options of people with disabilities so that they can enjoy equal access.

In this sense, some questions arise, such as (Oliver & Barnes, 2012): How inclusive is the learning environment for students with disabilities? What are the challenges that higher education institutions face in promoting and implementing inclusive education?

The literature indicates several educational and policy problems in the medical model, including the false assumption that students with the same disability have the same learning needs (Nes & Stromstad, 2003). This assumption highlights disability pathologies for people with disabilities and focuses on individual disabilities, shifting attention away from the need for collective policy solutions that can change social gaps and physical environments. In turn, the social model emphasises the need to restructure educational environments

in the higher education sector to enable all students to develop (rather than focusing on individual disabilities), and teaching practices to facilitate learning for all students (Doyle & Robson, 2002).

In recent years, several authors have criticised and defended this model. In this sense, as this model suggests that people are disabled by society, not by their bodies, one of the main criticisms refers to the neglect of disability and its effect on people's lives (Shakespeare, 2004). In turn, Shakespeare and Watson (2010) state that while environments and services can and should be adapted whenever possible, there are still disadvantages associated with many deficiencies that no environmental change can completely eliminate. They also allude to three challenges associated with social models of disability. Firstly, even if social barriers are removed, it is disadvantageous to have multiple forms of disability. Secondly, it is more difficult to celebrate disability, as compared to other forms of identity, such as gender, as reclaiming disability as a concept is difficult due to disability, limitation, and exclusion. Thirdly, society needs to provide extra resources to emancipate people with disabilities, to meet the needs that arise from disability, not just those that arise from the removal of discrimination.

In this chapter, we defend the social model, although we recognize its limitations in understanding the complex interaction of individual and environmental factors in the lives of people with disabilities, as well as the benefits of labels or diagnoses in the medical model (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

Within the scope of the social model of disability, studies with the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education in several countries have emphasised the need to analyse several issues to make this level of education more accessible, such as (Fuller et al., 2004): Expand variety and flexibility in all aspects of teaching and learning and provide access to information, and build communication networks.

In line with the social model of disability, research has highlighted the need to promote inclusive policies and practices for the benefit of

all students, whether disabled or not. From the outset, it is important to clarify that in our understanding, pedagogical practices should promote inclusion, to the detriment of integration. In fact, we do not argue that the purpose of the intervention is the adaptation of the individual to the group but, as Chardon states (Demazure & Huys, 2018, p.18) inclusion proposes, with a clear intention, to respond to the particular needs of each student, considering the classroom as a privileged place. And this aim will be more easily achieved if we rely on a differentiated pedagogy that equates the possibilities of the subject and the demands of the task and the context or, better, the task in the context.

3. Institutional level.

In higher education, many demands are placed on students in general and, in particular, on students with disabilities, and they are no less so for institutions. For Pérez-Esteban et al. (2023, p. 2), "the university reality differs from this legislative ideal, despite all the efforts that have been made in the educational stages at the primary and secondary level". For some students, entering higher education is the first time they leave their parents' home, without ties or support from family members, sometimes to a different city where it is urgent to make new friends. In addition, the academic context is different from what they were used to and with increased levels of demand.

If we associate the practice of sports in a competitive framework with this reality, with different and sometimes far training and study locations, in addition to the travel inherent to competitions, generally on weekends, it becomes easy to understand the particular care and concern that these students complain about. For higher education institutions, the challenge is no less, and they arise at the most diverse levels: architectural barriers that must be overcome, school schedules adjusted to the needs (training and travel of students with disabilities and those who practise federated sports) of students, preparation of

teachers to interact with students and adapt classes (especially for students with sensory limitations), creation of specific and specialised support structures (e.g. translation of materials for blind or deaf people, etc.) and promotion of a culture of inclusion. In fact, if the existence of a teacher with specialised training is common at the level of compulsory education, for the most part, higher education institutions must have psycho pedagogical support centres, equipped with appropriate resources and instruments that accompany students (in particular those with a disability), identifying at each moment their difficulties and the resources that must be mobilised to ensure the success of their inclusion. However, this objective will only be achieved if there are effective coordination and cooperation strategies across the entire academic community that promote pedagogical and curricular adaptations, study support, the removal of architectural barriers, etc. Waisman et al. (2023) maintain that the institution has the power and possibility to influence student success, mitigating stigmatising attitudes toward students with special needs.

There are three important pillars that need to be considered to create and establish an inclusive learning environment (Emmers et al., 2020): Inclusive culture, which forms the basis for the other two pillars, inclusive practice, and inclusive policy. In this sense, teachers in higher education must create an inclusive culture (e.g., inclusive values and a climate where all students are welcome), implement inclusive practice (e.g., using inclusive strategies), and create inclusive policies (or that is, anchoring good practices and the creation of policy plans following the principles of universal learning).

However, the importance of these three factors is little researched at the level of higher education institutions, which implies that there is no comprehensive or complete view of this issue, and students still experience problems in each of these aspects.

With respect to culture, many people with mobility disabilities must deal with misunderstanding and negative attitudes (e.g., negative comments and bullying) from teachers in higher education (Moriña, 2017). There are also problems in terms of practice, where facilities

are often not adjusted to the needs of students, and teachers do not feel competent enough to teach people with this type of disability, or the necessary pedagogical adaptations are simply not implemented (Lombardi et al., 2013).

Although higher education institutions are responsible for the inclusion of students with disabilities, there is no mandatory system to guarantee the implementation of inclusive policies. The academic participation and success of students with disabilities may be hampered by various restrictions. Some studies point out that the universities' responses to inclusion tend to be more reactive than proactive (Riddell et al., 2006), and that the educational environment in higher education is, therefore, prone to segregation (Borland & James, 1999).

Many of the difficulties of inclusion and personal autonomy that students with disabilities face are related to personal and communication barriers, physical barriers that impede mobility, prevalent attitudes towards disability, and the availability and use of equipment and teaching resources (Martins et al., 2018). In turn, Borland and James (1999) state that students face three types of barriers, namely physical access barriers (infrastructures); curricular access (e.g., methodology and content) and attitudinal barriers.

Likewise, an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development study (OECD, 2003) indicated the following barriers that are commonly encountered by students with disabilities: a) financing, especially lack of solid funding sources; b) attitudes of decision-makers and teachers towards disabilities and students with disabilities; c) lack of cooperation between higher education institutions and other educational sectors; d) lack of flexibility in providing alternative and differentiated forms of learning for students with disabilities; e) physical accessibility to buildings; f) lack of coordination between the objectives of the program, its contents and the individual needs of students.

At the level of higher education institutions, several studies identify attitudinal barriers as one of the main difficulties encountered by students with disabilities (Main et al., 2016).

It is important to highlight, therefore, that despite the existence of legislation on equal educational opportunities, many higher education institutions are still not prepared to respond to the needs of students with disabilities, to promote their inclusion, personal development and participation in academic and social life (Emmers et al., 2020). In this sense, it is important to determine whether these institutions have established the appropriate conditions to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities, as well as identify current obstacles to their inclusion. To this end, it is crucial to evaluate the way in which academic services respond to students with disabilities, identify their individual needs, inform them about the forms of educational support available and institutional proposals, to guarantee their academic and social success.

According to Moriña (2017), there are several challenges reported by students with disabilities: architectural barriers; inaccessible information and technology; rules and policies that are not effectively applied (for example, exam times and formats were not adapted, service was not facilitated for students with specific difficulties arising from their disability); or methodologies that did not favour inclusion (for example, lack of interaction between students and teaching staff, technological resources that were identified as helping but were not used).

Despite the gaps in the literature, there are also studies that describe a range of facilitators to support students with disabilities within higher education institutions. Among them, the following stand out (Moriña, 2017): Family support; friendships and support networks between peers; the help of certain teachers and staff who make the necessary adjustments, such as the use of technologies that facilitate learning (adapted software); support offices for disabled people; the use of students' personal strategies implemented to deal with their difficulties.

Also, Lombardi et al. (2013) defend the need for institution staff to receive disability-related training to promote student participation and success. In turn, Richardson (2016) reveals that when faced with

the choice between face-to-face and online tutorial support, students with and without disabilities were equally likely to choose online support over face-to-face support.

4. The role educators.

The role professors is certainly decisive in the teaching-learning process. However, for Tăbăcaru et al. (2022) it is essential for teachers to have specific knowledge and skills to support students with special educational needs. At the same time, we all remember phenomena that have already been extensively studied since the 1960s, namely the Pygmalion effect. Sánchez et al. (2021, p. 541) highlight "the need to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion of students from initial teacher training as part of the curriculum or through additional training". And add:

Teachers are not educated to give an adequate response to students with disabilities, it being necessary to make it possible for teachers to address their functions related to attention to diversity, understanding and promoting organisational and curricular changes that are required by inclusive education (p. 541).

Finally, they also highlight the lack of resources and time to serve students with disabilities.

The study conducted by Martins et al. (2018) allowed us to verify that almost all the professors interviewed showed sensitivity on the subject and were willing to provide alternative teaching and assessment strategies. On the other hand, they indicate that they tend to work in a sector where there are still many gaps in information, and do not receive specific training to deal with people with disabilities. In several cases, they complained about the excessive number of students in some courses, which reduces the time available for individual interactions, particularly with students with disabilities.

The use of pedagogical adjustments by professors was also mentioned by course directors, regarding classes, the assessment process, assessment instruments, and materials used. Other adjustments included providing support beyond the classroom. Many academic services staff also revealed a lack of experience and information, especially when dealing with students with specific disabilities, such as Asperger's syndrome.

Regarding barriers, the most important obstacle identified was the negative attitudes presented by faculty members (Moriña, 2017). In many cases, students stated that some professors doubted that they had a disability, others did not adapt teaching projects, and still others questioned their ability to study at university.

An important issue to underline, related to the teaching staff, is their need for training and awareness of disabilities. Several studies have highlighted the training of university teachers in the area of disability (Moriña Díez et al., 2015). Training teaching staff to respond to the needs of students with disabilities is fundamental to higher education. In this sense, some universities have already taken on this challenge and designed programs to raise awareness and prepare their academic staff.

The creation of an inclusive educational environment depends on an inclusive culture, which, to be created, depends on the attitudes of everyone involved in an inclusive educational context, namely professors. Negative attitudes result in unsuccessful attempts to promote inclusion. On the other hand, positive attitudes contribute to more effective teaching strategies and better learning environments (Emmers et al., 2020).

Attitudes towards people with disabilities are influenced by teachers' personal characteristics, such as age and gender, as well as environmental factors, such as experience with people with disabilities and teachers' beliefs that prevail in a school (Avramidis et al., 2000). For example, as compared to men, women have more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Another study showed that the older the teachers, the more negative

their attitudes towards inclusion (Hwang & Evans, 2011). Furthermore, environmental factors are also important, such as contact with people with disabilities and previous teaching experience with these people, as they are associated with the professors' attitudes towards inclusion (Murray et al., 2011).

On the other hand, to create a powerful learning environment, teachers, in addition to holding inclusive values and positive attitudes, also need to believe in themselves and be able to use inclusive strategies, with their attitudes towards inclusion being positively influenced by their sense of self-efficacy as an experienced teacher (Murray et al., 2011).

The study by Hofman and Kilimo (2014) found that teachers who have more positive attitudes towards students with disabilities have a greater belief in their own abilities and are therefore more favourable to inclusion. Furthermore, teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are open to new ideas and methods and are less reluctant to consider individual students' needs in their educational practices (Emmers et al., 2020).

Educational barriers are also found when adequate teaching equipment and resources are unavailable to students with disabilities, making their access to knowledge difficult and leading to high dropout and failure rates (Gonçalves & Cardoso, 2010). Pedagogical barriers still prevail due to the lack of diversity and flexibility in teaching and assessment methods, which in turn are based on society's negative perception of disability (Gonçalves & Cardoso, 2010). This dominant view in society, particularly in higher education, can be understood in the context of the medical model of disability, according to which someone without 'flaws' or disability is perceived as the norm (Madriaga et al., 2011).

5. The teaching and learning process.

Now focusing our attention on the teaching-learning process, it is important to mention that face-to-face teaching with students, and between students and the teacher, promotes values and attitudes that are decisive in the training of higher education students, namely interaction, cooperation, sharing, solidarity, empathy, etc. In this sense, it presents virtues that cannot be ignored. However, it also requires greater availability of time (travel), money (transport, eating out), and may even prevent the attendance of some classes due to overlap with other tasks in the student's life (work, sports, etc.).

In turn, distance learning and virtual environments present important limitations, but also virtues that cannot and should not be ignored (it allows overcoming some of the limitations listed above). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, its relevance as a means of helping students in their education and development process was clearly demonstrated. This type of teaching will certainly be of great importance for students with disabilities to overcome some barriers that face-to-face teaching emphasises, namely, according to Akin (2019), in the field of stigmatisation, accessibility, and the perception by their peers, of their lower levels of ability.

Regarding questions of a more methodological didactic nature, we would like to highlight that firstly, it is necessary to detect needs, that is, an initial assessment is needed. The aim is to identify all the characteristics of people with disabilities that may affect future planning. Due to the variety of educational needs that students may present, it will be necessary to carry out an exhaustive initial assessment that provides the greatest possible information about them.

Among the various data to be collected, we highlight the following (Ruiz, 2014): Contextualization (examples: family characteristics, specific programs received, conditions of school involvement); characteristics of the disability (know its characteristics and implications for teaching sessions); and the identification of the skills that the student presents at the beginning of the school year. This assessment aims to

understand the interaction that the student establishes through involvement, and can be both quantitative and qualitative.

This in-depth knowledge of the person, on the one hand, and the task, on the other, will allow decisions to be made that may affect the following aspects (Ruiz, 2014):

- *The methodology*: It refers to all the elements relating to how to present the task and organise it. One of the most significant aspects refers to information. In this context, there are several aspects to take into consideration: when are you informed about the task? (Before, during or after?); what are you informed about? (Your organisation?); How is the task carried out? Motivation for completion? Inform about the monitoring of the session? How do you get information? In other words, which information channel will you use? (Verbal exposure? Demonstrations? Tactile help? Others? Which ones?).
- *The task*: It requires in-depth knowledge of its characteristics, nature, and structure. Based on the knowledge of the task, it is possible to introduce the most appropriate adaptations to facilitate the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities.
- *The material*: This is one of the elements that allows us to identify the permanent relationship between involvement and the individual. Some of the characteristics that may be decisive in the choice of materials are the ease of mobility of the person, the capacity and nature of the information transmitted, security, ease of manipulation and motivation.
- *The facilities*: Some of the aspects to consider are the absence of architectural barriers, anti-slip surfaces, non-abrasive surfaces, well-defined spaces, and stable surfaces.

Finally, it is important to talk about the evaluation process. For it to be inclusive, on some occasions, it will be necessary to introduce modifications considering the skills that are intended to be achieved and the potential of these students. Otherwise, there is a risk of some

being excluded or stigmatised for not reaching the defined parameters, generally for an average student. Among the adaptations that can be made within the scope of student assessment, Ruiz (2014) highlights the following: modifying the assessment criteria, modifying the activity or task being assessed, proposing alternatives to the level of skills that should be assessed, and increasing the types of data obtained.

6. Conclusions.

The literature consulted allows us to affirm that transformations are necessary, both at the institutional level, and in classroom practices, so that universities become more inclusive.

In this sense, university spaces must be fully accessible, without physical barriers of any kind. On the other hand, institutions must prepare and monitor the especially sensitive transition of students with disabilities during their first year, particularly in the first weeks of classes. They must take proactive action in this transition, to avoid early dropout and promote success for students with disabilities. Strategies may include special orientation sessions, tutorial support (for example, assigning a student from a more advanced year as a counsellor) or having the support of appropriately prepared people.

Finally, we argue that higher education must support and promote the training of professors, not only in the contents of the curricular unit they teach and conduct research on, but above all, in how to teach. In other words, investing in the development of pedagogical, didactic, and methodological strategies that allow teachers to attain the skills necessary to respond to the needs of students with disabilities in their learning and development process.

In conclusion, it is not enough for higher education institutions to guarantee access to students with disabilities. Its policies and practices must allow education to be effectively inclusive, ensuring that all students can fully participate in the various dimensions of academic life and benefit from a quality teaching and learning process.

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Chapter 5

The role of stakeholders for the dual career of student-athletes with disabilities.

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Abstract

This chapter explores the role of stakeholders in the development of student-athletes with disabilities. The dual career challenge for athletes with disabilities, balancing sports and education or work, is recognized as a complex issue that requires multi-stakeholder involvement. Stakeholder theory is introduced, highlighting the diverse range of individuals, groups, and organisations involved in supporting people with disabilities. Sports organisations are encouraged to incorporate principles from both the business and public sectors to address the unique challenges faced by disabled student-athletes. Different types of stakeholders are categorised as internal and external, with the government playing a crucial role in influencing policies related to dual careers for athletes with health challenges. In summary, this chapter emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts to facilitate the dual career of athletes with disabilities and to remove barriers to their success.

Keywords: Good Practices; Universities; Support Network; Support Policies.

1. Introduction.

The modern understanding of sport in present-day culture includes a new conceptualization related to its strong social nature, which has been developed/intensified in recent decades. Whether we talk about sport as a leisure or recreational activity, sport as a pursuit of excellence, or sport as a means of recovery and overcoming health problems, there is an underlying common component that highlights its capacity to evolve over time, namely its social fabric - a network of interactions that empowers individuals, and society overall.

Jarvie (2006) asserts the transformative value of sport and how it can change the lives of people in multiple ways: sport and human rights, sport and the environment, sport and poverty, sport and education, etc. Sport is meaningful to different groups of individuals differentiated by social status, age, sex, nationality, colour, disability, or financial status. These characteristics often act as dividers, underlining the inequality of sport that pursues only such patterns.

Nowadays, the challenge is to create a sense of cooperation, cohesion, mutual support, and equal opportunities for all sports practitioners, including those with disabilities or those who are disabled and struggling with dual careers. This objective, reflected in the efforts of recent years, does not imply a simple process, but a challenging one, which requires joint efforts of social actors in both the microsystem and the macrosystem. Recognised as a national/international social phenomenon, sport and its ancillary services contribute to the production or reproduction of social, cultural and/or economic capital (Jarvie, 2006), and therefore, to meet multiple social needs for different types of population.

Under the motto "A Union of Equality", the European Union is implementing the Disability Strategy 2021 - 2030, which highlights the constant commitment to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities. The same document stresses the diversity of disabilities and the need to identify the specific requirements of each person in relation to the socio-professional and physical environment. The

prospect of increasing accessibility to lead a normal life, which offers the opportunity for socio-occupational integration, is a priority for the European Union (European Commission, 2021).

In the context of this strategy, sports specialists are seeking optimal solutions to ensure the conditions for education and sport for people with disabilities. The issue of the dual career, namely the process of reconciling a sports career with studies or work, which is a source of concern for most elite athletes (López-Flores et al., 2021), is a growing concern for researchers interested in the process of personal development in parallel with career preparation.

Within this framework, social actors are invited to take part in this complex effort, each of them bringing knowledge, human resources, financial means, or sustainable policies to effectively engage in its development. Under these general circumstances, dual career athletes with a disability have become increasingly interesting for academic staff, sports entities, communities, public authorities, as well as the private sector willing to support this endeavour. Essentially, a dual career for a student-athlete with disabilities is a challenge for all stakeholders in terms of individual, socio-environmental, and political dimensions (Guidotti et al., 2015).

2. The stakeholders – defining aspects.

To increase the ability of academic and sporting entities to engage stakeholders interested in dual careers, let us review some ideas from those who first introduced the stakeholder theory: Freeman (1984) and Friedman (1962). The first recognized a broader view when defining a stakeholder, namely just about anyone who is affected by the company and its operation, including customers, employees, suppliers, political action groups, environmental groups, local communities, the media, financial institutions, government groups, etc. (Freeman, 1984). Thus, the corporate environment is described as an ecosystem of related groups, all of which are considered and important for main-

taining the long-term success of the company. If you are able to convince all the stakeholders to swim or row in the same direction, the company will have real momentum and power (Freeman, 1984).

This approach is in opposition to Friedman's shareholder theory, which states that the relevant stakeholders a company should be concerned with are its shareholders, their profits, and their growth (Friedman, 1962).

Thus, specifically, for our area of interest, a stakeholder means any person, group or organisation that participates in supporting the dual career of student-athletes. Thus, many stakeholders can be identified by the specificity of their activity, which may have a significant contribution to the social integration of people with disabilities: representatives of civil society - NGOs, partners from the private, economic and business environment, entrepreneurs, and academic institutions, which support the rights and socio-professional integration of people with disabilities, but also sports organisations, donors, government institutions, local administrations and other state structures that consistently and coherently implement public policies in the field of integration of people with disabilities.

According to Chappelet (2017), sports organisations should incorporate both the business world - corporate governance - and the public sector - democratic governance, because today's sports entities, just as higher education institutions, face pressure to be profitable, to provide high-quality services and end products, to maintain and increase consumer interest, to be role models, and to do all of this with limited financial and time resources (Parnell et al., 2017). In addition, adapted sports played by students with disabilities have issues that need to be addressed through a joint effort that requires teamwork, communication, and creativity from all actors involved. Sharing a common vision and working together to facilitate dual career facilitators and disability barriers are the core aspects that provide a fulfilling professional and personal life for this target population.

In a nutshell, a stakeholder is a party that has an interest in a company and can either affect or be affected by the business (Fer-

nando, 2023). The primary stakeholders in a typical corporation are its investors, employees, customers, and suppliers. However, with the increasing attention on corporate social responsibility, the concept has been extended to include communities, governments, trade associations, etc. (Fernando, 2023).

3. Types of stakeholders.

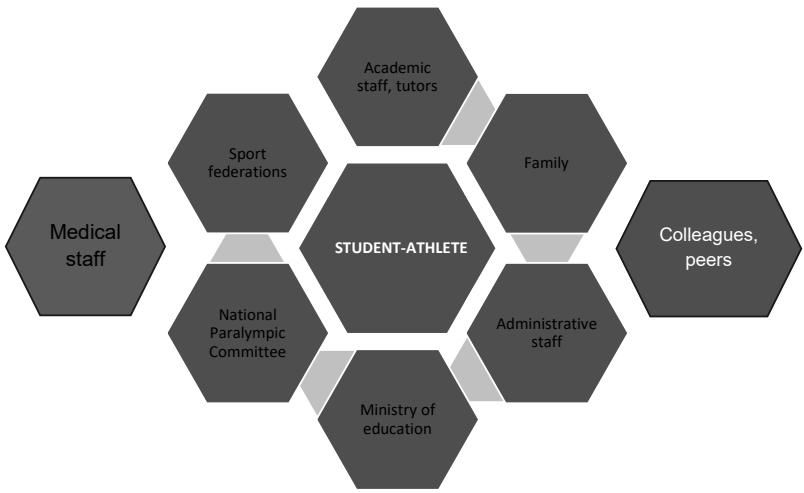
The literature reviewed mentions several classifications of the stakeholders in relation to a dual career. Stakeholders can be internal or external to an organisation (Fernando, 2023). The interest of internal stakeholders in a company emerges from a direct relationship, such as investment, employment, or ownership. In contrast, external stakeholders are not closely connected to a company, but are influenced by its actions and results. For example, suppliers, creditors, government, society/public groups will act as external stakeholders. The relationship between internal and external stakeholders, and how external stakeholders influence an individual or group, can be suggested by a situation in which a company on the waterfront is dumping toxic waste while open water swimmers are conducting their daily training sessions. Clearly, athletes will be affected by the water quality and thus their health and sporting results may be affected.

Conversely, a great athlete may have a direct effect on a company campaign, simply by joining his image with the corporate policy. This transfer of positive image capital may have a huge impact on the company revenue, thanks to this joint initiative.

The government, for example, acts as an external stakeholder for the student athlete with health challenges, by initiating policy changes on the dual career, leading to a higher motivation to pursue both academic and sport activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1

External stakeholders within the dual career of student athletes with disabilities.



Stakeholders are classified into primary and secondary (Kristiansen et al., 2016). Primary stakeholders are vital to the organisation, their roles are decisive for the activity and results of that entity, while secondary stakeholders, usually external ones, are those who can affect or be affected by the organisation, although they are not vital to the organisation itself. A survey conducted in 2019 in schools aimed to identify stakeholders belonging to the aforementioned categories. The surveyed population acknowledged parents, community, governing organizations, school board, and media as secondary stakeholders, while the physical education department of the ministry of education, physical education teachers, students, principals/superintendents of school, student sports federation, were labelled as primary ones (Mirzaei et al., 2019).

Delving deeper into the subject, stakeholders can be of three types: Latent, expectant, and definitive. The latent stakeholders' interests and power for the organisation are quite low; therefore, they are not as important or noticeable, while expectant stakeholders have strong interests in the organisation's issues but lack importance and power, which lead to more attention from managers. Finally, definitive stakeholders are the most interested and active; they require a lot of attention and are the most important for the organisation (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015).

Lastly, the stakeholders could be divided into principal (government, for example), strategic (ministries, universities, local authorities), and corporate (foundations, companies, aid funds, etc).

Micro and macro level stakeholders are also identified in different studies. Higher education institutions (through tutorial support or academic flexibility, for example) or sport clubs (through financial support, for example) will be considered within the micro system, while sport governing bodies or local authorities will act on the macro level.

Starting in 2013, the Erasmus+ Sport has funded 59 projects on the dual career of athletes (Hong et al., 2022). This topic is now part of the agenda of European Union sports programmes, due to EU Guidelines and multiple programmes implemented within the Member States at the government and sport federation levels. In relation with this, during the past few years, many authors have addressed the topic concerning the stakeholders' involvement in school sports (Mirzaei et al., 2019), elite sports (mostly) or adapted sports (to a lesser extent), revealing various perspectives of analysis. Mutter and Pavlovski (2014) stated that increased participation in school sports is significantly influenced by peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and sport characters. Hutchinson and Bennett (2012), Mackintosh (2014), Pule (2014), and Zdroik (2016) argue that the framework of stakeholders has certain specific aspects according to different countries, but almost all studies reveal the existence of common factors, such as school management, coaches and teachers, parents, community boosters, state authorities,

graduates, etc. Some studies acknowledge the role of the higher education entities in providing know-how, resources, and infrastructure, or the support from health professionals and the private sector in rendering sustainable sport activities for different categories of the population.

To summarise, studies in the field of dual careers have focused on public policies and structures in different European countries that aim to support dual careers, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the individual experiences of athletes who combine a sporting career with training or a professional activity. An important conclusion is that the level of implementation of the dual career concept differs across European countries, and that a certain flexibility in the organisation of studies strongly conditions the dual career of athletes. Therefore, the issue of harmoniously combining studies with a sporting career raises several difficulties, amidst the organisational and personal efforts of athletes to reconcile the academic and the sporting training process (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003).

Luckily, these stakeholders, once committed on a long-term basis, take on their responsibilities and provide sufficient opportunities so that students will have access to quality sport and physical activity, while pursuing their academic studies. Nonetheless, studies on this topic are still scarce.

Retaining significant stakeholders in sport, education, or dual career endeavours, entails including a continuous partnership with these providers in the core mission/vision of the sport club or higher education institution, involving them, when needed, in the decision-making process through an advisory approach.

4. Why are stakeholders important?

Undertaking a dual career certainly has its benefits, but also entails significant challenges that should be properly estimated by student-athletes and support staff. Overcoming these challenges

means balancing competing demands related to sport, and academic/vocational and private life, so that the Holistic Athlete Career model (HAC) could be operationalized (Wylleman et al., 2013), as it comprises athletic, psychological, psycho-social, academic/vocational, and financial levels. All of these should be taken into consideration by universities and sport clubs, and addressed through specific means by all micro and macro level stakeholders.

The importance of stakeholders resides in several reasons. The internal stakeholders of a university or sports club are important because the specific activities of these bodies rely on their ability to work as a team to achieve their mission and objectives. On the other hand, external stakeholders can (re)shape the overall dual career approach by transferring know-how and means, resources, and personnel to the student-athlete. For instance, university boards can change the philosophy and internal regulations to make it easier for student-athletes with disabilities to pursue dual careers, NGOs or other private companies can help ensure better physical accessibility in universities or sports clubs for students with physical disabilities, while governments can change laws and regulations to support school and sports activities and promote social inclusion. Finally, managing and fostering relationships between internal and external stakeholders is a key factor in promoting and bringing about social change in dual careers.

An essential part of the stakeholders' network, national governments should involve people with disabilities and representative organisations in actions aimed at defining public policies and measures for the implementation of the European strategies and those of international organisations. They should also ensure the centralisation of statistical baseline data on the effects generated by the measures implemented, and support NGOs for people with disabilities in identifying sources of funding and advising on their use.

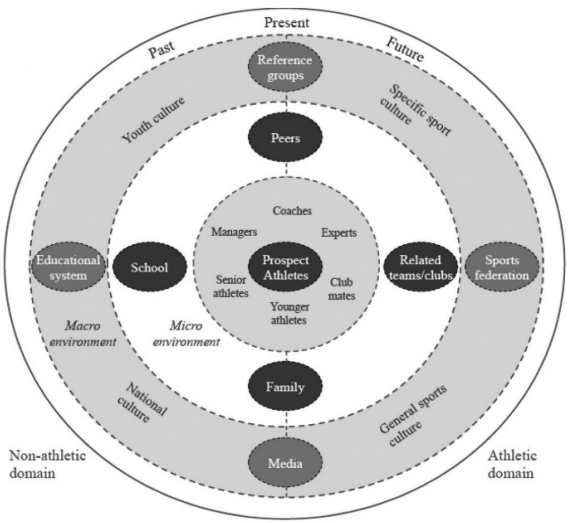
Obviously, in recent times, a significant role has been played by multi-stakeholder partnerships, namely networks formed by the various partners involved in the organisation and implementation of

sports and academic activities for student-athletes with disabilities. These partnerships can operate at international, regional, national, or community levels, and are notable for the way they define their role and objectives. They are also networks in which there is a genuine exchange of information on international and national models of good practices.

Moreover, relying on this stakeholders' network, certain specialists designed a dual career development environment (DCDE) model (Henriksen et al., 2020) throughout the lifespan, which connects the contributions of different social actors/stakeholders operating in different environments (at macro, meso, and micro levels). In this approach, student-athletes become the center, while micro and macro environments include three key areas – study, sports, and private life, each of these being the ground of intervention for the interwoven stakeholders (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The dual career development environment (Linnér et al., 2017).



Other initiatives across the world aim for the athletes to achieve a complete life - healthy, personally, and professionally fulfilled, in and outside the sport venues. A relevant example is the Western Australian Institute of Sport (WAIS, 2023) program, dedicated to achieving international sporting success. This complex aim involves a dual career plan envisioned on the long term, based on informed decisions, guidance, educational support, training opportunities, etc, to become professionally and personally empowered.

Some authors (Knight et al., 2018) have addressed the role of the support network for the dual career of teen athletes, and identified five themes, quoted as follows: recognizing dual career athletes' needs and make adaptive changes, anticipating barriers and suggesting solutions, demonstrating a belief in the value of education and a dual career, removing barriers to maintain a dual career, and creating an autonomy-supportive environment to foster dual career athletes' independence.

In order to enhance this support, some key factors are significant, according to the findings of the study:

- Focusing on the person as a whole,
- Integrating efforts within the support network,
- Fostering a culture that promotes continuing education.

Basically, the student-athlete with disabilities will be considered as a whole, with the relevant stakeholders contributing to fostering his/her well-being and engagement (WAIS, 2023) (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Athlete well-being and engagement factors (WAIS, 2023).

Based on the above arguments, an important role of stakeholders is therefore to create bridges of dialogue between different types of organisations and institutions to establish common strategies and programmes. On the other hand, the exchange of best practices and the implementation of innovative solutions to foster socio-occupational integration are the goal of the interactions they facilitate.

The role of stakeholders can be highlighted on several coordinates, namely:

- Supporting sports activities of students with disabilities.
- Supporting university education for people with disabilities who practise sport.
- Support the professional integration of people with disabilities with higher education.

Different objectives are pursued according to these strands, and appropriate supporting activities are organised, with specific approaches to financial or material support found in each strand.

Student athletes with disabilities maintain their status as beneficiaries of physical exercise, provided that an appropriate university environment exists or is created. Either within existing university clubs, where there should be adapted sports sections, or through the creation of new sports facilities, student athletes with disabilities must be provided with sports facilities and counselling to enable them to continue exercising at the level of competitive sport.

Studies have shown that this category of student athletes faces several difficulties that they cannot overcome without proper support for their sporting careers from universities and sports organisations. These include several external barriers encountered, namely: The distance between home and university, the lack of transport with the necessary adaptations to facilitate their transport, difficulties in organising the academic training programme, and the programme dedicated to sporting activity, especially when this is at a high level (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023). On the other hand, the internal barriers for which athletes with disabilities need specialised and consistent help are: Harmonisation of the support they receive from family, friends, community; involvement of family and local community in overcoming the different barriers faced by this category of athletes, providing counselling to the family, which sometimes tends to become more critical, due to difficulties in dealing with the emotions of athletes, providing medical care and recovery conditions after physical effort.

Currently, universities should promote their own inclusion policies, with specific references to students with disabilities involved in elite sports. At the European level, the concept of inclusive university is increasingly used, based on one of the axes of the European Development Strategy, which aims at inclusive education and lifelong learning for all. The European approach to micro-credentials, through flexible and modular learning pathways, can positively impact em-

ployability and the lifelong learning process of persons with disabilities (European Council, 2019).

As pointed out by Leiva-Arcas et al. (2023), universities need to support athletes with disabilities academically, athletically, and personally, through tailored, specialised support services capable of ensuring successful dual-career strategies for these student-athletes. The most important measures will target flexible study programmes, specialisation of university teachers in inclusive education, personalised educational pathways according to training interests, providing the possibility to train in the university's sports facilities, and scholarships to provide financial support to student athletes (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

The effect of these measures can be quantified not only in terms of academic success but also in terms of employability. In a 2016 study, Lastuka and Cottingham (2016) showed that students who played a year of adapted sport (rugby and wheelchair basketball) were 4% more likely to be employed than other disabled peers.

The professional and social integration of student-athletes with disabilities is based on the involvement of stakeholders in their education and vocational counselling process. Some of the most severe difficulties in the lives of people with disabilities relate to employability and the possibility of exercising the profession for which they are training (Lecerf, 2020).

According to European statistics, the employment rate of people with disabilities continues to be low and the risk of leaving these jobs is higher. Therefore, an important role of stakeholders is related to the establishment and management of so-called sheltered employment, where people with disabilities can carry out an economic activity that will enable them to ensure their personal autonomy. Another sustainable solution is that of entrepreneurship, which allows for the self-employment of people with disabilities in companies or associations operating in different areas of activity.

The most important initiatives adopted at the European level to increase the employability of people with disabilities are the adap-

tation of working conditions and non-discriminatory employment measures, jobs in public institutions, financial incentives, and increased accessibility for employment. Lecerf (2020) defined them as the European Pillar of Social Rights; these action lines reflect the specific way in which stakeholders respond to the objective of professional integration of people with disabilities. In terms of accommodating conditions in the workplace, employing institutions should provide adaptations of doors, corridors, staircases, sanitary facilities, etc. The non-discriminatory attitude is reflected in communication and relationship, as well as in the level of implementation of European recommendations in terms of workplace accommodation.

State institutions, in turn, implement measures to increase accessibility and promote non-discriminatory requirements in the workplace. At the same time, they provide financial incentives for the employment or vocational training of people with disabilities, in line with European recommendations and national legislation.

5. Examples of stakeholders' good practice.

5.1 Stakeholders in research.

Several research frameworks in sport and exercise medicine highly recommend stakeholder involvement as part of the research process (Hendricks, 2021), when human resources and methodologies/technologies help increase the capacity of the student-athlete with disabilities to achieve risk-free high sports performance. This topic may be of interest for sports research institutions, as possible stakeholders in scientific guidance of the individualised training process. The topic itself is an innovative one, with ideas and knowledge to be extended on larger scales.

Another theme of interest for university research has been dual career studies, through their academic staff – University of Rome Foro Italico, University of Taipei, UCAM, etc.

5.2 Stakeholders in sports education.

One of the examples of good practice that connects sports and education is the network of programmes of Special Olympics International, namely the Global Centre for Inclusion in Education, which serves as a hub for research, policy, and programming the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in academic, sport, social, and community activities. Developing inclusive mindsets, enhancing scholar work among global policy makers, evaluating best practices in sports and education are settled targets to be met thanks to the support of academic, research and policy institutes or government aids.

5.3 Stakeholders in developing sport activities.

Managing sport activities requires both financial and non-financial contributions made by stakeholders (Esteve et al., 2011). Heinemann (2005) states that the welfare state is considered responsible for sport and physical activities, to bring sport closer to society. On the other hand, the contributions to sports clubs are not limited to funds. For example, sports clubs receive in-kind support, namely facilities, sports equipment, and technical expertise from municipalities, allowing athletes to train and compete at the local sport venues.

At the international level, we find organisations such as Paralympic (whose main activity is the organisation of the Paralympic Games), Disabled Peoples' International, Inclusion International, the International Disability Alliance and World Blind Union, Special Olympics (dedicated to providing athletic opportunity to children and adults with intellectual disabilities, providing them with the opportunity to develop physically, demonstrate courage and sports abilities, and have fun), which design and promote coherent strategies and intervention

programmes, aimed at contributing to the social integration of people with disabilities in different regions of the world.

Several organisations also contribute to the promotion of sport for people with disabilities, such as:

- *Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA)* - whose aim is to promote and develop exercise opportunities for people with disabilities.
- *European Paralympic Committee* - whose mission is to promote opportunities for athletes with disabilities to participate in sport as part of the Paralympic movement.
- *International Blind Sports Federation* - European Continental Delegation - promotes sport among visually impaired people by assisting national member sports organisations on all continents.
- *International Committee of Sports for the Deaf* - responsible for organising the summer and winter Deaflympic Games and promoting sports at different age and performance levels.
- *The International Wheelchair & Amputee Sports Federation*, together with the International Sports Organisation for the Disabled, supports the aims of the Paralympic movement by guiding athletes with disabilities towards elite sports activities.
- *Special Olympics* - Europe/Eurasia - the umbrella organisation of an internationally and nationally recognised movement to support the participation of people with intellectual limitations in sport for all and in performance activities. The provision of specialist support and the transfer of best practices are constant objectives of this organisation.

Regional and sub-regional organisations include the Africa Disability Alliance, Disability, HIV & AIDS TRUST, the European Disability Forum, and the Horn of Africa Aid and Rehabilitation Action Network, while in Europe we note Adapt Europe: Sports Participation for Inclusion of Persons with a Disability.

5.4. Stakeholders at universities.

Stakeholders' theory applied in higher education emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014). In the context of higher education, stakeholders have legitimate interest in education and acquire the right to intervene (Bjørkquist, 2010). In 1975, studies began recognizing students as internal stakeholders, while external stakeholders may include employers (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014), the Ministry of Education, local authorities etc. Generally, in Europe, the rise of the stakeholders' role has emerged from the shift from a government-run higher education to modern systems, wherein the government's role involves more guidance than direct control (Neave, 2002).

6. Conclusions.

Nowadays, the modern understanding of sport, regardless of its specificity, involves a network of interactions that empowers individuals and society. Its present challenge is to create a sense of cooperation, cohesion, mutual support, and equal opportunities, for all sports practitioners, including those with disabilities, pursuing a dual career. Sports specialists are looking for optimal solutions to ensure the conditions for education and sport for people with disabilities, by reconciling their sport career with studies or work.

Within this framework, social actors are invited to take part in this complex effort, each of them bringing knowledge, human resources, financial means, or sustainable policies to effectively engage in its development. Under these general circumstances, dual career athletes with a disability have become increasingly interesting for the academic staff, sports entities, communities, and public authorities, as well as the private sector willing to support this endeavour.

Different stakeholders can be identified by the specificity of their activity, which may provide a significant contribution to the social

integration of people with disabilities: representatives of civil society - NGOs, partners from the private, economic, and business environment, entrepreneurs, and academic institutions, which support the rights and socio-professional integration of people with disabilities, but also sports organisations, donors, government institutions, local administrations and other state structures that consistently and coherently implement public policies in the field of integration of people with disabilities.

Either internal or external, latent, expectant, or definitive, acting at micro or macro levels, stakeholders play complementary roles in the short or long term, supporting the smooth integration of the students with limited abilities in school and sport settings in various ways.

An essential part of the stakeholders' network, national governments should involve people with disabilities and representative organisations, in actions aimed at defining public policies and measures for the implementation of the European strategies and those of international organisations.

In principle, stakeholders support adapted sport and academic endeavours for students at different levels- sport science research (within universities for example), sport education (for example the Global Centre for Inclusion in Education), developing sport activities (Paralympics, Special Olympics, Deaflympics, etc), and academics, provided that the government-run higher education shifts to modern systems, wherein the government's role involves more guidance than direct control.

In a nutshell, throughout this chapter we intended to incite reflections upon sport and its social impact, and how to optimise the constant interplay between the influencing stakeholders that constantly shape its philosophy, content, management, and recipients, bringing it to new levels and destinations.

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Chapter 6

Paralympic sports and accessibility requirements.

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Abstract

This chapter explores the intricate relationship between disability, sports, and human rights, emphasising the fundamental right of individuals with disabilities to equal access to sports and recreation. It underscores the transformative impact of the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which reframed the narrative around disability as a matter of human rights. The discussion further extends to the diverse spectrum of disabilities, including physical, organic, psychosocial, visual, and auditory impairments, and the imperative for tailored accommodations to ensure inclusivity. Notably, the chapter also recognizes the global appeal of Paralympic sports, encompassing both the Winter and Summer Paralympic Games, which serve as powerful platforms for inclusivity and equality in sports. In essence, this chapter underscores the essential principles of inclusive sports, human rights, and respectful interactions with individuals with disabilities.

Keywords: Disability; Para Sport; Paralympic Games; Human Rights; Para Athletes.

1. Introduction.

Disability is an issue that involves not only sports, but also the legal framework and human rights. Persons with disabilities have the right to equal access to recreational, leisure, and sporting activities. In this sense, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities establishes the obligation to guarantee access to physical culture and sport, considering equity and equality for persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

In the context of Paralympic sports, it is important to consider the needs of student-athletes depending on their type of disability. There are different types of disabilities that are considered in Paralympic sports, such as physical disability, visual disability, intellectual disability, and paralysis or brain injury. To ensure fair and equitable competition, classification systems are used according to sport and disability (Zucchi, 2001). These classification systems allow sports to be adapted to the needs and abilities of athletes with disabilities, seeking balance and equality in competition (United Nations, 2023).

In summary, sport is a human right that must be guaranteed for all people, including those with disabilities. In the context of Paralympic sports, it is essential to consider the needs of student-athletes according to their type of disability, and to adapt sports to their specific needs and abilities. In addition, it is important to ensure equal access to sporting activities for persons with disabilities, in compliance with human rights.

The unparalleled capacity of sports to transcend linguistic, cultural, and social barriers establishes it as an exceptional platform for the implementation of inclusive and adaptive strategies. Moreover, the widespread global appeal of sports, coupled with their multifaceted benefits in physical, social, and economic development, positions them as an ideal instrument for advancing the inclusion and well-being of individuals with disabilities. When addressing the intersection of disability and sports, the primary categorization revolves around distinguishing between inclusive and adapted sports.

On one hand, inclusive sports foster physical activity and recreational engagement among individuals, both with and without disabilities. These sports are tailored to the abilities of participants, while steadfastly upholding the fundamental objectives and characteristics of the specific sporting discipline (Pérez Tejero et al., 2013).

Conversely, adapted sports encompass the customization of a particular sport to accommodate the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, often necessitating adjustments to facilities, regulations, or equipment, to facilitate their participation (International Paralympic Committee, 2020). Presently, the International Paralympic Committee recognizes 28 Paralympic sports, comprising 22 in the summer and 6 in the winter.

Furthermore, within the realm of Paralympic Sports, a secondary categorization can be made, as proposed by Gold and Gold (2007): Summer Paralympic sports and Winter Paralympic sports. Each of these sports offers exciting opportunities for athletes with various disabilities, highlighting inclusion and excellence in the world of adapted sports.

2. Paralympic summer sports.

2.1. Archery: Precision at a distance.

Archery has been a fundamental part of the Paralympic Games since its inception in Stoke Mandeville in 1948. In this discipline, athletes compete from a distance of 70 metres, and hitting the central part, which measures only 12.2 centimetres wide, earns 10 points. Archers, who can have physical disabilities, are divided into three categories: those who can shoot while standing, from a chair, or with balance aids (World Archery, 2019).

2.2. Athletics: Overcoming barriers.

Athletics has been an essential part of the Paralympic program since the early Games in Rome in 1960. In this discipline, athletes compete in wheelchairs, with prosthetic limbs, or with the assistance of a non-visually impaired guide. Participants may have visual, physical, or intellectual disabilities, or cerebral palsy, and they are classified into two-digit categories, with the first indicating the type of functional disability they have (World Para Athletics, 2020).

2.3. Badminton: A newcomer in Tokyo 2020.

Badminton made its debut in the Paralympic program at the Tokyo 2020 Games. This Paralympic sport is played by athletes with physical disabilities who are divided into six classes, including two categories of athletes who compete in wheelchairs and four categories of athletes who compete standing (Badminton World Federation, 2022).

2.4. Boccia: Precision and strategy.

Boccia has been part of the Paralympic program since the New York 1984 Games. Athletes with physical disabilities and cerebral palsy are eligible to compete in this sport, which currently consists of seven medal events. The game is played individually, in pairs, or in teams on a rectangular court where players aim to throw their balls as close as possible to the target white ball while strategically keeping their opponents' balls away (Boccia International Sports Federation, 2021).

2.5. Canoeing: A debut in Rio 2016.

Canoeing made its Paralympic debut at the Rio 2016 Games. Paralympic canoeing competitions include stillwater canoeing in two types of individual boats: the kayak and the canoe. This sport is practised by men and women with trunk and/or lower limb disabilities,

impaired range of motion, or loss of muscle strength. Canoeists are divided into three classes based on their degree of disability and the craft they use (International Canoe Federation, 2019).

2.6. Cycling: On track and road.

Cycling, comprising both track and road events, has been a part of the Paralympic program since the introduction of road cycling at the 1984 Paralympic Games, and track cycling events since Atlanta 1996. Athletes with visual impairments, cerebral palsy, amputations, or other physical disabilities compete on tandems, conventional bicycles, handcycles, and tricycles. In cycling, athletes are divided into thirteen classes represented by a letter identifying the type of bicycle used (B, C, H, or T) and a number indicating the degree of disability (Union Cycliste Internationale, 2022).

2.7. Equestrian: Grace and skill on horseback.

Equestrian competitions were first introduced at the Paralympic Games in 1984, with its consecutive inclusion starting from Atlanta 1996. Paralympic riders are categorised into five grades according to their disability, with increasing complexity of movements required as the grade progresses (Fédération Equestre Internationale, 2022).

2.8. Football 5: A game of sound and silence.

The first Paralympic Games to feature men's 5-a-side football was Athens 2004. Five-a-side football is played by totally blind athletes (class B1) using a sound ball in a continuous combination of speed and skill. Each team consists of four outfield players, all of whom are blind and covered with a blindfold, plus a non-disabled goalkeeper. All players must wear eye patches and a mask that completely covers their eyes. Additionally, the crowd must remain silent throughout the match to allow both teams to hear the ball (International Blind Sports Federation, 2022a).

2.9. Goalball: A game of silence and precision.

Goalball, played by blind or visually impaired athletes with a sound ball, made its debut at the Paralympic Games in Toronto in 1976, initially as an exhibition sport. It was officially included in the men's category at Arnheim 1980, and the women's category at New York and Stoke Mandeville 1984. Two teams of three players each compete on an indoor court marked with tactile lines. Players must wear a mask that completely covers their eyes, and the hall must remain silent during the entire match to allow both teams to hear the ball (International Blind Sports Federation, 2022b).

2.10. Judo: Art and skill in combat.

Judo was introduced into the Paralympic program at Seoul 1988 for men and Athens 2004 for women. Paralympic judo is practised by judokas who are blind (J2) or severely visually impaired (J1). Judo matches last up to five minutes, during which contestants score points based on the techniques they execute. In Paralympic judo, the opponents begin to fight already holding each other by the lapels to compensate for their visual impairment (International Blind Sports Federation, 2022c).

2.11. Taekwondo: Kicks and forms.

Taekwondo made its Paralympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games, comprising two modalities: Kyorugi (combat) and Poomsae (exhibition). Kyorugi is exclusively for participants with physical disabilities in the arms, and all athletes compete standing with full use of their legs. Athletes are divided into four classes (World Taekwondo, 2019).

2.12. Triathlon: Swimming, cycling, and running.

Triathlon made its Paralympic debut at the Rio 2016 Games. Athletes with visual impairments, physical disabilities, and cerebral palsy are eligible. The event consists of three disciplines: open water swimming, road cycling, and running. Athletes with visual impairments must also be accompanied by a guide. Currently, triathletes are divided into six sport classes according to their disability, with competitions taking place in sprint mode (World Triathlon, 2019).

2.13. Powerlifting: The ultimate test of strength.

The first Paralympic Games to feature men's weightlifting were held in Tokyo in 1964, with women's weightlifting debuting in Sydney 2000. Athletes with disabilities such as spinal cord injuries, amputations, cerebral palsy, or other impairments compete in the bench press. They must meet minimum eligibility criteria based on their abilities, and are grouped by body weight, not injury. Athletes have three attempts to lift progressively heavier weights, with the strongest lifter taking the victory (World Para Powerlifting, 2022).

2.14. Rowing: Power on the water.

Paralympic rowing, introduced at the 2008 Beijing Games, requires equipment adapted to the athlete's disability. Athletes with visual impairment, physical disability, and cerebral palsy are eligible. The program includes four events, including mixed events such doubles and coxed fours, along with men's and women's single sculls. Participants are classified into four sport classes based on their disability (World Rowing Federation, 2021).

2.15. Shooting: Precision and accuracy.

Shooting competitions were introduced at the Toronto 1976 Paralympic Games. Athletes use pistols or rifles to shoot at static targets. They are classified into various categories based on their disability, with SH1 and SH2 athletes participating in both pistol and rifle events at the Paralympic Games (World Shooting Para Sport, 2019).

2.16. Sitting volleyball: Dynamic competition.

Sitting volleyball debuted in the Paralympic program at the 1980 Arnheim Games for men and the 2004 Athens Games for women. Two teams of six players each compete on a 10 x 6-meter indoor court divided by a net. Athletes with physical disabilities are eligible, with two classes: MD for athletes with minor disabilities and D for those with more severe impairments. To ensure inclusivity, teams can have only one MD player on the court during matches (World ParaVolley, 2017).

2.17. Swimming: A Paralympic staple.

Swimming is one of the few sports continuously practised since the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960. Races take place in a 50-metre pool, with athletes starting from three positions: standing on the pool deck, sitting on the pool edge, or directly from the water. Swimmers are classified based on how their disability affects their performance in each stroke, including physical disability, cerebral palsy, visual disability, and intellectual disability (World Para Swimming, 2018).

2.18. Table tennis: Quick reflexes and precision.

Table tennis was included in the Paralympic program from the outset in Rome in 1960. Paralympic table tennis is played similarly to non-disabled table tennis in individual and team competitions. Athletes are grouped into eleven classes, including those with physical disabilities or cerebral palsy, whether competing in a wheelchair or standing, and athletes with intellectual disabilities (International Table Tennis Federation, 2020).

2.19. Wheelchair basketball: Inclusion on the court.

Wheelchair basketball debuted during the 1960 Rome Games, with women joining the competition in Tel Aviv 1968. The rules closely resemble those of able-bodied basketball, with the main difference being that players must bounce or pass the ball after pushing the chair twice. Athletes with physical disabilities are eligible, with each player assigned a score between 1.0 and 4.5 based on their functional ability. The sum of the points of the five players on the court cannot exceed 14 during the game (International Wheelchair Basketball Federation, 2020).

2.20. Wheelchair fencing: The art of the blade.

Wheelchair fencing has been part of the Paralympic program since the 1960 Rome Games. Athletes with physical disabilities compete in wheelchairs anchored to the ground, using three weapons: foil, epee, and sabre. The foil scores only if it hits the opponent's torso, while the epee and sabre can touch at any point above the waist. Wheelchair fencing competitions are structured into two classes, A and B (International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation, 2020).

2.21. Wheelchair rugby: The battle on wheels.

Wheelchair rugby was introduced at the Paralympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, initially as an exhibition event and later as a medal event in Sydney 2000. Played by two teams of four players on an indoor court similar in size to basketball courts, the game uses a white ball identical to those used in volleyball. The goal is to get the ball across the opponent's back line. Players are grouped into seven sporting classes, ranging from 0.5 to 3.5 (World Wheelchair Rugby, 2021).

2.22. Wheelchair tennis: A game of adaptation.

Wheelchair tennis debuted as an exhibition sport at the 1988 Seoul Games and was added to the Paralympic program at the Barcelona 1992 Games. Athletes with physical disabilities are eligible to compete. Paralympic wheelchair tennis follows the same rules as able-bodied tennis, with one modification: the ball is allowed to bounce twice, and only the first bounce must be inside the lines of the court (International Tennis Federation, 2021).

3. Paralympic winter sports.

Paralympic Winter Sports offer a thrilling display of athleticism and determination in the snowy and icy landscapes. Let's explore the different disciplines:

3.1. Alpine skiing: Mastering the mountain.

Paralympic alpine skiing encompasses a range of events, including downhill, super-giant, giant slalom, slalom, and super-combined. These events are open to athletes with various disabilities, such as the blind or visually impaired, those with physical impairments competing in a

standing position, and those competing in sit-ski. Athletes in each of these categories participate together, with the aid of a correction factor, creating a total of 13 classes (World Para Alpine Skiing, 2021).

3.2. Biathlon: Combining skiing and precision.

The biathlon made its Paralympic debut at the 1988 Innsbruck Games, initially as a sport exclusively for the physically disabled. In the following edition, Albertville 1992, visually impaired biathletes joined the competition. This sport combines two disciplines: cross-country skiing and shooting. Athletes compete in three groups based on their type of disability: visually impaired, athletes competing in a standing position, and athletes competing in a chair. A further subdivision occurs based on the degree of disability among skiers (World Para Nordic Skiing, 2018).

3.3. Cross-country skiing: Gliding through winter.

Cross-country skiing was one of only two sports contested at the inaugural Paralympic Winter Games in Örnsköldsvik in 1976. Athletes with disabilities such as physical, visual, or cerebral palsy participate. Competitors are categorised into three groups, and a compensation factor ensures fair competition among skiers (World Para Nordic Skiing, 2021).

3.4. Ice hockey: The thrill of sleds and pucks.

Ice hockey made its Winter Paralympic debut at Lillehammer 1994, with women's teams joining the competition in Vancouver 2010. This dynamic sport is played by individuals with physical disabilities in their lower limbs. Players use sleds that allow the puck to pass beneath them and wield two sticks for mobility and shooting. Games consist of three fifteen-minute halves with five players per team (World Para Ice Hockey, 2020).

3.5. Snowboarding: Shredding the slopes.

Snowboarding graced the Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014. Athletes with disabilities affecting one of their limbs participate, and classification depends on the affected limbs. In snowboard cross, athletes navigate a challenging course filled with jumps, ramps, and obstacles. Banked slalom requires riders to manoeuvre a course with hills and depressions, all on a natural slope. Classification ensures fair competition among athletes (World Para Snowboard, 2021).

3.6. Wheelchair curling: Precision on ice.

Wheelchair curling entered the Winter Paralympic stage in Turin 2006, welcoming athletes with physical disabilities. This discipline, akin to pentaquin on ice, features two teams of four players, including athletes of both sexes. The playing field has two concentric circles of different colours, 45.5 metres from the throwing area. Teams aim to place stones as close as possible to the centre or tee after eight throws per team. The rules mirror those of the World Curling Federation, with exceptions including the prohibition of sweeping and the allowance of a stick for assistance (World Curling Federation, 2021).

While these sports are celebrated in the Paralympic Games, it's worth noting that many other adapted sports, although not included in the Paralympic program, are practised in a regulated manner, offering athletes diverse opportunities to compete and excel (Move United, 2021).

4. Accessibility requirements.

Disability is often seen as an inherent condition within a person, such as a medical condition that necessitates the use of a wheelchair or medication. However, the modern concept of disability perceives it as an interaction between an individual's personal condition (such as

using a wheelchair or experiencing visual impairment) and environmental factors (such as negative attitudes or inaccessible buildings), which together result in disability and affect an individual's participation in society.

To illustrate this concept, let's consider someone using a wheelchair (personal factor) who lives in a city with accessible buildings (environmental factor). In this scenario, that person can participate in the community on equal terms with someone who doesn't use a wheelchair, resulting in minimal or no disability. Conversely, an individual with an intellectual disability (personal factor) facing the community's belief that people with intellectual disabilities lack the capacity to vote (negative environmental factor) experiences exclusion from society and the denial of their voting rights, resulting in disability.

Individuals with disabilities often find themselves excluded from mainstream society and denied their human rights. Discrimination against people with disabilities takes various forms, ranging from overt discrimination, such as denying educational opportunities, to subtler forms such as segregation and isolation due to physical and social barriers. The effects of disability-based discrimination have been particularly severe in fields such as education, employment, housing, transportation, cultural life, and access to public places and services. This discrimination may result from distinctions, exclusions, restrictions, or preferences, or from the denial of reasonable accommodation based on disability, effectively nullifying, or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of the rights of people with disabilities.

Despite some legislative progress in the 20th century, these human rights violations have not been systematically addressed in society. Most disability-related laws and policies operated on the assumption that people with disabilities simply could not exercise the same rights as those without disabilities. Consequently, the focus often revolved around rehabilitation and social services.

However, everything changed in 2006 with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), a pivotal document aimed at ensuring that individuals with disabilities enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing (United Nations, 2006). The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by individuals with disabilities and to foster respect for their inherent dignity.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (A/RES/61/106) were adopted on December 13, 2006, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and opened for signature on March 30, 2007. It garnered 82 signatories for the Convention, 44 for the Optional Protocol, and 1 ratification of the Convention, marking the highest number of signatories in history for a UN Convention on its opening day. This Convention, the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century, also welcomed signatures from regional integration organisations. It officially came into force on May 3, 2008.

The Convention builds upon decades of United Nations efforts to shift perceptions and approaches to persons with disabilities. It elevates the concept from viewing individuals with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment, and social protection, to recognizing them as subjects with rights. These individuals can assert those rights, making informed decisions for their lives, and actively participating as members of society.

Designed as a human rights instrument with a strong social development dimension, the Convention adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and underscores that all individuals, regardless of disability type, must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and specifies how all rights categories apply to individuals with disabilities, identifies areas requiring adaptations to enable them to exercise their rights effectively, and highlights areas where their rights have been violated and protection needs to be reinforced.

5. Types of disabilities.

In the realm of disability, diversity reigns supreme. Disabilities come in many forms, each presenting unique challenges and considerations. Understanding these various types of disabilities is essential for fostering an inclusive and accessible society. From physical disabilities that affect mobility, to sensory impairments such blindness or deafness, and from cognitive disabilities that impact intellectual functioning, to invisible disabilities such as chronic illnesses or mental health conditions, the spectrum of disabilities is vast and multifaceted. In the following paragraphs we will delve into the intricacies of the different types of disabilities according to The World Report on Disability of the World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011), shedding light on the experiences and needs of people facing these various challenges.

A physical disability is one that impacts a person's mobility or dexterity, encompassing a broad range of conditions. This includes individuals who may rely on mobility aids or assistive devices for their day-to-day activities. Additionally, it comprises those who may have lost limbs or who require specific adjustments due to the unique shape of their bodies, to ensure their full participation in society. Ensuring physical accessibility in buildings, furnishings, digital tools, and other environments is paramount. It's equally vital to offer tailored support, accommodations, and adjustments that align with the specific needs of individuals with physical disabilities.

Organic disabilities pertain to conditions that affect a person's internal organs, often linked to diseases that might not be immediately perceptible to others. Examples include cancer, digestive disorders such as Crohn's disease and Ulcerative Colitis, cystic fibrosis, and heart conditions, among others. These disabilities typically involve periodic health crises, necessitating medical treatment, medication, and periods of rest at home. Finding ways to facilitate their continued education, during the educational period of these people, such as ac-

commodating classes, tests, and other activities despite absences, can significantly contribute to their academic success.

Psychosocial disabilities can manifest at any age and are frequently not visible to others. Mental disabilities often face the most misconceptions and stigmatisation within society. Prejudice and myths, such as associating schizophrenia with violence, can lead to negative attitudes. Psychosocial disabilities encompass stress-related conditions, major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia. Depression, a prevalent non-psychotic mental illness (distinct from psychosis characterised by a loss of contact with reality), is one example. Tailoring approaches based on the specific disability is crucial, which may involve flexibility regarding time, evaluations, and public presentations, all while avoiding stereotypes and patronising attitudes.

Visual disabilities encompass a wide spectrum of conditions, from total blindness to varying degrees of visual impairment. Blind individuals may have no visual perception or only limited light perception. Visually impaired individuals may struggle to see objects even with corrective measures, but can often read large print with effort and special aids. Some may have difficulties recognizing objects in front of them (loss of central vision) or detecting objects in their peripheral vision. It is important to inquire about the specific physical and digital support products needed. For individuals with blindness, initial assistance with mobility and orientation is vital. Additionally, verbal descriptions are crucial when presenting visual content.

Deafness and hearing loss can result from various factors, including physical damage, prenatal conditions, or exposure to loud noises. A distinction exists between individuals who are deaf and those with hearing impairments. Those who acquire hearing loss up to around three years of age often possess relatively good speech and lip-reading abilities. Accommodations may vary, including subtitles, sign language interpreters, or clear and slow speech. Some individuals may have difficulty speaking, in which case written communication can be a helpful alternative. Always prioritise direct communication with the individual and not just their interpreter.

In our diverse and inclusive world, it is essential to approach interactions with individuals who have disabilities with empathy, respect, and a deep understanding of their unique perspectives. By recognizing their humanity before their disability and honouring their dignity, we create an inclusive environment that fosters positive relationships. Below, we offer guidance on how to interact in a thoughtful and respectful manner with people with disabilities based on The World Report on Disability of the World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011), emphasising their autonomy, their capabilities, and the importance of their voice in every interaction.

When engaging with individuals with disabilities, it is crucial to recognize their humanity above their disability and uphold their dignity throughout interactions. We should communicate naturally, showing respect by addressing the person directly and avoiding prejudices or overprotective attitudes. Before helping, kindly inquire if it's needed and how best to provide it, allowing them to express their preferences. Encouraging their autonomy and decision-making while steering clear of condescending behaviour is essential. Recognizing each person's uniqueness, even among those with the same disability, and focusing on their abilities rather than limitations is key. Respecting their privacy, especially in informal relationships, and promoting inclusivity to enhance self-esteem and societal perception are vital. Prioritising their needs, feelings, and preferences, and acknowledging their right to self-expression and being heard, ultimately fosters an inclusive and equitable society where individuals with disabilities are respected for their inherent worth as individuals.

6. Conclusions.

In conclusion, disability issues encompass various dimensions, including sports, legal frameworks, and human rights. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates equal access to physical culture and sports, emphasising equity and equality. Pa-

ralympic sports adapt to the needs of athletes with different disabilities through classification systems, aiming for fair competition. Sports provide an exceptional platform for inclusivity and adaptive strategies, with inclusive and adapted sports accommodating individuals both with and without disabilities. Discrimination against people with disabilities has historically been prevalent, but the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities marked a pivotal shift towards recognizing their rights and dignity. Different types of disabilities, including physical, organic, psychosocial, visual, and hearing disabilities, require tailored approaches to facilitate inclusion and accessibility. Interactions with individuals with disabilities should prioritise respect, autonomy, and recognition of their unique abilities to foster an inclusive and equitable society.

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Chapter 7

The end of a sporting life.

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Abstract.

The cessation of a sporting career represents a pivotal juncture in the life of athletes, heralding the conclusion of a significant life chapter and the onset of a new existential phase. This transition can be particularly nuanced for athletes with disabilities, who must not only navigate the cessation of their athletic career but also confront the societal attitudes and barriers associated with disability. This chapter delves into the intricacies of the transition from sports, emphasising the potential of dual career approaches to foster a smoother transition and bolster societal inclusivity. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of existing literature, this chapter elucidates the impact of athletic identity on this transition, the benefits of dual career pathways, and the challenges faced in a post-sports career. Furthermore, it explores the prospects that lie beyond the sporting arena, underscoring the transferable skills that athletes with disabilities possess which can be harnessed in various domains. This chapter contributes to the discourse on promoting inclusivity and supporting the holistic development of athletes with disabilities as they transition into life beyond sports. Through a meticulous exploration of these dimensions, the chapter posits a framework for understanding and supporting the transition of athletes with disabilities, thereby contributing to the broader narrative of social inclusion and diversity in both the sporting and academic realms.

Keywords: Dropout; Dual Career; Post-sport; Athletic Identity; Disability.

1. Introduction: Setting the stage for the end of an athletic career.

The conclusion of an athlete's career is a significant event. It signifies not only the conclusion of an era characterised by hard work, dedication, and numerous accomplishments, but also marks a pivotal point of transition from one stage of life to another. This transition can be especially intricate for athletes with disabilities. They navigate not only the customary emotions and adjustments accompanying the conclusion of a sporting career but also confront unique challenges stemming from their dual identity as athletes and individuals with disabilities. In other words, this stage presents a range of specific challenges and benefits for disabled athletes that go beyond sport and involve issues such as identity, socialisation, and career development.

A key framework that assists athletes with disabilities to navigate through this web of transition is the dual career pathway, which combines athletic and academic or professional undertakings. As delineated in the European Handbook "Para-Limits, Dual Career, Disability, and Sport" (Leiva-Arcas et al., 2023), the dual career model seeks to provide a supportive ecosystem that enables the harmonious blend of sporting and academic endeavours. Such a holistic approach is not a simple structure but an expression of philosophy, recognising the multifaceted identities and potentials of athletes with disabilities.

The cessation of an athletic career is not an isolated event but a process that has emotional, social, and practical significance. Various research studies have delved into the psychological and social impacts accompanying this transition. For example, Wylleman et al. (2004) investigated the psychological transitions that athletes experience at different stages of their athletic career, thereby emphasising the need for a supportive environment in the retirement phase. Additionally, the research by Park et al. (2013) explores the identity transitions athletes undergo, showcasing the intertwined nature of athletic and personal identity.

Moreover, the end of a sporting career can be perceived as a point of divergence where the pathways of sport and academia distinctly bifurcate or synergistically converge to foster a new phase of life. Despite the evolution of the adapted sports community over the past decade, little has been done to develop a discourse regarding late-life career transitions in this population. There is a burgeoning necessity to delve into the experiences, challenges, and support mechanisms requisite for facilitating a smooth transition.

2. Transitioning from sport: The impact of athletic identity.

Athletic identity pertains to the degree to which an individual identifies with being an athlete and incorporates this aspect of their life into their total self-concept. This identity often becomes fundamental to an athlete's sense of self and exerts a substantial impact on their habits, aspirations, and beliefs. Athletic identity is significant in the life of an athlete because it influences their feeling of self and purpose.

This attachment to their athletic identity can make the transition out of sport particularly difficult, as athletes grapple with a loss of purpose and structure in their lives. Research consistently indicates that athletes with a strong athletic identity are more unprepared to manage their career transition out of sport (Porter, 2019).

Understanding the implications of these challenges is especially crucial for athletes with disabilities, who must navigate not only the loss of their athletic identity but also confront the potential negative stereotypes and societal barriers associated with their disabilities. This challenge is further amplified for athletes with disabilities, who may have additional layers of identity tied to their disabilities. These athletes not only identify as athletes but also as individuals with disabilities, which can complicate the process of transitioning from sport.

Athletic identity is a potent construct that encapsulates the essence of an athlete's persona, often becoming an intrinsic part of their self-schema. This identity is not merely a designation but a lived experience, entwined with emotions, ambitions, and social interactions. The prowess and recognition accrued through athletic endeavours often fortify this identity, making it a dominant aspect of an athlete's self-concept.

The transition phase marking the culmination of a sporting career heralds a crucial period of identity re-evaluation and adaptation. The extant literature has delineated the profound impact of athletic identity on this transitional process. For instance, a study by Brewer et al. (1993) highlighted the concept of 'athletic identity foreclosure,' where individuals have trouble in relinquishing their athletic identity, which in turn, may exacerbate the challenges encountered during transition.

The complexity of this transition is accentuated for athletes with disabilities. Their athletic identity often serves as a beacon of personal and societal affirmation, transcending the stigmatisation and marginalisation associated with disability. The sporting arena is not merely a venue of competition but a domain of empowerment, self-expression, and social integration for athletes with disabilities.

Moreover, the intersectionality of athletic and disabled identities can render the transition process intricate and emotionally taxing. The dual identity as an athlete and an individual with a disability often intertwines with societal perceptions and personal aspirations. A study by Perrier et al. (2014) elucidated how athletes with disabilities negotiate their identities amidst societal attitudes and their personal athletic journey, showcasing the nuanced interplay between personal and societal identity constructs.

Furthermore, societal attitudes towards disability can often reverberate through the transitional phase, impacting the self-esteem and career aspirations of retiring athletes with disabilities. The potential stereotyping and attitudinal barriers encountered in mainstream society may pose additional challenges, necessitating a robust support system to facilitate a smooth transition.

As propounded in the Para-Limits project, the dual-career model offers a holistic support paradigm, blending academic, vocational, and psychosocial dimensions to assist athletes with disabilities in transitioning smoothly from sport to new career avenues. By fostering a conducive environment for identity exploration, skill development, and social integration, the dual career model can significantly mitigate the identity dissonance experienced during the transition phase.

3. The power of dual careers for athletes with disabilities.

The duality of managing both academic and athletic pursuits, often referred to as a dual career, is a facet of life that many athletes with disabilities engage with. The concept of a dual career transcends the simplistic binary of education and sports, evolving into a holistic framework that enables a seamless transition into life after sports. This framework is especially salient for athletes with disabilities, who may encounter a distinct set of challenges as they transition out of their athletic careers.

Nyberg et al. (2023) underscore the merit of engaging in a dual career, highlighting how it prepares athletes with disabilities for life post-sports by nurturing a repertoire of transferable skills and resilience. The exigency of adaptability, time management, and a balanced identity that emanates from the dual career experience is invaluable, as athletes with disabilities transition into new realms of life. These skills are not just instrumental in managing the pragmatic aspects of transition but also in mitigating the emotional and identity-related challenges that come with the end of a sporting career.

Moreover, the dual career model embodies a potent medium for nurturing a diversified identity that transcends the athletic sphere. This multifaceted identity is pivotal when counteracting the identity loss often associated with athletic retirement, as highlighted by Porter (2019). The engagement in academic pursuits alongside athletic en-

deavours provides a continuum of identity and purpose, which can be especially empowering for athletes with disabilities.

Furthermore, the integration of athletes with disabilities in dual career pathways has the potential to catalyse a paradigm shift in societal perceptions and inclusivity. As Leiva-Arcas et al. (2023) articulate, the presence of athletes with disabilities in both academic and sporting domains challenges preconceived notions and fosters a culture of diversity and respect. This integration is not merely a symbol of inclusivity, but a stride towards creating accessible and supportive environments in educational institutions.

The ripple effect of this integration can be profound. It can inspire both disabled and non-disabled individuals, cultivating a milieu of mutual respect, understanding, and inspiration. Moreover, it propels institutions to re-evaluate and augment their accessibility measures, thereby creating an inclusive ethos that benefits all.

In a broader societal context, the promotion of dual careers for athletes with disabilities serves as a testament to the capabilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities. It challenges the stereotypical narratives associated with disability, replacing them with narratives of empowerment, capability, and inclusivity.

4. Challenges faced by athletes with disabilities post-sports career.

The transition from a sporting career into new life domains presents a unique set of challenges for athletes with disabilities. These challenges are multifaceted and can be amplified due to the intersectionality of athletic and disability identities. Delving into the literature provides a lens through which the various dimensions of these challenges can be understood and addressed.

- *Identity crisis:* The end of a sporting career often triggers an identity crisis among athletes, especially for those with disabilities

(Webb et al., 1998). The dual identity as an athlete and an individual with a disability can lead to a complex re-evaluation of self and societal position post-sports career.

- *Employment opportunities:* Finding gainful employment post-sports career can be challenging for athletes with disabilities. Despite having developed a myriad of transferable skills through sports, these athletes may face employer biases and physical accessibility challenges in the traditional job market.
- *Psychological adjustments:* The psychological adjustments required during this transition phase are substantial. Athletes with disabilities may experience feelings of loss, grief, and anxiety as they navigate through the end of their sports career (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007).
- *Societal perceptions and stigma:* Athletes with disabilities might encounter societal stigma and negative attitudes towards disability, which can impede their smooth transition into new life domains (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006).
- *Accessibility and inclusion:* Accessibility in education and employment sectors remains a significant challenge. Despite legal frameworks promoting inclusion, its practical implementation often falls short, impacting the opportunities available to athletes with disabilities post-sports career.
- *Support networks:* The availability and accessibility of support networks post-sports career are crucial for a successful transition. A lack of adequate support can exacerbate the challenges faced by athletes with disabilities (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).
- *Health and well-being:* Maintaining physical and mental health post-sports career could also be a challenge. The change in routine and the possible decrease in physical activity levels can impact the overall well-being of athletes with disabilities.

A nuanced understanding of these challenges is pivotal for developing robust support systems and policies to facilitate a smoother transition for athletes with disabilities. It is also vital for the broader

societal endeavour of fostering inclusivity and equality for individuals with disabilities.

5. Addressing the future: Life after sports for athletes with disabilities.

The cessation of an athletic career can be seen as a crossroads, opening up a myriad of pathways leading towards a fruitful life after sports. Athletes with disabilities, who are equipped with a unique set of skills honed over years of training and competition, are well-poised to make significant strides in various realms of life beyond sports. The discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and goal-oriented mindset, which are all emblematic of their athletic journey, are highly transferable and invaluable in numerous fields.

- *Career transition:* The transition into new careers is a notable avenue where athletes with disabilities can leverage their acquired skills. Their adeptness at teamwork, leadership, and handling pressure, are assets in professional environments (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). A range of studies underscores the successful transition of athletes into careers in coaching, mentoring, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles in organisations.
- *Academic pursuits:* The discipline and goal-setting skills inherent in athletes can be channelled towards academic endeavours. Athletes with disabilities may pursue further education, enhancing their knowledge and opening doors to careers in academia, research, or specialised professional fields.
- *Advocacy and community engagement:* Athletes with disabilities often transition into roles of advocacy, championing for inclusivity, accessibility, and rights of individuals with disabilities (Hardin & Hardin, 2004). Their personal experiences and public personas can be powerful tools in effecting societal change.

- *Mentorship and coaching:* For many athletes with disabilities, this path naturally leads to roles of mentorship and coaching in the world of adaptive sports. They can serve as invaluable mentors, supporters, and motivational figures for the next generation of athletes.
- *Entrepreneurial ventures:* The resilience, problem-solving ability, and strategic planning skills acquired through sports, seamlessly transfer to entrepreneurial ventures. Some athletes with disabilities venture into starting their own businesses, contributing to economic development and innovation.
- *Holistic personal development:* Post-sports life also provides an opportunity for holistic personal development. Athletes could explore new interests, develop new skills, and forge new relationships, leading to a well-rounded and fulfilling life.
- *Inspirational narratives:* Case studies of athletes with disabilities who have transitioned successfully post-sports careers serve as motivational narratives. These success stories can act as a beacon of possibility and inspiration for other athletes navigating similar transitions.

Exploring life beyond the sporting arena is a journey filled with opportunities for growth, contribution, and fulfilment. The narrative of athletes with disabilities transitioning into new life chapters post-sports career is an inspirational testament to the boundless potential inherent in every individual, regardless of physical ability.

6. Conclusions.

Athletes with disabilities embark on journeys abundant with stories of resilience, determination, and remarkable achievements, transcending the barriers often posed by societal perceptions and physical challenges. Examining the transition from sports to new life domains for athletes with disabilities presents a discourse of para-

mount importance. It not only highlights the unique challenges faced by these athletes, but also the boundless potential and opportunities that lie ahead.

The concept of a dual career emerges as a beacon of holistic development, furnishing a structured pathway that harmoniously blends sports and academic or vocational pursuits. This model not only facilitates a smooth transition, but also nurtures a diversified identity that is pivotal in mitigating the identity crisis often associated with the cessation of a sports career.

Moreover, the transferable skills honed over years of athletic training — discipline, teamwork, leadership, resilience, to name a few — are invaluable assets that athletes with disabilities carry into their post-sports endeavours. Whether transitioning into new careers, pursuing further education, engaging in advocacy, or venturing into entrepreneurship, the foundational skills acquired through sports provide a solid groundwork.

The array of success stories and case studies showcasing athletes with disabilities successfully transitioning into life post-sports life stands as a testament to the boundless potential inherent in every individual. These narratives not only provide inspiration, but also actionable insights for other athletes navigating similar transitional phases.

Furthermore, the societal implications of successful transitions are profound. They challenge preconceived notions, foster a culture of inclusivity, and underscore the importance of creating supportive and accessible environments in educational institutions and workplaces. Impacting communities, and potentially, societal norms and policies, these transitions extend their ripple effect well beyond the individuals.

This discourse invites a collaborative endeavour among policymakers, educational institutions, sporting bodies, and society at large, to foster an ecosystem that supports the holistic development and successful transition of athletes with disabilities. By doing so, we are not merely aiding individual transitions, but contributing to a broader societal endeavour of fostering inclusivity, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.

The explorations and discussions encapsulated in this chapter aim to contribute to this endeavour, shedding light on the multi-dimensional aspects of the transition process for athletes with disabilities and envisaging pragmatic strategies to bolster the support framework. Through a meticulous examination of existing literature, personal narratives, and empirical data, a pathway towards a better understanding and facilitation of life after sports for athletes with disabilities is charted, beckoning a future filled with promise, inclusivity, and growth.

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Chapter 8

Recommendations to facilitate and encourage dual career for Para-athlete students.

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the importance of human rights in promoting equal participation of all people in education and sport, for their holistic development and full participation in society. It highlights the variability of disability support policies across Europe and the need for more inclusive outcomes in education, work, and sport for people with disabilities. The chapter call attention to the challenges para-athletes face in balancing their academic and work careers with their sporting activities. It calls for recommendations at various levels, including the individual, the interpersonal environment, educational institutions, sports bodies, companies, and policy makers. These recommendations cover the promotion of awareness, cooperation, flexibility, support, and inclusion in the pursuit of para-sport dual careers, with a particular focus on removing barriers and fostering cultural change towards equitable social, academic, work, and sporting landscapes. Finally, the chapter underlines the role of policy makers in creating opportunities and monitoring the alignment of policy intent with practice in the field of para-sport dual careers.

Keywords: Disability Sport, Dual Career Guidelines; Policy Makers; Inclusion.

1. Introduction.

Human rights support the equal involvement of all people in education and sports activities, to ensure their holistic development for a full participation in society. Despite the development of inclusion towards the incorporation of disabled persons helping to provide opportunities for disabled people, in Europe, there is a large variability of disability support policies not necessarily leading to inclusive outcomes at the educational, working, and sports levels (Christiaens & Brittain, 2023; Mark et al., 2019; Ramberg & Watkins, 2020; Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Based on the analysis of the limited literature on para-sportspersons trying to combine their academic/working careers (e.g., dual career), and on the precious insights provided by European dual career para-athletes involved in the Para-Limits project on the challenges faced at the personal, environmental, social, and logistical/organisational levels, offering specific recommendations is crucial for building effective policies to develop the para-sports dual career at its micro (e.g., individual), meso (e.g., interpersonal entourage), macro (e.g., social, organisational), and global (e.g., policy) dimensions (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). In fact, even though the para-sports persons have to take full responsibility of their dual career and develop a finely-tuned daily organisation to meet their rehabilitation, educational/work, and training/competition commitments, they need strong relationships and cooperation with a proactive entourage of parents, relatives, sport and academic staff, and work colleagues that can help them find flexible solutions and support the intrinsic values of para-sports as a mean to unify communities and to foster breaking barriers. Furthermore, academic institutions, sports bodies, and companies, are crucial when interpreting mainstreaming policies offering inclusive provisions, which must go beyond the removal of physical barriers, enhanced accessibility, and segregated physical and social environment (O'Gorman, 2011; Skille & Stenling, 2017). Thus, dual career para-sportspersons could be viewed as human resources who are driven by personal interests and determined to achieve their

goals, which could lead to a cultural change towards more equitable social, academic, work, and sport landscapes (Houlihan, 2011; Storr et al., 2020). Finally, policy makers have to take responsibilities towards creating opportunities for dual career sportspersons by supporting a strategic rationale, wise decision making, and an appropriate allocation of resources and funds to sustain inclusive changes, and to monitor the bridging of the gap between policy intent and practice in the field of para-sports dual career.

2. Dual career micro level: Recommendations for the dual career para-sportspersons.

The following section lists the recommendations for the micro level of dual career of para-sport persons.

- The para-sports persons must take full responsibility of their dual career rights through in-depth knowledge of the legal, organisational, and inclusive dual career policies in place at their local, regional, national and international levels.
- The dual career para-sportspersons shall understand their relevant role model for enhancing the advancement of an inclusive dual career culture at educational and work levels for the whole population.
- The dual career para-sportspersons shall increase their visibility through media and social media and act as role models to motivate disabled and non-disabled individuals to engage in sports, also in combination with their sport and academic/work careers.
- The dual career para-sportspersons shall become policy-entrepreneurs to lead an equitable sport environment that subsumes the current ableist approach of disabled or a non-disabled athlete identity.

3. Dual career meso level: Recommendations for the interpersonal entourage (e.g., family members, sports staff, academic staff, employers, social workers, volunteers) of the dual career para-sportspersons.

The recommendations for the impersonal environment of para-sports people following the dual career are set out below:

- Family members of dual career para-sportspersons must have in-depth knowledge of the legal, organisational, and inclusive dual career policies and opportunities available at their local, regional, national, and international levels.
- Family members shall motivate the full engagement of para-sports persons also in academic/work careers.
- Family members shall be able to recognize, in dual career para-sportspersons, the signs and symptoms of possible conflicts due to difficulties in combining academic/work and sports careers, identify possible solutions, and/or find specialized personnel for help, if needed.
- Family members of dual career para-sportspersons shall establish an effective dialogue with academic, work, and sport staff to support an inclusive dual career culture at educational and work levels for the whole population.
- The sports staff should be prepared to support dual career para-athletes in organizing their academic/working schedules to avoid conflict with their training and competitions.
- The sports staff should establish an inclusive sport environment for disabled and non-disabled athletes and arrange flexible training plans to prepare for academic examinations.
- The sports staff should establish an effective dialogue with family members and employers of their para-athletes to enhance a supportive and inclusive dual career culture at educational and work levels.

- The sports staff should be able to recognize, in dual career para-athletes, the signs and symptoms of possible difficulties in combining sports and academic commitments and be prepared to adopt possible adjustments to avoid dropouts.
- The academic staff should support dual career para-athletes in organising their academic schedules to avoid conflict with their training and competitions, also ensuring flexibility for examinations, individualised learning schedule, and extra tutoring, when necessary.
- The academic staff should be able to recognize in dual career para-sportspersons the signs and symptoms of possible difficulties of combining academic and sports commitments and be prepared to adopt possible adjustments to avoid dropouts.
- The academic staff shall understand the relevant role model of the dual career para-sportspersons for advancement of an inclusive culture for the whole population. Sports staff should arrange flexible training plans and an inclusive sport environment for disabled and non-disabled athletes.
- Sports staff should establish an effective dialogue with family members and employers of their para-athletes to enhance a supportive and inclusive dual career culture at educational and work levels.
- Employers should provide flexible working schedules and remote work necessary to sustain the training or competitions of employee-sports persons with disabilities.
- Employers should arrange training equipment/areas at the workplace to foster an inclusive sport environment for disabled and non-disabled employees.
- Employers should increase the visibility of their employee-para-sports persons through their social media and business channels to motivate their disabled and non-disabled employers to engage in sports and active lifestyles.
- Employers should increase the visibility of their employee-para-sports persons within their company to motivate their disa-

bled and non-disabled employers to engage in sports and active lifestyles.

- Employers should establish an effective dialogue with the sports staff of their employed para-athletes to enhance their engagement in a work career to avoid undue conflicts.
- Social workers and volunteers should motivate para-sportspersons to continue their academic/work and sport commitments.
- Social workers and volunteers should help para-sports persons to engage in the dual career by providing information on the legal, organisational, and inclusive dual career policies and opportunities available at their local, regional, national, and international levels.
- Social workers and volunteers could help para-sportspersons engage in the dual career by establishing an effective dialogue with family members, academic, work and sport staff to make reasonable adjustments in case of conflicts.

4. Dual career macro level: Recommendations for the educational institutions, sport bodies, and companies for the dual career para-sportspersons.

The recommendations for the dual career for para-sports people at the macro-level are as follows:

- Educational institutions should adopt dual career policies for sustaining disabled and non-disabled sports persons as students.
- Educational institutions should provide scholarships, prepared and dedicated personnel, accessible educational and training facilities, and special transportation to support the holistic development of para-sportspersons.
- Educational institutions should build and enhance an inclusive academic environment to avoid ableism of disabled stu-

dent-sportspersons by raising awareness around inclusion in the sport landscape.

- Educational institutions should monitor the academic progress of para-sportspersons as students and provide extra academic support when needed.
- Educational institutions should establish cooperation with sports bodies to arrange a flexible educational schedule to avoid conflicts between the academic and sports calendars, which also includes distant learning.
- Educational institutions should establish cooperation agreements with companies to facilitate the transition of the disabled sports persons in the labour market at the end of their academic career.
- Educational institutions should increase the visibility of their dual career for sports persons by advertising their sport and academic achievements to the academic staff and student community.
- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should adopt dual career policies for sustaining disabled and non-disabled sportspersons as students and employees.
- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should monitor the continuous activity of their registered para-sportspersons as students or employees and should provide extra support when needed..
- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should commit to increasing the number of dual career para-sportspersons through recruitment campaigns, financial support, special equipment, and logistics adapted to the dual career needs.
- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should engage in inclusive dual careers by establishing agreements with educational institutions and companies.
- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should include issues on the para-sports dual career as an integral part of coach education.

- Sport bodies (e.g., sports federations, sports associations, and sports clubs) should increase the visibility of dual career-sports persons by advertising the academic/working achievements at the local level and in the traditional media and social media.
- Companies should align their social responsibility to dual career principles and adopt inclusive policies for sustaining disabled and non-disabled employee-sportspersons.
- Companies should provide quotas, accessible working and training facilities, and non-formal and informal education to support career advancement of para-sportspersons.
- Companies should build and enhance an inclusive working environment to avoid ableism of disabled employee-sportspersons.
- Companies should establish cooperation with sports bodies to arrange a flexible working schedule and smart working for avoiding conflicts between the sports calendars and the working outcomes.
- Companies should align their brand values and vision to sport and the para-sport dual career and increase the visibility of their employee-sportspersons by advertising their sport and working achievements as part of their core target audience.

5. Dual career global level: Recommendations for the policymakers of the dual career para-sportspersons.

The recommendations for policy makers on the dual careers of para-athletes are summarised in the following section.

- Policymakers should outreach and bridge programmes for inclusive sport participation programmes at the educational and work levels for disabled and non-disabled sportspersons, thus avoiding segregated contexts.

- Policymakers should give high visibility to inclusive sport participation programmes at the educational and work levels, also through traditional media and social media campaigns.
- Policymakers should foster, maintain, and enhance affirmative dual career actions to facilitate the admission and employment of the paralympic athlete, also including quotas.
- Policymakers should promote equity and inclusive dual careers by considering them prerequisites for sustainable form of grants and scholarships at the educational, work, and work levels.
- Policymakers should allocate funds necessary to cover the extra costs for educational, work or training for sportspersons with disabilities.
- Policymakers should provide incentives (e.g., tax reductions and subsidies) and financial support for accessible sports equipment/rooms/facilities/areas embedded at the educational and work levels.
- Policymakers should provide incentives (e.g., tax reductions and subsidies) for employers when dual career policies are present for the employee-sportsperson.
- Policymakers should provide targeted support and close monitoring of the effects of dual career policies and actions for para-sportspersons through measurable criteria.
- Policymakers should provide bursaries for specialised and individualised coaching, caregiving, tutorship/assistance, and transportation of the dual career para-sportspersons.
- Policymakers should structure the legal requirements for sport organisations to make reasonable adjustments, striving towards an accessible environment in an existing non-disabled environment.

6. Conclusions.

The chapter has analysed the need for comprehensive para-athlete support systems, with an emphasis on inclusive policies at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and global levels. These policies aim to break down barriers, foster equity, and promote a cultural shift towards more inclusive academic, work and sporting environments. Policy makers play a key role in creating opportunities and monitoring policy implementation. Ultimately, our vision advocates for a holistic approach to facilitating the para-sport dual-career, considering the unique challenges faced by disabled athletes and the potential for positive social impact.

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Chapter 9

Research and transferability in the field of the dual career of the student-athletes with disabilities: The Erasmus+ Sport 'Para-Limits' project.

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Abstract

This chapter delves into the fundamental conceptual principles of the dual career model for student-athletes with disabilities, aiming to enhance comprehension and future refinement. The chapter is organised into three parts. In the first, the objectives of the Para-Limits project that guided the entire development of the project during its implementation are explained. The second part deals with the innovative value of the thematic developed and the methodology conducted in the project by all partners. And lastly, the third part discusses the added value that has remained in the European Union after the development of the project, in the form of scientific publications of impact, easy-to-use manuals, and online platforms for access to all the information of the project.

Keywords: Dual Career; Student-Athlete; Disability; Adapted Sport; Higher Education.

1. Para-Limits project objectives.

The overall objective of Para-Limits was to contribute to the European Union's policies on social inclusion through the promotion of dual careers for top-level athletes with disabilities. The objective was to design a comprehensive solution that could be implemented at a low cost and effort in different EU member states to achieve the effective integration of this population group and to remove the barriers that prevent them from developing a successful university and sports career.

Para-Limits aimed to implement the dual career adapted to the needs of athletes with disabilities through the development of a strategic partnership at the European level between universities and institutions to strengthen social inclusion through sport and higher education. To this end, the following objectives were pursued:

- To promote research on social integration and high-level sport for disabled people. Para-Limits aimed to increase knowledge about the needs of disabled athletes who decide to study to obtain a university degree and to learn more about the existing barriers they have to overcome. The research was carried out at two levels: exploring the current situation in each of the participating countries, and at the global EU level.
- To create a collaborative support network between the different agents involved in supporting the dual career of adapted athletes. Para-Limits sought to link local sports federations, clubs, and institutions with participating universities to coordinate actions with the shared objective of promoting, securing and enabling dual careers for high-level student-athletes with disabilities. The transferability of good practices was sought, and genuine guidelines were created to serve as a model of good practice.
- To foster the adaptation of universities to the dual career of athletes with disabilities through the design and development of an innovative curriculum following the MOOC (Massive Online

Open Courses) structure aimed at the training of expert mentors. This course aimed to train the staff of the universities part of the consortium (professors and administrative staff) to become professional guides to provide specific support to student-athletes with disabilities and ensure the success of the programme.

- To disseminate the results and good actions developed to facilitate the replicability of the model in other environments that want to pursue the dual career of student athletes with disabilities, considering the results of the project. Para-Limits sought the replication of the project in other EU member states to contribute to the common goal of achieving the effective social inclusion of people with disabilities and promoting the expansion of high-level adapted sport, avoiding regional differences, and achieving a common development.
- To monitor the milestones achieved through the creation of an interdisciplinary collegiate institution in which all members of the project consortium will participate. Its objective was the evaluation, analysis, and dissemination of information on a regular basis, on social integration and adapted sport through Higher Education. Its task was to produce regular reports and to formulate proposals for action and improvement, which may also serve as resources for consultation when necessary.

Para-Limits tried to address the objectives set by European policies in the field of social integration and adapted sport according to the Education and Training 2020 strategy. In conclusion, the link between social integration and sport practice is strong and well documented by scientific research by Cánovas-Álvarez (2020). The dual career is a great tool for developing this strategy in high-level disabled athletes, as they have the added difficulty of investing more effort in their sporting career in order to be competitive, which deprives them of opportunities to develop their talent in other contexts such as academia. The Para-Limits project aimed to sensitise all stakeholders to develop positive and empathetic attitudes towards disabled athle-

tes through a stable and cohesive support network. The project also sought to train qualified professionals who are trained to meet the specific needs of this target group (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

To this end, Para-Limits was developed on the following ethical pillars that will mark the philosophy of the project.

- Act based on scientific evidence. In order to be effective, all tasks developed within the project's framework of action had to be inspired by scientific criteria and developed on the basis of theory and evidence-based awareness.
- Holistic approach to the problem of social inclusion and adapted sport. It was necessary to build a shared knowledge base about the real situation of disabled athletes and the barriers they encounter in their integral training. All parties involved in this reality were consulted to generate a cross-sectoral understanding that reflects the approach of all parties.
- Effective and impactful measures to promote the adapted dual career. The consortium members committed themselves to developing actions that go beyond their local level and aim to achieve a broader impact. The Para-Limits project started from a regional approach to reach wider contexts in the framework of social development needs identified by European policies.

2. Para-Limits project in the framework of the 2030 agenda.

The Para-Limits project was considered innovative for the following reasons:

- It addressed an underexplored area in previous Erasmus+ Sport calls by offering support to student athletes with disabilities pursuing a Dual Career.

- There were no established guidelines for assisting student-athletes with disabilities in managing the demands of both their university studies and high-level athletic commitments.
- European universities lacked specialised sports mentors trained to cater to this specific group, to ensure their social inclusion and equal opportunities in both sports and higher education rights.

In Europe, significant disparities existed in addressing the educational needs and rights of high-level student athletes. The challenge of harmonising university education with other commitments, such as work or competitive sports at the highest level, was well-recognized, and there were no clear, consistent rules across EU member countries to tackle this issue. The challenge became even more pronounced for individuals with disabilities, who faced the dual challenge of excelling in university studies and high-level sports training (European Commission, 2007).

It was emphasised that people with disabilities held the same universal and human right to access education and sports as anyone else according to the Disability in the EU: facts and figures of the European Commission (2022). With immense personal effort and support from their families, society, and institutions, they demonstrated the capability to pursue both high-level academic education and excellence in sports without making sacrifices. The need had arisen to take a step forward by training expert mentors who could help this population to successfully combine their academic and sports pursuits inclusively, considering the individual challenges that each individual already possesses (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023). This inclusiveness had to be guaranteed within the broader framework of the dual career, with tailored adaptations for people with disabilities.

Addressing this challenge required the identification of the specific needs and obstacles faced by this population in their daily lives. Frequently, these obstacles arose from the difficult decision of choosing between a successful sporting career, and pursuing an academic

path that would provide long-term stability. This dilemma resulted in a form of social exclusion, particularly impacting high-level athletes with disabilities who lacked the necessary support to balance their training and competition commitments with attending classes and studying (Aquilina, 2013).

Based on The Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Dual Careers in High-Performance Sport (European Commission, 2012), the concept of an adapted dual career emerged to achieve social inclusion for this population. It aimed to establish robust and multidisciplinary structures that could consistently support athletes who aspired to compete at a high level while simultaneously pursuing academic education that would secure their future well-being.

In one approach, certain universities have established counselling initiatives for student athletes. Similarly, the EU Erasmus+ Sport project call, focusing on the Dual Career, has spurred the creation of intriguing proposals aimed at advancing dual career opportunities at various levels. Among these initiatives, there was a successfully concluded project called ESTPORT, led by the UCAM (2016-2018), which extended the native sports mentoring model to four additional locations in European universities that lacked this position. The UCAM has earned a reputation as Spain's premier sports university, and in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, its athletes secured 14 medals. In the same year's Paralympic Games, they won seven medals, making the UCAM the world's leading university in the combined Olympic and Paralympic medal tally. This success can be attributed to its sports mentoring program, which forms the cornerstone of its dual career support policy.

Nevertheless, despite having remarkable Paralympic medallists among its ranks, including Teresa Perales (the highest-awarded Paralympic athlete globally), the UCAM lacked a specific performance program for disabled student athletes. This same gap was also observed internationally, prompting the initiation of the current project.

Much like this project, other initiatives have explored and continue to explore effective strategies to make the dual career support a fundamental component of higher education, rather than a sporadic effort (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). Upholding the human right to education must take precedence over exploiting athletes for purely commercial purposes, or as icons and heroes who are left without support when they complete their academic careers without a clear path to a profession (Adams & Holland, 2006; Isidori, 2016).

This situation is even more critical for individuals with disabilities, who face double or even triple challenges and must integrate socially in both academic and sporting realms (Bantjes et al., 2019; Grenier et al., 2014; Labonté et al., 2012). The Para-Limits project introduces a new dimension for disabled student-athletes, viewing them not as passive recipients of support measures, but as active participants with access to communication channels for providing feedback that can influence process improvements. Disabled student-athletes should serve as role models within the dual career context. To achieve the full inclusion for these athletes, various forms of learning and support should be tailored to their specific needs, as Vaquero-Cristóbal et al. (2023) showed in their research.

In this project, we undertook a ground-breaking approach, aiming to collaboratively support disabled student-athletes by involving both universities that already had disabled athletes in their student body, and expert organisations specialising in Dual Career promotion (EAS) and adapted high-level competitive sports (EPC). The project also received support from Collective Innovation, an authority in online training that employs innovative and inclusive methodologies based in Norway.

This socially inclusive and egalitarian initiative was designed to assist a group of individuals who aspired to showcase their talents. It addressed the societal imperative of ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens through the development of advanced, inclusive models (Bailey, 2005; Batts & Andrews, 2011; Groff et al., 2009).

As previously mentioned, the key EU policies related to sports, including the White Paper on Sport in 2007, the Education and Training 2020 strategy, and the Youth Strategy 2019-2027, highlight the significant role played by sports in European society. They emphasised its contributions to areas such as health, education, social and cultural interaction, as well as social inclusion. Specifically, within the domain of dual career, all these policies acknowledge the importance of offering dual career training to young student-athletes. They stress the necessity of ensuring that these athletes receive a high-quality education alongside their sports training to enhance their future employability. Already highlighted by the European Community institutions as can be read in the points "The societal role of sport" and "Enhancing the role of sport in education and training" included in the White Paper on Sport, this project is based on the use of sport as a tool to enhance the education, health, and social development of young student-athletes; in addition to strengthening international relations between countries, they were recognized for their role in enhancing Europe's human capital through sport. Sport served as a means of imparting values that fostered knowledge, motivation, skills, and a readiness for personal effort. The objective of the Para-Limits project is to establish guidelines for the training and education of young athletes in Europe, with the potential to contribute to the policies and programs mentioned earlier.

The EU's contribution to this project shifted the issue of the dual career from the national level to the regional and international levels. Different countries addressed this matter in their unique ways, leading to diverse experiences (Debois et al., 2015; Defruyt et al., 2020; Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015). The levels of dual career development varied significantly among EU nations, each following its own path and lessons learned. Most EU countries indicated that they had at least one initiative or policy focused on the Dual Career for young student-athletes. Investing in and promoting the training of talented young student-athletes under suitable conditions was deemed essential for the sustainable growth of sport at all levels. The Commission

underscored the importance of ensuring that systems for training young athletes were open to all, avoiding discrimination based on nationality and, in the case of this project, disability (Batts & Andrews, 2011; DePauw, 2012; International Paralympic Committee, 2019).

The core values of the Paralympic Movement, including determination, equality, inspiration, and courage, were central to this project, with a particular emphasis on equality. The International Paralympic Committee's definition of equality stated that "Paralympic Sport acts as an agent for change to break down social barriers of discrimination for persons with an impairment" (Haslett et al., 2017; Magnanini et al., 2022; Martin, 2013). The Para-Limits project did not solely focus on providing sports training to students with disabilities to keep them active, but also aimed to offer them an avenue toward independence, granting access to higher education, and fostering self-confidence. Sport was viewed as a tool that equipped these student-athletes with valuable life skills, such as managing pressure, handling success and failure, rigorous training, self-motivation, pushing boundaries, and discipline (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997; Höglund & Bruhn, 2022; Gladstone, 2001; Reina et al., 2018; Rezaul, 2015; Thomas & Smith, 2008).

Furthermore, the European Commission was actively developing and supporting higher education policies in EU countries in alignment with the Education and Training 2020 strategy. Two key objectives were closely related to this project: addressing future skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development, and building inclusive and connected higher education systems. Additionally, within the EU youth strategy for 2019-2027, two goals directly correlated with this project: the promotion of inclusive societies, and the enhancement of quality learning. One of the primary objectives of this project was to provide an opportunity for student-athletes with disabilities to pursue parallel careers in sports and academia, thereby contributing to a more inclusive society and enhancing the quality of educational processes in higher education institutions.

Citing the White Paper on sport, section 2.5 titled "Using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration, and equal opportunities,"

it was recognized that sport held a universal potential for promoting social cohesion, with access to sports ensured for all citizens. The importance of sports in facilitating social inclusion, particularly for underrepresented groups such as young people, individuals at risk of exclusion, and people with disabilities, was highlighted. The Para-Limits Project aimed to train mentors in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to serve as role models and positive influencers for student-athletes with disabilities. In the future, these mentors could potentially be former student-athletes who had undergone the mentoring process, ensuring the project's autonomy and continuity over time. In the past, this collaborative partnership spanning multiple countries not only facilitated the exchange of best practices, experiences, and innovative solutions among the partners, but also included a strategic aim of engaging regional and national policymakers to ensure the project's long-term sustainability.

The partnership comprised a diverse mix of participants, including universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), sports clubs and federations, private companies, and governmental authorities. The broad-reaching influence at the EU level was established by implementing the project's methodology in eight different EU countries: Spain, Romania, Italy, Portugal, Norway, Ireland, Malta, and Austria. This collaboration not only enabled the transfer of experiences, best practices, and innovative solutions, but also enhanced the project's visibility among regional and national policymakers.

The guidelines developed as part of the Para-Limits project were presented to a broad network of policymakers and stakeholders from the partner countries at the final conference held in Spain. This ensured the guidelines' transferability through an online platform.

Taking all these factors into account, the EU's added value of the project can be summarised as follows:

- Presenting an innovative approach to support high-level student-athletes with disabilities, allowing them to access valuable job-related information and knowledge tailored to their educational needs.

- Creating a network of stakeholders in each partner country, which guarantees the transfer of knowledge and experience at the EU level. The project's results were translated into English to facilitate their future implementation in the work of EU organisations.
- Emphasising an approach that considers the perspective of the target groups. These documents were designed to be adaptable and implemented in national contexts.
- Promoting a cross-sectoral approach by drawing on the expertise and experiences of the partners within their local contexts. Ultimately, shared best practices could be tailored and implemented at the local level in all partner countries.

3. Outputs from the Para-Limits project.

In relation to the outputs generated from the project Para-Limits, these were achieved through a holistic approach using both quantitative and qualitative techniques and through an international perspective made possible by the participation of all project partners. The generation of the project products began with the literature review of the state of the art in each of the participating countries (desk-research). Thanks to this information, it was possible to select and/or develop the tools to be used in the next phase of the research (field-research) to analyse the situation specifically in Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Romania, and Norway, thus being able to become aware about the prevailing situation and the specific needs in each of the countries, in order to establish common lines of action.

In this regard, a literature review was first carried out. This review focused on collecting information about the legal framework for the dual career, including national, regional, and local policies on adapted sport and social inclusion; good practices, both from public and private initiatives; general situation of high-level adapted sport at the national level; situation of access of people with disabilities to Higher Education; review of existing barriers and obstacles for the

dual career of the athlete/student with disabilities; competences for the sport mentoring of people with disabilities; and characteristics of expert support staff for the athlete with disabilities.

Following this, an exploratory phase was carried out to detect the needs and barriers of student-athletes with disabilities in achieving success in both their academic and sporting careers. For this purpose, a questionnaire was designed based on previous published questionnaires. More specifically, the "Perceptions of dual career student-athletes" (ESTPORT) questionnaire (Sánchez-Pato et al. 2016), the Exercise Benefits/Barriers Scale (EBBS) (Sechrist et al., 1987) and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Visek et al. 2008) were used for data collection. These questionnaires were completed by a total of 203 student-athletes with disabilities from different European countries. The second activity was to conduct five focus groups in different European countries. These were carried out with between six and eight people belonging to: adapted sport clubs; adapted sport federations; NGOs specialized in social inclusion of disabled people; and researchers in inclusive education.

Based on the results on barriers perceived by student-athletes with disabilities and on the conclusions of the focus groups conducted with disabled sport-related stakeholders, it was possible to detect the main problems to be solved to optimize the success of the dual career, and the topics on which professors and coaches need training in order to help student-athletes with disabilities.

Thus, a Good Practice Guide on social inclusion, adapted sport and dual careers was produced, which aimed to raise awareness among stakeholders about the real needs and barriers faced by student-athletes with disabilities, inspiring them to take positive action to promote the creation of a dual career support network for athletes with disabilities.

Subsequently, an innovative pilot course for the training of dual career expert mentors for student-athletes with disabilities was designed and implemented, whose structure and modules were based on the data collected in the pilot phase, creating a comprehensive curriculum.

The importance of the training course presented below is based on the absence of a training course of this type that is open, accessible, and adaptable to the needs of potential participants, both in terms of the time available to carry it out, as well as the contents of interest they consider should go into more depth, and from where it can be carried out. In addition, the extensive analysis carried out at the European level allows for the transfer of good practices between European Union countries, and training in common policies that promote the mobility of students and professors.

4. Conclusions.

The Para-Limits project sought to advance the social inclusion of top-level athletes with disabilities by promoting dual careers. It introduced innovative strategies to support disabled student-athletes, addressing a previously underexplored area. The project emphasized scientific evidence and a holistic approach to comprehensively tackle the challenges faced by this population. It aimed to break down barriers, facilitate social inclusion, and enhance the quality of education for disabled student-athletes, aligning with EU policies and values.

By collaborating with various stakeholders, including universities, sports clubs, and governmental authorities across eight EU countries, Para-Limits established a robust network for knowledge sharing and future implementation. The project's added value lay in its innovative approach, which provided tailored support, training, and resources, for student-athletes with disabilities, promoting equal opportunities and social cohesion.

The guidelines developed as part of Para-Limits were presented to policymakers and stakeholders, ensuring their transferability and potential impact at the EU level. Ultimately, the project aimed to empower disabled athletes to pursue dual careers successfully, contributing to a more inclusive society and the expansion of high-level adapted sports, aligning with EU objectives and values.

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