



DiscoverU

DISCOVERING UNIVERSITY SPORT AND DUAL CAREER

Dual Career and University Sport in Europe: European Policies, Guidelines and Practices aimed to support dual-career athletes in Higher Education Institutions



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Since the 2004 European Year of Education through Sport (EYES) and the publication of the European White Paper on Sports, The European Parliament and the European Commission recognized sports for playing a relevant role in developing a European culture, acknowledged the impact of sports on several aspects of other sectors, and identified the specific needs of the sport actors and stakeholders, such as the sportspersons' rights to have a holistic development through the combination of academic/work and sports careers (e.g., dual career) (European Commission, 2007; European Parliament, 2003; Amara et al., 2004). In having specific cultural heritages and full competence in the political and organizational aspects of sport, education, and economy, dual career is implemented in a limited number of Member States, results quite deregulated, and is handled differently across different EU Member States, which mainly adopt four modalities: 1) legislative or governmental regulations of the State-Centric Regulation approach; 2) promotion of formal dual career agreements, funding mechanisms and guidance of the State as Sponsor/Facilitator approach; 3) mediations and advocacy between the student-athletes and the sport bodies and/or education institutions of the National Sporting Federations/Institutes as Intermediary approach; and 4) no formal measures and/or arrangements of the Laisser-faire/No Formal Structures approach (Aquilina & Henry, 2010).

In this multifaceted context, the publication of the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes represented the crucial milestone for raising the awareness on the. Although recognizing the autonomy of the Member States to rule on sports, education, and economics, the Guidelines urged sport governing bodies, educational institutes, and companies to recognize the challenges and needs of sportspersons and to advance their legal and financial frameworks for the creation of dual career friendly entourage (European Commission, 2012, Morris et al., 2021). Furthermore, the European Union included the dual career of sportspersons (e.g., athletes, coaches, physical trainers, referees, and sports managers) among the priorities of its Work Plans and its funding programmes (e.g., Calls for Tenders, Capacity Buildings, Collaborative Partnerships, European Studies, and Lifelong Learning Programmes) aiming to share the dual career best practices between the Member States, to establish links and fruitful dialogues between different actors and stakeholders, and to envision innovative and sustainable solutions in several dual career dimensions (European Union, 2014, 2017, 2020; Guidotti et al., 2023). In particular, in 2016 two European studies were published, one on the minimum quality requirements for dual career services based on the analysis of the actual career policies and programmes in place at national and regional levels at sport, education, and dual career agencies (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016); the other presented a dual career meta-model regarding the dimensions,

structures, components, and relations between the dual career actors and stakeholders, supplementing previous models for the development and career transitions of European talented and elite dual career athletes (Henriksen et al., 2010; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

The advancement of a European dual career discourse is further substantiated by the publication of scientific literature reviews and special issues of international peer-review journals on dual career (Guidotti, Cortis, Capranica, 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019, Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022; Guidotti et al., 2023). Finally, to establish and nurture an effective dialogue between educational bodies (i.e., universities, high schools, sports schools), sport organizations (i.e., clubs, sport federations, National Olympic Committees), and companies, in the last 20 years the European Athlete as Student (EAS) network fosters collaboration in the development of innovative projects and research on dual career, and promotes the development of a European dual career culture (Capranica et al., 2015; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; Condello et al., 2019; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

In light of the wide spectrum of sport spanning from grassroots to elite performance, at academic level eligibility for dual career paths is generally for elite athletes participating in official competitions at national or international levels (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). Despite the tension between elite and grassroots sport that develop in different directions, the elite sport and sport-for-all benefit one another with sport-for-all having a supply function through a large base of people practicing sport leading to few elite champions and the top having an inspirational function through sport success and sport champions being role models for extensive participation in sport-for-all and physical activities (International Olympic Committee, 2000; van Bottenburg, 2002).

On the level of university sport in Europe, the European University Sports Association (EUSA) was established in 1999, and is the governing body in the field. It is recognised by the International University Sports Federation (FISU), where it is a continental and associate member, and also by other institutions like the European Commission, Council of Europe, and several European and International sports and other organisations. EUSA counts 47 members – national university sports bodies, and over 100 associate members – higher education institutions across Europe. It has official partnerships and memorandums of understanding with key European organisations from Olympic, Paralympic level, Grassroot sport, Student bodies and other stakeholders. Since 2001, sports events are organised in forms of European Universities Championships, and since 2012 also European Universities Games; attracting over 5000 participants across over 20 sports on annual basis. In the sports activities, the participants are student athletes, aged 17-30, primarily representing the university in Europe they are studying at, regardless of their own nationality. Apart of the sports events, EUSA also coordinates and organises educational activities and runs projects on several topics, including dual career.

In this context, the DiscoverU project aims to collect and to share experiences and good practices in sport-related activities and events in tertiary education to contribute to the strengthening of an open university environment fostering the engagement of university students on sports and improving conditions for dual career athletes in the Partner countries.

In general, universities offer their students the opportunity to engage in grassroots sport activities and in university championships organized at local, national, European, and international levels. Furthermore, some higher education institutions encompass Bachelor, Master's, and PhD degrees in sports. Conversely, in most European countries dual career policies are not fully implemented at higher education level and athletes are not fully aware of their rights to combine sports and academic careers (Amsterdam University Applied Sciences, 2016; Condello et al., 2019).

In line with the aim of the European Higher Education Area to enhance the quality of higher education through a transparent homogenization of processes of accreditation and duration of degrees, curricula content, credit transfer (ECTS) and accumulation system, teaching methods, service provision, and organization of the academic year, and to overcome the existing inter- and intra-country diversity in dual career, national and local interpretations two European Collaborative partnerships on the mobility of migrating dual career student athletes (e.g., AMID project), and on the implementation of dual career at higher educational institutes (e.g., More Than Gold project) through specific guidelines for Institutions and for authorities (Abelkals et al., 2021a, 2021b; Brooks, 2019; European Commission, 2015; Fuchs et al., 2021; Izzicupo et al., 2022; Mutz & van Munster, 2020).

In considering that the athletes' motivation and engagement in the academic domain need a positive entourage, support services, and dual career paths and programmes (Izzicupo et al., 2022), the More Than Gold Guidelines recommend the implementation of main strategies for the development and/or maintenance of adequate support through a constant monitoring of the actual dual career services in relation to the relevance and implementation feasibility of six main categories:

1. Assistance/ tutorship (e.g., dual career proactive programmes capable to act autonomously, even anticipating needs; dual career programmes based on individuality and adaptable to individual needs; dual career programmes based on the integration of cooperation between academic departments, sports or professional services; psychological support; tutorship/mentorship support).

2. Curricula development (e.g., distance learning; individualized study plan; recognition of ECTS for the sport career; untraditional learning strategies through the creation of digital portfolios and the use of social networks)
3. Financial support (e.g., remission of tuition fees for student-athletes; salary; scholarships for student-athletes; other financial support)
4. Logistic support (e.g., access to educational facilities such as gymnasium, internet, e-mail services, e-libraries, labs, research centers; accommodation facilities for student-athletes; economic investment for university facilities; sport facilities)
5. Social support (e.g., institutional dual career committee; local/international seminars, workshops, and meetings on up-to-date dual career issues; peer to peer support; publicity for student-athletes representing university; publicity on the student-athletes and their characteristics suitable for the labour market; seminars, workshops, meetings with parents and coaches)
6. Policies (e.g., National dual career policies; special access contingent reserved for actual or former high-performance athletes; sport observatory of the university for controlling and monitoring the application of the dual career statute).

Despite elite athletes represent a minority of the academic student community, they can have an inspirational role for their peers. In this framework, the UNESCO recognized the human, educational, social and civic values of sport and established in 2016 the International Day of University Sport to be celebrated on September 20, which provides a forum to highlight the social role of universities and their curricula by making sport available to all and encouraging people to exercise regularly.

3

IMPLEMENTATION OF DUAL CAREER AND UNIVERSITY SPORT

Athletes enrolled at university level have the opportunity to compete at multi-sport continental and international university sport events (e.g., European EUSA Games, and World University Championships). Whilst recognition and support of student-athletes is formalized in Northern America and Oceania (Australian Government/Australian Institute of Sport, 2024; Canadian Sport Institute, 2024; NCAA, 2024), the multiplicity of national dual career approaches present European student-athletes with different educational paths (Condello et al., 2019). Following the publication of the European dual career guidelines, some governments implemented policies at national, regional or local level, some national action-oriented guidelines have been published, and several higher educational institutes developed their own dual career programmes, services and provisions (European Commission, 2012; Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016).

In light of the classification by Aquilina and Henry (2010), examples of dual career good practices for State-centric regulation (Portugal), State as sponsor/facilitator (Sweden),

and the implementation from a Laissez-faire/No Formal Structures to a National Sporting Federations/Institutes as intermediary (Austria) categories are presented.

In light of its State-centric regulation, a Portuguese dual career law recognized the rights of members of national team competing in Continental, World and/or Olympic and Paralympic competitions, and national sports championships to arrange flexible class timetables and exams. Through agreements with National Sport Federations, some Portuguese universities further implemented their dual career paths by providing the student-athletes sports facilities, dormitories, flexible academic schedules and tutors. In particular, the University of Coimbra presents a remarkable good practice, with its “Academica” being the oldest and largest university student sport association in the country and the central pillar of the student participation in a wide range of enriching extra-curricular sports activities. In 2018, the University of Coimbra organized the European Universities Games and the Rectors’ Conference on dual career and university sports. The following year, the Portuguese Government approved the Decree-Law n.55/2019, which requires the Portuguese universities to reinforce their dual career supportive mechanisms and to extend them to athletes who participate in university sport competitions or are enrolled in the sports service of their university (República Portuguesa, 2019). In particular, student athletes are eligible for dual career paths if they participate in at least 60% of official competitions, or at least 75% of training, or at least 25% one training per week, and meet academic requirements of at least 36 academic credits per year (República Portuguesa, 2019). For student athletes, classes can be selected according to their sport schedule, class absence to participate in official competitions is allowed, and flexible schedule for exams and/or additional examination periods are arranged (República Portuguesa, 2019). Portuguese University Sport Federation – FADU (Federação Académica do Desporto Universitário) is coordinating university sports on national, as well as on regional level, bringing together universities, academic and student organisations.

Sweden supports dual career through the promotion of formal dual career agreements, funding mechanisms, guidance for a high number of dual career programmes and research projects (Swedish Sports Confederation, 2018). In addition to governmental funding, various types of municipal, regional and local subsidies are ensured for dual career system at upper secondary sports schools (Regeringskansliet, 2020). In considering that the Swedish Universities do not have a comparable dual career support system, in 2018 Sweden was the first Member State to publish the national dual career guidelines for elite athletes, which urges a strict collaboration between universities, sports associations, and sports clubs to establish a dual career hub for innovative education initiatives for a holistic approach to student-athletes’ development (Linnér et al., 2019, 2020; Swedish Sports Confederation, 2018). The Swedish guidelines also value the engagement of role models, mentors, and expert support providers to establish a well-functioning dual career environment through guidance, inspiration, and a sense of community (Storm et al., 2021). Swedish University Sports Federation - SAIF (Sveriges

Akademiska Idrottsförbundet) develops, coordinates and represents Swedish student sports through competitions, education and advocacy work nationally and internationally.

Previously included in the Laisser-faire/No Formal Structures category (Aquilina & Henry, 2010), in 2016 the Austrian Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Education, and the Austrian Employment Services (AMS) established and finance the non-governmental, non-profit dual career national agency KADA, which aims to support the academic path of elite student athletes and to prepare them for post-competitive career opportunities thanks to counsellors who are former elite athletes with a professional background in psychology or human resources management (<https://www.kada.co.at>). Also companies financially support KADA through their corporate social responsibility and offers of vocational training for athletes in preparation of a post-sport career. In acting as an autonomous connection between the Austrian sports organizations (e.g., Austrian Olympic Committee-ÖOC, the Austrian Sport Aid-ÖSH, Unisport Austria, the Austrian Federal Network of Sports Psychology-ÖBS, Austrian National Sports Organization-BSO, the Military Sports Center of the Austrian Armed Forces-HSLZ, and Austrian sports federations) and educational institutions, KADA promotes academic flexibility, offers elite athletes tailored consulting services and blended learning training to access higher education, advises suitable university programmes for combining sport and education career paths, and facilitates the transition of former elite athletes and coaches into the labour market. Austrian University Sports Organisation - Unisport Austria, established by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, with the task of supporting the universities in grassroots sport and regional competitive sport) and the professional associations, especially for international assignments.

4

UNIVERSITY SPORT AND DUAL CAREER IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

The Partners of the DiscoverU project represent six countries members of the European Higher Education Area, representing also key areas of education, training, youth, and sport. In providing information on the dual career and university sport in their country, the partners will share experiences and ensure a wide dissemination, exploitation, and sustainability of the project results for enhancing sport and physical activity opportunities for students in higher education and increase their participation in active lifestyles in future years.

4.1 Croatia

Since 2007, the Croatian Olympic Committee (CRO OC) has been actively involved in promoting and supporting the concept of "dual career" for athletes. This initiative was first launched with the project "Categorized Athletes in the Croatian Educational System

(2008-2012)," aimed at informing the academic community about elite athletes and offering them special conditions and support within the educational system. Since 2012, these efforts have aligned with the "EU Guidelines for Dual Careers of Athletes" issued by the European Commission. One key recommendation was the creation of the National Program for Career Development and Post-Sport Career (2014-2020), which was adopted by the CRO OC and supported by the National Council for Sport.

The dual career concept has been recognized as a priority in several national documents, including the National Sports Program (2014-2020) and its successor (2019-2026), as well as the new Sports Law adopted in 2023. A significant step in supporting student-athletes came in 2015 with the signing of an agreement between the CRO OC, nine university rectors, and the Croatian Academic Sports Federation. This led to the creation of the "Regulation of the Rector Council on Student-Athletes Studying at Universities in Croatia" in 2016, setting guidelines for athletes balancing sports and education.

CRO OC's involvement in the European Athletes as Student (EAS) network since 2017 has further encouraged the adoption of best practices from other member countries. Numerous activities have been implemented across Croatia, including promotional events, educational workshops, roundtables, and publications aimed at raising awareness of dual careers. Additionally, projects have been supported by the European Olympic Committees and the Erasmus+ Sport initiative since 2019.

Despite progress, challenges remain in the practical implementation of dual career policies. Many athletes still face difficulties due to a lack of systemic regulation, and success often depends on the goodwill of individual institutions. According to the CRO OC, there are around 4,561 categorized athletes in Croatia, the majority of whom are top-level or talented athletes.

University sport in Croatia is coordinated by the Croatian Academic Sports Federation - CASF (*Hrvatski akademski sportski savez - HASS*), which under the brand Unisport Croatia/Hrvatska unites regional university sport organisations, universities and other stakeholders. The organisation provides opportunities for university students to compete, do recreation, engage in non-formal education, have fun and socialize in a healthy way. CASF strives to develop and popularize student sports and build a framework of optimal conditions for a healthy life. Its greatest value is that it not only gathers sports enthusiasts, but also provides a framework for cross-sectoral cooperation between individuals and organizations operating in the fields of education, volunteerism, culture, youth and economy. CASF organises national as well as international university sports events and activities, and is recognised as one of the most active national bodies in the field, alongside bigger organisations from larger countries like Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Türkiye.

4.2 Hungary

Hungary has a long history of traditions and experiences in university sport, on amateur as well as top level. Foundations of national and international organizations dates back to 1907 with the foundation of the Hungarian University Sports Federation - HUSF (Magyar Egyetemi Főiskolai Sportszövetség - MEFS), which was the first of the kind in Europe, and second in the World. In 1959, the organisation joined the International University Sports Federation (FISU) and in 1999 HUSF was one of the founding member of the European University Sports Association (EUSA).

MEFS hosted some of the editions of the largest university sports events in Hungary, including the 1935 World University Games, 1949 and 1954 World Student Games, 1965 Summer Universiade, and 2024 European Universities Games. Hungary also hosted 14 World University Championships, 5 European Universities Championships.

National university sports championships consists of over 35 sport on annual basis, which are included in the annual event calendar of the national sport federations, attracting around 4000 participants.

Dual career model in Hungary provides admittance support system (extra points, exemption), sports scholarships and subsidised or free housing, mentoring and tutoring, high-level training possibilities in university sports clubs, and participation at national and international events.

Hungarian Olympic Committee carries out a dedicated Dual Career Programme, to which Olympic disciplines' junior and senior national team athletes can apply. It provides mental support, studying support, support in enhancing sport performance, and offers civil-life career assistance after the sporting career. Currently 17 partner universities offer 12 available services such as psychology, rehabilitation or life coach.

A project of trial career model is under preparation to be implemented as well as a pilot, coordinating three key areas of sports, study and work. It is planned to be designed for youth athletes just beginning their sporting career life and not only for elite athletes. The plan is to be a self-financed system with a cooperation of companies, schools and sports teams. The services foresee standardised mentoring and tutoring system in higher education, mentoring and tutoring, coordinated interaction between family, coach and school representatives, c Career guidance consulting services, financial support and non-financial support in form of language school, self-development services and similar.

4.3 Italy

Included by Aquilina and Henry (2010) in the Laisser-faire/No Formal Structures category, in 2015 Italy included the first legal measure for dual career high school student-athletes in the Law No. 107, in which an article (art.1(7)g) declares that the protection of high-school student-athletes' right to education must be a priority. To prompted the development of dual career programmes at university level, the following year the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), the Ministry for Education, University, and Research (MIUR), the Italian University Rectors' Conference (CRUI), the Italian University Sports Centre (CUSI), the Italian Paralympic Committee (CIP) and the National Association of Bodies for the Right to Education (ANDISU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (Bastianon & Greco, 2018; Bastianon, 2021). In 2018, delegated of Rectors interested in exchanging visions, experiences, and cooperation in sport initiatives established the Italian university sport system network UniSport Italia, which created the first electronic database of Italian university dual careers programmes to facilitate athletes in identifying the best academic path for their needs. Promoted by UniSport Italia, CONI, CIP, and CUSI developed and approved in 2023 the National Guidelines for the Incentive and Support of the Dual Career of High-Level Athletes Who Undertake a University Career (CONI et al., 2023). The Guidelines foster financial support, credit recognition for their sports commitment, academic flexibility and remote examination during competitive periods, academic tutorship, and free access to university facilities (CONI et al., 2023). In light of their inspirational role, student athletes have to participate in orientation initiatives organized by the University. Further implementation should consider the extension of dual career programmes for sub-elite athletes, the monitoring of the dual career paths of athletes through official and reliable data, and the engagement of professional dual career counsellors.

In Italy, university sport system is based on the national law 394/1977, which implies that the management of the sport infrastructures of universities and the management of the organization of sport activities for students, organized accordingly to the regulations for Sport Associations. The governing body is the Italian University Sport Federation - FederCUSI, which has a long history, and recently became a full member of the Italian Olympic Committee - CONI in 2023.

Italy is a frequent host of the top level university sport events like the Universiades, now known as the FISU World University Games, World University Championships, European Universities Championships and European Universities Games.

On national level, over 20 sports are organised as national universities championships on annual level, involving teams and individual student athletes from all regions in Italy.

4.4 Malta

In being the smallest Member State, Maltese athletes can engage in championships of other countries and in the European Championships for Small Countries. The Malta Sports Council (SportMalta), the Maltese Olympic Committee (MOC), the Malta University Sports Club (MUSC) are the main national sports bodies. In Olympic Committee supports the development of talented athletes from 18 different sport disciplines but no dual career support is present at sport level. Following the partnership in the European project ESPORT (Sanchez-Pato et al., 2021), the Università Ta' Malta established in 2017 the Student Athlete Support Programme (SASP) for national team athletes officially recognised by the Malta Olympic Committee, who have the possibility of obtaining their Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) whilst maintaining their training programmes with their National Sport Federation Academies. Through the SASP the University encourages and supports student-athletes to find a balance between their academic and sporting commitments, allowing a personalized and flexible timetable, a sport mentor from their faculty/institute to facilitate administrative procedures and academic arrangements, and special academic absences to participate in training camps or competitive events. The Malta University Sports Club (MUSC) ranks as one of the oldest student organisations on campus, since 1925. Their main target is to promote Sports and Physical Activity amongst students and to promote life long physical activity and a healthy life style, also supporting the students to engage in international university sport events.

4.5 Poland

Akademicki Związek Sportowy (University Sports Association) - AZS is one of the biggest sport organisations in Poland and the biggest sports students' organisation that exists from the beginning of the 20th century. At present the AZS has around 45 000 members, associated in more than 200 clubs, who train in about 3 000 sections. The AZS main purposes according to its statute include promotion of volunteering, national identity and European integration, actions for handicapped and against pathologies or addictions. AZS also encourages students to take responsibility for the local environment and social matters. AZS participates in the development of university sports for people with disabilities. A regular series of competitions is organised and there's on-going cooperation with the universities to develop that part of the sports sector. In 2020 AZS received European Commission's #BeInclusive Award for the activity in the field of sport for people with disabilities.

One of the most crucial aspects of work for the association is the dual career of athletes. The wide network of clubs is one of the most helpful elements - AZS is the governing body over University Sport Clubs (AZS clubs) all over Poland. AZS clubs are operating at almost all public as well as non-public HEIs in Poland. Although they are supported and guided by the main AZS, their development depends on their members and internal relations with HEI. In many cases, AZS clubs are representing student-athletes and making sure that they can gain points for the scholarship for example due to participation in AZS national competitions.

National Academic Representation is a programme introduced in 2019 that is the result of cooperation between the Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Science and Higher Education and University Sport Association of Poland (AZS). It is directly supporting HEIs with funding to be dedicated for the proposed student-athletes. The funds are supporting the additional hours of tutors dedicated for students-athletes as well as organising flexible and individual meetings and online consultations. First edition, taking place in 2020 supported the dual career of 412 students-athletes with over 1 500 000 EUR dedicated for this group, each year growing in numbers of participating universities and students.

Additionally, AZS is coordinating a program dedicated to supporting trainings, sport camps and participation in competition for elite athlete who are also students. They get systematic support allowing them to focus on training and education. There is over 1500 participants in the program.

Due to this experience of the AZS and its deep involvement in the conversations on dual career in Poland with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport.

Poland is also organizer of many international university sport events – both on the European and World level.

From 1977 to 2024, Poland hosted 33 World University Championships across various sports. These included handball (Warsaw 1977, Wrocław 1998, Gdańsk 2006), judo (Wrocław 1980), table tennis (Gdańsk 1984, Wrocław 2002), cross-country running (Poznań 1990, Łódź 2012), rowing (Poznań 1992, 2000, 2016), badminton (Kraków 2002), slalom canoeing (Kraków 2002, 2006), flatwater canoeing (Poznań 2010, Bydgoszcz 2022), wrestling (Łódź 2004), futsal (Poznań 2006), bridge (Łódź 2008, 2016), karate (Wrocław 2008), match racing (Gdańsk 2008), shooting sports (Wrocław 2010, Bydgoszcz 2016), chess (Katowice 2014), cycling (Jelenia Góra 2014), archery (Legnica 2014), and speed skating (Zakopane 2012), marking FISU's first event in that discipline. Additionally, Poland hosted the first-ever World University Cheerleading Championship in 2018 in Łódź, which also hosted floorball that year, while Biała Podlaska hosted weightlifting. In 2024, Poland hosted triathlon competition in Gdansk.

Poland also hosted the Winter Universiade twice; in 1993 and 2001 in Zakopane. These events attracted the best student-athletes from around the world, allowing Poland to showcase itself as an excellent organizer of international competitions.

On the European level, Poland has hosted 27 European University Championships (EUC) in various sports, demonstrating its strong position in academic sports in Europe. Some notable events include: Karate: Wrocław (2005); Handball: Łódź (2007), Katowice (2013), Bydgoszcz (2019_); Futsal: Wrocław (2008), Poznań (2015); Basketball: Gorzów Wielkopolski (2005), Poznań (2010, 2019); Badminton: Kraków (2004, 2008), Warsaw (2015), Łódź (2019); Football: Wrocław (2004, 2009), Warsaw (2010); Tennis: Poznań (2009), Wrocław (2015); Beach Volleyball: Gdynia (2009); Rowing: Kruszwica (2009), Poznań (2013) Bydgoszcz (2023); Volleyball: Warsaw (2010), Rzeszów (2017), Łódź (2019);

Bridge: Warsaw (2011, 2015); Sport Climbing: Katowice (2015, first EUC in this sport); Aesthetic Group Gymnastics: EUSA Cup in Wrocław (2009).

Additionally, Poland hosted the largest international university sports event in history, the European Universities Games 2022 in Łódź.

4.6 Slovenia

Many high schools, both general, vocational and technical, have sports departments in their programs. A grammar school with a sports department is a variant of a general grammar school, with an emphasis on the coordination of sports and school commitments. The number of sports lessons has also increased ("Registration for the 2014/15 school year", 2014). Pupils can enrol at schools with sports departments if they meet special conditions, e.g. sporting achievements. Candidates are classified into statuses A, B and C based on their sporting achievements, which are determined by the categorization of athletes. The statuses mean more or less adjustments for the individual athlete. The successful coordination of school and sporting commitments is ensured by sports and school coordinators at the schools who, in cooperation with the coaches of the individual athletes, ensure that the young athletes' school and training activities run more or less smoothly. The possibility of distance learning is becoming more and more widespread and is used to advantage by top athletes who are absent for long periods due to training and competitions. We do not have any special schools for Nordic athletes in Slovenia.

At universities in Slovenia, the Higher Education Act stipulates that the universities themselves determine the study system and the forms and times of examinations. The adjustment of study obligations of top athletes at college depends on the individual universities, and top athletes usually try to arrange adjustments themselves or in cooperation with individual professional associations (taking exams, possibility of longer absences, completing the year in several years, reduction of points required for enrolment in the first year, free enrolment in part-time studies, reduced compulsory attendance at lectures and exercises, distance learning).

Slovenian university sports association (SUSA) is a non-profit NGO that operates at a high education level in Slovenia. SUSA is organised as an association of university sports organisations that operate on university level in Slovenia. Its key activities are organising extracurricular sport activities for students at university level in Slovenia (recreational, competitive), organisation of participation of Slovene students and international student sport competitions, coordination of university sport organisations at universities in Slovenia.

Slovenia hosted 4 World University Sport Championships, 10 European University Sport Championships and several gatherings, events and meetings of university sport bodies and stakeholders on European and international level.

European University Sports Association (EUSA) publishes annually the data about participation at European Universities events it governs, in the European Universities Championships Statistics & Awards Report and/or European Universities Games Statistics & Awards Report.

The data below shows an excerpt from data of the pre-covid season of European Universities Championships 2019, and the first full post-covid season of the European Universities Championships 2023.

Season/ Country	2019		2023	
	Participation	Ranking	Participation	Ranking
Croatia	284	6	381	5
Hungary	210	9	426	4
Italy	160	13	225	9
Malta	0	-	0	-
Poland	370	5	294	7
Slovenia	62	21	24	28
All European	5.242	N/A	5.570	N/A

In sharing information on effective relevant experiences and on good practices in one country can stimulate emulation in other countries, with overall the ambition to advance Europe-wide dual career and university sports. In the last two decades, several European countries showed the interest to improve, consolidate, and/or implement sport policies and to organize sport at university level as a crucial tool for the advancement of the European values and a lifelong engagement in active lifestyles of future generations of citizens. Thanks to the European efforts, a substantial progress of a European dual career discourse has been observed (European Parliament, 2021; Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2016; Guidotti et al., 2023; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Furthermore, the growing participation of students in the University Sports Games and Championships substantiates the relevant role of universities in the development of quality education in and through sports towards the creation of solid cooperation and alliances between sports bodies and education institutions.

Information from EUSA about participation at the European university sports events partially reflects the size of the country, the work of the national university sport bodies, and the support to university sport on national and university level.

In general, the establishment of the ERASMUS+ Programme and the European dual career guidelines urged Members States to address and implement their policies and provisions in the education and the sport sectors (Guidotti et al., 2023). In this framework, the DiscoverU project and the organization of transnational university sport championships and games help fostering the cooperation between a variety of partners from different geographical and cultural areas of the European Union, stimulating a fruitful dialogue, concrete actions and results.

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