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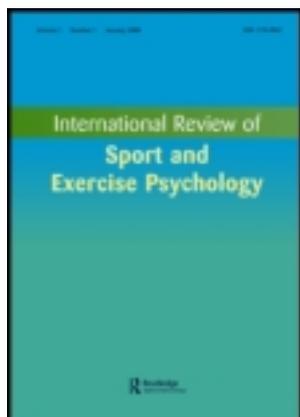
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### A critical review of career research and assistance through the cultural lens: towards cultural praxis of athletes' careers

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## **A critical review of career research and assistance through the cultural lens: towards cultural praxis of athletes' careers**

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In this review article, a content area of athlete career in sport psychology is analyzed through the cultural lens: that is, through paradigmatic perspectives of cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and cultural studies. Based on previous review papers, but mainly on the chapters of the anthology *Athletes' Careers across Cultures*, we identified three dominant (North American, Australian, and European) and two emerging (Asian and South American) cultural discourses in the career topic. These discourses are characterized by research foci, theoretical frameworks, and career assistance programs in action. Our critical analysis of career research and assistance around the world further indicates a need for more contextualized and culturally competent career projects, which blend theory/research, applied work, and lived culture into cultural praxis. To satisfy this need, a new paradigm termed *cultural praxis of athletes' careers* is suggested. In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of review papers in negotiating emerging terminology, values, principles, and approaches underlying the career topic, and share some ideas for future reviews in career research and assistance.

**Keywords:** athlete career; career assistance; career transitions; cultural praxis

### **Why do we need another review paper on athletes' career development and transitions?**

As stated by Stephen Mellalieu and Sheldon Hanton (2009), editors of three recent books of in-depth literature reviews on key subject areas in sport and exercise psychology (Hanton & Mellalieu, 2006, 2012; Mellalieu & Hanton, 2009), '[a] review of literature functions as an initial vehicle for a topic organization, reorganization and defined structure' (p. 1). Keeping in mind such a mission of literature reviews, this review article aims to articulate cultural dimensions in career research and assistance by means of stimulating career researchers' and practitioners' cultural praxis-type thinking and encouraging contextualized and culturally and methodologically congruent career projects blending theory/research, applied work, and lived culture to better cover career experiences of culturally diverse athletic populations around the world.

More specifically this review article is inspired by three major sources. The first of them contains 12 review papers/books on athletes' career development and transitions (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Gordon, Lavalley, & Grove, 2005; Hackfort & Huang, 2005; Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013a; Petitpas, Brewer, &

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Van Raalte, 2009; Stambulova, 2010; Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman, De Knop, & Reints, 2011; Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999) and one meta-review paper (Stambulova, 2012) published since the end of the 1990s. In particular, the recent meta-review that introduced the previous reviews' content and followed how the career topic was structured and restructured in the last decade or so, summarized major shifts in career research and assistance. One of them is 'from perceiving a body of career transition knowledge as universal and applicable to any culture to more culturally informed career research and interventions' (Stambulova, 2012, p. 177).

This turn to culture in the career topic is explored in the recent International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) book *Athletes' Careers across Cultures (ACAC)* (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013a), which is the second source of our inspiration and 'data' for this review. The book's contributors provide reviews of career research and career assistance programs (CAPs) in 19 countries: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA. All the reviews that preceded *ACAC* were based solely on English-language literature; literature in national languages has never been in the international focus and has remained 'non-existent' for authors who have tried in their review papers to structure the career topic in sport psychology. In *ACAC*, all reviews are conducted by cultural insiders and 223 references to works in national languages are cited in the book. The book therefore sets a new ground for a critical review of the career topic through a cultural lens.

In the introductory chapter of *ACAC* (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013), an evolution of incorporating culture into career research and practice is traced using a wave metaphor. The first – *cross-cultural* – wave in career research was characterized by an increased interest in understanding the role of culture in athletes' career development and transitions. The researchers approached the study of culture within the positivist epistemology, attempting to access athletes' career experiences through questionnaires and surveys. Culture was conceptualized as an external entity, contained within national boundaries and having an effect on athletes' career transitions (mainly athletic retirement). National identity was likened to culture and served as an independent variable to assess similarities and differences in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions of athletes upon retirement in various nations. The cross-cultural career studies (for an overview see Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009) acknowledged the multidimensionality of the transition out of elite sports and suggested a culturally specific approach in applied work (i.e., helping retired athletes in adjusting to a specific socio-cultural environment). The second wave – *cultural mindset* – in career research was characterized by an attempt to permeate athlete career studies with a cultural mindset, and generally reflected the epistemological turn toward cultural psychology (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009). Cultural psychologists view culture and psychological processes as mutually constituted and stress the importance of language, communication, relational perspectives, cultural practices and meanings, beliefs, and values in human development, learning, and behavior. The focus of research, therefore, is on understanding a constitutive dynamic between psychological processes and socio-cultural contexts. To date, cultural research on athletes' careers exists but is rather limited (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Schinke et al., 2006). The third wave – *cultural praxis of athletes' careers* – can be seen as a set of future challenges for the career topic in sport psychology and will be considered later in this article.

‘Waves, as the metaphor implies, move forward and back, each contributing towards understanding culture in athletes’ careers’ (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013, p. 12). This thought led us to use the recent ISSP Position Stand on culturally competent research and practice in sport and exercise psychology (Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013) as the third source of inspiration for this review. In this paper the authors state that ‘many sport and exercise psychology professionals are intuitive or naive cultural or cross-cultural researchers lacking awareness of how all aspects of their projects are culturally infused’ (p. 137) and suggest criteria for identifying sport and exercise psychology projects from the cross-cultural and cultural psychology perspectives:

*A culturally competent research project can be designed as a cross-cultural psychology study, a cultural psychology study, and/or cultural praxis. When an etic perspective on culture is used (i.e., culture as external entity or independent variable), the project can be classified as cross-cultural even if it does not include a comparison of participants from different cultures. When an emic perspective on culture is employed (i.e., of a cultural insider inseparable from the context), the project aligns more closely with cultural psychology. Finally, and most recently, a project that blends theory/research, practice, and lived culture can be classified as a cultural praxis project. (p. 137, emphasis in original)*

The Position Stand authors further show benefits of positioning research and applied projects in terms of their philosophical and methodological perspectives as well as in relevant socio-cultural and historical contexts.

In this article, first we critically review and summarize career research and CAPs in 19 countries based mainly on *ACAC*. After that we outline a set of new challenges for future developmental trajectories in the career topic, which we coin *cultural praxis of athletes’ careers*.

## **Critical review of career research and assistance around the world**

### ***Dominant and emerging discourses in career research and assistance***

In the ISSP Position Stand on athletes’ career development and transitions (Stambulova et al., 2009) four major cultural traditions in career research and assistance are identified – North American, Australian, West European, and East European – based on the analysis of publications in the English language. These four traditions are briefly described by means of contrasting socio-cultural contexts (especially between the all ‘Western’ and the East European tradition) and comparing major research foci in relevant countries. In the first attempt to analyze career research from a cultural standpoint, the authors conclude that career researchers tend to internalize ideas/topics for their projects from the historical and socio-cultural contexts they belong to.

*ACAC*, containing about 500 research references, has provided us with a more detailed view of career research and assistance across cultures by incorporating relevant literature in national languages and perspectives of the authors who represent their countries, live in relevant socio-cultural contexts, and are permeated by their culturally relevant perceptions, beliefs, and value systems. Therefore, *ACAC* allows the opportunity to clarify a global picture of career research and assistance by substantiating its major intellectual traditions and discourses.<sup>1</sup>

Based on *ACAC*, we identified three dominant and two emerging discourses in career research and assistance that are briefly summarized in [Table 1](#). The *ACAC* confirmed that North American, Australian, and West European traditions comprise the dominant and

Table 1. Dominant and emerging discourses in career research and assistance around the world\*.

Athlete Career Research Traditions	Career Assistance Programs (examples)
North American (dominant) discourse (on examples of the USA and Canada)	
<p><i>Major research foci:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– athletic retirement</li> <li>– athletic identity</li> <li>– transitions of student-athletes</li> <li>– stages and trajectories in talent/career development</li> <li>– adaptation in within-career transitions</li> <li>– career development and transitions of indigenous athletes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Career Assistance Program for Athletes (USA)</li> <li>– CHAMPS/Life Skills Program for college/university student-athletes (USA)</li> <li>– CAPs for professional athletes, e.g. Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League</li> <li>– The First Tee – for youth athletes (USA)</li> <li>– Play It Smart – for youth athletes (USA)</li> <li>– Canadian Sport for Life</li> <li>– Long-Term Athlete Development Program (Canada)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Theoretical frameworks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981)</li> <li>– the athletic career termination model (Taylor &amp; Ogilvie, 1994)</li> <li>– the life development intervention model (Danish, et al., 1993)</li> <li>– the four stages career model (Salmela, 1994)</li> <li>– the developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The Canadian Sport Centre Network</li> <li>– Post-Olympic Excellence Seminar for retired elite athletes and 24/7 crisis services provided by Canadian Olympic Committee</li> </ul>
Australian (dominant) discourse (on examples of Australia and New Zealand)	
<p><i>Major research foci:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– athletic retirement of elite amateur and professional athletes</li> <li>– career transition needs of athletes and coaches (mainly in retirement)</li> <li>– athletic identity</li> <li>– athletes' life skills</li> <li>– within-career transitions</li> <li>– transitions of indigenous athletes</li> <li>– applied research including evaluation of CAPs</li> <li>– exploring athletes' experiences of the New Zealand carding system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Life Skills for Elite Athletes program (Australia)</li> <li>– Athlete Career Education (ACE) Program (Australia)</li> <li>– Olympic Job Opportunity Program (Australia)</li> <li>– CAPs in professional football and rugby (Australia)</li> <li>– ACE implemented as a part of support services to carded athletes with foci on life skills and career guidance (New Zealand)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Theoretical frameworks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981)</li> <li>– the athletic career termination model (Taylor &amp; Ogilvie, 1994)</li> <li>– the life development intervention model (Danish et al., 1993)</li> <li>– the account-making model adapted to sport (Grove, Lavallee, Gordon, &amp; Harvey, 1998)</li> </ul>	

Table 1 (Continued)

Athlete Career Research Traditions	Career Assistance Programs (examples)
European (dominant) discourse (on examples of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK)	
<i>Major research foci:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– athletic retirement</li> <li>– transition from junior to senior sports</li> <li>– transition from amateur to professional sports</li> <li>– dual career development and transitions</li> <li>– athletes' crisis-transitions</li> <li>– athletic identity and identity crisis</li> <li>– athletes' non-athletic transitions</li> <li>– talent development trajectories</li> <li>– athletic talent development environments</li> <li>– cultural transitions</li> <li>– athletes' skills relevant to different career stages</li> <li>– early professionalization in sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Career Support Program for Flemish athletes (based on Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)</li> <li>– Performance Lifestyle Program (former ACE UK Program, UK)</li> <li>– Study4player and Job4player (Denmark)</li> <li>– Paths of Excellence in Sport (France)</li> <li>– Partner Universities of Top Level Sport – dual career programs (Germany)</li> <li>– Athletes' Advice and Information Bureau (Spain)</li> <li>– ÈXITS (Spain)</li> <li>– Tutoresport for student-athletes (based on the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain)</li> <li>– Dual career programs at sport (boarding) schools (e.g. in Germany, France, Sweden, Slovenia, Russia)</li> <li>– Career Support at Olympic Training Centres (e.g., in Germany)</li> </ul>
<i>Theoretical frameworks:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman &amp; Lavallee, 2004)</li> <li>– the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981)</li> <li>– the athletic career termination model (Taylor &amp; Ogilvie, 1994)</li> <li>– the developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007)</li> <li>– the life development intervention model (Danish et al., 1993)</li> <li>– the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)</li> <li>– the analytical athletic career model (Stambulova, 1994)</li> <li>– the athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003)</li> <li>– the athletic talent development environment model (Henriksen, 2010)</li> <li>– the environment success factors model (Henriksen, 2010)</li> </ul>	
	Asian (emerging) discourse (on examples of China and Japan)
<i>Major research foci:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– career termination</li> <li>– athletic retirement process and outcomes</li> <li>– 'second' (post-sport) career</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– State Policies and Measures for Retired Athletes' Resettlement (China)</li> <li>– Athletic Career Management Services at Nanjing Institute of Physical Education (China)</li> <li>– Vocational Education Programs for Athletes (China)</li> <li>– Japanese professional football league support center</li> <li>– Japanese Olympic Committee Career Academy</li> </ul>
<i>Theoretical frameworks:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the three-level career development model (Si, 2008)</li> <li>– the four-phase athletic retirement framework (Wang, 2006)</li> </ul>	

Table 1 (Continued)

Athlete Career Research Traditions	Career Assistance Programs (examples)
South American (emerging) discourse (on the example of Brazil)	
<i>Major research foci:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– talent detection</li> <li>– environment and talent/career development</li> <li>– transition from junior to senior sports</li> <li>– transition from amateur to professional sports</li> <li>– athletic retirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Athlete Career Program (ACP)</li> <li>– Discovery of Sport Talents Program</li> <li>– Sport Talent Grant of the State of San Paulo</li> <li>– San Paulo Paraspport Program</li> <li>– Citizenship and Social Security Program</li> </ul>
<i>Theoretical frameworks:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)</li> </ul>	

\*Based on the book *Athletes' Careers across Cultures* (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013a).

most influential discourses in international career research and assistance. The East European tradition identified in the aforementioned ISSP Position Stand (Stambulova et al., 2009) and represented mainly by the Russian discourse (i.e., several culture-specific theoretical frameworks, focusing on within-career transitions and crisis-transitions) still looks distinct but is also becoming closer to and overlapping more (increased interest in athletic retirement research and assistance; turn to a holistic view of an athlete) with the West European tradition. Therefore, in Table 1 we incorporate it into 'joint' European discourse. Two emerging discourses made visible by ACAC are Asian and South American. In Table 1 we outline major research topics and theoretical frameworks (with their main references) used in each discourse and provide examples of CAPs.

As seen in Table 1, the dominant discourses in career research cover a greater variety of topics than the emerging discourses. The European discourse is the most diverse in terms of research foci and theoretical frameworks, reflecting most probably the diversity of cultures behind it. The topic of athletic retirement is represented (although studied differently) in all the discourses, which confirms societal concerns around the world about athletes' adaptation to post-sport life (see more in Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Park et al., 2013a; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). Athletic career development is considered (mainly in the dominant discourses) through analysis of career/talent development stages and trajectories as well as through within-career transitions (see more in Petitpas et al., 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009; Wylleman et al., 1999, 2011). Within-career transitions are a growing and diverse topic because researchers deal not only with normative transitions predicted by career-stage models (e.g., from junior to senior sports, from amateur to professional sports) but also with the transitions caused by specific features of national sport systems and/or particular sport cultures (e.g. Poczwadowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2013; Stambulova, 1994; Verkooijen, van Hove, & Dik, 2012). The North American and Australian discourses uniquely contribute to the understanding of indigenous athletes' career transitions and adaptation to mainstream cultures (e.g. Nicholson, Hoye, & Gallant, 2011; Schinke et al., 2006; Schinke, Peltier, Ryba, Wabano, & Wabano, 2010; Stronach, 2012).

It is noticeable in Table 1 that theoretical frameworks created within the three dominant discourses easily cross international borders, and relevant research findings are imported by other countries to base their CAPs upon. For example, the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) born in Belgium/the UK and currently termed the ‘holistic athletic career model’ (Wylleman, 2013) is widely employed across many European cultures; the developmental model of sport participation (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007) created in Canada is influential not only in North America but also in Australia and some European countries (e.g. Denmark, Sweden); the athletic retirement model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) and the life development intervention model (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993) developed in the USA are currently actively used not only in North America but also in Australia and Europe. In the countries with almost no career studies of their own, research findings from geographically neighboring countries or countries with a similar language are used to develop sport policies and CAPs. For example, Mexico imports career research from the USA, Canada, and Spain (Fink, 2013). It is therefore difficult to relate Mexico to one particular discourse until research on Mexican athletes helps to create ‘a far more effective model for Mexican sports organizations to implement, both in terms of improving performance and helping athletes with transitioning in and out of their sports’ (Fink, 2013, p. 146). It is also interesting to note the striking similarities between English speaking countries (Australia, New Zealand, the USA, the UK, and Canada) in terms of both research and CAPs. British discourse is an example of being situated ‘in between’ the European (e.g. the holistic lifespan perspective, within-career transitions, balancing sport and studies/work) on the one hand, and North American and Australian traditions (e.g. identity research, relying heavily on life development intervention approach, emulating the Australian Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program) on the other hand (e.g. Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). Researchers/practitioners within both emerging discourses at first actively adopted ideas/models from the dominant discourses but then shifted to developing their own approaches. This trend is especially visible in Chinese research, with the three-level career development model (Si, 2008) and the four-phase athletic retirement framework (Wang, 2006).

Table 1 also exemplifies some of more than 60 CAPs introduced in *ACAC*. We learned that the CAPs (even within one country) are founded and funded by various organizations, such as national governing bodies, educational institutions, local communities, high performance centers, and professional sport associations. Their target groups are eligible (i.e. identified or carded) young athletes, elite athletes, professional athletes, and retiring/retired athletes. Helping athletes to make their athletic career a part of and a resource for their life career and prepare well for athletic retirement permeates a majority of existing CAPs.

The most internationally influential CAP is the Australian ACE program providing ‘career and education services to support elite athletes as they transitioned into, through and out of sport’ (Chambers, Gordon, & Morris, 2013, p. 21). This program was adopted by several countries (e.g. the UK, New Zealand, and Ireland) but also adapted to the relevant cultural contexts. For example, the ACE UK program was first modeled on the Australian ACE but then rebranded as the Performance Lifestyle Program ‘to ensure that performance is the main focus of the program’ (Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013b, p. 215). Different kinds and forms of existing dual career (sport and education, sport and work) programs around the world incorporate basic tenets of the Australian ACE program to meet athletes’ individual needs in sport and education/work, taking into account their age,

sport specialization, career stage, financial status, and other relevant factors. A recent development in Europe is a collective work on the ‘EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes: Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Dual Careers in High-Performance Sport’ (2012) – a document aimed at setting up a minimal standard for dual career programs in the European Union countries.

Major services offered by CAPs across cultures include career planning/guidance, educational guidance, lifestyle management, life skills training, media training, and retirement guidance and support (see also Gordon et al., 2005; Hackfort & Huang, 2005; Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2009; Stambulova, 2010, 2012). In many programs these psychological career assistance services are combined with performance enhancement services, as well as with financial management, medical, nutritional, and other expert support. Despite a diversity of CAPs around the world, their sport psychology personnel almost everywhere adopt preventive/educational, ‘whole career’, ‘whole person’, and ecological perspectives to empower athletes in their career and personal growth.

Finalizing our overview of the cultural discourses in career research and assistance, it is important to note that this analysis is restricted to the countries covered by the chapters in *ACAC*. Meanwhile, there are many other countries (e.g. in Africa or the Arab world) with well-developed sport and internationally recognized sporting achievements that so far either do not have career research or such research exists but is still unknown internationally.

### ***Lessons learned: career research, career assistance, and minding the gap***

Career researchers across cultures study athletes’ careers predominantly within the positivist and post-positivist epistemological paradigms using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Only a few existing career studies have utilized narrative and ethnographic methodological traditions (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Fuentes, Torregrosa, & Feliu, 2009; Henriksen, 2010), gravitating toward constructivist epistemologies.

As further analysis of career research in 19 countries shows, longitudinal studies are in the minority (Mayer, 1995; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignières, 2003; Torregrosa, Sanchez, & Cruz, 2003), as are intervention studies with an experimental design (e.g. Lavalley, 2005). Evaluation research of CAPs is scarce, although some examples relevant to Australia, the USA, the UK, and Spain, have been provided (Bobridge, Gordon, Walker, & Thompson, 2003; Mateos, Torregrosa, & Cruz, 2010; Shiina, Brewer, Petitpas, & Cornelius, 2003). Considering the epistemological grounds of these studies, we can conclude that all of them are conducted within positivist or post-positivist paradigms, confirming that career researchers so far have not dared to apply a constructivist paradigm in longitudinal or intervention studies.

In terms of theoretical frameworks used in current career research, researchers often adopt models from dominant discourses without a critical analysis of their applied fit in the intended socio-cultural context. Many studies are still culture-blind or not sufficiently contextualized and positioned. For some of the *ACAC* authors, writing their chapter was probably the first attempt at contextualizing their national career research and assistance.

When moving from career research to overviewing CAPs in 19 countries, our overall impression is that in spite of some commonalities in the content of CAPs in different

countries, career assistance is more contextualized and culturally informed than career research because practitioners are ‘closer’ than researchers to the athletes’ everyday life and lived culture. Meanwhile, working within one cultural context, practitioners too often focus solely on the content, the *what*, of the services, taking for granted culturally constituted methods of delivery, the *how*, of their services. Practitioners’ lack of cultural reflexivity can potentially hinder the applicability of career services to athletes from different cultures (see also Gill, 2007; Ryba, 2009; Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009).

The authors of *ACAC* clearly state that existence of CAPs is heavily dependent on the economic situation in the country. Some authors point out that because of the economic crisis in their respective countries (e.g. Greece, Spain), the availability of CAPs has been restricted or even canceled, leaving the athletes without opportunities for professional career support. In many countries only eligible athletes have access to the career services (e.g., four athlete categories in France, carded athletes in New Zealand and Ireland) and the rest of the athletic population is left on their own. Even when services are available, it appears that coaches encourage their athletes to take advantage of services with immediate effects (e.g. physiotherapy) rather than development-oriented services (e.g. career planning; Ryan & Thorpe, 2013).

To briefly sum up, current challenges for CAPs include financing, promotion, evaluation, accessibility, and contextual sensitivity. For example, more attention should be paid to marginalized groups of athletes (e.g. women, indigenous) as well as to transnational, ‘imported’ and immigrant athletes<sup>2</sup> by means of creating cultural transition/adaptation services.

## **Toward cultural praxis of athletes’ careers**

### ***Why this new challenge is needed***

A shift to a new paradigm is usually a reflection of dramatic changes in the relevant field and the researchers’/practitioners’ dissatisfaction with current paradigms that mismatch the new reality. Sport has become more demanding, complex, and multifaceted, simultaneously highlighting and uniting diversity. It is not surprising, then, that during the last decade or two there has been an increased awareness of cultural diversity in sports, and calls for a culturally informed sport psychology research and practice (e.g. Gill, 2007; Ryba, 2009; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010; Ryba et al., 2013; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). These calls have fallen on the fruitful ground of the contextually sensitive practices of career researchers and practitioners. Referring to the metaphor of waves used earlier to describe the evolution of cultural awareness in the career topic in sport psychology, we are currently riding mainly on the first two waves, the cross-cultural and the cultural mindset, and consider the third wave – *the cultural praxis of athletes’ careers* – as a set of emerging challenges for career researchers and service providers.

### ***What is cultural praxis of athletes’ careers?***

The new approach termed the *cultural praxis of athletes’ careers* (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013b) is articulated as a set of challenges for career researchers and practitioners to consider in relation to career theories, research, and assistance as permeated by culture

and united into cultural praxis. More specifically, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* implies several aspects as outlined below.

#### *Holistic perspective in career research and assistance*

First of all, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* implies a holistic perspective in career research and assistance. This means combining such perspectives as a whole career, a whole person, and a whole environment. While the first two perspectives are embraced by the holistic lifespan approach (Wylleman et al., 2004, 2011; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and well accepted in the field, the holistic ecological perspective (Henriksen, 2010) is still relatively new. Merging the holistic lifespan and the holistic ecological perspectives will lead us to a better understanding of athletes' career/transition experiences as constituted by relevant cultures and will also not only facilitate individual career assistance interventions but also stimulate ecological interventions aimed at optimizing athletes' career development environments (e.g. Henriksen, Larsen, & Christensen, in press).

#### *Contextual/cultural situatedness in career research and assistance*

Second, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* implies a reflexive situatedness of career projects in relevant socio-cultural and historical contexts. More specifically, the contextual/cultural situatedness should permeate all the phases in a project including: (1) researchers' awareness and reflexivity about how research questions originate from the context participants live in; (2) culturally specific definitions/meanings of key concepts; (3) culturally adapted theoretical frameworks or adopting general models as a basis for data collection with further transformation of the general model into the empirical model that is based on the empirical data and grasps specific features of the participants' careers (e.g., in a certain sport, country, ethnic group); (4) research instruments/applied strategies infused by meanings understandable for the participants; and (5) contextualized interpretation of the results and practical implications.

#### *Idiosyncratic approach in career research and assistance*

Third, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* values an idiosyncratic approach in studying diverse (and especially marginalized) athletic populations and draws attention to diversity in career patterns and trajectories which should be matched accordingly by the career services. As commented by Henriksen and Christensen (2013) in relation to applicability of the developmental model of sport participation (Côté et al., 2007) to Danish athletes' career development, 'the two pathways to elite performance ... were insufficient analytical categories, and ... specialization pathways are more related to individuals and more culturally situated than what we often acknowledge' (p. 80). Ryan and Thorpe (2013) emphasized the same in relation to career assistance: 'Arguably, individually tailored approaches would be far more beneficial than blanket service provision which fail to address athletes' personal sport histories (and futures)' (p. 158).

#### *Transnationalism and trans-disciplinary research*

Fourth, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* stimulates research on transnational athletes 'whose career development is negotiated in a sociocultural space across borders'

(Ryba & Stambulova, 2013, p. 11). Unlike the cross-cultural psychology with its comparative focus on athletes' careers and transitions in different countries (e.g. the European Perspectives on Athletic Retirement project), research on transnationalism adopts approaches from cultural psychology and cultural studies transcending the conventional dichotomies of a geographically 'rooted' culture and 'uprooted' immigration. The transnational framework deals with lived experiences of athletes who travel extensively internationally and almost constantly experience cultural transitions, adapting and re-adapting to new sites and conditions (Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012). The transnational lifestyle of elite athletes has an inevitable impact on their career development but also their identity formation, sense of home and belonging, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Without a deep understanding of transnationalism in athletes' careers, we will probably not be able to properly meet the needs of today's elite and professional athletes in career assistance services.

#### *Multicultural and transnational consulting and CAPs international networks*

Fifth, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* implies articulation of research and practice in a multicultural space of transnational networks and, therefore, encourages international cooperation between CAPs. Global mobility of athletes and coaches requires a new type of cooperation between sport psychology practitioners. Transnational sporting migrants should be able to access a culturally competent service provider in the 'host' country while a possibility to communicate with the clients' 'home'-based career consultants via the international professional network would facilitate the delivery of a collaborative service provision.

Today athletes' support teams are often multicultural, including coaches and experts from different countries. This trend is likely to become even more visible in the future. Therefore, CAPs international networks should be encouraged, and more attention should be paid to developing multicultural competencies of sport psychology practitioners, such as cultural reflexivity, understanding of the client's worldview, and the culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Ryba, 2009; Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009).

#### *Participatory action research*

Sixth, *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* encourages participatory action research which facilitates close collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and athlete-participants (Schinke et al., 2006, 2010). Participatory action projects involve a research-intervention-research cycle, that is, they consist of: (1) an exploration of the phenomenon (e.g. a particular career transition in a certain athletic population); (2) development of an intervention program based on the recommendations derived from the explorative study; and (3) evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention program by rigorous and culturally relevant research methods followed by possible changes in the intervention program. Petitpas, Van Raalte, and Brewer (2013) stated:

Future investigations should include component analyses and process analyses. Component analyses enable researchers to determine the extent to which additions or subtractions to an intervention contribute to the intervention's effectiveness. ... Process analyses allow for an examination of the degree to which changes in theoretically meaningful constructs are predictive of intervention outcomes. Such analyses could help researchers to determine the

mechanisms by which career assistance programs for athletes are effective, and to determine at what point, for what sports, in which national and/or cultural groups such programs could be most effectively implemented. (p. 232)

We would also like to add that such analyses should be culturally informed and use criteria valued in the culture(s) involved (see also Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009).

The participatory action research might well advocate changing sport policies in respective countries. For example, Ryan and Thorpe (2013) criticize the current practice of career assistance in New Zealand which directly or indirectly stimulates athletes to focus exclusively on their sport: ‘... If the New Zealand Academy of Sport is truly committed to the stated goal of promoting career development programs that adopt a holistic approach toward athlete development, then major changes are required within the culture of elite sport in New Zealand’ (pp. 156–157).

To briefly sum up, the approach we have coined *cultural praxis of athletes’ careers* considers career theories, research, and assistance as interwoven and permeated by culture. This approach supports cultural diversity and stimulates sport psychologists to deal with issues of marginalization, representation, and social justice through theory, research, and applied work.

### ***How to implement cultural praxis of athletes’ careers***

As the first step in implementation of *the cultural praxis of athletes’ careers* paradigm, we would like to encourage career researchers’ and practitioners’ reflexivity by means of *positioning* their research and applied projects in terms of the following aspects.

First of all, a project idea needs to be meaningfully positioned in a relevant socio-cultural and historically specific context. This means that researchers/practitioners should be aware of cultural constitution of the project participants and their own attitudes and behaviors in order to account for cultural and/or historical influences in athletes’ career development in particular contexts. *The cultural praxis of athletes’ careers* also emphasizes power operating on and through marginalized sporting bodies (e.g. women, indigenous athletes) advocating for understanding the role of socio-cultural difference in athlete career development and assistance.

Second, the project should be situated within a scientific discipline (e.g. sport psychology) or in the interdisciplinary space (e.g. an integration of psychological, sociological, and managerial approaches) to match the research problem. The cultural praxis paradigm stimulates researchers to consider inter/trans-disciplinary approaches because athletes’ lived experiences are always multifaceted and cannot be fully grasped by just one perspective.

Third, the project should be theoretically and methodologically positioned. The researchers should be clear about the paradigms and approaches/perspectives they use and show that their project is methodologically congruent (i.e., having the purposes, theoretical frameworks, methods of data collection, and interpretation interconnected; see Creswell, 2007) and culturally congruent (i.e., incorporating culturally relevant definitions of key concepts, theoretical frameworks, methods, and procedures of data collection and interpretation).

Fourth, advocating for blending theoretical and practical work together in praxis, we suggest positioning the project within applied discourses in sport psychology (e.g. performance enhancement, career assistance, health and wellbeing) and beyond (e.g. vocational psychology, counseling psychology) in terms of *what* theoretical perspectives and applied

strategies are used, *how*, and *why*. The projects might differ in terms of their applicability. Nevertheless, any project should be linked to relevant practice to ensure that empirical data and theory are informed by practice while, at the same time, contributing to a theory/research-driven practice (Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, 2012).

Fifth, the researchers should position themselves in the project and reflect on how their backgrounds and experiences influence development of the project in terms of its objectives, design, implementation, and interpretation of results obtained (Schinke et al., 2012).

Moving further from the first step in implementing *the cultural praxis of athletes' careers* (i.e., positioning of any project, e.g. cross-cultural or cultural), the next challenge is to encourage cultural praxis projects *per se* in which a research program is planned as part of applied work, and applied work is well informed by research data. Cultural praxis researchers are also encouraged to search '... for a sharable language with participants ... facilitating their reflections, insights, and solutions related to the project', and to develop/use 'theories as heuristic and contextualized constructions facilitating the adaptation of evidence-based intervention strategies to the participants' cultural characteristics and relevant contexts' (Ryba et al., 2013, p. 138).

### Conclusion and suggestions for future reviews

Each specific area of research and practice develops not only through adding new empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, and attracting more clients, but also by means of negotiating terminology, beliefs, and principles underlying research and professional practice. In this dialectical process, review papers that look back to ensure a progression forward play an important role. By critically engaging with existing scholarship, identifying gaps and inconsistencies, and offering a provisional synthesis of the body of knowledge, review papers can highlight what terms and concepts need to be further developed and/or negotiated within the field. For example, *ACAC* clearly showed that the emerging ways of being an athlete in the globalized sphere of sports are not always addressed by current career models. Terms such as international athletes, transnational athletes, imported athletes, and immigrant athletes are often used interchangeably, lacking conceptual clarity and the nuanced understanding of the multidimensionality of the phenomena. While Ryba and Stambulova (2013) offer a conceptualization of transnational athletes, more work is needed to advance definitions and relevant theoretical frameworks that would guide further research and applied work.

Based on our critical analysis of the three data sources comprising the present review, we also identified a few gaps for future review papers to address. First, reviewing the within-career transition research would be helpful to further develop within-career transition studies in a similar way to how review papers on athletic retirement (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001) stimulated awareness of its importance and relevant research (see also Park et al., 2013b). Second, future reviews of career assistance around the world could consider CAPs in terms of their relevance to the socio-cultural contexts they are developed in. The more complementary perspectives we find to review the career topic, the more we approach an understanding of what athletes' careers are, how they depend on the contexts the athletes belong to, and how we can help athletes to optimize their career development in sport and life.

## Notes

1. While we do not equate tradition with discourse, the nuanced discussion is beyond the scope of this article. Our usage of these two notions refers to the historically constructed bodies of knowledge that include common-sense assumptions, values, and belief systems that social groups share and which provide people with common grounds to understand each other. We furthermore locate 'discourse' within career research and assistance, in the intellectual and socio-cultural environment of which terms and everyday practices can acquire meaning and be defined.
2. There is no conceptual clarity in how these terms are used in the sport psychology literature. We briefly address this point later in the article.

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