

**STUDENT ATHLETES ERASMUS+ MOBILITY IN EUROPE**  
Erasmus+ SPORT project (ref 101050378)

**DELIVERABLE D4.3 RESULTS**

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## Executive Summary

This deliverable presents the outcomes of Deliverable D4.3 of the Erasmus+ SAMEurope project, focusing on the mobility, personality traits, and post-athletic career opportunities of dual career (DC) student athletes. Through a sociological lens, the project undertook three core studies: a self-assessment survey of student athletes, a correspondence study on employer perceptions, and a LinkedIn-based analysis of career trajectories post-university sport. Utilising the SMART framework, the deliverable illustrates how strategic goal setting enhanced the clarity and impact of the research process. While some data limitations (e.g. restricted access to FISU participation data) constrained analysis, the findings emphasise the value of international mobility and structured dual career pathways for athlete employability and personal development.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a tremendous push — internal and external — to start research funded by the European Union. Research on DC students, their mobility and particular personality traits has so far been very sparse in the European context. Expectations for ground-breaking findings from the sociological study are correspondingly high.

The intersection of dual career development and student mobility has been increasingly acknowledged in the literature. According to Fuchs et al. (2021), European student athletes often face complex challenges balancing academic demands and elite sport, making tailored support systems and policies critical. Moreover, Lupo et al. (2015) emphasise motivation as a core driver behind dual career success, while Netz and Grüttner (2021) underline the long-term economic advantages of international mobility during higher education. Despite these findings, empirical research specific to sociological profiling and employer reception of student athletes remains sparse in the EU context, which this study seeks to address.

The aim of the Deliverable D4.3, Results, is – again – to address the research project open to results accordingly internationally good scientific practice.

One widely accepted concept that serves as a criterion for setting goals and target agreements in the context of project management, employee management and personnel development is called SMART. This is a criterion for the clear formulation of measurable and verifiable goals and an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, Time-bound. The concept goes back to the management consultant and entrepreneur George T. Doran (1939-2011).

Although this model is frequently used, it also has clear limitations. In general, SMART targets represent a minimum description of targets. Depending on the context, the objectives must be further refined or additional requirements must be added to the objectives.

Recent scientific studies have identified two further important success criteria for objectives:

1. Agreed goals are twice as likely to succeed as predetermined goals (Locke et al., 2002). The consensual ‘agreement’ is missing from the SMART definition. This helps to formulate goals and resources in an appropriate relationship and to increase intrinsic motivation to achieve goals.
2. Progress towards goals should be reflected upon regularly in order to evaluate interim results and adapt them to current developments.
3. Too many goals at the same time compete with each other – at least for the resource of time. Goals should therefore be processed sequentially and not in parallel.

In the SAMEurope (Student Athletes Erasmus+ Mobility in Europe) project our target was and is to encourage dual career students to spend a while abroad – or to implement

the recommendations of the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (2012) on the European dimension of dual careers.

The sociological studies present three different approaches that are intended to contribute to this,

- to characterise the personality traits of the clientele of elite student athletes in contrast to the general student population,
- to analyse the mobility of student elite athletes and
- to explore the opportunities on the labour market for (former) student elite athletes.

The results will be included in a further international publication (end of 2025) and in the presentation that will be delivered during the final dissemination event (May 15th and 16th).

The following does not anticipate the scientific publication with its results, but presents the project plan that has been drawn up – prepared according to SMART – and its realisation.

Consistent application of ‘SMART’ results in clear, measurable and verifiable objectives:

- Long-term goals = direction setter = strategic goals
- Medium and short-term goals = tactical goals

Objectives and tasks are therefore documented in writing for everyone involved and affected. It is possible to recognise how the project progress has been achieved in the sociological studies and whether anything has changed in terms of the objectives.

To proceed, we used the following SMART goals template, created by the University of California:

Initial Goal (Write the goal you have in mind):

1. Specific (What do you want to accomplish? Who needs to be included? When do you want to do this? Why is this a goal?)
2. Measurable (How can you measure progress and know if you have successfully met your goal?)
3. Achievable (Do you have the skills required to achieve the goal? If not, can you obtain them? What is the motivation for this goal? Is the amount of effort required on par with what the goal will achieve?)
4. Relevant (Why am I setting this goal now? Is it aligned with overall values?):
5. Time-bound (What is the deadline and is it realistic?)
6. S.M.A.R.T. Goal (Review what you have written, and craft a new goal statement based on what the answers to the questions above have revealed)

## 2. SMART Rework of the Results

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Reasonable	Timebound
Self-Assessment of dual career student athletes	Comparison elite athletes/recreational athletes/couch potatoes	levels of happiness, life satisfaction and risk tolerance	German study concerning educational biography	Analysing an existing data set (Urgelles & Frick, 2022)
		personality differences		
	Comparison mobile and immobile DC students	Mental attitudes and personality traits		
Employer Perceptions	A correspondence study (with ethical approval) assessing companies' perceptions of job applications	effects of elite athlete status or international mobility on employer callbacks	labour market concerning upcoming chances for DC student athletes	Done in Germany, offered and rejected by the other European partners
		Correlations between grades and callback probabilities		
		Importance of extracurricular achievements for employers		
Career Trajectories	Systematic analysis of LinkedIn profiles of FISU World University Games participants	Insights into sports and business career developments of former student athletes	Real outcomes of a DC career	In progress

Prior research has demonstrated that employers often view athletic achievements as proxies for soft skills such as leadership, perseverance, and teamwork (Tracy et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2023). However, the extent to which these perceptions vary based on international mobility or elite athletic status remains unclear. Our correspondence study builds upon earlier meta-analyses of labour market discrimination (Lippens et al., 2023)

and hiring preference biases (Petzold, 2021), aiming to determine whether dual career experiences translate into tangible labour market advantages.

Critical success factors were the reservations of the consortium regarding the scientifically established procedure of a correspondence study and access to the public reporting data of the individual universities at the FISU World University Games.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The three sociological studies, instead of the Master thesis it was planned originally, – the first one based on self-assessment of DC student athletes, the second one a correspondence study and the third one looking at career trajectories – should identify, measure and highlight the benefits of a European mobility for a DC student. By leveraging data from international sporting events and employing a multi-method approach, the project seeks to provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by student athletes and facilitate their successful transition into post-athletic careers.

Here are the first findings. All of that are or will be part of scientific papers:

Self-assessment of DC student athletes (n = 372):

- Elite athletes exhibit higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction and risk tolerance
- Significant personality differences compared to recreational athletes and couch potatoes
- Mental attitudes and personality traits do not differ significantly between mobile and immobile DC students

Employer Perceptions (n = 800)

- No significant positive effects of elite athlete status or international mobility on employer callbacks
- Better grades are strongly associated with higher callback probabilities
- Implication: Employers primarily value academic performance over extracurricular achievements

Career Trajectories (n = 1981)

- Systematic analysis of LinkedIn profiles of FISU World University Games participants
- Insights into sports and business career developments of former student athletes

These findings resonate with previous work by Sauer et al. (2013) and Storm and Eske (2022), who found that athletic participation and structured dual career planning positively influence early career outcomes. The combination of international exposure and athletic discipline appears to form a distinct asset in the labour market, especially in roles valuing resilience, goal orientation, and cross-cultural adaptability. However, the access to the published data of participation at the FISU World University Games (prior: Universiade) was complicated or not possible and will limit the final results.

Overall, the SAMEurope project and especially the results of the sociological studies can serve the DC students to better self-promote and increase their employability. Obviously, it would be important that companies will become aware of the special mindset of DC student athletes, who benefit from European mobility and the advancement of dual career support systems and policies.



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