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Transnational Migration in Sport and Exercise: Co-producing Transition Spaces

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Editorial

Transnational Migration in Sport and Exercise: Co-producing Transition Spaces

The psychological studies of transnational athletes' careers and sport migrants' adaptations are uniquely situated at the intersection of cultural sport psychology and athlete career discourses, nuancing our understanding of migrants' subjectivities, experiences, and pursuits. Cultural sport psychology scholars promote cultural praxis in the form of culturally competent research and practice with individuals and, therefore, foreground their intersecting identities, cultural humility, critical perspectives on culture, acculturation, and acculturating environments, as well as context-driven practice (Krane & Waldron, 2021; McDougall et al., 2020; Ryba et al., 2013; 2018; Schinke et al., 2019). Career scholars study transnational migration as a career development issue from perspective of the whole person, whole career, and whole environment, as well as centralise cultural transitions and cultural adaptation interventions (Stambulova et al., 2021). These complementary views converged in *Cultural Transition model* (Ryba et al., 2016) to expose the dynamics of cultural transition processes as co-produced in relevant environments and contexts. The Cultural Transition model describes a temporal transition structure, consisting of three phases, the developmental tasks for each phase, and the mechanisms of unfolding cultural adaptation. Since its development, this model has been a theoretical foundation for many cultural transition studies and, moreover, informed psychological support of mobile sports persons (e.g., Ryba, Elbe et al., 2020; Ryba, Stambulova et al., 2020).

Calling papers for this Special Issue of *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, we emphasised the local/global interconnectivity of private and public business practices within sport and exercise industry as we sought to contextualise sporting migrations, including different forms of transnational movement: short-term mobility, long-term migration, and immigration. In the last two years, the concurrent global COVID-19 pandemic and the massive displacement of people by the war in Ukraine have accentuated that migrations are

embedded in a social, political, economic, and ideological context sustained by a complex network of social relations. That is, while migration refers to the physical movement of bodies, objects, and ideas from one place to another, it instigates a transition process through a series of events produced by the individuals, groups, as well as various organizations and institutions within relational space. Keeping in mind potential messiness and an ambivalent effect of power in the transition context, cultural transitions often leave disjuncture among institutional networks; hence, sport migrants around the world must construct their own paths through a transnational life, with less predictable trajectories. In addition to increased uncertainty in their transition context, the fluidity of social relations and cultural ties in cross-border living spaces also makes it more complex and challenging to study the psychological dimensions of migrants' transitions in the course of time. As guest editors, our process goals for this issue were to engage the contributing scholars to (1) ask uncharted or more complex questions with regards to the psychological dimensions of migration; (2) embark on methodological complexities to explore analytical solutions and novel forms of representation; (3) outreach to marginalised groups to produce meaningful transformation for newcomers and receivers; and (4) problematise certain practices currently in circulation while showing sustainable development paths for transnational communities and society.

Contributors to the Special Issue

We received 24 submissions from which 13 have been successfully peer reviewed and are now available for you. We are pleased with the geographical distribution of our authors, whom reside in 15 different countries worldwide. Of the 13 accepted articles, the following migration contexts were investigated: *high performance/ professional sport* (six papers), *recreational youth sport* (three papers), and *sport sciences* (four papers). Among them, there are three review-type papers, nine research papers (six qualitative, two mixed-methods, and

one quantitative), and one commentary. Below we provide a brief overview of contributions and insights offered by the authors.

Transnational Migration in High Performance/Professional Sport

In the narrative review paper, *Bobrownicki and Valentin* emphasised diversity of transnational sport subjects and paid special attention to marginalised groups of migrants experiencing constraints derived from nation-based sporting policies, organisations, and events. Based on analysis of authors' experiences and publicly available cases, the authors contributed with a (preliminary) taxonomy of identity orientations related to athletes' mobility, including novel groups termed *postnational*, *intranational*, and *non-national* athletes to be further studied by researchers and considered by practitioners.

In the mixed-methods research paper, *Storm et al.* focused on cultural transition experiences of young, professional Danish footballers with an emphasis on relational support. Data from survey and interviews with players and parents were integrated into the empirical model of the cultural transition of Danish footballers describing their experiences and influential relationships (e.g., with agents, coaches, peers, parents) co-producing the dynamic transition context throughout the three transition phases (Ryba et al., 2016).

Prato et al. in their narrative study considered cultural transitions of Columbian emigrant elite athletes from the perspective of the New Materialism and concept of *home assemblage*. The authors provided insights in how athletes worked on transforming their housing conditions and sports environments in the host country to create *a new sense of* (comfortable and safe) *home* to adjust and perform better.

In another narrative study, *Book et al.* focused on how intersecting identities of Black, male American basketball players grown in underserved communities shaped the players' professional cultural transitions to and within Europe. The players' voices were integrated into three vignettes to reveal facilitating (e.g., previous cultural transition experience,

resilience) and debilitating (being perceived and treated as “Black guy first and athlete second”) factors in the players’ complicated journey between European clubs and countries.

Darpatova-Hruzewicz and Book contributed with a longitudinal ethnographic study of two elite multicultural football teams with foci on such teams’ functioning, and a role of relations in migrant players’ adaptation and performance. Through a set of themes and three stories the authors centralised complex and dynamic nature of relations permeating the multicultural teams’ functioning termed *relational premise* and promoted an idea of *double (past-present) temporality* in the players’ cultural transition narratives.

Samuel et al.’s qualitative study shifted our attention to transnational coaches’ experiences of short-term mobility and long-term migration in the Israeli handball context. Coaches with diverse European background shared their cultural transition/adaptation experiences and insights about mobility and migration. The authors emphasised motives of migration, decision making, professional barriers, cultural similarities and differences, as well as messages to other coaches.

Transnational Migration in Recreational Youth Sport

Middleton, Petersen et al. contributed with a multi-disciplinary meta-synthesis of 23 qualitative research papers addressing acculturation journeys of forced migrants. Elaborating on benefits of, and barriers to, sport and physical activity for this marginalized group, the authors promoted safe sport and exercise environments (e.g., ethno-centric clubs) to provide space for marginalized identities and facilitate integration of forced migrants.

Middleton, Schinke et al. continued a similar line of research by giving voices to forced immigrant youths who talked about the role of sport in their acculturative journeys to Canada. Through art-based conversational interviews with findings represented as polyphonic vignettes, the authors revealed how the young participants’ meaning of sport and feeling safe in sport changed in response to the changes in the transitional context.

Van Yperen et al. contributed with a quantitative study of culturally diverse youth soccer players in the Netherlands on how belonging to national majority (or minority) and experience of the team climate influenced their perception of inclusion. The authors concluded that a coach-initiated mastery-oriented team climate and de-emphasising intra-group competition were related to a stronger perception of inclusion, especially for the minority players.

Transnational Migration in Sport Sciences

Quartiroli et al.'s qualitative study focused on transnational migration of sport psychology practitioners who came back home to begin their professional careers after having professional training abroad. The participants reflected on motivation, benefits, challenges, and coping with both ex- and re-patriation emphasising personal and professional benefits of education abroad and more challenging (than expected) repatriation process.

Chroni et al. collected transnational career narratives of two women sport scientists and blended them into one non-fiction story using a bricolage approach. Major lines going through the story consist of (but are not limited to): migration to advance academic career, challenges related to professional and personal adaptation, negotiations around overt and covert boundaries in receiving environments, searching for balance between work and family, helping others, being successful while staying true to themselves and their values.

In *Roychowdhury et al.* narrative review, the Cultural Transition model (Ryba et al., 2016) was applied to analysing migration of mindfulness ideas and practices from East to West. The authors pointed out that, on the one hand, mindfulness transition can be seen as successful with proven effectiveness of the mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) for athletes' performance and wellbeing. However, on the other hand, mindfulness practices, being transformed to fit-in the Western value system, lost their spiritual, ethical, and

philosophical foundations. The authors call for this issue to be critically addressed in sport psychology field.

Smith contributed with a commentary paper on *Roychowdhury et al.*'s call for a reflective pause to discuss mindfulness and MBIs. The author critically reflected on the Second-Generation MBIs initiated in clinical psychology as an attempt to get closer to the ethical roots of mindfulness, but still being not fully authentic and also called for further mindful scholarly reflections to develop culturally competent, ethical, and existentially sounded interventions.

From Present Achievements to New Adventures

In this Special Issue, we wanted to show the increased diversity in mobility and migration experiences that call for new thinking of how the cultural transition processes, embedded in social structures, practices, memories, and representations, are interconnected on a temporal axis, as well as co-produced in a web of social relations. As guest editors, we are satisfied with the outcome. We are particularly excited that the accepted papers are situated in different metaphysical orientations, thus illustrating diverse ways of designing scientific inquiry in this multifaceted topic area. The current compilation bears witness to an increased quality of research in this topic area with novel conceptual and theoretical contributions, for example, transnational taxonomy (*Bobrownicki and Valentin*), relational support in the cultural transition process (*Storm et al.*), new materialism and migrants' home assemblage of living and sport environments (*Prato et al.*), relational premise in multicultural teams and double temporality in transition narratives (*Darpatova-Hruzewicz & Book*), and return migration challenges (*Quartiroli et al.*). Our authors elaborated on methodological complexities (*Storm et al.*), explored novel forms of representation of the findings (*Chroni et al.*, *Middleton*, *Schinke et al.*), and outreached to under-researched groups of athletes (*Bobrownicki & Valentin*, *Book et al.*, *Middleton*, *Petersen et al.*, *Van Yperen et al.*), coaches

(*Samuel et al.*), practitioners (*Quartiroli et al.*), and women scientists (*Chroni et al.*) to discuss meaningful transformations for migrants and receivers. They problematised certain practices (MBI) currently in circulation (*Roychowdhury et al., Smith*) and contributed with practical implications for migrants and related environments (e.g., *Book et al., Darpatova-Hruzewicz & Book, Middleton, Schinke et al., Samuel et al., Storm et al.*). To briefly summarise, the articles included in the Special Issue not only allowed us to increase research quality in transnational migrations' studies, but also produced many advancements in ideas for future research, methodology, praxis, and sport policy that we set out to achieve. In addition, editing this Special Issue facilitated reflections on our own work, which we share next to highlight the contested issues and challenges that must be addressed to move the field forward.

It is easy to notice that when we talk of sports or any forms of participation, spatial metaphors dominate. There are 'closed', 'private' or 'intimate' spaces; there are 'open', 'public' or 'shared' spaces; some spaces are 'claimed' to liberate and transform their members while others are 'conquered' to oppress and disempower. We 'create', 'open up', 'shape', and 'leave' spaces as we routinely move in and out of them across time. In sociology, despite the varied terminology used (e.g., Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986; Löw, 2008), it is generally agreed that space is socially produced; it makes action possible and is itself the field of action. In this light, the living space of a transitioning subject undergoes dramatic metamorphosis not only with respect to stretching or compressing the network of relations defining a given site, but also with respect to shifting meanings and values that allow the site to be defined as such. It is precisely the migrants' psychological work of reimagining and reinscribing their habitual, taken for granted concepts and practices into new forms of social and cultural organisation that we emphasise in the Cultural Transition model (Ryba et al., 2016), yet a relational constitution of cultural transition processes in migrants'

transitional contexts has been under-theorised. This limits the model's non-deterministic explanatory power because when structure and agency change, shifts in actions, such as repetitive daily activities, may enhance or diminish an adaptive human relationship with the living space. As space is never neutral and involves the negotiation of power relations which shape the boundaries of participation – i.e., who may enter, with which identities, discourses, and interests, and who can influence the space production (Gaventa, 2006), the critical question is how a transition context is assembled in everyday life. Furthermore, people are integrated in the constitution of spaces as they actively position themselves, as well as are positioned by the actions of others (Löw, 2008). A considerable body of work in our field (including papers in this Special Issue) has provided insights into 'liminal space' of migrants and how their contradictory and ambiguous social positioning, for example, with coaches and teammates 'here' and 'there', may simultaneously open up and/or close down access to community resources, capacities for development, and health benefits. Developing analytical categories of a co-produced transition space would be potentially fruitful for untangling inequalities and mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion as a problem of simultaneous positioning of migrants and their receiving sites. We offer this perspective as promising for future localised work with transnational migrants.

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