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The use of Focus Group Interviews to define the perceived importance of competencies related to the entrepreneurship as starting point for a new career in European athletes: An AtLETyC study.

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study aimed to investigate the perceived importance of competencies related to entrepreneurship as starting point for a new career in European athletes.

Methods: A Focus Group Interview (FGI) within AtLETyC project (Erasmus+) was administered to seventy-eight European athletes (i.e., 26 female: 27±7 years; 52 male: 28±9 years) related to six countries (i.e., Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary, and Italy). Among the 22 items of the FGI, 8 items were focused on general aspects, contact information, and the evaluation of the educational background, of the sport entrepreneurship expertise, and learning capacity), whereas the remaining 14 Likert scale (i.e., 1-7) items were specifically oriented to determine the perceived importance of entrepreneurship-related competences. For the latter part of the FGI, not-parametric analyses (i.e., Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U) were applied.

Results: Results showed that all athletes highly consider the importance of both general and entrepreneurship-related competencies, excepting for the latter items in Slovenian athletes. However, main effects between athletes of different countries emerged in 12 of the 14 items, with the highest mean values (6.0-7.0) reported from Bosnia and Herzegovina athletes and the lowest ones (range = 3.6-4.8) from Slovenian counterpart.

Conclusion: Although a cross-national scenario in relation to the perceived importance of sport entrepreneurship competences seems to be influenced by different institutional supports for dual career, general results showed that European athletes highly perceived the importance of such competences, confirming the substantial necessity to apply the AtLETyC action.

Keywords: dual career; sport system; education; national culture; European Commission policies.

Introduction

Among the main strategic objectives of the European Union (EU), sport is currently recognized a crucial aspect for personal development, individual fulfilment, solidarity, tolerance and fair play of European citizens [1]. The achievement of the top level in sports is a progressive process [2], which requires a long-term involvement [3] in training and competition activities, often colliding with the necessary efforts for a satisfactory educational career [4]. In some European countries, the elite sport system mainly belongs to the private sector (i.e., federations, sport clubs), determining difficulties in combining sport and educational requirements, fostering sport or academic dropouts [5-7].

However, in the last decade, the term "dual career", which may refer to the combination of education with sport and/or work, has officially entered the European policy domain in sports [8], highlighting the substantial differences existing between Member States in supporting athletes during their educational/vocational development. As consequence, the EU established a financial programme (i.e., EU Erasmus+ 2014-2020), which allocated a relevant budget to support trans-national partnerships [11] with the purpose to strongly encourage the dialogue between sport and educational bodies to structure flexible academic curricula for student-athletes in their educational path and to assist them with post-athletic career opportunities [12].

To define the career development of athletes, a quantitative approach to evaluate sport and academic orientations from a psychological perspective was highlighted as necessary [13]. In fact, the knowledge of the student-athletes' dual career aspects in relation to different educational and sport systems in Europe could provide a better understanding of their sport and academic expectations, offering useful information for sport and academic decision makers. Therefore, cross-national comparisons related to student-athletes' dual career aspects could contribute to promote effective strategies for a sustainable combination of academic and sport programmes [14].

According to the recommendations reported in recent studies [15,16], cross-national studies and projects could play a crucial role for the identification of best practices to limit the sport and/or

academic dropouts, to encourage the successful retirement of elite athletes, and to guide multi-sector (i.e., governments, sport organizations, and education bodies) efforts in managing sport and education systems for future European citizens. However, European socio-cultural contexts show a variety of policy approaches toward the dual career [17,18,16], with some countries (such as Hungary and Lithuania) highly supportive in ensuring opportunities for an effective combination of sport and studies for their student-athletes, whereas others are (such as Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, and Slovenia) reluctant to establish and/or strengthen their dual career policies [19].

The monitoring of competences and needs in athletes emerged as necessary to foster future dual career policies [16]. In particular, cross-national analyses focused on these aspects at the final phase of the athletes' sport career, as well as after few years from the sport retirement moment, could crucially contribute to better define future strategies to support this particular population during this challenging life stage. One possible answer to these EU proposals and research encouragements in providing appropriate and effective dual career policies could be represented by the Erasmus+ Sport financed project "Athletes Learning Entrepreneurship – a new Type of Dual Career Approach" (AtLETyC), which has been structured to provide educational training on Entrepreneurship at postsecondary level to elite athletes [20]. In this project, coherently to the necessity of the cross-national cooperation [15,14], a consortium consisting of a university and a sport promotion bodies for each of the six involved countries (i.e., Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, and Slovenia) has been constituted with the main objective of developing a Massive Open On-line Course (MOOC)-based curricula on Entrepreneurship for athletes. In particular, this vocational training was envisioned to enlarge athletes' educational background to facilitate their transition into the labour market at the end of their sports career [20]. According to the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes [12], the AtLETyC project foresees the development of a professional course on entrepreneurship for athletes by means of modules, which are specifically tailor-made on athletes [20].

Therefore, the primary aim of the present study was to provide interviews (i.e., the AtLETyC Focus Group Interviews) which can be able to provide a cross-national (i.e., six European countries) monitoring the importance of competencies related to entrepreneurship perceived by athletes related to some different European countries. In line with previous cross-national studies on dual career aspects [14], it has been hypothesized that the perceived importance of competencies related to entrepreneurship would be influenced by nationality, strengthening the necessity to structure tailored made and sustainable educational courses for athletes.

Methods

Participants

The Local Institute Reviewer Board approved this study on the European athletes' perceived importance of competencies related to the entrepreneurship. All participants were preliminarily informed about the aims and benefits of the study, the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation, and the possibility drop the study at any time. Then, participants were invited to were required to provide a written informed consent.

The participants to this study had to be eligibility in relation to one of the following four inclusion criteria: i) being an elite athlete close to the end of the sports career; ii) being a former elite athlete since 1 or 2 years; iii) being a former elite athlete since 3-6 years; or iv) being an athlete still trying to reach the elite status.

The sample of participants to the AtLETyC Focus Group Interviews consisted of 78 athletes (general mean age = 28±8 years; 26 female, 27±7 years; 52 male, 28±9 years) were recruited by the AtLETyC sport organization partners (one for each of the six AtLETyC nations) after a preliminary phone/mail contact to fill in the related questionnaire. In particular, 10 (12.8%;) athletes came from Austria (2 alpine skiing, 4 cross country skiing, 1 football, 1 freestyle skiing, 1 handball, 1 judo), 11 (14.1%) from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1 alpine skiing, 1 track and field, 2 basketball, 1 football, 1 handball, 1 judo, 1 shooting, 1 skating, 2 weightlifting), 15 (19.2%) from Slovenia (2 basketball, 3 handball, 1 ice hockey, 1 kayak, 2 mountain bike, 2 skating, 2 tennis, volleyball), 16 (20.5%) from

Lithuania (1 boxing, 1 javelin, 1 judo, 2 modern pentathlon, 2 race walking, 2 sailing, 3 track and field, 4 wrestling) and Hungary (2 basketball, 2 canoe, 8 football, 1 motorcycling, 3 squash) respectively, and 10 (12.8%) from Italy (1 skating, 1 judo, 2 karate, 3 rowing, 1 skiing, 1 swimming, 1 swimming lifesaving).

Procedures

The coordinator of the AtLETyC consortium established the test of the FGIs in English; successively, each partner provided a translation into own national language. In particular, all items of the Focus Group Interview of the AtLETyC project (Table 1) were reported according to the following general goals: i) the identification of the needs of the target group; ii) the discussion of the possible course elements and the best learning approaches for the training of participants; iii) the identification of good practices in the interviewees' country; and iii) the promotion of the project and its results to the respective partners' countries.

To ascertain equivalence in meaning of the Focus Group Interviews, the back translation method was used for the different national languages in which the tool was applied [21]. Successively, the Focus Group Interviews were organized according to a qualitative approach where a group of people is asked to express perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes regarding a specific topic. Questions (i.e., items) were asked in an interactive group setting (i.e., form of open/ended questions), within a unique session for each country, where participants were free to talk with other group members. However, to make easier the data collection, Focus Group Interviews have been characterized by the filling in of a questionnaire.

A preliminary section (i.e., first section, 8 items) of the Focus Group Interview consisted of a questionnaire designed to gather general information of participants, including age, gender, practiced sports and contact information, and to evaluate their educational background experience, as well as their expertise about entrepreneurship in sport (i.e., experience in starting their own business). Differently, the second section (i.e., 14 items) was designed to investigate the European athletes' perceived importance of competencies related to entrepreneurship as a starting point of a

new career (e.g. helpful competences in case of entrepreneurship in sport and dual career). For this section, participants individually completed the 14 items of the Focus Group Interview indicating their level of agreement (i.e., from a minimum of 1: not important, to a maximum of 7: extremely important) with the statements.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Data analysis

Means and standard deviations (SD) of the 22 items reported into the Focus Group Interviews were reported in relation to the total sample and each country. No statistical application was adopted for each item reported in the first section of the Focus Group Interviews (i.e., 8 items) because of the lack of few data [22] and considering that they were considered only for describing the sample of participants. Conversely, for the second section (i.e., 14 items), the not-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was applied for each item. In case of differences in relation to the considered items, post hoc test with Bonferroni correction was performed (the new significance was set at $p < 0.008$). Finally, to provide a meaningful analysis for comparisons from small groups, the *phi* effect sizes (ESs) between groups were also calculated, considering 0.1, 0.3, 0.5 as small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively [23]. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (21.0; SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL) and the criterion for significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results

In Table 2, descriptive statistics of the results related to the first section of Focus Group Interview (i.e., evaluation of educational, entrepreneurial and learning capacity) were reported in relation to the total sample and each nation. In general, the total sample was mainly represented by elite athletes towards the end of their sports career (53.8%) who achieved the secondary school title (37.2%), participated in any informal education (55%), planned to run their own business (76%), had full access to the necessary education (76%), and assumed to be agree for the need of achieving

adequate knowledge in business (31.1%), and strongly agree that lifelong learning for building one's own career is necessary (60.3%). Conversely, they reported to disagree in relation to the perceived adequacy of their entrepreneurial skills to run their own business (34.6%).

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Data (i.e., means, standard deviations) and differences (i.e., *P* values; effect sizes) between countries of the second section of the Focus Group Interview regarding the perceived importance of athletes for competencies related to the educational entrepreneurship as a starting point of a new career were showed in Table 3. In general, positive answers (i.e., >4 in average, within the 1-7 Likert scale) emerged for the values of each country in relation to each item, excepting for Slovenian values for item #12 (i.e., *Skills on how to establish your own company*, 3.6±2), #13 (i.e., *Legal rights and obligations*, 3.8±2.2) and #14 (i.e., *Financing and bookkeeping*, 3.7±2.2). In spite of the general predominance of positive answers, main effects emerged for 12 out of 14 items. In particular, positive perceptions emerged for the *oral communication* (90%; *P*=0.032; ES = 0.6), the *written communication* (76%; *P*=0.004; ES range = 0.5-0.8), the *presentational skills* (88%; *P*=0.037; ES range = 0.5-0.6), the *foreign language skills* (83%; *P*=0.003; ES range = 0.4-0.7), the *ability to acquire information* (85%; *P*=0.042; ES = 0.5), the *project management* (85%; *P*=0.003; ES range = 0.4-0.7), the *initiative and entrepreneur spirit* (90%; *P*=0.016; ES range = 0.4-0.6), the *team work* (90%; *P*=0.016; ES range = 0.6-0.7), the *leadership skills* (92%; *P*=0.003; ES range = 0.4-0.7), the *skills on how to establish your own company* (78%; *P*=0.005; ES range = 0.4-0.6), the *legal rights and obligations* (82%; *P*=0.019; ES range = 0.4-0.6), and the *financing and bookkeeping* (68%; *P*=0.001; ES range = 0.4-0.7). Conversely, despite a predominance of positive answers (93%) emerged, *decision making* (*P*=0.056) and *interpersonal skills* (*P*=0.055) only approached the significance.

The eleven elite athletes from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported the highest perceived importance in each observed competence excepting items 9 and 14, thus determining the high number of differences with respect to other countries (i.e., with Austria: item 11; Slovenia: 1-4, 6, 7, 11-14; Hungary: 1-3, 6, 11, 14; and Italy: 4, 11) who reported lower scores. Conversely, Slovenia reported the lowest values in each item, causing further differences (regardless those with Bosnia and Herzegovina) with Austria (i.e., items 12-14), and Lithuania (i.e., item 12). In addition, Austria reported higher values with respect to Hungary (i.e., items 9, 14), and Italy (i.e., item 9); whereas Hungary showed a lower perception of importance for competence corresponding to item 6 with respect to Italy.

<Insert Table 3 about here>

Discussion

The present study represents the first approach to investigate the perceived importance of competencies related to educational entrepreneurship in athletes appertaining to different European countries as a starting point for a new career also in relation to different national contexts presenting different sport and education policies. In general, the main finding of the present study shows that the observed competences are perceived as important by all the interviewed athletes. However, even though the used questionnaire was not still validated, differences between athletes belonging to different national subgroups for almost all the considered items (i.e., all excepting items 5, 8, and 10), confirming the experimental hypothesis.

Some of all recruited athletes came from Hungary and Lithuania, which are related to “State Centric Regulation” and “State as Sponsor Facilitator” national category, respectively. These groups represent the highest political level in terms of supporting for dual career in Europe [17], therefore high divergences with respect to the other considered countries with a lower level of institutional dual career support (i.e., “No Formal Structures” national category) [17] could be

expected in this study. However, no influence on the perceived importance of competencies related to educational entrepreneurship seems to confirm the reported political scenario.

However, before discussing results, it has to report that the present study is characterized by evident limitations such as the scarce number of athletes (i.e. 10-16 for each country) and European countries (i.e., 6), which not allow the application of a statistical approach for a real validation of the used questionnaire. As consequence, the generalizability of the findings needs of further studies on this topic, which consider a larger number of countries and athletes, also classified in relation to different sport practice categories. In addition, the central and eastern European countries prevent any reference for the west ones. Finally, according to the preliminary section of the questionnaire, an unbalanced recruitment among countries emerged for the type of athletes (i.e., more Slovenian elite athletes towards the end of the sports career, and Hungarian and Italian former athletes), education background (i.e., more athletes with a master degree and secondary school in the Slovenian and Hungarian samples, respectively), participation in any informal education (i.e., only prevalent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenian, and Hungarian samples), and adequate knowledge of business requirements (i.e., recognized as highly adequate only in Austria).

The cross-national scenario is quite homogenous in terms of athletes' perceptions of running their own business and having full access to the necessary education (i.e., range of countries: 62.5-100%), the necessity of a lifelong learning for building their own career (i.e., range of countries: 80-100%), and the scarce adequacy of their own entrepreneurial skills to run their own business (i.e., not more than 31.2% of athletes reported "strongly agree" or "agree" answers in each country). In particular, for the "running own business" item (i.e., item 4) and the corresponding negative responses selected by about 25% of the athletes, it could be speculated that a relevant part of athletes living in European countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Lithuania, and Hungary are not interested on the entrepreneurship career.

Although positive answers (i.e., >4 in average, within the 1-7 Likert scale) emerged for the values of each country in relation to each item (excepting for Slovenian values in items #12, #13,

and #14), competences related to the entrepreneurship were differently perceived among countries, confirming findings of previous studies [14,24], which highlighted the influences of different policies on fundamental aspects such as motivations in combining education and sport, and the need of the institutional support to provide concrete encouragements to athletes in promoting pursuing their personal development [1,8,25,12].

Actually, results showed that the athletes from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported the highest perceived importance for almost all the competences (only for *team work* and *financing and bookkeeping*, they reported the second highest values after those of Austria), showing several differences with respect to other national counterparts. On the other hand, even though Slovenian athletes perceived the lowest level of importance in relation to the entrepreneurship competencies in line to the low interest showed in terms of "running own business" at the item 4 of the first section, and substantiating the lack of an effective institutional support for dual career, the perceived degree of importance of all competences reported by these athletes can be generally considered as satisfactory (i.e., score range: 3.6-4.8). In fact, excepting for three items (i.e., *skills on how to establish your own company*, *legal rights and obligations*, *financing and bookkeeping*), where the level of competences has not been perceived as important (i.e., score range: 3.6-3.8), Slovenian athletes reported high considerations for each of the other competences. Finally, considering the absence of specific references in terms of dual career policies for Bosnia and Herzegovina [17,18], further studies could better clarify the perceived importance of competencies for educational entrepreneurship related to this nation.

Therefore, regardless of effects between athletes appertaining to different countries, European athletes reported a positive perception of the considered competencies (i.e., range of total scores related to each competence: 5.0-6.1), showing encouraging information for the application of eventual educational courses on entrepreneurship. Consequently, the positive valorisation of these competences suggests that athletes are quite aware of the need of such competences for studying entrepreneurship, thus tending to highlight the potential efficacy of the AtLETyC action.

Conclusion

The peculiarity of the national sport systems (i.e., State regulation/facilitator, Federation, and Club orientated) is reflected by the local cultural practices. Thus, a common model for the management of athletes' dual career aspects should be considered inappropriate, especially in Europe where differences in sport systems strongly subsist [17,18]. Nevertheless, the European athletes' perceived importance of competences related to entrepreneurship resulted generally high, without any demonstrable influence from the political scenario about dual career. Therefore, European initiatives in the field of sport and higher education could be successfully developed also for effect of the European athletes' perceptions and awareness for general dual career aspects such as motivation [14,26] and identity [19], and others such as the importance of competences related to entrepreneurship. In other words, outstanding athletic achievements could result as a facilitator for sport careers such as sport managers, coaches, physical trainers and sport commentators [27,28,14], as well as entrepreneurship.

Studies on athletes' perceptions could explore the real potential of educational actions focused on the improvement of the dual career strategies, contributing to comply the proposals of European Commission such as the new European Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, which is specifically dedicated to Education and Sport. However, in considering the limited sample included in this study and the absence of a real validation process for the used questionnaire, further research is strongly needed to better define the European athletes' perception of competences related to entrepreneurship as a new professional career starting point, highlighting the impact of the European Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes [12]. As consequence, cross-national qualitative and quantitative information could make governments, sport organizations, and education bodies able to better plan new projects for the management of sport and education of European athletes who wish to combine the dual career demands.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval: “All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.”

Informed consent: “Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study”.

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Table 1. Items and answers of the AtLETyC Focus Group Interview.

Items	Answers
First Section: educational, entrepreneurial and learning capacity	
# 1. “Are you?”	A, “Elite athlete who is towards the end of the sports career; B, “Athlete who has ended the sport career 1 or 2 years ago; C, 2Athlete who has left the sport career 3-6 years ago; D, “Athlete who is not yet an elite athlete
# 2. “Your educational background is:”	A, “Master”; B, “Bachelor”; C, “Secondary School”; D, “Other”
# 3. “Have you participated in any informal education?”	A, “Yes”; B, “No”
# 4. “Are you planning to run your own business?”	A, “Yes”; B, “No”
# 5. “I have full access to the necessary education.”	A, “Yes”; B, “No”
# 6. “I believe that in the course of my education I have acquired adequate knowledge for business requirements”	A, “Strongly Agree”; B, “Agree”; C, “Don’t know”, D, “I disagree”; E, “I oppose this statement”
# 7. “Lifelong learning for building one’s own career is necessary”	A, “Strongly Agree”; B, “Agree”; C, “Don’t know”, D, “I disagree”; E, “I oppose this statement”
# 8. “My entrepreneurial skills are adequate to run my own business”	A, “Strongly Agree”; B, “Agree”; C, “Don’t know”, D, “I disagree”; E, “I oppose this statement”
Second Section: importance of general competencies, and its application in entrepreneurship for starting a new career.	
# 1.Oral communication	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 2.Written communication	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 3.Presentational skills	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 4.Foreign language skills	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 5.Ability to acquire information from different sources	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 6.Project drafting and its management	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 7.Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 8.Decision making	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 9.Team work	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 10.Interpersonal skills (communication, cooperation)	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 11.Leadership skills	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 12.Skills on how to establish your own company	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 13.Legal rights and obligations	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”
# 14.Financing and bookkeeping	1, “Not important” - 7, “Extremely important”

Table 2. Results (absolute and percentage values) of the items reported for the first section of the Focus Group Interview.

				Countries			
Items	Total (n=78)	Austria (n=10)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (n=11)	Slovenia (n=15)	Lithuania (n=16)	Hungary (n=16)	Italy (n=10)
# 1. "Are you?", n (%)							
Elite athlete who is towards the end of the sports career	42 (53.8)	7 (70)	4 (36.4)	13 (86.7)	10 (62.5)	3 (18.8)	5 (50)
Athlete who has ended the sport career 1 or 2 years ago	7 (9)	2 (20)	2 (18.2)	2 (13.3)	0	1 (6.3)	0
Athlete who has left the sport career 3-6 years ago	16 (20.5)	0	5 (45.5)	0	3 (18.8)	8 (50)	0
Athlete who is not yet an elite athlete	13 (16.7)	1 (10)	0	0	3 (18.8)	4 (25)	5 (50)
# 2. "Your educational background", n (%)							
Master	21 (26,9)	1 (10)	5 (45.5)	9 (60)	6 (37.5)	0	0
Bachelor	22 (28.2)	0	3 (27.3)	6 (40)	6 (37.5)	3 (18.8)	4 (40)
Secondary School	29 (37.2)	7 (70)	0	0	4 (25)	13 (81.2)	5 (50)
Other	6 (7.7)	2 (20)	3 (27.3)	0	0	0	1 (10)
# 3. "Have you participated in any informal education?", n (%)							
Yes	43 (55.1)	1 (10)	6 (54.5)	11 (73.3)	7 (43.8)	13 (81.2)	5 (50)
No	35 (44.9)	9 (90)	5 (45.5)	4 (26.7)	9 (56.2)	3 (18.8)	5 (50)
# 4. "Are you planning to run your own business?", n (%)							
Yes	59 (75.6)	10 (100)	7 (63.6)	10 (66.7)	12 (75)	10 (62.5)	10 (100)
No	19 (24.4)	0	4 (36.4)	5 (33.3)	4 (25)	6 (37.5)	0
# 5. "I have full access to the necessary education", n (%)							
Yes	59 (75.6)	10 (100)	8 (72.7)	13 (86.7)	11 (68.8)	10 (62.5)	7 (70)
No	19 (24.4)	0	3 (27.3)	2 (13.3)	5 (31.2)	6 (37.5)	3 (30)
# 6. "I believe that in the course of my education I have acquired adequate knowledge for business requirements", n (%)							
Strongly Agree	15 (19.2)	2 (20)	3 (27.3)	5 (33.3)	4 (25)	1 (6.3)	0
Agree	25 (32.1)	6 (60)	3 (27.3)	2 (13.3)	6 (37.5)	4 (25)	4 (40)
Don't know	16 (20.5)	2 (20)	1 (9.1)	1 (6.7)	6 (37.5)	6 (37.6)	0
I Disagree	15 (19.2)	0	3 (27.3)	7 (46.7)	0	5 (31.8)	0
I oppose this statement	7 (9)	0	1 (9.1)	0	0	0	6 (60)
# 7. "Lifelong learning for building one's own carrier is necessary", n (%)							
Strongly Agree	47 (60.3)	10 (100)	10 (90.9)	12 (80)	7 (43.8)	5 (31.2)	3 (30)
Agree	27 (34.6)	0	1 (9.1)	3 (20)	7 (43.8)	11 (68.8)	5 (50)
Don't know	1 (1.3)	0	0	0	1 (6.3)	0	0
I Disagree	3 (3.8)	0	0	0	1(6.3)	0	2 (20)
I oppose this statement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

# 8. “My entrepreneurial skills are adequate to run my own business” (%)							
Strongly Agree	3 (3.8)	0	1 (9.1)	1 (6.7)	0	0	1 (10)
Agree	11 (14.1)	0	1 (9.1)	3 (20)	5 (31.2)	0	2 (20)
Don’t know	20 (25.6)	0	2 (18.2)	4 (26.7)	7 (43.8)	3 (18.8)	4 (40)
I Disagree	27 (34.6)	8 (80)	4 (36.4)	2 (13.3)	4 (25)	6 (37.5)	3 (30)
I oppose this statement	17 (21.8)	2 (20)	3 (27.3)	5 (33.3)	0	7 (43.8)	0

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (*P* values; effect sizes) of athletes' competencies reported in the second section of the Focus Group Interview, in relation to different countries.

Items	Total (n=78)	Austria (n=10)	Bosnia and Herzegovina* (n=11)	Slovenia ¥ (n=15)	Lithuania # (n=16)	Hungary χ (n=16)	Italy τ (n=10)
# 1. Oral communication	6.1±1.6	6.6±0.7	7.0±0.0 (0.005;0.6)$^{¥}$ (0.002;0.6)^{χ}	4.8±2.8	6.2±1.2	6.1±0.8	6.6±0.5
# 2. Written communication	5.2±1.7	5.5±1.3	6.7±0.5 (0.001;0.7)$^{¥}$ (0.001;0.7)^{χ} (<0.001;0.8)^{τ}	4.1±2.4	5.4±1.5	5.1±1.3	4.9±1.0
# 3. Presentational skills	5.9±1.6	6.3±0.9	6.8±0.4 (0.01;0.5)$^{¥}$ (0.004;0.6)^{χ} (0.004;0.6)^{τ}	4.7±2.7	6.0±1.4	6.1±0.6	5.8±0.9
# 4. Foreign language skills	5.8±1.6	5.8±1.2	6.9±0.3 (<0.001;0.7)$^{¥}$ (0.005;0.6)^{τ}	4.2±2.5	6.3±0.9	6.1±1.2	5.9±1.2
# 5. Ability to acquire information from different sources	5.4±1.7	5.6±1.1	6.2±1.8	4.3±2.5	5.9±1.5	5.4±1.0	5.4±0.8
# 6. Project drafting and its management	5.5±1.7	5.8±0.9	6.6±0.7 (0.005;0.6)$^{¥}$ (<0.001;0.7)^{χ}	4.3±2.5	5.6±2.0	5.1±1.0 (0.005;0.6)^{τ}	6.3±0.7
# 7. Initiation and entrepreneurial spirit	5.9±1.6	6.5±0.7	6.9±0.3 (0.002;0.6)$^{¥}$	4.5±2.6	5.8±1.2	6.2±0.8	6.0±1.1
# 8. Decision making	6.1±1.5	6.3±0.7	6.8±0.4	4.7±2.7	6.4±0.7	6.6±0.6	6.2±0.6
# 9. Team work	6.1±1.6	7.0±0.0 (0.002;0.6)^{χ} (0.002; 0.7)^{τ}	6.7±0.6	4.8±2.8	6.4±0.9	6.1±0.9	6.0±0.9
# 10. Interpersonal skills (communication, cooperation)	6.0±1.5	6.1±1.0	6.8±0.4	4.7±2.7	6.6±0.5	6.1±0.6	6.2±0.8
# 11. Leadership skills	5.9±1.5	5.8±1.0 (0.004;0.6)*	6.9±0.3 (0.001;0.6)$^{¥}$ (0.006;0.5)^{χ} (0.001;0.7)^{τ}	4.5±2.6	6.3±0.9	6.3±0.7	5.6±0.8
# 12. Skills on how to establish your own company	5.3±1.7	5.8±1.0 (0.005;0.6)$^{¥}$	6.0±1.1 (0.002;0.6)$^{¥}$	3.6±2.0 (0.001;0.6)$^{#}$	5.8±1.8	5.3±1.4	5.6±1.0
# 13. Legal rights and obligations	5.3±1.7	6.1±1.0	6.2±0.8	3.8±2.2 (	5.3±1.8	5.6±1.0	5.4±1.4

		(0.004;0.6)[¥]	(0.002;0.6)[¥]				
# 14. Financing and bookkeeping	5.0±1.8	6.4±1.0 (0.001;0.7)[¥] (0.003;0.6)[χ]	6.3±0.8 (0.001;0.6)[¥] (0.002;0.6)[χ]	3.7±2.2	4.8±1.9	4.6±1.3	5.2±1.1

Notes: difference ($P \leq 0.05$) with respect to Bosnia[*], Slovenia[¥], Lithuania[#], Hungary[χ], Italy[τ].