

JYU DISSERTATIONS 642

Kaisa-Mari Jama

Career-Themed Life Narratives of Sports Graduates: Intertwinement of Careers and Nonwork Elements of Life



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND
PSYCHOLOGY

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and Nonwork Elements of Life**

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ABSTRACT

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This study focused on career-themed life narratives of Finnish sports degree graduates. The aim of the study was to holistically understand graduates' education and career experiences, taking into consideration the complexity, context and subjectivity of modern careers. The main research question was: How do sports graduates' career experiences intertwine with their life narratives? Data were collected as written, career-themed life stories (n=60) through an open writing invitation to sports degree graduates from years 2004-2015. The study consists of three sub-studies. The first sub-study described the qualitative variation in the different meanings that the graduates attributed to formal sport education as a part of their career-themed life narratives. The second sub-study described the typical career story models of the participants. The third sub-study aimed to understand what meanings were attributed to difficulties in the narratives. Data were analysed using phenomenography (sub-study I), narrative analysis (sub-study II), and reflexive thematic analysis (sub-study III). Drawing together, the findings suggest that work and nonwork were interwoven in many ways, and that hobbyism and identity were especially relevant. These also contributed to pondering career change, which was a notable element in the narratives. Reflections on realized and potential career change were influenced by both experiences of unpleasant characteristics of the sports industry and more personal reasons for looking for a career path that is fitting in more than just a practical sense. Difficult experiences were also meaningful in multiple ways, both professionally and personally. In conclusion, the findings indicate that graduates' search for a personally meaningful career path should be considered when discussing sports graduates' careers.

Keywords: sports graduates, narrative research, chaos theory of careers, career paths, intertwining of work and nonwork

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Jama, Kaisa-Mari

Urien sekä elämän ei-ammattillisten elementtien yhteenkietoutuminen liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urateemaisissa elämänkertomuksissa

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Tässä väitöstutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urateemaisia elämänkertomuksia. Tavoitteena oli ymmärtää valmistuneiden koulutus- ja urakokemuksia kokonaisvaltaisesti, ottaen huomioon nykyaikaisten urien monimutkaisuus, konteksti ja subjektiivisuus. Päättökysymys oli: Miten liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urakokemukset kytkeytyvät heidän elämänkertomuksiinsa? Tutkimukseen osallistui 60 liikunta-alan tutkinnon vuosina 2004–2015 suorittanutta henkilöä, jotka vastasivat avoimeen kirjoituskutsuun. Tutkimus koostuu kolmesta osatutkimuksesta. Ensimmäisessä osatutkimuksessa kuvailtiin tutkintokoulutukselle annettuja, laadullisesti erilaisia merkityksiä. Toisessa osatutkimuksessa hahmoteltiin aineiston tyypillisiä uratarinamalleja. Kolmas osatutkimus käsitteli vaikeuksien saamia merkityksiä kertomuksissa. Aineisto analysoitiin fenomenografisesti (1. osatutkimus) sekä narratiivisen (2. osatutkimus) ja refleksiivisen temaattisen analyysin (3. osatutkimus) avulla. Yhdessä tulokset osoittavat, että ammatilliset ja ei-ammattilliset elämän osa-alueet kietoutuvat monin tavoin yhteen, ja erityisesti harrastuneisuus ja identiteetti olivat keskeisiä ilmiöitä, jotka loivat yhteyksiä ammatillisen ja ei-ammattillisen välille. Niihin liittyvät kysymykset näkyivät myös alanvaihtopohdinnoissa, jotka olivat aineistossa yleisiä. Toteutuneiden ja mahdollisten alanvaihtojen pohdiskeluun vaikuttivat paitsi kokemukset liikunta-alan huonoista puolista, myös muuten kuin käytännön tasolla itseä tyydyttävän urapolun etsiminen. Myös vaikeat kokemukset olivat monin tavoin merkityksellisiä, sekä ammatillisesti että henkilökohtaisesti. Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että valmistuneiden pyrkimys henkilökohtaisesti merkityksellisen urapolun löytämiseen on keskeinen näkökulma liikunta-alalle valmistuneiden urapoluista keskusteltaessa.

Avainsanat: liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet, narratiivinen tutkimus, työurien kaaosteoria, urapolut, ammatillisen ja ei-ammattillisen yhteenkietoutuminen

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As a researcher interested in the Chaos Theory of Careers, I am painfully aware that it is impossible to dissect all the different elements of my life that have led me to this point. Life is a mysterious chain of events that could have unfolded completely differently if something as small as random personal encounters or as big as societal development would have gone differently. The acknowledgements section is about people, so that helps to narrow it down, but the task is still impossible. For example, childhood hobby instructors, teachers in elementary schools, fellow students and teachers in my previous Bachelor of Sports Studies and Master of Sports Sciences studies as well as previous scholars have all had some sort of a role in how I have come about writing this thesis. Focusing on the past five or so years, I would, however, like to express my gratitude here to certain individuals and organizations that have been especially influential in the process of writing this thesis.

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Rovaniemi, Finland, 6.4.2023

Kaisa-Mari Jama

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following three publications, hereafter referred to as sub-study I, sub-study II, and sub-study III. Copies of the articles are included in the appendices, when available.

- Sub-study I Jama, K-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R. 2021. Liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutuksen merkitykset valmistuneiden elämäkertomuksissa - fenomenografinen analyysi [Meanings of sports degree education in the life stories of graduates - a phenomenographic analysis]. *Liikunta & Tiede*, 58(4), 82-90.
- Sub-study II Jama, K-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R. 2023. To stay or to leave? Career story models of Finnish sports graduates. *Sport, Education and Society*, 28(2), 200-212.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1997979>
- Sub-study III Jama, K-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R. The meaning of difficulties in career narratives: the case of sports graduates. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. Accepted for publication.

The author of the thesis is the first author of each article and responsible for writing the manuscripts. All authors contributed to the study conception and design in advisory roles. Data collection and initial analysis were performed by the first author, but all authors contributed to discussions of the analyses in later stages. All authors commented on versions of the manuscripts and read and approved the final manuscripts.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Education, work, and careers have gone through fundamental changes in recent decades. Trends such as globalization, digitalization and individualization have increased students' and graduates' opportunities, allowing them to choose from endless possibilities. Education and work are not only a source of income, but means of self-expression. Careers are complex, and people no longer expect to work for the same employer until retirement. Education, work and careers have become means of identity building, but also sources of uncertainty. This has created many challenges for individuals, educational institutions, employers, and societies. The sports industry is one of the fields that clearly exemplify this change and is in focus of this study.

This thesis draws from two main theoretical perspectives: chaos theory of careers and life narratives. It explores education and careers from the individual point of view, shedding light on how individuals make meaning of their career experiences through career-themed life narratives, and how the careers intertwine with nonwork life elements. I explore what kinds of meanings are attributed to degree education, what are the typical story models of sports graduates, and what meanings are attributed to difficulties in the career narratives. In the following chapter I will introduce the context, theoretical framework, and aim of the study.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Finnish sport education

In Finland, education for the sports labour market can roughly be classified into two main categories. The first category includes study programmes provided by the Finnish education system: they give a degree title and eligibility to continue to further studies within the education system. The second category includes miscellaneous studies organized by the second or third sector. Sports degrees in

the Finnish education system are presented in Figure 1. As the figure illustrates, the Finnish education system allows flexibly combining degrees from different educational institutions. For example, it is possible to continue to higher education with a vocational qualification or continue to a master's programme at university after completing a bachelor's degree at a university of applied sciences.

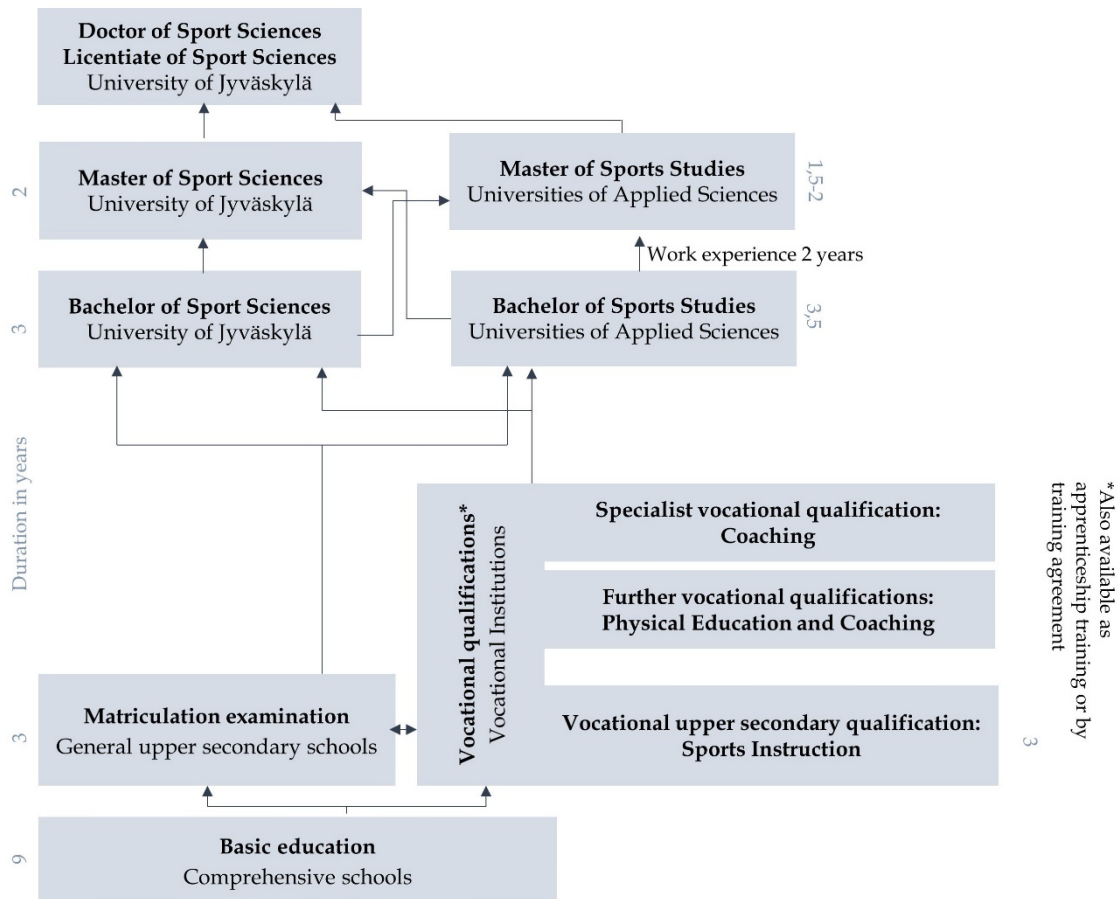


FIGURE 1 Sports degrees in the Finnish education system. Adapted from the Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education (2018) and Kanerva (2019)

The second category of sports studies includes other courses that do not lead to attaining a degree. While this study focuses on graduates from degree education, other options are also described in the following section in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the sports industry. Next, I will first give an overview of the education offered by the Finnish education system, and then shortly look at the options provided by other organizers.

1.1.1.1 Vocational qualifications

Sports institutes offer studies for vocational upper secondary qualification, which gives the graduate broad-based basic vocational skills in the field (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a). The degree title is *sports assistant* (in

Finnish: *liikuntaneuvoja*) (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018). In practice, the studies provide proficiency in practical work tasks such as sports and exercise instruction, lifeguarding, and personal training, and graduates are often employed in municipalities, fitness centres, swimming pools, and other sport service organizations, or may be self-employed. Studies for acquiring a vocational upper secondary qualification are free of charge (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a). Yearly, around 320-420 individuals graduate as sports assistants in Finland (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, p. 30).

Another way of achieving a similar vocational qualification is completing the further vocational qualification in sports and coaching, which also gives eligibility to continue studies in the education system but has a more narrow and specialized competence area (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-a, 2020). While the eligibility criteria are the same, the further vocational qualification is often considered as further training for adults who may already have some competence in the field, whereas vocational upper secondary qualification is often completed soon after basic education (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019, p. 8; see e.g., OSAO, 2019; Varalan urheiluopisto, 2020).

Similarly, the specialist vocational qualification in coaching demonstrates highly advanced skills and is generally intended for professionals in coaching positions with basic training or corresponding competence (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a; Suomen Urheiluopisto Vierumäki, n.d.; Vuokatti Sport, 2020). All vocational qualifications use competence demonstrations as a way of demonstrating meeting the qualification requirements, and previous learning is recognized (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019, pp. 12–13). Around 400 to 600 individuals complete different kinds of sport-related further or specialist vocational qualifications each year (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, p. 30).

As all vocational qualifications are based on competence demonstrations, one does not need to complete specific education to acquire the required skills (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019, p. 12). In practice, if the required skills have been gained previously in other environments, one needs to only attend the competence demonstrations to acquire the qualification. Further and specialist vocational qualifications are subject to charge (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019, p. 7) and, as mentioned above, mainly intended for adults who are already in the labour market, whereas vocational upper secondary qualification studies are more often completed soon after basic education. It is, therefore, more likely, that individuals seeking further or specialist vocational qualifications take part in the less preparatory education offered by sports institutes than those seeking to complete the vocational upper secondary qualification. For this reason, vocational upper secondary qualification holders are more likely to have completed structurally similar education than those holding higher education degrees. This comparability is a relevant point for the present study, as I am interested in the educational experiences of degree

graduates. Hence, regarding vocational qualifications, only graduates with the vocational upper secondary qualification were included as participants of this study.

1.1.1.2 Higher education degrees

As demonstrated in Figure 1, higher education in Finland is provided by a dual model (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018, pp. 22–24). Universities of applied sciences (UAS) have a more practical emphasis, while (traditional) universities focus on scientific research and instruction.

The bachelor qualification in UAS is *Bachelor of Sports Studies* (In Finnish: *liikunnanohjaaja (AMK)*). UAS bachelor studies aim for broad competencies in the field, including sport pedagogy, health promotion, sport leadership, and entrepreneurship. In addition, different UASs offer different specialties, such as sports coaching, sport service development, outdoor recreation, and children's sport (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-b). Graduates often work in municipalities, sport clubs, sport organizations and private companies. In addition to instructing and coaching, they may work in expert, management, administrative, or developmental roles. Yearly, around 150-200 degrees are completed (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, p. 30).

After acquiring two years of work experience (three years until 2019), it is possible to continue to master studies in a UAS (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-c; Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). The programmes are usually intended for those already in working life. They offer a possibility for advanced professional studies and to complete a master level education that is equivalent to a university master's degree. The degree title is *Master of Sports Studies* (In Finnish: *liikunnanohjaaja (YAMK)*) (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-d). UASs offer different programmes with different emphases, such as physical activity and sport coaching, health promotion, and development and leadership (Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, n.d.; Lapland University of Applied Sciences, n.d.; South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, n.d.). Around 30-50 degrees are completed annually (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-a).

In Finnish universities students are usually admitted to study for a master's degree, and a bachelor's degree is considered an intermediate stage in the studies (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018, pp. 22–23). Universities also offer further studies for Licentiate and Doctor's degrees. The only university in Finland offering sport and physical exercise education is the University of Jyväskylä (University of Jyväskylä, 2021a). Subjects for sport science students include sport pedagogy, sport and exercise psychology, adapted physical activity, social sciences of sport, and biology of physical activity (University of Jyväskylä, 2021a). The degree titles are *Bachelor*, *Master*, *Licentiate* and *Doctor of Sport Sciences* (in Finnish: *liikuntatieteiden kandidaatti, maisteri,*

lisensiaatti and *tohtori*) (Valtioneuvoston asetus yliopistojen tutkinnoista [Finnish Government Decree on University Degrees], 2020). About 130-160 individuals graduate as Masters of Sport Sciences each year (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, p. 30).

1.1.1.3 Non-degree education

In addition to degree studies, there are other study options for those aspiring to prepare themselves for the sports labour market. While sports institutes offer vocational degree studies, they also provide other training (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-b). As a part of liberal adult education, sports institutes offer foundation one-term courses in sport instructing that prepare for entrance examinations of degree programmes and offer basic skills in the field (Finnish Sports Institutes, n.d.; Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-b). Some folk high schools also offer liberal adult education in the field of sports, such as personal training education (Helsingin Evankelinen Opisto, n.d.; Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-c).

Other courses are offered by the second and third sectors. For example, the Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation trains lifeguards and swimming teachers (Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation, n.d.). National governing bodies of different sports offer coach education for their own sports, (see e.g., Finnish Basketball Association, n.d.; Finnish Figure Skating Association, n.d.). In addition, organizations such as the Finnish Coaches Association and the Finnish Olympic Committee provide courses for coaches and other sports personnel (Finnish Coaches Association, n.d.; Finnish Olympic Committee, n.d.). These courses can be organized in cooperation with sports institutes (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-b). There are no official statistics on how much work force the various non-degree education programmes produce, but as an example, it has been estimated that the field of personal training alone educates at least 1,000 individuals yearly (Ala-Vähälä, 2020, p. 17).

The courses are not necessarily intended only for the labour market, however. Sports activities in Finland are heavily dependent on volunteers and many coaches and instructors work on a voluntary basis (Vehmas et al., 2018). Training in sports and physical activity is also a business. For example, there are many private companies in Finland offering education for personal training (Ala-Vähälä, 2020). Another example is licensed group fitness instruction training, where instructors take courses to be able to instruct trademarked exercise classes (see Sippola, 2019).

1.1.2 Sports industry as an employer

The sport and physical activity sector is a growing employer in Western countries, including Finland (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2022a, 2022b; European Observatoire of Sport and Employment, 2020; Eurostat, n.d.; Pellinen et al., 2019). For convenience, I will use the term *sports industry* to refer

to the employment field of sports and physical activity. This includes a variety of occupations in sport-related organizations in the first, second and third sectors, such as in sports institutes, higher education institutions, municipalities, fitness clubs, outdoor activity providers, sport clubs, sports federations, and other sports bodies (Pellinen et al., 2019). Typical occupations in the field include sport coaches, sport and fitness instructors, management staff, and teachers (ESSA-Sport, 2019).

Work in the sports industry is characterized by high levels of non-standard employment. For example, in the European Union in 2019, 48.8% of people working in sports and fitness occupations were part-time, while the comparative figure for all workers in the sport sector was 43.7% and the average for all sectors was 19.1% (European Observatoire of Sport and Employment, 2020, p. 28, 39)¹. Similarly, self-employment is emphasized, as 31.6% of sport and fitness workers were self-employed compared to 22% in all sport sector occupations and 14.3% as the average for all sectors (European Observatoire of Sport and Employment, 2020, p. 30, 41). In Finland, the majority (57.9%) of people working in sport-specific occupations had a part-time contract (Pellinen et al., 2019, p. 24). Another indication of the nature of the sports industry is the young age of employees. In 2021, 32% of workers in sport employment were under 30 years old, which is almost twice as much compared to the 17% share of young employees in all employment (Eurostat, n.d.). This figure implies that many sports workers move to other industries over time.

Attrition from sport employment has also been noted by sport career scholars. Minten and Forsyth (2014) reported that ten years after graduation the majority, 57%, of sports graduates were employed outside of sport. Similarly, Sleaf and Reed (2006) reported that 37% of graduates were employed outside education or sport-related occupations, and Schwab et al. (2015) reported that only 39% of sport management alumni worked in sport management jobs. In Finland, attrition is most visible in Bachelor of Sport Studies, with 35% of graduates working in another field five years after graduation (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, p. 36). The reported reasons for career change included interest in a different career, poor salary, and difficulty gaining employment (Minten & Forsyth, 2014, p. 98; Schwab et al., 2015, p. 8). Minten (2010) has suggested that employability should not be seen just as a set of attributes of the graduate, but as an interactive system between the graduate, the employer, and the job. Graduate commitment required that these attributes were utilized and that the job met their expectations and aspirations.

Another challenge for sports graduates is that the industry is traditionally non-regulated in nature as there are little formal entry requirements, although some signs of professionalization are visible (Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016;

¹ The sports and fitness occupation numbers include people working in sport occupations in both sports and non-sports organizations such as fitness instructors in hotels. The sport sector figure on the other hand includes people working in sports organizations in non-sport occupations, such as cleaners. Comparing the figures implies that the sports sector overall favours non-standard employment, but this form of employment is even more favoured in sport-related occupations, whether or not employment is in sports organizations.

Kaiser & Beech, 2012, p. 292; Taylor & Garratt, 2010). For example, in Finland, there have been efforts to establish a register of authorized personal trainers. However, the register is based on voluntariness, as educators and personal trainers can choose if they want to apply to be authorized, and employers do not necessarily require authorization (Ala-Vähälä, 2020, p. 37). Overall, the non-regulation means that the labour force from the non-sport education market competes for the same jobs as sports graduates (Kaiser & Beech, 2012, pp. 297–298).

By contrast, sports degrees are undervalued in some sectors of the sports industry. Regarding coaching positions, Hall et al. (2019, pp. 892–893) have argued that the degree has “weak industry credibility”, as employers prefer national governing body coaching (NGB) awards. NGB awards seem indeed to be the industry standard for coaching accreditation, even though their usefulness has been questioned (Piggott, 2012). Turner and Nelson (2009, pp. 16–17) found that graduates themselves regard higher coaching education as more useful with regard to professional development than NGBs. Similar notions have been presented regarding personal training. Robinson et al. (2006) conducted a pilot study and concluded that a personal trainer certificate was notably preferred by fitness clubs compared to degree education. They discussed how degree students were confused as to why they needed to obtain a personal training certificate after their degree and noted that obtaining certification does not add to the professional skills of a bachelor in exercise science. In Finland, the issue of undervalued degrees has been especially raised by Bachelors of Sports Studies (Lappalainen, 2009, pp. 14–16). Finnish UAS degrees have been reported to have similar issues in other fields as well. Compared to university degrees, UAS degrees seem to have a lower ranking both in the labour market and in graduates’ perception (Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2021; Isopahkala-Bouret & Ojala, 2023).

Due to the low appreciation of sports degrees, it has been reported that the majority of sports graduates seek additional qualifications. Sleaf and Reed (2006, p. 52) found that 80% of graduates had undertaken courses after graduation, and Bernal-García et al. (2018, p. 1245) found that 92.2% of respondents had complementary training. Additional qualifications have been recognized as a relevant factor for successful career entry (Schlesinger et al., 2015). While sports degrees might be insufficient on their own, the degree is still seen as important for enhancing employability (Sleaf & Reed, 2006, p. 52; Tomlinson, 2008; Turner & Nelson, 2009).

The graduates’ reaction is understandable, as there are certain expectations connected to completing degree studies. These expectations are visible in the motivations for seeking degree education, such as seeking deeper or wider competences, higher income, obtaining a certain job, and improving employment opportunities (Hall et al., 2019, pp. 889–892; Turner & Nelson, 2009, p. 11; Vuolle, 2013, pp. 28, 45). Generally, higher educational attainment has been positively connected to beneficial outcomes such as social status and well-being (Easterbrook et al., 2016). In the specific context of the sports industry, a completed degree has been shown to lead to a better starting salary and secure

jobs for sport science graduates, especially in the occupational field of schools (Schlesinger et al., 2015). Bachelor degree graduates have been reported to be in a slightly better position in the labour market than vocational graduates (Ala-Vähälä, 2012, 2022). PE teacher education stands out, as it seems to offer most possibilities for secure, stable jobs that correspond to the level of education (Schlesinger et al., 2015).

There is a lack of comparable statistical graduate tracking data on employment for different sports degrees in Finland. Some information is available, especially for Masters of Sport Sciences since 2017 (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-b). A cohort study of Masters of Sport Sciences from graduation years 2012-2015, conducted five years after graduation, showed that 55-77% of each cohort held a permanent full-time job. Also, 55-77% reported that their current job required the master's degree that they held. In total, 26-40% of graduates had been employed by the same employer since their graduation, meaning that the rest had had several employments during the five-year period, possibly with periods of unemployment. The earlier mentioned need for additional education is visible, as only 21-37% of graduates had not participated in additional education after their graduation. Of the respondents, 50-68% described that their main duties were involved with education, which is expected as PE teaching is the biggest Masters of Sport Sciences programme.

For Bachelors and Masters of Sport Studies (UAS), the equivalent information is available only to a very limited extent, having been collected only since 2018 and referring to cohorts that graduated five years earlier, that is, since 2013 (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-c). However, the data is reported by school, and the number of respondents is very low. For privacy reasons, the data is also partially subject to nondisclosure. Therefore, it is not possible to report the statistics here reliably in a systematic way. For vocational education, there is no national data collection for graduate tracking (Häme University of Applied Sciences, 2022, p. 1).

Some information is available through different reports studying the employment of Finnish sports graduates. It seems that although distinct Finnish degree programmes at different levels have different profiles, in reality, there is overlap between them in the job market (Ala-Vähälä, 2012, p. 43, 2022, pp. 45-48; Lappalainen, 2009, p. 19; Vuolle, 2013, p. 53). For example, both sports assistants (vocational degree) and Bachelors of Sport Studies (UAS) are often employed in instructing tasks, even though the latter are also qualified to apply for some of the same specialist positions as university graduates (Ala-Vähälä, 2012, pp. 34-35, 2022, pp. 50-55).

Drawing together the information provided in this subsection, this suggests that attaining a higher degree does enhance quality employment opportunities, but there is an imbalance in the number of graduates and the number of corresponding jobs, leading to overlapping competition for the same jobs for different level graduates. In addition, there is pressure from the bottom up, as many jobs do not require degree education and are also pursued by applicants

with other educational backgrounds. This imbalance might be leading to the issues described earlier, such as attrition from sport employment and undervaluation of degrees.

1.1.3 Careers in the sports industry

The characteristics of the sports industry described above are naturally reflected in careers. Accordingly, Minten and Forsyth (2014) have concluded that the careers of sports graduates are dynamic, complex, and heterogeneous. Multifunctionality is also a common feature of sports careers: many sports professionals combine multiple jobs at the same time, or work in diverse positions throughout their career. Bernal-García et al. (2018) reported that 44.8% of graduates held two jobs, and almost a third of these jobs were not sports-related. Campos-Izquierdo et al. (2016, pp. 116–117) found that 60% of Spanish sport and physical activity professionals had performed multiple functions at the same time in their careers, and 33.5% were doing so at the time of the study. At the time of investigation, 39% were involved in different functions than earlier in their career.

Physical education (PE) teachers, however, seem to be somewhat an exception compared to other occupations in the sports industry. Minten and Forsyth (2014, p. 99) noted that PE teachers seemed to display traditional career paths and stayed in same jobs more than other graduates. It seems possible that this is due to the special conditions related to PE teaching. One of these conditions is that PE teacher education offers a route towards a specific job, unlike most other degrees in the field that prepare generalists. Furthermore, in most countries, physical education teacher positions have clear qualification requirements, unlike many other sport positions (European Commission, 2013). For example, in Finland, aspiring PE teachers get their PE teaching eligibility by studying sport pedagogy in a teacher programme, where they start practicing in schools in their first study year and do so throughout their five-year master's programme (University of Jyväskylä, 2022). On the other hand, other subjects in the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, such as Social Sciences of Sport, Sport Psychology, or Science of Sport Coaching and Fitness Testing, educate general experts in their field (University of Jyväskylä, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d). Similar general expertise is the goal of bachelor studies, and the vocational degree aims for general competences in a variety of sport-related practical work (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.-b, 2018).

Finally, another aspect that needs to be considered when studying sports graduates is that not all students in the field seek a career in the sports industry. General interest in sports and enjoyment of physical activity has been reported as a significant reason for entering sports education (Minten & Forsyth, 2014, p. 98; Turner & Nelson, 2009, pp. 12–13; Vuolle, 2013, p. 28, 45). However, there are conflicting findings related to enrolment motivation. In a study by Hall et al. (2019, pp. 889–890), motives were mainly career-related, whereas in a study by Minten and Forsyth (2014, pp. 98, 101), only three of the sixteen participants enrolled in degree studies with a clear career intention. Therefore, it is relevant

to approach sports graduates from a wider perspective, acknowledging the nonwork elements of graduates' lives. Following the lines of Casper et al. (2018), I prefer the concept of *nonwork* instead of terms such as "personal life", "family life" or simply "life", as it is a broad concept that captures the many roles individuals have in their life, without suggesting that work is not part of life.

There is fairly little research considering sports graduates careers from a wider perspective. Most studies focus on PE teachers (Iannucci & MacPhail, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2006; Thorburn, 2011, 2014). However, as discussed above, PE teachers might not represent other sports graduates' career experiences well. There are also some studies regarding professional coaches (Holmes et al., 2020; Purdy & Potrac, 2014). However, that research is not comparable with the present study as coaches have varied educational backgrounds and do not necessarily hold degrees. Therefore, there is a need for sports degree graduate research with a life story perspective.

1.2 Theoretical starting point

1.2.1 Chaos Theory of Careers

The previous section has shown that careers of sports graduates rarely follow traditional trajectories, with graduates needing to hold multiple positions, obtain additional education, change occupations flexibly, and be prepared to consider shifting careers. The phenomenon does not only concern the sports industry, but there is a wide consent among career scholars that stable, linear career paths have been replaced with dynamic and complex careers (Amundson et al., 2014; Baruch, 2004; Lo Presti, 2009; Lyons et al., 2015).

The transformation in careers has also required new perspectives in career theories. Traditional theories that focused on matching individual traits and abilities with a fitting career (Holland, 1996) or saw career development as stages (Super, 1980) poorly fit the experiences of today's individuals. More recently, multiple attempts have been made to better recognize the complexity of modern careers (Amundson et al., 2014; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Pryor and Bright (2003) have criticized many career development theories for still assuming that career development is based on rational and controlled decision making, while the reality we live in is complex and dynamic, and includes unpredictable events. I agree with this notion; for example, while Savickas' Career Construction Theory (2005) is designed to understand "' multicultural society and global economy", it is based on Super and Holland's ideas, and for example, is interested in matching the individual's "vocational personality" with a corresponding vocational field. Another issue with assumptions of rationalized and controlled decision-making is that overemphasizing agency may be a privileged view that ignores barriers such as class, social origin, gender and ethnicity (Inkson et al., 2012; Mayrhofer et al., 2007).

Even with privileged individuals, there are many contextual factors that limit possibilities to choose, or choosing is done in a limited frame that is affected by influences such as spouse or children (Inkson et al., 2012). In addition to the individual level, careers are affected by many other factors in the local, societal, and global contexts. Pryor and Bright (2003) argue that career theories should take into account not only this complexity, but also the interactive and adaptive nature of humans. They view humans and environments as “complex, open, adaptive systems, which are extremely sensitive to change” (p. 16). The interactivity between systems leads to more complexity and unpredictability.

This complexity, interaction and change is included in their Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC, Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2014), which this study draws on in its design. According to the theory, an individual’s career is formulated in interaction between the person and their environments. While people can construct their career through purposive action, their career development is also affected by other influences, such as other people, organizations, culture, and unplanned events. The theory also takes into account the constructivist tendencies of people. How individuals interpret themselves, their experiences and their environments has an effect on how they think and function, which then influences careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003). Pryor and Bright (2003, pp. 16–17) note that even purposive action is not always rational in the sense that it can be maladaptive or affected by unconscious motivations.

It is, however, important to understand that the word *chaos* here does not imply any negative connotation but merely refers to the complex and unpredictable nature of the phenomenon (Pryor & Bright, 2003, p. 16). In fact, order is an important element in chaos theory – while chaotic systems are not predictable, they also self-generate order (Pryor & Bright, 2003). This idea is easily understood by the metaphor of weather (Pryor & Bright, 2008, p. 77). While long-term predictions are impossible, there are noticeable patterns that can be understood and utilized. Similarly, there are patterns in career development that can be researched and theorized (Pryor & Bright, 2008).

Pryor and Bright’s ideas of combining career development with systems theory is not unique, and in fact, systems theory has been recognized as one of the most important innovations in modern career theory (Amundson, 2005). Patton and McMahon (2014) have even presented a metatheoretical framework of career development that is constructed using systems theory. The System Theory Framework (STF) of career development offers a perspective on how the different career theories contribute to our understanding of careers and shows how they are related to each other. Thus, it is not a theory of career development (see Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 201). However, the framework does offer support in showing how the systems theory approach is suitable for understanding the complexity of career influences. Chaos theory approaches have also been presented by, for example, Bloch (2005), Duffy (2000) and Gluck (1997). However, Pryor and Bright’s Chaos Theory of Careers seems to be the most sustained and researched application of the chaos theory approach to career development (see e.g., Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; Borg et al., 2014;

Järvensivu & Pulkki, 2020; Pryor & Bright, 2007, 2008, 2014; Schlesinger & Daley, 2016).

Overall, CTC seems to acknowledge the complexity of modern careers well. It matches the everyday experience that a career is not merely about choosing jobs, but is affected by a range of factors such as family, the state of the job market, power relations, global influences, and random occurrences. It allows looking for order while acknowledging that careers are difficult to predict. It recognizes human meaning-making activities but understands that individuals have limited capabilities for building their careers. Through acknowledging contextual factors, it also understands the nonwork elements of human life that affect careers. To the best of my knowledge, CTC has not previously been applied in the context of sports graduates.

1.2.2 Life narratives in career research

One of the solutions for understanding the complexity of careers is the use of narratives (Amundson et al., 2014; Cohen & Mallon, 2001; Hartung, 2013; Pryor & Bright, 2008; Savickas, 2012). In general, narratives are a natural way for humans to organize experiences (Bruner, 1996, p. 121). Life narratives consist of two basic elements: the sequence of events that makes the plot, and the evaluative elements that convey the point or purpose of the narrative (Bruner, 1996, pp. 121–122; Linde, 1993, pp. 21, 71–72). An important note to be made here is the differentiation between *narratives* and *stories*. Across disciplines there are multiple definitions of these, and some scholars view them as synonymous (Paley, 2009). In the context of the present study, I align with defining story as the sequence of events, whereas narrative is the textual representation of the story (Ryan, 2005, p. 347). What this means in practice is that the same basic plot, the story, can be told in multiple different ways. Each of these is a different narrative.

Narratives are constructed. The process of creating a narrative involves selection, as “not every sequence of events is worth recounting” (Bruner, 1996, p. 121). This study is highly dependent on this assumption of the selective process in creating narratives: everything that the participants wrote is meaningful to them – otherwise it would have not been written down. Narratives are a way of attributing meaning to past events and experiences and connecting them to social context and present moment (Cohen & Mallon, 2001, p. 56). Polkinghorne (1995, p. 5) refers to this process where different events, happenings and actions are composed into thematically unified, temporally organized accounts, as *narrative configuration*. The result of this process is a narrative. For example, McAdams (2001, p. 101) has described constructing life stories as follows:

Life stories are based on biographical facts, but they go considerably beyond the facts as people selectively appropriate aspects of their experiences and imaginatively construe both past and future to construct stories that make sense to them and their audiences, that vividly and integrate life and make it more or less meaningful.

Thus, a life narrative is a way of reflecting lived life and giving meaning to past events and the future by relating them to each other and to the context. Note that the quotation above also considers the social element of narratives. The presence of an audience is always to be acknowledged (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). This issue is further discussed in the sections on the philosophical underpinnings and quality evaluation of the present study.

The same process of narrative configuration can be applied to careers. Viewed objectively, a career might be seen as merely a list of educational and professional positions a person has held throughout their life. Career narratives, however, deal with the *subjective career* and concern the meanings that individuals attribute to their work-related experiences (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). The meanings in the narratives are visible in two ways: through *plot* and *evaluative elements*. According to Polkinghorne (1995, pp. 6–8), the plot shows the significance of each event in relation to other events, making the meaning-making visible. Events that change the story's outcome from where it was travelling towards can be called turning points, and these events are especially meaningful in the plot (Clausen, 1998, p. 202; Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). Polkinghorne (1995, p. 8) notes that these can often be recognized only in retrospect, as the event that causes important changes might initially seem insignificant.

In the context of careers, turning points can lead to *career transitions*. Career transition can broadly be defined as a process where an individual disengages from one work situation and engages in another (Fernandez et al., 2008, p. 385). Koivunen et al. (2012) have argued that career transitions can be categorized by means of a four-square matrix, where the two dimensions are agency and subjectivity/objectivity. For example, deciding to put more effort into one's work is a self-motivated subjective transition, whereas being fired is a forced objective transition. How the transition is experienced also relates to how expected it is, or how big a difference there is between the anticipated and the experience (Louis, 1980, pp. 331–332). In line with CTC, Peake and McDowall (2012) have identified several ways in which unplanned events, chance, and non-linearity brought about career transitions in career narratives.

It is important to note that not all career transitions are turning points and necessary for the outcome of the narrative episode. Clausen (1998, pp. 202–203) points out that normative transitions, such as entering an occupation, are not necessarily turning points as they are expected and, thus, do not constitute changes in the direction of the plot. However, they can be turning points, depending on the subjective meaning-making related to the events. It is noteworthy that the present study was not only interested in career events, as other aspects of life were also considered.

In addition to plot, the other important cues in examining meanings in life narratives are evaluative elements. Life narratives are not only lists of sequences of events, but include important information that guide the reader on how the events should be understood (Linde, 1993, p. 21; Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 17). These evaluative points can be indicated by a wide variety of linguistic choices, such as

choice of words, repetition and expressions of contrast (Linde, 1993, pp. 71–72). Polkinghorne (1995, p. 17) points out that different people react differently to the same events, which makes evaluative information crucial in understanding the experiences of the narrator.

Human constructivism is incorporated in CTC, and it has been combined with narrative methods (McIlveen, 2014; Peake & McDowall, 2012; Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2008). In the context of counselling, Pryor and Bright (2008, p. 81) note that CTC does not require narrative approaches. They point out that the coherence provided by narratives may underestimate the complexity of reality and see this as a limitation of narrative counselling. As a researcher, however, I am interested in how individuals understand their career and make meaning of their experiences, rather than trying to give an answer to objective reality. For more on this topic, see section 2.1 Philosophical underpinnings, where I discuss the relation of objective reality and my research.

The dynamic structure of meanings associated with individual's career-related motivations, interests, competencies, and roles can be referred as *career identity* (Meijers, 1998, p. 191; Meijers & Lengelle, 2012, p. 157). As a concept of identity, it deals with how one conceives of oneself as a whole in relation to others, but specifically in the context of work and working (Meijers, 1998). Meijers (1998, p. 193) argues that career identity is an answer to the question "What does work mean in and for my life?". Career identity is an active practice that can be expressed in the form of story (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012). The identity perspective is relevant, as it underlines how career stories always portray the individual's sense of self, not only their experiences. Motivations and desires for the future are reflected in the stories and frame how career events are experienced. Misalignment between work and identity can present itself, for example, as expressions of negative emotions and lead to reactions such as seeking change in work or doing identity work (Kira & Balkin, 2014). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, pp. 1164–1165), *identity work* refers to "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness". Thus, career identity is a dynamic structure: identity develops continuously throughout life, and likewise life stories develop and change (McAdams, 2001, p. 106).

The subjective perspective is important, as in today's world of work, meaningfulness, identity work, and well-being are entwined, and work provides not only income, but also a sense of identity, purpose and self-fulfilment (Baruch, 2004, p. 59; Kira & Balkin, 2014). While previously identities were more or less given and fixed at a collective level, nowadays individuals face the task of actively working out their identities, as increased possibilities and individualization have made people more aware of their personal life trajectories (Tomlinson, 2013, pp. 20–23). Therefore, narratives offer a relevant means of understanding people's career experiences. Narratives are a way of sense-making that allows scholars to see how individuals interpret their past experiences in a way that makes sense for them in the present moment (Cohen & Mallon, 2001, pp. 56–61).

CTC also emphasizes the effect that other systems (besides the individual) have on the individual's career (Bright & Pryor, 2011, 2014). These influences may be in the context of education, work, and career, but also in nonwork elements of life. Individuals tell different stories about their life depending on their perspective and, moreover, providing a one, all-encompassing account might even be impossible (Raggatt, 2006). Stories told from a certain perspective can be referred as topical life stories (Plummer, 2001, p. 26). In this thesis, I refer to my data as career-themed life narratives.

Overall, understanding career as a story allows seeing people as "holistic, self-organizing, and active constructors and shapers of their lives through work, family, play, and other elements of human experience" (Hartung, 2013, p. 36). Narratives give people an opportunity to explain their career choices and are a way of capturing the transitions and disruptions between different stages of life and career (Cohen & Mallon, 2001, p. 56; Savickas, 2005, p. 58). CTC together with life narratives provide a holistic view of today's careers and the context they are manifested in.

1.3 Research aim and questions

The aim of this study is to holistically understand the education and career experiences of Finnish sports graduates through career-themed life narratives. The main research question is: How do sports graduates' career experiences intertwine with their life narratives?

The study consists of three sub-studies, each of which addresses a related research question. The sub-research questions are:

1. What qualitatively different meanings do sports degree graduates attribute to their degrees as part of their life narratives?
2. What are the typical career story models among sports graduates?
3. What meanings do difficulties have in sports degree graduates' career-themed life narratives?

The first research question adds to our understanding of the influence of degree education on an individual's life in the field of sports. Using phenomenography, this sub-study provided the first comprehensive description of the variety of qualitative meanings attributed to sports degree studies. The second sub-study sought to understand the modern careers of sports graduates by describing typical career story models among sports degree graduates. Narrative analysis was used to identify both the collective characteristics and the diversity of experiences among the graduates. The third sub-study tackled a very understudied phenomenon, difficulties in career development. A systematic overview of the different meanings attributed to difficulties in sports graduates' career narratives was provided using reflexive thematic analysis.

Overall, the purpose of this study is to broaden the scope of research on modern careers, considering both the complexity of modern careers and the individualistic trend of seeing careers as a means of meaning making and seeking purpose. Through this study, the participants and their peers may gain new understanding of their lives and careers. The knowledge gained in this study is also useful for developing education and work life in the sports industry. It can be utilized by employers in finding new ways to grow employee attraction and commitment. Education institutions can exploit the gained knowledge especially in marketing, student counselling and the development of alumni activities. On an educational policy level, the findings provide important insights for further development of vocational and higher education in Finland in the growing sports industry and beyond.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Philosophical underpinnings

The section below briefly describes the ontological and epistemological positions of this research, as well as how they are in line with Chaos Theory of Careers, as well as narrative and phenomenographic research traditions and reflexive thematic analysis, which are the methodological approaches applied in this study.

Narrative research is used widely, and while there seems to be a consensus that narratives are about meaningful connections between events or experiences, there are differences in epistemological and ontological assumptions between different approaches (Meretoja, 2014; Ritivoi, 2005; Squire et al., 2008). Roughly classified, the epistemologically centred approach sees narratives primarily as an instrument for making meaning of human experience (e.g., Bruner, 1991), while the ontologically centred approach considers that human experience has a narrative order (e.g., Ricoeur, 1984).

However, Meretoja (2014) has criticized this sheer division, noting that the philosophical underpinnings of these positions are less obvious and more overlapping than often presented, and thus the division is somewhat blurred. Meretoja (2014, p. 105) points out that some of this confusion may be due to the fact that people from different perspectives are partly talking about different things:

It is one thing to ask whether the unfolding of historical events follows a narrative logic, and another to ask whether our experiences of ourselves or of the world have a narrative dimension in some sense.

This is an important notion, and in the present study I focus on studying people's subjective perceptions of their own careers. While I will later discuss those perceptions in relation to reality, I am not forced to discuss if the *world* in general has narrative order. I do, however, tend to think that *human experience* has narrative features. While nature itself may not follow a narrative structure, there

are narrative elements in human life: we interpret and act upon our interpretations while living, instead of first living and then narrating (Carr, 1986, pp. 125–126; Meretoja, 2014, pp. 96–97). It is, however, open to question whether human life has a beginning, middle and an end, or if only the story we tell about our life has those features (Ritivoi, 2005). Nevertheless, narrative interpretation of our experience is a fundamental aspect of being human (Meretoja, 2014, p. 97). In this way I do think that narrativity has ontological grounds.

This being said, it is important to separate narratives from reality, even though narrative interpretation is *a part of human reality*. If narratives were seen as reality itself, there would not be room for critique or alternative narratives (Meretoja, 2014, pp. 103–104). Narratives are interpretative in nature. Therefore, I mainly rely on narrative as a cognitive instrument. Life is not an uninterrupted, coherent story, and our life stories or narrative identities cannot even be told as one, grand, synthesizing story. Instead, we narrate multiple different stories of our lives that vary both in form and content (Battersby, 2006, p. 34; Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011, p. 335; Raggatt, 2006, p. 15). In this way, narrative is a tool for organizing our experiences of ourselves in the world. This position goes together with seeing narrative interpretation as a part of life, and also does not assume that narrative is the *only* way we make sense of our experiences (Meretoja, 2014, p. 101).

Separating narratives and reality does not, however, indicate that narratives are not true and real, or that they falsify reality (Meretoja, 2014, pp. 96–97). I presume that there is a reality that is shared and, in some ways, unaffected by our construction of it, but that each individual can experience it differently, as our premises for interpreting that reality are unique. In this way, the narratives also reflect objective reality. Ontologically, this is in line with the phenomenographic research tradition, which supports a non-dualistic ontology and presumes that there is a world that we both *live in* and *experience* (Åkerlind, 2005a, p. 72; Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13).

Along the same lines, Pryor and Bright (2003) base their Chaos Theory of Careers on an assumption that the world is both knowable and constructed. They point out that construction is necessary for humans:

Because reality is so complex it is inevitable that humans will select and construct their vision of it in order to function and adapt to reality as they experience it. (p. 16)

For me, the question of whether these constructions are accurate displays of the objective reality is somewhat irrelevant. As Pryor and Bright (2003) note, the individual constructions can be very influential from the career development perspective, even if they are not accurate objectively speaking. They call this position *constructive realist*. In phenomenography, a similar view is expressed in making the distinction between first- and second-order perspectives. While the former makes statements about reality, the latter makes statements about how that reality is perceived (Marton, 2015, p. 106). The perception of an individual is partly affected by pre-existent, socio-cultural master narratives that are interpersonally co-constructed (Bamberg, 2005, p. 287; Squire et al., 2008, p. 6). They are, nevertheless, integrated into the individual perception. Thus,

narratives contain information on what events, experiences, interpretations and aspirations are meaningful and influential for individuals. However, it needs to be acknowledged that narratives are not a means to reach individual experience as “pure”: narratives are descriptions that are performative in nature, written with a purpose, for an audience (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Essentially, I am studying narratives, not experiences.

Another important notion is the consideration of the truth claims that I make regarding the findings of this study. Especially the reflexive thematic analysis that I have used (unlike some other thematic approaches) highlights subjectivity, seeing it as a resource rather than as a falsifying element in qualitative research. Reflexive thematic analysis does not aim to *find* the “truth” from the data, but utilizes the researcher’s interpretation in *producing* meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Similarly, phenomenographic findings are seen as *one* rather than the *only* possible interpretation of the data, depending on the researcher (Marton, 1988, p. 147). I apply this line of thought throughout this thesis. This issue is further discussed in the Discussion when reflecting on the quality of this research.

In conclusion, I view that while there is an objective reality that we live in, each of us also has unique ways of understanding, interpreting, and experiencing that reality. My interest lies in these subjective perceptions and their narrative presentations, which are true to individuals themselves, as they have an influence on us regardless of whether they are accurate objectively speaking. However, narratives are not created in a vacuum, and thus, they also reflect the world we live in. I see narratives as a natural way of interpreting human experiences, and therefore as a relevant method for gaining and generating knowledge about the constructed perceptions of individuals.

2.2 A reflective overview of the research process

Self-reflexivity, transparency and thick description are considered some of the key features in producing high-quality qualitative research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). As the present study draws heavily on the interpretations and reflexivity of the researcher, I consider it essential to provide an overview of the research process. The main purpose of this subsection is to give the reader a sense of how this research has unfolded, illustrating how the perspectives of the research have come together. I hope this provides readers with additional knowledge for assessing the quality of the present study. There is also a second purpose. Qualitative research is often presented neatly, while the process itself can be quite messy (Clark et al., 2007). While I do not believe that my research process is messy in any unusual way, during the initial and incomplete phases of the study it felt like it was. As a researcher of narratives as well as of difficult experiences, I hope that expounding this process will both promote transparency in further work and offer peer support to other doctoral students involved in incomplete

processes. In the following, a short narrative account is provided, supported by a visual, temporally presented description of the thesis process (Figure 2).

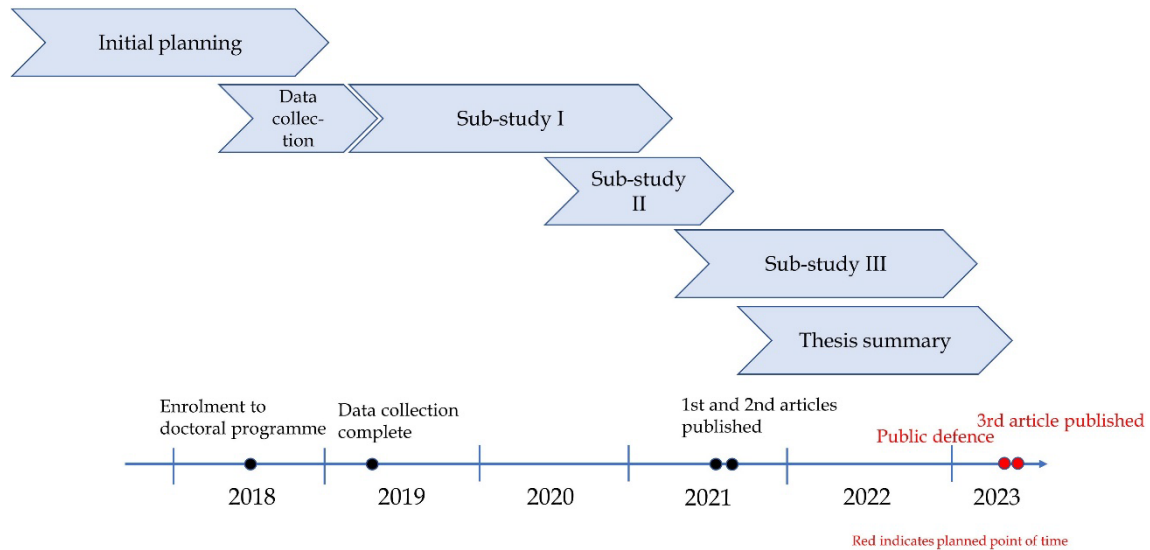


FIGURE 2 Temporal presentation of the thesis process

The initial planning of this research project was grounded, on one hand, on my observations of the experiences of fellow graduates from Bachelor of Sports Studies programmes. Even during the studies, we discussed the degree’s position in the labour market and noticed how many graduates changed field. On the other hand, during my own bachelor and master theses, I had become convinced of the research potential of narratives. Collecting life stories was part of my research plan from the outset, together with research questions that illuminate the meanings attributed to formal education and the kinds of stories graduates tell about their careers.

My initial research idea was to focus on bachelors of Sports Studies, but I was not accepted to the doctoral programme on my first application round, after which my supervisors advised me to broaden my research topic to all sports degree graduates. At that stage, I also gave up the idea of collecting elaborative interview data from graduates and turned instead to studying employer expectations as a complementary perspective.

After being accepted to the programme, I spent time in the library reading more about career and life story research. I soon had a clear idea of data gathering and the pilot collection was carried out in autumn 2018, followed with the main data collection in early 2019. My initial goal was to collect 40-50 narratives, although I was concerned that people might find writing their life stories too time-consuming and laborious. I expected needing to carry out additional data collection rounds, but was happily surprised to have 60 narratives at the end of the data gathering. As my study continued, the data proved to be both rich and thought-provoking. In autumn 2019 my supervisors encouraged me to focus on studying the narratives I already had and to leave the employer perspective as a future endeavour.

During spring 2019 I struggled with the analysis for my first sub-study. I had initially planned a phenomenological approach, but failed to fully grasp the “whys and hows” of my study. After a period of struggles, my main supervisor carefully suggested considering whether phenomenography would suit my purposes. I was soon convinced that it was worth pursuing. Looking into the range of meanings in the data seemed far more fitting than finding the essence of the phenomenon², both philosophically and practically.

While I was convinced that a phenomenographic approach was the right choice for my purposes for the first sub-study, the processes of analysis and article writing were challenging. Creating the categories of description and identifying the themes of variation was a laborious process – I had the puzzle pieces, but finding out how they relate to each other was a demanding process that required trial and error, feedback from other scholars, and discussions with co-authors. In the end, however, I was very satisfied with the outcome space (i.e., how the findings are reported). It represented the data well in my opinion, and was intriguing. The peer-reviewers required major changes, but that mostly reflected my lack of experience of article writing: especially the introduction and discussion needed rewriting. The process of publishing the first article was very educational.

My struggles writing the first article also led to an important discovery. I had initially considered using Career Construction Theory (CCT, Savickas, 2005) as a theoretical framework for my studies, as it emphasizes the role of narratives. The more I read about it (focusing on all aspects, not only the ones that fit into my thinking), the less convinced I was that it was the theory for me. In an e-mail to a colleague, I wrote (translated from Finnish):

-- even though the starting point of the theory (subjective career, career as a story, meaning-making for life and career events through stories) fits my research perfectly, I haven't been able to find points of contact between my work and the concepts of the theory (career adaptability, life themes, etc.).

CCT was too deterministic for me, and wanted, in my opinion, to place people in boxes and label them. Ideas such as matching people to occupations based on their “vocational personality” (Savickas, 2005, pp. 43–44) had little relevance with the ideas that I had about career development, based both on my personal experience and the data I was studying. Pryor and Bright (2014, p. 4) shared a similar view, and wrote:

Our fundamental objection to these theoretical formulations was that they did not relate very well to life as it is lived. The extant theories did not seem to relate well to realities beyond the immediate challenge to make career decisions, to incorporate the whole of the rest of a person's life or the context in which such decisions were to be made.

In contrast to CCT, Pryor and Bright's Chaos Theory of Careers seemed to fit quite well, not only in terms of its premises, but also its developments. For example, CTC uses *attractors* to describe different career patterns (Amundson et

² See for example Larsson & Holmström (2007) for a comparison between phenomenographic and phenomenological analysis.

al., 2014, p. 18; Pryor & Bright, 2014, p. 6), and I was able to recognize these patterns in my data.

The process of the second sub-study went rather smoothly, and the reviewers only suggested minor changes. Hence, the first two articles were published online less than two months apart in autumn 2021. During the first sub-study I had already got to know the data well, methodologically I had a clear idea of what I was doing, and I had a better understanding of what article writing was.

The idea of the third sub-study changed during the process. After discarding the idea of a second data set with an employer perspective, I planned to study the application and enrolment decisions and reflections of graduates. However, the findings of the first two sub-studies sparked a new idea. It had become evident that many participants in my study struggled in their careers, but reflected these difficulties in different ways: some thrived regardless, while others expressed bitterness. The idea of studying difficulties instead of enrolment stories seemed fresher, and I thought it would also be beneficial for my personal career development: the study would possibly be interesting regarding modern careers in general, not only in the context of the sports industry.

After I had an idea of what my research question would be, I searched for a both philosophically and practically suitable analysis method. Discussions with other scholars led me to discovering reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the beginning, the idea of the process was less clear than with the second article, but the analysis was interesting to conduct. The methodological literature together with discussions with peers and supervisors helped me to get past the mental tangles I faced when analysing the data with the new (for me) analysis method and writing the manuscript. At the time of writing, the article has been accepted for publication after two rounds of minor revisions and is expected to be published in spring 2023.

I began writing the thesis summary during a related university course, and continued working on the summary after the first draft of the third article was finished. Writing the summary has been both easy and hard. On one hand, I felt that my thesis is a unified entity, and I already had most pieces of the puzzle. On the other hand, understanding the findings and their meanings really challenged me. Luckily, science is not a lonely job: previous writers, peers, mentors, and supervisors have been a great help in developing my thinking.

Finally, as I am studying the intertwinement of work and nonwork, it is essential to note that the thesis process has not been separate from other elements of my life. Intermittency of funding, family occurrences, health issues, relocating, and my efforts in public participation all impacted my research process. I see, though, that slowing down in research is not necessarily detrimental, as it also provides opportunities for thinking. On the other hand, family, friends, hobbies, and communities have also been great resource, fostering my well-being and therefore supporting my work.

2.3 Data

Along the lines of Chaos Theory of Careers, my aim in data collection was to gather career narratives that would consider career development holistically, giving the participants an opportunity to incorporate any aspects of their life that affected their career into the story. To bring out these contextual factors, I asked participants to write their *life stories*, instead of just *career stories*. The purpose was to encourage them to write about any possible work- or nonwork-related influences during their lives that they recognized as playing a part in the formation of their careers.

The data of this study consisted of 60 life narratives written from the career perspective by sports degree graduates. What follows is a description of the data collection process and of the data.

2.3.1 Data collection

Data collection was planned together with the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) and conducted using their Penna data collection tool, which is designed to enable collecting and archiving qualitative textual data (Finnish Social Science Data Archive, n.d.). The FSD also ensured that ethical guidelines were followed regarding the collection of personal data, especially in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation. With the participants' consent, the data was archived for later use.

Pilot data was collected in autumn 2018 with purposive sampling. The sample was planned to include participants with varying educational backgrounds and current work statuses. The aim of the pilot collection was to ensure that the data request was clear and suitable for various participants. The data produced by the pilot participants matched the expectations regarding the form and content of the data collected. Based on feedback from the pilot participants, a page explaining the methodology of the study more thoroughly was added to the research invitation. As the collecting instrument itself was not changed, the pilot data was included in the actual data.

To qualify to participate in the study, participants were required to have completed a vocational (degree title *sports assistant*), bachelor's or master's level degree in sports (degree titles *Bachelor* or *Master of Sport Studies/Sciences*, respectively) with a graduation year between 2004-2015. The timeframe was chosen so that the research would be directed at modern, 21st century degree programmes. The degree title of sports assistant was introduced in 2001, when the education was changed to its current format as a three-year programme. Thus, since 2004 all graduates have graduated as sports assistants (J. Leivo, personal communication December 13, 2018). On the other hand, ending the time frame in 2015 ensured that all participants had built their careers for at least full two years after graduation.

Actual data collection was carried out in January-February 2019. An open invitation to participate was shared through alumni lists of educational

institutions, worker’s unions, and social media. The invitation consisted of an information page on the university website and a data collection form on the FSD website. The invitation page is presented in Appendix 1, the linked method page in Appendix 2, and the data collection form in Appendix 3. In the invitation, participants were asked to write their life story from the perspective of their career. Auxiliary questions were provided as prompts, but freedom of writing was highlighted. Together with the narrative, age, gender, completed degrees and current work status were queried as background information. In addition, participants were asked to either grant or deny permission to archive their responses by the FSD for future use.

2.3.2 Participants and data

In total, 68 responses were submitted. Eight responses were discarded. Reasons for non-acceptance were lack of required degree, graduation year not between 2004-2015, or only background information was provided without a written response. Of the 60 accepted participants, 23 reported themselves as male, 37 as female, and 0 as other. Average age was 31 years, the range varying from 22 to 51 years. The professional background information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Professional background information of the participants

	Of 60 participants	
Highest completed sports degree		
Vocational	15	25%
Bachelor of Sport Studies (UAS)	25	42%
Bachelor of Sport Sciences (university)	2	3%
Master of Sport Studies (UAS)	5	8%
Master of Sport Sciences (university)	12	20%
Doctor of Sport Sciences	1	2%
Degree in other occupational field as well		
Yes	24	40%
No	36	60%
Current field		
In sports industry	36	60%
Not in sports industry	13	22%
Other (e.g., partly in sports industry)	11	18%

UAS = University of Applied Sciences

Of the participants, 19 had combined multiple separate sports degree programmes in their education. This number does not include participants who reported both a bachelor and a master’s degree in Sport Sciences, as in Finnish universities a bachelor’s degree is usually considered an intermediate stage of master’s studies, and not all university masters reported it. Even more interesting is that 40% of participants had completed at least one degree in another field outside of sports. Overall, the background information of the participants demonstrates the non-linearity of modern careers.

The length of the 60 narratives varied between 27 and 1,946 words, averaging at 504 words. All 60 narratives were analysed in the first sub-study. The second sub-study employed 59 narratives, as one was discarded due to not containing all of the plot elements required for analysis. In the third sub-study, 54 narratives were analysed, as six were excluded for not containing any description of difficulties.

2.4 Analysis

All sub-studies employed the same data pool (60 narratives), but different sub-research questions had different aims and required different analysis methods. An overview of the sub-study methods and research questions is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Overview of the sub-studies

	Research question	Number of analysed narratives	Method of analysis	Form of findings
Sub-study I	What qualitatively different meanings do sports degree graduates attribute to their degrees as part of their life narratives?	60	Phenomenography	Categories of description
Sub-study II	What are the typical career story models among sports graduates?	59	Narrative analysis	Story models
Sub-study III	What meanings do difficulties have in sports degree graduates' career-themed life narratives?	54	Reflexive thematic analysis	Themes

In the following, each analysis is process is described in detail.

2.4.1 Phenomenographic analysis of meanings attributed to sports degree education

Phenomenography is a research approach that aims to systematically investigate the qualitatively different ways that people experience or think about phenomena (Marton, 1988). It was originally developed by educational researchers in Sweden in the late 70s and early 80s (Marton, 1988, p. 141). Phenomenography is interested in meanings, and the aim is to represent the different meanings as a structured set in which the meanings are logically related to each other (Åkerlind, 2005a, pp. 71-72; Marton, 2015, pp. 106-107). Åkerlind (2005a, pp. 71-72) has argued that the logical structure relating the different meanings is a strength of phenomenographic research. She notes that:

-- it provides a way of looking at collective human experience of phenomena holistically, despite the fact that such phenomena may be perceived differently by different people and under different circumstances.

The word *collective* is crucial. Phenomenographic research aims to identify the range of meanings within the data, expressed by different participants, and is not to be understood as an individual level description (Åkerlind, 2005b, p. 323).

Sub-study I aimed to identify the different meanings attributed to sports degree education. The analysis followed the procedures described in the phenomenographic literature (Åkerlind, 2005b; Marton, 1988, pp. 154–155). The analysis began with familiarizing with the data by reading the narratives multiple times. After an overall understanding of the data was reached, the analysis continued with coding. Using Atlas.ti computer software, quotations that were relevant regarding the research questions were marked. Åkerlind (2005b, p. 327) points out that there is variation among phenomenographers in choosing to work with whole transcripts, segments of transcripts or with smaller quotes. In the present study, the coded segments were quotes of varying lengths, as suggested by Marton (1988, pp. 154–155). The quotation approach was chosen because the participants often expressed multiple different meanings for their education in one narrative. It is, however, vital that the interpretations of the quotes are made in relation to the original data throughout the analysis (Marton, 1988, pp. 154–155).

In the next step, the analysis was taken from individual narratives to a collective level, focusing on the “pool of meanings” (Marton, 1988, p. 155). To facilitate management of hundreds of codes, similar codes were first tentatively visually organized, bringing similar codes closer together. After that, the codes were more closely analysed and codes that had similar essential meaning were grouped together. By comparing the similarities and differences between the groups, and by combining groups together, initial categories of description were formed. Analysis was continued by comparing the initial categories and identifying the themes or qualities that separated the categories from each other. In phenomenography, these are called themes or dimensions of variation (Åkerlind, 2005c, p. 152). For clarification: the purpose was not to identify all possible themes in the data, but to focus on themes that make differences between categories visible.

Categories were then organized into a table, where the grouping was visible both in relation to the categories of description and themes of variation. The categories and themes were tentatively named. Codes that had been left unattached were closely analysed in relation to the groups, and grouping and naming were redone, so that all codes were finally placed under fitting titles. Finally, analysis was taken back to the level of individual codes, as it was checked that each code fitted both the category and the theme under which it was placed. Similarly, all quotes attached to codes were systematically checked. The final product of phenomenographic analysis is called an outcome space, usually presented in the form of a table, which presents the categories of description and how they are related to each other (Åkerlind et al., 2005, p. 95.). Often the

categories are in some hierarchical order in relation to each other. In addition, the contents of each category are elaborated in descriptive texts.

2.4.2 Narrative analysis of sports graduates' career story models

Narrative research has been used for decades and, in the 21st century, has been notably popular in the social sciences. There is a wide variety of approaches and the narrative research framework offers very little guidelines on the practicalities of research (Squire et al., 2008, pp. 1–3). The differences are rooted in the different philosophical assumptions discussed in section 2.1. With varied perspectives come varied definitions: for example, the term *narrative analysis* has different definitions in different approaches (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). For example, Riessmann (2008, pp. 11–14) sees narrative analysis as a broad term, referring to the family of methods that analyse storied data, and especially sequences of action or events. Polkinghorne (1995) makes a more distinct definition and distinguishes *analysis of narrative* and *narrative analysis*. According to Polkinghorne (1995), the former refers to studies that examine narrative data with paradigmatic analysis, while the latter refers to a process where data is synthesized into a coherent account. The present study understood narrative analysis as presented by Polkinghorne (1995).

The study aimed to identify typical career story models among Finnish sports graduates. As the narrative framework offers little specified guidelines for analysis, different analytical processes have to be developed for different data and aims (Bold, 2012, pp. 120–121; Riessman, 2008, p. 18). The analysis process developed for the purpose of this study was based on two explanatory elements of life stories: *plot* and *tone*. Polkinghorne (1995, pp. 7–8) explains that the plot is the structure that contextualizes the meaning of individual events, shows their temporal order and brings forward perceptions of causal links. The temporality of plots means that each story needs a beginning, middle, and end (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 17). In between, not all events are important to the story: only times or events that change the direction of the story are crucial for reaching the denouement, and these can be referred to as *turning points* (Clausen, 1998, pp. 202–206; Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). Hence, during the analysis, beginning, middle, end, and turning points were identified for each story.

Life narratives are more than just the events that they include. According to Linde (1993, pp. 21–22, 71–72), evaluative sections in the narrative convey how the events should be understood. Polkinghorne (1995, p. 17) notes that emotions provide important insights to individual's meanings and understandings, as different people react so the same events in different ways. The term *tone* is used here to refer to the evaluative element of life stories, and the overall tone of each story was identified.

In practice, the analysis began by familiarizing with the data. Having analysed the data for sub-study I, I already had an overall understanding of them. Regardless of that, the new analysis came with a new perspective, and I aimed to read through the narratives several times again with "fresh eyes". I also wrote a long and short summary of each narrative. This was to help bring forward the

essential elements of each story. The summaries also helped with managing the large data set in the next phases of the analysis. I used Atlas.ti computer software as a tool to manage the data during analysis process.

In the next stage, the stories were grouped based on the plot and tone of the stories. Initial grouping was performed based on the short summaries, and then the grouping was revised by comparing the longer summaries that had more detail. Groups were tentatively named according to their most prominent features. Some narratives shared characteristics from two groups. At this point, these were marked as borderline cases and left for later consideration.

Following the grouping, the analysis was brought back to each full narrative within a group, and the plots were analysed more thoroughly. Beginning, middle, and end, as well as turning points of each story were identified. Naturally, there were often many evaluative manifestations in the narratives, but the most prominent emotional feature of the narrative was identified as its tone. Each story was also examined to verify its belonging to the group. Special attention was paid to borderline cases, and they were investigated both individually and as a group to validate the formed groups. Each borderline case was finally placed in the most fitting group.

The final stage of the analysis was compiling the story models based on the groups. Narratives of each group were presented as a table, where each story's beginning, middle, end, turning points, and tone were listed. Collectively recurring contents were identified as typical characteristics of that specific story model. Next, a coherent example story for each story model was constructed. This was done by using only quotations from the original narratives within that group, extracting quotes from the narratives as widely as possible. The example narratives were constructed so that they included all the identified typical characteristics of that story model. The purpose of the example narratives was to validate each story model by comparing the example narrative to the original narratives within that group. Finally, final titles were assigned to the groups to highlight the distinctive nature of each story model.

2.4.3 Reflexive thematic analysis of the meaning of difficulties in career narratives

The third sub-study aimed to understand the meaning of difficulties in the career-themed life narratives. The research question was approached from a paradigmatic-type narrative perspective that analyses narratives and searches for common elements across the data set (Polkinghorne, 1995). The chosen analytic method was reflexive thematic analysis, as it was philosophically compatible with the overall project and is a suitable for qualitatively analysing shared meanings in the data, resulting in themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important distinction is that themes in reflexive thematic analysis do not refer to shared *topics*, but shared *meanings* (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis emphasizes the role of the researcher, stressing that the product of the analysis is actively created by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594).

The analytic process followed the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage consisted of familiarizing with the data. While the data was already familiar from previous analyses, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) note that this immersion needs to be active, looking for patterns in the data. Thus, it was important to read the data through from the perspective of the research question. Following their suggestions, I also wrote down initial ideas for coding, which proved helpful in maintaining consistency during coding.

The second phase was generating codes using Atlas.ti software. In the previous phase, when writing down initial ideas, I had not separated out difficulties from the perceived consequences, but coded them as one. For example, an initial coding idea in my notes is “problems with employment contract resulted in resignation”. Here, problems with employment was the difficulty, and resignation (change in plot) was the meaning. After starting coding systematically, it soon became clear that there were too many combinations, and the number of codes would be impossible to manage within the limits of the project. I decided to do double coding, and coded difficulties in blue colour and their meaning in the narrative in green. The difficulties were grouped and labelled to gain an overall understanding of the types of difficulties that the narratives described, and this was used as contextual information. The actual analysis, however, focused on the meanings. Thus, the following description focuses on the analysis of meanings.

In the next step, attention was brought to a broader level and initial themes were formed by organizing the codes visually into groups. Further, an initial mind map was formed while considering the relationships between themes, organizing the codes into themes and sub-themes. Next, the themes needed to be reviewed. In practice, all quotations within each theme were read, and each theme was checked to ensure internal coherence of the theme. Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 341) refer to this as a *central concept* that unites the theme. Themes were also checked in relation to other themes, as different themes should be clearly distinct from each other. In the end, the thematic map was considered in relation to the whole data set. The reviewing phase required many revisions of the themes until they reflected the data fittingly. In the end, themes were named, and the findings were explained in the article manuscript.

3 FINDINGS

In this dissertation, the career life stories of sports graduates were examined in three sub-studies. In the following, I will first summarize the findings of each sub-study, and then present the synthesis of the findings.

3.1 Sub-study I: Meanings of sports degree education in the life narratives of graduates

The purpose of the first sub-study was to find out what meanings the graduates attributed to their sports degree education as a part of their career-themed life narrative. The following research questions were addressed: 1. What meanings do sports graduates attribute to degree education? 2. How are the meanings qualitatively different from each other? In total, 60 career life stories written by sports graduates were included as data. Using phenomenography, six different categories of meaning were formed. The education was experienced as a (1) disappointment, (2) instrument, (3) practical choice, (4) enabler, (5) goal-oriented route, and (6) holistic reformer. Variations between these categories were identified through five themes: a) general experience of studies, b) professional development, c) employment and career, d) life outside work, and e) psychological needs. The themes of variation reveal the differences between the categories. The outcome space is presented in Table 3 in page 44.

In the first category, (1) disappointment, the education was attributed negative meanings. Participants expressed disappointment towards the studies, but also towards the perceived utility of the education, both professionally and in personal life. The second category, (2) instrument, showed meanings that were not negative, but the education was described in merely instrumental terms. The education was described as having simple, practical consequences in life that were not necessarily sport related. However, sports education and work were seen as a convenient choice, as the studies and work in the field were perceived as nice and straightforward.

In the third category, (3) practical choice, appreciation of the field of sport became visible, but the role of education was more to maintain current life than to change it. The education was primarily seen as a practical choice that enabled staying in one's comfort zone. The meanings still remained quite one-dimensional, for example professional development was understood as a list of skills or subjects. In the fourth category, (4) enabler, the education was clearly seen as changing life for the better. This change was perceived as positive and unplanned in nature, education being the enabler.

In the fifth category, (5) goal-oriented route, the education was seen as a way to a desired outcome. The education was associated with intense positive meanings. Nevertheless, the education was not a self-evident shortcut to happiness, and goals were not always achieved. In the sixth category, (6) holistic reformer, the education had thoroughly changed the participants life for the better. The sport industry was no longer only a job, but its meanings were intertwined holistically with the self.

The findings showed that the meanings of sports degree education were not limited to employment and professional self, but were intertwined with the individual's life in many ways. Collectively, the categories suggested that the feeling of meaningfulness was connected to perceived changes in one's life. If the individual experienced that the education did not bring about change in oneself, in one's career, or in private life, it was perceived as a disappointment. In contrast, the more profound changes in one's life were reflected in the intensity of the role that was attributed to education.

TABLE 3 Outcome space: meanings of sports degree education

Themes of variation	Categories - Sports degree education as a:					
	1 disappointment	2 instrument	3 practical choice	4 enabler	5 goal-oriented route	6 holistic transformer
<i>a) general experience of studies</i>	negative experience	affecting everyday life	within comfort zone	impressive experience	labour-consuming but rewarding	captivating
<i>b) professional development</i>	uncertainty of own competence	formal qualification	learning vocational skills	expansion of professional understanding	integrating education and work	transformation of professional identity
<i>c) employment and career</i>	weak career options	temporary career stage	natural continuum of a sporty life	enabling employment	reaching a desired position	fulfilling career dreams
<i>d) life outside work</i>	life difficulties	money	fitting solution for life situation	utilizing knowledge in everyday life	furtherance of own sporting	mental capital
<i>e) psychological needs</i>	not fulfilled	external validation	feeling of safety	feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness	actively searching for challenges	creating meaningful relationships

3.2 Sub-study II: Career story models of Finnish sports graduates

This study sought to understand how Finnish sports graduates described their education and career paths as a part of their life stories. The purpose of the analysis was to identify collective features as well as variation within the career stories of Finnish sports graduates. The research question was: What are the typical career story models among sports graduates? Data consisted of 59 career life stories written by Finnish sports graduates and was analysed with narrative analysis. Analysing the similarities and differences between the plot and tone of the stories, five different typical story models were formed based on the data. The formed story models were: (1) *from struggles to career change*; (2) *momentum for a new career*; (3) *no pain, no gain*; (4) *natural path to success*; and (5) *from aspirations to an uncertain future*.

In the first story model, (1) *from struggles to career change*, the protagonist no longer worked in sport. The career change had been made due to negative experiences in work life. The sport career was perceived as a dead end, and the protagonist had to find another career to pursue. The second story model, (2) *momentum for a new career*, also ends in employment in another field. However, in this story model sport education, work or career was seen as an important part of the story that contributed to achieving their current position. The sport path was not superfluous, but benefitted the protagonist in some way, and therefore the tone of the story was more positive than in the first story model. In both story models the protagonist was pushed away from sports by negative experiences, but in the second story model the turning points also included positive experiences from another field, creating an appealing alternative to sports.

In the third story model, (3) *no pain, no gain*, the protagonist had faced difficulties in their journey, as in the first two story models. However, in this story model the end position is in the sport industry, so the protagonist had overcome the hurdles and, possibly through trial and error, found their way in the field of sports. The story was not easy and smooth, and personal persistence, initiative, and survival were highlighted in achieving the desired outcome. The fourth story model, (4) *natural path to success*, also ended up in the field of sport. In this story model, however, the path was quite smooth. When difficulties were mentioned, they were told through the lens of positive consequences that followed.

The fifth and final story model, (5) *from aspirations to an uncertain future*, left the end of the story open. The protagonist was still working in sports, but the story highlights the protagonist's ponderings about their future. The difficulties faced were similar to the first three story models, but the protagonist is yet to make a career decision – to stay or to leave.

Collectively, these findings suggest that many graduates face experiences that challenge their remaining in the sports industry. While being accepted to a sports degree programme was an important part of most stories, experiences in working life defined the decision to stay or leave. Obtaining a career-defining

key job was important in finding one's place in the industry. On the other hand, leaving the sports industry could also be seen as a positive consequence if a satisfying and suitable position was found after realizing a career in sports was not the right fit. This study showed how graduates struggle, but also highlighted how people cope with these difficulties in their stories.

3.3 Sub-study III: Meaning of difficulties in sports graduates' career-themed life narratives

The aim of the third sub-study was to understand what meanings difficulties have in today's career narratives using the case of sports degree graduates. A total of 54 career-themed life narratives from graduates with a vocational, bachelor or master level sports degree were analysed with reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis generated five themes that describe patterns of meaning in the data. Difficulties were perceived as (1) *cause of concrete career and life events*, (2) *process/action-shaper*, (3) *junctions*, (4) *inducers of unpleasant reflections*, and (5) *encouragement for learning and growth*. These meanings were conveyed by two elements of life narratives: plot and reflection. These elements had different emphasis in different themes.

The first theme, *difficulties as perceived cause of concrete career and life events*, understood the meaning of difficulties through the plot of the story. Participants perceived difficulties as having led to certain events either directly or through a chain reaction. Some of these events were very significant, as they may even be turning points in the story, such as when the career path shifted to a different field. Other more minor changes included examples such as a change of job or becoming temporarily unemployed. Not all events were career related, such as relocating.

In the second theme, a reflective element was introduced, while the theme still considered the events described in the plot. The theme, *difficulties as process/action-shaper*, showed how difficulties sparked change in the participants' thinking and actions. The focus was on the process, as the result was not necessarily changed. An example of this was when a participant described slowing their study pace in reaction to difficulties, but the end result, graduation, remained the same. Another typical example was the process of gaining admission to a desired education programme. After an initial denial, own preparation effort was highlighted, leading to successful admission.

Similarly, the meaning described in the third theme involved both plot and reflection. The theme *difficulties as junctions* illustrated how participants understood difficulties as possible but unrealized turning points in the story. The theme involved reflection on what could have happened, or what could happen in the future. Difficulties were seen as crossroads at which the participants considered potential alternative stories.

The fourth and fifth themes focused solely on reflections. The fourth theme, *difficulties as inducers of unpleasant reflections*, discussed the negative emotions and assessments involved with the faced difficulties. Participants shared their negative views of their career trajectories and of the sports industry. They described many unpleasant feelings, such as bitterness, frustration, and shame. Many also discussed the uncertainty of the future and their search for a satisfying career.

The final theme, *difficulties as encouragement for learning and growth*, focused on positive reflections. Many ways of learning and growing were reported as outcomes of difficulties. Difficulties had, for example, led to finding one's true passion, and resulted in gaining new skills. Personal growth, such as humbling, was also seen as a positive consequence. Previous difficulties also sparked new perspectives, and helped value the current, better life.

Overall, the findings showed that difficulties are often a meaningful part of the individual's career experiences and can be reflected upon in many ways. While difficulties are unpleasant and may cause negative effects, this study demonstrated that they also hold important value and that there are many ways of reflecting on them in a positive way.

3.4 Synthesis of the main findings

Drawing together the findings of the three sub-studies presented above, three overarching themes can be identified. These themes reflect how sports graduates' career experiences intertwine with their life narratives. The themes are *interweaving of work and nonwork*, *pondering of career change*, and *perceiving difficulties as meaningful*. The themes are qualitatively interrelated, and these relations are shown in Figure 3. The findings focus on the perceptions of the participants, but also reflect the shared reality, as presented on the outer edge of the figure (outside the dotted line).

Firstly, the findings suggest that work and nonwork are interwoven in many ways. A sporty childhood is the basis for interest in sport education and working in sports, and this personal involvement is present throughout the narratives. There are two elements to this involvement: hobbyism and identity. On one hand, sport is seen as a fun and familiar activity. For example, the motivation for sport education was not necessarily interest in a sports career, but the education also had instrumental and practical meanings, and sport was a comfortable choice. On the other hand, sport can be a part of identity. For example, sports education was given the most intense meanings when meanings were holistically intertwined with the self, and sport was more than a hobby or a profession.

Further, non-professional life events can be important turning points in careers stories, such as when career changes are made for family reasons. Participants experienced many difficulties outside work, such as injuries, illnesses, and family crises that were meaningful also in the career context.

Correspondingly, career difficulties affected nonwork elements of life. Along the same lines, life outside work and psychological needs were important elements of the meanings that were attributed to education, and motives for choosing sport education were not necessarily associated with career but related to other elements of life.

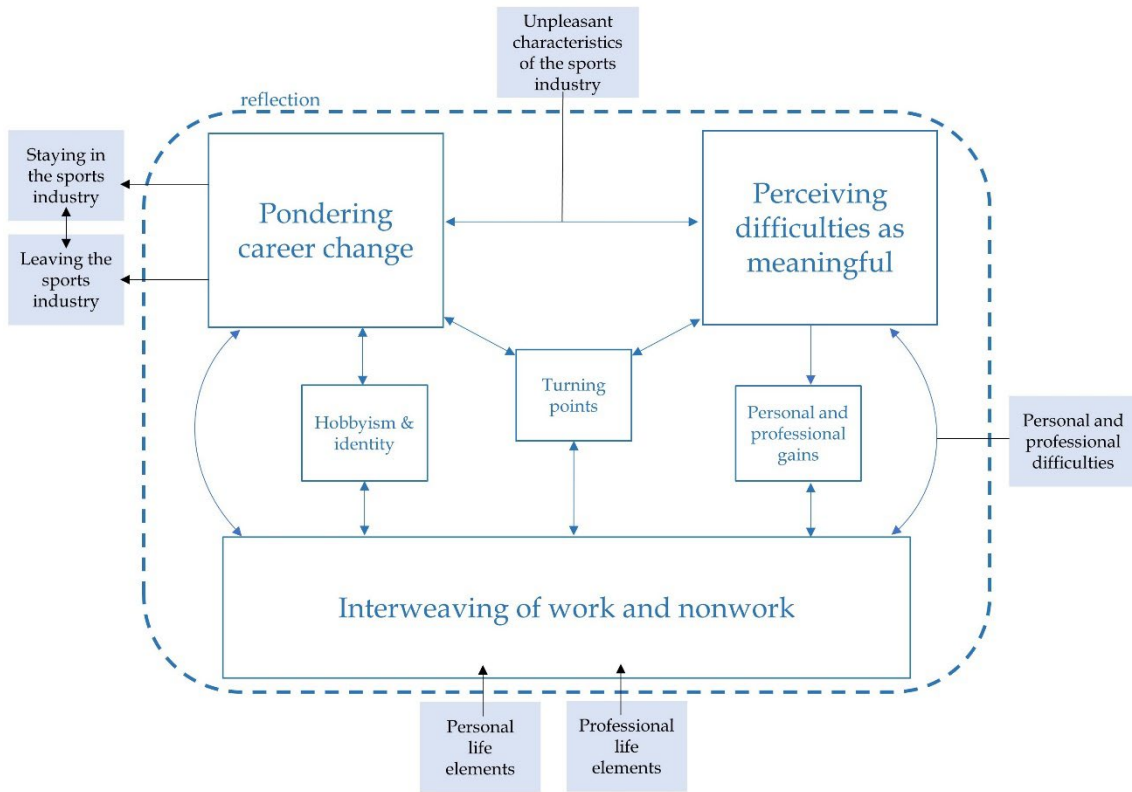


FIGURE 3 Synthesis of the main findings

Secondly, the data show how the graduates ponder career change. Partly, this is rooted in the mentioned premise that a career in sports was not intended at all in the first place. Many participants had, or discovered, competing interests in other fields, and therefore a career change was not necessarily a negative consequence but, in fact, a desired one.

However, the participants also discussed many structural challenges in the sports industry, such as limited career opportunities, unpleasant working hours, health requirements, and low pay. For some, the disappointment became visible already during their education. These difficulties shaped their perceptions of the field and their possible career trajectories and led participants to re-seek their professional path. Because of the experienced issues, the sports industry was seen as a poor fit with the wider picture of their life. A career change was seen as a solution to these problems. Staying in the sports industry required counterbalancing, positive experiences in the sports industry. The earlier mentioned hobbyism and identity-level sport involvement were also visible in career change pondering, as, for different reasons, some had continued partly working in sports even after a career change.

Thirdly, the findings highlight how difficult experiences are meaningful and can be reflected in a positive way. Experienced difficulties were a force for seeking change, and the change might be welcomed, as demonstrated earlier. After finding a satisfying professional position, be it in the sports industry or somewhere else, one might perceive oneself as a *survivor*, who gained growth and learning experiences in the process. The gains were both professional and personal. Difficulties can also be meaningful even when they do not directly result in positive consequences, as they provide turning points and opportunities for reflection.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Discussion on the findings

This thesis set out to understand how sports graduates' career experiences intertwine with their life narratives. The aim was to understand the education and career experiences of Finnish sports graduates via a framework that acknowledges career holistically, that is, as involving all elements of human life. The question was approached through three sub-studies. Sub-study I studied meanings that graduates attribute to formal sports education. Sub-study II aimed to understand what kinds of career paths surround these degree programmes by investigating typical story models in the data. Sub-study III discussed what meanings were attributed to difficulties in the narratives. Together, these questions add to our understanding of modern careers and how they intertwine with other elements of life.

Participants were asked to write their life story from the perspective of their career. The majority of narratives started with a description of a sporty childhood. Participants often wrote about the processes of choosing their educational paths and how they succeeded in pursuing them. They wrote about finding their first jobs, and significant jobs later in their career. They described how their own actions had affected their career, but also how peers, managers, work organizations and the labour market had affected their career path. They described the many considerations they had regarding choosing the sports industry and their reasons for pursuing other careers. They reflected on their current position in the job market and their future plans. They shared many emotions that they had experienced during their career. They also described how all of this, their career, was formed in interaction with other elements of their life. They described how their home location, family situation, hobbies, personal characteristics, goals and values, health, and other people and occurrences affected their life and career. The narratives were intricate: different elements

were tangled together without clear boundaries. Professional and personal were at times separate, at times united.

The synthesis of findings can be understood through three themes. The first theme, *interweaving of work and nonwork*, is the foundation for the findings. As the premise of this study was to understand education and career in relation to the rest of a person's life, it is less surprising that the findings show several ways in which work and nonwork elements of life are connected. Nevertheless, the findings highlight how career cannot be separated from the rest of a person's life. Some of the meaningful nonwork elements interwoven with career were everyday life, family, health, hobbies, psychological needs, and identity. The findings of this study support the idea of using a holistic perspective when investigating educational choices, work, and careers (Hartung, 2013, p. 36).

The two other themes are more surprising. *Pondering career change* is related to how sports graduates either consider or end up pursuing a career in other fields, whereas *perceiving difficulties as meaningful* shows how sports graduates reflect on and cope with the challenges they encounter regarding their careers. Thus, the two themes mirror the adversities that sports graduates encounter. Career change and difficulties are often interpreted as negative phenomena in principle, and, at a glance, Figure 3 (p. 48) might paint a rather negative picture of how sports graduates' career experiences intertwine with their life narratives. Both themes raise issues that can be unpleasant from both the individual and societal perspectives. Some participants quite strongly expressed negative reflections such as disappointment, frustration, and bitterness in their narratives. While many of them had overcome difficulties, not all narratives had a happy ending. It is important to understand that professional struggles can be a personal tragedy with serious consequences (Duff & Chan, 2014). Individual struggles also project to the societal level. Individual well-being benefits society, and career changes may not be desired as governments aim to prolong working careers (Finnish Government, n.d.).

One possible explanation for accentuating these seemingly negative themes is that the connections between work and nonwork aspects of life become especially visible when there is a need for change in or discrepancies between them. Writing a life narrative requires the person to select what to include. Bruner (1996, p. 121) has argued that narratives focus on aspects that disrupt the expected. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) make a similar suggestion, and argue that while identity work can be an on-going act, individual's self-identity awareness is heightened during strain, transitions and unexpected events. They claim that conscious identity work is always rooted in some level of disruption. Therefore, participants may have been less likely to write about events and thoughts related to life being smooth and requiring no change. However, looking more closely, the themes are qualitatively connected to many positive phenomena such as learning, growth and finding one's place in the world of work. Indeed, one key finding in the present study is the positive meanings that were attributed to unpleasant career and life events. Partly this might relate to career identity. Kira and Balkin (2014) have argued that

misalignment between work and identity can lead to reactions such as work crafting or identity work that can have positive outcomes, such as changes in work or learning. Similarly, Pryor and Bright (2012) have previously highlighted the value of failing in career development.

While the aim of the present study was to understand the subjective career experiences of the participants, those perceptions naturally mirror the reality in which they live. Previous research has reported graduates' high levels of attrition from sport employment, prevalence of part-time employment, and undervaluing of degrees (European Observatoire of Sport and Employment, 2020, pp. 28, 39; Minten & Forsyth, 2014; Pellinen et al., 2019, p. 24; Schwab et al., 2015; Sleaf & Reed, 2006). The present study is in line with previous findings in highlighting how significant an issue considering a career change is for sports graduates. Previous studies have identified interest in alternative careers, poor salary, and difficulty gaining employment as reasons for leaving (Minten & Forsyth, 2014; Schwab et al., 2015). The data of the present study gave similar reasons, with many participants reflecting their interest in other fields, but also the many challenges within the sports employment. Poor salaries, inconvenient working hours, health requirements, low appreciation of education, neglectful employers, ethical issues, and limited career advancement opportunities were some of the issues that graduates mentioned as experiences that pushed them away from sport employment. As suggested in subsection 1.1.2, there might be an imbalance between the number of graduates and the number of equivalent degree-requiring jobs, an issue further complicated by the unregulated nature of the industry and the greater mass of employees from other educational backgrounds. This creates tension that is visible in the data of the present study.

Thus, the present study supports earlier findings on sports graduates' dynamic, complex, and heterogeneous careers (Bernal-García et al., 2018; Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016; Minten & Forsyth, 2014). The above-mentioned characteristics of the sports industry do seem to be a significant issue, but at the same time, the present study broadens our understanding of the reasons for heterogeneous and complex careers among sports graduates. I argue that the reasons for this are multifaceted and that the careers are formed in an interplay between work and nonwork life elements. This study demonstrated the varied combinations of educational backgrounds in and outside of sports, and both realized and potential career changes in the narratives. Especially sub-study II added to our understanding of the reasons why people stay in or leave the sports industry. Participants strived to balance their personal interest in sport and the realities of working life in the sports industry. On one hand, negative characteristics of the industry, such as limited career opportunities and low pay, and seeing sports more as a hobby, contributed to pondering to leave. On the other hand, staying was motivated by passion for sports and gaining positive experiences from working in sports. These positive experiences were not necessarily solely concerned with work but could also provide personal gains, such as feeling appreciated.

Previously Minten (2010) has noted that the possibility to use graduate attributes and having appropriate expectations are important elements in achieving organizational commitment among sports graduates. Previous studies have also recognized that sports degree studies seem to be less valued by employers than national governing body coaching awards (NGBs), even though the NGBs seem to produce more narrow and shallow competencies (Hall et al., 2019, pp. 892–893; Piggott, 2012; Turner & Nelson, 2009). Similar issues have been discussed regarding personal training certificates (Robinson et al., 2006). The frustration of graduates was also visible in the present study, where one of the sources of disappointment in sub-study I was employers' and customers' lack of respect for the competences gained from degree studies. The difference between short courses and years-long degree education was obvious to the graduates. On a more positive note, some participants turned this comparison around as a source of professional pride.

The present study also shows that sports graduates often sought jobs that were not only equivalent to their education, but also fitted their family situation, were interesting to them, and in line with their values. Difficulty gaining employment was therefore a question of gaining *satisfying* and *fitting* employment, with participants mainly raising issue with the jobs that they held, as opposed to writing about unemployment. This is not to be understood as graduates being “princesses with peas”. Participants expressed quite relatable needs: supporting their families, staying healthy, doing something that they found interesting and rewarding, and not working in unethical ways. A similar desire to find vocational fit through either a planned or unexpected career transition has previously been documented, for example, by Peake and McDowall (2012).

Education as an important element in the career path was one of the turning points identified in sub-study II. Sub-study I focused on education and showed how prominent nonwork themes were regarding the meanings attributed to education. Moreover, only two of the five themes differentiating the categories of meaning were strictly professional. *Life outside work* and *psychological needs* were themes that revealed meanings that were related to nonwork elements of life. In addition, the theme *general experience of studies* involved meanings about everyday life and adventurous experiences. Overall, the meanings attributed to sports degree education varied, and the outcome space equally showed both work and nonwork elements of life. The meanings attributed to sports degree education were most intense when the education was perceived to bring profound changes in life, and where working in sports was not only considered work but holistically intertwined with the self. Previous studies have indicated that achieving deeper level change is not necessarily easy. For example, in Norway PE teacher students have been reported to perceive the meaning of education mainly as skill learning (Mordal-Moen & Green, 2014).

The findings also support the notion of Minten and Forsyth (2014, p. 101), who concluded that sports students do not necessarily have career intentions when they enter a sports degree programme. The present study brought up

hobbyism and identity-level involvement in sport as phenomena that affect career planning and decisions in many ways. While for some, sport-related career intentions may have formulated during studies, some regarded sports education and/or work to be a temporary solution to begin with and, therefore, a career change was both expected and desired.

Generally, the findings support the applicability of the Chaos Theory of Careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2014) to the careers of sports graduates. Firstly, the findings show how careers are affected by many contextual factors and are not formed solely as a result of rational career decision-making. Psychological needs, hobbies, family, and health issues were some of the elements of individual experiences that were perceived as meaningful in relation to the formation of a career path. Secondly, careers are formulated in interaction with other systems: all turning points identified in sub-study II were either controlled by or in interactions with other people. Thirdly, chance affects careers. Many participants described unexpected, random events that led to turning points in their narratives. This finding is in agreement with Peake and McDowall's (2012) findings, which showed that "chaos elements" such as chance, unplanned events, and non-linearity brought about career transitions. Finally, there is order in chaotic systems. While all narratives were unique, it was also possible to identify patterns in the data regarding the plots, reflections, and contents of the narratives. Based on these four points, I argue that together with the narrative approach, the Chaos Theory of Careers is suitable for understanding sports graduates' careers in intertwinement with the rest of individual lives. As the many participants were educated and worked within other fields, it seems possible that the applicability is not limited to the context of the sport and physical activity sector, but could be expanded to other fields with similar characteristics, such as high levels of non-standard employment, a non-regulated nature, and a young workforce. Further work needs to be done to establish the applicability of the theory in other fields.

4.2 Quality of the research

In the following, I present and reflect on the central issues regarding the ethics and quality of the present study, which was conducted in strict compliance with the principles of responsible conduct of research and the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2012, 2019). This section focuses on the aspects that overarch the whole project, and concern issues related to the methodology of this study as a whole. The quality of each sub-study is discussed in the corresponding articles.

In this study, participants created written life narratives. It has been suggested that written accounts might promote more coherence and reflection than oral accounts, as writing allows the participant to more carefully construct and edit their response (Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 41; May, 2008, p. 482; Nygren & Blom, 2001, p. 373). When written, the response is less affected by the limits of

the participant's short-term memory or loss of train of thought (Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 41). Another benefit compared to face-to-face interviews is that written accounts give the participant more control of the situation, and might therefore encourage them to share more personal information (Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 45). On the other hand, if participants lack trust in how their texts will be used, lack of encouraging communicative feedback that is present in an interview situation, might limit their willingness to share information (May, 2008, p. 482).

Depending on the perspective, this possibility of editing before submitting can be seen as a pro or a con. The present study does not view this editing process as "censorship" but sees two main benefits in it. Firstly, as this study is interested in the meaning-making and subjective experience of the participants, the possibility for them to clarify their narratives contributes to the quality of the study. Secondly, it is an ethical advantage that the participants have a genuine opportunity to control what they share, even if it means that they leave out some parts of the story. Trust between potential participants and the researcher is key. To gain this trust, I shared the aims and methodology of the study on the research invitation webpage as widely as was possible. In this regard, however, the challenge in qualitative research is that the research process is not fixed, and research questions, theoretical framing and methods can evolve and even change during the process (Agee, 2009). As I did not want to give out information that would later be outdated, the information about the research questions and methodology was quite broad.

Interviewing is a very popular way to produce data in qualitative research, and it has somewhat been considered the default means of data collection in many disciplines and methodologies (Åkerlind, 2005a, p. 67; Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 40; Huusko et al., 2020; Miller, 2000; Nygren & Blom, 2001, p. 370). However, I found interviewing to be unsuitable for the present study. As explained in the Introduction, this study was heavily based on the idea of letting the participant choose what they wanted to tell and the basic assumption that everything that they choose to include is meaningful. Therefore, I did not want to, for example, ask additional, elaborating questions, as this would have guided the participant to share things that they had not originally chosen to elaborate. This has been called the "midwife effect", and it has been argued to be one of the benefits of interviewing as the interviewer can help the participant talk about things that they might not otherwise have paid attention to, or resolve possible inconsistencies (Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 41; Nygren & Blom, 2001, p. 381). In this case, however, I wanted to let the participants have full control over what they chose to share and to what extent, and therefore written narratives were a more suitable option.

A convenient benefit of written narratives is that the time-consuming phases of interviewing and transcribing are avoided (Nygren & Blom, 2001, p. 381). Presumably, written narratives are also shorter and clearer than those produced in interviews and, thus, easier to analyse (Handy & Ross, 2005, p. 45). These factors allowed a larger number of narratives to be analysed, contributing to the quality of this study. Using a wide range of participants is one form of

triangulation, and it aims to provide opportunities for rich data as well as strengthening the voice of the subjects in comparison to the researcher's voice (Shenton, 2004, pp. 65–66, 72). The former is especially important in the present study. Especially regarding phenomenography (sub-study I), it has been highlighted that the sample should be as heterogeneous as possible so that the range of variation of possible ways of understanding the phenomenon in question is captured (Åkerlind & Kayrooz, 2003, p. 331). All sub-studies investigated participants' narratives on a collective level, so a higher number of different participants was beneficial overall.

A downside of collecting written data compared to interviewing is the demands on participants. Handy and Ross (2005, pp. 41, 45) have suggested that written accounts require greater skills of self-reflection, and that the process of writing may be difficult for some individuals. It is likely that potential participants with lower skills or motivation for writing chose not to participate or produced narratives that may not portray their career experiences as multidimensionally. However, this seems to be a limitation that cannot be avoided regardless of the data collection method. Correspondingly, others are more comfortable with writing than interviews and benefit from the possibility to choose a convenient time and place for writing (Handy & Ross, 2005, pp. 41, 45). This will thus have had an impact on the types of participants who chose to take part in the present study. Overall, however, the participants were heterogeneous both in terms of educational background and experiences. All three articles also presented a wide range in findings: from disappointment to intense meanings of positive self-reforming and success as well as a variety of experiences in between.

One important perspective is to consider in which ways narratives represent individual experience, cultural context and social action. Atkinson and Delamont (2006) have pointed out that narratives should be understood as social action. They argue that it is not enough to understand the social context of the narratives, but also to recognize that narratives are performative and shaped by shared convention. They also call for more analytical approaches to narratives, instead of celebrating them as "informants' voices that speak for themselves" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, pp. 165–166). In the present study, I have aimed to act accordingly. While this study focuses on subjective experiences, all three sub-studies were brought to a collective level in their analyses. In this way, no individual narrative is overly emphasized in its significance and the findings inherently reflect the social patterns in the narratives.

A related question is: what are the societal master narratives that shape the individual narratives of sports graduates? To date, I have not found previous studies on this topic, and there is little life narrative research on sports graduates overall (see page 22). However, sub-study II focused on the story models in the data, and in a way serves as an internal mirror for observing this shared perspective: it discusses one interpretation of socially shared narrative patterns among the participants' narratives. As discussed above, I view the wide

spectrum of the story models (similarly to the findings in other two articles) as testimony to the data not being dominated by any specific master narrative.

Graduates' narratives are, however, likely to be influenced by at least some normative expectations on how their lives and careers "should" unfold. Undoubtedly, individuals had particular motivations for participating and different messages they wanted to bring forward: perhaps some respondents wanted to share their success stories, and others wanted to give vent to the struggles they had had. While the variance in meanings and story models implies that the potential risk of only attracting extreme cases as data did not realize, it is still necessary to remember that there is no way of separating the performative element from the data. As discussed in the theoretical background (see page 26), narratives are also a way of expressing identity and related desires, which are likely to influence how the self is portrayed to the audience. Thus, this study has been conducted with an idea that the life narratives of graduates discuss events and experiences that the participants perceive as meaningful, while keeping in mind that the analysis focuses on narratives, not on experience itself in any kind of "pure" way.

The methodology of the present study is based on interpretation, and so are the findings (Bold, 2012, p. 121; Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594; Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 318; Svensson, 1997, p. 162). This influences both the trustworthiness of the findings as well as the ethicality of the study. Regarding trustworthiness, this is a key philosophical underpinning that needs to be considered when discussing the quality of the study. As discussed in section 2.1, the findings of this study are one, but not the only, way of understanding the data. The aim has not been to analyse objectively what is already in the data, but rather to generate themes, patterns and meanings that help us understand the experiences of Finnish sports graduates. This is not to say that there was no pursuit of objectivity at all: the analysis was data-driven and, through reflection, I have tried to ensure that the findings represent the data rather than my presumptions. Instead, it is a question of utilizing resources.

Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) have emphasized this point when talking about researcher subjectivity: instead of trying to eliminate previous knowledge, the researcher can use their resources and skills for the benefit of the study. The researchers' knowledge of the phenomenon can be seen as content-related validity (Collier-Reed et al., 2009, p. 343). Therefore, for example, there was no need for actions such as coder reliability checking, as used by some phenomenographers, in which the coding is matched between two or more researchers (Åkerlind, 2005b, pp. 331–332). Marton (1988, p. 148) has pointed out that it is more relevant to evaluate whether the findings can be recognized by others, rather than whether others would come up with the same findings. For this reason, peer and audience validation was carried out to support the trustworthiness of the study, as suggested by Loh (2013, pp. 6–7)

Regarding the ethics of the study, the interpretative research design raises the question of narrative ownership, which has been argued to be a key ethical issue in narrative research (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 324). Narrative ownership

can be understood as faithfulness to the original story (van den Hoonaard, 2016, p. 588). Participants may feel betrayed or undermined if they do not recognize themselves in the researcher's work (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 324). However, the purpose of narrative research is not to clarify the participants' message, but to interpret meanings (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 324). In addition, the present study offers findings on a collective level, as the aim was not to analyse any single participant's narrative as an individual case. Still, it needs to be acknowledged that the final representation is the researcher's view. Also, as a researcher, I chose not to collect any personal data as background information and aimed to report the findings in a way that other people cannot identify the participants. However, some participants included their name in their narrative. This might imply that they would have wanted to share their story under their own name.

I have shared the details of the research process as openly as it has been possible within the limits of reporting and without compromising the possibility for the participants to remain unrecognisable for others. This can be referred to as thick description and is an established way of promoting the quality of research in multiple ways (Loh, 2013; Tracy, 2010). Another specific method that I have applied is keeping a reflexive journal (Loh, 2013).

However, while there are specific techniques that can be used in order to better quality, as listed above, I see quality also as something that is present in the researcher's attitude and way of working, and in all their actions throughout the study. To conclude this section, I want to take a broader look at the quality of this research. Tracy (2010) has suggested an expansive and flexible conceptualization of excellent qualitative research, which has eight criteria. I argue that this broader view of quality is reflected in the entirety of this thesis: in its logic, in the way it is written, and in its words. I hope that especially the Introduction showed that this thesis has a *worthy topic*, and together with the methodology chapter, illustrated that the theoretical constructions and methodology are appropriate for the study, contributing to *rich rigor*. I hope that the reader can agree that this thesis demonstrated honesty and self-reflexivity, and therefore conveyed *sincerity*. I have, especially in this chapter, aimed to show how I have fostered *credibility* by taking steps to ensure the trustworthiness and plausibility of the findings. I hope that there is *resonance* between the thesis and its readers, and I have aimed to facilitate this by producing a written report that is logical and easy to read, and by discussing the possibilities of the findings in the Discussion. Similarly, in the Discussion I have tried to prove how this study has made a *significant contribution*. Throughout the project, I have aimed for *ethical* research, and I hope that this is reflected in all the choices of this study. Lastly, I argue that this thesis shows *meaningful coherence* by achieving its purpose with fitting methods and by tying together all sections comprehensibly. These are my aims and hopes, but it is for the reader to evaluate if they are sufficiently reflected in this report.

4.3 Implications and future directions

The impact of this study can be understood on four levels: theoretical, political, organizational, and individual. Theoretically, this study contributes to the academic discussion of sports graduates' career experiences in intertwinement with their life stories. While several previous studies in Finland and internationally have examined sports studies graduates, they have mainly focused on employability and employment (e.g., Aarto-Pesonen, 2013; Ala-Vähälä, 2012; Bernal-García et al., 2018; Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016; Dowling, 2011; Lappalainen, 2009; Minten & Forsyth, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2006; Thorburn, 2014; Turner & Nelson, 2009). Generally, employability has remained one of the most researched concepts in career research, and it has been suggested that career scholars should pay more attention to careers in conjunction with other, related concepts, such as life, instead of focusing solely on "pure" careers (Baruch et al., 2015). Overall, this study provides a wider perspective on modern careers by recognizing the meaning-making related to careers and understanding career in relation to the rest of an individual's life. The main theoretical implications of the synthesis of the findings were discussed in section 4.1, but in the following, I will further the discussion by summarizing the theoretical implications of each article. I will then advance to discuss political, organizational, and individual level implications, as well as suggest directions for future work.

The first sub-study adds to our understanding of the influence of degree education on individual's life, especially in the field of sports. From previous studies it is generally known that education affects many life outcomes, such as employment, income and social status, attitudes and wellbeing (Baum et al., 2013; Easterbrook et al., 2016; T. Schlesinger et al., 2015). However, in the field of sports, education has mainly been studied in regard to professional themes, such as employability. It is known that degree education provides both substance-related and general work skills, and that work placements are important for professional development and gaining employment (Hall et al., 2019; Laine & Ilmola, 2016; Mordal-Moen & Green, 2014; Palomäki, 2009; Sleaf & Reed, 2006; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2012; Vuolle, 2013). This study provided the first comprehensive description of the variety of qualitative meanings attributed to sports degree studies. Based on the findings, it was concluded that a key element in meaningfulness was the perception of how the studies have changed oneself and one's life. More intensive meanings were attributed to education when greater positive change was perceived. The meaning of education was not only related to professional life, but intertwined with life in many ways, such as in relation to family and psychological needs.

The second sub-study sought to further our knowledge of modern careers by describing different career story models among sports degree graduates. Previous research has argued that sports graduates have complex and heterogeneous careers as they face many challenges, such as the perceived need to gain additional qualifications and difficulties finding permanent employment

that matches their education (Bernal-García et al., 2018; Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016; Minten & Forsyth, 2014; Pellinen et al., 2019, p. 24; Purdy & Potrac, 2014; Schwab et al., 2015; Sleaf & Reed, 2006). The findings of this study suggest that graduates strive to balance their personal sportiveness and the realities of working life. The identified turning points demonstrate how careers are shaped in interaction with other people and surrounding society, and they also reveal the perceived processes that led to staying or leaving the sports industry.

The third sub-study tackled an understudied phenomenon: difficulties in career development. Career success has been one of the dominant areas of interest in career research (Baruch et al., 2015). As a critique of this, Pryor and Bright (2012) have suggested that failure should also be valued in career development. The findings of the present study support this idea, as difficulties were shown to be meaningful in the career narratives in many ways, for example by pushing for change, sparking learning and growth, and offering possibilities for reflection. This finding is similar to that of Peake and McDowall (2012), who found that a sense of disappointment was common in their career narrative data and acted as a catalyst in career transition in seeking a more meaningful career. It is also noteworthy that while some consequences were both undesired and unpleasant, difficulties are to be expected and should therefore be normalized.

Moving on now to consider the practical implications of the present study as a whole. On an educational policy level the findings provide important information for further development of educational and career policies in Finland in the growing sports industry and beyond. The recent development of educational policies in Finland has limited opportunities for career changes. From 2016, higher education institutions have been required to reserve study places for individuals who have not previously accepted a study place in Finland (Ahola et al., 2018, p. 19). The goal of the reform has been to shorten study paths, but it is questionable whether the quota has achieved this (Ahola et al., 2018). The quota has been criticized for positioning career changes as morally questionable and not allowing individuals to experiment, make missteps, or find their career paths via detours (Haltia et al., 2022).

The findings of the present study support this critique. Firstly, it should not be assumed that everyone applies to sports degree education with a plan to build a career in the industry. This does not imply, necessarily, that these applicants have purely hedonistic motives, but rather that they might not have figured out their professional interest yet. The data showed that the participants had multiple interests and a variety of reasons for pursuing a degree. Secondly, the findings showed how careers are in many ways intertwined with other aspects of life. Many graduates were in a situation where the realities of the sports industry had made it hard to live a satisfying life and led them to question their career choice. The career paths were not based only on rational choices; instead, there were many elements in the stories that were difficult or impossible to control by the graduates themselves.

While I support the aim of the quota to reserve study places for individuals aiming to complete their degrees, within the sports industry I see shortening

study paths more as a question of developing programmes and student counselling in ways that meet the needs of graduates and working life. After all, all participants in the present study had graduated, but the route to work was still not a simple one. Based on the data, it is hard to see graduation as a way of ensuring long working careers. It is questionable in today's rapidly changing world to assume that one degree is sufficient for all individuals, or that they would be able to pick the right one as young people. In the context of career transitions, Peake and McDowall (2012) have previously suggested that "chaotic" elements such as chance, false starts, dissatisfaction and unpredictability can be a route to successful careers without the need for traditional career planning. The present study accords with this and adds non-work elements into the equation. Based on the present study, career formation is a complex phenomenon that is hard to predict. I see political actions that aim to limit possibilities for life-long learning as a threat to individual well-being, as they can harm people's quest to pursue meaningful professional paths.

Another possible policy-level implication concerns the complex careers of sports graduates and the reasons for them. Especially sub-study II raised the notion that pondering career change is a significant question even among graduates who have continued to work in the sports industry. The findings are consistent with those of earlier studies on attrition from the sports industry (Minten & Forsyth, 2014; Schwab et al., 2015; Sleaf & Reed, 2006). As the industry is a growing employer and significant to the Finnish economy (Gholamzadeh Fasandoz, 2016; Pellinen et al., 2019), the work conditions of the industry should be critically examined. Other issues worth more investigation are the formal and informal competence requirements for sport employment, the number of workforce with different educational backgrounds, and their competences. The present study shed light on the subjective experiences of sports degree graduates, and raised questions about the characteristics of sport employment and how they are perceived to affect career paths.

Some of the issues discussed in the data, such as low pay, problems with employment contracts and undervaluation of degree studies, could be improved either on a policy level or by employers. It seems that there is at least some need for political action. Some organizations of sports professionals have pursued changes to Finnish degree titles, which seem to be disadvantageous especially for Bachelors and Masters of Sport Studies (Akavan erityisalat & Nuoli ry, 2014; Ala-Vähälä, 2022). Other related issues are the varied sport-related job titles and the lack of acknowledgement of expert-level tasks in collective labour contract in municipalities, which are an important sport employer in Finland (Ala-Vähälä, 2022, pp. 50–51; Pietilä & Piirainen, 2017). These issues hinder the position of a single employee in the labour market, but also affect the valuation of expertise and degree studies in sport employment in general. Promoting actions that aim to reduce attrition might also be of interest regarding the Finnish Government's aim to prolong working careers (Finnish Government, n.d.). Further research is needed on how to generally improve conditions in the industry and how that

might affect attrition, which could advance prolonging working careers in the sports industry.

When discussing the problems related to the undervaluation of degrees, it is necessary here to point out that I do not think that competence could not be acquired by other means. In some fields, there has been debate whether degree studies are needed at all with regard to being hired or in work (Tholen et al., 2016). Educational degrees are, nevertheless, the normative professional merit in today's society, and more and more fields require degree credentials (Baker, 2011). Therefore, graduates' expectations regarding the value of their degrees are understandable. However, a degree on its own is often not enough, and might be overlooked by employers (Hall et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2008). Accordingly, Isopahkala-Bouret and Ojala (2023) have argued that the question of the employability of graduates is not only about the competence gained by individuals, but is also socially structured as different credentials are perceived to hold different levels of prestige. Previous studies have discussed how employers, at least in some occupational fields in the sports industry, actually prefer more narrow qualifications over degrees, even though degree studies provide more competences (Hall et al., 2019; Piggott, 2012; Robinson et al., 2006; Turner & Nelson, 2009). It was expected that this contradiction between degree employability and perceived competence would be reflected in the data, and it is especially visible in the overarching theme of career change consideration when related to faced difficulties.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that many commercial education providers benefit from the vague position of sports degrees, and their underappreciation might also affect the wage development of degree graduates, possibly leading to a cheaper, well-educated workforce in the industry. The reverse side is that if degrees are not valued among employers, society does not gather all of the benefits expected from the investments made in education (note that degree education in Finland is free of charge for students). This argues for society to act to ensure that degrees are properly valued. While the purpose of the present study was not to compare different sports degrees, earlier parts of this thesis have discussed how especially Bachelors of Sport Studies seem to face these difficulties, while PE teachers have a more stable position in the labour market. The struggles of Sport Studies bachelors can be tied to a larger discussion about the weaker position of degrees from universities of applied sciences (Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2021). Isopahkala-Bouret and Ojala (2023, pp. 361–362) have pointed out that to prevent inequalities among graduates, all graduate degrees should be valued, not only those that are perceived to be most prestigious.

Continuing on the characteristic issues of the sport industry, employers can utilize the findings of this study at an organizational level by paying attention to what is meaningful to graduates. As the private sport sector is growing and labour-intensive services are becoming more important (Laine, 2017), providing fair employment might be a worthwhile means of distinguishing from competitors in the eyes of the potential workforce. Further, based on the findings,

it seems that work and nonwork are intertwined not only on a practical level, but also in deeper and more reflective ways. For today's employees, it may not be enough that work is a sufficient provider and compatible with family life, but workers also value their leisure time, are interested in self-development, and are involved in their work on an identity level. Rather than separating professional and personal, I argue that professional is personal. More research is needed to find out in what ways these factors contribute to workplace commitment in sports graduates.

Organizational level implications also concern education providers. The first sub-study focused on sports degree education and generated insights on what meanings graduates attribute to education. It also discussed the motives for applying, as well as some perceived strengths of sports education. Educational institutions can also learn from perceived disappointments, as they point out potential areas for development. These implications are further discussed in Article I. One possible implication of the synthesis of the findings is that education providers might want to consider the complexity of career formation in student counselling, but also in evaluating their programmes. For example, when institutions conduct follow-ups of their alumni, they could get more accurate information by acknowledging that graduates might have had varied reasons for completing the degree.

One obvious direction for future research is comparing different degrees. The present study examined sports degree graduates as a one group. There were several reasons for this. The study was based on a holistic philosophy, according to which people's lives are seen as a whole. Many vocationally qualified sports assistants continue their education in bachelor studies in universities of applied sciences (UAS), and many UAS bachelors complete their master's degrees at university (Vuolle, 2013, p. 53). This was also reflected in the data of the present study, as almost 40% of graduates had participated in more than one sports degree programme. Often, different programmes were not distinguished in the narratives, and I did not want to set additional guidelines or restrictions for the participants when writing their stories. Thus, differentiating the degree programmes would have been methodologically challenging, as it would have not been possible to analyse different degrees separately. This challenge would have remained even if the group of participants was defined as graduates of a specific degree programme, as they still might have experiences of more than one programme, and it is not possible to isolate their effects in the life story, if it is viewed holistically. Also, the purpose of the study was not to compare different degrees. The analyses were made at a collective level, and the findings do not apply to any specific degree programme alone.

It needs to be stated that the above-described position reflects my assumptions as a sports degree graduate and as a researcher. I view the relation between sports degree education and careers as a complex phenomenon that is hard to place in a clearly defined "box". As discussed in earlier parts of this thesis, individuals seek education flexibly, and their careers are "messy": multifunctional, complex, and dynamic. However, by not separating the

different level degrees from each other, I do not intend to claim that there is no difference between the meanings of each programme to the graduates, or how they are perceived to affect career paths. With a different research frame, it would be possible to examine each degree separately or in comparison to other degrees. Thus, there is future work to be done in this regard.

One key finding of the present study was the positive meanings that were attributed to difficult experiences. This finding highlights the possibilities of narrative in career counselling, as difficult experiences can be utilized as a resource for reflection, coping and learning. On the other hand, Pryor and Bright (2008, p. 81) have also criticized narratives for oversimplification by encouraging clients to narrate a coherent story of incoherent reality. In my view, they nevertheless help the narrator to find meaning in their work experiences and can help in seeking change, doing identity work, or in learning. This has been argued to be connected to well-being (Kira & Balkin, 2014).

Thus, one of the questions that emerges from these findings is the adequacy of student and career counselling. Some participants mentioned student counselling in the contexts of lower and upper secondary schools, but further student or career counselling was not discussed in the data. The findings of this study show that these individuals pondered their career paths in many ways, faced difficulties, and navigated the intersections of work and nonwork. These findings raise intriguing questions about the possibilities of counselling. Does student counselling in both secondary and tertiary education give a realistic picture of the sports industry? Does student counselling discuss the motives for application, or is it based on assumptions of a career in the industry? Does counselling in general sufficiently acknowledge the nonwork elements of life? Could career counselling outside educational institutions be helpful for struggling graduates? Further studies might find these questions fruitful.

On an individual level, this study provides participants and their peers new understanding of their lives and careers. Especially, I hope that this study offers peer support for those who are struggling in some way in their career, as this seemed to be a common feature of graduates' experiences. It is perfectly normal to have difficulties in life, both personally and professionally. The findings also highlight hopeful perspectives by demonstrating how difficult experiences can be perceived in positive ways. Lastly, the findings are a reminder that no life is prewritten before it is lived: the end of the story might still be open. Even if struggling, it is possible to find a satisfying professional path, though this may require effort, new perspectives, and brave decisions.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Careers of sports graduates have been reported to be dynamic, complex and heterogeneous (Minten & Forsyth, 2014). According to the Chaos Theory of Careers, an individual's career is formed in interaction between the individual and other systems, such as other people and environments (Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2014). Therefore, it cannot be assumed that careers are developed only rationally, but instead are affected by many influences, such as family, societal impacts and random occurrences. The Chaos Theory of Careers also acknowledges the constructive tendencies of humans and how they affect careers. Pryor and Bright (2003, pp. 16–17) note that people act based on their interpretations, regardless of the fact that these interpretations may not be true objectively speaking.

Previous studies of sports graduates have mainly focused on professional aspects such as employment and employability. I wanted to broaden the knowledge of sports graduates' careers by including a life story perspective, as this allows careers to be examined holistically, acknowledging all elements of human life. I collected 60 career-themed life narratives from Finnish sports graduates, and analysed the data with phenomenography, narrative analysis, and reflexive thematic analysis.

This study found that, on a collective level, hobbyism and identity-level involvement are especially meaningful with respect to how nonwork elements of life are connected to careers among sports graduates. Hobbyism was a motivator for studying sports, and a career in sports was a way of continuing the hobby as an adult. On the other hand, hobbyism also contributed to pondering career change. For some, sports education and work were temporary solutions before their true professional calling was identified. Personal involvement with sports also went much deeper than it just being a hobby. For many participants, the involvement was on an identity level. It was a passion and a mission in life. Sports degree education was attributed with most intense meanings when the participants experienced profound changes in their life via education. On the other hand, identity-level involvement might be a difficult issue if the realities of the sports industry make it an unsustainable career choice.

Another central finding of this study related to attrition from the sports industry. Pondering career change was present in stories that ended in another field as well as in stories that continued in the industry. Certain negative practical aspects of the sports industry, such as low pay, inconvenient working hours and limited career opportunities, were perceived to be pushing graduates away from sports. On the other hand, the findings demonstrated that staying in the field was not only about practical matters – graduates also sought possibilities for self-development, meaningful work, and enjoyment. Career turning points included events and processes that were work as well as nonwork related.

Although participants had faced many difficulties in both the work and nonwork domains of their life, these difficulties were often meaningful in their narratives. This is the third important finding of this study. The value in difficulties was seen in many ways: they were a push to seek change, created opportunities for learning and growth, and provided opportunities for reflection. Difficulties contributed to pondering career change, but were also valuable for both professional and personal development. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that difficulties are, clearly, not wholly positive. They are also a source of unpleasant and harmful emotions, and some individuals might benefit from enhanced support in their careers and in understanding and dealing constructively with these aspects.

Finally, this thesis demonstrated that the Chaos Theory of Careers is a relevant and suitable theory for studying sports graduates' careers. Together with life narratives, it provides a framework for understanding careers as a subjective, holistic experience. The theory may be useful for understanding elements of career development that can remain hidden from perspectives that view careers through a solely professional lens. Similarly, the present study highlighted how narratives are a practicable tool for career meaning-making and reflection.

YHTEENVETO (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Tausta

Tutkin väitöskirjassani liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urateemaisia elämäнкertomuksia. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää valmistuneiden koulutus- ja urakokemuksia kokonaisvaltaisesti, suhteessa muuhun elämään. Tämä näkökulma kytkeytyy yhteiskunnalliseen muutokseen, jossa urien luonne on muuttunut: epätyypilliset työsuhteet yleistyvät, ja pitkät työsuhteet saman työnantajan palveluksessa ovat harvinaisuuksia. Samalla koulutuksen, työn ja urien merkitys on laajentunut elannon tuojasta identiteetin rakentamisen välineeksi, joka on yhteydessä myös hyvinvointiin. Liikunta-alalla on paljon epätyypillisiä työsuhteita, ja urien on todettu olevan dynaamisia, monimutkaisia ja heterogeenisiä. Siten liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet ovat kiinnostava ja ajankohtainen esimerkki nykyaikaisista urakokemuksista.

Uraa lähestytään tässä tutkimuksessa subjektiivisesta näkökulmasta eli yksilön omasta kokemuksesta käsin. Tutkimus nojaa erityisesti kahteen teoreettiseen näkökulmaan: työurien kaaosteoriaan sekä elämäнкertomusten tutkimukseen. Työurien kaaosteorian (Pryor & Bright, 2003) mukaan yksilön ura muotoutuu systeemisesti yksilön ja ympäristöjen välillä. Ura ei siis rakennu yksilön rationaalisen päätöksenteon seurauksena, vaan siihen vaikuttavat monimutkaisella tavalla esimerkiksi muut ihmiset, sattuma ja ympäristö sekä paikallisella että globaalilla tasolla. Teoria ottaa huomioon myös inhimillisen taipumuksen konstruktion: yksilön tekemät tulkinnat itsestään, kokemuksistaan ja ympäristöstään vaikuttavat siihen, miten hän ajattelee ja toimii, mikä puolestaan vaikuttaa uraan.

Menetelmällisesti tutkimus pohjaa narratiiviseen elämäнкertomusperinteseen. Elämäнкertomus on henkilökohtainen kertomus, jossa aiemmat kokemukset ja tulevaisuus saavat merkityksiä suhteessa toisiinsa ja ympäristöön. Elämäнкertomusta kirjoittaessaan yksilö valitsee, mitkä kokemukset ovat merkityksellisiä, ja koostaa niistä yhtenäisen kertomuksen. Tässä tutkimuksessa elämäнкertomukset ovat urateemaisia, eli yksilö on tarkastellut elämänsä työuran näkökulmasta. Näin on mahdollista tutkia urakokemuksia siten, että siihen liittyvä koko elämän konteksti tulee näkyväksi.

Väitöstutkimukseni koostuu kolmesta vertaisarvioidusta artikkelista ja yhteenveto-osasta. Yhteenveto esittelee laajemmin tutkimuksen taustaa ja teoreettisia lähtökohtia, kuvaa osatutkimusten menetelmät ja tulokset, tarkastelee tutkimustulosten hyödynnettävyyttä sekä arvioi tutkimuksen laatua ja luotettavuutta yksittäisiä artikkeleita laajemmin ja yhteen vetäen.

Tutkimuskysymykset ja toteutus

Tutkimuksen päätutkimuskysymys on: Miten liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urakokemukset kytkeytyvät heidän elämäнкertomuksiinsa? Jokainen

osatutkimus tuottaa tietoa eri näkökulmasta. Tutkimuskysymykset osatutkimuksittain ovat:

1. Millaisia laadullisesti erilaisia merkityksiä liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet antavat tutkinnoilleen osana heidän elämäkertomuksiaan?
2. Millaisia ovat liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden tyypilliset uratarinamallit?
3. Millaisia merkityksiä vaikeudet saavat liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urateemaisissa elämäkertomuksissa?

Tutkimuksen aineistona on 60 urateemaista elämäkertomusta, jotka kerättiin syksyn 2018 ja kevään 2019 aikana avoimen kirjoituskutsun avulla. Kirjoituskutsussa liikuntaneuvoja-, liikunnanohjaaja- (AMK tai YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisterin tutkinnon vuosina 2004–2015 suorittaneita pyydettiin kertomaan oma elämäntarinansa uran näkökulmasta. Aineistossa on sekä liikunta-alalla työskenteleviä että alaa vaihtaneita. Aineisto analysoitiin fenomenografisesti (osatutkimus I), narratiivisen analyysin avulla (osatutkimus II) sekä refleksiivisen temaattisen analyysin avulla (osatutkimus III).

Tulokset

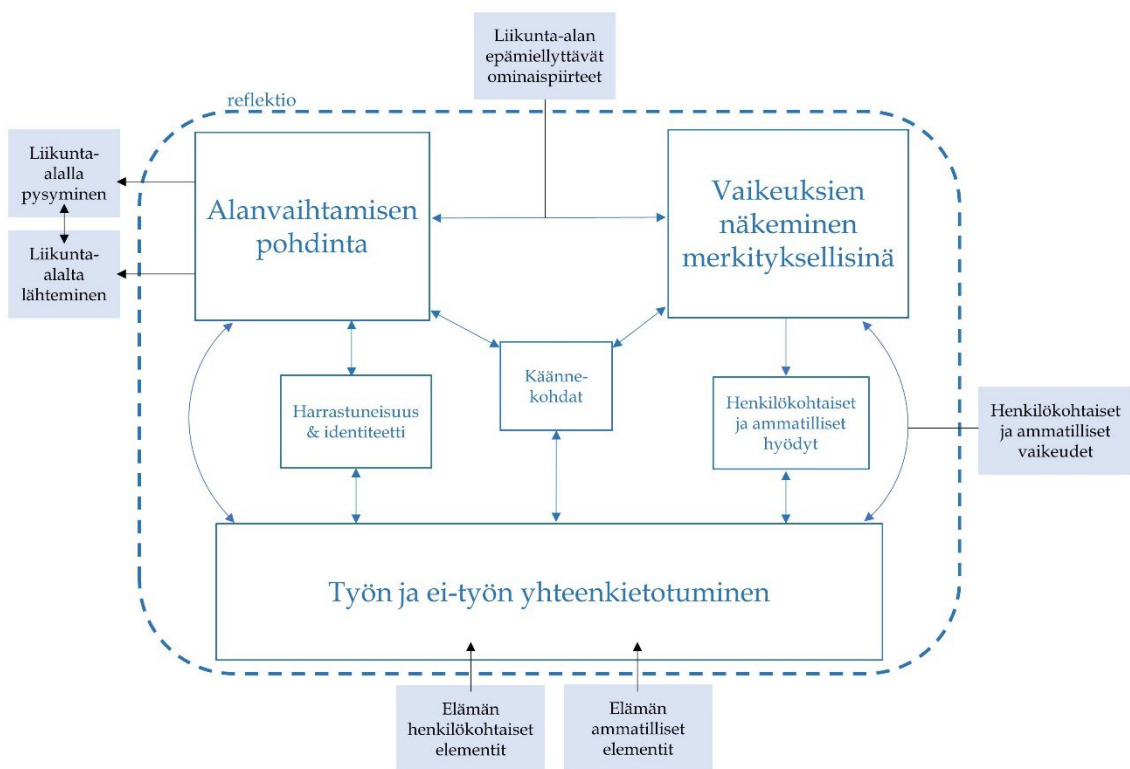
Ensimmäisen osatutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutus kietoutui osaksi elämää monin tavoin, ei vain ammatillisesti. Koulutuksen merkityksellisyyden kokemus yhdistyi kokemukseen myönteisestä muutoksesta. Koulutukselle annettiin voimakkaampia merkityksiä silloin, kun sen kautta oli koettu suuria myönteisiä muutoksia itsessä tai omassa elämässä, kun taas vähäiset muutokset liittyivät pettymyksen kokemukseen. Koulutukseen ei aina hakeuduttu liikunta-alan uraa tavoitellen, vaan opintoja suoritettiin myös harrastusmielellä ja muista syistä.

Toisessa osatutkimuksessa luotiin tyypillisiä tarinoita kuvaavia tarinamalleja, joita oli viisi erilaista. Mallit toivat esiin, millaisia käännekohtia kertomuksissa tyypillisesti oli, ja miten kertomukset erosivat toisistaan sekä tunnelmaltaan että juoneltaan. Yhdessä nämä kertomusmallit toivat näkyväksi, miten valmistuneet tasapainottelevat oman liikunnallisen kiinnostuksensa sekä työelämän realiteettien välillä. Monet olivat jo vaihtaneet alaa tai vähintään harkinneet sitä, ja alalla pysymistä määritteli se, miten työelämän kokemukset vastasivat koulutuksen muovaamia odotuksia tai henkilökohtaisia unelmia.

Kolmannen osatutkimuksen tulokset korostivat sitä, että myös vaikeat kokemukset olivat valmistuneille usein merkityksellisiä. Vaikeuksien koettiin johtavan muutokseen ja muokkaavan omaa toimintaa. Vaikeudet tarjosivat mahdollisuuden vaihtoehtoisten elämäntietojen pohtimiseen, ja ne nähtiin sekä epämiellyttävien tunteiden että myönteisten asioiden, kuten oppimisen ja kasvun, edistäjinä. Vaikeat kokemukset olivat siis myös hyödyllisiä.

Kun osatutkimusten tulokset vedetään yhteen, niistä voidaan tunnistaa kolme läpileikkaavaa teemaa. Teemat ovat ammatillisen ja ei-ammattillisen yhteenkietoutuminen, alanvaihtamisen pohdinta sekä vaikeuksien näkeminen

merkityksellisenä. Yhteenveto on esitetty visuaalisesti kuviossa 4. Tutkimuksen ensimmäinen päälöydös on, että harrastuneisuus ja identiteetti olivat erityisen tärkeitä elementtejä siinä, miten elämän ei-ammattilliset osa-alueet kietoutuvat liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden uriin. Toiseksi esiin nousee se, miten yleistä alanvaihtamisen pohdinta oli aineistossa. Tähän liittyi sekä liikunta-alan epämiellyttävät ominaispiirteet (kuten matalat palkat) että edellä kuvatut ei-ammattilliset elementit. Kolmanneksi tutkimustulokset korostavat vaikeiden kokemusten merkityksellisyyttä urien kannalta, riippumatta siitä, liittyvätkö vaikeudet työhön vai muuhun elämään. Samoin ammatillisten vaikeuksien merkitys nousi esiin sekä uran että muun elämän kannalta. Huomionarvoista on, että vaikeuksilla oli myös myönteisiä merkityksiä.



KUVIO 4 Päätutkimustulosten synteesi

Johtopäätökset

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat aiempia havaintoja liikunta-alan urien monimuotoisuudesta. Liikunta-alan haasteet, kuten matalat palkat, hankalat työajat ja rajoitetut työllisyys- ja uranäkymät, tulivat esiin aineistossa. Toisaalta tämä tutkimus laajentaa ymmärrystä urien moninaisuuden syistä. Tulokset tuovat esiin niitä tapoja, joilla henkilökohtainen on läsnä uran muotoutumisessa, ja kysymys ei ole vain käytännön seikoista, kuten työn ja perheen yhteensovittamisesta. Esimerkiksi itsensä kehittäminen, työn sopiminen omaan arvomaailmaan, identiteetti ja intohimo liikuntaan nousevat esiin merkityksellisinä asioina urapolun muotoutumisessa.

Identiteetti ja harrastuneisuus nousevat esiin erityisen merkityksellisinä seikkoina siinä, miten ammatillinen ja ei-ammattillinen kietoutuivat yhteen. Liikuntaharrastus on motivaattori koulutukseen hakeutumiselle, ja ura liikunta-alalla on keino jatkaa liikunnallista elämää. Toisaalta harrastuneisuus näyttäytyi myös syynä pohtia alanvaihtoa, sillä liikunta-ala saattoi alunperinkin olla väliaikainen ratkaisu omaa ammatillista suuntaa etsiessä. Liikunnallisuus koettiin osin kuitenkin myös syvempänä, identiteettitason ilmiönä pelkän harrastuksen sijaan. Liikunta ja sen edistäminen olivat osa itseä, ja intohimo liikuntaa kohtaan motivoi liikunta-alan työhön. Toisaalta työn kietoutuminen identiteettiin saattaa vaikeuttaa alanvaihtopäätöksen tekemistä silloin, kun itselle mieluisan uran toteuttaminen muodostuu haastavaksi.

Myös vaikeat kokemukset ovat kertomuksissa merkityksellisiä monin tavoin, sekä henkilökohtaisella tasolla että ammatillisesta näkökulmasta. Vaikeudet luonnollisesti myötävaikuttavat alanvaihtopohdintoihin, mutta myös tarjoavat mahdollisuuksia oppimiselle ja kasvulle sekä ammatillisesti että henkilökohtaisesti. Toisaalta vaikeudet tuovat tullessaan myös vaikeita tunteita, kuten katkeruutta ja toivottomuutta. Vaikeuksia ei siis voi ohittaa pelkästään ”oppimiskokemuksina”. Tutkimus haastaakin pohtimaan, millaista tukea uravaikeuksien kanssa painivat tarvitsevat esimerkiksi opinto- ja uraohjauksen muodossa.

Teoreettisesti tutkimus osoittaa, että erityisesti yhdistettynä narratiiviseen näkökulmaan, urien kaaosteoria on soveltuva teoreettinen lähtökohta liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urien tutkimiseen. Tutkimus lisää ymmärrystä liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden monimuotoisista urista sekä ammatillisen ja ei-ammattillisen yhteenkietoutumisesta nykyaikaisissa urissa. Käytännön tasolla tutkimus haastaa oletuksia koulutukseen hakeutumisesta vain ammatillisista syistä, ja korostaa yksilön kokonaisvaltaisten tarpeiden merkitystä nykyajan työelämässä.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Writing invitation webpage

Oletko suorittanut liikunta-alan tutkinnon? Kerro tarinasi!

Onko sinulla liikuntaneuvojan, liikunnanohjaajan (AMK/YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisterin tutkinto? Kaisa-Mari Jama tutkii väitöstutkimuksessaan liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneiden urapolkuja sekä koulutuksen merkitystä yksilöiden elämässä. Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää esimerkiksi koulutusten ja työmarkkinoiden kehittämisessä.



Liikunta-alan koulutukset ovat suosittuja, mutta työkentänä liikunta-ala on kirjava. Löysitkö sinä valmistumisen jälkeen paikkasi liikunta-alalta, vai päädyitkö jatkokouluttautumaan tai vaihtamaan kokonaan alaa? Millainen on sinun polkusi? Kerro tarinasi ja osallistu tutkimukseen!

Kuka voi osallistua?

Voit osallistua, jos sinulla on liikuntaneuvojan, liikunnanohjaajan (AMK/YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisterin tutkinto, ja valmistumisvuotesi on välillä 2004-2015. Muita rajoituksia ei ole: Nykyinen työtilanteesi voi olla mikä tahansa ja sinulla voi olla myös muita tutkintoja: sekä liikunta-alalla toimivien että alaa vaihtaneiden kertomukset ovat yhtä arvokkaita. Myöskään työttömyys, opiskelu, vanhempainvapaa tai muu vastaava tilanne eivät ole esteitä tutkimukseen osallistumiselle.

Miten osallistun?

Voit osallistua kirjoittamalla **oman elämäntarinasi työurasi näkökulmasta**. Tarkemmat ohjeet ja kirjoituksen lähettäminen tapahtuu **täällä**. Lomake on auki 28.2.2019 asti.

Miksi kirjoittaa?

Jokainen osallistuja on arvokas, sillä liikunta-alan koulutuksista valmistuneiden kokemuksia ei ole aiemmin laajasti tutkittu. Osallistumalla tutkimukseen sinun kokemuksesi tulevat kuulluksi ja samalla autat kehittämään niin liikunta-alan koulutusta kuin suomalaista ammatti- ja korkeakoulutusta laajemminkin. Tutkimuksen tuloksista hyötyvät myös liikunta-alan työnantajat sekä edunvalvonta. Edistät myös urapolkuja ja liikunta-alaa käsittelevän tieteellisen tiedon lisääntymistä. Kirjoittaminen voi myös auttaa sinua ymmärtämään omaa elämääsi ja uraasi aikaisempaa paremmin.

Mitä kirjoitukselleni tapahtuu?

Huolehdimme tiedoistasi asianmukaisesti noudattaen tietosuojalainsäädäntöä ja tutkimuseettisiä periaatteita. Voit vastata nimettömästi. Kirjoituksestasi voidaan julkaista otteita tutkimustulosten yhteydessä. Kirjoituksista muodostettava sähköinen tutkimusaineisto arkistoidaan pysyvästi Yhteiskuntatieteelliseen tietoarkistoon myöhempää tutkimus-, opiskelu- ja opetuskäyttöä varten. Oma vastauksesi arkistoidaan vain, jos annat siihen luvan. Arkistoitavia tekstejä muokataan tarvittaessa esimerkiksi poistamalla kolmansiin henkilöihin liittyviä tunnistetietoja. Voit lukea lisää [tutkimuksen metodologiasta](#).

Vastaan mielelläni, jos sinulla on jotakin kysyttävää. Lämmin kiitos avustasi!

Väitöskirjatutkija, LitM Kaisa-Mari Jama
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kaisa-mari.p.jama@student.jyu.fi

Tervetuloa mukaan! [Klikkaa tästä päästäksesi lähetyslomakkeelle](#).

Appendix 2: Writing invitation, methodology subpage

 Jyväskylän yliopisto

EN | Yhteystiedot 

Pääsivu > Tutkimus > Osallistu tutkimukseen > Liikunta-alalta valmistuneiden urapolut > Tutkimuksen metodologiasta

Tutkimus 07.01.2019 

> Tutkimus- ja innovaatiopalvelut

< Osallistu tutkimukseen

> Liikunta-alalta valmistuneiden urapolut

> Tutkimuksen metodologiasta

Tutkimuksen metodologiasta

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisia merkityksiä liikunta-alan koulutus saa valmistuneiden (myös alaa vaihtaneiden) elämäntarinoissa, sekä millaisia urapolkuja koulutusten ympärille on muodostunut. Tätä varten valmistuneilta opiskelijoilta kerätään urateemaisia elämäntarinoita. Lisäksi väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan liikunta-alan työnantajien odotuksia erillisen aineiston avulla. Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta artikkelista sekä yhteenveto-osasta.


Elämäntarina-aineistoa analysoidaan narratiivisesti ja temaattisesti. Päättökysymykset ovat:

- Miten suomalaiset liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet kuvailevat koulutus- ja urapolkujaan?
- Millainen merkitys formaalilla koulutuksella on liikunta-alalta valmistuneiden elämäntarinoissa?

Tutkimus pohjaa laajaan, narratiiviseen elämäntarinatraditioon. Samalla se liittyy osaksi kansainvälistä, nykyaikaista uratutkimusta, jossa urapolut ymmärretään yksilöllisinä käsikirjoituksina perinteisempien vaihemallien sijaan.

Kirjoittaja kuuluu kasvatustieteiden tohtorihjelmaan. Väitöskirjan vastuullisena ohjaajana toimii professori Päivi Tynjälä (paivi.tynjala@jyu.fi).

Appendix 3: Data collection form

Penna Etusivu Käyttöohje 

Liikunta-alalta valmistuneiden urapolut

Kiitos kiinnostuksestasi osallistua **liikunta-alan koulutuksen saaneiden urapolkututkimukseen!** Voit osallistua, jos sinulla on liikuntaneuvojan, liikunnanohjaajan (AMK/YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisterin tutkinto, ja valmistumisvuotesi on välillä 2004-2015.

Tällä lomakkeella voit lähettää kirjoitelmasi joko kopiomalla tai kirjoittamalla sen suoraan alla olevaan kenttään. Lomake on auki 28.2.2019 asti.

Ohjeita

Kirjoita oma elämäntarinasasi työurasi näkökulmasta. Kirjoita niistä tapahtumista, henkilöistä, valinnoista ja ajatuksista, jotka ovat mielestäsi olleet keskeisiä oman urapolkusi muotoutumisessa. Liikunta-alan koulutuksella voi olla tarinassasi pieni tai iso rooli. Älä ajattele, että sinun tulisi kirjoittaa jollakin tietyllä tavalla, vaan kirjoita juuri niistä asioista, jotka sinusta itsestäsi tuntuvat tärkeiltä. Kerro myös tulevaisuudensuunnitelmistasi. Kirjoituksen muoto ja pituus ovat vapaat. Voit hyödyntää seuraavia apukysymyksiä:

- Millainen on koulutuspolkusi? Mitä olet opiskellut ja mikä johti sinut kyseisiin opiskelupaikkoihin? Kerro niistä asioista, joiden koet vaikuttaneen valintoihisi ennen opiskelua ja sen aikana (esim. lappaus, harrastukset, ihmiset, sijainti, elämäntapahtumat).
- Mitä osaamista olet saanut opinnoistasi? Entä mitä muuta opinnot ovat tuoneet elämäsi?
- Mitkä työpaikat ovat olleet sinulle merkittävimpiä? Miten päädyit niihin? Miten ne linkittyvät opintoihisi? Kerro asioista, joiden koet vaikuttaneen työmahdollisuuksiasi ja vastaanottamiasi työpaikkoihin.
- Mitkä ovat urapolkusi tärkeimpiä etappeja tai käännekohtia?
- Jos olet yhä liikunta-alalla, mikä on saanut sinut pysymään alalla? Mikäli et ole, kerro valintaasi johtaneista syistä.

Kirjoituksen lähettäminen yhteydessä sinulta kysytään muutamia taustatietokysymyksiä. Huolehdimme tiedoistasi asianmukaisesti noudattaen tietosuojalainsäädäntöä ja tutkimuseettisiä periaatteita. Vältä oikeiden nimien käyttöä, kun kerrot muista elämäsi vaikuttaneista yksityisistä henkilöistä. Kirjoituksestasi voidaan julkaista otteita tutkimuksissa ja niiden yhteydessä voidaan julkaista antamiasi taustatietoja, kuten sukupuolesi ja ikäsi.

Kirjoituksista muodostettava sähköinen tutkimusaineisto arkistoidaan pysyvästi Yhteiskuntatieteelliseen tietoaarkistoon myöhempää tutkimus-, opetus- ja opetuskäyttöä varten. Oma vastauksesi arkistoidaan vain, jos annat siihen luvan. Arkistoitavia tekstejä muokataan tarvittaessa esimerkiksi poistamalla kolmansien henkilöihin liittyviä tunnistetietoja. Henkilötietoja käsitellään tietosuoja-asetuksen mukaisesti akateemisen ja kirjallisen ilmaisun tarkoitukseen. Ennen vastaamistasi tutustu Pennan käyttöohjeisiin, joihin löydät linkin sivun yläpäästä.

HUOM! Pennassa on huoltoikkuna torstaisin kello 7:00–10:00, jolloin palvelussa voi olla käyttökatkoja. Tietoaarkisto ei takaa Pennan käytettävyyttä kyseisenä aikana.

Vastaa mielelläni, jos sinulla on jotakin kysyttävää.
Lämmin kiitos!
Väitöskirjatutkija, LitM Kaisa-Mari Jama
Jyväskylän yliopisto
kaisa-mari.p.jama@student.jyu.fi

Ikä (0-3 merkkiä)

Sukupuoli

nainen
 mies
 muu

Suoritetut tutkinnot valmistumisvuosiin (myös muut kuin liikunta-alan) (0-300 merkkiä)

Mikä seuraavista kuvaa sinua mielestäsi parhaiten

työskentelen liikunta-alalla
 en työskentele liikunta-alalla
 jokin muu

Jos vastasit edellisessä kysymyksessä 'jokin muu', tarkenna tähän mikä (0-100 merkkiä)

Arkistointilupa *

Kirjoitukseni ja siihen liittyvät taustatiedot SAA arkistoida Tietoaarkistoon ja luovuttaa tutkimus, opetus ja opiskelukäyttöä varten.
 Kirjoitustani ja siihen liittyviä taustatietoja EI SAA arkistoida Tietoaarkistoon eikä luovuttaa tutkimus, opetus ja opiskelukäyttöä varten.

Kirjoita tekstisi tähän. Voit suurentaa tekstikentän kokoa vetämällä kursorilla alaspäin kentän oikeasta alakulmasta.
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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

LIIKUNTA-ALAN TUTKINTOKOULUTUKSEN MERKITYKSET VALMISTUNEIDEN ELÄMÄNKERTOMUKSISSA - FENOMENOGRAFINEN ANALYYSI

by

Jama, K-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R.,
2021

Liikunta & Tiede vol 58(4), 82-90

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Käsikirjoituksia otetaan arviointiprosessiin kaksi kertaa vuodessa. Seuraavat jättöajat ovat 30.9.2021 ja 31.3.2022. Kirjoitusohjeet ja arviointiprosessin kuvaus ovat luettavissa osoitteessa www.lts.fi.

Käsikirjoitusten arvioinnista vastaa toimitusryhmä, johon kuuluvat Sanna Palomäki (päätoimittaja), Katja Borodulin, Hannu Itkonen, Jari Kanerva, Kari L. Keskinen, Jouko Kokkonen (toimittaja), Tiina Kujala ja Kati Lehtonen.



LIIKUNTA-ALAN TUTKINTOKOULUTUKSEN MERKITYKSET VALMISTUNEIDEN ELÄMÄNKERTOMUKSISSA – FENOMENOGRAFINEN ANALYYSI

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Jama, K.-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R. 2021. Liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutuksen merkitykset valmistuneiden elämäntarinoissa – fenomenografinen analyysi. Liikunta & Tiede 58 (4), 82–90.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kuvailla, millaisia laadullisesti erilaisia merkityksiä liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet antoivat alan tutkintokoulutukselle urateemaisissa elämäntarinoissaan. Kertomusten avulla oli mahdollista tavoittaa koulutukselle annetut merkitykset suhteessa uran muotoutumisen monitahoisuuteen.

Tutkimukseen osallistui 60 liikuntaneuvoja-, liikunnan-ohjaaja- (AMK tai YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisteri -tutkinnon vuosina 2004–2015 suorittanutta henkilöä, jotka vastasivat avoimeen kirjoituskutsuun. Kutsussa osallistujia pyydyttiin kirjoittamaan tutkimusta varten oma urateemainen elämäntarinasensa. Kertomusaineisto analysoitiin fenomenografisesti etsimällä teksteistä merkitysilmauksia ja ryhmittämällä ne kuvauskategorioksi.

Liikunta-alan koulutukselle kertomuksissa annetut merkitykset jakautuivat kuuteen kategoriaan, jotka erosivat toisistaan sisällöllisesti. Koulutus voitiin nähdä (1) pettymyksenä, (2) välineenä, (3) käytännöllisenä valintana, (4) mahdollistajana, (5) tavoitteellisenä reittinä tai (6) kokonaisvaltaisena uudistajana. Kategorioiden välinen vaihtelu näkyi seuraavissa teemoissa: a) yleinen kokemus opiskeluaikasta, b) ammatillinen kehittyminen, c) työllistyminen ja ura, d) muu elämä sekä e) psykologiset tarpeet.

Johtopäätöksenä todettiin, että kategorioiden välisissä eroissa keskeisiksi nousivat kirjoittajien kokemukset siitä, millaisia muutoksia koulutus on saanut aikaan itsessä ja omassa elämässä. Opintojen merkitys ei ollut vain ammatillinen, vaan koulutus kietoutui osaksi elämäntarinaa monin eri tavoin.

Asiasanat: liikunta-ala, urakertomukset, fenomenografia

ABSTRACT

Jama, K.-M., Tynjälä, P., Aarto-Pesonen, L., Malinen, A. & Hämäläinen, R. 2021. Meanings of sport degree education in the life stories of graduates – phenomenographical analysis. Liikunta & Tiede 58 (4), 82–90.

The aim of this paper was to describe the qualitative variation in different meanings that the graduates attributed to the formal sport education as a part of their career-oriented life narratives. Narratives enabled exploring the meanings attributed to education in relation to the complexity of career development.

60 graduates of sport degree programmes in vocational upper secondary and higher education took part in the study. They responded to an open writing invitation to graduates from graduation years 2004–2015. In the invitation they were asked to write their personal career-oriented life stories. The data was analyzed using phenomenography, that is by finding meaningful expressions from the data and then grouping them into categories of description.

The results showed that the meanings attributed to sport degree studies were divided into six categories that varied in regards of content. The education was experienced as (1) disappointment, (2) instrument, (3) practical choice, (4) enabler, (5) goal-oriented route, and (6) holistic reformer. Variations between these categories were identified through five themes: a) general experience of studies, b) professional development, c) employment and career, 5) life outside work and 6) psychological needs.

It was concluded that a key element in meaningfulness was the perception of how the studies have changed oneself and one's life. Meaning of education was not only related to professional life but intertwined with life in many ways.

Keywords: sport industry, career narratives, phenomenography

JOHDANTO

Liikunta-ala uravalintana

Liikunta-ala on kasvanut työllistäjänä Suomessa voimakkaasti (ESSA-Sport 2019, 18). Alan tutkintonimikkeet ovat ammatillisessa peruskoulutuksessa *liikuntaneuvoja*, ammatikorkeakoulussa *liikunnanohjaaja* (AMK ja YAMK) sekä yliopistokoulutuksessa *liikuntatieteiden kandidaatti*, *maisteri* ja *tohtori*. Ammatillisena lisäkoulutuksena voi suorittaa liikunnan ja valmennuksen ammattitutkinnon sekä valmennuksen erityisammattitutkinnon. Alan koulutuksia tarjoavat myös yksityinen ja kolmas sektori. Näistä merkittävimpiä ovat personal trainer -kurssit, erilaiset lisenssikoulutukset sekä laji-liittojen valmennuskoulutukset.

Tutkinnot ovat pääasiassa generalistitutkintoja, joilla ei ole selvää profiilia työmarkkinoilla. Siten liikunta-alan urat ovat tyypillisesti vaihtelevia ja monimuotoisia, pois lukien liikunnanopettajat, joiden urat ovat useammin perinteisen uran määritelmää mukailevia (Minten & Forsyth 2014, 99). Liikunta-alan työpaikoista kilpailevat myös muut kuin liikunta-alan koulutuksen suorittaneet, sillä liikunnanopettajia lukuunottamatta muodollisia pätevyysvaatimuksia on vain vähän (Kaiser & Beech 2012, 292, 297–298, ks. myös esim. Haverinen 2019).

Urapolkuihin liikunta-alalla liittyvät haasteet on tunnistettu myös kansainvälisesti. Aiemmissä tutkimuksissa jopa huomattavan osan valmistuneista on raportoitu vaihtaneen alaa. Tärkeimpiä alanvaihdon syitä ovat olleet riittämätön palkka, rajoitetut työ- ja uramahdollisuudet sekä kiinnostus muita aloja kohtaan. (Minten & Forsyth 2014, 98; Schwab et al. 2015, 7–8; Sleep & Reed 2006, 52.) Minten (2010, 77) huomautti, että valmistuneet eivät sitoudu työhönsä, jos he kokevat, ettei heidän osaamistaan hyödynnetä riittävällä tavalla. Schlesingerin ym. (2015, 1234) tutkimuksessa tutkinto nähtiin työllistymisen edellytyksenä erityisesti kouluympäristössä, kun taas muualla liikunta-alalla tai alan ulkopuolella työskentelevät eivät pitäneet tutkintoa työllistymisensä kannalta välttämättömänä.

Tutkintoon johtavaa valmennuskoulutusta tutkineet Hall ym. (2019, 892–893) huomauttivat, ettei valmennustyön saamiseen tarvita alan tutkintoa, ja että tutkinnoilla on valmennuksen kentällä heikko uskottavuus. Myös Turnerin ja Nelsonin (2009, 18–20) tutkimuksessa tuli esiin, että kentällä edellytetään lajiiliittojen myöntämiä todistuksia, vaikka korkeakoulu- ja laji- ja uramahdollisuudet sekä kiinnostus muita aloja kohtaan. (Minten & Forsyth 2014, 98; Schwab et al. 2015, 7–8; Sleep & Reed 2006, 52.) Minten (2010, 77) huomautti, että valmistuneet eivät sitoudu työhönsä, jos he kokevat, ettei heidän osaamistaan hyödynnetä riittävällä tavalla. Schlesingerin ym. (2015, 1234) tutkimuksessa tutkinto nähtiin työllistymisen edellytyksenä erityisesti kouluympäristössä, kun taas muualla liikunta-alalla tai alan ulkopuolella työskentelevät eivät pitäneet tutkintoa työllistymisensä kannalta välttämättömänä.

Liikunta-alan koulutuksen merkitykset yksilön näkökulmasta

Liikunta-alan koulutukseen hakeutumisen motiiveiksi on raportoitu laajemman ja syvemmän osaamisen hankkiminen, parempi palkkaus, tietyille uralle pääseminen tai yleisempi työllistymismahdollisuuksien parantaminen ja laajentaminen (Hall ym. 2019, 889–892; Turner & Nelson 2009, 11). Koulutuksen on koettu tuottavan sekä substanssiin liittyvää osaamista että yleisiä työelämätaitoja (Hall ym. 2019, 892–898; Sleep & Reed 2006, 53–55). Norjalaisten liikunnanopettajien on raportoitu kokeneen koulutuksen merki-

tyksen lähinnä lajitaitojen ja didaktisen osaamisen kehittämiseksi (Dowling 2011, 210–211, 218; Mordal-Moen & Green 2014, 814–815).

Yksilö ei kuitenkaan voi tarkkaan ennakoida, miten koulutus tulee omaan uraan ja elämään vaikuttamaan. Koulutus voi esimerkiksi avata silmiä uusille urasuunnitelmille (Hall ym. 2019, 892; Minten & Forsyth 2014, 98). Harjoittelujen on toistuvasti raportoitu olevan merkittäviä kokemuksia työllistymisen ja ammatillisen kehittymisen näkökulmasta (Hall ym. 2019, 896; Laine & Ilmola 2016, 65; Mordal-Moen & Green 2014, 811–812; Palomäki 2009, 60–61; Sleep & Reed 2006, 54, 56; Van Schalkwyk ym. 2012, 220–221; Vuolle 2013, 29). Koulutuksen vaikutus voi olla myös lannistava: Iso-Britanniassa tutkinnon koettiin parantavan työllistettävyyttä, mutta samalla luottamus työpaikan saamiseen väheni opintojen edetessä (Beaumont ym. 2016, 5).

Vaikka työllistyminen ja osaamisen kehittyminen ovat koulutuksen keskeisiä päämääriä, se ei yksilön näkökulmasta ole koulutuksen merkityksen koko kuva. Koulutustason on havaittu vaikuttavan paitsi työllistymiseen ja palkkaukseen, myös sosiaaliseen statukseen, hyvinvointiin ja asenteisiin (Easterbrook ym. 2016; Schlesinger ym. 2015, 1232). Koulutus on siten tärkeä vaikutin urien ja elämäntulon muotoutumisessa myös muuten kuin pelkän työllistymisen näkökulmasta. Minten ja Forsyth (2014, 95, 98, 101) huomauttavat, ettei ole perusteltua olettaa, että kaikki liikunta-alan tutkintoja suorittavat tavoittelevat uraa liikunta-alalla, vaan opiskelulle voi olla myös muita motiiveja, kuten liikunnasta nauttiminen. Suomessa Vuolle (2013, 28, 45) raportoi, että urheilu-ura tai henkilökohtainen kiinnostus liikuntaan olivat merkittäviä perusteita koulutusvalinnalle.

Kertomukset uratutkimuksen välineenä

Pitkien, vakaiden työsuhteiden muututtua epätyypillisemmiksi uratutkimus on tarvinnut uusia lähestymistapoja, sillä perinteiset urateoriat pohjautuvat oletuksiin sekä yksilön ominaisuuksien että työpaikkojen muuttumattomuudesta (Savickas ym. 2009, 240). Uratutkimuksen teoria onkin kehittynyt ammatinvalinnan psykologiasta merkitysten rakentamiseen (*meaning-making*) työn kautta (Bujold 2004, 471–472). Savickasin ym. (2009, 240) mukaan tutkimuksen tulisi lähestyä uria yksilöllisinä käsikirjoituksina perinteisten vaihemallien sijaan. Tässä tutkimuksessa ura ymmärrettiin subjektiivisena kokemuksena. Objektiivisesti määritellynä ura voidaan ymmärtää sarjana työpaikkoja. Subjektiivinen ura tarkoittaa puolestaan sitä, miten nämä kokemukset nivoutuvat yhtenäiseksi kokonaisuudeksi, jonka voi muotoilla merkitykselliseksi kertomukseksi. (Savickas 2005, 43.)

Narratiivien käyttöä on pidetty yhtenä ratkaisuna nykyikäiseen uratutkimukseen, sillä niiden avulla on mahdollista tavoittaa uran muotoutumiseen liittyvä monitahoisuus. Tarinoiden avulla yksilöt antavat merkityksiä menneille tapahtumille ja kytkevät ne sosiaaliseen kontekstiin. Tarinoiden avulla tavoitetaan myös eri vaiheiden väliset siirtymät ja katkokset. (Cohen & Mallon 2001, 56.) Esimerkiksi Savickas (2005) on lähestynyt urakehitystä narratiivisesta näkökulmasta. Hänen mukaansa urat rakentuvat yksilöiden asettaessa merkityksiä ammatilliselle toiminnalleen ja työhön liittyville kokemuksilleen sekä tehdessä valintoja, joiden avulla he ilmaisevat itseään. (Savickas 2005, 43.)

Monia vallitsevia urateorioita on kuitenkin kritisoitu siitä, että ne korostavat liiaksi yksilön rationaalista päätöksentekoa eivätkä siten vastaa elettyä todellisuutta (Pryor &

Bright 2003; 12–13, 2014, 4). Pryorin ja Brightin (2003; 2014) työurien kaaosteoria (*chaos theory of careers*, CTC) ottaa huomioon sen, ettei ura muodostu vain yksilön rationaalista valinnoista, vaan siihen vaikuttavat muutkin asiat, kuten toiset ihmiset, olosuhteet ja sattuma. Teorian mukaan yksilöt, kuten maailma yleensäkin, ovat monimutkaisia, avoimia ja mukautuvia systeemejä, jotka ovat herkkiä muutokselle. Yksilön ura rakentuu siten yhden systeemin (yksilön) ja muiden systeemien (muut ihmiset, organisaatiot, kulttuuri, rakenteet, ympäristö) vuorovaikutuksessa. Näin ollen urat eivät perustu vain yksilön valintoihin eivätkä ole lineaarisia tai helposti ennustettavia.

Aiempi tutkimus on pitkälti rajautunut tarkastelemaan koulutusta ammatillisesta näkökulmasta. Suomessa suurin osa liikunta-alan koulutustutkimuksesta on keskittynyt liikunnanopettajakoulutukseen (esim. Aarto-Pesonen 2013; Palomäki 2009). Muita alan tutkimuksia on tarkasteltu lähinnä selvityksissä, joissa on tarkasteltu valmistuneiden koettua osaamista sekä työhön sijoittumista (Ala-Vähälä 2012; Laine & Ilmola 2016; Lappalainen 2009; Tuomela 2006; Vuolle 2013). Ura ei kuitenkaan tapahdu tyhjiössä, vaan työhön liittyvät tapahtumat ovat yhteydessä muun elämän tapahtumiin. Tämän artikkelin lähtökohtana oli, että koulutukselle annetut merkitykset voivat kytkeytyä myös muihin elämän tapahtumiin, minkä vuoksi koulutukselle annettuja merkityksiä haluttiin tarkastella kertomusten avulla. Näin yksilön uratapahtumien laajempi konteksti sekä rationaalisten valintojen ulkopuoliset seikat tulevat näkyviksi.

TUTKIMUSTEHTÄVÄ, -AINEISTO JA -MENETELMÄT

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kuvata, millaisia laadullisesti erilaisia merkityksiä liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet antoivat alan opinnoille urateemaisissa elämäntutkimuksissaan. Tavoitteena oli lisätä ymmärrystä valmistuneiden opinto- ja urakokemuksista ja siten edistää liikunta-alan koulutusten ja työelämän kehittämistä. Tutkimuskysymykset olivat:

1. Millaisia merkityksiä liikunta-alan tutkinnon suorittaneet antavat tutkintokoulutukselle?
2. Miten erilaiset koulutukselle annetut merkitykset eroavat toisistaan laadullisesti?

Jotta opintojen merkitystä voitiin tarkastella urien kaaosteorian mukaisesti osana elämää ja suhteessa toisiin ihmisiin, kontekstiin ja sattumiin, käytettiin aineistona osallistujien kirjoittamia urateemaisia elämäntutkimuksia. Suomenkielisessä tutkimuskäsitteistössä *tarina* (story) on vakiintunut viittaamaan kertomuksen tapahtumakulkuun, kun taas *kertomus* (narrative) on tarinan tekstuaalinen toteutuma (Ryan 2005, 347). Merkityksiä tutkittaessa on juonen lisäksi tärkeää ymmärtää elämäntutkimuksen arvioivia osia, joissa kirjoittaja ilmaisee sitä, miten tapahtumat tulisi ymmärtää (Linde 1993, 71–72). Siksi tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään arkielellä tutumman elämäntarina-sanan sijaan käsitettä elämäntutkimus viitattaessa aineistoksi tuotettuihin kertomuksiin. Tarinalla puolestaan viitataan kertomuksen tapahtumakulkuun. Potentiaalisille osallistujille tarkoitettua kirjoituskutsussa käytettiin tutumpaa käsitettä elämäntarina.

McAdamsin (2001, 101) mukaan elämäntutkimus on henkilökohtainen kertomus, jossa elettyä elämää reflektoidaan, ja jossa tapahtumat saavat merkityksen suhteessa toisiinsa. Kertomusta kirjoittaessaan yksilöt valikoivat ne ainekset muistoista kokemuksista ja tulevaisuuden toiveista, joita

he itse pitivät tarinan kannalta merkityksellisinä, ja kokemukset saavat merkityksen suhteessa ihmisen muuhun elämään. Elämäntutkimus ei siis ole objektiivinen kuvaus siitä, mitä tapahtui, vaan kokijan näkemys siitä, mikä on itselle merkityksellistä.

Tutkimuksen aineistona käytetyt urateemaiset elämäntutkimukset kerättiin syyskuun 2018 ja helmikuun 2019 välillä. Osallistujia pyydettiin mukaan avoimella kirjoituskutsulla, jota jaettiin oppilaitosten alumniliistojen, alan ammattiliittojen sähköpostiliistojen sekä sosiaalisen median kautta. Mukaan kutsuttiin henkilöitä, jotka olivat suorittaneet liikuntaneuvojan, liikunnanohjaajan (AMK tai YAMK) tai liikuntatieteiden maisterin tutkinnon vuosien 2004–2015 välillä. Aikarajauksella pyrittiin varmistamaan, että tutkimus kohdistuisi nykyaikaisiin, 2000-luvun tutkinto-ohjelmiin. Liikuntaneuvojan tutkintonimike otettiin käyttöön vuonna 2001 koulutuksen muuttuessa kolmivuotiseksi, joten vuonna 2004 kaikki valmistuneet olivat liikuntaneuvoja (J. Leivo, henkilökohtainen tiedonanto, 13.12.2018). Toisaalta rajaus vuoteen 2015 asti varmisti sen, että osallistujat olivat jo ehtineet saada perspektiiviä opintoihinsa vähintään kahden vuoden ajan valmistumisensa jälkeen.

Vaikka eri liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutukset ovat erityyppisesti profiloituneita, työmarkkinoilla on käytännössä paljon päällekkäisyyttä (Ala-Vähälä 2012, 43; Lappalainen 2009, 19; Vuolle 2013, 53). Esimerkiksi sekä liikuntaneuvojat että liikunnanohjaajat (AMK) työllistyvät usein liikunnanohjaustehtäviin, vaikka korkeakoulutettuina jälkimmäiset voivat hakeutua osin samoihin asiantuntijatehtäviin kuin yliopistossa koulutetut (Ala-Vähälä 2012, 34–35). Kaikilla tasoilla koulutetaan urheiluvalmentajia. Lisäksi suomalainen koulutusjärjestelmä mahdollistaa eritasoisten koulutusten yhdistelemisen joustavasti. Monet liikuntaneuvojat hakeutuvat ammattikorkeakouluun ja liikunnanohjaajat (AMK) yliopistoon jatkamaan liikunta-alan opintoja (Vuolle 2013, 53). Esimerkiksi tämän tutkimuksen osallistujista 38 prosentilla oli kokemusta useammasta kuin yhdestä liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutuksesta, ja elämäntutkimuksissa eri koulutuksia ei välttämättä eroteltu toisistaan. Näiden seikkojen vuoksi oli mielekästä tutkia tutkintokoulutukselle annettuja merkityksiä tekemättä tarkkaa rajanvetoa eri koulutusten välille.

Kutsussa osallistujia pyydettiin kirjoittamaan oma urateemainen ja vapaamuotoinen elämäntarinansa. Kirjoituskutsuun oli liitetty apukysymyksiä, joita sai halutessaan hyödyntää, mutta kutsussa korostettiin kirjoittajan valinnanvapautta. Lisäksi osallistujilta kysyttiin kohdejoukon kuvaamiseksi taustatietoina ikää, sukupuolta, suorittettuja tutkintoja, työskentelikkö henkilö kirjoitushetkellä liikunta-alalla sekä arkistointilupaa. Epäselvissä tapauksissa taustatietoja, lähinnä suoritettuja tutkintoja, hyödynnettiin analyysin aikana selvittämään kertomusten juonikulkua.

Vastauksia saatiin 68, joista 60 oli tarinamuotoisia, täyten asetetun valmistumisvuosikriteerin ja hyväksyttiin aineistoksi. Kirjoitusten pituus vaihteli 27 sanasta 1946 sanaan (ka. 504 sanaa). Vastaaajista naisia oli 37 ja miehiä 23, muita 0. Ikä vaihteli 22–51 vuoden välillä (ka. 31 vuotta). 37 vastaaja kertoi opiskelleensa yhden liikunta-alan tutkinnon, kun taas 23 oli opiskellut useampaa liikunta-alan tutkintoa.

Liikuntaneuvojatutkinnon korkeimpänä liikunta-alan tutkintona ilmoitti suorittaneensa 15 osallistujaa (yhteensä tutkinnon raportoi 23 vastaajaa). Muilla tutkinnoilla vastaavat luvut olivat liikunnanohjaaja (AMK) 25 (34), liikunnanoh-

jaaja (YAMK) 5 (5), liikuntatieteiden kandidaatti 2 (4), liikuntatieteiden maisteri 12 (13) ja liikuntatieteiden tohtori 1 (1). Lisäksi neljä osallistujaa ilmoitti maisteritutkinnon ja yksi YAMK-tutkinnon olevan kesken jo olemassa olevan alemman tutkinnon lisäksi. Osa maisteritutkinnon suorittaneista ei maininnut alemmaa tutkintoa lainkaan, joten kandidaattien todellinen kokonaismäärä lienee tässä ilmoitettua suurempi. Vastaajista 36 ilmoitti toimivansa liikunta-alalla, ja 13 oli vaihtanut kokonaan alaa. 11 vastasi ”muu”, mikä avovastauksentän mukaan tarkoitti esimerkiksi sitä, että vastaa-ja oli osin liikunta-alalla.

Analyysi toteutettiin fenomenografisesti. Fenomenografisen tutkimuksen tavoitteena on systemaattisesti kuvata, millaisia tietyn ilmiön ymmärtämisen tai kokemisen tapoja tiettyssä ryhmässä esiintyy, sekä miten nämä tavat ovat suhteessa toisiinsa (Åkerlind 2005a, 322). Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkoituksena oli luonnehtia laadullisia eroja liikunta-alalta valmistuneiden opiskelu- ja urakokemuksissa. Fenomenografiassa tutkimuskohteena ovat ihmisten kokemukset ja käsitykset, ei todellisuus sinänsä. Lähtökohtana on, että eri yksilöt voivat kokea ja ymmärtää yhteisen todellisuuden eri tavoin. Nämä käsitykset ymmärretään merkityksenantoprosesseina. Fenomenografian avulla on siis mahdollista saada selville, millaisia merkityksiä tutkimuksen kohteena olevalle ilmiölle annetaan. (Marton 2005, 144, 153–154; Åkerlind 2005a, 322–323.) Analyysin tuloksena erilaiset tavat kokea liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutuksen merkitys jäsenyivät kuvauskategorioiden, jotka eroavat toisistaan keskeisten piirteidensä suhteen. Kategoriat eivät kuvaa yksilöitä, vaan sitä variaatiota, miten jokin asia koetaan tai ymmärretään tiettyssä tutkittavien joukossa.

Analyyssi mukaili kirjallisuudessa esitettyjä vaiheita (Marton 2005, 153–154, Åkerlind 2005a). Aluksi kertomukset luettiin läpi useaan kertaan, jotta aineistosta ja yksittäisistä kertomuksista muodostui kokonaiskäsitys. Tämän jälkeen aineisto koodattiin etsien siitä tutkimuskysymyksen kannalta olennaisia ilmaisuja. Ilmaisujen merkitys analysoitiin suhteessa kertomukseen, johon ne kuuluivat (Marton 2005, 153–154).

Koska fenomenografiassa tarkoituksena ei ole tuottaa yksilötason kuvauksia vaan saada selville aineistossa esiintyvää vaihtelua (Marton 2005, 153–154), seuraavassa vaiheessa kiinnostus suuntautui yksittäisten kertomusten sijaan ilmaisujen ja koodien muodostamaan kokonaisuuteen. Suurta koodien määrää jäseneltiin visuaalisesti lajittelemalla sisällöltään samantyyppisiä koodeja lähekkäin. Tämän jälkeen merkityssisällöltään yhtenevät koodit ryhmiteltiin. Koodiryhmien samanlaisuutta ja erilaisuutta tarkastelemalla sekä ryhmiä yhdistelemällä luotiin alustavat kuvauskategoriat, jotka kuvasivat erilaisia tapoja kokea liikunta-alan koulutuksen merkitys. Alustavia kategorioita vertailemalla identifioitiin myös teemat tai ominaisuudet, joiden perusteella eri kategoriat erosivat toisistaan. Näitä kutsutaan fenomenografiasa variaation ulottuvuuksiksi tai variaation teemoiksi (Åkerlind 2005b, 152).

Kategoriat jäseneltiin taulukoksi, jossa ryhmittely tuli näkyviin myös teemojen suhteen. Kategoriat ja teemat nimettiin alustavilla otsikoilla. Irrallisiksi jääneitä koodeja tarkasteltiin suhteessa muihin ryhmiin, ja ryhmittelyä sekä nimeämisiä tehtiin tarvittaessa uudestaan, jotta jokainen koodi oli sijoitettuna sitä kuvaavan otsikon alle. Analyysiä jatkettiin palaamalla yksittäisten koodien tasolle tarkastamaan, että ne sopivat sekä siihen kategoriaan että variaation teemaan, johon ne

oli sijoitettu. Samoin kaikki koodeihin liitetyt aineistokatkelmat käytiin järjestelmällisesti läpi.

Analyysin tuloksena kaikki aineistossa esiintyvät erilaiset liikunta-alan koulutukselle annetut merkitykset oli jäsennely systemaattisesti rakentuneeksi kokonaisuudeksi, jossa erilaiset ymmärtämisen tavat on esitetty kategorioina suhteessa toisiinsa. Samoin tuotiin esiin, miten eri kategoriat sisällöllisesti eroavat toistaan. Fenomenografian periaatteiden mukaisesti kuvauskategoriat jäsenyivät hierarkkiseksi tulosvaruudeksi (taulukko 1), jossa sisällöltään syvällisin tai kompleksisin kategoria on sijoitettu oikeaan reunaan. Kategoriat eroavat toisistaan laadullisesti viiden variaation teeman mukaisesti, jotka on nimetty taulukon ensimmäisessä sarakkeessa.

TULOKSET

Osallistujien antamat merkitykset liikunta-alan koulutuksesta jakautuivat kuuteen kategoriaan: he kokivat koulutuksen 1) pettymyksenä, 2) välineenä, 3) käytännöllisenä valintana, 4) mahdollistajana, 5) tavoitteellisenä reittinä tai 6) kokonaisvaltaisena uudistajana. Nämä erilaiset koulutukselle annetut merkitykset erosivat toisistaan seuraavien viiden teeman mukaisesti: yleinen kokemus opiskelujasta, ammatillinen kehittyminen, työllistyminen ja ura, muu elämä sekä psykologiset tarpeet.

Ensimmäinen kategoria on luonteeltaan kielteinen. Tämän jälkeen kategoriat muuttuvat myönteisiksi, ja vasemmalta oikealle taulukossa siirryttäessä merkityksen intensiteetti yksilön elämässä kasvaa. Tulososassa jokaista kategoriaa tarkastellaan lähemmin keskittyen kussakin kuitenkin kiinnostavimpiin ja monitahoisimpiin teemoihin.

Liikunta-alan koulutus pettymyksenä

Ensimmäisessä kategoriassa liikunta-alan koulutus koettiin pettymyksenä. *Yleistä kokemusta opiskelujasta* kuvattiin kielteisesti. Pettymys saattoi kohdistua opintojen sisältöön tai toteutustapaan. Puutteita koettiin esimerkiksi aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistamisessa. Pettymyksen vaikuttivat myös esimerkiksi ristiriidat odotusten ja todellisuuden välillä, kuten yksi osallistujista kuvasi: ”[Opiskelupaikan] opintosuunnitelma vaikutti todella mielenkiintoiselta kokonaisuudelta paperilla, mutta todellisuudessa siitä aiheutui melko suuri pettymys, --. Opettajien kiireellisyys ja välinpitämättömyys oli välillä hyvinkin räikeää.”

Pettymykset *työllistymisen ja uran* osalta olivat moninaisia. Usein koettiin, ettei koulutusta vastaavaa työtä ole tarjolla, tai ne eivät ole mielekkäitä työtehtävien, palkan tai työaikaajan suhteen. Toisaalta koettiin myös, ettei tutkinto ole tuottanut riittävää osaamista, pätevyyttä tai kontakteja työllistymiseen. Tutkinnon arvo nähtiin joskus jopa kielteisenä: ”Koulutustani on piiloteltu, etteivät muut työntekijät (esim. personal trainerit) tuntisi oloaan huonoksi, --.” Opintoihin käytetty aika saatettiin kokea veloitteena pyrkiä työllistymään liikunta-alalle silloinkin, kun alan sopivuus itselle oli jo kyseenalaistettu. Uramahdollisuudet arvioitiin heikoiksi ja koulutuksen mielekkyys kyseenalaistettiin: ”Turhautti, koska olinhan opiskellut ammatin, mutta tein samoja työtehtäviä kouluttamattomien lukiolaisuorten kanssa, ilman säännöllistä työaikaa tai kuukausipalkkaa.”

Pettymys-kategoriassa koulutuksen merkitykset *muun elämän* kannalta jakautuvat oman liikunnan ilon katoamiseen ja riittämättömään elantoon. ”Jouduin kuitenkin menemään eri

Taulukko 1. Tulosavaruus

Variaation teemat	Kategoriat: Liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutus on					
	1 pettymys	2 väline	3 käytännöllinen valinta	4 mahdollistaja	5 tavoitteellinen reitti	6 kokonaisvaltaisen uudistaja
<i>yleinen kokemus opiskeluajasta</i>	opinnot kielteisinä kokemuksina	opinnot arkeen vaikuttajana	opinnot mukavuusalueella	opinnot elämyksenä	opinnot työläänä mutta antoisana	opinnot veivät mukanaan
<i>ammattillinen kehittyminen</i>	epävarmuus osaamisesta	muodollinen pätevyys	ammattillisten taitojen oppiminen	ammattillisen ymmärryksen laajeneminen	koulutuksen ja työn integroituminen	ammattillisen identiteetin transformaatio
<i>työllistyminen ja ura</i>	heikot uramahdollisuudet	uran välivaihe	liikunnallisen elämän luonteva jatkumo	työllistymisen mahdollistuminen	haluttuun työhön pääseminen	uraan elämien toteuttaminen
<i>muu elämä</i>	elämän hankaluudet	raha	elämäntilanteeseen sopiva ratkaisu	opitun hyödyntäminen arjessa	oman urheilun edistäminen	henkinen pääoma
<i>psykkiset tarpeet</i>	jäävät täyttymättä	ulkoinen hyväksyntä	turvallisuuden tunne	autonomian, pystyvyyden ja kuuluvuuden kokemukset	aktiivinen haasteiden etsiminen	merkityksellisten ihmissuhteiden luominen

alalle töihin, että voin maksaa laskuni (tunteja ei ollut säännöllisesti tarpeeksi) --.” *Psykkiset tarpeet* jäivät pettymys-kategoriassa täyttymättä. Kuuluvuuden tunteen osalta opintojen sosiaalinen puoli ei toiminut voimavarana: ei-tyypillisen opintopolun läpikäyminen aiheutti joillekin irrallisuuden kokemuksen vastakohtana muiden opiskelijoiden tiiviille sosiaalisille suhteille. Kielteiset käsitykset pärjäämisestä tulivat esiin mielikuvissa omasta kyvykkyydestä suhteessa opiskeluoikeuden saamiseen tai opinnoissa pärjäämiseen. Tämä tuli esiin lähinnä liikuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan kohdalla. Mielikuvat liittyivät sekä yliopisto-opiskeluihin ylipäätään että liikuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan vaikean sisäänkäynnin maineeseen: ”Ajattelin myös tuohon aikaan, että yliopisto-opinnot ovat fiksumpia ihmisiä varten enkä siksi uskaltanut ajatellaakaan hakemista niihin.”

Liikunta-alan koulutus välineenä

Toiseen eli väline-kategoriaan siirryttäessä liikunta-alan koulutusta ei enää koettu kielteisenä, mutta sen rooli oli välineellinen. Koulutusta kuvattiin itselle aiheutuneiden seurausten kautta. Liikunta-alan opinnot olivat hyvä keino muiden tavoitteiden saavuttamiseen, koska alan opintoja ja työtä pidettiin mukavana tai helppona. *Kokemus opiskeluajasta* kuvattiin sen kautta, miten opinnot vaikuttivat omaan arkeen. Opiskelu saattoi edistää tai muuttaa omaa harrastamista tai palauttaa kilpailumisen pariin. Tärkeäksi saatettiin kokea sekin, että opiskelujen toteutustapa mahdollisti työssäkäynnin läpi opiskelujen. Opiskelu-aikaan liitettiin myös juhliminen ja ilta- ja iltojen opintokaverien kanssa. *Ammattillisen kehittymisen* näkökulma rajoittui lähinnä suoritettuun tutkintoon. Osallistujat korostivat muodollista pätevyyttä, kuten eräs osallistujista totesi: ”AMK-tutkinto on tosin mahdollistanut paperilla tietyn koulutustason työnhakuun.” Opinnoista saatu todistus oli väline, joka mahdollisti työllistymisen tai jatko-opintoihin pääsemisen.

Välineellisyys *työllistymisen ja uran* teemassa tarkoitti sitä, että liikunta-alan opintoihin ei hakeuduttu toiveena ura liikunta-alalla, vaan opintojen kautta saavutettiin jokin toinen tavoite. Opintoihin saatettiin lähteä harrastusmiehellä, tai niitä pidettiin väliaikaisratkaisuna omaa suuntaa etsiessä. Opintoihin lähettiin ikään kuin jatkamaan hauskaa, harrastus-

painotteista elämää. Toisaalta opinnot mahdollistivat myös sivutoimisten töiden saamisen silloin, kun rahaa tarvittiin jonkin muun uratavoitteen saavuttamiseen. *Psykkisten tarpeiden* osalta välineellisyys näkyi siinä, että koulutusvalinnalla tavoiteltiin ulkoista hyväksyntää. Aineistossa esiin nousi erityisesti vanhempien odotusten täyttäminen. Etenkin nuorella iällä perheen vaikutus voi olla vielä vahva.

Liikunta-alan koulutus käytännöllisenä valintana

Käytännöllisen valinnan kategoriassa itse liikunta-alan arvostus tulee esiin, kun edellisessä kategoriassa merkitykset eivät ole alaisdonnaisia. Sävy on myönteinen, mutta koulutuksen merkitys ilmenee enemmän olemassa olevan elämänpolun jatkamisen kuin elämän muuttamisen kannalta. Koulutus on ennen kaikkea käytännöllinen ja omalla mukavuusalueella pysyttämistä painottava ratkaisu.

Ammattillinen kehittyminen nähtiin koulutuksen tuottamien työelämässä tarvittavien taitojen kautta. Myös muu kuin substanssiosaaminen, kuten esiintymis- tai kielitaito, koettiin merkityksellisenä. Tyypillistä oli luetella saatua osaamista oppiaineittain tai kuvata ammatin vaatimia perusvalmiuksia: ”Opinnot antoivat minulle opit anatomian ja fysiologian perusteista, ryhmien ohjaamisen käytännöstä, uintiohjeiden pätevyyden, tanssitaidon ja tutustuttivat monen lajin perusteisiin käytännön näkökulmasta.”

Työllistymisen ja uran osalta koulutusvalintaa kuvattiin usein liikunnallisen elämän luonnollisena jatkumona niin opiskelupaikan kuin opiskelujen sisällöllisten valintojen osalta. Koulutusta kuvattiin oman urheilu-uran jättämisen aukon täyttämiseksi silloin, kun kilpaura oli päättynyt. Osalle harrastus oli jo aiemmin muuttunut työksi, kuten valmentamiseksi, ja siten työhön kouluttautuminen tuntui järkevältä. Harrastusten muuntaminen ammatiksi houkutteli: ”Lisäksi olen itse ollut aina liikunnallinen ja tuolloin olin kova kuntosaliharjoittelija, ja kuvittelin liikunta-alan olevan personal trainingia ja lihasten pumpppailua.”

Liikunta-ala ei kuitenkaan välttämättä ollut selviö, vaan se saatettiin valita myös paremman vaihtoehdon puuttuessa, tai parempana vaihtoehtona verrattuna johonkin muuhun uravaihtoehtoon. ”Tavallisen” tai ”paperisen” opiskelun sijaan liikunta-ala kuulosti toiminnalliselta ja mielekkäältä vaihtoehdolta.

Kilpaurheilijan uraan verrattuna alan muihin töihin koulutautuminen nähtiin realistisempaan vaihtoehtona, ”oikeana ammattina”. Alan sisällä koulutusvalintaa tehdessä puntaroiitiin myös eri koulustustasojen sopivuutta itselle, ja näin esimerkiksi ammattikorkeakoulu saattoi tuntua luonteelta valinnalta suhteessa mielikuvaan itsestä opiskelijana ja työssä. Sattumankin merkitys saattoi olla iso: alan opintoihin saattoi yksinkertaisesti tarjoutua sopiva mahdollisuus, johon päätettiin tarttua: ”Pomoni ehdotti liikuntaneuvojan koulutusta oppisopimuksella ja se olikin mukava tarjous.”

Muun elämän osalta korostui koulutusvalintojen tekemisen muun elämän perusteella. Opintojen yhteensovittaminen perhe-elämän kanssa oli keskeistä. Myös koulutuksen alkamisen ajankohta suhteessa oman elämän tapahtumiin saattoi olla koulutusvalintaan vaikuttava asia. Oppilaitoksen sijainti parisuhteen, perheen tai harrastuksen kannalta oli usein tärkeä tekijä, mutta myös opintojen toteutustapa vaikutti valintaan: ”Kun sijaisuus loppui, lähdin opiskelemaan [paikkakunnalle] (oli perheen näkökulmasta mahdollista, koska oli aikuisille suunnattu monimuotokoulutus) --.”

Psyykkisten tarpeiden osalta koulutuksella oli turvaa tuova merkitys. Tulevaisuus tuntui epävarmalta, eikä uratoiveista tai -mahdollisuuksista ollut selvää käsitystä, mihin opinnot tarjosivat mahdollisuuden saada helpotusta. Myös usko kohtalon johdatukseen opiskelupaikan vastaanottamisessa tuli esiin. Turvallisuuden tunteeseen pyrittiin opiskelupaikan ja opintosisältöjen valintojen kautta: ”Vaikka periaatteessa suorititiin vain kahden vuoden maisteritutkinnon [pääaine], mahduti noihin vuosiin opintopisteitä tuplasti: --. Näin jälkepäin taaksepäin katsoessani voin todeta, että kenties tämä mahdollisuuksien haaliminen oli epävarmuutta siitä, mitä haluaisin tulevaisuudessa tehdä.”

Liikunta-alan koulutus mahdollistajana

Tässä kategoriassa liikunta-alan koulutuksen koetaan selvästi muuttaneen elämää myönteiseen suuntaan, kun edellisessä kategoriassa koulutus lähinnä mahdollisti olemassa olevan elämän jatkuvuuden. Kategoriassa korostuvat koulutuksen myötä elämään tulleet myönteiset asiat, jotka ovat luonteeltaan ei-suunniteltuja. Kun edellisessä kategoriassa *ammattilinen kehittyminen* nähtiin koulutuksen tuottamina taitoina, tässä kategoriassa korostui ammatillisen ymmärryksen laajeneminen sekä liikunta-alasta että itsestä ammatillisena. Näitä kokemuksia liitettiin paitsi opintoihin yleensä, myös tiettyihin opinnoissa koettuihin käännekohtiin, esimerkiksi harjoitteluihin tai oppinäytetyöhön. ”YAMK-opintojen aikana opin niin paljon uutta, ymmärrykseni työelämää ja eri aloja kohtaan kasvoi, opin uusia työmenetelmiä, verkostoiduin ja sain varmuutta omaan osaamiseeni, sitä ammattitaitoa.”

Työllistymisen ja uran näkökulmasta koulutus on luonnollisesti merkittävä mahdollistaja, mikä tuli esiin moninaisissa kuvailuissa siinä, millä suunnittelemattomilla tavoilla koulutus on vaikuttanut työllistymiseen ja uraan. Koulutus koettiin mahdollisuutena työllistymiseen ylipäättänsä, tai tietyn mielekkään työn tai jatko-opiskelupaikan mahdollistajana. Yksittäiset kokemukset eivät aina olleet myönteisiä, mutta niiden seuraukset koettiin merkityksellisinä, kuten eräs osallistuja kuvasi: ”Vaikka opetustyö koulussa ei minulle sopinutkaan, ala tuntui omalta.” Harjoittelut koettiin oviksi työelämään, ja verkostoitumisen merkitystä korostettiin myös muuten, kuten yrittäjyyteen ryhtymisessä. Usein koulutus sisälsi tapahtumia tai sisältöjä, jotka johtivat oivalluksiin uusista kiinnostuksen kohteista tai kokemukseen oman uran löytämisestä:

”Oppinäytetyöni liittyi kuitenkin oppimisen ja liikunnan yhteyksiin, josta sitten tuli jatkossa urani punainen lanka.”

Psyykkisten tarpeiden osalta tyypillisiä olivat kokemukset, jotka vahvistivat tunnetta autonomiasta, omasta pystyvyydestä ja joukkoon kuulumisesta. Osallistujat korostivat omaa koulutusvalintaa muista erottuvana, itsenäisenä ratkaisuna suhteessa perheeseen tai kavereihin. Toisaalta kuuluvuuden tunteet olivat merkittäviä, mikä tuli esiin muun muassa vertailuna aiempiin opiskelukokemuksiin, kuten eräs osallistuja kirjoitti: ”Liikunnalta koin ensimmäisen kerran löytäneeni henkisen kotini ja samanhenkisen porukan.” Sosiaalinen rentoutuminen, yhteenkuuluvuuden tunne ja vertaistuki osoittautuivat tärkeiksi. Luokkahenkeä kuvattiin hyväksi, mikä mahdollisti rennon sosiaalisen kanssakäymisen ja tunteen kuulumisesta yhteisöön tai paikkaan. Hyvän me-hengen ja opiskelutovereilta saadun vertaistuen koettiin myös edistäneen opintojen suorittamista sekä etenemistä työurala myös opintojen jälkeen. Pätevyyden tunteen osalta yleistä oli kuvailla kokemuksia, joissa oma pystyvyys oli yllättänyt. Esiin nousi myös vertailu aiempiin opintokokemuksiin, jolloin joko opintojen käytäntöpainotteisuus tai sisältö mahdollistivat odottamattoman positiivisen kokemuksen itsestä opiskelijana.

Liikunta-alan koulutus tavoitteellisena reittinä

Tässä kategoriassa esiin nousevat suunnitelmallisuus ja tavoitteellisuus, ja koulutus nähtiin tavoitteellisena reittinä haluttuun päämäärään. Koulutuksen liitettiin intensiivisiä myönteisiä merkityksiä, vaikka koulutusta ei koettu itsestään selvänä onnen tuojana, eli haluttuja päämääriä ei aina saavutettu. *Ammatillisen kehittymisen* osalta korostettiin opintojen ja työn yhteyttä. Opintoihin hakeuduttiin nimenomaan täydentämään omaa osaamista työn vaatimusten tai omien uratoiveiden mukaisesti. Erityisesti harjoittelujen ja oppinäytetöiden merkitys työelämästä oppimisen paikkana tuli esiin. Tärkeitä olivat myös kokemukset, joissa koulutuksesta hankittua osaamista pääsi hyödyntämään työelämässä, myös muulla kuin liikunta-alalla.

Koulutuksen merkitys *urasuunnittelussa ja reittinä työllistymiseen* on luonnollisesti keskeinen. Tyypillisesti koulutusta kuvattiin tavoitteellisena reittinä tietynlaiseen, kiinnostavaan työhön, tai ylipäättään liikunta-alalle. Aina koulutusvalinnan taustalla ei siis ollut täsmällistä visiota alalla työskentelystä, vaan koulutus saattoi olla reitti ”johonkin parempaan”, kuten esimiestason tehtäviin. Myös halu tietyn kohderyhmän tai tiettyjen aihealueiden kanssa työskentelyyn saivat hakeutumaan koulutukseen. Kouluttautumisen motiiveja kuvattiin myös yleisemmin kuten haluna jakaa oppitua tai vaikuttaa asioihin tulevaisuudessa. Ammattiteista opettajuus nousi erityisesti esiin. Opettajuus oli vertailukohta, ja koulutus oli reitti johonkin sellaiseen alan työhön, joka ei ole opettajuutta. Toisaalta se oli toivetyö, johon eri koulutusten kautta pyrittiin. Joillekin ammattikorkeakoulutus oli suunniteltu välivaihe matkalla liikunnanopettajaksi: ”Liikunnanohjaajan koulutus ei tuntunut tarjoavan minulle selkeää urapolkua, eikä se koskaan ollut minulle se mieluinen ammatti, vaan ainoastaan väylä päästä kouluttautumaan liikunnanopettajaksi.”

Psyykkisten tarpeiden osalta keskeiseksi nousi aktiivinen hakeutuminen haasteiden pariin. Syynä kouluttautumisel-le oli sopivan kokoisten haasteiden ja itsensä kehittämisen kautta saavutettavat pätevyyden kokemukset. Myös uuden oppiminen motivoi hakeutumaan koulutukseen, ja käyty koulutus saattoi toimia valmistavana itseluottamuksen tuo-

jana seuraaviin koulutuksiin hakiessa. Toisaalta koulutus antoi mahdollisuuden tyydyttää omaa kunnianhimoa ja näyttämisen halua, mistä mainittiin erityisesti liikuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan kohdalla: ”Olen aina tiennyt, että Jyväskylässä on liikuntatieteellinen tiedekunta ja sinne on todella vaikea päästä opiskelemaan. Varmaan yksi syy hakemiselle oli näyttämisen halu: minä pystyn pääsemään liikunnalle, vaikken olekaan liikunnallinen erityislahjakkuus.”

Liikunta-alan koulutus kokonaisvaltaisena uudistajana

Viimeisessä kategoriassa koulutus on muuttanut siihen osallistujan elämää perustavanlaatuisesti myönteiseen suuntaan. Liikunta-ala ei enää ollut vain työtä, vaan merkitys kietoutui itseen kokonaisvaltaisesti. *Opiskeluaikaa* kuvattiin siten, että opinnot ”vain veivät mukanaan”. Kyse ei siis ole vain hienosta kokemuksesta tai ammatillisen päämäärän saavuttamisesta, kuten edellisissä kategorioissa. Tässä keskeiseksi muodostui opintojen itseisarvoinen merkitys sekä opintojen sytyttämä, voimakas motivaatio, joka sai etenemään opinnoissa suunniteltua pidemmälle.

Ammatillista kehittymistä kuvattiin ammatillisen identiteetin transformaationa eli ammatillinen kehittyminen ymmärrettiin kokonaisvaltaisena ammatti-identiteettiä muokkaavana prosessina.

”Vaikka tiesin koko ajan haluavani nimenomaan liikunnanopettajaksi, en voi tänä päivänä kuin olla tyytyväinen suuntaan, johon elämä minut tuolloin vei. Suoraan lukiosta tulleen ujon pikku kylän tyttönä uskon, että [paikkakunta] oli minulle paras tapa aloittaa liikunnanopettajanidentiteettini kypsyttäminen. Sain rauhassa totutella korkeakouluopiskeluun ja itsenäiseen elämään, kasvattaa tietämystäni ja taitojani liikunnan parissa, tehdä virheitä ja kasvattaa itseluottamusta sekä kokemusta työskentelystä liikunnan parissa. Tämä kaikki lisäsi uskoani siihen, että minun tulevaisuuteni on liikunnan parissa.”

Ammatillisen identiteetin kehittyminen näkyi myös vertailuna muihin, kuten eräs osallistujista kuvasi toivoessaan työelämältä tulevaisuudessa enemmän arvostusta: ”Välillä tuntuu melko loukkaavalta, kun viiden vuoden alan opiskelusi asetetaan samanarvoisiksi kuin spartan gear -kahvakuulaohjaajan koulutus.”

Työllistymisen ja uran osalta koulutus sai merkityksen uraunelmien toteuttajana. Koulutukseen pääseminen itsessään oli unelmien täyttymys, tai se mahdollisti unelma-ammattiin kouluttautumisen. Liikunta koettiin elämäntehtävänä, ei vain työnä, ja koulutus antoi mahdollisuuden toteuttaa itseään ja toimia oman intohimon parissa. Unelmien muodostumiseen olivat vaikuttaneet myös ammatilliset esikuvat, ja koulutus oli siten mahdollisuus tulla oman esikuvan kaltaiseksi.

Muun elämän kannalta koulutus nähtiin ennen kaikkea henkisen pääoman antajana. Koulutuksen koettiin mahdollistaneen henkisen kasvun, ja se koettiin antoisaksi elämäksi, ei vain työtä varten. Arvojen muokkautuminen, itsetuntemuksen kehittyminen sekä nöyryyden ja sivistyksen lisääntyminen olivat koulutuksen tuomia asioita, joita arvostettiin korkealle.

”Opettajista [Nimi] on jäänyt parhaiten mieleen. Hänen opeistaan olen saanut eniten elämäni varten. Muistan kurssin, jossa käytiin läpi itsetuntemusta ja itsestä oppimista. Kuka minä olen? Tätä en ollut aikaisemmin miettinyt. Aiheesta ja tässä kehitymisestä voisi kirjoittaa paljonkin, mut-

ta riittää, että totean tämän olleen merkittävin asia, kun mietin, miksi olen tässä missä nyt olen.”

POHDINTA JA JOHTOPÄÄTÖKSET

Tämä fenomenografinen tutkimus toi esiin liikunta-alan koulutuksen erilaisten merkitysten kirjon alalla opiskelleille. Opinnot koettiin 1) pettymyksenä, 2) välineenä, 2) käytännöllisenä valintana, 4) mahdollistajana, 5) tavoitteellisenä reittinä tai 6) kokonaisvaltaisena uudistajana. Tulokset osoittivat, että liikunta-alan tutkintokoulutuksen merkitys ei ole vain ammatillinen, vaan koulutus kietoutui osaksi elämää monin eri tavoin. Tarkastelemalla kategorioiden välisiä eroja voitiin tunnistaa, millaiset kokemukset tuottivat tunteen siitä, että koulutus on omassa elämässä erityisen merkityksellisen. Analyysin perusteella merkityksellisyyden kokemus yhdistyi kokemukseen myönteisestä muutoksesta. Mikäli yksilö koki, ettei koulutus saanut aikaan muutosta itsessä, urassa tai muussa elämässä, koulutus koettiin pettymyksenä. Sen sijaan suuremmat myönteiset muutokset näkyivät koulutukselle annetun roolin intensiteetissä. Siten esimerkiksi identiteettitason muutokset tai kumppanin löytäminen koettiin kaikkein merkittävimpänä.

Koska ammatillinen kehittyminen on koulutuksen merkittävä päämäärä, voidaan tähän teemaan kiinnittää erityistä huomiota. Tulosten perusteella opintojen merkityksellisyyden kokemusta voidaan lisätä kohdentamalla huomio käytännön tietojen ja taitojen lisäksi osaamisen muihin ulottuvuuksiin, kuten asenteeseen, itseluottamuksen vahvistamiseen, itsensä kehittämisen taitoihin sekä ammatilliseen identiteettiin. Syvemmän tason muutoksen saaminen ei ole itsestäänselvyys, sillä norjalaisten liikunnanopettajaopiskelijoiden on raportoitu näkevän koulutuksen merkityksen lähes pelkästään liikuntataitojen ja -didaktiikan oppimisen kautta, ja kokemus voi syntyä identiteetin tasolla jo opintojen aikana tai jopa ennen sitä (Dowling 2011, 210–211, 218; Mordal-Moen & Green 2014, 814–815). Toisaalta tämän tutkimuksen tulokset ovat linjassa ammatillisen oppimisen tutkimuksen kanssa. Identiteetillä, itsesääteilytaidoilla ja reflektiolla sekä aidon työelämän sosiokulttuurisella ympäristöllä on todistetusti merkitystä työhön liittyvässä oppimisessä (esim. Tynjälä 2013).

Tässä tutkimuksessa toistui monet aiemmissä tutkimuksissa havaitut koulutukseen hakeutumisen motiivit kuten työllistymismahdollisuuksien parantaminen, tietyille uralle pääseminen, osaamisen kartuttaminen, palkkauksen parantaminen (Hall ym. 2019, 889–892; Turner & Nelson 2009, 11) sekä oma urheilu-ura ja liikunnasta nauttiminen (Minten & Forsyth 2014, 98; Vuolle 2013, 28, 45). Lisäksi esiin tulivat koulutusvalinnalla tavoiteltu ulkoinen hyväksyntä sekä turvallisuuden tunteen saavuttaminen. Edellä mainittujen, luonteeltaan tavoitteellisten merkitysten lisäksi koulutukselle annettiin kuitenkin paljon myös sellaisia merkityksiä, jotka olivat luonteeltaan ennakoimattomia. Erityisesti *pettymys-* ja *mahdollistaja* -kategoriat ovat tällaisia, samoin osa *kokonaisvaltainen uudistaja* -kategorian merkityksistä. Tämä tutkimus lisää ymmärrystä koulutuksen merkityksestä esittämällä kokonaisvaltaisen jäsenyyden niistä moninaisista tavoista, joilla liikunta-alan koulutus vaikuttaa yksilöön ja hänen elämäänsä.

Tulosvaruuden tarkastelu kokonaisuudessaan vahvistaa Mintenin ja Forsythin (2014, 95, 98, 101) huomiota siitä, ettei koulutukseen aina välttämättä hakeuduta tavoitellen

pitkää uraa liikunta-alalla. Vaikka tulosavaruudessa ammatillinen kehittyminen sekä ura olivat tärkeitä teemoja, kokonaisuudessa tulivat näkyviin myös esimerkiksi opintojen elämyksellisyys, oman liikunnallisuuden tukeminen sekä liikunta-alan koulutus uran välivaiheena tai sivutoimisen toiminnan mahdollistajana. Esiin nousi myös se, että liikunta-alan opinnot koettiin vastakohtana ”tavalliselle opiskelulle”. Tämän tyyppinen harrastuksellisuuden kysymys lienee erityisen oleellinen liikunta- ja taidealoilla. Aihe on tärkeä liikunta-alan tutkimuksen ja kehittämisen näkökulmasta. Esimerkiksi valmistuneiden sijoittumisen seurannan ja koulutustutkimuksen olisi hyvä ottaa huomioon opiskelijoiden moninaiset motiivit aiempaa selkeämmin. Koulutuspoliittinen arvokysymys sen sijaan on opinto-ohjauksen ja opiskelijavalinnan näkökulmasta se, missä määrin opintojen suorittaminen harrastusmielessä on toivottua, ja millä tavoin la koulutukseen käytetyt resurssit ohjautuvat yhteiskunnan hyväksi.

Toinen yhteiskunnallisesti kiinnostava tutkimustulos on koulutuksen kokeminen pettymyksenä, sillä opiskeluissa koetut umpikujat sopivat huonosti yhteiskunnassa vallitsevaan keskusteluun työurien pidentämisestä. Katteoria heijastelee liikunta-alalla aiemmin tunnustettuja haasteita, kuten rajoitetuiksi koettuja työllistymismahdollisuuksia (Minten & Forsyth 2014, 98; Schwab ym. 2015, 7) sekä alan sääntelemättömyyttä (Kaiser & Beech 2012, 292). Ura- ja työtyytyväisyyden kannalta onkin tärkeää, että yksilö kokee pystyvänsä hyödyntämään tutkinnon tuottamaa osaamista työssään (Schwab ym. 2015, 6; Minten 2010, 77). Varsinkin liikunnanohjaaja (AMK) -tutkinnon suorittaneiden turhautuminen on tullut esiin myös aiemmin (Ala-Vähälä 2012, 43; Vuolle 2013, 52).

Myös yksilön näkökulmasta opiskelujen kokeminen pettymyksenä on luonnollisesti epätoivottua. Pettymys yhdistyy kokemukseen epäonnistumisesta. Pryor ja Bright (2012, 70) kuitenkin huomauttavat työurien kaaosteorian pohjalta, että myös urien kontekstissa ihmisten tulisi odottaa epäonnistuvansa säännöllisesti, koska maailma on niin monimutkainen, että sen tapahtumien ennakoiminen ja niihin vaikuttaminen on vaikeaa. Epäonnistumisia ei voi välttää, ja siksi olisi hyvä nähdä niiden myönteiset mahdollisuudet (Pryor & Bright 2012). Kiinnostava tulos tässä tutkimuksessa oli, että jotkut yksilöt antoivat kielteisille kokemuksille myönteisiä merkityksiä. Hankalista kokemuksista oli voinut seurata jotakin myönteiseksi koettua, kuten itselle paremmin sopivan alan löytäminen. Merkityksen löytäminen onkin narratiivisen ura-ajattelun vahvuus (Savickas ym. 2009, 243). Kun tunnustetaan pettymyksen kokemuksista seuranneet myönteiset muutokset elämässä, on helpompi hyväksyä ne osaksi omaa uraa. Näin pettymykset muuttuvat merkitykselliseksi osaksi tarinaa, jolla on tyytyväinen kertoja. Tulosten perusteella voisikin pitää mahdollisena, että narratiivinen uraohjaus voisi parantaa erityisesti niiden yksilöiden hyvinvointia, jotka kokevat koulutuksen pettymyksenä.

Fenomenografisen analyysin tulos on tutkijan löytämä jäsenitys aineistosta. Samasta aineistosta voi tehdä useampia jäsenityksiä riippuen tutkijan omasta ymmärryksestä. Samoin aineisto on tuotettu tietystä hetkestä, ja eri aikana kirjoitettua kertomuksista voisi olla löydettävissä erilaisia merkityksiä. Riippuvuutta voidaan fenomenografisessa tutkimuksessa kuitenkin arvioida siten, että esitetyt kategoriat tulisi olla muidenkin tunnustettavissa. (Collier-Reed ym. 2009, 343; Marton & Pong 2005, 147.) Tämän mahdollistamiseksi

tässä tutkimuksessa tulokset aineistokatkelmineen sekä metodin kuvaus on esitetty niin yksityiskohtaisesti kuin tilan puitteissa on mahdollista.

Tulosten uskottavuutta ja vahvistettavuutta pyrittiin varmistamaan avoimella kirjoituskutsulla ja sen laajalla levittämällä. Tavoitteena oli kerätä riittävän suuri ja heterogeeninen aineisto, jotta erilaiset kokemukset tulisivat aineistosta esiin ja tutkijan ennakkokäsitysten merkitys pienenesi (Shenton 2004, 65–66, 72). Tulosavaruuden moninaisuuden perusteella voidaan olettaa, ettei avoimeen kutsuun liittyvä riski pelkkien ääripään kokemusten esille tulosta toteutunut. Kertomusten tuottaminen kutsun perusteella vaatii kuitenkin osallistujilta tiettyä aloitteellisuutta sekä motivaatiota kirjoittamiseen, mikä väistämättä on johtanut osallistujien valikoitumiseen.

Tämä tutkimus rajoittui käsittelemään tiettyä ajankohtana tuotettuja kertomuksia tutkijan ymmärryksen kautta. Tulokset eivät ole siirrettävissä muille aloille tai kansainvälisesti erilaisiin ympäristöihin. Analyysissä eritasoisia koulutuksia ei ole eritelty toisistaan, joten tulokset eivät sellaisenaan koske jokaista koulutusta erikseen. Jatkossa olisikin kiinnostavaa vertailla, miten eritasoisille koulutuksille annettavat merkitykset eroavat toisistaan. Pitkittäistutkimuksella taas olisi mahdollista tutkia, miten yksilön koulutukselle antamat merkitykset muuttuvat ajan kuluessa.

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II

TO STAY OR TO LEAVE? CAREER STORY MODELS OF FINNISH SPORTS GRADUATES

by

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To stay or to leave? Career story models of Finnish sports graduates

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To stay or to leave? Career story models of Finnish sports graduates

Previous research has revealed the challenges of sports graduates. Of particular concern is the question of how sports graduates navigate these difficulties in the job market. This study sought to understand the modern careers of sports graduates by describing different career story models among sports degree graduates. Life story data collection was employed to capture the various influences affecting career paths. The data consisted of 59 career life stories collected from Finnish sports degree graduates who were recruited through an open writing invitation. Data were analysed with the narrative method. Five typical career story models were identified among Finnish sports degree graduates: (1) From struggles to career change; (2) Momentum for a new career; (3) No pain, no gain; (4) Natural path to success; and (5) From aspirations to an uncertain future. Collectively, these story models suggest that graduates seem to balance between their personal enthusiasm for sport and fitness and the realities of working life. Many graduates contemplated leaving the industry, and remaining in the sports industry was defined by how much working life met the expectations shaped by education or personal dreams. These findings indicate that since many sport graduates struggle with the structural challenges of the sports industry, additional support through student counselling and in finding quality entry level jobs might be beneficial in preventing career change and supporting careers in sports. Narrative career counselling is suggested to promote the wellbeing of individuals who struggle in their careers.

Keywords: career story; life story; sports graduate; sports work; narrative research

Introduction

The sports and fitness industry is a growing employer in Western countries (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a; 2020b; Eurostat, 2020). While many individuals seek to obtain a sports degree, challenges regarding the relationship between degree studies and employment have been identified. Hall et al. (2019) found that a degree is not required for coaching positions and that a coaching degree has ‘weak industry credibility’ (p. 10). Turner and Nelson (2009) noted that coaching awards granted by national sports associations were seen as an industry standard, unlike university degrees. As many as 80–90% of graduates have been reported to pursue additional qualifications after graduation (Bernal-García et al., 2018; Sleaf & Reed, 2006). However, graduates themselves have perceived their degree studies as providing deeper understanding than coaching awards (Turner & Nelson, 2009) and that, although insufficient on its own, a degree is nevertheless important for employability (Sleaf & Reed, 2006; Tomlinson, 2008; Turner & Nelson, 2009). Schwab et al. (2015) reported that most sport management alumni did not remain in the industry, citing low salaries and limited employment opportunities as the main reasons for leaving. Similarly, Sleaf and Reed (2006) found that a relatively high percentage, 37%, of graduates of physical education and sport science were not working in education or sport-related occupations.

Research on sports degree graduates has mostly focused on employability, while much less is known about sports graduates’ paths from a broader life story perspective. Some studies can be found in the context of physical education teachers (Iannucci & MacPhail, 2019; O’Sullivan et al., 2009; Thorburn, 2011; 2014). The distinctive feature of physical education teacher education programmes is that they are one of the few non-generalist degree programmes in the field, offering a route towards a specific position in the labour market; however, PE teachers might still face additional challenges compared

to other subject teachers (Gariglio, 2021) Another major research branch involves careers in coaching (e.g. Christensen, 2013; Purdy et al., 2019), and some narrative studies can be found. A narrative-biographical study by Purdy and Potrac (2016) included the career story of one high performance coach, and Holmes et al. (2021) used life stories to study coaches' early life experiences. However, coaching research has insufficiently considered the perspective of degree education. Coaching education research has often focused on coaching courses organized by national governing bodies or federations, as they are seen as the standard route to coaching accreditation (Nash & Sproule, 2009; Piggott, 2012; Turner & Nelson, 2009).

Beyond physical education teachers and coaches, little research has been focused on the variety of other careers within the sports industry. Allin and Humberstone (2006) studied the careers and lives of outdoor educators, but education was not a prerequisite for participation in their study. In conclusion, there is a need for further research on sport graduates and their career experiences.

Theoretical starting point

As permanent and long-term employment have become more atypical in society, the theory of career research has advanced from occupational choice and fixed stages to seeing careers as individual scripts (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2012). The sports industry is characterized by a high degree of part-time, seasonal, and temporary employment. Due to non-standard employment, many professionals are required to deal with employment insecurity, hold multiple jobs, and perform multiple functions throughout their career (Bernal-García et al., 2018; Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016; Purdy et al., 2019).

Traditional career theories that focus on rational, individual career decision-making poorly match the lived experience of today's world. Over the past two decades, several attempts have been made to better understand modern careers (Amundson et al., 2014). Pryor's and Bright's (2014; 2003) chaos theory of careers (CTC) acknowledges that a career is not merely the sum of individual career choices, but is also affected by other influences, change, unpredictable events and personal life aspects. According to the CTC, individuals, as the world itself, are complex, open and adaptive systems, and sensitive to change. Consequently, an individual's career is formulated in interaction between one complex dynamical system (the individual) and other complex dynamical systems (e.g. environments and other people). Therefore, careers are not based solely on individual choices and are difficult to predict.

One suggested solution for recognizing the complexity of modern careers is the use of narratives (Amundson et al., 2014; Hartung, 2013; Pryor & Bright, 2008; Savickas, 2012). Pryor and Bright (2003, 13) note that career theories should take into account people's tendency to interpret and understand their experiences by constructing them into meaningful accounts. A life story is a personal narrative in which the lived life is reflected upon and past events and the future are given meaning in relation to each other and the cultural context. While based on biographical facts, it is not an objective description of what has happened, but a selected view of what the individual perceives as meaningful. (McAdams, 2001.) Similarly, the present study understands careers as subjective: while an objective career can be seen as a sequence of jobs, a subjective career is a cohesive whole that includes meaningful experiences that are structured into a meaningful story (Savickas, 2005). A topical life story is a life story that is written from a particular perspective (Plummer, 2001), such as a career (hereafter 'career life story').

Subjective stories provide a context for career occurrences and make it possible to understand individual career experiences related to time and place, offering a window to understanding the ‘why’ behind career decisions (Savickas, 2005). They also allow discussion of other influences and random events in one’s career path (Del Corso & Rehfuß, 2011; Pryor & Bright, 2003). Hence, a holistic career path understanding, beyond rational choices, is enabled, as called for by the CTC.

The Finnish context

Sports degree studies in Finland are offered in three types of educational institutes. The Vocational Qualification in Sports Instruction (degree title *sport assistant*) is an upper secondary level degree offered by vocational institutes, and can be completed either as school-based or apprenticeship training (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). Bachelor’s and master’s degrees are offered both by universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS), but they have different profiles. Universities emphasize scientific research and instruction, while UASs adopt a more practical approach. Universities also offer postgraduate studies. (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018.) The university titles are *Bachelor*, *Master* or *Doctor of Sport Sciences*, and the UAS degree titles are *Bachelor* or *Master of Sport Studies*.

In the present study, *sports graduates* refer to graduates from the programmes presented above. A variety of majors are included, such as physical education, social sciences in sport, and exercise physiology. In contrast, following the categorization of Finnish education system, degrees in Health Sciences, such as physiotherapy or gerontology and public health, are not included.

In the Finnish context, it is expedient to conduct sports graduate career path research in a way that includes all degree levels due to the flexible nature of the Finnish education system. For example, a UAS bachelor's degree gives eligibility to pursue a master's degree at university. In addition, although the different educational programmes have different profiles, in practice, the profiles often overlap in the job market (Vuolle, 2013). For example, sport assistants and bachelors of sport studies are both often employed in sport instructing, while the latter can also apply for some of the same specialist positions as university graduates. Sport coaches are trained at all levels.

This study investigates how Finnish sports graduates describe their education and career paths as a part of their life stories. The aim of the analysis was to identify the collective features as well as the variation within the career stories of Finnish sport graduates. The research question is: What are the typical career story models among sport graduates?

Materials and methods

Data collection and participants

The data of this study consisted of 59 career life stories written by Finnish sports graduates between September 2018 and February 2019. Potential participants were reached with an open invitation through alumni lists of educational institutes, worker's unions and social media. Inclusion required the participant to hold a sports degree (vocational, bachelor or master's) completed between 2004 and 2015. The time range was chosen so that the career paths reflect 21st century degree education programmes and to ensure more than 24 months since graduation so that the graduate participants had had time to start settling into working life. A three-year vocational sports assistant programme was introduced in 2001 and by 2004 all graduates had qualified as sport assistants (J. Leivo, personal communication, September 13, 2018).

In the invitation, participants were asked to write their life story from the perspective of their career. Auxiliary questions were included for prompting, but freedom of writing was emphasized. In addition, age, gender, completed degrees, current work status in the sports industry, and permission to archive stories were queried. In total, 68 responses were submitted, 59 of which met the graduation year and story format (plot) criteria. The length of the 59 stories varied between 46 and 1946 words, averaging 512 words. The background information of the participants is presented in Table 1. Some participants held more than one degree or were completing their second degree. In Finland, bachelor-level sport science is typically considered an intermediate stage of master's studies, and not all master's degree holders reported it.

[Insert Table 1 near here]

This study followed the ethical guidelines by Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Accordingly, no ethical review statement was needed (TENK 2019). Informed consent of participants was ensured by inviting participants to participate through a web page that contained information about the purpose and methodology of the study, data handling and contact information.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using narrative analysis in which the data were synthesized into a coherent account resulting in emplotted story models (Polkinghorne, 1995). The final story models are of a theoretical nature: While they are based on the data, a single narrative in the data may share features with one or more of the final story models. Similarly, an individual's story does not necessarily include all the characteristics of the equivalent story model.

The story models were based on two explanatory elements: *plot* and *tone*. According to Polkinghorne (1995), the significance of individual events is understood through the plot of the story. As stories are temporal in nature, each story needs a beginning, middle and end. Times or events that change the direction of the story are called *turning points* (Clausen, 1998) and are crucial for reaching the story's outcome (Polkinghorne, 1995). These may be unexpected life events, such as a death in the family, or normative role transitions, such as entering an occupation (Clausen, 1998). In addition to plot, it is important to understand the evaluative element of life stories, which guides the addressee in how the story and its events should be understood (Linde, 1993). Polkinghorne (1995, 17) notes that emotional states in the data provide important information for the researcher. In the present study, this evaluative layer is referred to as the tone of the story.

There is no specific structure to narrative analysis, as different methods have to be developed for different data and aims (Bold, 2012; Riessman, 2008). The following four-stage, data-driven procedure was developed for the purpose of this study:

Stage 1: Familiarizing with data

The stories were read through several times until an overall understanding of the data was reached. A long and short summary of each story were written to help bring forward the plot of the story and manage the data.

Stage 2: Grouping the stories

The summaries were used as a tool to understand the most essential plot and tone of each story. Initial story model groups were formed based on the shorter summaries, and the groups were then revised based on the more extensive summaries. The grouping was based on the two main features, plot and tone. A preliminary name was given to each group based on their most prominent features. At this point, stories that did not clearly

belong into a single group but demonstrated prominent features from two story models, were marked as borderline cases for later consideration.

Stage 3: Analysing individual stories within groups

In the third stage, the analysis was focussed on each full story within the groups. The plot of the story was analysed more closely. First, the beginning, middle, end, and turning points of each story were identified. Turning points were defined based on both plot and narration: moments that impacted the life course significantly or tied other events together, such as not being admitted to a desired study programme or finding one's true aspiration, were considered as turning points. Normative transitions were considered as turning points if there were narrative clues, such as thick description or emotive words involved (Clausen, 1998). The most prominent emotional feature of each story was identified as the tone of the story. Each story was revisited to verify their belonging to a specific group. Borderline cases were investigated individually and as a group in order to verify the justification of the formed groups, and finally placed in the most fitting group.

Stage 4: Compiling story models

A table was formed of each group, listing each story's beginning, middle, end, turning points and tone. Recurring events and tones were identified within groups. Collectively recurring contents were defined as typical features of each story model. Story models were tested by constructing a coherent example story of each story model, using only quotations from the original stories in that group as widely as possible. The example stories were ensured to include all identified typical features and compared to the original stories in each group to validate each story model. The final titles were created to bring forward the distinctive nature of each story model.

Quality evaluation

Narrative research is interpretative action, so the final representation is unavoidably an interpretation made by the researcher (Bold, 2012; Smythe & Murray, 2000). The quality of narrative research should specifically be addressed in terms of trustworthiness, verisimilitude and utility (Loh, 2013). To promote these, Loh (2013) emphasizes the process of member checking. In the present study, member checks were conducted with selected pilot data contributors. The purpose was to check if they recognized a difference between the example stories, to hear to which story model or models they most related to, and their reasoning for that. In addition, peer and audience validation was sought after initial data analysis. The discussions were taken into consideration in the final analysis and conclusion. A research journal was kept throughout the research process to promote reflexivity.

The limitations of the study are related to the data collected. This study examined stories that were produced at a certain time with the understanding of the researchers at the point of analysis. Thus, the circumstances of the sports industry in Finnish society are reflected in the findings, and this should be kept in mind when comparing these findings with studies conducted at other times and in different contexts. The data collection was limited to Finnish-speaking participants who had completed their degree rather recently.

Findings

The career story models of sports graduates

Five different typical story models were formed based on the data: (1) *from struggles to career change*; (2) *momentum for a new career*; (3) *no pain, no gain*; (4) *natural path to success*; and (5) *from aspirations to an uncertain future*. These story models differed from each other in tone and plot. The data were consistent in that all of the stories in the

data could be placed within these models, and each model drew from at least five clear cases. Some of the original stories demonstrated prominent features from two models. In the following, each story model with its typical characteristics and data extracts are presented.

From struggles to career change

In the first story model, the protagonists had given up their career in sport and moved to a different field. The story starts with either a sporty childhood or an early-career sport related job, or with a general aspiration to work in the sports industry. By the middle of the story, employment in the field had been achieved; however, the story ends with employment in another field due to experiences in the job market, which became a turning point leading to the career change. The tone of the story was either displeased if the writers felt resentful, or content if they perceived themselves as a survivor who had succeeded in finding a more suitable career.

The typical turning point in this story model is negative experiences of working life in the sports industry. Some had unfortunate experiences during their employment, such as late or incorrect salary payments or poor appreciation of their competence. One participant described their experience of working at a gym and how it contributed to their career change:

For a year I put up with my professional skills being undervalued and the ethically unacceptable culture of treating clients as idiots. Constant late payment of wages, working for less than someone on a supermarket checkout, and the employer's continuous neglect of their obligations were the last straw.

Most respondents attributed poor working conditions as the reason for leaving the field. Many different aspects were mentioned as down sides of the sports industry, such as lack of jobs, limited opportunities for career advancement, inconvenient

working hours, health requirements, and low salaries. These characteristics were considered when making career decisions. Finding a better job in another field was seen as a solution to these problems.

Regarding personal interest, none of the writers expressed that their original choice of education was necessarily wrong for them; in fact, most expressed a desire to have continued working in the field. The sports industry was seen as interesting, but they had not succeeded in finding a satisfying position in the labour market.

Momentum for a new career

In the second story model, the protagonists had either completely or partly given up their career in sport, but the profession was still an important part of their story. The story typically started with a sporty childhood, advanced to studies and employment in the sports industry, and ended with employment or studies in another field. The initial turning point was similar than in the first story model: the realization that the sports industry is not the right fit for them. However, this story model also included a more positive turning point where the protagonists gained a vision for a more suitable career.

In the story model, sport education was an important component enabling the current, good life, rather than a dead end or a mistaken route requiring a completely new career choice, as in the previous story model. Therefore, the tone of the story was satisfied. For example, one of the writers described how sport education had benefited her in finding her professional path:

In my final year I took advanced studies in applied physical education. That then led me to the idea of doing physiotherapy studies. As soon as I graduated, I managed to get in to study in my hometown to be a physiotherapist. I don't know if it would have been as easy to get in without my background education.

In this story model, the end position was often employment in which the degree certificate or competence gained from the sports degree was usable in another field, such as physiotherapy or education. It was also common among the writers to partly work in sports alongside their main job in another field. Some did so for practical reasons, for example if they considered sports too demanding as a full-time occupation, but for many, other career interests were chosen over working exclusively in sports. Even when the career change was made for practical reasons, working part time in sports was seen as a positive addition to professional life, bringing enjoyment and variety. For some, partial employment in sports was seen as a paid hobby. Some writers stated that sport had always been a temporary solution for them and they had never considered staying in the field for long.

In comparison to the first story model, the typical turning points here were both pushing and pulling: certain experiences of the sports industry pushed them away from sports, while other experiences pulled them towards another field. In this story model, the motivation for career change seemed to come more from the pulling experiences, and the pushing experiences only added to this. For example, typically, the main reason for seeking employment in another field was discovering an interest in that field. In contrast to the first story model, this might be the reason for more the positive tone in these stories. For example, one writer reflected:

Even now I still sometimes think that being PE teacher would have been a great career option for me too, and I can't say which one would have suited me most in the end: doctor or PE teacher. But I've taken the medical route now. The sports route offered me a lot of wonderful experiences and useful lessons and skills considering my own hobbies and for doing sports and exercise with my kids. And it will certainly be of great use in my future medical profession.

As the career shift was initiated by internal motivation, there was no need for bitterness.

No pain, no gain

The title of the third story model refers to stories where inconvenience, discomfort or detours must be taken before achieving a satisfactory position in the sports job market.

The story typically started with a sporty childhood, advanced to studies in sports, and ended with a satisfying job in the field. However, there were hurdles along the way. For different people the complications in the story came at different parts of the journey.

Some struggled in choosing the right education path after school. Many participants experienced disappointment from not being accepted in the study programme of their choice. Some experienced setbacks in working life, such as poor terms of employment.

Such difficulties and occurrences prevented the protagonists from having a smooth success story as a career path. These experiences were, however, not necessarily seen as disappointments, and were often perceived in terms of finding one's own path through trial and error. For example, one participant described her struggles in choosing her preferred area of study, and how her experience of working life contributed to her finding her preferred profession through a process of elimination:

I can still remember the stress and anxiety of having to make such big decisions. I applied to class teacher education and to the School of Economics --. -- I'd also been considering PE teacher education at the University of Jyväskylä, --. In the end, I didn't get in anywhere and I took a year off, during which I worked as a substitute teacher in primary schools and realized I wasn't cut out to be a teacher.

On the other hand, the stories also contained positive experiences as turning points that led the individual towards finding their place in the field of sport. These experiences acted as a counterbalance to negative experiences and reinforced either choosing or staying in the sports industry. For many participants, these positive

experiences contributed to their current career satisfaction. For example, after many struggles in his career path, one participant described a positive turning point as follows:

I felt a great sense of trust when I got to carry out a comprehensive physical activity study for the municipality and determine the remuneration for it myself. While I was working on a plan for a sports and exercise facility, the very same municipality announced an open position as a sports instructor, --. I happened to get it, and that's the road I'm on still.

The end tone of this story model was satisfied, but getting to that point had required perseverance. Therefore, the happy ending was not taken for granted, but personal initiative and survival were highlighted.

Natural path to success

The fourth story model represented a success story. In this story model, the sport education choice had come naturally after a sporty childhood, transition between school and work had been smooth, and the achieved employment in the sports industry met the wishes of the protagonists. The smoothness of the stories did not, however, mean that the protagonists had not faced difficulties. The stories included events that could have been perceived as negative, such as disappointments and injuries. However, when these were mentioned, the story was told through the positive consequences of these events, whereas the events themselves were mentioned only briefly. The tone of the story was satisfied and happy.

There were four typical turning points in this story model. Firstly, many reported an occurrence or moment of realization that led to seeking a specific sport education programme. This could have been a short, simple event, such as learning about the existence of such a programme, or more of a process in which their interest in the

studies was discovered. For some, this related to personal life events, for example when an injury created space for new career steps. Often, coincidences played important role in the process of learning about own interests, as the following participant illustrates:

I was training in a sports centre one day when I met my old PE teacher from high school. I told him what I was doing these days, and I remembered that he had the same educational background. However, he filled me in that he had since gone on to do his master's studies at the University of Jyväskylä and described it as the best choice of his life. This gave me a clear sense that I needed to go and learn more after my university of applied sciences phase.

A second important turning point was being accepted onto a sports education programme of one's choice, typically at university. This seemed to be related to the perceived difficulty of admission into the faculty of sport and health sciences. Many applied more than once, which highlighted the value of being accepted into the programme.

The third typical turning point was a moment, experience, or realization that became a defining feature of one's career. These sometimes appeared to be a random event, such as a conversation, which led to a vision for a chosen profession. More often they were longer processes during employment or studies, for example when work experience revealed the kinds of professional tasks that are interesting and fitting, or experiences during studies leading to discovering an interesting career path. Practicums and theses were often important places for networking and learning about oneself and about professional life and were meaningful in many ways. As one participant reflects: *'That work placement came to determine to a large extent the kind of professional I have become today.'*

The fourth turning point was securing a ‘key job’ that was perceived to have a significant role in the individual’s career development. This may have come due to the individual’s own initiative, or more by chance, but turned out to be especially important for their career. This importance came, for example, from the contents of the work, networking, or growth in professional self-esteem, which were seen as important enablers in relation to their current, rewarding career situation, as one participant explains:

I unknowingly showed my potential to the management, and I was invited to become my boss’s deputy. It was a relatively big post, and it allowed me to get into a position in my career where I can to some extent already choose where I want to work -

From aspirations to an uncertain future

In this story model the end of the story remained open. The sport path had been a natural choice, and the plot ran from a sporty childhood to sports studies and employment in the sports industry. However, the characteristics of the sports industry had created uncertainty about the future, leaving the protagonists unsure whether they should stay in sports or pursue other options. The tone varied between stories more than in the other story models, but the most typical tone was one of being tired – not aggressively disappointed, but not happy either. For example, one participant described her stagnant state by stating: *‘At the moment I feel like my career isn’t and won’t turn out to be anything special or the most enjoyable option out there. But if I look at new options, there’s nothing else that sparks interest either.’* In some stories the overall tone was disillusioned or, in contrast, quite persistent in expressing hopes for a better future.

Two turning points were typical to this story model. The first important turning point was receiving a study place in a sports education programme. Commonly in these stories was that the transition between school and vocational or higher education was not smooth. The protagonists either had difficulties choosing their preferred vocational interest or did not get into their first study choice. After these struggles, getting into a satisfactory programme felt like an important turning point.

The second turning point was the realization of certain unpleasant or unsuitable aspects of the sports profession. These were similar ‘pushing’ experiences to those found in the first two story models. However, in these stories the protagonists had yet to find a new career direction, and only considered leaving the field, as one participant explained: *‘I’ve been doing coaching work for thirteen years, but my motivation is fading year on year. The reason for this is the salary paid in sports. — That’s the main reason for motivation dropping and for thinking about changing fields.’*

As the end of the story remains open, it is clear that the protagonists are facing new career decisions in the future. This was often visible in the final paragraphs of the stories, where the writers typically explained their reflections about the future. For example, one participant, who had taken a career break for family reasons, concluded:

The idea is to also come up with a plan B in case I don't find any meaningful work in the sports and physical activity sector. Although physical exercise and well-being are still really interesting to me and I would like to work in the field, after starting a family and buying a home, regular working hours, regular day work and a regular monthly wage are all the more important as basic requirements.

Discussion

This study identified five typical career story models among Finnish sports degree graduates: (1) *from struggles to career change*, (2) *momentum for new career*, (3) *no*

pain, no gain, (4) natural path to success and (5) from aspirations to an uncertain future. Collectively, the stories show that the graduates seemed to balance between their personal enthusiasm for sport and fitness and the realities of working life. Staying in the sports industry in the long run seemed to be defined by how working life met the expectations shaped by education or personal dreams. To stay or to leave seemed to be a central question in the data.

According to Pryor and Bright (2014), careers are unpredictable in that they contain events that are unplanned and unpredictable, affected by context, and subject to change. In the current study, most of the turning points characterizing different story models were unplanned experiences. All of the turning points were also either controlled by other people (such as admission to a specific educational programme) or in interaction with other systems (such as bad experiences in a work place). While most stories began with a sporty childhood and aimed at career in sport, many different occurrences led to the stories having many different endings. These findings highlight the unpredictable nature of careers. Context, complexity, change and chance were key elements in the descriptions of careers in this study, in line with CTC (Pryor & Bright, 2014) and previous findings (Purdy & Potrac, 2016). However, reality also has a predictable dimension (Pryor & Bright, 2014). Story models can therefore be utilized in career counselling (Pryor & Bright, 2008), since each individual's career path is shaped by different types of events and their personal reactions to those events, as illustrated by the five different story models of the present study.

The findings of this study suggest that many sports graduates in Finland contemplate leaving the field. This is a concerning finding as in addition to implying a high degree of dissatisfaction at the individual level, it is also an undesirable situation from a societal perspective. In the stories, changing career or planning to do so were

often attributed to structural challenges of the sports industry, such as limited career opportunities, poor salaries and the need for degree holders to compete for the same jobs with less-qualified people. The findings are in line with previous studies (Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2016; Gariglio, 2021; Schwab et al., 2015). The disappointment of graduates is understandable, as previous research (Hall et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2008) has reported that even when students recognized that the degree itself did not guarantee employment, they still had expectations that a degree would provide better employability, more senior roles and higher salaries.

However, not all career changes can be attributed to defects of the sports industry. The *momentum for a new career* story model demonstrated the elements that pulled toward another field, in addition to pushing elements. This finding is consistent with Iannucci and MacPhail (2019), who reported that physical education teachers experienced a push from physical education and a pull towards the elective subject. In general, it seems that in order to increase employment satisfaction and reduce career changes, attention should be paid both to improving work conditions in the sports industry and to student counselling in sport education to help graduates prepare for the realities of working life.

It has been previously reported that sports graduates whose career status matched their degree were more likely to be satisfied with their career (Schwab et al., 2015). This is not surprising, and in the present study the tone of the story was satisfied in the two story models that ended with a position in the sports industry. However, the tone was also satisfied in the *momentum for new career* model, and for some individuals even in the *from struggles to career change* model, even though both story models resulted in career change. This was explained by perceived positive consequences, such as finding a better suited profession. One important attribute of satisfaction was a

positive attitude towards part-time employment in sports, which may be explained by the findings of Schwab et al. (2015), who reported passion for job and love of sports as important sources of career satisfaction among sport management professionals.

The varying tones of the *from struggles to career change* story model raise an interesting point. Some of the writers were embittered, others saw themselves as survivors. Similarly, the *no pain, no gain* story model suggested that difficult experiences do not necessarily determine the career path. Previous studies (O'Sullivan, 2006; Thorburn, 2011) have shown that physical education teachers have many coping strategies to overcome the external hurdles in the teaching position. These findings demonstrate how so-called failures in career development can benefit individuals in many ways, as suggested by Pryor and Bright (2012). They are also consistent with the idea that when creating narratives, people tend to tie their experiences into a meaningful whole (Pryor & Bright, 2003; Savickas, 2005).

While it is important to understand why people leave, it is equally important to understand reasons for staying. One of the important turning points in the *no pain, no gain* story model was positive experiences that acted as a counterbalance to negative experiences and reinforced staying in the sports industry. The finding is in agreement with Iannucci and MacPhail (2019), who identified intrinsic reward and extrinsic recognition as critical incidents in career trajectories. The *natural path to success* story model highlights the turning points that were perceived as important in achieving a relatively smooth and successful employment trajectory. One of the turning points was employment in a 'key job', which resembles the description of serendipities and employment by Allin and Humberstone (2006) regarding the final turning points in two outdoor educators' career stories. Another meaningful experience in the present study was the work placement module, supporting previous findings on the importance of

work placements (Fleming et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2019; Sleaf & Reed, 2006). While only limited attempts have been made so far to identify sports graduates' life stories, there are similarities between the present findings and those described in the existing literature on sport students' and graduates' experiences. In this study, sport education was an important stage of the career path in most story models. This finding reflects those by Thorburn (2014), who identified the usefulness of teacher education as one of the main areas that characterized the best times in a veteran physical education teacher's career. In Thorburn's study, another important area was experiences where the teaching subject's relevance and teaching expertise were recognized. This accords with the findings of the present study, as positive, reinforcing experiences were a typical turning point in both story models where the protagonists had chosen to stay in the sports industry. Thorburn (2011) has also reported career deliberations of weighing the pros and cons of the current career, similarly to this study. The *from aspirations to an uncertain future* story model leaves the ending of the story open, reminding us that life stories are ever changing and unfinished. This story model has similarities with the analysis of Purdy and Potrac (2016). They described the professional path of one coach who had previously developed positive future expectations, but then faced disappointments, and, ultimately, was left re-evaluating her possibilities and motivation for pursuing her current career.

Implications and future directions

The present study foregrounds the career struggles of sport graduates, but also shows how people manage these challenges. Attributing meaning to one's degree education even after a career change, and framing oneself as a survivor, can contribute to coherence of the story and thus help individuals to cope with difficult experiences. An implication of this is the possibility that personal well-being could be promoted through

narrative career counselling among sports graduates who encounter difficulties in their careers. To understand the graduate experiences more extensively, further research might investigate sports career stories internationally, as well as the career stories of more senior alumni and of individuals who have chosen to terminate their sports studies. This study also touched on different attitudes towards career struggles, which would be a fruitful area for further work.

Another perspective raised by the present study is the important turning points of those who are thriving in the sport industry. The findings suggest that graduates may benefit if special attention is paid to student counselling regarding practicums and theses, which were identified as important in career development. Another significant turning point was finding a key job, implying that some graduates might require additional early career support in finding a quality entry-level job.

Declaration of interest statement

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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Gender	Age	Sports degrees	Current field
female 36 (61%)	range 22–51 years	Vocational Qualification in Sports Instruction (sports assistant) 22	sports industry 35 (59%)
male 23 (39%)	average 31 years	Bachelor of Sport Sciences (UAS) 34	non-sports industry 13 (22%)
other 0 (0%)		Master of Sport Sciences (UAS) 5 +1 unfinished	other (e.g. partly in the sports industry) 11 (19%)
		Master of Sport Sciences 13 + 4 unfinished	
		Bachelor of Sport Sciences 4	
		Doctor of Sport Sciences 1	

Table 1. Background information of the participants



III

THE MEANING OF DIFFICULTIES IN CAREER NARRATIVES: THE CASE OF SPORTS GRADUATES

by

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