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6 **Exploring the Life Form of a Student Athlete Afforded by a Dual Career**7 **Development Environment in Finland**

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21 **Abstract**

22 The current paper introduces a case study conducted in one of the most well-established *athletic*
23 *talent development environments* (ATDE) in Finland, with the focus on the environment's
24 ecological dynamics and organisational culture, in light of its recent effort to rebrand itself as
25 *a dual career development environment* (DCDE). Our analysis has been inspired by the *holistic*
26 *ecological approach* (HEA) and *ecological dynamics*, wherein we have considered DCDE
27 from the point of view of its transactions with agentic individuals and affordances for student
28 athletes in the study domain, the sports domain, and the private domain. We believe our
29 findings can provide other sports environments with insight into what to consider when
30 transforming organisational culture of an environment to better aid their student athletes in
31 realising their dual career goals.

32 **Exploring the Life Form of a Student Athlete Afforded by a Dual Career**

33 **Development Environment in Finland**

34 In this paper, we present a case study on a Finnish *dual career development*
35 *environment* (DCDE), which refers to a “purposefully developed system that aims to
36 facilitate athletes' investment in combining their competitive sporting career with education
37 or work” (Morris et al., 2020); in other words, it is an environment that enables athletes to
38 acquire a diploma or work while competing in sports. Inspired by the *holistic ecological*
39 *approach* (HEA) (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017), we investigated the environment
40 holistically, focusing on key agents in the three domains of the environment: sport, study, and
41 private life. However, while immersing to the environment during an ethnographic stage, we
42 were faced with an obvious imbalance between the domains that we felt we could not depict
43 accurately using the DCDE model as intended by the HEA. Therefore, while drawing
44 inspiration from it and using DCDE as a tool in analysis, we were interested in developing an
45 explanatory understanding of the imbalance in the environment than simply mapping it. To
46 accomplish this task, we have used *ecological dynamics*, which emphasise the continuous
47 transactions between individuals and their environments (Davids, Araújo, & Brymer, 2016;
48 Immonen, Brymer, Davids, Liukkonen, & Jaakkola, 2018) and Schein's (2017)
49 organisational culture theory as our theoretical framework.

50 Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010) proposed shifting focus from individual
51 athletes' development to the development environment in order to facilitate the understanding
52 of challenges involved in talent development today, which later led Henriksen and
53 Stambulova (2017) to create the *athletic talent development environment* (ATDE) working
54 models to aid researchers in analysing environments. However, more recently, the importance
55 of *dual career* (DC) has been increasing in the athlete career discourse (Stambulova, Ryba, &
56 Henriksen, 2020), which is evidenced by the introduction of the DC policy guidelines (2012)

57 for the European Union states and Morris et al. (2020) recognising eight distinct types of
58 DCDEs in the European context. Moreover, DC has recently become the desired standard in
59 Finland as well: “The goal of the competitive and the elite sports system in Finland is that
60 every athlete will graduate from secondary or vocational school” (Finnish Olympic
61 Committee’s website, 2020a). We find this change to be exceedingly relevant and current due
62 to the overhaul of the application process to tertiary education occurring in spring 2020 that
63 will greatly inconvenience students who have not planned their secondary school studies with
64 a degree in mind. That is, in the future, certain careers will have secondary school course
65 requirements; for example, architects must complete the nine compulsory courses in
66 advanced mathematics in upper secondary school prior to applying to university
67 (Opintopolku’s website, 2020). We believe that sports institutions may be under pressure to
68 transform from ATDEs into DCDEs due to these changes and we also recognise the urgency
69 for action because these changes have already taken place nationally. However,
70 simultaneously, we wondered whether the sports academies that have recently rebranded,
71 such as the one we studied, have had enough time to make the required changes to its
72 organisational culture to best support their student athletes because cultural change is a slow
73 and challenging process with multiple layers and components (McDougall, Ronkainen,
74 Richardson, Littlewood, & Nesti, 2019; Schein, 2017).

75 Schein (2017) explains that in organisational culture, there are three levels: artifacts
76 (observed behaviour, and visible structures and processes,), espoused beliefs and values
77 (rationalisations, ideals, values, and aspirations), and basic underlying assumptions
78 (subconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values that determine perception, thought,
79 feeling, and behaviour). Schein, however, also highlights that artifacts are difficult to
80 decipher, as different groups may interpret them differently (e.g. pyramids have different
81 meanings in different cultures) and espoused beliefs may not be in line with behaviour or

82 artifacts, meaning that actions taken may not reflect the projected public image, which means
83 that us, as outsiders, would have to try to ask the right questions.

84 According to McDougall et al. (2019), culture cannot be consciously manipulated as a
85 whole and it is an inevitable part of the practicalities within organisations (e.g. group member
86 performance or behaviour, leadership, and strategy), they would even argue that culture does
87 not change from an old culture into an entirely new one. Moreover, McDougall et al. note
88 that there are multiple subcultures and ambiguities with differing interpretations of entities
89 within most sporting contexts, which means that the culture of a sporting environment may
90 not be a single, uniform culture, and people are also typically a part of multiple (sub)cultures.
91 However, according to Schein (2017), sharing a sense of group identity is a key component
92 of culture and it is also the force that aids in stabilising said culture, which means that for a
93 sports environment to function well, key agents must work together towards a shared identity.

94 In order to better understand the psychosocial implications of the imbalance between
95 the domains of sport, study, and private life in the environment, we focused on analysing and
96 mapping the ecological dynamics of the environment: 1) the *affordances* of the environment,
97 which Immonen et al. (2018) define broadly as relational concepts that combine features of
98 an environment with; 2) individual *effectivities*, which are perceived based on the possibilities
99 for action an individual has; and 3) *form of life*, which Davids et al. (2016) explain to
100 comprise a pattern of behaviour that becomes both regular and stable over time and may be
101 easier for some persons to acquire than others. If we borrow the example of Immonen et al.
102 (2017): “skateboarders might seek handrails in urban environments as an affordance to
103 creatively perform, normally perceived to support locomotion by other individuals, and a
104 skilled skateboarder might approach the same handrail with a different set of ‘tricks’
105 compared to novice”, we will see that affordances refer to the physical matter or persons an
106 individual can act upon, and that effectivities refer to the range or difficulty of said acts

107 available to the individual. In light of Davids et al.'s (2016) definition, a form of life in this
108 case could be persons skateboarding on a regular basis and it would be easier for persons
109 living nearby a skate park to engage in these activities, effectively making the forming of a
110 life form easier for these persons. Immonen et al. (2017) further highlight that these
111 behavioural patterns are embedded in sociocultural practices, in other words, the number of
112 different philosophies and styles of interacting with specific conditions and its constraints that
113 people develop and share. In this paper we, therefore, discuss the opportunities, expertise or
114 the lack of thereof, available to the student athletes and what patterns of behaviour they align
115 themselves with.

116 **An Ethnographic Case Study: A Respected Endurance Sport**

117 There are currently 19 sports academies, 15 sports upper secondary schools, 15 sports
118 vocational schools, and one sports university in Finland (Finnish Olympic Committee,
119 2020b). All of the secondary schools have a special national task of raising elite athletes that
120 compete at the top of their sport nationally or internationally, or simply aim to be
121 professionals in their sport (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2020a). Student athletes attending
122 these schools have their own curriculum that includes sports related courses and they may
123 complete up to eight fewer other compulsory courses (e.g. half the Finnish courses normally
124 required). In addition to the secondary schools with national tasks, there are also sports-
125 friendly schools that offer academic flexibility for student athletes, but wherein support is not
126 nationally standardised and formal arrangements may not be in place, which may lead to poor
127 communication between sporting federations and the school (Morris et al., 2020).

128 Prior to attending upper secondary schools or vocational schools, athletes in Finland
129 have traditionally been able to attend sports clubs and sports-friendly primary schools (ages
130 7-15), however, in 2017 (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2020b), a sports lower secondary
131 experiment was started in 25 schools across the country. As the experiment is still underway,

132 it is difficult to estimate its effects on the overall pathways of student athletes, however,
133 training camps aimed at student athletes attending lower secondary schools are a significant
134 part of the recruitment process of sports academies and the schools attached to them. On the
135 one hand, these camps offer sports academies with an opportunity to showcase their
136 environment, and on the other hand, they enable student athletes to familiarise themselves
137 with an environment prior to making a long-term commitment. Sports academies typically
138 also advertise their environments on their websites and social media, as do schools. For
139 example, certain sports academies share success stories of their alumni on their website, and
140 some schools highlight the possibility of combining professional sports and flexible
141 education successfully, with others barely mentioning education. Post upper secondary school
142 and vocational school, student athletes have the option of applying to a sports-friendly
143 tertiary school (only one in the country), the military's sports academy, or following other
144 non-athlete specific paths. On the whole, student athletes choose their own, individual
145 pathways as there are no established tracks available.

146 The environment chosen for this ethnographic case study was one that had a) been
147 established before the DC guidelines were published by the European Commission (2012),
148 which means that the environment has only recently gone through the transformation from an
149 ATDE into a DCDE; b) has a history of producing a high number of successful elite athletes;
150 and c) has an upper secondary school as a part of the environment. Within this environment,
151 we chose a respected endurance sport that requires high volumes of training and has been a
152 consistently popular sport in Finland.

153 In a reported compiled by the Research Institute for Olympic Sports (2017), the upper
154 secondary had 336 students, of which 162 were student athletes in 2016. Currently (school's
155 website, 2020a), the sports academy has 21 sports staff members of whom 19 are coaches, 22
156 teachers, and a dormitory 'mother' (i.e., a person whose job is to support student athletes in

157 the dormitory and to conduct room inspections). Most coaches are previous elite athletes of
158 their sport and are considered role models and mentors by student athletes. Each coach is
159 officially responsible for 15 student athletes' training and absences, however, they are also
160 the most likely persons the student athletes will turn to when facing hardships. Additionally,
161 the sports academy has close ties with the Olympic Committee, the relevant sport association,
162 and there is a research facility in the vicinity of the academy. The access to and the number of
163 sports related services, such as physiotherapy and testing, is also good. Overall, the sports
164 related affordances in the environment are high and there is much for student athletes to gain
165 by being in the environment.

166 Out of the 22 teachers, two act as student counsellors, two are currently on a leave of
167 absence, 14/22 teach at least two subjects, and 15/22 are homeroom teachers. Moreover, they
168 are also responsible for teaching non-athlete students and while there are courses with only
169 student athletes, many courses are shared by both. Three out of four interviewed teachers
170 were previous student athletes themselves, the fourth was not a former student athlete, but
171 had family members who were; all had an understanding of what it means to be a student
172 athlete. In comparison to sports, the educational affordances are fewer.

173 This study is based on Finland's data drawn from the Erasmus+ Sport project
174 'Ecology of Dual Career' (ECO-DC) that received ethical approval from the Ethics
175 Committee of the relevant university. The environment and its complexity were investigated
176 from multiple perspectives within a real-life context in the form of an ethnographic case
177 study wherein we study the form of life, affordances and effectivities in a well-established
178 sports environment in Finland. We position ourselves within the philosophical realm of
179 critical realism, which subscribes to an assumption that there is a reality independent of our
180 knowledge of it (ontological realism). However, we also maintain that our knowledge is
181 theory-laden and fallible (epistemological constructivism) (Maxwell, 2017). Our chosen

182 methods provide us with a thick description of the environment and our stance aims to
183 explain the social-psychological phenomena behind it. Finally, we transformed the DCDE
184 working model into an empirical model based on the data collected in the environment.

185 **Data Collection**

186 An ethnographical case study approach was chosen for data collection in order to
187 study the balance of the domains in the environment, the ecological dynamics that showcase
188 it, and the culture that may explain it. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), explain that
189 ethnographic research consists of participating in the daily lives of people, observing them,
190 and interacting with them, while collecting available data that is relevant to the issue studied.
191 To this end, the first and second author travelled to the environment and in doing so, we
192 employed participant observation (Spradely, 1980) due to its ability to enhance one's
193 understanding of a culture (Tangaard, 2006) as well as in an attempt to achieve contextual
194 sensitivity. We conducted 14 semi-structured interviews and 17 hours of observations within
195 the environment (dormitories, school, and practice) and an additional five days of
196 observations during competitions. Observing the student athletes for five days outside of their
197 environment provided a meaningful insight into their forms of life outside the environment.
198 During the stay in the environment, we collected documents both physically and online, and
199 supplemented the interviews with an additional four non-structured interviews with key
200 stakeholders at a later date. The interviews were 20-150 minutes long each; participants
201 included student athletes, their parents, teachers, coaches, school principal, student
202 counsellor, mental trainer, dormitory 'mother' and academy director. The first author, whose
203 background is in education, observed teachers and student athletes within the school as well
204 as the dormitories, whereas the second author, whose background is in sports, observed
205 coaches and student athletes during practice and competitions.

206 Data Analysis and Interpretation

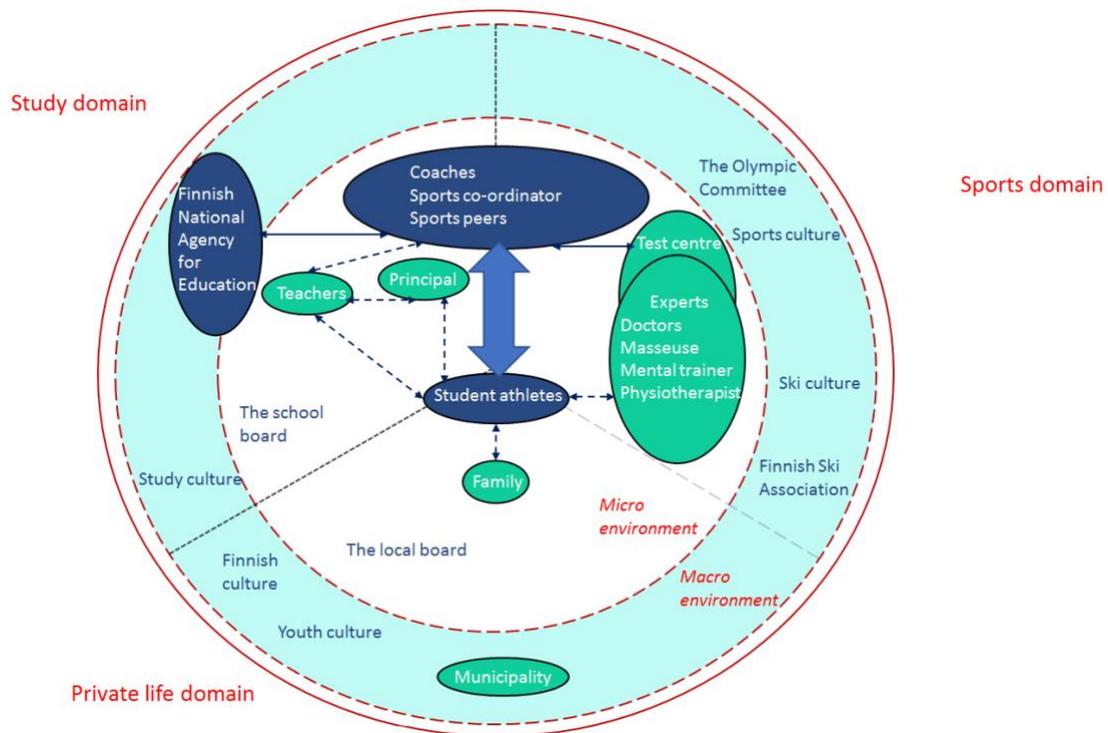
207 Our data analysis included transforming the working DCDE model developed within
208 the ECO-DC project into the empirical model based on a rich data set consisting of
209 interviews, observations, and documents. First, the first and third author discussed the
210 organisation of the environment and mapped first version of the DCDE empirical model
211 immediately after the ethnographic phase. Next, the first, second and third author discussed
212 and modified the model several times over meetings as they were immersing in the collected
213 data.

214 The second author analysed the data by conducting a thematic analysis at the latent
215 level (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016), which was connected to deductive and inductive
216 processes, in what may be described as the abductive approach. Abductive reasoning allows
217 for moving between meanings and the theoretical framework throughout the analysis, which
218 is a process that the third author facilitated, and it also acknowledges the creative process of
219 interpretation when viewing participants' experiences through a theoretical framework
220 (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012). We chose this
221 approach to better understand the participants' experiences (inductively) and to explore how
222 these experiences could be understood (deductively) in the light of organisational culture
223 (McDougall et al., 2019; Schein, 2017), ecological dynamics (Davids et al., 2016; Immonen
224 et al., 2018), and inspired by the HEA (Henriksen et al., 2010). Once data analyses were
225 complete, the DCDE model was refined and presented for feedback in the environment, after
226 which it was finalised into the current version.

227

228

The Empirical Model



229

230 Figure 1 — The empirical model of a Finnish dual career development environment.

231 In the empirical model, we have used arrows to indicate relationship dynamics. Solid
232 arrows indicate a strong relationship, whereas dashed lines indicate a weaker relationship.

233 The divider between the sports domain and the private life domain differs in colour and style
234 to depict the lack of a clear boundary between the two as we found that the non-sports related
235 affordances were limited in the environment. For example, student athlete ‘Johanna’

236 [pseudonym] expressed that living away from the dormitories has been beneficial to her due
237 to the decreased presence of other athletes training. According to Gibson (as cited in Davids
238 et al., 2016), affordances are not always necessarily positive; they may have negative

239 consequences and it seems that ‘Johanna’ may have viewed the sport driven form of life of
240 athletes as such.

241 The Role of Coaches

242 The core of the environment was the strong relationship between the student athletes
243 and the coaches. The coaches' official responsibilities comprise training and informing
244 teachers of upcoming competitions and training camps, helping student athletes to book
245 appointments for expert services like the environment's mental trainer, test centre,
246 physiotherapist et cetera, as well as create plans for individual athletes with experts.
247 However, coaches were also the closest persons to the student athletes in the environment,
248 typically made themselves available outside of their working hours and thus partook in many
249 unofficial tasks, such as helping student athletes with homework and major tests
250 (matriculation examinations), as well as their personal problems, alongside the official duties.
251 Regardless the nature of the issue the student athletes were faced with, they would typically
252 turn to their coaches for assistance. On the one hand, this resulted in a strong bond between
253 the two, but on the other hand, it led to the coaches being overworked and dealing with issues
254 they had no training for, which is concerning for two reasons: 1) student athletes may not
255 have the required effectivities to recognise other affordances in the environment or they may
256 not trust them; and 2) the organisational culture within the environment is fragmented to the
257 point that coaches feel they cannot trust agents in the other domains. The former was
258 supported by none of the interviewed student athletes naming key agents besides coaches;
259 and the latter may be supported by coaches choosing to rely on themselves rather than
260 redirecting student athletes to more relevant agents. The first and second author also
261 discovered clear tensions between the coaches and the teachers specifically in the meeting
262 they presented the findings of the study in. These tensions surfaced after a coach unrelated to
263 the study stated that teachers did not understand coaches' work and that maybe they could
264 learn to do so in the future, which was met with a negative reaction from the teachers.
265 However, interestingly, all of the teaching staff interviewed (four) had some level of expert

266 knowledge of a student athlete's life as they had all either been student athletes or had one in
267 their family, which means that they likely possess some insight on the topic, although that is
268 not to say that they possess a nuanced understanding of coaches' work or know all there is to
269 know about being a student athlete. Although it is unclear whether the teaching staff had
270 shared their experience, we recognise it is a notable affordance that may aid in bringing
271 together the teaching and sports staff, as well as encourage student athletes to rely more on
272 their teachers of their own volition.

273 Additionally, the coaches benefit from annual in-service training, both by the sports
274 academy and the Olympic Committee, discussions arranged for them by the sports academy,
275 and conferences offered by the sports association, all with the aim of further developing the
276 coaches' skills and knowledgebase. In other words, the coaches' effectivities are well-
277 maintained and continued to be systematically developed, which made the coaches very
278 valuable assets to the environment.

279 **The Sports Domain and the Private Domain**

280 As can be seen in Figure 1, the sports domain was dominant and encroached on all the
281 other domains. In terms of affordances, this domination was visible in how the sports
282 facilities were prioritised and staff training. For example, the academy was investing in a
283 notable piece of rental equipment despite the school using somewhat outdated teaching
284 equipment (e.g. lack of online material, cited by the student counsellor and observed by the
285 first author), the lack of teacher training (cited by teacher 'Milla' [pseudonym]), and mould
286 issues in the school that were affecting students and teachers. Student athlete 'Johanna'
287 counted herself lucky and described the mould issues as:

288 Well it doesn't bug me when I'm healthy... but when I was sick ... and I had to go to
289 school to take a test so that's when I noticed that like, my head felt like it was gonna
290 explode and I couldn't stop coughing ...

291 It was particularly difficult to separate the sports domain from the private life domain
292 because besides spending time in each other's rooms, common room and sauna, the student
293 athletes chose to do sport related activities in their free time and did so mostly with athletes
294 from their own sport. Based on our interpretations of the interviews with student athletes and
295 the observations, the link between peers was strong whereas the link between them and their
296 family had weakened since relocation to the environment. Concretely, student athlete 'Paavo'
297 was the only one out of the six student athletes interviewed that contacted his family on a
298 daily basis, with others reporting to not seeing or contacting their family often, and student
299 athletes overall speaking little about their parents even after probing. If student athletes spoke
300 of the importance of their family, besides student athlete 'Johanna', only the financial support
301 that enabled the athletes to remain in the environment and the support provided when an
302 athlete was struggling were mentioned. For example, student athlete 'Anniina' found that she
303 seldom had much time to miss her family nor did she see them often, and student athlete
304 'Tanja' noted she might call her family if she had a day off and her friends were busy, and
305 she had nothing else to do, which was also cited as a reason for visiting home: "so if I know
306 I've got a lighter week ahead of me, I like to go home because I know there's like, more stuff
307 to do besides just chilling or doing sports".

308 Although one possible reason behind student athletes not mentioning their families
309 may be due to location of the environment, it is difficult to enter or exit via public
310 transportation due to its sparsity and because underage students cannot get a license, and it
311 may be difficult for families to visit due to a lack of accommodation. It is also possible that
312 student athletes simply take their parents for granted. For example, father 'Jaakko' reported a
313 close relationship with his son, which culminated in the two being able to discuss anything,
314 contacting each other three times a week, and the student athlete visiting home twice every
315 three months, with 'Jaakko' possibly visiting his son in the environment within that

316 timeframe as well. This could indicate that the location of the environment may be a
317 hindrance, but ultimately not the key issue, with the relationship between the student athlete
318 and their parents playing a more significant role. Furthermore, 'Jaakko' praised the
319 environment for its improvements in the sports domain and professionalism, noting that, in
320 his opinion, it is important that the best student athletes receive the most support in the
321 environment, and that the student athletes whose sport motivation decreases are not the
322 environment's responsibility. Interestingly, 'Jaakko', despite being a teacher, also did not
323 seem to take any interest in his son's education, only mentioning education in relation to
324 communication with the school, which was stated to be the responsibility of the student
325 athlete's mother and the reason why he did not know anything about it.

326 Conversely, mother 'Tuula' noted that she and her daughter's father, whose
327 relationship with the student athlete was stated to be better, had wished that their daughter
328 would not enter the environment and arguments had ensued, although the parents had
329 supported their child in her decision in the end. Ultimately 'Tuula' expressed her worry over
330 her daughter and reported to attempting to stay in touch daily, but also noted that her
331 daughter would occasionally hang up without a warning, and that she may not be aware of
332 everything happening in the environment. Moreover, 'Tuula' stated that she only
333 communicated with the school when necessary (clearing extended absences with the
334 principal) and that whereas the communication with the coaches had been better in
335 comparison to school initially, however, 'Tuula' felt that once her daughter began to show
336 signs of struggling (overtraining, being ill repeatedly), the communication had become less
337 frequent and mostly took place indirectly through the student athlete. 'Tuula' also noted that
338 prior to the struggles, her daughter's coach had been inflexible in regards to the training
339 program, insisting certain matters be done in a certain way, which implies that some attempts

340 had been made at discussing and changing the program prior to the struggles, and that to
341 ‘Tuula’s’ knowledge (satisfactory) actions had not been taken.

342 ‘Tuula’ had also noticed that after spending an extended period of time at home, her
343 daughter was more energetic and expressed her emotions more freely in comparison to
344 before, which is an important notion because it showcases the importance of student athletes
345 maintaining good relations with their parents and the need for a break away from the
346 environment. Furthermore, from a developmental point of view, this is a life stage for upper
347 secondary school aged young people wherein peers become more important to them and
348 although it is possible that they take their parents for granted, it does not mean that their
349 relationship is weak. However, it is also concerning that student athletes typically did not
350 mention their families beyond financial needs and that the communication between the
351 domains and the families was poor, as student athletes have important developmental tasks
352 they must complete (e.g. such as exploring their identity, social relationships, sexuality) in
353 this life stage and a weak relationship with one’s family is not beneficial. It also further
354 highlights the issue present in the environment wherein the student athlete’s form of life is
355 predominantly about sports, their coaches, and their peers, as connecting with family and
356 socialising with people with diverse views would also be important.

357 In this sense, the form of life of a typical athlete was to eat, exercise, attend school,
358 and train with the same few people every day, which may be harmful to their overall
359 development because, according to Savickas (2013), personality is built outside in rather than
360 inside out, meaning outside agents are essential in moulding one’s personality, and because
361 personal development is fostered by change, which is triggered by other people. Savickas
362 suggests that the reason for this is that individuals are reluctant to exit their comfort zones
363 and require others to push them. Therefore, if the individual were to be surrounded mostly by
364 other likeminded people, they run the risk of not venturing outside of their comfort zone and

365 thus, missing meaningful opportunities for growth. Moreover, an imbalanced environment
366 may also be stressful: student athletes ‘Miika’ and ‘Johanna’ stated that they wished to move
367 out of the dormitory specifically due to needing a break from sports and finding it difficult to
368 get one while living in the dormitory.

369 It should also be noted that the environment valued sports achievements highly and
370 commonly only the students who had achieved success in competitions would receive
371 recognition on the academy’s website and on social media, which is significant in that the
372 sports academy is responsible for marketing the environment to potential students and in that
373 especially the successful athlete alumni are used in recruiting new students. For example, the
374 names of multiple athlete alumni are mentioned on the school’s website and student athlete
375 ‘Johanna’ also recites the names of several successful athlete alumni as potential reasons for
376 enrolment. Furthermore, some valuable affordances, such as the services of the mental
377 trainer, were reserved for elite athletes and coaches only, and although the student athletes
378 were supportive of each other and their teammates, the focus on achievements may have
379 contributed to the perceived difficulty of having a break from sports in the dormitory, as
380 evidenced by student athlete ‘Anniina’s’ statement: “Yeah and maybe that’s just the thing
381 that we have here, there might be some difficulty in focusing on your own thing when you’re
382 just looking at other people”. Moreover, a gatekeeper noted that the possibility of a rating
383 system where talented athletes would be prioritised has been discussed. It may also have
384 ultimately contributed to the coaches choosing the authoritarian style, which, according to
385 Lockwood and Perlman (2008), is a coaching style where a coach provides direct instruction
386 to student athletes and makes all the decisions for them, which, while enabling athletes to
387 achieve precise performances and maintain discipline amongst athletes, does not support
388 them in growing into independent athletes. For example, the divergent coaching style requires
389 athletes to practise their skills in multiple ways and to learn decision making skills, which

390 help them develop their creative side and learn responsibility over their learning (Lockwood
391 & Perlman, 2008).

392 Since our research was not concerned with the reason behind the environment's
393 coaches choosing the more authoritarian coaching style, we can merely speculate that it may
394 have had to do with the expectations of producing elite athletes or because this style of
395 coaching has been used successfully in the environment until today. As cited by the academy
396 director, elite athletes are a significant source of income and a means of recruiting new
397 athletes, which is also visible on the school's website (13 mentions of athlete alumni on the
398 front page for sports upper secondary applicants (school's website, 2020b)). Hence, although
399 this coaching style may have been successful in the past, we recognise that the affordances
400 for the study domain that would have naturally existed within the sports domain in the form
401 of informal learning were overlooked as a result of this style. Moreover, through observations
402 and interviews, we noticed that the opportunities within the school were treated as less
403 important by student athletes. For example, it was common for student athletes to prioritise
404 sports by skipping class, leaving homework unfinished, and arriving late, which may be due
405 to sports being the reason the interviewed student athletes chose this environment. Student
406 athlete 'Viljami' expressed that "because all the main goals are in sports so that might be why
407 it's sort of hard to get motivated for school to the extent that you need to be or should be".

408 We consider this phenomenon deserving of attention because it may lead to gaps in
409 education as evidenced by the cases in Edwards's (2019) article, where colleges were
410 creating fake courses for their student athletes, and because the interviewed student
411 counsellor noted that student athletes typically do not begin to consider future career
412 prospects besides that of a professional athlete until the end of their secondary education or,
413 commonly, after it. As stated before, due to the recent changes to the Finnish application
414 system, this phenomenon and the imbalance of the domains is becoming serious risks to the

415 student athletes' future DC and, worse yet, it seems as though the environment itself is
416 turning its plentiful sports related affordances into a threat to individual development.

417 **The Study Domain**

418 As mentioned above, the study domain was visibly not as valued in the environment
419 as sports. We saw physical evidence of this in classrooms being named after alumni who had
420 achieved success in sports and in the ways funds were prioritised: the sport facilities were
421 top-notch and were being upgraded, whereas equipment and material used in education was
422 somewhat outdated (e.g. lack of online material). Moreover, teacher 'Milla' also noted that
423 teachers do not receive annual teacher training (coaches do), teacher 'Emmi' stated that some
424 coaches would skip the once per semester meeting set up between homeroom teachers and
425 coaches, and sports were repeatedly cited as the reason for student athletes to enrol in the
426 school to the point that education was barely mentioned beyond the scope of graduating one
427 way or another (even on the school's website for applicants, where studies and studying are
428 mentioned a total of four times versus 13 mentions of athlete alumni and nine mentions of
429 sports or training (school's website, 2020b)), which, although less physical, were clear signs
430 of the lack of value assigned to the study domain. It was also not always clear whether the
431 purpose of coming to school was to learn, to socialise with sports peers, or to utilise the free
432 lunch opportunity provided by Finnish schools, although this may be true for non-athlete
433 students as well. However, in comparison to the goals for high achievement set in sports, the
434 goal in upper secondary education was to graduate rather than meet specific grade or career
435 related goals, despite the upcoming, known changes to the application process. According to
436 Kalenius (2014), in order to find employment in Finland, one is typically required to possess
437 a profession or a master's degree, which means that early and continuous career counselling
438 would be important to the student athletes' future, yet according to student athlete 'Viljami',
439 there is no guidance for tertiary education opportunities unless the student actively and

440 independently seeks the information out themselves. The interviewed student counsellor,
441 however, refuted this claim by stating that such guidance is available to student athletes, they
442 simply choose not to utilise it during their studies, which suggests that it may be more likely
443 that the sources able to provide guidance are not recognised as affordances by student
444 athletes, or that they are not being encouraged to use them by agents they consider role
445 models. For example, as stated before, student athletes viewed coaches as their mentors and
446 role models, yet we found that while coaches encouraged studying, they did not encourage
447 the continuation of their studies after graduation. There was also no mention of concrete
448 actions taken to promote education, rather, student athletes were advised to prioritise sports
449 and complete homework if there was time left.

450 According to Savickas (2013), children resolve conflicts in their life by looking to
451 role models who have had similar issues and have managed to solve them, which means that
452 in order for student athletes to take their studies and future career aspirations besides that of a
453 professional athlete more seriously, it would be crucial for coaches to support their efforts.
454 This idea was supported by teacher ‘Emmi’s’ observation that the attitude of popular sports
455 was detrimental to the overall attitude of the group: if a popular sports peer viewed education
456 as valuable, the other athletes in the group tended to do so as well, and vice versa. Moreover,
457 this specific environment also had a high number of teachers with personal knowledge of a
458 student athlete’s life: they have potential to provide unique support to the athletes of the
459 environment. If the coaches and the teachers were to communicate better and work towards
460 the same goals together, they may be able to greatly improve the effectivities of each other
461 and the affordances of the environment, which would likely benefit the students greatly.

462 Although there were no grade or career specific goals in the environment, the study
463 domain seemed results oriented as well. The first and second author observed student athletes
464 taking tests seemingly frequently during their observations, although it is difficult to ascertain

465 whether student athletes were being tested more frequently than upper secondary students
466 normally would be based on a short period of observations. The high number of tests may, for
467 example, be due to student athletes travelling often for competitions, which could cause tests
468 to build up over time. This interpretation is supported by teacher ‘Milla’s’ comment:
469 “because student athletes are quite often not here during tests or even retakes .. I’d say that I
470 do that on a weekly, sometimes even daily, basis, have student athletes take tests they
471 missed ..”, although it is not possible to rate the overall frequency of testing in a Finnish
472 school based on one teacher, or even one course, as teachers have full authority over their
473 educational methods. It was, however, clear that the current system was putting a strain on
474 both the teachers and the student athletes: all the interviewed student athletes besides
475 ‘Johanna’ felt that their workload for school was high and student athlete ‘Paavo’ in
476 particular felt that he had little time to himself. He described his daily life being consumed
477 with training, travelling to or being at school, or doing homework. ‘Paavo’s’ testimony is
478 consistent with past research (c.f., Elliott, Drummond, & Knight, 2018; Ryba et al., 2017) and
479 it is also concerning that the student athletes’ perception of their form of life is that they are
480 always partaking in school or sports related activities. This perception lacks the private life
481 domain that is an integral part of the holistic view, it does not support achieving the important
482 developmental tasks set for the life stage upper secondary school aged youths are in, and both
483 may lead to future issues. For example, if student athletes feel that they are not getting a
484 break or enough rest, any amount of work may feel high regardless of the actual amount.
485 There may even already be some evidence of this happening as student athlete ‘Johanna’
486 stated that she does not necessarily do schoolwork while she is away competing, and both
487 ‘Anniina’ and ‘Paavo’ confessed to forgetting to or not doing their homework at times.
488 Teachers ‘Jaana’ and ‘Emmi’ drew attention to well-being and managing one’s energy as
489 well, with the former noting the importance and difficulty of student athletes managing their

490 energy and with the latter expressing the necessity for student athletes to determine and
491 maintain boundaries for what they consider to be enough on their behalf (and that others have
492 to accept it as well).

493 In order to aid student athletes in bearing the workload, some efforts were taken. For
494 example, staff members claimed that student athletes do not have as much schoolwork during
495 the competitive season of their sport, however, student athlete ‘Viljami’ had an opposing
496 view: in his opinion, student athletes are assigned a disproportional amount of work for being
497 absent, which would cause schoolwork to pile up excessively during the competitive season
498 (e.g. the high number of tests witnessed by first and second author). Although there were
499 student athletes who felt that the school was not flexible enough academically, student athlete
500 ‘Johanna’ had transferred from a non-sports upper secondary school and said she was doing
501 less work and getting the same or better grades than before, which may indicate that student
502 athletes lack the effectivities to accurately measure the amount of school work or they may
503 simply be overburdened by the system overall. Considering that student athletes collectively
504 felt that especially the freshman year was challenging due to the high number of courses, 35
505 courses out of the total 75 required, and that some student athletes expressed relief after
506 removing themselves from the dormitory, it may be useful for the environment to reconsider
507 its division of labour. For example, although the purpose of this endeavour was to leave
508 student athletes with more time for sports in the following years of their studies, student
509 athletes are left with little free time and feel burdened. Student athlete ‘Paavo’ in particular
510 felt that he was left to deal with the challenges alone and wished there had been a better
511 support network. According to Henriksen, Storm, Kuettel, Linnér and Stambulova (2020),
512 having a DCDE support team is beneficial to the success of such environments, which may
513 be an affordance this environment ought to invest in. Meanwhile, key agents in the
514 environment should attempt to create fast acting solutions to safeguard student athletes’

515 futures. One such effort the key agents could undertake is debating and reconsidering the
516 priorities in flexibility of their environment, although we recognise that it is not an easy task
517 as it would require the agents in the environment to improve their communication, find a
518 shared culture, and come to an agreement on the direction to take, which we know to be a
519 slow and difficult process based on literature (e.g. McDougall et al., 2019; Schein, 2017). We
520 also acknowledge that even if the aforementioned factors were in order, shifting the
521 environment's focus to a more balanced one would require significant changes to its
522 operations and systems. For example, because there is a concrete lack of activities besides
523 sports in the environment, even if more time were to be released from sports into the other
524 domains, it is likely that student athletes would continue to engage in sports, which would not
525 solve the issue of imbalance currently present in the environment. Moreover, although it is
526 important that teachers and coaches improve their communication, in order to strengthen the
527 connection between student athletes and their families, the environment would have to invest
528 more into including student athletes' families. We, therefore, fully recognise that developing
529 the environment and solving its issues would require resources and effort that would not be
530 possible to deliver overnight.

531 The role of flexibility (academic) as a key affordance of a DCDE is easy to recognise
532 as it is explicitly mentioned in six of the eight descriptions of the types of DCDEs Morris et
533 al. (2020) discovered in the context of European Union states, yet the level of flexibility may
534 be difficult to evaluate. On the one hand, teachers were willing to make exceptions and
535 accommodate for sports by remaking tests frequently and allowing student athletes some
536 freedom in terms of classwork, but on the other hand, there are also rules and regulations they
537 must follow. If a teacher has not seen what a student is capable of by receiving enough work,
538 they cannot justify their grading and, thus, cannot grade the student. Incidentally, the
539 interviewed student counsellor revealed that the school has additional solutions for student

540 athletes whose schedule does not work with the school, for example, students may complete
541 school in five years instead of four or they can complete courses in night school. However,
542 these affordances were not preferred, and student athletes were not alerted to their existence.

543 **Reflections**

544 Acknowledging the limitations of a brief ethnographic period in the environment, it
545 was clear that the study domain was underdeveloped and the different domains of the
546 environment were imbalanced as both the teachers and the coaches were overworked, and
547 student athletes reported to having difficulties as well. There was deficiency of certain
548 affordances in the study domain and the private domain (e.g. online material, teacher training,
549 and non-sports related activities in the dormitories) and the effectivities of different agents
550 were not being utilised or recognised in domains, which ultimately caused instability in all
551 domains and led to a one-dimensional form of life for student athletes.

552 As Gibson suggested (as cited in Davids et al., 2016), affordances may not always
553 have positive outcomes and it is important for people to manage those affordances in order to
554 avoid danger to themselves. Based on our findings, it seems that the dominating presence of
555 sports-related affordances may be causing the other domains to suffer and it may also be
556 nurturing a negative form of life for the athletes as they are willing to skip school and
557 assignments in favour of doing sports. Moreover, student athletes also did not seem to
558 attribute resources to taking care of their developmental needs beyond sports, which could be
559 seen in most athletes not taking the time to connect with their families and non-athlete peers
560 at school. Although this may not have been an issue for the student athletes thus far, it seems
561 highly possible that it will turn into one in the long-run if the key agents in the domains do
562 not work on mutual understanding to form a shared culture and better plan the utilisation of
563 the opportunities they wish to offer to their student athletes.

589 interacted with the school on a regular basis, one having no knowledge on the topic at all, and
590 with the other only communicating with the school when necessary.

591 Considering that nearly 70% of student athletes attending upper secondary school in
592 Finland expect to obtain a master's degree in the future (Ryba et al., 2016) and that, in the
593 light of the application overhaul, it seems that student athletes attending secondary schools
594 with a national task may be somewhat more vulnerable to future course related complications
595 due to ability to exclude eight courses, it would be crucial for this environment to ensure all
596 agents within their environment establish better communication and co-operation to ensure
597 the best possible outcome for student athletes, that is, a balanced and sustainable DC that
598 does not happen at the expense of any of the important pieces of a student athlete's present
599 and future life. More concretely, according to the Council of State (Valtioneuvosto, 2017),
600 upper secondary schools with a national tasks are intended for athletes aiming to compete at
601 high levels and such schools ought to "enable the co-ordination of upper secondary studies
602 and competitive sports", which is currently not happening due to the constant prioritisation of
603 sports. Moreover, the environment should also be working to improve the inclusion of
604 families in the student athletes' lives, as well as supporting school-aged young people's
605 learning of challenging developmental tasks associated with their life stage. This is critical
606 because, due to its location, it is the dominant environment for the student athletes' overall
607 development. As it stands, based on our observations, interviews, and collected data, the
608 imbalance in the environment is likely causing student athletes to not receive all the
609 important seeds necessary for their future life design.

610 Furthermore, we recommend that other, similar environments that are going through
611 the same transformation should exercise extra caution in the integration of efforts and
612 interpretations should be debated together in order to build mutual trust and understanding.
613 Student athletes should preferably be made a part of this process and be allowed to share their

614 experiences to foster understanding of freedoms and flexibilities, as well as responsibilities.
615 Although there typically are no dedicated DC teams in Finland, we recommend establishing
616 such a team as recent findings suggest that having one contributes to the success of DCDEs
617 (Henriksen et al., 2020), whose role will likely continue to increase (at least in Finland). We
618 also recognise the need for further research in order to better support environments
619 experiencing similar issues.

620 **Conclusion**

621 Investigating a sports environment that recently rebranded (but not yet transformed)
622 from an ATDE into a DCDE through the lenses of organisational culture (McDougall et al.,
623 2019; Schein, 2017), ecological dynamics (Davids et al., 2016; Immonen et al., 2018) and
624 with the support of the HEA (Henriksen et al., 2010) provided us with insights into the
625 functions of the environment and the life of a student athlete it forms. We discovered the
626 imbalance of the environment and explored the reasons behind it, which could be useful in
627 improving this and other environments facing similar issues or circumstances. Other
628 environments transforming from an ATDE into a DCDE should work towards a shared
629 understanding of culture that is built on trust and mutual effort, and key agents ought to learn
630 to recognise the expertise they each possess and utilise it accordingly. We argue that
631 undertaking such efforts is crucial to ensuring sustainability of the environment to support
632 student athletes' dual careers and overall life balance.

633 **Declaration of Conflicts of Interest**

634 The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research,
635 authorship and/or publication of this article.

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731

732 Table 1

733 *Overview of data collection*

Observations		
Place	Activities observed	Informal interviews
At the school (12 h)	Classes and teaching with student	Mental trainer
	and non-student athletes	Dormitory attendant
	Everyday interaction	11 student-athletes
	School activity and behaviour	1 former student-athlete
Dormitory (1 h)	Student-athlete free time activities	2 coaches
	Student-athlete behaviour	
At the sports academy (6 h)	Training and coaching	
	Meetings	
	Everyday interaction	
At the competitions (5 d)	Coaching and student-athlete	
	behaviour	
Semi-structured interviews		
Interviewee	Time	Place
Upper secondary principal	45 min	Sports academy cafe
The head of the academy	50 min	Meeting room

Teacher Jaana	37 min	Classroom
Teacher Milla	54 min	Classroom
Teacher Emmi	58 min	Cafe
Student counsellor Pihla	150 min	Phone
Student athlete Miika	21 min	Sports hotel cafe
Student athlete Johanna	46 min	Sports hotel cafe
Student athlete Viljami	38 min	Sports hotel cafe
Student athlete Anniina	33 min	Meeting room
Student athlete Tanja	48 min	Meeting room
Student athlete Paavo	25 min	School building
Coach Juuso	50 min	Sports hotel cafe
Coach Mika	49 min	Meeting room

Document analysis

Class schedule, website (school, academy, municipality), reports of the statistics of the sports academy (e.g., graduation rates, medal results, number of elite athletes) social media, race results.
