

Successful transition out of elite sport: what is the influence of the national context?



Seminar

“Talentudvikling” og “Dual Career”

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Overview

- Background
- Objectives
- Framework
- Methods and design
- Results of comparison between former Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes
- Dual Career in Denmark
- Discussion

- **Background as an elite athlete**

Ski-jumping World Cup Tour (1995-2011),
participation at three Olympic Games



- **Dual-career pathway**

Sports studies at ETH Zurich (1999-2006)

- **PhD project 2013-2016**

University of Southern Denmark



Athletic retirement

- The end of an elite sports career entails significant changes in different areas of an athlete's life *(Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)*
- There are many different factors which influence the quality of the transition out of elite sport. However, all these factors work differently in different countries/cultures *(Park et al., 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013)*
- Cross-national comparison studies about the transition out of elite sport are limited *(e.g., Alfermann et al., 2004)*

Objectives

- To compare transition out of sport of former Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes in terms of
 - (a) Individual characteristics
 - (b) Characteristics of the career end
 - (c) Quality of adaptation to the post-sport life



Cultural framework for the transition out of elite sport

(adapted from Stambulova et al., 2007)

Macro level

(Country)

Welfare system

Domestic living standards

Cultural traditions, values and beliefs

Meso level

(Sport system)

Elite sports climate

Financial support for athletes

Job / Dual career possibilities for elite athletes

Athlete Career and Retirement Services

Part 2: Interview with stakeholders



The transition process and outcomes:

Micro level

(Athletes and close environment)

Transition demands

Part 1: Survey with former elite athletes

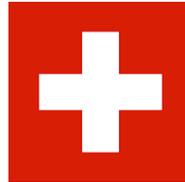
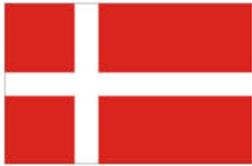
Preconditions for athletic retirement

Support received and adaptation strategies used

Identification with new role and demands outside elite sport



Why these countries?



- **Similarities**
 - European context
 - Similar ranking at London 2012 Olympics
- **Differences**
 - Dual Career support
 - Structure of sport system
 - Cultural dimensions
 - Welfare system
 - Living standard and size of population

Methods

- **Cross-sectional research design, retrospective study** using an **online-survey** among former elite athletes (retired between 2008-2013)
- **Questionnaire** based on *Athletic Retirement Survey* (Alfermann et al., 2004)
- Instrument translated into **Danish, German, and Polish**





Sample

	Switzerland	Denmark	Poland
N athletes	231	86	84
Age years at career end (SD)	30.5 (6.3)	30.4 (5.4)	32.7 (5.8)
Gender (female)	31.2%	33.7%	36.9%
Amount of sport disciplines	34	25	24
Top 3 at OG/WCS	34%	44%	33%

- Total sample: **401 former international elite athletes**
- **Response rate: 60-65%** in all countries

Transition out of elite sport

(Model adapted from Schlossberg, 1981)

Situational characteristics

Environmental characteristics

Individual characteristics

Personal/motivational
Performance
Sport environment
Job/educational
Financial
Family
Health
Loss /relief (perception of career end)
Concrete plans for future
Voluntariness to retire
Timing (on-time/off-time)

-related
reasons

Social support private environment
Social support sport environment

Gender
Age
Athletic Identity
Educational level
Total income
Income from sport (in %)
Popularity (individual)
Confidence in skills
Work experience
Sport success (top 3)
Career balance (gains/losses)

Quality of adaptation

Emotional difficulties
Social difficulties
Health/body difficulties
Financial difficulties
Vocational/educational difficulties
Duration of adaptation
Perception of transition

Variables from systematic review by
Park, et al. (2013)

Results

Table 1. Comparison of *individual characteristics* of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

Item (range)	Switzerland		Denmark		Poland		Effect size	F/ χ^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Higher Education	39% _a		62% _b		85% _c		.36	53.27***
Income from sport	46% _a		52%		59% _b		.14	3.41*
Previous work experience (h/week)	13.35 _a	14.12	11.88	13.07	8.50 _b	11.71	.14	4.03*
Confidence in skills (11- 55)	38.97 _a	9.13	33.35 _b	8.25	40.88 _a	7.91	.29	18.26***
Athletic identity (1-7)	5.28 _a	0.84	5.54	0.81	5.81 _b	0.88	.25	12.94***
Popularity (1-5)	2.47 _a	1.12	2.26 _a	1.22	3.02 _b	1.13	.22	10.55***
Investments vs. benefits (1-5)	3.18 _a	1.45	4.22 _b	1.05	2.86 _a	1.34	.34	25.20***
Job related to sport after career	35% _a		34% _a		75% _b		.33	42.70***

Note: Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

Table 2. Comparison of *situational characteristics* of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

Item (Range 1 - 5)	Switzerland		Denmark		Poland		Effect size	F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Family-related reasons	2.47_a	1.54	3.30_b	1.51	2.82	1.61	.21	9.36***
Personal/motivational reasons	2.71_a	1.22	3.19_b	1.19	2.58_a	1.21	.18	6.44**
Financial-related reasons	2.38	1.49	2.66	1.44	2.81	1.67	.12	2.86
Health-related reasons	2.63	1.64	2.59	1.52	2.81	1.54	.01	0.48
Job/educational reasons	2.44	1.24	2.49	1.07	2.18	1.08	.10	1.88
Voluntariness	3.60	1.57	3.98	1.41	3.83	1.41	.10	1.96
Plans for future	3.57	1.32	3.71	1.12	3.83	1.41	.08	1.39
Career end as loss vs. relief	3.12_a	0.87	3.31_a	1.09	2.25_b	1.07	.37	31.81***

Note: Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

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Results

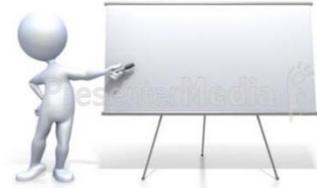
Table 3. Comparison of *adaptational characteristics* of Swiss, Danish, and Polish athletes

Item (Range 1 - 5)	Switzerland		Denmark		Poland		Effect size	F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Emotional difficulties	2.76_a	1.33	3.20_b	1.32	3.01	1.34	.13	3.69*
Social difficulties	2.43_a	1.19	2.92_b	1.34	2.79	1.30	.17	5.91**
Health/body difficulties	2.00_a	1.17	2.41_b	1.22	2.38_b	1.31	.16	5.19**
Vocational/educational difficulties	1.81_a	1.14	2.01	1.09	2.40_b	1.20	.20	8.30***
Financial difficulties	1.71_a	1.01	1.88_a	0.98	2.75_b	1.38	.35	26.91***
Perception of transition (5 = v. good)	4.45_a	0.65	4.45_a	0.62	3.61_b	0.97	.43	45.19***
Duration of adaptation (months)	9.23	8.95	10.44	8.33	9.05	9.05	.06	0.70

Note: Means with different subscripts in a row are significantly different from each other. Effect size .1 = small; .3 = moderate; .5 = large

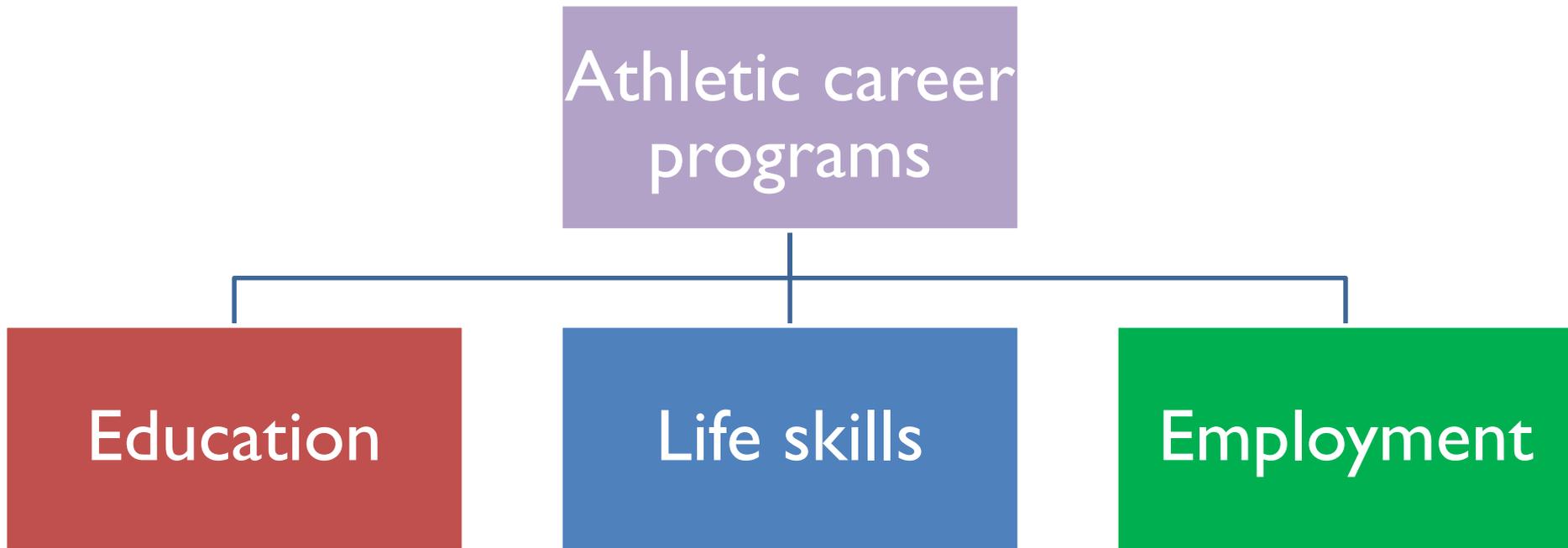
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Summary of comparison between CH, DK, and POL athletes



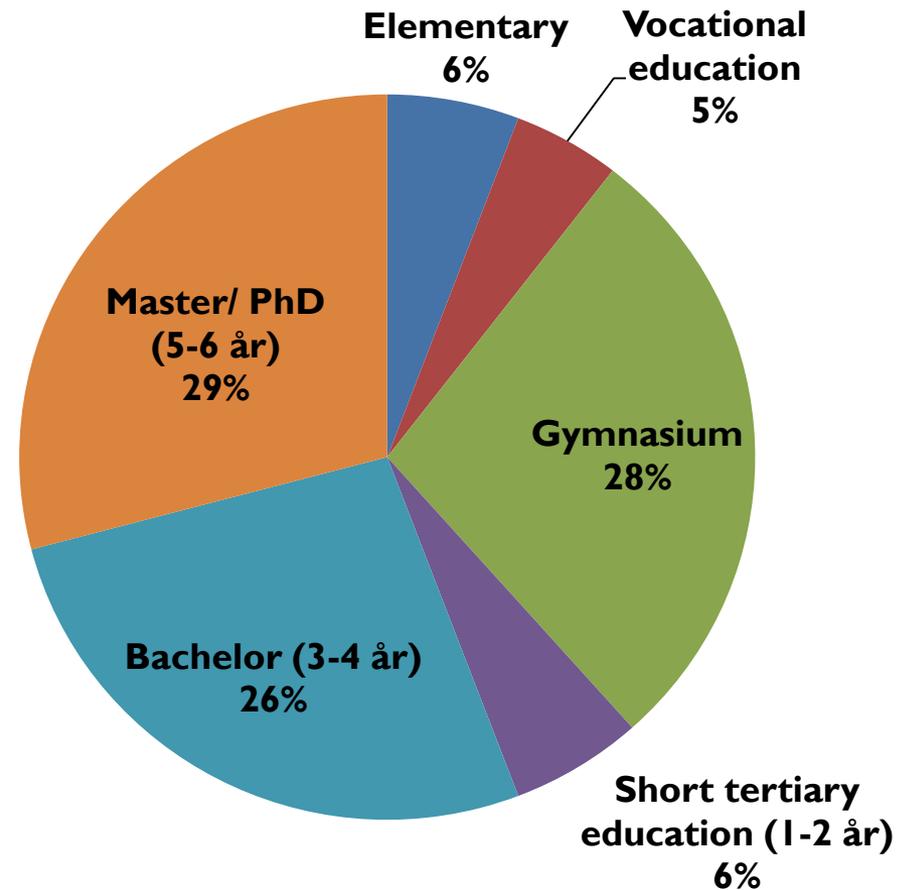
- The national context and the sports system had a strong influence on **individual characteristics** (pre-conditions) for athletic retirement
- A more **common pattern** emerged in terms of **career-end characteristics**
- The **social/emotional** adaptation was generally perceived as most difficult
- The **adaptation** was **easiest for Swiss athletes and more difficult for Polish athletes**
- **It is important to consider the socio-cultural context when studying the transition out of elite sport**

Dual Career Environment for elite athletes



Education level of Danish athletes

Highest completed educational level at career end

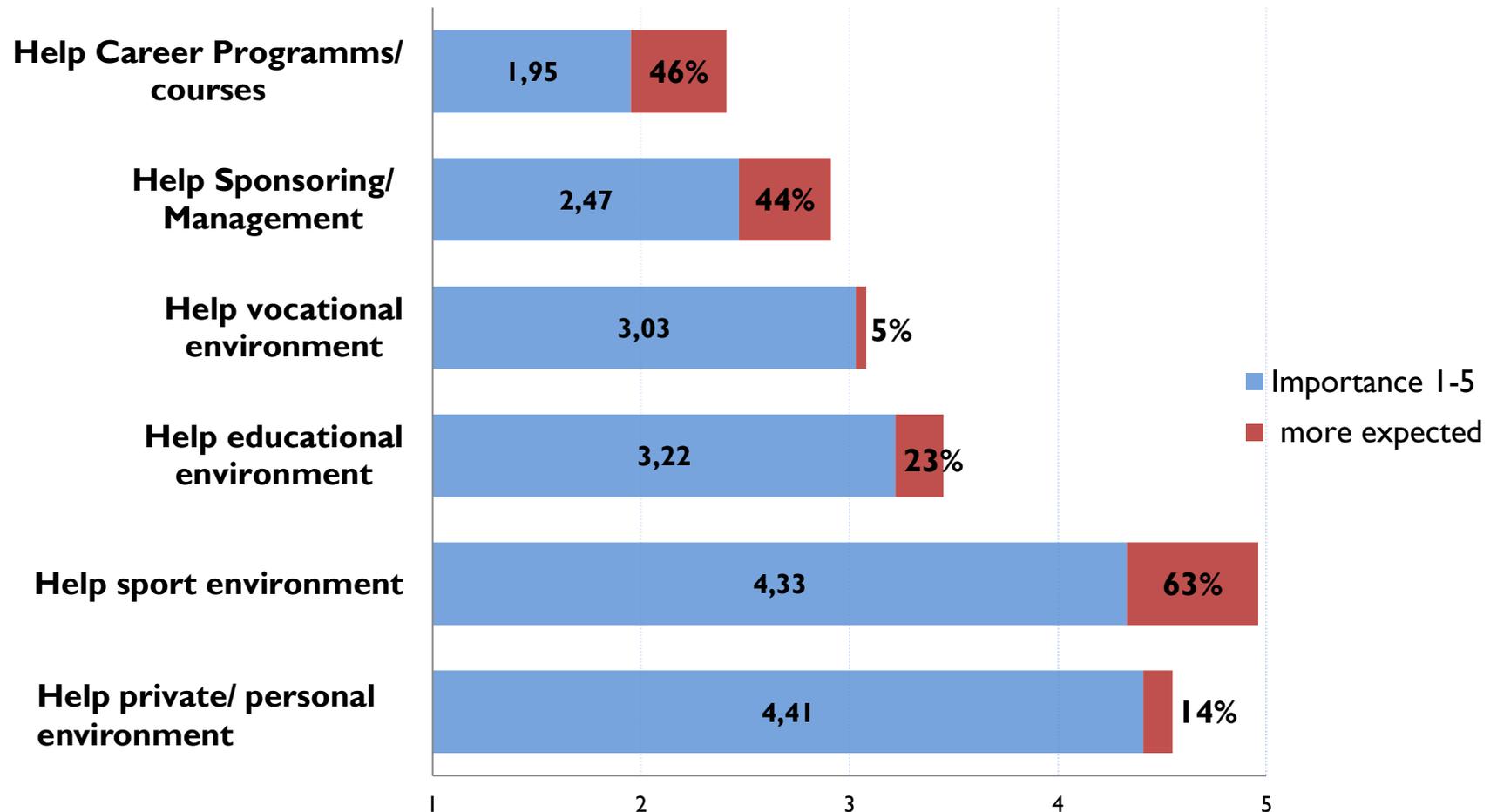


Dual Career



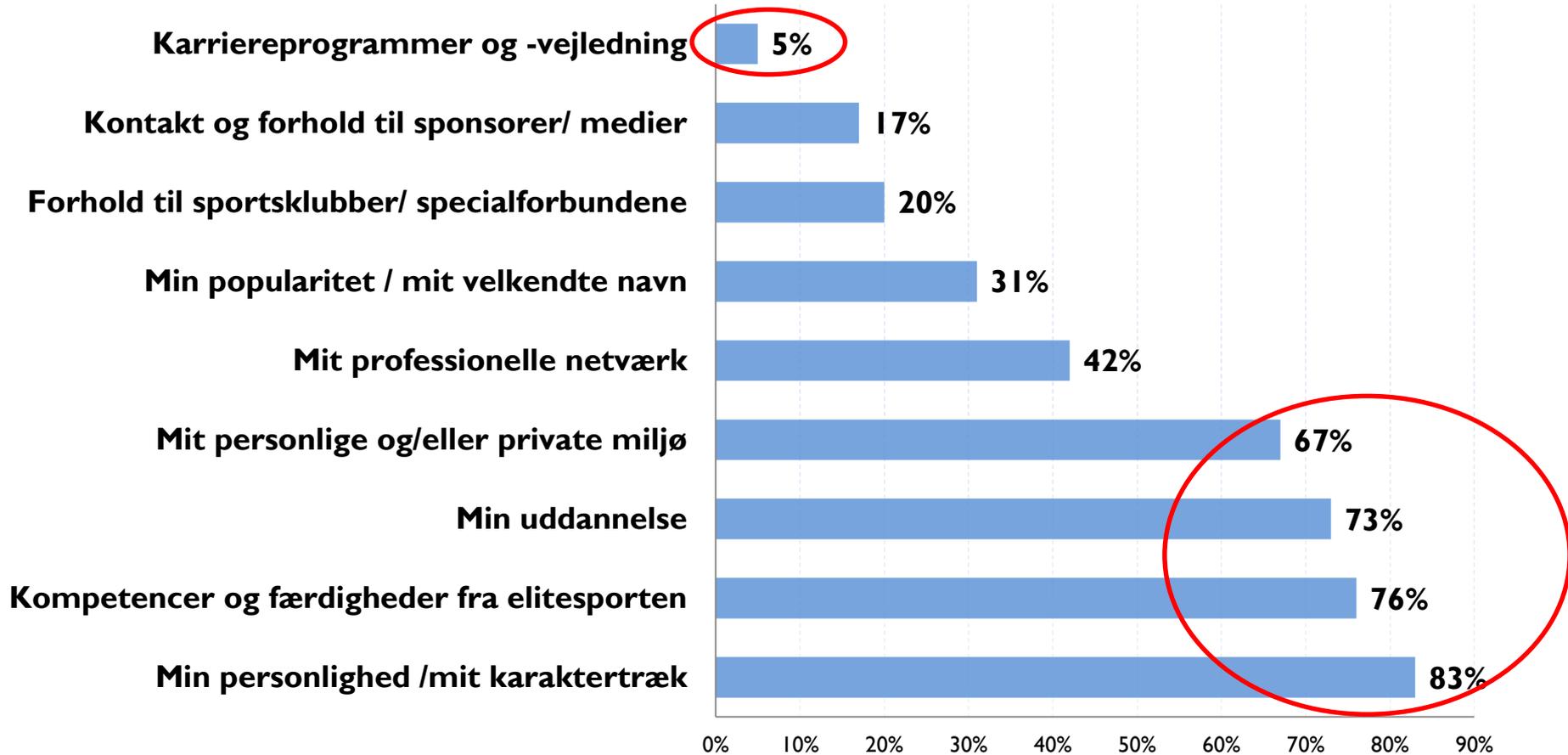
Development of skills and competences

Importance and expectations of Danish athletes (n = 86) for skills development during their sports career



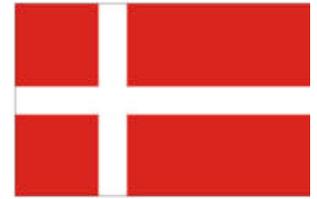
Reasons for finding job (self-reported)

Reasons for Danish athletes to find their job after the career



Note: Percentage of athletes who named reasons as helpful or very helpful

Job situation



Job situation after sports career

- 25% had periods without employment (avg. duration 7,6 month), but for some it was their own choice
 - **20% self-employed**
 - **68% employed**
 - **20% under education**
 - **4% looking for a job**
- Many former athletes have more than one occupation
- About 1/3 of Danish athletes relocate in the field of sport





Questions?

Thank you for your attention!

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