# PARALYMPIC ATHLETES' DUAL CAREER PATHWAYS: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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submitted by **GİZEM GİRİŞMEN** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Physical Education and Sports, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences _____

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE
Head of Department
Department of Physical Education and Sports _____

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE
Supervisor
Department of Physical Education and Sports _____

**Examining Committee Members:**

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI (Head of the Examining Committee)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Physical Education and Sports _____

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Physical Education and Sports _____

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI
Middle East Technical University
Department of Educational Sciences _____

Prof. Dr. Canan KOCA
Hacettepe University
Department of Recreation _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Deniz HÜNÜK
Hacettepe University
Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching _____

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

**Name, Last Name:** Gizem GİRİŞMEN

**Signature:**

## ABSTRACT

PARALYMPIC ATHLETES' DUAL CAREER PATHWAYS:
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

GİRİŞMEN, Gizem
Ph.D., The Department of Physical Education and Sports
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE

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This study explores Paralympic athletes' DC pathways and experiences through employing a constructivist version of grounded theory. To this end, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten active Paralympic athletes either studying at university, working full-time alongside their sports careers, or combining academic and vocational pursuits. The results of this study reveal that Paralympic athletes' career development experiences involve individual pathways with linear and interrupted non-linear characteristics, encompassing early and late career construction styles. A phase-based model acknowledging the different phases of DC processes better reflects the diversity of the Paralympic athletes who occasionally extended their careers by incorporating a third career. Based on career sequences and the number of careers pursued, four career development pathways were identified: typical and atypical pathways, with dual and multiple careers. The processes in the para athlete development pathways, the stressors and facilitators related to the disability experience and para sports were the most significant features making Paralympic athletes' DC experiences unique. The dependence on their support network further complicated DC

processes for the athletes with severe impairments and transformed the external support providers into indispensable parts of the DC experience. To manage their dual and multiple careers, Paralympic athletes adopted period and career based strategic planning practices. This study underlines the significance of supporting Paralympic athletes holistically, primarily through emphasizing their individual needs throughout their DC and MC pathways.

**Key words:** dual career in sports, student-athlete, para sports, Paralympic athletes, disability.

# ÖZ

PARALİMPİK SPORCULARININ SPORDA ÇİFT KARİYER YOLLARI:
BİR TEMELLENDİRİLMİŞ KURAM ÇALIŞMASI

GİRİŞMEN, Gizem
Doktora, Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE

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Bu çalışma, Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer (ÇK) süreçlerini ve deneyimlerini yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram aracılığıyla incelemektedir. Bu amaçla, sportif kariyerlerinin yanı sıra üniversitede okuyan ya da tam zamanlı çalışan veya hem akademik hem de iş yaşamlarını bir arada yürüten on aktif Paralimpik sporcuyla derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, paralimpik sporcuların kariyer gelişim deneyimlerinin, erken ve geç kariyer inşa etme stillerini içeren hem doğrusal hem de kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan özelliklere sahip bireysel yollar içerdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. ÇK süreçlerinin farklı aşamalarını ortaya koyan, evre odaklı bir model, mevcut kariyerlerine zaman zaman üçüncü bir kariyeri daha ekleyen Paralimpik sporcuların çeşitliliğini daha iyi yansıtmıştır. Kariyer örüntülerine ve kariyer sayısına göre dört farklı kariyer gelişim yolu belirlenmiştir: Tipik ve Atipik - Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yolları. Paralimpik sporcuların sporda ÇK deneyimlerini farklılaştıran en önemli etmenler; para spordaki gelişim yollarındaki süreçler, sporcuların engelliliğin yanı sıra para sporları nasıl deneyimledikleri ve bu deneyimlerle ilişkili stres yaratan ve kolaylaştırıcı etkide bulunan unsurlardır. Destek

ağına bağımlılık, ağır engelli sporcular için ÇK süreçlerini daha karmaşık hale getirmiş ve destek sağlayıcılarını ÇK deneyiminin ayrılmaz bir parçasına dönüştürmüştür. Paralimpik sporcular çift veya çoklu kariyerlerini yönetmek için, dönem ve kariyer odaklı stratejik planlama pratiklerini benimsemişlerdir. Bu çalışma, paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yolları boyunca, özellikle bireysel ihtiyaçlarını dikkate alarak bütüncül olarak desteklenmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** sporda çift kariyer, öğrenci-sporcu, para sporlar, paralimpik sporcular, engellilik.

*To those*

*who dream of and make an effort for an equitable, fair, and better world.*

*It is possible, be part of it…*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AI: | Acquired Impairment |
| AHSN: | Athletes with High Support Needs |
| CI: | Congenital Impairment |
| DC: | Dual Career |
| GESFED: | Sports Federation for Visually Impaired |
| GSB: | Ministry of Youth and Sports Türkiye |
| HACM: | The Holistic Athlete Career Model |
| IPC: | International Paralympic Committee |
| MC: | Multiple Career |
| PGs: | Paralympic Games |
| TBESF: | Sports Federation for Physically Impaired |
| TÖSSFED: | Sports Federation for Intellectually Impaired |

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research evolutions paving the way for growing interest in dual career (DC) in sports research and a background on the study of (DC) in the para sports context. By outlining the rationale for researching the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes, it is aimed to situate the significance of this research, especially within DC in sports research as well as in the para sports context. Additionally, this chapter provides definitions of terms frequently used throughout the study and aims to clarify the terminology regarding disability and para sports. Lastly, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

## 1.1. The Research Evolutions Behind Growing Interest in Dual Career in Sports Research

For the last decades, there have been changes regarding how athletes, and correspondingly, their careers, are perceived (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). The studies and research projects on athlete career transitions and termination stimulated researchers to consider athletes through athletic and non-athletic domains, as well as the relationship between these domains (Stambulova et al., 2024).

The evolution of dual career in sports research is closely related to the evolution of athlete career development research (Stambulova et al., 2021) and perceiving athletes beyond their role as sports performers as well as challenging “the performance narrative” (Carless & Douglas, 2012) which emphasizes the prioritization of performance outcomes above anything. A recently published position statement (Stambulova et al., 2021) that provided an overview of the athletic career development

and career transition research clearly outlined the evolution stimulating interest in dual career in sports research. Accordingly, the focus of earlier research on athlete career development mainly addressed the retirement of athletes and studied post-athletic career adjustments as well as career assistance programs. In the ’90s, the development stage of athlete career research witnessed a shift in conceptualizing athlete careers in the sports domain by recognizing different stages and transitions from beginning to end (Stambulova et al., 2021). Athletes’ experiences revealed multiple challenges associated with post-sports career transition extending beyond the athletic domain, such as identity struggles, reduced interactions with their coach and teammates, financial struggles, renewing social networks, restructuring lifestyles and vocational concerns (Wylleman et al., 2013, 2020).

Similarly, studies on athlete transitions highlighted that student athletes experienced simultaneous, interrelated changes and multiple demands not only related to their athletic engagements but also to their educational pursuits, identity development, social relationships, and financial situations, as well as changes in legal status (Brown et al., 2015; Cosh & Tully, 2015; Debois et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2015; Wylleman, 2019).

With the contribution of studies focusing on transitions faced by athletes (Brown et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2015; Wylleman et al., 1999, 2013), it was revealed that transitions experienced by athletes needed a lifespan perspective with a multi-layered focus. Athletes had multiple and diverse engagements, and they were encountering demands and challenges occurring at multiple layers of their lives (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2020). Moreover, they were experiencing multiple simultaneous transitions coinciding with their development at different levels as psychological, psychosocial, academic and vocational, financial, and legal (Stambulova & Samuel, 2020; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman, 2019). Consequently, a significant conceptual change in athlete career research occurred by progressing from studying athletic career transition in isolation to considering the interactive, interconnected, concurrent, dynamic, and complex nature of athletes’ development.

The holistic lifespan perspective stimulated the adoption of a multi-layered focus involving a "whole person" perspective (Wylleman et al., 2013; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) which recognized athletes' roles and responsibilities outside of sports domain and a "whole career" approach (Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015, 2019) which emphasized athletic as well as non-athletic domains and further complemented by a "whole environment" perspective (Henriksen et al., 2010; Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017; Linnér et al., 2022; Nikander et al., 2022) in which athlete career development was situated and multiple stakeholders interacted.

Understanding and accepting athletes as more than sports performers with multiple engagements and roles shifted the attention of the research to focus more on the multidimensional aspects of their lives and stimulated interest in studying athletes' lives beyond the sports domain (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2020). Consequently, this progression stimulated interest in dual career research which became a widely studied topic from diverse perspectives (Guidotti et al., 2015; Li & Sum, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022).

The term dual career (DC) in sport was introduced for the first time by the European Commission in its White Paper in 2007 (Guidotti et al., 2015). Simply, it signifies a career that combines sport with education or work (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Individuals pursuing DC in sports have two different career foci involving sport and education or sport and work, and they experience developmental journeys across diverse domains with different, interrelated, concurrent, overlapping transitions and phases. In the last decades, there has been growing interest and an increase in publications regarding DC in sport (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022).

For a long time, substantial research on DC was conducted in North America with an exclusive focus on student-athletes, covering university period and collegiate system (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015; Li & Sum, 2017). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), overseeing the performance of its member institutions regarding academic support systems, career development programs as well as the eligibility of student-athletes and their academic performance, aims to promote policies and

practices for supportive, positive learning and competitive environments (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021). Within the school-based DC system in the United States where intercollegiate athletics are integrated into higher education, the research focus was mainly on student athletes' characteristics, athletic identity, retirement, career development trajectories, and career transitions into a university as well as vocational career upon graduation (Carodine et al., 2001; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Murphy et al., 1996; Petitpas et al., 2009; Smith & Hardin, 2020; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova & Samuel, 2020).

Similarly, other regions such as Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand with their emerging DC studies mainly focused on student-athletes by studying DC demands, barriers, available assistance, how student-athletes were coping while pursuing DC and transition into retirement (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Pink et al., 2015; Ryan, 2015; Sum et al., 2017; Tshube & Feltz, 2015).

Within the European context, DC in sport became one of the critical priorities in the EU research agenda following the publication of the European Union Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes in 2012 (European Commission (EC), 2012; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Various research projects related to DC competencies (GEES, 2014), employability competencies (B-WISER, 2018), classification of dual career development environments (ECO-DC, 2018), optimization of mental health services for student-athletes (DC4MH, 2021), were supported through the Erasmus+ Sport program (Stambulova et al., 2024).

In the European context, where the sporting system is mainly club-based (Ryba et al., 2015) and the diversity of educational systems and DC policies exist (Aquilina & Henry, 2010), DC studies covered a wide array of research foci, conceivably as a reflection of the multiplicity of national approaches and cultural diversity among the European countries (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). It has been mainly guided by the holistic lifespan perspective (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2013; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016), acknowledging athletic career as one aspect of the life career and developing athletes holistically as well as adopting the holistic ecological perspective (Henriksen et al., 2010, 2020) focusing on the

structure, components, and stakeholders of the environment in which DC athletes develop.

In the last decades, DC research focused on a broad spectrum of interrelated topics such as DC pathways and transitions (Cartigny et al., 2021; Li & Sum, 2017; Mateu et al., 2020; Ryba et al., 2015, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2015; Torregrosa et al., 2015; Vickers & Morris, 2022), DC associated demands, challenges, coping strategies (Brown et al., 2015; European Commission (EC), 2012; Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015; Gomez et al., 2018; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022; C. Ryan, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2020), DC competencies (De Brandt et al., 2018; Linnér et al., 2020; Perez-Rivases et al., 2020), DC athletes' identity, motivation, wellbeing (Aunola et al., 2018; Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Defruyt et al., 2020; Kavoura & Ryba, 2020; Kegelaers et al., 2022; Lupo et al., 2015), parenting in DC context (Tessitore et al., 2021), social support regarding DC (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Knight et al., 2018). With its multi-dimensional focus, this growing body of research was an important reflection of conceptualizing athlete development holistically and recognizing the significance of the environment in which DC development was situated.

Whilst the recent DC research showed that numerous athletes from different regions (Condello et al., 2019; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014), age groups (Guidotti et al., 2015; López-Flores et al., 2021), developmental and competitive levels (Ryba et al., 2015; Torregrosa et al., 2015), pathways (Cartigny et al., 2021; O'Neil et al., 2021; Ryba et al., 2015), dual career combination (Moreno et al., 2021; Örencik et al., 2023), identity constructs (Cartigny et al., 2021) and motivational orientations (Aunola et al., 2018; Lupo et al., 2015) pursued DC confirming the diversity of DC athlete profiles, yet DC studies predominantly focused on student-athletes, especially at upper secondary and higher education levels and fell short of considering the heterogeneity within DC athlete population (Stambulova et al., 2024).

Similarly, the DC research conducted in Türkiye, despite being in its infancy and having a limited scope (Bozyiğit et al., 2022; Karadağ & Aşçı, 2021; Koçak et al., 2023; Semiz, 2018), mainly focused on the DC experiences of and challenges

encountered by student-athletes at higher education together with research on scale adaptations regarding dual career competency and student athletes' career situations. These studies revealed some facilitative measures in place to support student-athletes; however, these measures generally targeted decorated high-performance athletes. Moreover, organized, coordinated and systematic approaches to supporting student-athletes were missing in Türkiye (Koçak et al., 2023).

Thus far, DC research has been student-athlete-centric and has ignored DC para athletes and their DC experiences to a great extent (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). DC experiences of athletes with a disability persistently stated as a research gap within DC research (Stambulova et al., 2024). Based on the previous calls for contextually informed research and recognition of diverse athlete profiles (Stambulova et al., 2021), studying DC pathways of Paralympic athletes aims to address this knowledge gap, expand DC research and reveal para sport specific DC experiences. The further rationale behind studying the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes is addressed in the following section.

### 1.2. Rationale for Studying Paralympic Athletes' DC Pathways

Dual career research neglected the experiences of para athletes to a great extent (Campbell, 2018; Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Within the progression of DC in sports literature (Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova et al., 2021; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022), there have been very limited studies regarding contextualized understanding of para-athletes' DC experiences. Except for the recently conducted research on DC barriers in the para sports context (Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023) and the higher education experiences of student para athletes (Campbell, 2018), DC in para sports context remains an under-researched area. These research efforts provided initial insights and revealed that in addition to commonly experienced DC challenges such as absence of flexibility, coinciding schedules, difficulty in balancing DC and long travel distances between different pursuits, there were also unique challenges of DC in para sports such as accessibility, absence of accessible facilities and services (Magnanini et al., 2022),

travel challenges (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023) and experience of disability (Campbell, 2018).

Based on the limited research available (Campbell, 2018; Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS), 2021; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023), it is revealed that the contextual differences associated with para sports and challenges associated with disability experience added complexity while pursuing DC and DC para athletes experienced diversified challenges compared to their non-disabled peers pursuing DC. Hence, the initial research outcomes underlined that it was crucial to understand and provide insights into personal and social processes behind the DC experiences of para athletes, situate their DC pathways by considering the unique constraints of para sports and reflect on disability specific nuances.

With a similar motive, researchers identifying distinctive features of para sports highlighted the need to exclusively study athlete's development pathways in para sports by considering disability related factors and how these pathways were differentiated from the non-disabled sports domain (Baker et al., 2017; Dehghansai et al., 2017; Dowling et al., 2018; Hutzler et al., 2016; Lemez et al., 2020; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018). The studies on para sports showed that the fragmented and complex organizational structures of para sports (Hutzler et al., 2016; Patatas et al., 2018), classification process acting as a prerequisite eligibility for becoming a para athlete (Martin & Prokesova, 2022; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020), interactional relationship among classification, talent identification and developmental trajectories (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Fortin-Guichard et al., 2023), intersection of gender as well as the severity of impairment (Brittain, 2016, p. 149; Dehghansai et al., 2022; Slocum et al., 2018), coaching context (Allan et al., 2020; Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Patatas et al., 2021; Tawse et al., 2012; Townsend et al., 2023; Turnnidge et al., 2012), the interaction of athlete, environment and task constraints (Dehghansai et al., 2020), access to adapted equipment and associated costs (Arnold et al., 2017; Kean et al., 2017; Peake & Davies, 2024) the influence of macro level factors involving infrastructure, available resources, policy

priorities, social and cultural experience of disability (Dehghansai et al., 2022; Dowling et al., 2018; Patatas et al., 2021), impact of technology (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Peake & Davies, 2024), diversity of athlete profiles (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas et al., 2021; Pinder et al., 2023), care needs of severely impaired athletes and logistics behind care (Dehghansai et al., 2022; Lowry et al., 2022), impairment specific pathways (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Peake & Davies, 2024), overprotective parents (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021), funding priorities (Dehghansai et al., 2021; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014), trends in para sports involving systemic professionalization (Bundon, 2022), availability of support services being varied by type and severity of impairment and sport class (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020), the multidimensionality of the athlete and guide relationship (Bundon & Mannella, 2023; Peake & Davies, 2024) had reflections on the experiences of para athletes and the variations in their developmental pathways compared to non-disabled athletes. All these features complicated the para athlete development pathways.

Despite attracting attention to the individuality and uniqueness of each para athlete's development pathway, researchers stressed important factors affecting the athletic trajectories in para sports. The age at which an athlete acquired the impairment, as well as gained access to sports, classification and athletes' potential competitiveness within their sports class, prior sports experience, diversified sports participation access points and risk of forced retirement due to classification reviews had implications on the multiple developmental pathways in para sports (Legg et al., 2023).

Similarly, para athletes experienced early or late athletic career initiation opportunities and it was found that while athletes with acquired impairment progressed faster through their athletic careers compared to athletes with congenital impairments, the latter group reached the career milestones such as sports initiation, first appearance at national and international competitions earlier (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas et al., 2021). Often, para athletes experienced blurring of developmental stages with initiation, development and specialization stages happening almost simultaneously (Bundon, 2022; Peake & Davies, 2024). These unique aspects

differentiated experiencing para sports from non-disabled sports and how para athletes accessed sports, progressed through their careers' developmental phases and ended their sporting careers.

Relatedly, research on the retirement experiences of elite Paralympic athletes highlighted the unique retirement challenges experienced by para athletes and attracted attention to de-classification or secondary disabilities due to injuries forcing them to an involuntary or premature career termination (Bundon et al., 2018). Moreover, the pursuit of medals becoming a top priority (Bundon, 2022; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017) and coaches, as well as high-performance staff's increased expectations of commitment from para athletes posed threats to the continuation of athletes' educational or vocational pursuits. The shift in expectations necessitating increased dedication forced para athletes to reconsider their careers by quitting their jobs and schools or moving to centralized training facilities (Bundon, 2022), especially in tense periods heading toward the Paralympic Games (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Dehghansai, Pinder, Baker, & Renshaw, 2021). Furthermore, para athletes with an exclusive focus on athletic careers expressed feelings of stress and worry because of having restricted options after retirement, which posed challenges on their wellbeing (Miller et al., 2024).

Together with the future employment concerns after retirement (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018), the trends in para sports such as professionalization (Houlihan & Chapman, 2017; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014) and the evolving nature of para sports toward Olympification further complicated the retirement decisions of para athletes as well as their career trajectories (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018). Thus, multidimensional factors affected the athlete development pathways in para sports. It is revealed that para athletes who participated in sports at various ages, instead of experiencing a typical linear pathway with normative transitions, navigated through their athletic careers with possible entry and exit sequences bearing nonlinear characteristics with varying progression pace (Arnold et al., 2017).

Another significant aspect in need of consideration while studying para sports is its context-specific stressors. Elite level para athletes reported extra stressors other than

athletic performance related concerns as compared to their Olympic peers. Classification system (Arnold et al., 2017), fragility of their athletic careers because of sport class reviews (Miller et al., 2024), developing and balancing multiple identities (Huang & Brittain, 2006; Martin et al., 2020; Martin, 2017b), managing fast track independence expectations upon transition to centralized training facilities (Miller et al., 2024), lack of staff with impairment specific knowledge and experience (Martin Ginis et al., 2016), lack of disability specific coaching (Martin, 2017a; Smith et al., 2016), inaccessible environments (Arnold et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016), combined effect of injury with the original impairment on daily functioning (Bundon, 2019) were the additional challenges encountered by para athletes.

The para sport specific features identified by studies focusing both on athlete development pathways and retirement experiences in para sports underlined the contextual complexity and suggested that despite the available models or frameworks situated in non-disabled sport domain provided valuable insights, they were not accurately reflecting the unique features of para athletes' experiences (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020). A need to conduct contextually informed research by considering disability-related factors and the dynamics of para sports domain was strongly highlighted and recommended.

Concerning the DC studies, researchers were often criticized for being culture blind and unable to incorporate contextually informed perspectives, as well as adopting dominant discourses without being critical of the fit between the context and adopted framework (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). The European Commission's EU guidelines on dual careers of athletes (2012, p. 6) made a similar point and attracted attention to the complexity of para athlete's pathways being affected by the onset and type of impairment and para athletes possibly being older than their non-disabled peers at the same stage of their careers.

Within the DC literature, an athletic career was typically conceptualized as initiated during childhood and continued through adolescence and adulthood, overlapping with simultaneous progression through primary, secondary and high schools following (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022; Wylleman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the research on

para sports development pathways showing variations in athletic trajectories and age at which para athletes accessed sports and transitioned into elite level depending on the impairment related features highlighted concerns about the accuracy of age and maturation-based models for para sports domain (Lemez et al., 2020). Moreover, as para athletes often experienced intertwined and blurred athletic developmental stages due to fast progression, representation of concurrent and overlapping stages matching athletic and educational progressions might be incompatible within para sports context. Therefore, despite providing holistic, multidimensional, and interactional analysis opportunities, frameworks that incorporated typical maturation-based perspectives and linear, concurrent developmental progressions, such as the Holistic Athlete Career Model (HACM) (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016), could not appropriately correspond to the experiences of para-athletes whose developmental process involved nonlinear characteristics and fast progressions.

To sum up, the current research on para athlete development pathways suggested that the DC pathways and experiences of para athletes might be more complicated than typical linear DC conceptualization dominantly guiding most DC studies.

The International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) Position Stand on career development and transitions of athletes (Stambulova et al., 2021) made a similar point and highlighted the need to recognize the diverse profiles of athletes, question the linear conceptualization of athletes' development and focus on marginalized athlete populations such as para athletes. In a similar manner, the most recently published position statement on athletes' DC in the European context reiterated the dual career of para athletes as a research gap and encouraged researchers to direct their efforts towards "equity deserving groups of DC athletes" (Stambulova et al., 2024, p. 9).

Research on dual career in sport well reported the importance of the holistic development of athletes and the support needed during their DC experience (Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). However, DC studies thus far were student-athlete and non-disabled sports centric and remained very limited in focusing on para athletes' DC experiences and pathways.

Regarding careers other than sports, both the employment rates and attainment of tertiary degrees of individuals with disabilities were lower than persons without disabilities, and a great majority felt discriminated against based on disability, signifying challenges of enjoying equal opportunities (United Nations, 2018). Moreover, individuals with disability experienced additional challenges based on discrimination, accessibility issues, ableism and limited provision of school or workplace accommodations that were not typically encountered by their non-disabled peers while accessing education (Akbulut, 2012; Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (ERG), 2016; Toplumsal Haklar ve Araştırmalar Derneği (TOHAD), 2015) or vocation (Ananian & Dellaferrera, 2024; United Nations, 2018).

Based on the above-discussed contextual differences in the para sports domain and additional challenges associated with experiencing disability while accessing education or work, it is conceivable that the DC pathways of para athletes involve additional complexity. Nevertheless, how these para sports specific features and their reflections shape the DC process of para athletes and its associated outcomes remains underexplored, which raises questions about DC in para sports being a theoretically underdeveloped and unguided research area.

To support the holistic development of para athletes, it is essential to understand the processes they experience while pursuing dual careers in sports and identify the influential features affecting these processes. It is conceivable that failing to consider para athletes' DC pathways will undermine developing informed DC policies and providing appropriate support corresponding to their needs. Moreover, failing to understand their DC experiences might leave para athletes vulnerable in maintaining their dual career engagements or in making forced choices between their athletic, educational, or vocational pursuits.

In this regard, it is crucial to fulfill the above-explained research gap by focusing exclusively on Paralympic athletes' DC experiences and to develop a substantive exploratory theory about their DC processes and pathways.

## 1.3. Purpose of the Study

To the researcher's knowledge, there has not been any research studying para athletes' DC pathways to date. In contrast to the progression of DC in sports literature (Stambulova et al., 2024; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022), there has been very limited development in recognizing the diverse profiles of DC athletes beyond student-athletes. Moreover, previous studies on talent identification and athlete development pathways in para sport questioned the transferability of existing models situated in non-disabled sports domain and called researchers to be cautious in transferring or modifying existing models (Baker et al., 2017; Dehghansai et al., 2022; Lemez et al., 2020). Instead, studies aiming to reflect para sports specific uniqueness and contextual dynamics are highly needed and encouraged (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Hutzler et al., 2016; Legg et al., 2023; Pankowiak et al., 2023; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020).

This study's main motive is to address this missing piece of dual career research and to provide a new perspective on DC experiences by revealing the unique experiences of DC para athletes, rather than being limited by the previously available models and attempting to fit DC para athletes' experiences into dominant models.

In other words, DC in para sport context lacks theoretical explanations, which reflect the development of DC pathways corresponding to the multitude of DC experiences involving para athletes.

To address this under-developed research area and expand the scope of DC research beyond non-disabled athletes, this study aims to examine Paralympic athletes' dual career pathways, unique contextual features of DC in para sports and develop a substantive exploratory theory about the DC process and pathways of DC para athletes. Ultimately, it is intended that the introduced theory adds fresh insights into the DC in sports literature, broadens DC athletes' conceptualization and stimulates interest in further research about para sports within the broader sports science research.

## 1.4. Research Questions

To provide para sports context-specific insights into the DC in sports literature and develop a substantive exploratory theory about the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes, the following research questions guided the study:

How do Paralympic athletes experience dual career in sport?

- What are the processes experienced by Paralympic athletes in pursuing dual career in sport and education or work?
- How do dual career pathways vary?
- What influences DC processes?
- What actions are taken in DC experiences?

## 1.5. Note on Terminology and Definitions of Terms

This section provides the conceptual definitions of frequently used terms throughout this study. Even though the terms below are widely discussed and may have broader conceptualizations, the provided definitions and terminology reflect their conceptualization and use within this study.

Impairment: Although often used interchangeably with disability, "impairment" specifically refers to a physical or biological condition, possibly resulting in functional limitations. "Impairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or a leg but disability is the social process that turns impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access" (Davis, 2006, p. 232). However, it is also important to note that this study's standpoint also acknowledges the complexity of conceptualizing impairment and impairment effects' potential to become a medium for oppressive practices (Smith & Bundon, 2018).

Disability: "Disability is an evolving concept and it results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal

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| | and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (UN CRPD, 2006, p. 1). |
| Para sports: | "Para sport means any sport recognized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), whether featured on the Paralympic program or not, in which athletes with a disability participate and which has classification rules compliant with the IPC Athlete Classification Code" (International Paralympic Committee (IPC), 2021b, p. 3). Within the scope of this study, para sports with the Paralympic Games pathway are included. |
| Paralympic Sports: | "A sport whose International Federation is recognized by the International Paralympic Committee and which is on the Paralympic program" (IPC, 2021a, p. 3). |
| Para athletes: | "A general term for pro and amateur athletes with disabilities who play sport but have not competed at a Paralympic Games" (IPC, 2021a, p. 3). |
| Paralympic athletes or Paralympians (PLY): | "An athlete who has taken part in a Paralympic Games. Athletes are only Paralympians once they have taken part in a Paralympic Games" (IPC, 2021a, p. 3). |
| Prospective Paralympian or Pre-Paralympic Athlete: | Although the term "Paralympic hopeful" (IPC, 2021b, p. 6) is used to define "an athlete who is due to take part in the Paralympic Games," within the scope of this study para athletes in the high performance pathway who are due to take part in the |

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| | Paralympic Games are defined as prospective Paralympian or pre-Paralympic athlete. |
| Athlete with high support needs (AHSN): | Athletes with high support needs (AHSN) generally require additional support at competitions and in their daily lives and are defined as those who compete within eligible sport classes in Paralympic sports (IPC, 2016). Based on the eligible sport classes determined and published by the IPC, facilitative measures are taken for providing support to ensure the participation of AHSN at competitions. By the definition, AHSN require greater and possibly more specialized support needs than other athletes on and off the field of play (Brittain, 2016). The main categories of AHSN involve athletes with more severe physical disabilities such as quadriplegia or cerebral palsy and athletes with visual impairment who may need a guide to support them in their daily activities and during competitions (Slocum et al., 2018) as well as athletes with intellectual impairment. |
| High-performance athlete: | Elite level and high performance are often used interchangeably and their definitions vary on a continuum with inconsistencies (Sotiriadou & De Bosscher, 2018). However, within the scope of this study a high-performance athlete is defined with reference to competitive experience at the international level. Accordingly, an athlete who has already competed at the international level or who aspires to pursue an athletic career at the international level (Swann et al., 2015) is considered a high performance or an elite level athlete. |
| Dual career: | Dual career in sport (DC) denotes “a career with the major foci on sport and studies or work” (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015, p. 1). An athlete who combined sport with education or work is denoted as a DC athlete. |

With regard to the choice of terminology, despite being a complex issue, it is also essential to reflect on the identity-first versus person-first debate. Throughout this study, person-first language (individuals with disabilities) is preferred instead of identity-first language (disabled people). This choice is closely related to recognizing individuals from a whole-person perspective and highlighting their multi-dimensional identities rather than featuring their disabled identity as the dominant and sole signifier.

Since the participants of this study were individuals with diverse careers such as sports, education and vocation, using an identity first language and overemphasizing disability as the central identity marker would contradict this study's and researcher's standpoint of perceiving them from a holistic perspective. As contended by Peers and colleagues (2014), the choice of terminology should accurately represent the participants and be considered, accountable and consistent with the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Moreover, in accordance with the terminologies associated with the Paralympic movement, "able-bodied sport" and "able-bodied athlete" were avoided as they might covertly imply that "people with disabilities lack able bodies or the ability to use their bodies" (IPC, 2021a, p. 4) The preferred terms were "non-disabled athlete" and "non-disabled sport" throughout this study.

Lastly, the terms para sports, para athletes, prospective Paralympians were mainly used throughout this study. The reason behind this preference was related to participants' profiles and representing then accurately. Powis and colleagues (2023) were critical of using the term para instead of disability and disconnecting the link between disability studies and disability sport research. It was neither this study's nor the researcher's aim to avoid the use of disability word nor to erase the reference to disability from disability sports research but solely to be accurate while representing participants and their preferences in this study.

### 1.6. The Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction chapter, which provides a brief background of the research area and the rationale for studying Paralympic athletes' DC pathways, the second chapter mainly presents the conceptual framework involving different disability

conceptualizations, previous research regarding DC in sports and athlete development pathways within the para sports context. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approaches by discussing philosophical and methodological foundations, clarifying the rationale for conducting constructivist grounded theory, and detailing the iterative process of data collection and analysis processes. Chapter 4 provides the findings of conducted grounded theory and theorizes Paralympic athletes' DC pathways. The Relational Model of Paralympic athletes' Dual and Multiple Career Pathways is presented and discussed by addressing the research questions. Finally, chapter 5 provides para sports context specific discussions regarding DC in para sports experiences. Lastly, this study's significance, future research directions, limitations, and main conclusions are also provided.

# CHAPTER 2

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the conceptual framework that played a critical role in understanding the dual career experiences and pathways of Paralympic athletes. In this context, diverse disability conceptualizations, ableism, internalized ableism, dual career in sports research consisting of factors influencing dual career experiences, pathways, as well as para sports and Türkiye specific research are elaborated in this chapter. In order to understand the para sports context, athlete development pathways, stressors in para sports, and para sports in Türkiye will be presented as well.

## 2.1. Conceptualizing Disability

Understanding the conceptualization of disability is important for researchers studying para sports and para athletes. There are diverse ways to understand disability and each perspective has different implications for sports experience, para athletes and society. The way disability is conceptualized affects decisions about how athletes are treated and supported in their sports journeys, what is prioritized and how para athletes are addressed in the media, policy agenda and within their sports organizations as well as how research is conducted (Smith & Bundon, 2018). Therefore, even if researchers do not directly employ any of the disability models in their studies, it is still essential to understand these conceptualizations and their reflections on individuals with disabilities' experiences and para sports regardless of the adopted research method (Brittain, 2020).

Overviewing disability models also enables researchers to examine their implicit or explicit beliefs about disability (Martin, 2017d). The following sections outline the

history behind disability, the dominant and emerging models of disability to provide diverse perspectives in understanding disability and associated experiences.

### 2.1.1. History Behind Disability

Understanding the evolution of disability conceptualization requires consideration of the history of disability, including the economic, political, and social structures of the respective eras. It is also related to understanding how being different and bodies deviating from the norm are perceived and responded to, across different periods.

Braddock and Parish (2001), provided a comprehensive overview of the history behind disability and how understanding disability evolved from ancient civilizations to contemporary approaches. Accordingly, in the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome disability was often viewed through a religious perspective and associated with divine punishment, God's anger and individuals with disabilities were often abandoned or subjected to infanticide.

In the Middle Ages, disability was further stigmatized and associated with sin, immorality and witchcraft. However, despite experiencing stigmatization, individuals with disability also received some aid and were treated as charitable objects (Braddock & Parish, 2001).

The Enlightenment era with its emphasis on science and reason saw a shift towards medical explanations for disability being increasingly conceptualized as a medical condition in need of diagnosis and treatment. This tendency also led to medical interventions, institutionalization, segregation and medical dominance in conceptualizing disability (Woodill & Velche, 1995). The marginalization of individuals with disabilities intensified with their bodies being perceived as deviating from normalcy, less productive and profitable for the industrialized economic system demanding high levels of physical and intellectual efforts (Braddock & Parish, 2001).

The rise of new production processes and harsh working conditions of newly emerged industries such as mining or machinery, influenced the institutionalization of disabled individuals since family members became less available for taking care of their

disabled relatives. The institutionalization stepped in to provide necessary care (Oliver, 1990).

Another turning point in the history of disability occurred during the late twentieth century when the dominance of medical discourse in explaining disability was criticized and opposed. Activists with disabilities challenged the segregation and care provisions upon which people with disabilities had no control and attracted attention to the disabling role of societal attitudes. In response to the medicalization of disability, the social model introduced a new perspective that reconceptualized disability as a social construct and highlighted the role of societal barriers, prejudices, physical barriers and discrimination as the primary factors limiting the opportunities of people with disabilities (Barnes, 2012; Oliver, 1996).

The shift in conceptualizing disability from exclusively situating it in individual toward social also stimulated the fight for rights-based approaches and advocacy for equal opportunities leading ultimately to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on the 13th of December 2006. The common ground of social and human rights models involves rejecting the conceptualization of disability as a personal tragedy; however, the human rights perspective attracts attention to multi-layered factors rather than merely reducing disability to social barriers (Misener & Darcy, 2014; UN, 2006).

With regard to conceptualizations of disability in more recent years, there has been a shift towards a relational understanding, intersectional analyses, challenging ableism and new approaches of enquiry (Haslett & Smith, 2020). Reductionist accounts limiting disability conceptualization either within individual or social spheres in a mutually exclusive manner were criticized. Debates addressed the dichotomy between impairment and disability, negligence of personal experience as well as the failure of certain models to fully address the complexities of disability experiences. (Haslett & Smith, 2020; Smith & Bundon, 2018).

The overview of the history of disability revealed the evolving nature of disability conceptualization from ancient religious beliefs to medicalized understandings and, more recently, to social, relational and rights-based perspectives. Each period

contributed to shaping societal attitudes towards disability and influenced how individuals with disabilities were perceived and treated. There are various disability models providing frameworks and challenging assumptions regarding how we understand disability. The disability models had a key role in guiding practices and policies across various domains involving sports. Lastly, despite the availability of various disability conceptualizations, in the following sections three of these models being widely recognized for their differentiated understanding of disability are discussed.

### 2.1.2. The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability has historically been the primary framework for understanding disability (Haslett & Smith, 2020). Similarly, understanding the purpose of sports as rehabilitation and classification in para sports being mostly a medical practice also asserted the dominance of medical understanding of disability within the para sports context (Smith & Bundon, 2018).

According to the medical model of disability, physical limitations and impairments define disability. Disability is understood as a biological deficiency or a medical problem residing in the individual (Haslett & Smith, 2020). Based on this model, any incapacity deriving from impairment to perform an activity within the range defined normal for an individual denotes disability (Thomas, 2007).

Understanding disability takes its roots from pathologizing disability and highlights biological inferiority unable to perform similarly to “normal” individuals. Since disability is conceptualized as a medical label in need of treatment, the impaired body takes the attention and medical interventions often conducted by non-disabled individuals are emphasized to address disability (Shakespeare, 2006).

The medical model of disability has been widely criticized by both researchers and activists with disability on the grounds of creating a problematic dichotomy of “normal” and “disabled” by reducing disability to a medical condition located within the body and relying on bio-physical assumptions of “normality” while neglecting socio-cultural circumstances in its creation. Other criticisms highlighted portraying

disability as a personal tragedy in need of overcoming and the role of the medical model in promoting feelings of incompleteness and self-blaming people with disabilities (Haslett & Smith, 2020; Smith & Bundon, 2018). These criticisms stimulated the introduction of alternative frameworks to understand disability.

### 2.1.3. The Social Model of Disability

Despite various forms of the social models of disability (Shakespeare, 2014), this section discusses the UK version of the social model. In response to the dominance of medical discourse in explaining disability and associated critics, the social model of disability offered a new perspective and shifted emphasis from individual to the neglected role of social forces in understanding disability. It challenged the medical model's sole focus being on impaired body and argued that societal structures and attitudes were the main sources of disability, not the impairment itself (Thomas, 2004a).

The social model made a crucial distinction between "impairment" denoting the physical or mental condition and "disability" denoting the social construction as a result of societal attitudes and barriers (Oliver, 1996). The central idea behind the model is that while impairments may limit some physical or cognitive functions, it is societal barriers such as inaccessible environment, discriminatory attitudes, prejudices and institutionalized exclusion that disable people (Barnes, 2012).

This standpoint reconceptualizes disability as a social construct rather than a personal tragedy or a medical problem. Consequently, it challenges medical intervention as a solution and rather advocates for challenging and removing societal barriers, which prevent individuals with impairments' equal participation and independency (Oliver, 1996).

The social model of disability has been empowering for individuals with impairment by encouraging them to consider the disabling role of society instead of considering their impairment as the problem. While the social model of disability has been widely influential for politicizing disability and calling for activism, it has also received significant criticism (Smith & Bundon, 2018).

The social model's strict separation of impairment and disability was one of the main criticisms. This dualist perspective is argued to neglect the complex interactions between impairments and societal factors in the daily experiences of people with disabilities. Moreover, it has been suggested that even if all societal barriers were removed and social discrimination was addressed, people with impairments might still face challenges and limitations related to their impairment (Shakespeare, 2014).

The social model's conceptualization of disability is widely criticized because of oversimplifying the role and impact of impairment and its stance toward excluding body (Thomas, 2007). By excessively focusing on the societal aspect of disability, the social model fails to account for the personal and varied experiences of living with an impairment (Shakespeare, 2014). Nevertheless, its contribution to advocating for disability rights and collective action is well recognized within disability studies.

### 2.1.4. Beyond Dualist Conceptualizations: The Social Relational Model of Disability

The social relational model offers a progressive conceptualization of disability by addressing criticisms related to both the social model and individualist perspectives, such as the medical model (Haslett & Smith, 2020). According to the social relational model, disability is conceptualized as a social relationship between privileged, non-impaired, and marginalized impaired individuals and social structure (Thomas, 2007). Therefore, while considering disability, both the experiences associated with impairment, denoted as impairment effects and disablism are taken into account. Impairment effects signify:

> "The direct and unavoidable impacts that "impairments" (physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional) have on individuals' embodied functioning in the social world. Impairments and impairment effects are always bio-social and culturally constructed in character, and may occur at any stage in the life course" (Thomas, 2012, p. 211).

At its core, the social relational model underscores that disability includes not only the effect of impairments, such as pain and activity restrictions, but also the influence of discriminatory conditions such as attitudes and social and environmental structures

(Powis et al., 2023; Thomas, 2007). Therefore, individuals' impairment and personal experiences are acknowledged together with the role of social and environmental structures in shaping these experiences. The social relational model advocates for examining how these social relations restrict people with impairments, while also considering impairment effects and disabling social structures (Martin, 2017d). In doing so, the model emphasizes certain concepts such as disablism. Based on the social relational model of disability, disablism denotes,

> "The social imposition of avoidable restrictions on the life activities, aspirations and psycho-emotional well-being of people categorized as "impaired" by those deemed "normal". Disablism is social–relational in character and constitutes a form of social oppression in contemporary society- alongside sexism, racism, ageism, and homophobia" (Thomas, 2012, p. 211).

While conceptualizing disability, the social relational model in addition to acknowledging the impairment effects and associated activity restrictions, introduced concepts of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism and structural disablism. This model highlighted the complex interplay between personal and societal factors contributing to disablism (Haslett & Smith, 2020).

An imaginary case provided by Smith and Bundon (2018) referring to a retired wheelchair tennis player who wants to become a coach but is discouraged by a non-disabled coach, suggesting that they cannot coach "able-bodied" athletes due to their impairment, reveals the complex interplay between impairment effect, psycho-emotional disablism and the ways disability is manifested in social relations and structures. While the impairment of a former para athlete may limit and affect certain activities and movements, coach's attitude imposes additional restrictions on wheelchair tennis player's potential. Coaches' assumptions reflect what qualifies someone as a coach and what a para athlete can do or become because of their impairment leading to disablism (Smith & Bundon, 2018).

The social relationship between coach and athlete has the potential to damage para athletes' self-esteem and wellbeing. Direct psycho-emotional disablism is manifested based on the coach's power within this relationship (Smith & Bundon, 2018).

Moreover, when such attitudes are supported by other institutional structures such as hiring practices favoring non-disabled candidates, structural disablism can also occur. Besides, this experience may also stimulate para athlete who aspires to become a coach, to adopt self-imposed limitations on what they can do or become by shaping their sense of self and behavior, leading to internalizing the oppression they experience (Reeve, 2014).

As this imaginary case (Smith & Bundon, 2018) reveals, individuals with impairments can encounter various forms of interrelating oppression such as psycho-emotional disablism, structural disablism and internalized oppression. The disability conceptualization of the social relational model enables a comprehensive analytical perspective to address impairment effects and various forms of interrelating disablism occurring at personal, social, and institutional levels.

### 2.1.5. Ableism and Internalized Ableism

With the progression of disability studies, researchers called for moving beyond disability models toward new frameworks to address social and personal processes associated with disability (Brittain, 2020). Concepts such as ableism and internalized ableism are relatively new concepts. Although disablism and ableism are often used interchangeably to describe disability discrimination, they offer different perspectives and focus (Harpur, 2012). As contended by Silva and Howe (2019), focusing on disablism or ableism involved a crucial philosophical decision because while disablism primarily addressed the oppressive symptoms or outcomes of disability oppression, ableism concentrated on the root causes of this oppression.

Based on the perspective of ableism, the focus is on the discriminator and the act of discrimination by addressing the processes responsible for creating and sustaining discrimination. Whereas disablism focuses on those who are discriminated against. “Disablism only focuses on those that society has labeled disabled. Ableism, in contrast has the potential to focus attention on all groups in society who act in a discriminatory manner to those who do not apparently meet a physical norm” (Harpur, 2009, p. 134). Some researchers (Harpur, 2012; Silva, 2023) assert that the focus needs to change from discriminated party to the act of discrimination and related processes

because of its greater potential for advocacy. However, compared to sexism or racism signifying discrimination based on sex or race respectively, ableism is the most invisible one among other "-isms" (Silva, 2023).

Ableism denotes "a network of beliefs, processes, and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human" (Campbell, 2001, p. 44). Ableism is related to the conceptions of norms and normalcy as well as associated power relations (Brittain, 2020). For instance, a library designed from an ableist perspective may lack elevators, ramps, or accessible restrooms, eventually excluding individuals who need elevators to access upper floors (Harpur, 2009). This design tendency has its roots in the idealization of able body and accepting, favoring the able-bodied experience as the "norm" and creating a divide between able and disabled individuals (Silva & Howe, 2019). Consequently, buildings such as this library are designed and constructed by considering only those who satisfy normative standards in mind.

Disabling attitudes and restrictions resulting in oppression have a potential to trigger some individuals with disabilities to internalize ableist perspectives (Harpur, 2009). Within the para sport, internalized ableism can be manifested itself through athletes and coaches' acceptance of a second-class status as compared to their non-disabled peers (Brittain, 2016a). According to Reeve (2014), internalized oppression arises when disabled individuals unconsciously adopt negative views about disability due to enduring various forms of oppression. Living in a culture that often views disability negatively can lead disabled people to undervalue their sense of self and impose limitations on what they can do or become. Behaviors manifesting the internalized ableism involves people with disabilities comparing themselves to other individuals with disability and distancing from each other, hiding impairments to conform to ableist norms or overachieving to prove themselves and portray the supercrip stereotype (Haslett & Smith, 2020; Silva & Howe, 2019).

Lastly, as this section aims to provide insights on ableism, it is important to refer to Silva (2023), who called for researchers to remember their ethical responsibility to

identify their biases and challenge ableism by understanding their personal and sports' role in constructing, sustaining and reinforcing ableism.

## 2.2. Dual Career in Sports Research

In achieving to explore DC pathways of Paralympic athletes and address their DC experiences, it is important to understand the current state of research about dual careers in sports. Following an overview of the recent DC research, this section aims to address the factors influencing DC experiences, the research on DC pathways, as well as the DC studies conducted in para sports context and Türkiye.

### 2.2.1. Introduction

In the last decades, there has been growing interest and publications regarding DC in sport covering a broad spectrum of interrelated topics (Stambulova et al., 2024; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). While the systematic literature review conducted in 2015 (Guidotti et al., 2015), characterized DC research as being at its intermediate stage, today with the growing number of research addressing various topics such as DC transitions, associated demands, challenges, well-being, coping strategies, DC environments as well as the role of support, DC term has become established (Stambulova et al., 2024). This growing body of research is an important reflection of conceptualizing athlete development from a holistic perspective and recognizing the significance of the environment in which their development takes place.

Within the DC literature, an athletic career is typically conceptualized as initiated during childhood and continued through adolescence and adulthood, overlapping with simultaneous progression through primary, secondary and high schools following university education (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022; Wylleman et al., 2020). This conceptualization dominantly guided DC research and revealed a predominant focus on studying student-athletes, especially at upper secondary and higher education levels but fell short of considering the heterogeneity within DC athlete population such as DC in sport and work (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021; Deason, 2019), DC at primary school

(Stambulova et al., 2024) and DC experiences of athletes with a disability (Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

For a long time, substantial research on DC was conducted in North America, focusing exclusively on student-athletes, covering university period and collegiate system (Guidotti et al., 2015; Li & Sum, 2017; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Transitioning to college and a vocational career following graduation were the two major topics of DC transitions in the North American context (Stambulova et al., 2021). Additionally, DC research in the American context, explored developmental tasks of student-athletes and their academic and athletic identities. This research also examined the development of identity foreclosure that restricted student-athletes' identity exclusively to their athletic roles, hindering the development of other aspects of their identity (Petitpas & France, 2010; Stambulova et al., 2021).

Recently, with the increasing support and call for policy actions by the European Union, European DC research has been stimulated and become at the forefront of worldwide DC studies with its growing publications (Stambulova et al., 2024; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). In the European context, where the sporting system is mainly club-based (Ryba et al., 2015) and the diversity of educational systems and DC policies exist (Aquilina & Henry, 2010), DC studies covered a wide array of research foci, conceivably as a reflection of the multiplicity of national approaches and cultural diversity among the European countries (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). It has been mainly guided by the holistic lifespan perspective (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2013; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016), acknowledging athletic career as one aspect of the life career and developing athletes holistically as well as the holistic ecological perspective (Henriksen et al., 2010, 2020; Nikander et al., 2022) focusing on the structure, components and stakeholders of the environment in which DC athletes develop.

Despite the multi-dimensional benefits associated with pursuing DC such as increased social networks and socialization opportunities, balanced lifestyle, development of multiple identities, chances of developing transferable life skills in other domains, ability to self-regulate, higher chances of employability and better retirement planning

(Aquilina, 2013; EC, 2012), DC athletes faced multidimensional challenges such as time conflicts (Condello et al., 2019; Cosh & Tully, 2014), higher training load (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022), lack of flexibility (Mateu et al., 2020); lack of free time, homesickness, narrowed social networks (Stambulova et al., 2015), fatigue, financial pressure, conflicting schedules, inflexibility of coaches (Cosh & Tully, 2015), identity and role conflicts (Ryba et al., 2017), educational institutions' negative stance towards DC (Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015) in maintaining the balance between training and education.

The Holistic Athletic Career Model (HACM) (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016), has been a key framework in guiding athlete career studies (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) as well as in creating guidelines on dual career at both international (EC, 2012) and national levels (The Swedish Sports Confederation, 2018). It also facilitated the identification of the various challenges that dual career athletes were simultaneously facing. The model illustrated the complexity of athletes' development and associated transitions. Based on the HACM (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) athletes experienced overlapping transitions at multi-dimensional developmental levels such as athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal levels, with each level revealing its own normative progressive sequences. Therefore, athletes needed to cope with simultaneous challenges as they progressed through different levels of their development.

At the athletic level, for instance, the overlapping transition to university coinciding with junior to senior transition experienced by most student-athletes necessitated them to cope with both athletic concerns, such as increasing training loads or possibly adjusting to a new training environment as well as challenges at psychosocial level such as adjusting to a new social environment upon moving away for their academic pursuit (Brown et al., 2015). At the academic level, student-athletes transitioning to higher education experienced different challenges as compared to those in secondary education, such as deciding on a subject of study, adjusting to a more independent lifestyle with less supervision and sustaining motivation for academic activities (Wylleman et al., 2020).

Similarly, at the psychosocial level, they had to deal with increased self-responsibility upon decreased parental support (Brown et al., 2015). Addressing motivational challenges (Lupo et al., 2015), physical and mental fatigue (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022) and coping with role strain and negotiating their role and identity as an athlete and teenage further complicated their experiences at the psychological level (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). Similarly, at the financial level student athletes needed to deal with accommodation expenses and tuition fees as well as high costs of educational programs providing necessary flexibility (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022). Besides, at the legal level, upon graduation from university, DC athletes were challenged by losing their student-athlete status and associated privileges such as reduced tariffs for transportation (Wylleman et al., 2020).

All these challenges, either examined individually at each of these developmental levels or considered simultaneously throughout DC athletes' development, necessitated DC athletes coping with them and figuring out how to prioritize based on their resources (Stambulova et al., 2024).

In connection with the increasing number of studies focusing on DC in sports field, there has been a growing interest in conducting systematic reviews as well (Deason, 2019; Guidotti et al., 2015; Li & Sum, 2017; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). Additionally, recently published "Position Statement on Athletes' Dual Careers in European Context" by European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) summarized the current state of studies and outlined the direction of DC research (Stambulova et al., 2024).

The systematic review conducted by Guidotti et al. (2015) analyzing 49 studies published in Europe between 2007 and 2014, revealed that early DC research mainly focused on several dimensions separately. At the micro (individual) level, studies emphasized athletes' motivations, reasons for dropout, and career transition experiences. At the meso (interpersonal) level, the focus was on teachers' perceptions of student-athletes, whereas the macro (social-environmental) level highlighted the role of career assistance and practices in the educational and sports environments. The global (policy) level examined the organizational and governmental policies.

Additionally, the review underscored the diverse profiles of DC athletes, considering factors such as competition level, gender, age, and sport type.

In the same year that Guidotti et al.'s (2015) systematic review was published, a special issue on dual career (DC) development and transitions (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015) was released. This special issue on DC included 13 articles examining DC transitions and the relevant experiences of athletes across Europe (8 articles) and in other regions, such as New Zealand, Australia, Africa, and Canada, as well as the pathways of transnational athletes showcasing their academic, athletic and cultural transitions. These studies highlighted the multi-layered changes, normative and non-normative transitions, and challenges that DC athletes experienced during their development. This special issue on DC development and transitions also revealed the growing acceptance of the "holistic lifespan perspective" and the "whole person" approach in conducting DC research (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015).

While the previous systematic review exclusively focused on the European context, the meta synthesis conducted by Li and Sum (2017), by including articles over a 20-year period (1996-2016) from worldwide, reviewed 9 articles employing a qualitative methodology. Their study conceptualized transition into DC by a four-stage model illustrating the regular processes and influential features at each stage. The four phases of DC involved "becoming the athlete with a dual career, negotiating a new lifestyle, dealing with daily routine, attaining a balance / denying to continue" (Li & Sum, 2017). Moreover, the factors influencing the DC experience were categorized by individual factors involving physical and psychological conditions, interpersonal factors involving social agents and coping strategies, and external factors involving support, opportunity, prejudice, financial and unfavorable conditions (Li & Sum, 2017).

Another state-of-the-art critical review conducted by Stambulova and Wylleman (2019) covered period between 2015 and 2018 by reviewing 42 articles within the European context and identified the trends within DC research such as holistic lifespan, ecological and context-sensitive approaches. Based on the critical review, the significance of support mechanisms was highlighted. Moreover, DC studies have

underlined a complex interplay of various external and internal factors shaping student-athlete development. However, research on DC in work, DC at primary school level, and DC for Paralympic athletes were exclusively mentioned as research gaps in need of consideration (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

To expand the review of DC literature beyond European studies and incorporate diverse methodological approaches involving quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies, Deason (2019) conducted a mixed-studies synthesis by reviewing 33 studies on DC to identify factors impacting DC experiences. The findings highlighted four key factors, including social support, personal resources, and academic and athletic environments' openness toward DC in facilitating positive DC experiences. Additionally, the review suggested that DC pathways were more complex than the predominantly referenced the HACM framework (Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) and that alternative pathways existed across the DC lifespan (Deason, 2019).

In a similar vein, Vidal-Vilaplana et al. (2022) employed a bibliometric analysis and a systematic review to identify thematic clusters in dual career (DC) research. This review included 163 studies on DC published up to 2021, without being restricted by any geographical limitations. Accordingly, the reviewed studies were conducted by 386 authors from 204 institutions across 40 countries, underscoring the research progression and international reach (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). The most productive region for DC research was Europe, with a significant increase in publications, especially after DC topic and supporting DC athletes were recognized as a priority at the EU level. The increased interest in DC research has continued to broaden perspectives in the field, and the authors recommended further research on environmental influences, transnational experiences, and culturally sensitive perspectives to deepen the DC literature. With regard to the thematic analysis, five interconnected themes were identified, which involved support policies within contexts, a holistic view of sports career development and transitions, young student-athletes' DC perceptions, benefits and challenges in DC development, and DC pathways (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022).

The most recent review outlining the previous research on DC, consolidating the current state of DC knowledge as well as identifying the gaps is the "Position Statement on Athletes' Dual Careers in the European Context" published by the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) (Stambulova et al., 2024). Accordingly, the review attracted attention to the growing global interest in DC research for the past decades. The European DC research has been mainly guided by a holistic developmental approach (Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) denoting how DC athletes developed in holistic ways and an holistic ecological approach (Henriksen et al., 2020) acknowledging the role of environment's structure and component as well as stakeholder's collaboration in shaping DC experiences. Moreover, the position statement underscored the role of context in creating facilitation or challenges, availability of various DC pathways, the importance of prioritization and use of resources in addressing challenges, the significance of personal resources, DC competences, the complimentary and facilitative role of social support corresponding to the DC athletes' needs as well as considering wellbeing both as a resource and an outcome. It also underlined the reciprocal influence between DC athlete and DC environment in which they develop (Stambulova et al., 2024).

### 2.2.2. Factors Influencing Dual Career Experiences

In light of DC literature, factors influencing DC experiences are considered multilayered, interconnected, and conceptualized through personal resources, social support, and relational dynamics, as well as environmental influences and cultural perspectives.

#### 2.2.2.1. Personal Resources

While combining their athletic career with education or work, DC athletes experienced multidimensional challenges and needed resources to cope with these competing demands (Wylleman et al., 2020). Recent DC studies stressed the importance of both external and personal resources in initiating and managing a successful DC process (Brown et al., 2015; Defruyt et al., 2020; Li & Sum, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Therefore, being resourceful is stressed as a crucial component for athletes to cope with competing challenges (De Brandt et al., 2017). In

addition to the external support, DC athletes' internal resources involving skills, experience and attributes played a critical role in facilitating DC experiences (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022).

Personal attributes, including self-identity structure (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Stambulova et al., 2015), perceived competence concerning independence and self-discipline (Defruyt et al., 2020), self-efficacy (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021), motivational patterns (Aunola et al., 2018; Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Defruyt et al., 2020; Lupo et al., 2015), career aims (Sum et al., 2017), psychological and social characteristics (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Li & Sum, 2017; MacNamara & Collins, 2010) as well as personal competences (De Brandt et al., 2017, 2018; Wylleman et al., 2020) acted as key assets to an athlete's ability to initiate and manage dual career in sports. The study by Cartigny et al. (2021) showed that based on their identity and self-confidence towards DC, there were different types of DC athletes and correspondingly different support needs relating to their profiles.

Based on the research involving 3,350 student-athletes from nine European countries, De Brandt et al. (2018) considered a variety of dual career (DC) competencies that were grouped into four interrelated clusters. By offering a holistic and developmental consideration of the competencies, a list of 29 items including the four main DC competencies such as DC management, career planning, emotional awareness, social intelligence and adaptability is developed (De Brandt et al., 2018). Correspondingly, DC management involved competencies that encompassed self-discipline, dedication, time management, prioritization, staying committed and planning skills. Career planning competence encompassed adaptability, the ability to handle unexpected changes, establishing back-up plans, and considering career plans outside of sports domain. The third DC competence, emotional awareness emphasizes the emotional aspect and refers to the ability to cope with stress, adversity, developmental pressures, and self-belief in overcoming challenges. Lastly, social intelligence and adaptability competence highlighted relational and interpersonal skills that included seeking advice from others, learning from past experiences as well as from others, and maintaining relationships with key individuals (De Brandt et al., 2018). Possessing DC

competencies was emphasized as significant personal resources to cope with the multi-layered demands of DC processes throughout an athlete's DC journey (De Brandt et al., 2017, 2018; Perez-Rivases et al., 2020; Wylleman et al., 2020).

Studies showed that developing DC competencies could be especially challenging for athletes (Linnér et al., 2019). Research exploring Swedish student-athletes DC scenarios and competencies found that coping with stress, prioritizing, and maintaining focus without distraction were the most needed competencies for development (Linnér et al., 2019). Similarly, a recent study on Spanish female student-athletes revealed that while they valued the generic DC competencies, they felt specifically a need for further development in DC management and emotional awareness competencies (Perez-Rivases et al., 2020). These findings highlighted a discrepancy between perceived importance and possession of DC competences and underscored the significance of external support in enhancing DC capabilities by analyzing situation and athlete specific needs thoroughly. Understanding and identifying DC athletes' possession of DC competencies, perceived importance of various skills and areas for further growth is crucial for providing effective support corresponding to their needs (De Brandt et al., 2017).

Additionally, the wellbeing of DC athletes appeared as both an important resource in coping with DC challenges and an outcome of DC since mental ill health of DC athletes could act as a DC barrier (Stambulova et al., 2024). Recently considering the complex phenomenon of wellbeing and providing social and professional support has been emphasized (Stambulova et al., 2024; Storm et al., 2021), attracting attention to the importance of social support and relational dynamics within DC to the spotlight.

#### 2.2.2.2. Social Support and Relational Dynamics of DC Experiences

Recent research highlighted that effective social and professional support played a critical role in helping DC athletes manage the complex, coinciding and competing challenges of a dual career (Defruyt et al., 2019; Storm et al., 2021; Sum et al., 2017). Supporting athletes in developing DC competencies and their DC journey attracts attention to the proximal level relationships between the athlete and significant others (Knight & Harwood, 2015). How a DC athlete experiences dual career processes is

not only dependent on the individual but also on the intertwined interpersonal relationships with their support network involving parents, coaches, teammates, peers, siblings, teachers, employers (Defruyt et al., 2020; Henriksen et al., 2020; Knight et al., 2018; Knight & Harwood, 2015; Li & Sum, 2017; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Sum et al., 2017). Moreover, the study by De Brandt et al. (2018) found that maintaining relationships with their social network, asking for help and advice from them were important facilitators for DC athletes denoted as social intelligence and adaptability competences. Athletes expressed significance of relying on their support network, yet sometimes experienced struggles in their relationships (Knight et al., 2018; Li & Sum, 2017; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022).

Coaches, as one of the most influential social actors in athletes' lives, played a critical role by serving both as a source of support as well as a pressure (Cosh & Tully, 2015). Some coaches expressed concerns over athletes' divided focus and expected them to prioritize sports over education (Aquilina, 2013; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Knight et al., 2018; Knight & Harwood, 2015; Singer, 2008). Whereas others acted as facilitators, by providing enjoyable training environments, supporting their athletes to manage stress (Cosh & Tully, 2015), promoting a balanced life, and recognizing the value of education alongside athletic pursuits (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Sum et al., 2017; Tekavc et al., 2015). However, while many coaches expressed appreciation for athletes' educational efforts, the practical reflection was usually missing and they did not consistently reflect the value of education in their (Ronkainen et al., 2018).

In addition to coaches, the studies revealed that parents and how they perceived DC could be a source of support through providing moral, financial, and logistical support (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022; Tekavc et al., 2015), or pressure because of their controlling behaviors and overemphasis on the single dimension of their children's life (Defruyt et al., 2020; Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Knight et al., 2018; Tekavc et al., 2015). Moreover, despite feeling enthusiastic about supporting their children, parents often felt unprepared to decide on suitable approaches to supporting their children concerning their DC journey (Knight & Harwood, 2015; Tessitore et al., 2021).

Among other members of the entourage, peers had positive and negative roles in DC athletes' experiences (Deason, 2019; Linnér et al., 2021). While some peers helped cope with stress and loneliness (Sum et al., 2017) or supported athletes academically by sharing class notes (Linnér et al., 2021), others, especially non-sports peers, created challenges due to failures in meeting socialization expectations. This situation sometimes leads athletes to experience conflicting roles, resulting in role strain between their athletic and teenage identities (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). In some cases, admiring successful role models and following their footsteps inspired athletes to initiate their higher education (Defruyt et al., 2020). Additionally, the study by Sum et al. (2017) found that teammates acted as a source of motivation and guidance, while siblings by providing emotional and sometimes financial support, facilitated the DC process.

Similarly, teachers and academic staff facilitated DC experience by counseling and emphasizing long term career planning (Knight & Harwood, 2015), supporting athletes by providing special arrangements concerning school work (Tekavc et al., 2015), rearranging exam dates by taking coinciding schedules into account (Brown et al., 2015) or made it difficult for DC athletes by stigmatizing them (Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015), and let DC athletes feel constrained by refusing to provide flexibility (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022).

From the beginning until the end of DC pathway, social agents so-called "team around the athlete" (Knight et al., 2018, p.145) had a key role in athletes' academic, athletic and/or vocational domains (Li & Sum, 2017; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019), with their roles and significance changing on a continuum (Henriksen et al., 2020; Knight & Harwood, 2015; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022). As DC athletes navigated through their developmental journey and experienced changes associated with transitions, such as moving away for education, decreased contact with their support network, the roles of significant others changed over time (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022; Sum et al., 2017; Wylleman et al., 2020). Moreover, as they progressed within their DC pathway, they were expected to become more autonomous, resourceful, and self-responsible, which gradually transformed the role of external support to a more complementary role (Stambulova et al., 2024).

The extent to which significant others' support responded to the needs and expectations of DC athletes were closely related to anticipating the DC demands, problems, recognizing the needs of DC athletes and addressing these needs with necessary adaptations, enhancing DC athletes' agency through autonomy-supportive environments and appreciating the value of dual career (Knight et al., 2018).

The interdependence and complexity within each layer of the DC social ecosystem showed that support processes at various levels were reciprocal, rather than independent (Henriksen et al., 2020; Nikander et al., 2022; Storm et al., 2021). While each one of these significant figures individually and separately fulfilled important roles regarding DC athletes' experiences, considering their interrelationships was also necessary. Research conducted by Knight et al. (2018) revealed the importance of integrated efforts across the support network by highlighting the importance of collaboration, mutual support, shared goals, open communication and avoiding conflicting messages. Moreover, considering DC athlete as a whole person, recognizing and valuing all aspects of their life, and consistently promoting and voicing the benefits of education, adopting a competence driven and empowering approach were highlighted as the key factors in optimizing relational dynamics and support provided to the DC athlete (Knight et al., 2018; Stambulova et al., 2024).

#### 2.2.2.3. Environmental Structures, Opportunities and Cultural Influences

The characteristics of the DC context, available opportunities, its structure, and resources create opportunities as well as constraints while pursuing DC (Stambulova et al., 2024). The development of DC athletes, their DC experiences and pathways followed are related to the development of the environment (Morris et al., 2021; Stambulova et al., 2021).

Beyond individual and social relational influences, the broader environment in which athletes develop, plays a vital role in shaping their DC journey. As outlined by the HACM (Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman et al., 2013), athletes while progressing developmentally navigated and interacted with different environments such as schools, academic institutions, sports organizations, universities, and sport clubs.

Previous studies regarding DC development revealed that DC settings and available support varied to a great extent and had multidimensional reflections and implications within DC social ecosystem (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Guidotti et al., 2015; Henriksen et al., 2020; Kuettel et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). The extent to which academic environment and athletic environment are open to nurturing dual career pursuits, the availability of academic as well as athletic flexibility, access to academic support, financial incentives, adjustment of academic and training schedules, structured support and guidance, the availability of Career Assistance Programs (CAPs) and the organization of national DC systems are among the essential features of supportive DC environments influencing DC athletes and their respective DC processes (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Deason, 2019; Henriksen et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2021; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Sum et al., 2017). DC athletes' expectations of flexibility in higher education and perceived support attracted them to consider combining education and sports (Defruyt et al., 2020).

Across the world, the organization of sports and education differs to a great extent regarding structure, type, and management. While some countries and models integrate sports directly into the educational system, others have differing approaches that involved sports being practiced through sports clubs with little or no connection to the educational system (Quinaud et al., 2022).

Within the school-based DC system in the United States where intercollegiate athletics are integrated into higher education, The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), oversees the performance of its member institutions regarding academic support systems, career development programs as well as the eligibility of student-athlete, their academic performance and aims to promote policies and practices for supportive, positive learning and competitive environments (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021). Consequently, student-athletes are offered structured support such as career counselling, scholarships, and tutoring, as a reflection of institutional support on DC (Quinaud et al., 2022).

Whereas, in Europe where the sporting system is mainly club-based (Ryba et al., 2015) and educational systems are diversified, the national layer of DC experiences involves differing national approaches and DC policies highlight the availability of differing support and interactions between education and sports environments (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Accordingly, the structure and support available to elite athletes in higher education in Europe were classified by four different typologies that involved "state-centric regulation" where the government regulates higher education institutions to provide adapted support through legislative measures, "state as a sponsor/facilitator" through promoting formal agreements between educational and sporting organizations, "national sports federations or sports institutes as intermediaries" where national sports organizations act on behalf of student-athletes for providing support and lastly, "laissez-faire" approach with lack of structured measures and leaving arrangements and negotiations rely on individuals (Aquilina & Henry, 2010).

The environment in which athletes experience DC has reflections on policies, interactions, provided support and the DC structure (Henriksen et al., 2020; Kuettel et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Storm et al., 2021). In addition to classifying national approaches in supporting DC, the study by Morris et al. (2021) further expanded knowledge by outlining different environments within nations that offered different approaches to supporting athletes and establishing communication lines between sport and education. Accordingly, eight dual career development environments (DCDEs) with varying resources, structures, goals, processes were identified across seven European countries targeting various educational levels, sports, student, and athlete profiles and providing different approaches in response to the priorities of individuals. These DCDEs involved "sports-friendly schools, elite sport schools/colleges, professional and/or private clubs, sport-friendly universities, combined dual career systems, national sports programs, defense forces programs, and players' union programs" (Morris et al., 2021, p. 6). A crucial factor in facilitating DC experience is the stance of the environment toward accommodating DC athletes by acknowledging and addressing their needs, while a lack of coordination and communication constrain the compatibility of both careers (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022).

To have an informed understanding of environments' role, recent research explored an athlete-friendly university as a DCDE and the influential factors in supporting DC athletes (Henriksen et al., 2020). The findings underscored the multi-layered, dynamic, and interconnected nature of the environment where optimizing the whole environment was as crucial as focusing individually on student-athletes' challenges and needs (Henriksen et al., 2020). The important elements to developing student-athletes as individuals, athletes, and students involved the coordination provided by DC support team in facilitating communication and support across different domains. Besides, offering individualized solutions corresponding to DC athletes' experiences, adopting a competence-enhancing approach in empowering DC athletes, acknowledging optimal balance, and recognizing athletes as whole persons were essential elements (Henriksen et al., 2020). Hence, it is crucial to recognize the dynamism within and across each dimension and understand the ongoing processes by recognizing the evolving perspectives of DC environments.

Moving from highlighting the supportive measures in DC experience such as offering flexible training and study programs or availability of mentorship, Storm et al. (2021), despite acknowledging the uniqueness of each environment within its culture, identified the essential features of dual career development environments. They underlined the significance of focusing on a whole spectrum and the interaction between various people across organizations and the athlete. Accordingly, the essential features shared by these diverse dual career development environments highlighted the significance of a "holistic structure" encompassing "dedicated support team for coordination, integrated efforts via communication across the whole environment, acknowledgment, and support from the environment, guidance of role models and mentorship, access to expert support" (Storm et al., 2021, p. 5), as well as a "shared DC philosophy" denoting "a whole person and empowerment approaches, individualized flexible DC solutions, bearing responsibility for well-being and adopting a proactive approach to develop DC environment" (Storm et al., 2021, p. 5).

More recent attention of DC in sports literature has focused on individual DC athletes, DC pathways, transitions and related challenges, the team around them, their role in DC processes, and the environment in which athletes develop. To date, research

exploring the cultural influences on dual career development of athletes has been scarce (Kuettel et al., 2020). At the macro system of DC development, attitudes, ideologies of culture, norms, values, prejudices, beliefs, youth, educational and sports culture are crucial features affecting the DC environment and the way DC development is perceived and supported (Henriksen et al., 2020; Kuettel et al., 2020; Li & Sum, 2017; Sum et al., 2017). The cultural transitions of Aboriginal athletes upon relocation to pursue academic and sports careers underlined the crucial role of culture in shaping their DC experiences through dealing with stereotypes, culturally oppressing behaviors, loss of social cultural support and renegotiating their identities (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015).

Another study conducted by Kuettel et al. (2020) also revealed the cultural influence on the DC development and trajectories of athletes through exploring the values and beliefs of significant stakeholders in DC team. Accordingly, athletes in Denmark, Poland, and Switzerland encountered differing levels of support and program structures in their DC pathways, reflecting the respective countries' distinct cultures and ideologies of welfare regimes (Kuettel et al., 2020). For instance, in a Danish sport-friendly university recognizing DC athletes as active agents and autonomous individuals in charge of their own DC development led to a shift from proactive to reactive support in order to stimulate autonomy and active involvement of DC athlete in planning and prioritization (Henriksen et al., 2020). The national context, culturally and socially imposed expectations from DC athletes, macro cultural influences encompassing the culture of sports, education, and youth, as well as how the agency of athletes is conceptualized, have reflections on DC social ecosystem and diversified approaches in DC development (Henriksen et al., 2020; Kuettel et al., 2020). The complexities embedded in DC contexts and dual career development environments revealed that DC processes at various levels were part of a related culture constituting a role in developing DC environments (Kuettel et al., 2020).

### 2.2.3. DC Research on Pathways

There are diverse DC pathways depending on different contexts and athletes' preferences (Stambulova et al., 2024). As discussed in the previous section, diverse

national approaches concerning DC as well as different dual career development environments, allow athletes to follow different DC pathways.

The studies exploring career transitions and employing holistic career perspective provided valuable insights into DC pathways. The athletic career transition research revealed that student-athletes in the North American context mainly experienced two major transitions involving transition into university and vocational post-sport career as most student-athletes drop out of sports and retire following college graduation due to losing competition opportunities in professional sports to continue their athletic career (Stambulova et al., 2021). In contrast, previous DC research in the European context revealed that student-athletes mainly experienced three major transitions, which allowed them to follow their preferred pathways (Stambulova et al., 2021).

Accordingly, following the transition to upper secondary school, student-athletes have a chance to decide on continuing their education at a regular school or elite sport school (Stambulova et al., 2015). Upon graduating from high school, student athletes might choose to continue their education at university or experience a linear-pathway by focusing exclusively on their sports career (Mateu et al., 2020; Ryba et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2021). The study by Vickers and Morris (2022) studied the career pathway upon university graduation and showed that student-athletes followed four different routes encompassing full focus on the sporting pathway, combining sport and work or triple career pathway, pursuing postgraduate studies together with elite sport pathway as well as an alternative pathway by dropping out of sport and transitioning into employment or postgraduate studies.

As previously discussed within the DC literature, an athletic career was typically conceptualized as initiated during childhood and continued through adolescence and adulthood, overlapping with simultaneous progression through primary, secondary, and high schools following university education (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022). Since DC athletes progressed through different levels of their development, they experienced multiple and overlapping transitions and needed to cope with associated demands (Wylleman et al., 2020), which made sustaining a constant commitment to both academic and sports careers equally and fully challenging (Stambulova et al.,

2015). Depending on individual priorities, the balance between education and sports is reconsidered and negotiated leading to different typologies of DC athlete (Stambulova & Harwood, 2022).

Recent research categorized different typologies of DC pathways into three categories that involved a sporting pathway signifying a sports dominance within DC, an educational- vocational pathway signifying an education-vocation dominant focus to DC and DC pathway representing a balance between education-vocation and sports with each category showing different identity development as well as support needs (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021). Moreover, it has been suggested that although a dual career pathway signifies an equal progression in each domain, in practice, the importance given to given to careers occasionally varies and fluctuates (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021; Mateu et al., 2020).

Similarly, Torregrossa et al. (2015) identified a three-pathway classification in DC. Accordingly, a "linear path" indicated an exclusive focus on sports careers, a "convergent path" represented prioritization of sports over vocation-education, and a "parallel path" emphasized an equal prioritization of sports and education-vocation, revealing both athletes' choices and sporting culture effect on the pathway followed. Their research showed that athletes from super-professionalized sports were often influenced by their environment to pursue a linear path. In contrast, athletes from semi-professionalized sports pursued convergent or parallel paths. Lastly, athletes from traditional Olympic sports experienced more flexibility in choosing pathways based on their priorities (Torregrosa et al., 2015).

In addition to the above-discussed DC pathways, Stambulova et al. (2015) classified DC athletes into three categories as "students doing sports" signifying students who focused on academics by considering limited opportunities in sports following an educational-vocational pathway (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021), "athletes trying to study" prioritizing sports and following a sporting pathway (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021), and "athletes searching for optimal balance" striving for a more balanced experience, making shifts between pursuits and following a dual career pathway (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021).

Besides other studies (Garrett et al., 2020; Palumbo et al., 2021; Ryba et al., 2015) introduced diverse profile of athletes following transnational DC pathways based on geographical mobilization and migration motives such as financial incentives, better competition opportunities, coach encouragement, and recruitment, personal, political reasons, experiencing new cultures.

### 2.2.4. DC Research in Para Sports Context

Dual career research neglected para sports context and experiences of para athletes to a great extent (Campbell, 2018; Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Except for the recently conducted research on DC barriers in the para sports context (Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023) and the higher education experiences of student para athletes (Campbell, 2018), DC in para sports context remains an under-researched area. These research efforts provided initial insights and revealed that absence of flexibility, lack of institutional support, long travel distances between home and university, absence of accessible facilities and services, travel challenges and difficulty in balancing training and study were challenges encountered by student-athletes with disabilities (Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

The Para-Limits project (Leiva-Arcas et al., 2023), aiming to contribute to social inclusion through promoting dual career of athletes with disabilities, indicated that various interconnected stakeholders had a key role in supporting these athletes. Hence, developing effective, coherent, and coordinated efforts between support providers from academic, sports, and personal domains is essential for enabling student-athletes with disabilities' academic and athletic development (Leiva-Arcas et al., 2023). Similarly, the Swedish National Guidelines for Elite Athletes' Dual Career (2018) attracted attention to student-athletes requiring special support by dedicating a section and underlined that universities might need to implement more complex arrangements to meet their disability and elite sports associated needs.

Research exploring the experiences of DC para athletes and their higher education landscape (TASS, 2021) emphasized a collaborative approach in increasing opportunities and improving experiences of student para athletes. Some student para

athletes shared feelings of being valued less than their non disabled peers which underlined the need for greater recognition and promotion of para sports within university settings. Moreover, one of the key challenges experienced by student para-athletes was the transition out of higher education, which revealed four different pathways. These pathways included becoming a full-time para-athlete, retiring from sports to pursue a career due to difficulties balancing an elite athletic career with full-time work, pursuing postgraduate studies while competing and sustaining an athletic career while unemployed and depending on disability benefits (TASS, 2021). Understanding these challenges and experiences encountered by student para athletes is crucial to provide appropriate support.

According to Leiva-Arcas et al. (2023), to facilitate managing dual careers, universities should offer individualized support to student-athletes with disabilities corresponding to their academic, athletic, and personal needs. Facilitative measures in supporting DC involved flexible study programs, additional exam options, training for academic staff concerning inclusive education, introducing personalized educational programs aligning with athletic pursuits, access to university sports facilities for training, and providing scholarships for financial support (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023).

Based on the limited research (Campbell, 2018; Leiva-Arcas et al., 2023; Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; TASS, 2021; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023), it is revealed that the contextual differences associated with para sports and challenges associated with disability experience added complexity while pursuing DC and para athletes experienced diversified challenges as compared to their non-disabled peers pursuing DC.

Relatedly, the research on the retirement experiences of elite Paralympic athletes highlighted the unique retirement challenges experienced by para athletes and attracted attention to de-classification or secondary disabilities due to injuries forcing them to an involuntary or premature career termination (Bundon et al., 2018). Moreover, the pursuit of medals becoming a top priority (Bundon, 2022; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017) and coaches, as well as high-performance staff's increased expectations of

commitment from para athletes posed threats to the continuation of athletes' educational or vocational pursuits. The shift in expectations necessitating increased dedication, forced para athletes to reconsider their careers by quitting their jobs and schools or moving to centralized training facilities (Bundon, 2022), especially in tense periods heading toward the Paralympic Games (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Dehghansai, Pinder, Baker, & Renshaw, 2021). Furthermore, para athletes with exclusive focus on athletic career expressed feelings of stress and worry because of having restricted options after retirement, which posed challenges to their wellbeing (Miller et al., 2024).

Together with the future employment concerns after retirement (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018), the trends in para sports such as professionalization (Houlihan & Chapman, 2017; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014) and the evolving nature of para sports toward Olympification further complicated the retirement decisions of para athletes as well as their career trajectories (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018).

### 2.2.5. Dual Career Research in Türkiye

Compared to the increase in DC researches worldwide, especially in the European context in recent years (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022), DC studies in Türkiye have been limited. Despite being in its infancy and limited, DC research conducted in Türkiye (Bozyiğit et al., 2022; Karadağ & Aşçı, 2021; Koçak et al., 2023; Semiz, 2018; Urhan & Fişne, 2022), mainly focused on the DC experiences and challenges encountered by student-athletes at higher education, together with research on scale adaptations regarding dual career competency and student athletes' career situations. To date, these studies mainly focused on the micro level by studying student-athletes' experiences.

Research indicated that student-athletes in Türkiye faced challenges involving coinciding schedules, transportation issues, long travel distances between school and training facilities, time management challenges, financial concerns, and role conflicts (Koçak et al., 2023; Semiz, 2018). High performance student-athletes reported that they felt obliged to prioritize training camps and competitions over their education due to schedules being beyond their control (Koçak et al., 2023). Additionally, student-athletes competing at the international level shared that they experienced challenges

in maintaining social relationships, managing absence due to intense training periods, coping with stress related to conflicting responsibilities, facing negative attitudes of coaches toward their academic pursuits, and dealing with persistent fatigue (Urhan & Fişne, 2022).

Despite these challenges, student-athletes highlighted the value of education for their future by referring to and recognizing the limited lifespan of an athletic career. To deal with dual career demands, student-athletes adopted various coping strategies such as sacrificing social activities and social relationships, relying on self-discipline, seeking flexibility from their academic institutions, and requesting support from academic staff (Koçak et al., 2023).

Recently, the Turkish National Olympic Committee, as one of the partners of the "Supporting Athletes' Dual Careers Project," introduced an online course aiming to raise awareness of Olympic athletes on dual careers, shared strategies for managing dual careers, and showcased success stories of other student-athletes as role models (Türkiye Milli Olimpiyat Komitesi (TMOK), 2024). However, both structured career assistance programs and career counseling services are missing in Türkiye, highlighting the need to develop career assistance programs corresponding to student-athletes' needs (Koçak et al., 2023).

On the other hand, some supportive measures exist for decorated national athletes, such as reserved university enrollment quotas. National athletes are granted special quotas for admission to higher education institutions in sports, and their application threshold scores are set lower than other candidates. According to Article 7.5 of the 2024 Higher Education Institutions Examination (YKS) Guide, national athletes who place in the top three positions in the Olympics, World Championships, and European Championships are placed in higher education institutions in the field of sports within the allocated quotas (Student Selection and Placement Centre, 2024).

The Ministry of National Education also allocates quotas for national athletes who have either ranked in the top positions or have been chosen to the national team at least ten times in Olympic disciplines. Providing they meet the required criteria, these athletes are appointed as physical education teachers based on their ranking among the

applicants for that year, without requiring a centralized exam (Ministry of National Education, 2015).

DC studies in Türkiye referred to these facilitative measures supporting student-athletes such as flexibility allowing them to take make-up exams for overlapping exam and training-competition schedules, scholarships facilitating educational opportunities in both sport and non-sports fields of study at foundation universities, and legislative measures facilitating employment opportunities of national athletes (Alp, 2020; Koçak et al., 2023). However, these measures were criticized for their limited reach, mainly targeting decorated high-performance athletes in higher education, revealing the absence of organized, coordinated, and systematic approaches to supporting student-athletes in Türkiye (Koçak et al., 2023).

## 2.3. Research on Para Sports

Emphasizing a context-sensitive approach is crucial to situating and understanding the relevant experiences of para athletes. Therefore, to achieve contextual awareness, this section aims to consider para athlete development pathways, and stressors experienced by para athletes.

### 2.3.1. Athlete Development Pathways in Para Sports

Identifying talents and developing athletes to achieve their potential are crucial agenda items for most scholars, practitioners, and policymakers (Pinder et al., 2023). Correspondingly, there has been a growing interest in researching athlete development pathways for the last decades. However, a major focus of previous research was on conceptualizing the developmental progression of non-disabled athletes, leaving para athletes and their experiences under-explored (Baker et al., 2017; Dehghansai et al., 2017; Dowling et al., 2018; Hutzler et al., 2016; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018).

While exploring the para athlete development pathways, researchers (Lemez et al., 2020; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020) discussed the adaptability of acknowledged athlete developmental models such as the HACM (Wylleman & Rosier,

2016), the LTAD model (Balyi et al., 2013), the FTEM model (Gulbin et al., 2013), the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) (Côté et al., 2007) and stressed that despite these models' potential in providing valuable insights for the development of para athletes, they were not accurately reflecting para athletes' experiences and para sport specific features. Similarly, recent research on para sports highlighted concerns about the accuracy of age and maturation-based models for para sports domain by referring to variations related to the onset of impairment and availability of resources across different developmental environments (Lemez et al., 2020; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020).

The evolution of para athlete development pathways is related to the evolution of para sports (Legg et al., 2023). During the early periods of para sports development, the dominant perspective of athlete development pathways adopted a rehabilitation focus that aimed to integrate people with disabilities into society, followed by a shift from disabled patient-based competitions to athlete-based competitions from mid-80s to early 2000s (Legg & Steadward, 2011).

The next period emphasized establishing stronger ties with mainstream sports organizations like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with an emphasis on delivering professional sports events and addressing some critical issues related to eligibility and classification (Bundon, 2022; Legg & Steadward, 2011). Therefore, the vision of rehabilitation sport is firstly converted to recreational sport followed by providing competitive sport opportunities that emphasized a high-performance perspective and professionalization of Paralympic sport (Bundon, 2022; Howe et al., 2023).

Despite attracting attention to the individuality and uniqueness of each para athlete's developmental trajectory, researchers tried to identify important characteristics of para athlete development (Dehghansai et al., 2017; Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Legg et al., 2023; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018; Storli et al., 2022). Accordingly, Patatas et al. (2020; 2021) by considering existing developmental models reflected on para athlete development trajectories and identified six interconnected, and fluid developmental phases, which included

attraction, retention, competition, talent identification and development, elite phase, and voluntary or forced retirement.

Often, para athletes experience the blurring of developmental stages with initiation, development and specialization stages experienced almost concurrently (Bundon, 2022; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Peake & Davies, 2024). The pathway to the elite level is considered less competitive, shorter and often at later ages than usual as compared to non-disabled sports, as there are usually fewer athletes in sport classes, enabling faster participation at international competitions (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & De Rycke, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018).

From another perspective, Higgs et al. (2016) in Long-Term Athlete Development for Athletes with Disabilities highlighted that para athletes experienced and progressed across similar developmental stages with slight changes that acknowledged the significance of awareness and first involvement as well as differences in progression pace based on disability related features. In the course of time, the model is further developed and named as the "Long Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity" (Higgs et al., 2019), highlighting the significance of personal, organizational, and system factors in delivering quality sports experience as well as unique and various development pathways existing within the para sport.

Despite being a relatively new research area, previous studies indicated that there was no single, universal model outlining para-athletes' development pathways, and rather illustrating a wide range of athlete profiles involving individual differences in development pathways (Dehghansai et al., 2017; Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020).

The onset of impairment and classification are the two crucial features in need of attention while exploring para athlete development pathways (Dehghansai et al., 2022; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & De Rycke, 2020; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018). Depending on the onset of impairment, which signifies the age at which an individual acquired impairment, para athletes participated in sports at varying ages as well as at different maturational stages of their lives (Patatas et al., 2018). This variation is related to the diversity of athlete profiles. Some

para-athletes started sports in their mid-40s and continued competing at the Paralympic level for over 20 years, as well as those who engaged in high-performance sports from early adolescence (Baker et al., 2023). Consequently, the athlete development processes, depending on the unique characteristics of each athlete show variability and complexity (Dehghansai et al., 2017; Lemez et al., 2020).

The onset of impairment, as well as the prior sports experience before acquiring impairment, further complicates the talent identification process, underscoring the importance of individualized approaches. The study by Lemez et al. (2020) showed that the majority of para athletes with acquired impairment had prior sporting experience in the non-disabled domain before entering into para sports. Relatedly, para athletes depending on the onset of impairment and prior sports experience before entering into para sports, access or re-access sports at different ages with differing sports experiences revealing variations in their development trajectories (Dehghansai et al., 2022). These differences also affect coaches' talent identification approaches and consideration of their athletes' readiness according to their age as well as prior training level (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014).

Para athlete development pathways are characterized by faster progression and early participation at international competitions, with transitions from locale to international level taking three years on average (Dehghansai & Baker, 2020), and occasionally leaving limited time for acquiring developmentally appropriate skills (Bundon, 2022). The study by Patatas et al. (2021) showed that para athletes with congenital impairments entered sports at earlier ages than athletes with acquired impairments, and both groups had different progression paces. Accordingly, it was found that while athletes with acquired impairment progressed faster through their athletic careers as compared to athletes with congenital impairments, the latter group reached the career milestones such as sports initiation, first appearance at national and international competitions earlier which is conceivably related to having a prior sport experience (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas et al., 2021).

On the other hand, another study examining Norwegian para athletes' development trajectories towards the elite phase revealed that para athletes engaged in sports related

activities at early ages and the youth sport period involved highly heterogeneous experiences (Storli et al., 2022). The varied findings of research on para athlete development pathways (Dehghansai et al., 2017; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Storli et al., 2022) revealed differences concerning the ages at which para athletes participated in sports and diversified progression paces reflecting the individualized characteristics of para sports.

Classification and meeting the para sports specific minimum eligibility criteria are the foundational elements to be part of the para sports system (Legg et al., 2023). Therefore, to become a para athlete and progress across para athlete development pathways, an individual with a disability primarily must be evaluated for classification and have an eligible impairment satisfying the minimum impairment criteria of the respective para sports (Fortin-Guichard et al., 2023). For that reason, athletes' development and high-performance pathways are influenced by the classification process. Athletes' potential sports class, relative position, and potential competitiveness within a sports class have reflections on their development pathways (Dehghansai et al., 2022; Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & De Rycke, 2020; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020). Therefore, sports class of a para athlete being related to their impairment is one of the most crucial features determining talent identification, development pathway as well as the level of support and funding (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014). Additionally, athletes' career trajectories are affected by the changes in athletes' sports classes due to impairment progression or classification rule changes, sometimes forcing athletes to experience involuntary retirement (Bundon et al., 2018; Legg et al., 2023).

The sport participation access points and entry or re-entry into sports after a traumatic event or a degenerative illness reveal unique features tied to para sports context (Patatas et al., 2018). The way individuals access sport change to a great extent based on whether they have an acquired or congenital disability. The dominance of sports clubs and schools as access points in non-disabled sport system shifts greatly to rehabilitation centers for individuals with acquired disability and special education

schools in the case of congenital disabilities (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & De Rycke, 2020; Patatas et al., 2018).

Among the various para sport development pathways, parents and their concerns for their child's social inclusion due to restricted sports opportunities in mainstream settings, act as driving forces in directing their children toward competitive para sports (Coates & Howe, 2023). Parents and their support were critical factors in predicting children with disabilities' physical activity behaviors (Siebert et al., 2017). Similarly, the study by Storli et al. (2022) highlighted the significant role of family across para athletes' development trajectory, especially by referring to their critical role in initiating and maintaining sports involvement during childhood. While supporting their children to participate in sports, parents often fulfilled multidimensional roles, made sacrifices and experienced various challenges such as financial difficulties and restricted suitable local sports opportunities (Coates & Howe, 2023), with these experiences shedding light on the broader social, cultural and environmental role in shaping experiences.

As Dowling et al. (2018) asserted while considering para sports, layers of complexity must be recognized since the macro context influences access to para sports, available opportunities, and nations' ability to develop and support high-performance para athletes. The study by Patatas et al. (2018; 2020) highlighted accessibility issues of facilities and transport as well as restricted opportunities concerning accessing structured sports opportunities at clubs and training with qualified coaches in para sports domain. On the other hand, para athletes from Norway had the opportunity to experience sampling of various sports during their childhood despite these sports activities being organized, coach-led, and focusing on sports specific skills (Storli et al., 2022).

With that being said, coaches are one the most crucial social agents throughout para athletes' development trajectories from the very beginning (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020). With their dynamic, multidimensional roles (Tawse et al., 2012) and relationships with para athletes, coaches can facilitate positive outcomes throughout para athletes' development, such as redefining capabilities through

discovering new skills, enhancing self-confidence, developing higher self-expectations, increased socialization and enhanced leadership skills as well as self-acceptance (Turnnidge et al., 2012, p. 1134). Moreover, coaches play a critical role in shaping sports environment (Turnnidge et al., 2012).

In para sports, coaches must have disability specific knowledge as well as working knowledge on classification, as they are the vital stakeholders in talent identification through finding eligible and classifiable para athletes (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020). In addition to impairment related factors and classification, there were multidimensional factors affecting talent identification and development in para sports. These factors encompassed considering prior sports background of athletes and parents, athletes' level of independence, funding concerns, malleable constraints as athletes' other commitments like education or vocation, their residency and overprotectiveness of families (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021, p. 4). Relatedly, the professionalization of para sports stimulated coaches and sports managers to identify talents strategically and direct recruited ones toward national programs to follow accelerated development pathway (Bundon, 2022).

In a similar vein, the pursuit of medals becoming a top priority (Bundon, 2022; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017) and coaches, as well as high-performance staff's increased expectations of year-round training commitment from para athletes created threats to the continuation of athletes' educational or vocational pursuits. The shift in expectations necessitating increased dedication forced para athletes to reconsider their careers by quitting or pausing their jobs and academic engagements or moving to centralized training facilities (Bundon, 2022), especially in tense periods heading toward the Paralympic Games (Dehghansai, Pinder, & Baker, 2021; Dehghansai, Pinder, Baker, et al., 2021).

Together with the future employment concerns after retirement (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018), the trends in para sports such as professionalization (Houlihan & Chapman, 2017; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014) and the evolving nature of para sports toward Olympification further affected retirement decisions of para athletes and struggled them to leave their athletic careers (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018).

Hence, multidimensional factors affected the athlete development pathways in para sports.

To sum up, age at which an athlete acquired impairment as well as accessed sports, classification and athletes' potential competitiveness within their sports class, prior sports experience, impairment specific pathways, diversified sports participation access points and risk of forced retirement due to classification reviews have implications for the multiple developmental pathways in para sports (Legg et al., 2023).

Lastly, research on para athlete development pathways revealed that para athletes who participated in sports at various ages, instead of experiencing a typical linear pathway with normative transitions, navigated through their athletic careers with possible entry and exit sequences bearing nonlinear characteristics with varying progression pace (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020).

### 2.3.2. Stressors in Para Sports

Exploring unique contextual stressors is important for understanding the experiences of para athletes. Para athletes experienced extra stressors other than athletic performance-related concerns unique to their sports experience.

Acquiring impairment, adjusting and living with a disability can be additional challenges to address for para athletes while also adapting and learning a new sport (Martin, 2017c). Developing and balancing multiple identities (Huang & Brittain, 2006; Martin et al., 2020) and transitioning from non-disabled to para sport (Arnold et al., 2017) can challenge para athletes as they may face self-esteem and identity issues upon initiating a new sports experience (Martin, 2017c). Additionally, many athletes struggle because of the combined effect of injury with the original impairment on daily functioning (Bundon, 2019) as well as impairment effects such as chronic pain and fatigue that limit training sessions and their performance at competitions (Martin, 2017c).

Together with lack of knowledgeable staff, disability-specific quality coaching and training (Arnold et al., 2017; Kean et al., 2017), inaccessible environments (Arnold et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016), finding accessible gyms, training without guide partners, transportation issues, long distance travel challenges exacerbating pressure sores (Campbell & Jones, 2002; Martin, 2017c) pose further stressors to consider that their non disabled peers do not have to deal with.

The classification process is another para sports-specific stressor (Arnold et al., 2017). Unlike the more predictable classification process of non-disabled sports, such as weight-based approaches allowing athletes to control their competition category by losing or gaining weight, classification in para sports and sport class reviews are comparably less predictable, creating ambiguous and stressful experiences for para athletes (Martin, 2017c). Being classified late, changes in rules and perceiving some classification processes and outcomes as unfair and incorrect were shared by para athletes (Arnold et al., 2017). The fragility of their athletic careers because of reclassification (Miller et al., 2024) or an unfavorable change in their sport class with new competitors often challenges athletes through affecting their playing time based on strategic priorities in team structuring as well as their career trajectories. Similarly, forced retirement associated with de-classification have unique reflections on their career that non-disabled athletes do not encounter (Bundon et al., 2018). Although retirement due to declassification was often compared to forced retirement due to injury, it created additional pressure on para athletes' well-being since declassification was sometimes perceived by the public as an attempt to deceive the system (Bundon et al., 2018).

Access to costly adapted equipment, securing finances and dealing with additional funding needs for personal assistance or guide expenses were challenges in need of consideration for para athletes that made the cost of participating in sport higher than non-disabled sports (Peake & Davies, 2024). Especially, athletes with high support needs had to cope with securing their daily and sport-specific support, which meant managing additional costs (Peake & Davies, 2024). The study by Kean et al. (2017) exploring the impact of the environment on wheelchair basketball athletes also asserted the role of "economic environment" signifying access to equipment, funding,

sponsorship, “social environment” involving quality coaching as well as training and “physical environment” including the availability of accessible training facilities and partners, the proximity of facilities as vital facilitators in shaping para sports experiences.

When exploring para sports, it is crucial to acknowledge the layers of complexity, as the broader macro context plays a key role in shaping access to participation, available opportunities, and a country’s capacity to develop and sustain high-performance para athletes (Dowling et al., 2018). Attitudes toward disability, media attention associating para sports more with disability than sports, and inadequate media coverage (Arnold et al., 2017; Patatas et al., 2018), negotiating a Paralympic paradox (Purdue & Howe, 2012), limited recognition as “real” athletes, and experiencing stereotyped media representations further marginalized and complicated their experiences (Brittain, 2016; Martin, 2017c).

Regarding the macro context, future employment concerns after post sports career affected para athletes to struggle to leave sports (Bundon, 2022; Bundon et al., 2018). Additionally, the professionalization of sport (Bundon, 2022; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017; Radtke & Doll-Tepper, 2014) complicated their experience. Especially athletes with high support needs were affected by the professionalization role of athletes and increased dedication expectations. The fast-track independence expectations upon transition to centralized training facilities especially challenged the well-being of athletes with high support needs (Miller et al., 2024). Furthermore, para athletes with exclusive focus on athletic career expressed feelings of stress and worry because of having restricted options after retirement, which posed challenges on their wellbeing (Miller et al., 2024).

Lastly, a critical stressor situated in para sports relates to the unique relationship between para athletes and their guide, changing the dynamics of individual sports into team events that necessitate establishing a unique and close relationship for collaboration, and learning to work interdependently to experience independence (Bundon & Mannella, 2023). For para athletes not being able to use their agency in guide selection creates unique stressors in para sports (Bundon & Mannella, 2023).

Because of para sports' unique and contextual complexity, as elaborated above, it is crucial for researchers to conduct contextually informed research by considering disability-related factors and the dynamics of para sports.

### 2.3.3. Para Sports in Türkiye

The initial steps toward organizing para sports activities in Türkiye began after the Sports Council convened in 1990. Before the establishment of para sports federations, sporting activities for individuals with disabilities were primarily managed by organizations operating under the Confederation of Disabled People. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the Department of Sports Education within the General Directorate of Sports provided sporting opportunities for people with disabilities (Pepe & Konar, 2003).

On November 21, 1990, Türkiye established its first governing body for para sports, the Sports Federation for the Handicapped (Türkiye Özürlüler Spor Federasyonu). Later, in 1997, it was renamed the Sports Federation for People with Disabilities (Türkiye Engelliler Spor Federasyonu). This federation aimed to provide sporting opportunities for athletes with physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual impairments under the governance of the General Directorate of Sports (Mumcu, 2018).

To better organize sports activities, the Sports Federation for People with Disabilities was divided into four separate federations based on impairment: the Sports Federation for Physically Impaired (TBESF), the Sports Federation for Visually Impaired (GESFED), the Sports Federation for Intellectually Impaired (TÖSSFED), and the Sports Federation for Hearing Impaired (TIESF) (Pepe & Konar, 2003). These federations managed their activities under the General Directorate of Sports until they had financial and administrative autonomy in 2006.

Until recently, para sports governance in Türkiye followed an impairment-based structure rather than a sport-specific one. However, the organizational structure underwent a significant restructuring process starting at the end of 2022. Before this restructuring, para sports were exclusively managed by federations organized by impairment, providing multi-sport opportunities for specific groups such as athletes

with physical, visual, and intellectual impairments. Following the governance transfer process (see Appendix D), most para sports were reassigned to their respective national sports federations. For instance, before the restructuring, para archery was managed by the Sports Federation for Physically Impaired (TBESF), which oversaw athletes with physical disabilities, including para archers. After the restructuring, the Turkish Archery Federation became responsible for managing activities related to para archery. Similarly, the governance of other para sports previously managed by TBESF was transferred to their respective national sports federations.

On the other hand, the Sports Federation for the Intellectually Impaired (TÖSSFED) continues to manage multi-sport opportunities for para athletes with intellectual impairments. Similarly, except for para judo and para swimming, the Sports Federation for the Visually Impaired (GESFED) still provides sports opportunities for para athletes with visual impairments, retaining governance over Paralympic sports such as para athletics, football 5-a-side, and goalball. This fragmented organizational structure highlights the complexity of governance and the role of various stakeholders in delivering para sports opportunities in Türkiye.

The organizational structure of para sports in Türkiye involves both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders managing their activities at national and local levels. As the main stakeholder, the Ministry of Youth and Sports oversees sports opportunities for people with disabilities by supporting sports federations and coordinating with relevant stakeholders. Other governmental institutions contributing to para sports include the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, and the Council of Higher Education (Ministry of Youth and Sports (GSB), 2013; Kuruoğlu, 2023).

At the local level, provincial administrations of these ministries, municipalities, and universities also play important roles. Non-governmental actors such as the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) of Türkiye, sports clubs, and associations further support the para sports ecosystem (Canpolat, 2020). This multidimensional structure

involving various stakeholders provides sports opportunities for people with disabilities nationally and locally.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports' policy document included an exclusive section dedicated to "disability and sports" which underscored para sports as an effective tool for enhancing the socialization and integration of people with disabilities (GSB, 2013). Accordingly, the four main policy priorities in the document were outlined to address the relationship between sports and disability. The first priority focused on improving the accessibility of sports facilities and increasing opportunities for people with disabilities. In contrast, the second reference highlighted the importance of enhancing the athletic performance of athletes with disabilities and supporting high-performance para sports pathways. Increasing participation in sports through establishing specialized sports departments in educational institutions, promoting sports activities in special education schools, and providing sports equipment to these schools were also highlighted. Lastly, the policy underscored the rehabilitative benefits of para sports (GSB, 2013).

According to the 2019-2023 activity report of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the total number of athletes with disabilities was reported as 42638 and there were 1707 sports clubs providing sports opportunities for people with disabilities. The Ministry of Youth and Sports also supports sports federations and elite para athletes by monitoring their performances and providing financial assistance, such as athlete grants and monthly pensions (Ministry of Youth and Sports (GSB), 2023). According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports' activity report 2023, there were 4993 people with disabilities who participated in GSB sports schools without obstacles as of 31.12.2023 (GSB, 2023). Moreover, in 2019, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, signed a memorandum of understanding with foundation universities and introduced a scholarship program for national athletes to support their academic pursuits. During the 2023–2024 academic year, 89 national athletes, including student-para athletes, from 24 sports federations received scholarships to study at foundation universities (GSB, 2023). To date, 336 national athletes have benefited from the national athlete scholarship program (Directorate General for Sports Services, 2024).

**Table 1**

*All time participants from Türkiye at the Summer Paralympic Games*

| Paralympic Games | Men | Women | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992 Barcelona | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2000 Sydney | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2004 Athens | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| 2008 Beijing | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| 2012 London | 46 | 21 | 67 |
| 2016 Rio de Janeiro | 46 | 33 | 79 |
| 2020 Tokyo | 43 | 44 | 87 |
| 2024 Paris | 44 | 48 | 92 |

Türkiye's journey and performance at the Summer Paralympic Games over more than three decades provide valuable insights into its high-performance para sports development. Türkiye first participated in the Paralympic Games at Barcelona 1992, with one athlete competing in para swimming. Since then, both the number of Paralympians and the range of para sports have grown significantly. Since the Barcelona 1992 Paralympic Games, 216 Paralympians have represented Türkiye. At the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, there were 39 first-time Paralympians. A detailed overview of Türkiye's all-time Paralympic participants is provided in Table 1. Moreover, Türkiye had only two Paralympians competed in the winter PGs in contrast to the progression at the summer PGs.

Türkiye's first Paralympic medal came at the Athens 2004 Games, where Paralympian Korhan Yamaç won a gold and a bronze in shooting para sport, placing Türkiye 53rd on the medal table. Table 2 summarizes Türkiye's medal standings across the Summer Paralympic Games.

At the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, Türkiye achieved its best-ever ranking, finishing in 23rd place. Turkish Paralympians won a total of 28 medals, including six gold, ten silver, and 12 bronze. A total of 92 athletes competed at the Paris 2024 PGs across 15 para sports, including goalball, football 5-a-side, para judo, para archery, shooting para sport, para powerlifting, para athletics, para table tennis, wheelchair tennis, para

swimming, para taekwondo, wheelchair fencing, para badminton, para rowing, and para triathlon.

**Table 2**

*Medal Standings across the Summer Paralympic Games*

| All-Time Paralympic Summer Games Medal Standings of Türkiye | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Total | Medal Standing |
| 2004 Athens | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 53. |
| 2008 Beijing | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 48. |
| 2012 London | 1 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 43. |
| 2016 Rio de Janeiro | 3 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 33. |
| 2020 Tokyo | 2 | 4 | 9 | 15 | 42. |
| 2024 Paris | 6 | 10 | 12 | 28 | 23. |
| Total | 14 | 21 | 31 | 66 | |

In the summer Paralympic Games medal table, Türkiye ranks 57th. The NPC Türkiye has been most successful in table tennis, goalball, and para powerlifting, securing multiple gold, silver, and bronze medals in these disciplines. Moreover, para athletics, para archery, and para judo had the highest number of Paralympians, with 32 para athletes, 30 para archers, and 18 para judokas, respectively. The profiles of para sports, Türkiye's all-time Paralympians in each sport, and their performances at the Games are summarized in Table 3.

Over more than thirty years, Türkiye has considerably progressed in high-performance para sports, especially in individual sports as opposed to team sports. This is also reflected by the rising number of Paralympians, the expansion of participation across various parasports, and the increasing number of medals won.

**Table 3**

*The Profile of Para Sports in Türkiye*

| Sports | All time Paralympians | Number of Appearance at the Paralympic Games | Medal Count at the Paralympic Games |
|---|---|---|---|
| Para Athletics | 32 | 6 | 2 silver- 2 bronze medals |
| Para Swimming | 12 | 7 | 2 gold- 2 bronze medals |
| Para Archery | 30 | 5 | 2 gold- 3 silver- 2 bronze medals |
| Para Table Tennis | 12 | 6 | 2 gold- 4 silver- 8 bronze medals |
| Para Taekwondo | 9 | 2 | 1 gold- 4 silver- 2 bronze medals |
| Para Judo | 18 | 5 | 1 gold- 1 silver- 8 bronze medals |
| Wheelchair Basketball | 22 | 3 | 0 |
| Goalball Women & Men Teams | 23 | 3 | 3 gold - 1 bronze medals |
| Shooting Para Sport | 12 | 6 | 1 gold-3 silver- 2 bronze medals |
| Para Powerlifting | 13 | 6 | 2 gold- 4 silver- 3 bronze medals |
| Wheelchair Fencing | 1 | 2 | 1 bronze medal |
| Football-5-a-side | 22 | 3 | 0 |
| Wheelchair Tennis | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Para Badminton | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Para Rowing | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Para Triathlon | 1 | 1 | 0 |

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## 3.1. Outline of the Research Process

This chapter aims to outline the methodological approaches by discussing their philosophical and methodological foundations, clarifying the rationale for conducting constructivist grounded theory, and outlining the iterative process of data collection and analysis. Additionally, method-specific considerations are provided to ensure the research's trustworthiness and situate researchers' backgrounds and previous experiences through reflexivity are also provided.

The researcher's philosophical stance and choice of methodological framework are closely interrelated with how they approach the research process and address the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the next section begins by discussing different philosophical positions, followed by a discussion specifically focusing on this study's philosophical standpoint guiding the research.

## 3.2. Philosophical Standpoint

In conducting any research, there are two critical questions in need of answers: the choice of methodology and methods as well as the justification behind these decisions (Crotty, 1998). In studies, the latter is omitted to a great extent and rather, the choice and use of methodologies are discussed in detail. However, whether researchers clearly reveal it or not, they bring their perspectives and paradigm assumptions (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) to their studies. Especially for qualitative researchers, making their worldview explicit is not only crucial for outlining the relationship between the researchers and others but also for providing insight into what comprises

knowledge, who can provide such knowledge, and how the researcher will approach multiple and contradictory values when they come across (Lincoln, 2010, p. 7).

As a starting point, before conducting the research, researchers need to critically consider and reveal the philosophical assumptions informing the formulation of their research problem and how they aim to reach the knowledge required to address these research questions. In other words, understanding the philosophical assumptions of a researcher is one of the critical elements of the research process because these assumptions are closely related to the researcher's conception of the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and methodological choices (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, among the five phases of the research process set out by Creswell (2013), the second phase involved clarifying the theoretical paradigms guiding the action within the research process.

These philosophical assumptions involve multifaceted considerations that encompass the ontological position addressing "the nature of reality", the epistemology answering "what counts as knowledge?", the methodology detailing the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and the axiology positioning the researcher through values (Creswell, 2013). By explicitly articulating the followed research paradigm, researchers make the underlying structure behind their choices apparent.

As contended by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), there was a continuous evolution within qualitative research and while older paradigms were being reconfigured, new ones appeared on the horizon and constituted a multiplicity of paradigms. The perspectives related to paradigms were quite debated and even classified as "paradigm wars" expanding over a time frame with different classifications such as "the postpositivist-constructivist war against positivism," "the conflict between competing postpositivist, constructivist, and critical theory paradigms," and the recent conflict between "evidence-based methodologists and the mixed-methods, interpretive, and critical theory schools" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 35). As can be seen from paradigm wars, the variety of standpoints informing the nature of reality and knowledge, the role of the researcher, research design, representation of findings, and quality assessment criteria are dynamic, flexible, and changed over time (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

In an effort to overview the history of qualitative research, Renata Tesch (1990) attracted attention to the tensions between those who believed in "objective" results and those who contended a need for new approaches because of the complexity of the human sciences. Until the reform movements in the fields of education and psychology, certain paradigms dominated the world of science. The dominance of positivistic methods has experienced its reign for a very long time, in contrast to the limited efforts of some researchers conducting non-positivistic studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Tesch, 1990). Before discussing the paradigms, it is worth noting that the terminology about ontology, epistemology concepts, and theoretical perspectives is often ambiguous, with terms being frequently confused or used interchangeably, and that there is no easy categorization, only diverse perspectives to take into account.

### 3.2.1. Positivist Paradigm

Because of its long reign in the world of science, understanding the philosophical stance of the positivist paradigm is helpful in considering its diverging ontological and epistemological assumptions from other paradigms, especially from this study's philosophical stance. The three main paradigms to be discussed under the paradigm section are positivism, post-positivism, and interpretative paradigms, with a specific emphasis on constructivism. Each of these positions is considered not only through their philosophical assumptions but also through their practical research implications.

Positivism, which became popular due to the French philosopher Saint Simon, dominated the physical and social sciences for over four centuries and denoted a paradigm with ontological realism and epistemological objectivism (Tesch, 1990). Accordingly, research objectivity and achieving a single reality by the unbiased researcher through excluding values are the leading positions of the research process. In the positivistic paradigm, the ontology that addresses reality's nature is realism. According to realism, an objective external reality exists separately from individuals and their interpretation. This single reality, which does not change across contexts or time, can be discovered, explained, and predicted by value-free researchers through scientific empirical research (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Upon clarifying the nature of reality, the following consideration in need of attention is understanding what constitutes knowledge and how researchers know what they know, underpinning their epistemological assumptions. Within the positivist paradigm, the epistemological stance is objectivism and knowledge is conceptualized as independent of the researcher. There is a clear distinction between the researcher and the researched. Accordingly, knowledge can be discovered by an impartial researcher through methods that eliminate the researchers' influence (Crotty, 1998; Skinner et al., 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2020).

Considering a hypothetical research topic can provide clarity in understanding the methodological approaches within different paradigms. For instance, if a researcher is interested in exploring how female Paralympic athletes from individual and team sports navigate dual career experiences, different paradigms could research this topic in different ways. Hence, within the positivist paradigm, a researcher studying the dual career experiences of female Paralympic athletes would be preoccupied with the existence of a single external reality and prioritize the research objectivity through performing an unbiased and external observer role.

The search for an objective and externally situated layer of career experiences, waiting to be discovered would match the researcher's realist ontological assumption. In other words, the data would be considered existing independently in the world and the researcher's main aim would be to gather objective facts.

Hence, the employed methodology would conceivably be a realist-positivist or Glaserian variant of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Weed, 2017) through which the researcher aimed to discover a single truth from constantly comparing data by an iterative process of data collection and analysis, ultimately leading to a theory about objective facts regarding a knowable world (Charmaz, 2011; Weed, 2017).

The objectivist epistemological assumption of the positivist researcher would emphasize advancing knowledge through gathering, recording facts, setting subjective perceptions aside, developing universal explanations, and adopting scientific methods as in objectivist grounded theory methods to systematize knowledge. Moreover, according to the positivist paradigm, the subjective views of the female Paralympic

athletes, rather than contributing to reaching objective knowledge, would hinder understanding their experiences. From the positivist perspective, representing objective facts directly emerging from data and developing theory through applying strict grounded theory procedures would become the ultimate purpose (Charmaz, 2011, 2014). Consequently, the analytical process set out by the generated theory would be considered the truth (Weed, 2017).

### 3.2.2. Post Positivist Paradigm

Moving away from the positivist paradigm towards a non-positivistic stance, inspired by the German romantic movement emphasizing individuals' life experiences, had been challenging for scholars who experienced a hard time publishing their studies. As new methodologies like phenomenology emerged, with scientists describing their methods in detail, other researchers were encouraged, and a gradual change was stimulated (Tesch, 1990).

The post-positivist paradigm, also known as neo-realism (Smith & Sparkes, 2020), combines ontological critical realism with epistemological modified dualist/objectivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontological critical realism refers to the existence of a single reality, but it can only be approximated and imperfectly understandable (Creswell, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2020).

In order to discover knowledge that is accepted as probable facts, reducing the subjective influence of the researcher on research and employing methods that limit the researchers' biases are emphasized. Accordingly, the interaction between the researcher and the researched is purposefully minimized to control subjective influence on knowledge production, and values are excluded from the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Even though post-positivists acknowledge an approximated, probable understanding of reality, they still maintain an objective, bias-free approach to achieve accurate and valid truth. Until a recent paradigm shift favoring interpretivism that notably informed qualitative research, post-positivism dominated the field of sport and exercise psychology (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). By considering criticism about the limitations

of objectivity and valuing alternative approaches while still preserving objectivist ideals, post-positivism constitutes a more relativist version of positivism (Peile & McCouat, 1997). Within the post-positivist paradigm, adding the use of qualitative methods, appreciating multiple methods to study a phenomenon, collecting situational information in natural settings, and "discovering" knowledge become the important features of the research process. Additionally, the researcher is positioned as a neutral and distanced observer to ensure objectivity both during the research and in its reporting phase (Smith & Sparkes, 2020).

Had the previously mentioned hypothetical study of dual career experiences of female Paralympic athletes been situated in the post-positivist paradigm, the researcher would be preoccupied with shedding light on the study participants' perspectives and finding objective truth by limiting his or her role as a researcher on the knowledge production. Systematically conducting data collection and analysis in a logically sequential or iterative manner would be emphasized in the research process. Based on the post-positivist perspective, the researcher would predict on the most likely experiences and responses in a given context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, by employing a post-positivist or Straussian version of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weed, 2017), the researcher could be able to systematically gather data and analyze them in a constant comparative manner and let the theory "emerge" from the data and explain the patterns of behavior corresponding to the research problem.

The dominance of the post-positivist paradigm began to weaken by the 1980s with the emerging relativist trend, and the interpretative frameworks started to inform, mainly qualitative research, as an alternative (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). The subsequent section addresses the constructivist paradigm, often described as interpretivism, by discussing its ontological and epistemological assumptions and research implications.

### 3.2.3. Constructivist Paradigm

Among the various paradigms guiding research processes in sports science, the constructivist paradigm or so-called interpretivism has gained its significance in the last decades. The constructivist paradigm embraces ontological relativism and epistemological constructivism. Accordingly, the relativist ontology accepts multiple

realities instead of a single reality waiting to be discovered. Moreover, constructivist epistemology emphasizes knowledge being created rather than being discovered as an objective truth. In other words, knowledge is dependent on the subjective meanings developed by individuals' experiences and constructivist researchers aim to locate these experiences and interactions in context (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Peile & McCouat, 1997).

According to constructivism, each individual experiences and interprets the world in different ways, even the same phenomenon differently; hence, their meaning-making process is context-dependent. For that reason, constructivists, rather than predicting, aim to understand and explain how multiple realities are constructed by individuals in a given context and accentuate differences among individuals (Crotty, 1998). Efforts to understand human experiences and associated processes provided opportunities for constructivist researchers to construct concepts that might have been missed from a positivist standpoint.

Unlike researchers with objectivist epistemological standpoints who assume external reality and the necessity to fulfill unbiased, value-free observer roles, constructivists are interested in how individuals construct meanings and actions. Hence, they emphasize and provide an interpretive explanation of the studied context rather than portraying an exact picture of it. For that reason, acknowledging and emphasizing the co-creator role of the researcher in the research process is crucial (Charmaz, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Thus, researchers adopting the constructivist paradigm are situated and acknowledged as passionate participants in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Within the constructivist paradigm, researchers rely on participants' shared accounts, emphasize individuals' multifaceted realities within context, and become insiders by collaborating and spending time with the participant (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In doing so, researchers should be reflexive and open about their personal values, background, existing suppositions, judgements and relationships with participants, which is critical in minimizing their effects on the research process (Gearing, 2004).

Although the constructivist paradigm acknowledged the co-construction of knowledge and encouraged the researcher's role and perspective in the interpretation process, adopting a self-critical attitude and being reflexive about constructions are expected from researchers to be aware of and reduce the possible effects of their lived experience or presuppositions on the research process (Charmaz, 2011, 2016). In other words, researchers' critical stance becomes crucial in order to not impose their assumptions or pre-dispositions to lead the research process.

Considering that the previously mentioned hypothetical study of dual career experiences of female Paralympic athletes had been situated in a constructivist paradigm, the researcher would acknowledge the multiple constructed realities of DC para athletes and focus on their perspectives as well as actions concerning context, time, and place. Hence, within the constructivist paradigm, the researcher would be preoccupied with revealing the multiple realities by interpreting the interpretations of DC female athletes. Individual and social processes in context, underlying mechanisms, and social structures producing these experiences became the primary motive. The researcher's main focus would be on the constructed meanings of athletes while experiencing careers. Moreover, while conducting research, positioning the researcher in the study and acknowledging the researchers' background became critical elements to consider. For instance, by employing "the constructivist version of grounded theory" (Charmaz, 2006), the researcher could be able to study the constructed realities of participants, provide a conceptual understanding of these experiences, and reveal underlying relations behind these experiences by addressing the how's and why's of these experiences.

### 3.2.4. The Research Paradigm of This Study

As previously elaborated, the paradigm of a researcher is closely linked to the researchers' understanding of the nature of reality and knowledge as well as methodological choices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, before beginning any study, the philosophical stance through which the research is guided should be clarified. Researchers should critically evaluate and disclose the philosophical assumptions that shaped the formulation of their research problem and

the manner in which they planned to acquire the knowledge necessary to answer these research questions.

As the researcher, if I were conducting this study from the standpoint I had when I was in high school, I would clearly describe myself as a researcher who believed in a single reality and defined my goal as searching for that single reality. At that time, I thought I had a commonly shared perspective and that most people would have acted or interpreted the same way as I would do in a given situation. However, as I advanced my studies, experienced different settings, and interacted with various people from diverse backgrounds, I realized individual differences and their reflections on experiences. I realized that each individual experienced and interpreted the world in different ways, even the same phenomenon differently.

Consequently, their interpretations varied significantly and could not be understood or explained by a single truth. Individual differences matter while experiencing a phenomenon and should be recognized and emphasized. Adopting a reductionist position and overemphasizing generalizations for predictions of facts or probable facts made me question the insufficiency of this standpoint in addressing the experiences of individuals who did not fit in the generalized picture and were seen as outliers. Noticing individual differences and shedding light on individualized meaning-making processes made me deeply appreciate the strength of well-conducted qualitative studies, especially in addressing what, how, and why questions about experiences.

As reflecting the above-explained philosophical development journey of the researcher, this study was guided by a constructivist paradigm. Thus, it adopted ontological relativism, which recognized socially constructed multiple realities, as well as epistemological constructivism, which emphasized that knowledge is being created rather than being discovered as a value-free truth. Moreover, acknowledging the co-creator role of the researcher and providing an interpretative explanation of the phenomenon were critical elements to understand while considering this research and what was possible to know.

Therefore, the theory-building process reflected the interaction between the researcher and the participants, and embraced the researcher's interpretations. All of the above-

explained philosophical assumptions guided the research strategy and choice of methods, which were elaborated on in the following sections.

## 3.3. Methodological Background

### 3.3.1. Rationale for Employing Qualitative Study

Various scholars had difficulty finding an easy, satisfying, and clear-cut definition of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). The history of qualitative research showed that it was an ever-evolving process, with researchers having challenges to make their studies and approaches appreciated (Tesch, 1990).

Understanding qualitative research by focusing on its philosophical assumptions and distinguishing diverse inquiry methods, approaches, reporting, and situating researchers and their role during research reflect a more comprehensive and appropriate portrayal of qualitative research than merely oversimplifying it to the methods used (Creswell, 2013). The multiple paradigmatic standpoints presented in the previous section alone revealed the richness of qualitative research and its possibilities to researchers. Moreover, rather than struggling to find a fulfilling, clear definition, overviewing the characteristics of qualitative research and revealing why it was best suited for this study offered more beneficial explanations.

Through adopting a similar orientation, Smith and Sparkes (Smith & Sparkes, 2020) discussed the various characteristics of qualitative research, what it represented and the opportunities it offered. Accordingly, the focus on meaning, consideration of individuals' experiences, emphasizing interpretative efforts, encouraging interest in language, valuing context by appreciating "how"s and "where"s in shaping experience, adoption of a self-critical attitude through reflexivity and appreciating the reflection of material features on emotions constituted the significant characteristics of qualitative research (Smith & Sparkes, 2020).

The rich opportunities provided by qualitative research encouraged scholars to consider qualitative methods to inform their studies. Athlete career research was one

of these research areas that increasingly incorporated qualitative inquiry and recently shifted its research orientation towards favoring qualitative studies. One of the explanations behind this shift involved the dissatisfaction with studying athlete careers solely through a statistical lens, which provided relatively context-blind insights and a superficial portrayal of diverse athlete careers that fell short of revealing existing processes and associated meanings within career research (Stambulova, 2016). Thus, the growing contribution of qualitative studies especially facilitated the appreciation of different perspectives and voices and expanded the understanding of athlete careers.

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology for inquiry, based on the grounds mentioned above. As previously elaborated, para sports context and Paralympic athletes' experiences are among the missing pieces of dual career research (Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Providing context-sensitive processes, focusing on meaning and individuals' experiences as well as gaining detailed perspectives, can be best accomplished by qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2020) and by considering the voice of those experiencing dual careers. Moreover, according to Stambulova (2016), the research on athlete careers, due to its inherent qualitative nature, could be best addressed through qualitative studies, which enabled an understanding of the existing diversity and personal meanings tied to these diverse experiences.

Despite the fact that well-conducted quantitative studies provide reliable and generalizable data, the scarcity of research on dual career in para sports necessitates an in-depth exploration of participants' constructed realities. Moreover, this study's relativist ontological and constructivist epistemological standpoint also encourages qualitative inquiry, given its emphasis on interpretative efforts and focus on meaning. Reflecting on culturally sensitive experiences of missing voices, situating their experiences in para sports context and letting the context speak can be achieved by a qualitative study.

Consequently, a qualitative research methodology was best suited to address the research questions of this study. The following section addresses the choice of grounded theory, especially in its constructivist version, as the inquiry method.

### 3.3.2. Rationale for Employing Grounded Theory

Among the qualitative research methods, grounded theory is a suitable research methodology when the researcher is interested in studying how individuals are experiencing a phenomenon and identifying the underlying phases during the processes through inductive analysis. Especially when a researcher aims to achieve a theory explaining the research problem at hand. Hence, it is a theory-generating methodology. As Charmaz (2016, p. 1) stated, "the grounded theory facilitates studying processes at multiple levels of analysis and fosters making invisible processes transparent." In addition, by studying a process, researchers can connect the specific and the general as well as the individual and the social context through developing theories.

Since its introduction in sports and exercise studies in the early 2000s, grounded theory denoted both the methodology employed and the theory produced (Weed, 2009). As the end product, the theory is constructed from data shared by research participants, which researchers use flexible, systematic, inductive, comparative and iterative approaches to simultaneous data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). A well conducted study using grounded theory produces either a formal theory that is less specific and applicable across wider disciplinary problems or a substantive theory that is topic focused and context specific (Holt, 2016).

By employing grounded theory rather than merely describing, researchers make analytical connections (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to "what" and "how" questions that most qualitative studies search the answers for, grounded theory enables researchers to address "why" questions and also situate answers in the context (Charmaz, 2016). When the researcher seeks an explanation for the process, action, or interaction or when the previously introduced theories or models are not developed for or adequately tested on the interested sample of the study, grounded theory is an appropriate method to conduct (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Similarly, Weed (2017) contended that grounded theory was the most suitable method when the available studies were limited to providing insights about social processes and experiences in a given research area.

One of the main reasons behind employing grounded theory is that dual career research neglected the para sports context and the experiences of para athletes to a great extent (Campbell, 2018; Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019), which resulted in observable scholarly underdevelopment in this area. Moreover, previous studies on the athlete development pathways in para sport context (Hutzler et al., 2016; Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020) and para athlete retirement research (Bundon et al., 2018) revealed additional contextual complexity and showed that the available models or frameworks despite providing valuable insights were not accurately reflecting unique features of para athletes' experiences. In other words, DC in para sport context lacks theoretical explanations that reflect the development of DC pathways and correspond to the multitude of experiences.

Grounded theory is chosen as the research method since the dominant theories and models in athlete career research do not adequately respond to the contextualized understanding of para-athletes' DC experiences. The recent studies and projects (Campbell, 2018; Maciá-Andreu et al., 2023; Magnanini et al., 2022; Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS), 2021; Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2023) provided initial insights regarding the DC experiences of para-athletes but at the same time made a strong call for further research. Moreover, these studies also underlined the contextual differences embedded in para sport context. To address this research gap, this study aimed to explore and theorize how para athletes act and interact regarding DC in para sport context and generate a substantive explanatory model embracing the multiplicity of DC experiences. Grounded theory is considered a suitable design for this end.

In addition to the motive of providing a possible theoretical explanation regarding para athletes' DC experiences, the fit between the research questions and the research method also encouraged the use of grounded theory. Ensuring methodological coherence by asking analytical questions in the study's design phase is very crucial for researchers to plan a qualified and efficient qualitative study. Accordingly, justifying the inquiry method with respect to research questions, philosophical standpoint, and theoretical perspectives provides a powerful approach to evaluating the congruence of the research's roadmap.

Particularly, this study's research questions seeking explanations for dual career processes, pathways, and actions taken during DC experiences encourage the researcher to employ grounded theory as the inquiry method. Hence, grounded theory, with its flexible yet systematic tools, allows me as the researcher to answer the research questions of this study and address "why" questions behind DC processes.

### 3.3.3. Constructivist Grounded Theory

In addition to previously explained reasons behind choosing grounded as the inquiry method, it is also essential to explain why the constructivist version was preferred among others and reveal its role in methodological coherence.

The grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 to generate new context-specific theories that emerged from the data (Hallberg, 2006). Instead of moving from previously constructed theories, which were sometimes inappropriate or insufficient for studying the sample of interest, generating a theory grounded in the data through "systematic abstraction and the conceptualization of empirical data" (Hallberg, 2006, p. 143) for the use of future studies was the underlying intention of the introduction of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013, 2016; Holt, 2016; Weed, 2009). Over time, several variants of grounded theory were introduced.

This study employs the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), which contends that objective reality does not exist; instead, the experiences of participants and interactions among individuals, including interaction with the researcher, construct multiple realities (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Hallberg, 2006).

According to the constructivist variant of grounded theory, constructing a theory totally separate from the researcher is not possible because of the critical role of the researcher in the interpretative process (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016). The emphasis is on the co-construction of knowledge as the researchers also have an important role by including their perspective in the interpretation of experiences, social interactions of participants and ultimately in generating the theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Although all variants of grounded theory share some common features, such as concepts being grounded in data, focus on social processes, inductive construction of abstract categories, theoretical sampling, sensitivity, saturation, constant comparative and iterative cycles, and substantive theory, there are variant specific features as well (Charmaz, 2011; Weed, 2017). Constructivist grounded theorists differ from others by embracing relativist epistemology, acknowledging multiple standpoints and realities, adopting a self-critical stance, and situating their research in the social, contextual, and historical circumstances that shaped its construction (Charmaz, 2016). While employing a research method, the researcher should consider these features and evaluate whether they match the study's paradigm.

The congruence between the philosophical standpoint and the selected inquiry method is one of the crucial features to consider for methodological coherence and employing appropriate research. Therefore, the philosophical stance through which the research is guided needs alignment with the research method. Conducting this research using the constructivist variant of grounded theory is also in line with the constructivist paradigm as well as the relativist ontological and constructivist epistemological assumptions of this study. Suitably, multiple and subjective realities dependent on the participants who shared their constructed stories as well as on the researcher are recognized. Unlike objectivist grounded theory, which assumes knowledge is discovered objectively independent of the researcher, the constructivist variant highlights knowledge being co-constructed and achieved through a process of interpretation (Charmaz, 2006, 2011; Hallberg, 2006; Weed, 2009, 2017).

In accordance with methodological coherence, direct engagement with Paralympic athletes is ensured, and their voices and perspectives are considered to provide theoretical explanations rather than following pre-existing theoretical frameworks. Similarly, Stambulova (2016), in her study overviewing qualitative methodology through athlete career research, attracted attention to the promising potential of constructivist research in discovering novel aspects of athletes' development and emphasized studying athletes' (re)construction of life career paths contextually. Thus, understanding the complex and interrelated processes is achieved by considering the

meanings attached to the actions and interactions of the Paralympic athletes (Charmaz, 2006; Hallberg, 2006).

### 3.4. Participants

The sample of this research consisted of ten active Paralympic athletes who were receiving high-performance athlete grants from the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The participants represented a diverse spectrum of impairments, including both acquired and congenital as well as physical and visual impairments. All participants were either studying at a university or working full-time alongside their athletic careers. The profile of the participants is provided in Table 4.

Of these participants, eight were Paralympians, of whom three had medaled at a Paralympic Games, and two were prospective Paralympians[1]. All participants were highly decorated para athletes, having won medals at European and World championships.

The participants who shared their experiences were from eight different para sports including individual sports of para archery, para table tennis, para taekwondo, para swimming, para judo, para athletics as well as team sports of wheelchair basketball and goalball.

The sample of participants comprised five female and five male high-performance para athletes, five of whom were athletes with a congenital impairment and five with an acquired impairment. There were three participants with progressive impairments whose vision progressively deteriorated over time. Among the participants, four were athletes with high support needs, denoting athletes who were more severely impaired and generally requiring additional support at competitions and in daily life.

Regarding the dual career status, three were student-athletes, three were employee athletes, with one being self-employed, and four had multiple careers who simultaneously pursued educational, vocational, and athletic careers. Except for one

[1] Following the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, during the research process, all participants had become Paralympians.

participant who was self-employed and two participants who were professional wheelchair basketball players, all other employee athletes were working at state institutions as PE teachers, workers, sports advisors, civil servants or sport experts. The student-athletes and multiple career athletes with educational pursuits were studying for undergraduate degrees in sports management (n = 4), coaching education (n = 2), and international relations (n = 1). Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

**Table 4**

*The Profile of the Participants*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Onset of Impairment | Severity of Impairment | Sports | DC Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demir | M | AI[a] | AHSN[b] | Para archery<br>Individual sports | Student athlete |
| Mert | M | CI[c] | | Para table tennis<br>Individual sports | Employee athlete |
| Aylin | F | AI | AHSN | Para archery<br>Individual sports | Multiple careers<br>Student- employee-athlete (worker) |
| Demet | F | CI progressive impairment | | Goalball<br>Team sports | Multiple careers<br>Student- employee & athlete (civil servant) |
| Mehmet | M | CI | | Para Taekwondo<br>Individual sports | Multiple careers<br>(University student-employee & athlete (junior sport expert) |
| Ayşe | F | CI | | Para Swimming<br>Individual sports | Student athlete |
| Aslı | F | AI progressive impairment | AHSN | Para Judo<br>Individual sports | Employee athlete (self-employed athlete) |
| Kerem | M | AI | | Wheelchair basketball<br>Team sports | Multiple careers<br>(pro player at a sports club, junior sport expert & athlete) |
| Barış | M | AI | | Wheelchair basketball<br>Team sports | Employee athlete<br>(pro player at a sports club, PE teacher & athlete) |
| Defne | F | CI progressive impairment | AHSN | Para Athletics<br>Individual sports | Student athlete |

*Note*. [a] Acquired impairment. [b] Athlete with high support needs, [c] Congenital impairment

## 3.5. Data Collection Strategy

### 3.5.1. Participant Selection and Recruitment Process and Procedure

Following the ethical approval (protocol no. 0038-ODTUİAEK-2022) from the Middle East Technical University "Human Subjects Ethics Committee," a preliminary sampling plan was conducted to identify potential participants.

DC athletes are composed of a heterogeneous group of individuals with diverse profiles, characteristics, and differing pathways (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Guidotti et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2024; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Similarly, para-athletes in the high-performance pathway had heterogeneous profiles (Baker et al., 2023; Pinder et al., 2023). Therefore, before conducting interviews, to ensure maximum heterogeneity of the sample, the distribution of diverse characteristics such as gender, athletes from the team and individual sports, onset, nature, severity of impairments, and athletic experience were considered. Based on these criteria, a preliminary sample selection plan was discussed with three practicing experts from the Turkish Sports Federation for the Physically Impaired (TBESF), the Turkish Sports Federation for the Visually Impaired (GESFED), and the Turkish Taekwondo Federation. Additionally, to understand the profile of the high-performance para athletes in Türkiye, the list of Paralympians and the high-performance para athlete pool, regularly updated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, were reviewed.

To better reflect the para sports context and address heterogeneity within para sports' high-performance pathway, the sample was extended beyond Paralympic athletes by involving the para athletes receiving high-performance athlete grants from the Ministry of Youth and Sports who could become Paralympians. The inclusion criterion of being a high-performance athlete grant holder aimed to consider the diverse developmental levels of different para sports and the heterogeneity of para athletes with varying developmental levels in the high-performance pathway. Furthermore, the provision of a high-performance para athlete grant, while providing a certain amount of income to para athletes, was expected to impose specific athletic performance

responsibilities subject to regular monitoring and transform para sport as a career pathway.

At first, as a sampling strategy, the purposive sampling method (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Patton, 2002) was employed to gather data from the most information-rich sample to address the research questions. The initial inclusion criteria were determined as being an active Paralympian, receiving a high-performance athlete grant from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, having an impairment (diverse spectrum involving acquired or congenital, physical or visual), and studying or working alongside their athletic career. Based on the focus of the study, only active Paralympic athletes from the team and individual sports who had academic or vocational pursuits alongside their athletic career were included. On the other hand, the criteria excluded athletes with additional sensory or intellectual impairment and participation-level athletes. The initial participants were recruited through the Turkish Sports Federations for the Physically and the Visually Impaired and the Turkish Taekwondo Federation. Moreover, the athletes receiving high-performance grants were identified by contacting the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

After deciding on gathering data from the most information-rich sample, potential participants were contacted by phone, the scope of the research was explained, and initial oral consent was obtained. Before the interviews, interview questions (see Appendix C for the interview questions) were shared with participants to allow them to look over, think about, and consider their experiences. Just before the beginning of the interviews, the scope and ethical procedure of the research were re-explained, and written informed consent (see Appendix B for the informed consent form) was taken. Participants were reminded about their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Following the interviews, the participants were provided with the post-interview information form involving communication details of the researcher and the researcher's advisor to address any questions they had.

Following the first three interviews' iterative data collection and analysis process, with the identification of new concepts within and between categories, the theoretical sampling was used for subsequent data collection to refine these concepts and develop

the theory. In other words, to construct the theory, the development of new concepts necessitated reaching out to additional participants through "theoretical sampling" for gathering detailed descriptions, clarifying uncertainties, (re)considering interpretations as well as for refining, saturating the properties of categories (Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Hallberg, 2006; Holt, 2016; Weed, 2009).

Accordingly, after the first three interviews, discussing the impairment effects and the severity of impairment on career construction decisions and DC pathways led the researcher to consider reaching out to more severely impaired para athletes for whom provision of support was necessary for participation in sport and daily life. Thus, the theoretical sampling approach led to purposefully reaching out to athletes with high support needs (AHSN) to question the added layer of complexity while experiencing DC. Athletes with high support needs (AHSN) were individuals who generally required additional support at competitions or those with the highest levels of impairment competing within the eligible sport classes in Paralympic sports (IPC, 2016). Moreover, after gathering data from para athletes with multiple careers and recognizing the reflections of multiple pursuits on DC pathways, reaching out to multiple career athletes was another theoretical sampling strategy. Through theoretical sampling, athletes with high support needs who had acquired or congenital impairments with progressive impairment characteristics from individual and team sports and athletes with multiple careers were recruited. The characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 5.

The aim of using theoretical sampling was not to randomly increase the sample size but to gain rich information, search for participants guided by the developed theoretical insights, and refine them (Weed, 2009; Charmaz, 2016). The theoretical sampling and participants' shared experiences facilitated the development of "co-constructing" and "co-experiencing" theoretical concepts.

**Table 5**

*The Characteristics of the Sample*

| *The characteristics of the sample* | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sport | Team sport | 3 |
| | Individual sport | 7 |
| Gender | Female | 5 |
| | Male | 5 |
| Onset of impairment | Congenital impairment (CI) | 5 |
| | Acquired Impairment (AI) | 5 |
| Type of Impairment | Physical | 7 |
| | Visual (progressive impairment) | 3 |
| Severity of Impairment | Yes | 4 |
| Athlete with high support needs (AHSN) | No | 6 |
| Paralympian | Yes | 8 |
| | No | 2 |
| DC | Education (University) | 3 |
| | Employment | 3 |
| | University & Employment | 4 |
| Age | 19-39 | |
| Athletic experience | 7-17 | |

Before conducting the research, although researchers might reflect on the sample size estimates by considering some thresholds, in grounded theory, the sample size is determined by the theoretical saturation, a unique concept of grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike the concept of data saturation frequently mentioned in qualitative studies highlighting a point at which no new data are generated, theoretical saturation refers to a point when the relationships between categories and concepts are adequately revealed, theoretical completeness is achieved, and new data collection and analysis iterations will not advance the theory, instead act counterproductive (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016; Weed, 2009).

According to the constructivists, the developed theory reveals “one possible truth among many” (Weed, 2017, p. 153); similarly, the theoretical saturation is also conceptualized differently than the objectivists’ understanding, which emphasizes reaching the point at which the truth is fully discovered and represented. Based on the constructivist variant of grounded theory, theoretical saturation indicates the point at

which process insights have been exhausted (Weed, 2017). Scholars also attracted attention to the complete theoretical saturation, which is likely impossible or difficult to demonstrate. However, researchers could aim for a pragmatic conceptualization of saturation by appropriately highlighting the conceptual rigor and strength of the model revealing processes (Low, 2019).

As an abstract concept, theoretical saturation depends on the researcher's judgment of the adequate level of saturation satisfying the theoretical completeness (Holt, 2016). Moreover, Charmaz (2014) contended that as long as interviews provided information rich data and the depth of analysis were ensured, a small sample size could also develop a significant study and contribution. Additionally, appropriate participant selection, researchers' subject area expertise and experiences, conducting multiple interviews and employing theoretical sampling facilitated and supported researchers in deciding on the sufficient level of saturation (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017).

Reviewing the preliminary sample selection plan with three practicing experts from the para sports federations to achieve information-rich data, gathering further data via theoretical sampling, conducting more than one interview, and the researchers' experience in the para sports domain both as a retired Paralympian, a former IPC athletes' council member, and currently as a sports advisor provided an advantage in accessing the relevant network of participants, judging the adequacy of the sample size, the theoretical saturation, and deciding on the theoretical completeness.

### 3.5.2. Interviews and Field Experiences

Before applying for the ethical approval procedure, a discussion with a critical friend who had extensive experience in the para sports domain both as an athlete and a coach was held to review the scope and clarity of the interview questions.

The interviews were the primary data collection method of this research. According to constructivist theorists, the interview process begins with determining suitable potential participants as a pre-study task and moves on to how the interviewer and the participant co-constructed the interview (Charmaz, 2011).

Although there was a set of semi-structured questions, as Charmaz (2006) recommended, flexibility was provided during the interview to allow participants to open up, discuss, and share freely. Unlike objectivist grounded theorists who considered interviews as a means to obtain facts, constructivists employed in-depth interviewing to explore rather than interrogate (Charmaz, 2011).

Since each experience was unique, despite some standardized questions, as the interviewer, I considered the individuality of each participant and decided what to ask as well as when and how to ask and customize questions. It was important to ask questions to explore participants' DC experiences but at the same time be flexible enough to rephrase these questions to fit their experiences. Although pre-prepared interview questions were meant to guide the interview, in reality, it was the shared experiences and participants' perspectives on their experience that guided the flow.

To encourage a trust relationship, get to know participants better, and let them have some time to reflect on what had been discussed, more than one interview was conducted except for four participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). The life story approach (Atkinson, 1998) adopted in the interview process provided the researcher with a holistic understanding of the participants' lives and their interaction with critical events rather than exclusively focusing on DC experiences.

Although this study specifically focused on the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes, the data quickly revealed that it was impossible to discuss the dual career experiences of para athletes through a snapshot overview without situating these experiences in the broader context that they were shaped in and without understanding the life story perspective. In cases needed, follow-up calls were made for clarification. Moreover, following the interviews, the immediate and initial considerations about the interview process were written down by the researcher.

Following the initial interviews, "the selection to the national team and Paralympic games cycle" were identified as two critical periods significant in coping strategies and DC experiences. Therefore, the interview questions were reconsidered to better understand the reflection of these two crucial periods on DC experiences. Moreover, the shared experiences of DC para athletes revealed that legislative provisions aiming

to facilitate athletes' and people with disabilities' access to higher education and employment were significant pre-DC facilitators. Consequently, the interview questions were again revised to understand the reflection of the legislative framework and social policies on the DC process, experiences, and pathways.

Interview questions aimed to explore a broad range of experiences such as participants' background, first contact with sport, earlier phase of the sportive career, elite phase, becoming a DC athlete, DC experiences, the relationship between athletic and academic/vocational environment, significant others' role in DC process, DC experiences during pandemic or a Paralympic year and future expectations as well as feelings about retirement and future plans.

Although conducting face-to-face interviews was the preferred medium to collect data, an online interview option was also provided depending on the accessibility needs of participants. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted face-to-face and via online video calls or phone interviews. Even though there were debates about the advantages and drawbacks of phone interviews (Block & Erskine, 2012; Taylor, 2002), one of the participants' intense schedules between DC engagements, the geographically distant residence as well as the specific request to conduct the interview through phone interview rather than an online video call made the phone interview a helpful alternative option to access a valuable experience that was unreachable otherwise. Additionally, open-ended interview questions and previous acquaintances between the researcher and the participant were experienced as facilitating measures in conducting an effective phone interview. However, since "all is data" (Glaser, 2002) in the grounded theory methodology and every piece of information was valuable in the research process, being unable to observe the body language and behaviors of the participant and managing silent moments were considered challenging during the phone interview making it as a last resort to rely on as a researcher.

The researcher's previous dual career and sports experiences facilitated establishing a certain degree of trust and understanding with the participants, as anticipated. Additionally, to eliminate the traditional power imbalance between the researcher and the participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2012) and keep the interaction informal and

conversational when participants shared mutually encountered experiences by both participant and the researcher, such as athletic failures during a competition, short anecdotes were also voiced by the interviewer to enhance empathy, comfort, and reciprocity. Besides my athletic career, my disabled identity also helped participants to open up comfortably and frankly and share some unique experiences, especially related to disability, societal perceptions, and reactions.

The interviewing process was also a transformative and progressive experience for the researcher. Although interviewing a timid and reserved participant might be challenging, it was also difficult to interview a very talkative and articulate participant. Managing interviews appropriately involved critical decisions regarding when to encourage sharing and when to prevent digression, which as the researcher, I improved with the transformative learning process of this research.

Lastly, as the researcher, my previous athletic experience as a Paralympian and my disabled identity helped me to access some valuable experiences of participants who were hesitant about accepting oral interviews. Building such a mutual trust and respect relationship with the participants who were unreachable otherwise was a privilege that I was deeply grateful for.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

Before specifying the data analysis process, it is essential to highlight that data collection and analysis are not separate activities while conducting grounded theory. Instead, the analysis adopted an iterative and dynamic process with constant comparison cycles of collecting, analyzing, and theorizing data followed by collecting more data and the same cycle (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Weed, 2009). The "constant comparative method" was referred to as the "core category" of grounded theory (Hallberg, 2006, p. 143), during which each component of data, whether codes, categories, incidents, concepts, or properties, was constantly compared to each other to identify differences, similarities, variations and relations between categories. Regardless of the variant of grounded theory, the constant comparative method is the key element that must be followed while conducting the research, especially during the coding process (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Weed, 2017). The data analysis

started with the completion of the first interview, and simultaneous and iterative cycles were adopted throughout the analysis process.

As the primary data analysis step, all interviews were digitally recorded, and pseudonyms were assigned to each record. Before the transcription, audio recordings were listened to several times, and notes were taken regarding the initial impressions and insights. Regarding data preparation, all tapes were transcribed verbatim by manually writing. The researcher manually typed these transcriptions into Microsoft Word using audio dictation. This two-step process necessitated the researcher to spend time with the data, facilitated familiarization, and encouraged to reflect on the initial coding process. The transcribed interviews were uploaded for analysis to MAXQDA 2022 (VERBI Software, 2019), a software for qualitative data analysis.

### 3.6.1. Coding

While conducting grounded theory, researchers progress through breaking down data from interview transcripts towards reconstructing fractured data by interpreting them as meaningful categories. Subsequently, researchers develop their grounded theories by specifying the relationship between identified conceptual categories and integrating them theoretically (Holt, 2016). Thus, the data analysis of this study moved from description with initial codes to abstraction with focused codes, followed by the construction of theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2006). The coding process followed a search for what was simply in the data, what the data meant within context, and what the meaning of the data implied (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017).

For this study, three types of coding were used: initial, focused, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). After the initial coding, however, the process did not follow a linear sequence. Instead, there was an iterative and cyclical process through which all three coding techniques were considered to identify similarities and differences between incidents, the potential subcategories, and the relationships between categories (Holt, 2016).

Firstly, interview data were fractured during the initial coding process to understand processes and actions through the line-by-line coding that summarized participants'

experiences in a given line. The line-by-line coding facilitated avoiding the impositions of the researcher's assumptions about data and the production of grounded codes by extracting data from participants' experiences. The table 6 below presents the extract of the line-by-line coding of the interview with Barış[2].

**Table 6**

*Sample initial coding*

| Excerpt from Interview Statement of Barış | Initial coding |
|---|---|
| "I learned that athletes like me, who had been injured in sports and quit, could adapt to wheelchair basketball, sit in a wheelchair and continue their sports career." …."When I encountered the coach of [name of sports club] by chance, [coach name], he really convinced me to start this sport." | Learning sports opportunities in para sports domain<br>Coach convincing to consider wheelchair basketball |
| Gradually, I started playing in that way for a year, two years, so I can say that my adaptation process took around three years. Getting used to the wheelchair, getting used to this sport [wheelchair basketball], getting used to my friends, adapting. I mean, I went through a really difficult process. I remember those ways, I remember my hands, I mean, they were injured, they were bleeding..." | Adapting as a process-multi layered adaptation<br>Getting used to the wheelchair,<br>to a new sport, to friends<br>Difficult process-remembering physical struggles |
| "I had great difficulties because I am a heavy athlete in terms of body size and I am not used to a wheelchair. I mean, our sport is not like normal basketball. You score a point and run back, no one is blocking you. Here, [wheelchair basketball], there are obstacles on the way to score, there are obstacles on the way back. And then there is taking the ball at the end and throwing it. Really, these were very difficult for me stage by stage, stage by stage." | Experiencing difficulties<br>Not being use to a wheelchair<br>Differences from "normal basketball"- learning specific in-play demands |
| "To be honest, psychologically, can I adapt to the wheelchair? How would it be, I had some question marks in my head." | Psychological adaptation hesitations<br>Having questions in mind |

As the data collection proceeded, the following interviews were compared to previous ones to identify differences and commonalities and determine how further data collection would proceed for developing the theory.

[2] Barış, is a 39 years old wheelchair basketball player. He used to play basketball before being forced to dropout due to a serious injury. Following the forced dropout, the coach of the sports club that he played for many years stimulated him to consider playing wheelchair basketball and reinitiate his sport career.

While coding initially, a number of questions were of critical importance: “What process takes place? How does this process develop? What sort of actions do participants take, and how do they act during this process? How do participants think and feel while involved in this process? What sort of indications does participants’ observed behavior reveal? How does the process change, when, and why? What are the consequences of the process? What collectively might it represent?” (Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 5).

The coding became more focused and analytically directed by transforming the initial codes into more abstract concepts and conceptualizing the phenomena under research (Chun Tie et al., 2019). By means of focused coding, a shift from a descriptive to a conceptual understanding took place. It also enabled analysis for more extensive explanations and analytical categorizations with constant comparison at each stage, leading to theoretical integration (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016). In addition to overviewing each participants’ data through within-case analysis, participants’ shared stories were compared to other participants to identify differences and commonalities regarding concepts, patterns, and relationships across concepts. Table 7 presents the excerpt of the focused coding process of Barış’s interview.

As conceptualization progressed through focused coding, previously identified concepts were integrated theoretically to support the theory-building process. The theoretical coding enabled the researcher to specify relationships among concepts and interconnect them (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016). Moreover, the theoretical coding process clarified specific conditions within the general context. For instance, the concept of “co-experiencing” clarified the specific conditions within DC para athletes’ experiences by specifying the necessity of coordinated efforts for athletes who indispensably depended on support to continue their DC experience.

Since the data analysis aimed to theorize rather than describe, the theoretical integration process was instrumental in achieving an analytical perspective and connecting concepts. Achieving theoretical integration through embracing a “phase-based framework” helped the researcher to present a theoretically coherent and meaningful story by revealing specific conditions and consequences. As the

development of theoretical concepts progressed, diagramming was used to ease the integration of concepts, demonstrate relationships, and provide visual representation.

**Table 7**

*Sample focused coding*

| Excerpt from Interview statement | Focused coding |
|---|---|
| "I learned that athletes like me, who had been injured in sports and quit, could adapt to wheelchair basketball, sit in a wheelchair and continue their sports career." | Talent transfer<br><br>Attraction- chance to continue sport career |
| "Gradually, I started playing in that way for a year, two years, so I can say that my adaptation process took around three years. Getting used to the wheelchair, getting used to this sport [wheelchair basketball], getting used to my friends, adapting. I mean, I went through a really difficult process. I remember those days, I remember my hands, I mean, they were injured, they were bleeding..." | Becoming a para athlete<br><br>Transformation from basketball player to wheelchair basketball player |
| "I had great difficulties because I am a heavy athlete in terms of body size and I am not used to a wheelchair. I mean, our sport is not like normal basketball. You know, score a point and run back, no one is blocking you. Here, there are obstacles on the way to score, there are obstacles on the way back. And then there is taking the ball at the end and throwing it. Really, these were very difficult for me in stage by stage, stage by stage…." | Physical adaptation |
| .... To be honest, psychologically, can I adapt to the wheelchair? How would it be, I had some question marks in my head. | Psychological adaptation |

Although the coding process was solely conducted by the researcher of this study, discussions with two practicing expert critical friends (Smith & Sparkes, 2020) were ensured to have analytical eyes for critical reviewing. One had extensive experience in the para sports context both as an athlete and a coach, and the other critical friend had 10 years of experience as a Paralympic high-performance officer and served as an international judge for shooting para sport. Both reviewed the process and provided another eye for the analysis regarding relevance and resonance. Their critical perspective encouraged the researcher to refine "the Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways."

The theoretical sensitivity concept is one of the most critical features of ground theory methodology and refers to developing "grounded concepts" from collected data and avoiding relying on pre-conceptions that can affect analysis and interpretations

(Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weed, 2009). Therefore, it was crucial to acknowledge theoretical sensitivity to preserve interpretations free of pre-existing frameworks and remain analysis grounded in the data. Accordingly, "theoretical sensitivity" was emphasized through data collection and analysis processes by acknowledging certain awareness about dual career literature but avoiding predetermined frameworks to influence what might be developed. However, there were diverse views regarding the degree of avoidance from previous literature, thus the meaning of theoretical sensitivity and how it could be achieved. To elaborate, while Glaser and Strauss, in their early work (1967), stressed the importance of an uncontaminated mind free of the influence and guidance of previous research in theory development, Strauss and Corbin (1998) as well as Charmaz (2006), favored a more flexible perspective that allowed guidance of literature to some degree in the data collection process as long as the researcher remained reflective and critical (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016; Kelle, 2007).

The key aspect regarding theoretical sensitivity was balancing the researchers' open mind with a certain degree of focused literature review that allowed the identification of important features bearing theoretical significance (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, this research process avoided a detailed literature review in the initial data collection and analysis phases. Instead, as the data collection and analysis proceeded, the researcher engaged in a more focused literature review by adopting an ecological lens that enabled the identification of critical aspects in the data for theoretical significance. Additionally, some theories, such as the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016), the holistic ecological approach (HEA) (Henriksen et al., 2010, 2020), the social relational model of disability (Thomas, 2004a, 2004b) and the push pull anti-push anti-pull framework (Mullet et al., 2000) were considered.

### 3.6.2. Analytical Tools

In addition to the iterative and constant comparative coding process, certain tools supported the researcher in enhancing methodological rigor and advancing the analytical process. Memo writing played a crucial role in the progression of the

analysis, from describing what was in the data to conceptualizing the theoretical concepts and connecting them (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013). The significance of memoing is well revealed in Stern's analogy: "If data are the building blocks of the developing theory, then memos are the mortar" (Stern, 2007, cited in Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Throughout the coding processes, keeping memos was critical in exploring, understanding, and reflecting on relationships among data, codes, and concepts, as was writing about future directions and theoretical ideas. In a way, memos were the voiced version of thoughts and the analytical path followed by the researcher. Moreover, memoing was instrumental in helping the researcher remain reflexive, aware of one's preconceptions, and control their reflections on research. By keeping the researchers' significant role in mind, the ideas, observations, initial thoughts, possible implications, and analytical comparisons were written down in memos. Analytical self-discussions about and between the data were showcased in memos as they essentially reflected the researchers' conceptual speculations (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007, p. 71). Moreover, memos that made participants' diverse experiences apparent also guided the theoretical sampling and who to reach out to in the following stages of research. As the researcher, I predominantly wrote the coding, as well as free memos in which detailed interpretations of codes and theoretical insights were voiced.

Since memos were informal notes belonging to the researcher, instead of getting stuck into the writing style or being concerned with grammatical and literary aesthetic considerations, they were written freely to explore ideas without losing any record of thoughts and analytical self-discussions. Accordingly, the memos were written in Turkish, which allowed the researcher to articulate ideas and considerations comfortably in her mother language. Figure 1 presents a translated version of a coding memo.

Additional analytical tools that supported the analysis process involved within and cross-case analysis. With respect to the within-case analysis, each participant's case portraits and characteristics were written, and each case's visual timeline involving personal DC experience with critical incidents was created. Moreover, diagramming

each participant's pathway models facilitated the analysis process and identification of common and different aspects of their DC experiences. Common and unique features related to DC experience, facilitators and challenges in the DC processes, coping strategies, critical periods, and their reflections on DC-related decisions were analyzed for each participant. Whereas for cross-case analysis, what made Paralympic athletes' DC experience unique and how and why DC pathways differed were explored.



**Transformation of individuals**

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Upon initiating a new career and DC, participants experienced transformation. It is called a transformation because people experienced more than just a transition and underwent a "becoming process" with multi-layered negotiations and multi-dimensional considerations. Participants became someone different from what they were before.

For instance, Barış, a wheelchair basketball player, experienced a "becoming a para athlete" process through negotiating wheelchair adaptation upon talent transfer from non-disabled sports, or, in his words, "basketball of normals." He had hesitations about the physical and mental dimensions of adaptation. "Do I belong? Can I play? Can I adapt to wheelchairs psychologically?" were the significant questions in his mind during this transformation process. Accepting and adapting to physical challenges such as wounds and bleeding hands because of intense training with a wheelchair were part of the process. Despite his previous experience as a basketball player, becoming a wheelchair basketball player involved adaptation to new equipment, learning its efficient use, game play adjustments, as well as proving injuries and impairment. The transformation process was at the same time related to questioning belongingness, negotiating meaning associated with disability, and embracing a new identity. For each individual, the transformation process encompassed multi-layered negotiations.

The transformation process was also experienced by the support network involving athletes' family members, guides, and coaches. Siblings becoming training partners, mothers becoming caregivers, a part of the DC experience, or a father who accompanied his son, letting him become more independent, were some examples of individuals' transformation. The athlete's guide role extended beyond the sports domain, such as moving together to another city for athletes' educational pursuits, letting him become a part of the DC team, and adapting to co-mobilizing and co-sacrificing. Similarly, coaches' transformation process involved embracing multi-dimensional roles that extended beyond the sport domain, like providing transport, convincing families, becoming aware of accessibility issues, booking accessible hotels, learning para sports specific rules and team formation, learning classification, adapting equipment, or adapting coaching by taking individualized needs into account. In a sense, it was a process of becoming more than a coach with multiple roles, which required coaches to transform and experience multi layered negotiations.

**Figure 1**

*An Extract from a coding memo in the later stages of research*

## 3.7. Trustworthiness of the Study

Conducting quality research, irrespective of its categorization, contributes to our understanding of a phenomenon (Cassidy, 2016). Scholars discussing the methodological rigor in qualitative studies draw attention to two different approaches: the criteriological approach and the relativist approach (Burke, 2016; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). The criteriological approach, denotes a set of pre-determined assessment criteria such as "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Smith & Sparkes, 2020) or involving eight quality markers of "worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840), has been traditionally used. Following these lists of criteria without considering the ontological and epistemological orientations of respective research or strict consideration of member checks for validation or omitting the fit between criteria and study characteristics have been widely criticized in the sport and exercise literature (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Applying static criteria to ensure trustworthiness without considering the purpose and philosophical standpoint of the study is considered problematic, controversial, and criticized for undermining novel research approaches (Burke, 2016).

The other approach for ensuring qualitative studies' trustworthiness emphasizes the relativist or non-foundational approach. Based on the relativist approach, researchers use a contextually situated self-selected set of criteria. The relativist approach stresses considering possible characteristics best suited to the research. Moreover, the assessment criteria should be study-specific by taking the research paradigm, goals, and inquiry method into account (Burke, 2016; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). In other words, researchers must make well-informed decisions based on criteria that best reflect the essence of their study.

For judging the quality of this research, the best suiting characteristics were evaluated from the possible list of criteria set out by Smith and Sparkes (2020, p. 1010). Accordingly, worthiness was addressed by studying an under-researched area of "DC in parasports," offering new theoretical explanations through substantive theory as

well as encouraging a dialogue on the findings' naturalistic, transferable, or analytical generalizability (Smith, 2018). Moreover, prolonged engagements through the researcher's past relationships with athletes in para sports context, discussions with two critical friends with practicing expertise to have other perspectives to ensure the relevance of the theory, memoing, reflexivity were among the features to address the trustworthiness of this research.

During the research process, from its initial stage until the end, as the researcher, I was committed to reviewing and critically considering my background, previous experiences, values, and unconscious motivations by using reflexive bracketing (Geiring, 2004) to minimize their effects on the study and ensure research's credibility.

Additionally, method-specific considerations were employed to ensure this study's trustworthiness. According to Weed (2009, 2017), concepts such as validity and reliability did not have a place in grounded theory research; instead, there were systematic ways to enhance both micro and macro-level quality. Regarding the micro level quality, the eight core elements that involved "iterative process, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, codes, memos and concepts, constant comparison, theoretical saturation, fit, work, relevance and modifiability and the emergence of substantive theory" (Weed, 2009, p. 505) were followed thoroughly during the research to ensure methodological integrity.

Regarding theoretical sensitivity, a flexible perspective introduced by Charmaz (2006) that emphasized balancing the researchers' open mind with a certain level of literature review was considered. Accordingly, as long as the researcher remained critical and reflexive, a limited literature review was conducted. This research process avoided extensive literature review in the initial data collection and analysis phase. Instead, it engaged a more focused literature review by adopting an ecological lens that enabled the researcher to identify critical aspects for theoretical significance (Charmaz, 2006).

Progress through codes to concepts with the guidance of memos was ensured. During the research process, constant comparison between codes, data, and concepts was followed to develop the theory. Additionally, as discussed in the previous sections, the

quality at the macro level is satisfied by elaborating on the study's contribution, significance, and appropriateness of the chosen methodology (Weed, 2009).

With regard to the “fit, work, relevance and modifiability” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this study employed a constant comparison process, theoretical sampling reflecting diversified experiences, incorporated analytical explanations, and engaged with real-world concerns of DC para athletes.

In line with the constructivist variant of grounded theory, to elaborate the quality of the study, further criteria of "credibility, originality, resonance, usefulness" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182) were ensured. The credibility of this research is satisfied by considering a diverse sample further guided by theoretical sampling, which provided the researcher to reach out to athletes with high support needs, reveal additional complexity associated with disability experience, and access information-rich data. Moreover, by addressing a research gap in the DC research area, providing new theoretical conceptualizations such as “co-experiencing”, providing new DC pathways and new DC athlete profiles addressed the originality of this study.

To satisfy resonance, the researcher discussed the interpretations of data and the development of substantive theory with two critical friends having profound practicing expertise in para-sports. Their feedback ensured that the constructed theory resonated with the real world of para-sports and remained relevant in reflecting the diverse experiences of DC para-athletes. Lastly, usefulness is ensured by sparking interest in further research about para-sports, broadening DC para athletes’ conceptualization, and acknowledging diverse DC experiences and pathways based on the introduced substantive theory.

### 3.8. Reflexivity

Since the ultimate aim of this research was to develop a substantive exploratory theory about the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes by examining their dual career experiences, it was essential that the data guided the research process and reflected the participants' experiences. Therefore, it was crucial for me as the researcher of this

study to identify areas of potential bias and prevent my assumptions from guiding and shaping the research process.

Bracketing, defined as a process of being aware of one's values, beliefs, interests, feelings, and perceptions and not letting them influence the research process through all its stages (Ahern, 1999; Creswell, 2013) requires the researcher to use reflexivity to identify subjective awareness, welcome a commitment to bracket, and minimize the effect of potential areas of bias.

Throughout the research, to ensure reflexivity, the memoing process was ensured, and the ideas, observations, initial thoughts, and analytical comparisons were written down by the researcher about the progression of the research. The reflexive journey that I was willing to go through involved "acknowledging areas of subjectivity, identification of interest in conducting this study, areas of potential role conflict, considering feelings that may affect neutrality and being aware of previous experiences that may cause avoidance or favoring some situations, individuals, and reflecting on underlying motives and behaviors" (Ahern, 1999).

Throughout my life, sports had a great importance both before and after my car accident. I was not born with an impairment; I had a car accident at the age of 11, and I had spinal cord injury at T5 level, and I have been using a wheelchair since then. Sport has made me encounter diverse experiences ranging from the greatest visibility and recognition to invisibility and has been one of the most important colors of my life, contributing to who I am now. I experienced my first breaking point regarding sports after my car accident.

Before the accident, I was a successful, actively participating, energetic, joyful, and athletic student. Besides school, I was interested in skiing, swimming, and figure skating. Although I managed to incorporate sports again into my life after the accident through the rehabilitation process, it did not take me so long to become the invisible student of the PE classes. I was exempt from participating in PE courses and soon became a student who sat and watched her classmates during class, preparing term projects about different sports. I was invisible during the PE classes, and it was not solely related to the PE teachers and their attitudes but also to a system that regularly

ignored students with special needs in sports and treated them mainly through an ableist view.

Therefore, rather than actively participating in PE classes, I sat and prepared several term projects about different sports in seven years to get a grade for my PE classes.

Even though the school I was attending had a rights-based attitude towards individuals with special needs to a great extent, it also took its share from the widespread reflections of social and cultural understandings of disability that could not fit and accommodate sports and disability in the same picture.

Although I continued to participate in sports activities thanks to the support and efforts of my family, in a sense, sports became a forbidden zone for me in the institutional and public spheres. This experience of invisibility transformed into an appreciation, heroic portrayal, and widespread recognition when I got a gold medal at the Beijing Paralympic Games archery, which I started to practice after graduating from university. Hence, these conflicting experiences, ranging from invisibility to heroic appreciation, changed on a continuum throughout my life.

Recently, I realized that I took these challenging experiences as they came and did not question these conflicting experiences thoroughly—at least not until my graduate studies. My graduate studies at METU's Social Policy Department and the Physical Education and Sports Department gave me a broader perspective on situating my experiences and assessing them holistically by considering social structures.

My sports career had been a personal growth journey with ups and downs through which I learned to know myself better. However, it was not until this reflexive writing that I realized I considered sports a medium to respond, address, and act on societal discriminative attitudes and cultural, structural, and environmental barriers. While writing this reflection, I remembered my statement right after winning the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games gold medal. I said, “I believe I have completed my mission if I have proven that people who aren’t even able to leave their homes can achieve things as well.” Apparently, sports has not been just a personal journey for me after all but also a medium to highlight and address discriminative attitudes and social and

cultural oppression that many individuals with disability have to face every day. In a way, it provided me a medium to raise my voice.

After the first two years of my athletic career as a para-archer, I started working full-time, which further complicated issues due to competing expectations and requirements in both domains. I experienced being an elite-level Paralympian while combining full-time employment and sport. Just at the beginning of my athletic journey, a job that would provide me flexibility guided my choice about where to work. I purposefully preferred to work at a public institution, anticipating the heavy workload and schedule that might have been experienced if I had chosen to work for a private company. From the beginning, it was about choices, anticipation, proper planning, prioritizing, negotiations, chasing the balance on a continuum, and accepting sacrifices. However, my DC experience involved lots of compromises as well. At national training camps, I remember falling asleep while working to finish the job before the deadline because of exhaustion from training all day. These efforts could probably be related to addressing the low societal expectancy and proving them wrong about people with disabilities and their capabilities by showcasing hard work and dedication. Everything became more manageable for me after I made a name and gained success in the para-sports arena both at the national and international levels. I am well aware that my DC experience was one of the many experiences existing in DC in the sports universe.

After the 2012 London Paralympic Games, I retired from sport with a pre-planned transition to start my graduate studies. Over time, I started working as a sports advisor at the Ministry of Youth and Sports and continued to be involved in sports with different roles at national and international levels. I was the deputy chef de mission at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games, worked as a branch manager of the foreign relations department in a male-dominated domain, and was one of the members of "the Paralympic Games Performance Evaluation Commission." I had a chance to establish very close and cordial relations with para-athletes from each paralympic sport in Türkiye. I communicated with them often, safeguarded their rights, and witnessed the multidimensional challenges that they were experiencing. Voicing these challenges that athletes were experiencing and trying to find solutions were among the most

meaningful efforts of my life. When I decided to study the DC experiences of Paralympic athletes, I resigned from my role at the Paralympic Games Performance Evaluation Commission to avoid creating any conflict of interest. However, being the athlete representative at the commission had been one of the most important responsibilities I had ever experienced in my life.

At the international level, I was elected as a member of the IPC Athletes' Commission, worked there for 9 years, and tried to be the voice of athletes worldwide. I had a chance to communicate with para athletes with diverse developmental levels regarding their multidimensional experiences. Similarly, I was one of the board members of the European Paralympic Committee and served again as an athlete representative. I am still involved in working groups related to para-sports because I feel a sense of connection, belongingness, as well as interest. Therefore, this study resulted from such an interest in and connection to the para sports domain. Additionally, this research also provided an opportunity to acknowledge the experiences of a long-time neglected athlete population and give back to para-sports personally, from which I learned, and was empowered, a lot.

The above-stated sports background and activities gave me acquaintance, knowledge, connection, and access to the necessary network of athletes and people fulfilling diverse roles in the para-sports domain. However, besides the advantages my background could provide me during this research, I was also committed to acknowledging possible disadvantages. Therefore, I carefully considered my previous experiences and background during all processes to not impose my assumptions or pre-dispositions to lead the research process or value some participants' voices more than others.

Accordingly, as a starting point, I recognized that my background, being a retired elite-level Paralympic athlete with dual career experience, living with a disability since the age of eleven, having a strong interest in disability studies and sports, working as a long-time sports advisor in para-sports, and fulfilling various managerial roles in the sports domain, inevitably influenced this research from its first steps to its development, as well as the choice of the research topic.

Additionally, this research had significance for me as a medium to attract attention to a long-time ignored population of para-athletes in the scientific research area, shed light on their experiences, and give back to para-sports, where I grew personally and was empowered tremendously. I honestly desired that this research and its substantive theory would stimulate future studies related to para sports and encourage other researchers to turn their interest in para sports context.

Lastly, I honestly declare my willingness and commitment to this reflexive journey by adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness throughout the research process and letting the participants' voices and lived experiences guide the research process.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this research, aiming to develop the first grounded theory to explore the dual career (DC) experiences and pathways of Paralympic athletes. The findings of the research are given based on the research questions guiding this study:

How do Paralympic athletes experience dual career in sport?

- What are the processes experienced Paralympic athletes in pursuing dual career in sport and education or work?
- How do dual career pathways vary?
- What influences DC processes?
- What actions are taken in DC experiences?

## 4.1. Dual Career Experiences of Paralympic Athletes

The dual career (DC) experiences of Paralympic athletes involved both similar and different pathways compared to the generally referred conceptualization of a dual career, which typically involves advancing through consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational pursuits concurrent with different athletic developmental phases, as their career development experiences involved linear as well as interrupted non-linear characteristics.

While some Paralympic athletes' career pathways followed a relatively normative and linear path, typically beginning during high school by combining education and sports careers and progressing through consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational pursuits coexisting with different athletic developmental phases, other

Paralympic athletes' career pathways revealed interrupted career sequences with entry, exit and re-entry trajectories. These in-and-out sequences often included temporary cessations or dropping out of education or work careers, later followed by reinitiating DC with new career combinations of academic, vocational, and sports careers.

The processes in the para athlete development pathways, disability experience and the stressors as well as facilitators associated with para sports were the most significant features making para athletes' DC experiences unique compared to their non-disabled counterparts. The dependence on the support network further complicated DC processes for the athletes with severe impairments, revealing co-constructing and co-experiencing processes as they navigated their DC journey. Transitioning from non-disabled sports to para sports following a severe injury and undergoing adaption and transformation processes while pursuing DC were among the unique features experienced by Paralympic athletes. Thus, Paralympic athletes pursued individual pathways with dual and multiple careers, which involved differing career sequences and combinations initiated at different ages and developmental levels.

### 4.1.1. Early and Late Career Construction Styles

Paralympic athletes' career development experiences revealed early and late career construction styles. Paralympic athletes with an early career construction style, characterized by a relatively normative and linear career pathway, generally initiated their dual career pathway during high school years when they were around 15 years old and followed a consecutive educational progression coexisting with different phases of athletic development. Their DC experiences resembled the generally outlined dual career pathway in DC research.

Moreover, these athletes participated in sports younger than Paralympic athletes with late-career construction styles. During their career development process, despite experiencing entry and exit sequences due to health issues and coinciding schedules, Paralympic athletes with early career construction styles maintained their career trajectories and continued the same career combinations after concluding temporary cessation periods.

On the other hand, athletes with late career construction styles experienced in-and-out sequences during their career development processes, which changed their DC pathways. These athletes dropped out of education or vocational careers and resumed their career trajectories by re-initiating their dual career pathways with a new version of career combinations. The multi-dimensional interconnected factors such as accessibility, impairment effects, lack of flexibility, and prioritization of a career affected Paralympic athletes to drop out of their education or work careers, which later on resumed by initiating a new version of the DC pathway.

To exemplify, a Paralympic athlete who initiated their DC experience by combining a vocational career with a sports career dropped out of work due to impairment effects and accessibility issues and re-initiated an academic pathway by integrating an academic and sports career. Similarly, another Paralympic athlete dropped out of their academic career due to the perceived significance of a para sports career and lack of flexibility regarding coinciding schedules later resumed their DC pathway with a new career combination by pursuing vocational and athletic careers.

Especially Paralympic athletes with an acquired impairment due to a life-changing event such as an accident had the opportunity to initiate a relatively late athletic career despite the absence of a prior sports experience in their lives and transitioned quickly to the high-performance pathway although not planned initially. The findings showed that elite athletic careers in para sports domain were not necessarily constructed at young ages. Paralympic athletes participated in para sports at different ages, affected mainly by available sports opportunities, their families' stance toward sports, awareness about para sports opportunities and impairment-related features (onset, type, severity).

The absence of age-bound development pathways in para sports encouraged coaches and enabled participants to consider a para-athletic career even if they lacked prior sports experience. Therefore, the profile of DC Paralympic athletes and the age at which they participated in para sports and considered it as a career were diverse and did not hinder the development trajectories or their athletic success.

An additional finding derived from the shared stories of participants was the late career construction styles of DC Paralympic athletes, which were not limited by an athletic career but also encompassed the late initiation or re-initiation of their interrupted academic careers. Paralympic athletes experienced delayed academic careers or re-initiated dropped-out educational pursuits in different fields of study. The interaction among lack of flexibility, legislative provisions facilitating enrollment to higher education, and Paralympic athletes' questioning of their capabilities due to internalized ableism resulted in delayed academic careers.

### 4.1.2. Multiple Career Pathways

Diverse profiles of Paralympic athletes, such as student-athletes, employee-athletes, and athletes with multiple careers who had academic, vocational, and athletic careers, were identified. Another significant aspect of Paralympic athletes' career development process was initiating a third career while pursuing a dual career pathway. Among the participants, multiple career Paralympic athletes involved student-athletes studying at university and pursuing a para sports career, which further incorporated a third career by initiating a vocational career, or employee athletes who additionally initiated a previously dropout academic career in a different field of study. Thus, Paralympic athletes even extended their career engagements beyond two pursuits by initiating a third career, occasionally increasing career-related demands.

In contrast to the generally referred conceptualization of a dual carer pathway, which is often characterized by a progression from education to vocational pursuits alongside an athletic career, some Paralympic athletes' experiences revealed diverse career pathways, such as starting their vocational careers before graduating from university or enrolling in university while already working. This multitude of experiences challenged the typical DC conceptualization assuming linear consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational careers alongside athletic development and prevented Paralympic athletes' career development processes from being conceptualized solely by age-based normative and consecutive progressions of careers.

Given that the career development experiences of Paralympic athletes were more complicated than generally outlined DC conceptualization, a phase-based model acknowledging the different stages of career development processes better reflected the diversity of the Paralympic athletes pursuing dual and multiple careers. A phase-based conceptualization of Paralympic athletes' DC or MC pathways, illustrated in Figure 2, incorporated the linear as well as non-linear characteristics of their career experiences, which were further complicated by disability experience.

### 4.2. Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways

The experiences of Paralympic athletes guided the development of a behavioral framework, explaining the processes of dual and multiple career pathways in para sports context. Career pathways of Paralympic athletes are conceptualized by situating different processes, respective components of phases, and social relationships within the environment. Figure 2 illustrates the "Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways," describing the different interrelated phases experienced by Paralympic athletes from the pre-DC phase until retirement.

The model incorporates typical phases experienced by all dual and multiple career Paralympic athletes, such as "mobilization," "initiation and acclimatization," "strategizing period and career," and "retirement" as well as probable phases experienced by some Paralympic athletes while pursuing dual and multiple careers. While the inner layer sheds light on Paralympic athletes' social relationships, actions, and career experiences, the outer layer of the model involves social structure and the macro environment that affects the experience of DC and MC pathways. Within the model, the dashed arrows incorporated probable phases conceivably experienced by Paralympic athletes.

The outer layer of the model illustrates the macro environment in which Paralympic athletes experience their career development processes. *The social and cultural experience of disability* refers to how individuals with disabilities, including Paralympic athletes, are perceived, valued, and treated within society, as well as how

their interactions with society shape their lived experiences, opportunities, and access to resources.

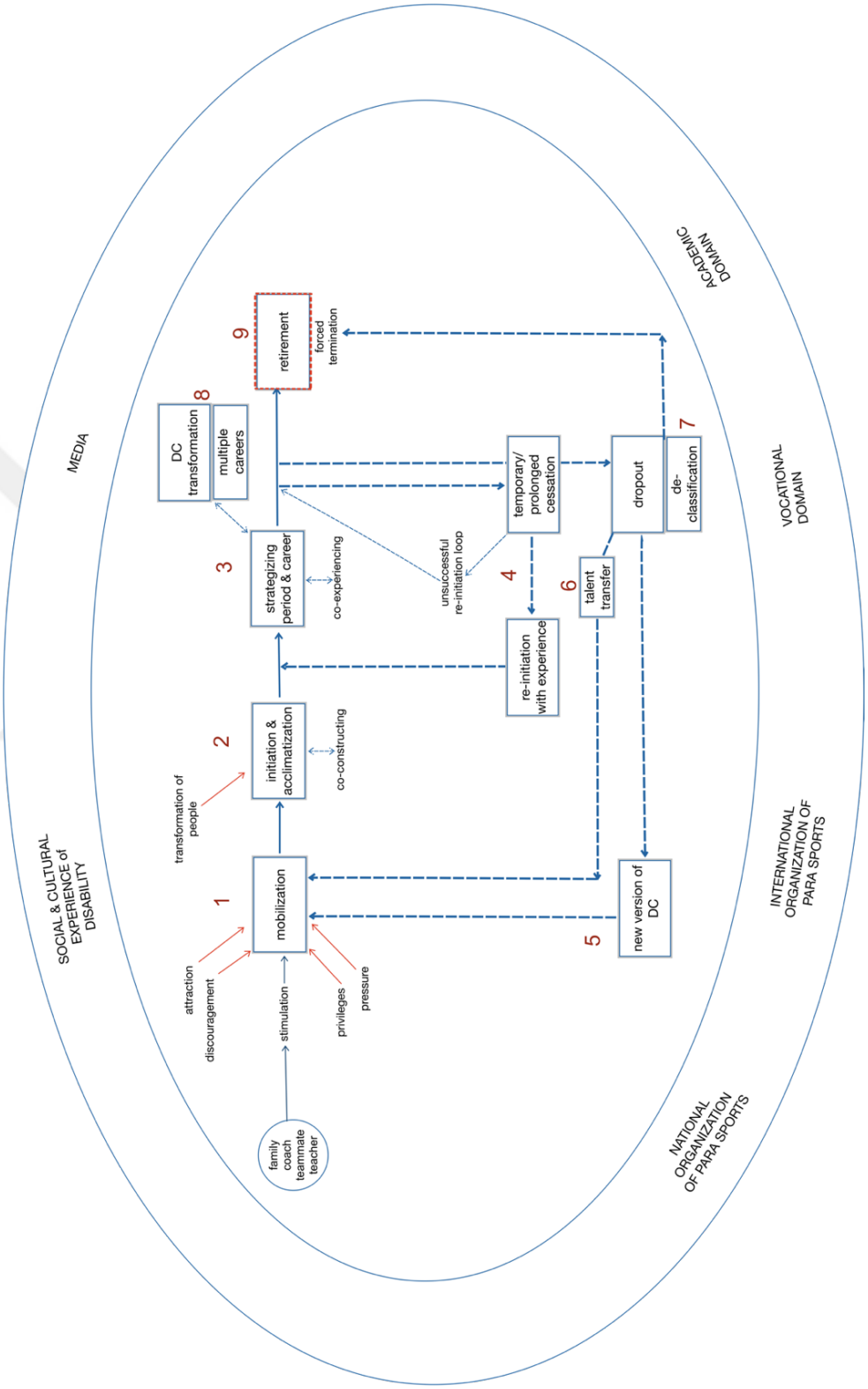



**Figure 2**

*Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Career Pathways*

*Media* encompasses the representation, portrayal, and coverage of para athletes and para sports, as well as how Para athletes engage with and respond to the media.

The *vocational domain* involves how individuals with disabilities, including employee Paralympic athletes, are perceived, valued, and treated, as well as the stance toward the dual career of Paralympic athletes. It encompasses employment opportunities for athletes and people with disabilities, the openness of workplaces to accommodate dual career pathways, the cultural environment toward sports, available support such as, flexibility or constraints, and the attitudes, interactions, and communication within vocational environments.

*The academic domain* entails how individuals with disabilities, including student Paralympic athletes, are perceived, valued, and treated, as well as the approach toward their dual career pathways. It includes academic career opportunities for athletes, the openness of academic environments to support dual career pathways, the availability of resources, flexibility or constraints, as well as attitudes and interactions within academic settings.

*The national organization of para sports* refers to the structure and governance of para sports at the national level, including how athlete development pathways are organized and progressed. It encompasses the management of para sports, the perceptions of para athletes, and the expectations placed on them, as well as the organization's stance toward the dual career of Paralympic athletes. This includes the extent to which the organization is open to accommodating dual career pathways, the availability of flexibility or constraints, and the attitudes and interactions within sports settings.

*The international organization of para sports* involves the structure and governance of Para sports at the international level, including the rules of sport, classification processes, and any changes to these regulations that affect athletes' opportunities, career trajectories, and development pathways.

Before describing the phases experienced by DC Paralympic athletes, it is important to provide participants' pre-DC experiences to understand the social and cultural

experience of disability and the environment in which Paralympic athletes experience career development processes.

Paralympic athletes commonly shared challenging experiences during their education, especially regarding peer bullying. Becoming an object of fun, being exposed to disturbing stares, being excluded from games, and feeling unwanted desk mates were some of the negative experiences that made Paralympic athletes experience psychological battles, feel depressed, and question why they had disabilities.

> "In elementary school, for example, I didn't have a desk mate at first... At that moment you don't understand, you feel sad, you feel depressed. I didn't have a desk mate. Nobody wanted to sit next to me... There was a lot of ridicule, there were a lot of people who said I had no hands, no arms and so on. Those things demoralize you. I feel the lack of them a lot when I play games in physical education class or when I do activities with two hands" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para-taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

> "There were many difficulties... Both in terms of friendships and, how should I put it, in my social environment. I also experienced incidents with my own friends, of course. I faced setbacks" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student-athlete).

> "When I was young, of course I experienced things like being stared at by younger children and being excluded by peers" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student-athlete).

> "My friends were also always making fun of me. They wouldn't let me play, and even if they did, I couldn't even see the ball the or the rope, I wasn't able to play in the way it was supposed to be, disrupting the games. That's why I was so marginalized by my friends... My fifth grade was a year when I went through a lot of psychological warfare. I was even very depressed at that time. Why am I disabled?" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Similarly, exclusionary experiences in education, lack of system-based practices acknowledging and accommodating students with disabilities, teachers' discriminative attitudes, their unwillingness to teach students with disabilities and acknowledge their needs, as well as environmental barriers, lack of accessible transport and prejudices denied individuals with disabilities access to equal experiences on par with their peers. These challenging experiences let Paralympic athletes feel ignored and often engage in self-initiated problem-solving processes such as moving to another city for

education, searching for new schools, or even hiding their impairments to prevent bullying.

> "...I needed to hide my hand until a certain age. I always wore long sleeves in summer and winter. I wouldn't wear a t-shirt in summer" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "I studied first grade in the village in a unified class. You all know the Black Sea climate and its environmental conditions. Rugged lands, mountainous areas, and so on. I was educated in a unified class in such an environment. Our school was shut down due to lack of students. My friends went to schools in the districts, but we had to move to Ankara with my family for education since I was disabled" (Mert, M, 32, para table tennis, CI, employee- athlete).

> "My teachers were not interested in me a bit. They did not help me with the lessons..." "...Let me put it this way, my teachers taught [subjects] as if they were below my intelligence. They didn't teach much, I mean they didn't put any effort in for me. They only focused on my classmates; they didn't try at all, they didn't support me... I ended up changing three public high schools (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student-athlete).

> "So this 4 + 4 + 4 system was introduced. While we used to have one teacher in our class, this time we had different teachers. And the teachers, of course, did not know how to deal with a visually impaired student at that time. Most of my teachers were definitely not helping me. I mean, I also heard things like, "What are you doing in school if you are visually impaired?" from many of my teachers. For instance, even in exams where I needed to score high, they didn't enlarge the text to address my needs because I couldn't see it. Nor did they allow someone to read it for me, so I scored poorly. They didn't even enlarge the texts; they made no effort to accommodate me at all" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

Before initiating dual career experiences in para sports, Paralympic athletes' commonly shared stories revealed multidimensional interacting barriers, discriminative attitudes, and restricted opportunities to participate equally and fully enjoy their rights.

### 4.2.1. Mobilization Phase: Diversifying the Opportunities

As illustrated in Figure 2, the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes began with the mobilization phase, during which significant others, such as family, coach, teammate,

PE teacher, and DC motives, interacted to stimulate and encourage participants to initiate their DC journey.

During the pre-DC phase, when participants had only one engagement in sports or education/work, diversifying the opportunities appeared as a prominent motive. The interaction between significant social agents involving family, coach, teammates, and teachers and DC motives encompassing "attraction," "discouragement," "privileges," and "pressure" stimulated Paralympic athletes to mobilize toward pursuing a dual career. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these pre-DC motives interacted to make participants combine sports, education, and vocational careers.

*The attraction-based mobilization* signifies the stimulating role of positive expectations about the future in initiating dual career journey. Envisioning positive future projections and increased opportunities through earning income, increasing social networks, mobility, socialization and traveling mobilized participants to consider participating in sports. Moreover, observing the lives of peers who traveled and earned income through sports careers stimulated one of the participants Mert to follow in the footsteps of his role model peers and consider sports as a career to expand opportunities.

> "Here at [school], I had friends who played basketball. They were going to practices and traveling for away games every two weeks since it was a team sport. I admired them for it. Plus, they were earning money as well. As a student, earning close to minimum wage allowed them to cover their needs without depending on their families. That really appealed to me" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee-athlete).

> "They told us that this was [the name of the project] and that they wanted us to try archery. I didn't know the archery at that time... They said, 'Come, it will be a different environment for you. You will be in the same environment with your other friends with disabilities'" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "When I met [name of teammate], he recommended archery for me. One day I went to visit him in training, I watched him shoot, I thought I could do it, it was actually a very big goal for me that day" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student-athlete).

Talent transfer from non-disabled sports upon a severe injury also stimulated positive future expectations by providing a second chance for an athletic career. Transitioning from non-disabled sports to para sports acted as a DC motive in reinitiating an athletic career and mobilizing toward a new chapter of the DC journey.

> "I received a different offer that I had never heard before in my life. I learned that athletes like me, who had been injured in sports and quit, could adapt to wheelchair basketball, sit in a wheelchair and continue their sports career. That's what I was told. So I started wheelchair basketball at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007" (Barış, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, employee-athlete).

Future career plans to become a sports manager, contribute to, shaping sports policies and climate, and become qualified enough to achieve these ends also appeared as an attraction-based DC motive for initiating an academic career by enrolling in the sports management department.

> "I am studying this department [sports management] in order to be useful to my country in some way and to pave the way for other people. So I really have no other goal. After all, with the department I have completed here, I will be equipped in some way and I will take part in a managerial level and be useful to people. This is really my main goal." ... "As I further my education life, I will be a useful person for the country. I have already reached a certain point in my sports life. In this sense, I am on a path that can blend these two situations with each other and transfer my experiences in the future and contribute to Türkiye's sports climate" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student-athlete).

*The discouragement-based mobilization* involved negative experiences and restrictions in the present that stimulate combining education/vocation and sports. Being unable to participate in sports after acquiring impairment, experiencing exclusion during physical education classes, and missing previous active days challenged DC Paralympic athletes.

Accessibility issues, impairment effects challenging participants to continue their current vocational careers, the absence of extra-curricular activities and restricted opportunities at a segregated boarding school, and monotone life experiences were difficulties that stimulated participants to consider sports as an opportunity and even a "light at the end of the tunnel".

> "Since it was a boarding school, there were not many activities we could do. You get up in the morning, go to class, the class ends, there is a tutoring session, you go to bed, the next day the same thing again"... (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "I fell into a void in high school because during physical education classes, while my friends were playing sports, I had to just watch them. I wasn't doing anything, just watching. I was exempt from the class, and that's a very bad thing for kids with disabilities. After acquiring disability at the age of 13, I couldn't participate in any kind of sports anymore... Then I started seeing matches on TV... I started watching them and began to believe that I could do it too" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

> "As I mentioned, I was working as a software developer, and during that period, especially before the accident, I was able to work at night. I would even stay up all night most of the time. Physically, my body was better suited to this kind of work at night. However, after the accident, during the time I was working at the agency, I couldn't do this as much because when I couldn't sleep at night, I would struggle physically. When I was alone, I often had a hard time as well. So I couldn't adapt to that work routine very well. We were working in an office in [name of the place], in a hilly area. I couldn't leave the office whenever I wanted, and I couldn't move around comfortably inside the office. I struggled a lot physically. For me, sports became like an escape. It was like the light at the end of the tunnel" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student-athlete).

Similarly, families' awareness upon seeing a world champion Paralympic athlete on TV and willingness to motive their child who gradually lost sight due to progressive impairment and distract their attention from regular hospital visits appeared as a DC motive. Searching for suitable sports activities that would not harm or negatively affect their child's condition was considered and guided which sports to choose and participate in.

> "Going back and forth between school and the hospital, my mom was thinking of ways to keep me motivated, to have me do something, especially since I had started losing my sight. Back then, I was young, and she didn't want me to be affected negatively. She was looking for something to motivate me. One day, while watching TV, she saw a visually impaired woman becoming a world champion in athletics. Then she said, 'I'll get my daughter into sports too'" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

*The privileges-based mobilization* involved positive and facilitative opportunities available in the present that encouraged initiating a dual career journey in sports. The

legislative instruments facilitating education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities and medaled national athletes at major international competitions such as the Paralympic Games, World and Continental championships facilitated enrollment in higher education or access to employment. Moreover, on some occasions national para athlete status and associated recognition, reaching out to networks, and benefiting from employment quotas for people with disabilities interacted and initiated the DC process.

> "We had an acquaintance who helped us. I told them that I was a national athlete. They told me there was a position for individuals with disabilities. At that time, it was a subcontractor position. Later, we transitioned to a permanent worker position. I told them I wanted to work, I didn't want to stay at home, and that I wanted to do something other than archery. After that, they hired me under the disability quota" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "Our state gave us the right since we are national athletes. In other words, we could be appointed by point appointment. I chose to be appointed. I was appointed [as a PE teacher]" (Barış, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, employee-athlete).

Paralympic athletes heavily relied on facilitative measures provided by legislation to plan and initiate their academic and vocational careers. The Public Personal Selection Examination for People with Disabilities (E-KPSS) provided employment opportunities at state institutions. Moreover, even if Paralympic athletes did not manage to enroll in initially planned or desired academic fields of study either because of limited time to study or discriminative practices, they still managed to pursue their academic careers primarily relying on the facilitation of being a decorated national athlete though legislation.

> "We have a certain threshold score, which is very low. Being a national athlete is important there; we move directly to the top position. This gives us the opportunity to get an education. I'm very happy about this aspect" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "Since I was already second in the Olympics[3] in my first year, I switched to [name of the university] with my direct preference" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

3 Paralympic Games

> "The ministry made an agreement with private universities the year I took the exam. There was an agreement for a 100% national athlete scholarship. I took the exam during that period. For me, it was the mindset of, "Even if I don't do anything, I can still get in." It was just about choosing a university and continuing from there. That's why I wanted to go to a private university. I could have directly entered state universities through the national athlete quota in the ÖSYM[4] system due to my ranking, but I wanted to study at a private university" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

> "Work actually came into my life along with my achievements in sports. With a regulation, or should I say, a law passed by our ministry, national athletes were hired as contracted sports experts. With my achievement, I was appointed as a sports expert for [name of the city]" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete)

> "I took the civil service exam. I thought, "Why not go to work? Even if I'm not a lawyer, I can still work in the courthouse." That's why I always listed the Ministry of Justice as my top choice. That's where I was assigned" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

> "Since I couldn't study much, I chose School of Physical Education and Sports [BESYO]. Otherwise, if I hadn't stopped focusing on my studies, I might have been in a different department" (Demet, F, 21, CI progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "I work as a sports expert at the Ministry of Sports. Since I am a national athlete, I was appointed through the national athlete system....They [sports managers from the Ministry of Youth and Sports] said it would be good if I applied [sports expert position]" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

Satisfying eligibility criteria to become a para athlete through the classification process and previous sports experience in non-disabled sports acted as opportunities available in the present that encouraged coaches to reach out to potential athletes to convince them about initiating a dual career journey in sports. Similarly, Paralympic athletes' search for potential teammates in specific sports classes to build a team stimulated them to look for specific athlete profiles required for the team composition and fulfill the athlete profiles needed for the team.

> "[coach name] was the wheelchair basketball team coach of [sports club name] at that time. He knew that I was injured...We ran into each other. I told him about my injury. He said, "Oh, okay, then let's get you started here." ... "I

4 The Student Selection and Placement Centre

started wheelchair basketball at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007. Of course, when I started, I had to prove my injuries with documents. We did that and we started" (Barış, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, employee-athlete).

"There was the World Championship in 2017. We started to prepare for it. New athletes also started to arrive in our sports class at that time. [Name of athlete] was always trying to find someone to create a team" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

*The pressure-based mobilization* involved the stimulating role of negative expectations and projections about the future in combining academic, vocational, and sports careers. Paralympic athletes were aware of the limited lifespan of an athletic career. Moreover, the fragility of an athletic career due to the risk of injury led participants to secure their future by initiating alternative careers to rely on. Anxiety about the future, securing and sustaining alternative income generation opportunities mobilized Paralympic athletes to initiate academic as well as vocational careers in addition to their sports careers. Similarly, expectations of families to secure and guarantee employment at a state institution and familial concerns about risky and uncertain athletic careers stimulated Paralympic athletes to acknowledge their families' concerns and initiate an additional vocational career in addition to their ongoing academic and sports careers.

"My mom was uneasy. Yes, she is one of the most supportive of me doing sports. She is the one who is always there for me. But she saw it as a devil's work, to use a little slang. It is risky, if you get injured, your life is over. There is a classic saying that you should lean your back against the state and just relax. Because she was in that mood, my mother was one of the most pleased people that I was appointed to youth sports [the Ministry] appointed as a sports expert. She was relieved, so now she said with peace of mind that her son is now a civil officer" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete)".

"I already had a job, being an athlete was very important to me. However, my family, like many others, believes that unless you have an official job, they always worry. They want a guaranteed job, they have that kind of thinking. Rightly so. I had already taken that exam [EKPSS[5]] in order not to disappoint them" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

[5] The Public Personnel Selection Examination for People with Disabilities

> “But like I said, if I had only been an athlete, my family wouldn't have been at ease. Because there wasn't a guaranteed job, they were worried that one day I would get injured and that would be the end of it” (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “Sports is a rewarding thing, but sports is also an ungrateful thing at the same time. It's actually something that can destroy your whole life with a single injury. Therefore, I think that there should be another regular life after doing sports or after the compulsory farewell to it. I think that you need to have a different profession. That's why I can say that I value the importance of studying or the significance of getting a job” (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

> “If I didn't have a job or school life, how long would I do archery, as long as my body allows me to? Maybe my body will not allow it, maybe I will have to quit archery next year. Then I would have to sit at home, because I have no other environment other than archery” (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The significant others including the family, coach, teammates, peers, and teachers were critical social agents in mobilizing Paralympic athletes towards dual and multiple career pathways. The participants’ experiences revealed that becoming a DC Paralympic athlete involved both planned (self-initiated) and unplanned (externally-initiated) practices. Although some participants did not intend to initiate a para athletic career, through the invitation and insistence of coaches and encouragement of their future teammates, they participated in sports, and with fast progression soon this sports activity transformed into a para athletic career, though not planned initially. During the pre-DC phase, addressing overprotective parents and convincing them about their child’s sports participation was a challenge to overcome for coaches to a great extent. Similarly, PE teachers were crucial agents in convincing overprotective families as well as enabling and stimulating their students with disabilities to try and sustain sports participation.

Most participants shared that their most important source of support was their families, primarily by referring to the support they received during the initial phases of their athletic development. Their families supported them emotionally and practically regarding transportation, caregiving, assistance during training, and organizing schedules. However, on the other side of experiences, Paralympic athletes struggled because of their overprotective families and their unsupportive attitudes triggered by

disability and gender stereotypes. Expectations to focus on rehabilitation, feeling concerned about their children getting hurt or injured, and worrying about their daughters because of gendered approaches, stereotypes and considering para sports endeavor as a challenge for the rehab process or a distraction in regaining their child's health were to name some of the concerns that athletes, their coaches and PE teachers addressed to sustain sports participation.

> "My parents didn't want me to do sports…They don't know how we [people with a visual impairment] do sports. And unfortunately, I'm a girl. We have this kind of mindset in Türkiye. So, because I'm a girl and also visually impaired, my family was overly protective of me. And they were afraid something might happen to me, that I might get hurt. Like, what if I hit my nose somewhere and it starts bleeding? They were constantly worried about me" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "To be honest, I didn't receive much family support either. But I'm not actually saying this in a blaming way. It's just that they were hoping I would continue with physical therapy and regain my previous health. That's why I had to use a hospital wheelchair for a long time" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student-athlete).

On the other hand, athletes also entered into para athletic careers through planned and self-initiated practices, such as reaching out to networks and trying to be identified as a talent. As a high school student, Mert's aspiration to be like his fellow student para athletes playing wheelchair basketball stimulated him to search for access to para sports through self-initiated plans and communicate with possible networks in the para sports domain.

Coaches were among the most influential figures who affected both the initiation of a para athletic career and experiences during the DC pathways. They fulfilled multidimensional roles and interacted with families and caregivers. Apart from talent identification, convincing overprotective families, and performance-related concerns, they had to address multidimensional issues related to para sports such as considering their athletes' impairment effects in adapting training and equipment, accessibility, transportation issues, and addressing caregiver needs as required for some para athletes to sustain their sports participation.

To conclude, during the pre-DC phase, the interaction among disability experience, para sports development pathways, classification, significant others involving family, coach, teammates, and PE teachers, social policies, and legislation facilitating access to education or employment, were prominent features in mobilizing Paralympic athletes towards DC pathways.

### 4.2.2. Initiation and Acclimatization Phase: Becoming a DC Paralympic Athlete

Following the mobilization phase, during which participants considered DC motives and were stimulated by significant others to mobilize toward initiating a dual career journey, Paralympic athletes experienced the initiation and acclimatization phases. As previously mentioned, the phases of pursuing dual and multiple careers were not mutually exclusive but interconnected.

At this phase, DC Paralympic athletes focused on learning the environment, the people, rules, responsibilities and adapting to the expectations. Upon participation into sports, most participants commonly shared that they did not initially plan to transition to high-performance para sports pathway but their sports experiences changed by experiencing fast progression and achieving athletic success. They were selected to the national team within a very short period of time, encountering a new environment and facing new expectations. Except for the two participants who had played sports since they were five and eight years old, other DC Paralympic athletes experienced a rapid transition into a high-performance pathway and selection to the national team that varied from six months to three years at most.

> “Then, I still didn’t believe in myself, so I went just for fun. Later, in 2013, the Turkish Championship for people with disabilities was held in Aksaray. I became the Turkish champion there. I still can’t quite understand how it happened, or what I did. That’s where I was selected for the national team” (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “My friends tell me that I have passed the world minimum qualification standard or something like that, but at that time I didn't know what the world minimum qualification standard was because I was in that mindset, I didn't know anything. Everything actually happened in the process. I learned in the

process. In a way, I grew up with this sports" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

"[The club president] tried me out in training one day. Can you believe it, the next day he got my license, and the day after that, he took me to a match in Samsun. The whole thing happened so fast" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

"In my first year I was selected for the national youth team" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

"When I was just six months into sports, I became second in Türkiye. For example, I thought I had become one of the best players in the world. At least until I went to the European Championship, of course" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

"I learned everything in the national team. I even learned how to fall in the national team. For example, during a match, there's something called shido in judo. Shido means a penalty, like a yellow card. While I was competing, the coach would tell my opponent, "You'll get penalized, you'll get a shido," and I used to think, "How can they give a penalty to such a grown girl? That's how clueless I was about judo. I didn't really know anything about it…. I can say that I grew up in the national team. I learned how to fall and everything else in the national team. I learned everything about judo there" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

"In the continuation of the story, in 2017, [two years after I started the sport], the Turkish Archery Federation called us to the national team camps after the competitions. My scores had started to reach world standards... We reached those scores in one or two months" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student-athlete).

"It hadn't even been a month, I was barely three weeks in when we went to Izmir for the Turkish Championship... My license was issued immediately. Later, after I won first place in the 400m, 200m, and 100m at the Turkish competition, and with my good results, my coach said, "'I want to make you a champion." I said okay. After Izmir, things got serious" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

"At first, I really didn't think I would get this far. Because goalball, for me, was something I did just for fun. Now, I'm doing it for work, completely for Türkiye. Back then, I was definitely doing it for enjoyment, just to pass the time. I was training with no real goal. To be honest, I wouldn't work hard, I would just go to training to kill time" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Being selected to the national team transformed their sports experience from leisure activity into a career requiring them to learn and adapt as well as negotiate the new

routine through the expectations of different stakeholders in academic, vocational and sports domain. Because of the fast progression and qualifying for the national team in an accelerated way, DC Paralympic athletes learnt the dynamics of the athletic environment and expectations while experiencing it.

DC Paralympic athletes were expected to increasingly commit to their sports career upon being selected to the national team, attend frequent training camps, travel extensively for competitions, and meet high-performance standards. As a Paralympic athlete Mehmet elaborated, there has been a radical change between now and in the past regarding how para athletes experienced para sports and responsibilities.

> "Our Paralympic taekwondo team was established in 2009. From what I learned from the older guys in the camp, they used to go to just one competition a year, and that was the World Championship. There were even years when they didn't go to the World Championship. National team camps didn't exist at all. Now, with the World Championship, three days before the event, the team comes together, everyone meets and gets to know each other, and then it's straight to the competition... Now, looking at it, they take care of everything, from the food we eat to where we stay. We were in camp for a year. For a year, we were under control, for a year we were in training. We go to at least 6-7 competitions a year. We're always in camp" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "We have camps all the time. As I said, we have a camp for 20 days of every month, but when the match is approaching, those 10 days are canceled and we are constantly in camp for a month or two" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "There are long periods. There were times when we did it [training camps] for 15-20 days, but in the Olympic year, for example, it was more. We continued like this for a month and a half" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "We really worked hard. When we were preparing for 2016, we probably did 15 camps" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "The federation, on one hand, is putting pressure, saying "If you don't get a good ranking, I won't take you." They keep intimidating you all the time" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

During the initiation and acclimatization phase, DC Paralympic athletes also learnt to adapt the changing course schedules and become more self-responsible by managing their schedules as they transitioned into university. The fast progression, attending to

the frequent and long national training camps further complicated their DC experiences, making it difficult to maintain academic routines like attending school and necessitated them to learn and find strategies to deal with new challenges.

> "The class schedules are different at university, it's a bit more relaxed environment. But then, problems like this start to arise. In high school, I had a certain standard, the school ended at 16:00… but in university, that wasn't the case. The training hours change every day, according to the class schedule. So, there were challenges like that"…"Sometimes I wouldn't go to the lectures at the university, I would prefer to go to training instead. I knew that the lecturer would grant me privileges about this…We had lecturers who told us that if there was a medal on the line, you can be a little flexible in my class, son, no problem" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

Especially Paralympic athletes who moved to another city to pursue their academic careers, experienced a pre-planning process by communicating their needs with relevant stakeholders at the university, negotiated possible flexibilities, support, scholarships as well as requested exceptional practices to be able to make informed decisions and sustain their DC pathways. DC Paralympic athletes also took compulsory attendance, admission fees, and available flexibilities into account in their decision-making process. The pre-planning process was a key component of their DC journey, as they needed to communicate their needs. Moreover, the adaptation process was more complicated for Paralympic athletes with high support needs as they needed to co-mobilize with their caregivers and guides. Being out of their comfort zone and experiencing an unfamiliar environment was more challenging for these athletes because they needed coordinated efforts with their support networks, such as caregivers and guides.

> "I can't move on my own. I went to [city name] with my father. We go everywhere together with the [guide athlete]. Like Siamese twins" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

> "Of course, these things happened step by step. Everything happened gradually, as I requested them. For example, our pool was at the west campus. They arranged a private vehicle for that pool, and then a nurse who could assist and help. These were provided upon my request"…"For instance, they also provide things like peer support for students with disabilities. But I didn't need something like that"…"What I need is help from the staff working there before training sessions, like putting on my swimsuit. Or, although I am able to do many things, I have difficulty pulling up my pants on my own, I need help with

> that. We had talked about assigning the staff there to assist with such issues" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

To maintain their DC journey, DC Paralympic athletes relied on flexibilities provided by legislation, learned their rights by reading relevant by-laws, and communicated with academic staff. Identifying and understanding who to go and ask for empathy in the academic domain, asking for flexibility from academic staff, receiving notes from their friends at university, and searching for alternative solutions with academic staff for managing schedule conflicts facilitated managing their DC experience. DC Paralympic athletes often developed self-initiated problem-solving strategies and their agentic capacities.

> "I open and read the regulations, and if I have a right, I learn about it, I said, I have such a right, I will write it in the petition. It says that you can take the exam electronically" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

> "Then, for example, I would go as [name] instead of [name]. Because I didn't know how they would react, I would go to [name]" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "When I go to work, I have to work very well so that I don't get called out at work, and when I go to camps, I have to perform very well there so that they don't talk about me behind my back" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "As for the lectures, my friends are recording them already. They take videos and audio recordings. They send them to me as well. This makes it much easier for us" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student-athlete).

> "We're constantly in [training] camp. I used to go and talk to the coaches in advance, saying "I can't come, I'm in camp, and so on" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).,

For DC Paralympic athletes, learning and conforming to the expected behaviors and satisfying the appropriate athlete profile expected by their coaches was also a transformative process. For instance, Ayşe, a para swimmer, learned the appropriate athlete profile by experience and acted accordingly by giving up speaking their mind and ceased asking questions to comply and meet her coach's expectations. As Ayşe

shared her experience at the national camp and how this experience changed her behaviors:

> "At the national team camp, it's not just your talent, but also your performance, work ethic, and athlete character that are evaluated. And I've never said this before, but after the first national team camp, we had a female head coach at the time. We were staying in the same room during the first camp, and after the camp ended, the coach said that my questions were scaring her and that she wasn't sure if I was suitable for the national team. That's why I couldn't go to an international competition the next year. However, I continued to participate in national team camps, and I kept those questions to myself" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

During the initiation and acclimatization phase, DC Paralympic athletes experienced radical changes that transformed their lives. Demir, a para archer, gained greater independence and mobility by replacing his hospital wheelchair with an active one. By interacting with and observing his teammates, he recognized the significance of a wheelchair for his mobility and independence. As Demir gained greater mobility, physical competence, and independence with his new active wheelchair, he started to attend training camps and participate in competitions alone. Over time, he also challenged his family's overprotective attitudes.

> "Until 2017, I always had a hospital wheelchair. I couldn't push that wheelchair on my own" … "Thanks to sports, I learned how to use a wheelchair. In the early days, I had a hospital wheelchair, I couldn't use it alone. I had a car, but my family was not very willing to let me go and use it alone. They were worried" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

> "On the days when I went to training I felt really good, I felt physically improved, mentally I felt better... So I believed that sport was a good path for me at that time" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

Initiating a DC journey and moving to another city alone upon transfer to a professional basketball team stimulated one of the participants to challenge himself to become more independent and increase self-confidence and competence. Becoming a professional player and attempting to live independently was a transformative process. Once, while participating in training camps with his father as a caregiver, Kerem described his transformation from dependent to independent: "I could not do anything by myself; I could not even put on my socks. What a transformation for a boy who could not wear socks in two years!"

> "With basketball, I socialized, my self-confidence increased and rehabilitation became much easier. Because I couldn't do anything on my own, I couldn't even put on my socks"... "I mean, the biggest thing that basketball added to me is that after that moment, I felt liberated. I mean, my shackles were removed" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

Similarly, becoming a para-athlete, a wheelchair basketball player upon talent transfer from basketball, required Barış to negotiate a multi-layered adaptation process. By dealing with psychological and physiological adaptations, questioning belongingness and capability, learning in-play demands and rules, and getting used to a new equipment "wheelchair" and friends, Barış experienced a transformation process from being a basketball player into a wheelchair basketball player and embracing a para-athlete identity.

> "To be honest, psychologically, can I adapt to the wheelchair? How would it be, I had some question marks in my head…. Gradually, I started playing in that way for a year, two years, so I can say that my adaptation process took around three years. Getting used to the wheelchair, getting used to this sport [wheelchair basketball], getting used to my friends, adapting. I mean, I went through a really difficult process. I remember those ways, I remember my hands, I mean, they were injured, they were bleeding" … "I had great difficulties because I am a heavy athlete in terms of body size and I am not used to a wheelchair. I mean, our sport is not like normal basketball. You score a point and run back, no one is blocking you. Here, [wheelchair basketball], there are obstacles on the way to score, there are obstacles on the way back. And then there is taking the ball at the end and throwing it. Really, these were very difficult for me stage by stage, stage by stage…."

Initiating a DC journey has been a transformative process for the participants. Through their sports careers, attending national training camps, observing their teammates, becoming more independent, and embracing their disabled identity were the shared experiences of DC paralympic athletes. Not only did DC paralympic athletes transform during the initiation and acclimatization phase, but their families and guides also experienced a transformation process by claiming new roles.

DC Paralympic athletes with high support needs faced unique challenges during the initiation and acclimatization phases, as they relied heavily on external support for both daily life and sports participation. The dependence on the support network further complicated DC processes for the athletes with severe impairments and their support

network to collaboratively figure out and navigate new routines, negotiate and manage expectations, and adapt together to evolving circumstances. This process also transformed the external support providers, such as caregivers and guides, into DC team members, through which they became critical members and inseparable parts of the DC experience.

During the initiation and acclimatization phase, athletes with high support needs and their support network engaged in a "co-constructing" process, where they negotiated and figured out their DC experience together and constructed academic careers accordingly. Paralympic athletes with high support needs experienced a collaborative and collective decision-making process in shaping their career trajectories rather than independently enjoying decisional autonomy and control in making career-related decisions. Securing the support of their families and guides was necessary for DC Paralympic athletes with severe impairments to maintain their sports and academic careers. Therefore, it was crucial for the mini-DC team, comprised of caregivers and guides, to decide together and act coherently to initiate and maintain the DC journey.

For instance, while Defne, a Paralympic athlete with high support needs was deciding on her academic career, she reflected together with her family and coach to determine the university and the field of study that she could enroll in. Although she wanted to study acting, both her family and coach guided her to study sports management and supported her while enrolling in the sports management department where her coach resided. The complex interplay between disability experience and ableist perspectives affected the construction of her academic career.

> "Then [coach name] said, "I'm here, I'm already in [City name]. [teammate name] is usually here too, you can come and go." This gave us support, and he [coach] suggested Defne should study sports management. [Coach] said sports management is better because coaching and teaching might be harder. They were right because you need to be able to see to do those things. That's why we chose the [sports] management department. [coach name] was kind enough to support us and helped guide us" … "We directly had to decide on sports management since my family and coach said it would be difficult" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

Because of the support needs required for both daily life and sports, this interdependent relationship required a collaborative approach involving her family, coach, and guide.

Through this co-constructing process, the mini-DC team decided together on her academic career and mobilized together to another city to ensure Defne could successfully pursue both her academic and athletic goals.

> "Of course, I loved acting, I loved it very much, I wanted to study it at university, but everyone told me that it would be a bit difficult to manage both sides" ... "They wanted me to study something related to sports because I was an athlete. That's why there is no problem in this regard" ... "They are very pleased about this. They wanted me to study something like this because it is related to sports. That's why they are very supportive" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

Similarly, Aylin relied on her mother's support as a caregiver to attend the frequent and long-duration national training camps, which required them to spend extended periods away from home. This interdependent relationship was critical in making her DC journey possible, and it also transformed her mother into a support provider and an indispensable part of the process. They formed a mini DC team together, navigated the demands of training camps, co-mobilized, and made shared sacrifices to sustain Aylin's dual career.

> "My mother was always with me, she made great sacrifices. I mean, she couldn't see my siblings' very important moments because she was always supporting me" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

During the initiation and acclimatization phase, the mini-DC team figured out the dynamics of their relationship and how to manage the DC experience. This phase also involved addressing uncertainties and concerns and understanding what was expected, emphasized to ensure the DC journey could continue. Moreover, the learning and adaptation process during this period was about adjusting to their new routine, addressing the ambiguities, and clarifying who was responsible for covering the financial costs associated with her mother's role as a caregiver. This process was also related to sports organization at the national level and learning what was emphasized and expected.

> "At first they didn't want a caregiver"... "[coach name] said Aylin, if you pass these minimum qualification scores, my mom will stay with us. She will be a caregiver for the national team. If you become a good athlete, no one will say anything to you. If you pass the minimum qualification score, no one will say

> anything, after all, you will be here with what you deserve. I scored higher than everyone else in that camp. I thought we were still going to pay for the hotel. We went to the reception on the last day. They said, well, the money has been paid, just so you know. Then [name] came. He said "your mom is the team's caregiver from now on. You shoot well, keep shooting like that and your mother will always be with you". You know, such a condition was obviously imposed" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

The transformation of people also involved the support network of Paralympic athletes, including family members, guides, and coaches, as they also adapted to new roles as part of the dual career (DC) journey. Siblings became training partners, mothers embraced caregiving roles central to the DC experience, and fathers who initially accompanied their sons at training camps later supported their children's independence. Guides extended their roles beyond the sports domain and moved with their athletes to new cities to support their academic journey. By co-mobilizing and making sacrifices, they became crucial members of the DC team. Similarly, coaches embraced multi-dimensional roles beyond the sports domain by assisting their athletes regarding transportation and accessibility issues while also convincing overprotective families.

The disability experience added a layer of complexity during the initiation and acclimatization phase. As these experiences clearly revealed, not only para athletes but also their support network learned to adapt and sacrificed for the athletic development and academic careers of DC Paralympic athletes.

During the adaptation and acclimatization to the DC routine, coaches, family, caregivers, guides, siblings, teammates, employers, and academic staff were significant actors. In addition to learning the responsibilities and adapting to expectations in sports and education/work domains, the needs associated with disability experience, as well as stressors involving accessibility, accessible transport, training, and equipment adaptations, added extra complexity to experiencing the new routine. To conclude, during the initiation and acclimatization phase, the interaction among transformation of sports as a career, becoming a para-athlete process, learning and adapting expectations, searching for flexibilities, and co-constructing DC with the mini DC team were prominent features that DC Paralympic athletes experienced.

### 4.2.3. Strategizing Period and Careers Phase

Following the initiation and acclimatization phase, during which participants learned to navigate and adapt to the expectations and demands of DC, Paralympic athletes experienced strategizing period and careers phase. Paralympic athletes' experiences revealed that there were blurry lines between the previous phase of initiation and acclimatization as well as strategizing phase, with these stages often interacting.

After Paralympic athletes initiated their DC pathway, they developed an awareness about significant periods. Experiencing the pre-PGs cycle with associated increased athletic demands and transitioning into university with increased academic demands revealed that different periods had changing commitment expectations and demands requiring DC Paralympic athletes to consider periodic priorities and adopt fluctuated focus.

During this phase, DC Paralympic athletes considered cyclical demands, negotiated the priorities within a period, experience changing support, and expectation of significant others as well as planned their careers on a continuum. They adopted period and career-based foci to sustain and manage their DC pathways. DC Paralympic athletes considered two main coping strategies while experiencing their DC journey: period-based and career-based strategic planning and management. The key concepts and coping strategies that belonged to respective planning approach is illustrated in Figure 3.

Accordingly, they focused on a period such as PGs cycle with its pre and post periods, transitioning into university, injury experience to negotiate and decide on periodic priorities, plan their actions and revisit their careers within the respective period. Additionally, DC Paralympic athletes adopted a career focus, considered career related priorities, available resources and manage them on a continuum.

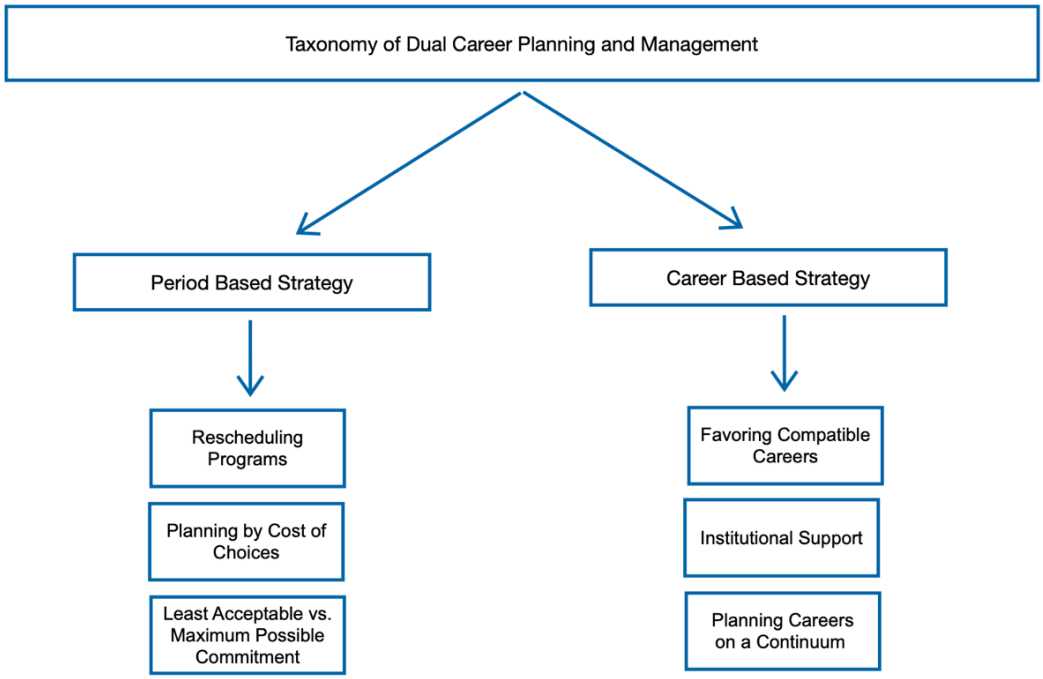



**Figure 3**

*Taxonomy of Paralympic Athletes' Dual Career Planning and Management*

Based on the *period-based strategy*, DC athletes considered cyclical demands, available resources, negotiated expectations with stakeholders and adopted fluctuated focus to deal with periodic demands. Depending on periodic priorities, DC para athletes reorganized schedules to satisfy cyclical demands. For instance, some DC Paralympic athletes experienced the transition to university in conjunction with the PGs qualification cycle. These two coinciding critical periods urged DC Paralympic athlete to reschedule their daily routine by reconsidering their sports and academic careers.

> "On the one hand, you are trying to set your training program. I mean, your coach gives you a training program, but it doesn't fit with the lesson schedule. So find yourself constantly trying to organize it" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "I would get up at 04:30 in the morning and then I would head off to training. I used to be at training between 05:30, 08:00 or even 08:30" …"There is also trying to keep up with this university exam style study system on the other hand. I was trying to do all of these things together and then I was off to training again." ... "Then, I had to study late into the night until 01:30, to make up for the classes I was missing and prepare for the university entrance exam, even

though an athlete shouldn't be staying up that late" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "We had a year of study before entering the university, but in the meantime, the Olympic rush, races and the university exam overlapped" … "It was very challenging, actually, I was training early in the morning, even in winter. We would start at 07:00 and finish at 08:00. Of course, our long runs didn't end at 08:00. Afterwards, I would have something to eat here at [the training area], from there I would head to school immediately, since they are very close. After school, I would go home, train again and then go back to school. That's how it went" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student-athlete).

> "I wasn't able to go to school during those times because it used to always overlap with training hours and stuff like that. That's why they arranged for me to receive education at home during the hours when the teachers were available" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

The increased athletic demands around major championships that coincided with the transition into university challenged athletes as they progressed through their DC journey. According to student-para athlete Ayşe, initiating the DC journey was easier than experiencing it, as the DC experience became progressively demanding and challenging.

> "It is very difficult to study at [University name], it is really much harder than getting into [University name], I realized this from the moment I started studying" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

Similarly, DC Paralympic athletes revisited their periodic priorities and carefully considered the cost of their decisions. Prior to making career-related decisions, they assessed the risks involved, evaluated potential performance concerns, and aligned their strategies with the demands of the period. For instance, para swimmer Ayşe, despite her desire to study abroad for her academic career, had to revisit priorities and change her plans due to the upcoming Paris 2024 PGs. Within a limited time frame, adapting to a new environment, culture, language and coach, as well as experiencing performance concerns and the pressure of preparing for the Games, urged her to prioritize athletic commitments and pursue her studies in Türkiye. This process illustrated how DC Paralympic athletes weighed the cost of their choices to balance dual career demands effectively.

> "Since there would only be a year and a half left until the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games if I had been there [United States], I felt that it could be a very short time to adapt to a new coach, a new culture, a new language, a new training system, and completely new lessons. My English wasn't that good, so I didn't want to take that risk. A year and a half was a very limited time to adapt to all of these. That's why I decided to study in Türkiye" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "During the four to five month period when we decided to train those athletes, we both did our own training, but also joined the children's training sessions after ours to teach them certain things like techniques and tactics. It was very tiring" … "The benefits outweighed the drawbacks. That's why we decided to postpone this for five-six months. After that time, we started to work again with those children. We are still continuing this, we are now in our fifth year now" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "The upcoming tournament is very crucial. Not only will we get a quota for Paris, but we will also become the world champion. That's why our tournament is more important right now. Work and school are important too, but for now, the national team is the top priority for both us and the coach" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

DC Paralympic athletes made shifts in their career prioritization by taking periodic demands and goals into account. While managing their careers, challenges such as performance declines and reduced training quality stimulated them to reassess their career-related responsibilities. To navigate these challenges, they negotiated with relevant stakeholders and developed strategies to address competing demands. Besides, DC Paralympic athletes reached out to their network for support and asked for understanding and flexibility to delay the less-priority activities by weighing the consequences of their choices.

> "My [coach] told me that the training would be kept light this year because I was preparing for the university entrance exam. The goal was for me to focus on getting into university this year and avoid dealing with the stress again in the upcoming years" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "I was assigned to [name of city] to train athletes as a coach. Obviously, the state was going to give me a salary for this. I worked for about five months. We started to train athletes, but some problems arose. We had qualified for Rio 2016, and I needed to train regularly since I had goals and needed to win a medal there. We asked for support from the ministry because our training

> environment was in [name of city], with all my friends, and all national athletes. My position was transferred to Ankara upon my request" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).
>
> "I told my coach frankly that if I wasn't given permission [to take the exam], I would have to go for another year, once a week. I really had to take the course. It would be devastating for me if I wasn't allowed to go, because this exam was really important. I mean, all the other things were fine, but this exam was very important"
>
> "I plan to carry on with my education online until 2024. Because when I went there physically, I saw that my fitness had dropped dramatically. Not training for two days in a row means that a week's training is completely wasted in our situation" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).
>
> "Because of sports, I have completely centered my life around it. I've put all my focus on the Olympics and postponed all my other life dreams to after 2024" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).
>
> "We try to combine the two [sports and vocational careers] and schedule them accordingly. You know, we postpone some things and give importance to other things. Now that Tokyo is over, our priorities have shifted, our previous focus has taken the second place, whereas developing and training athletes has become our main focus" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee-athlete).

DC Paralympic athletes also employed the "least acceptable versus maximum possible commitment" strategy to manage their DC pathways. The expectations from athletic and academic or vocational domains, together with the perceived significance of each career within the respective period, primarily influenced which strategy the athlete adopted.

When DC Paralympic athletes were primarily identified as athletes with limited expectations outside their athletic roles and responsibilities, they tended to adopt the "least acceptable commitment" strategy in their academic or vocational careers. This strategy signified committing only the minimum acceptable effort required to maintain their career in those domains within the respective period. For example, if an academic staff or employer conveyed that their main expectation was athletic success by stating, "Just come back as a champion, that's enough for us", the DC Paralympic athlete focused on meeting the bare minimum academic or vocational requirements to sustain that career.

> "Our provincial director helps me tremendously. 'Do everything in the name of archery, represent us in your best. That's all we want from you,' he told me last time" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

> "We had professors who said, 'If there is a medal at stake, you can be a little flexible in my class, son, no problem' … I used to skip lectures at university, I preferred to train instead, for instance" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "My school is very understanding; they are indeed very tolerant towards me. You know, most of my teachers just tell me to come back as a champion" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "I am employed at [name of employer]. Our directors and general managers are currently very understanding. They tell us to focus on our athletic training, and that there are people who will work much more productively for us at work. That's what it actually means, even though they don't say it outright. Focusing on representing my country and bringing back medals is the clear expectation. And also that I can work after I retire from sports" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "My manager says that don't you have a training session, son? Why are you still here, go to your training" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

On the contrary, when demands and expectations from academic or vocational domains were higher, DC Paralympic athletes sought to satisfy the "maximum possible commitment" in their careers. For instance, to compensate for their absences due to training camps and athletic obligations, they tried to overperform and made extra efforts to excel in their academic or vocational environments. This was often done to avoid complaints. By showcasing their maximum possible commitment, they aimed to demonstrate their dedication and avoid any potential conflicts.

> "They say things like, "If you're going to be an athlete, what are you doing in a government job?" To avoid giving anyone at work a reason to criticize me, I have to work very hard and show great performance when I'm there so that when I leave for training camps, no one will have any material to talk behind my back" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "Even at the camps, for example, I was attending lessons in the evenings, even while eating in the cafeteria. I mean, it's the same with my exams, I used to get

> permission from the coach and then take them [the exams]" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete)..
>
> "Just because the permission letter didn't arrive, they would join the camp late since they weren't allowed to go without it. They were told that they needed to wait until the letter arrived to be able to go. It wasn't as strict for me since my workplace and university were a bit more understanding, so I did not have to go directly ... They [teammates] went through more troubles. For example, I recall landing in Türkiye at midnight or 01:00, and by 08:00 or 09:00, they would already be back at work" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The support and understanding provided by coaches regarding dual careers were affected by the PGs cycle. Coaches who were very supportive of DC experience became more anxious and concerned about the demands of other careers during the pre-PGs cycle. Even previously supportive coaches expressed their concerns, urging athletes to prioritize their athletic careers and postpone other commitments until after the PGs.

The pre-qualification period for the PGs was one of the most critical phases, shaping coaches' attitudes, expectations, and planning, as well as the experiences and pathways of DC Paralympic athletes. For instance, para judo athlete Aslı who broke her arm before the Paralympic Games started to train again despite her injury as there had been an extra quota allocation, which stimulated both coach and athlete to reconsider the new circumstances.

> "I had prepared so much that I could not give up right away. Then, Türkiye received a wildcard spot [bipartite invitation] for the +70 kg category. I immediately started gaining weight with the support of my coaches even with my arm broken. I left my arm treatment halfway and entered the qualification process again. I can say that I went to the Olympics with a broken arm" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Based on *the career-based strategy*, DC Paralympic athletes adopted a career focus, planned and managed their careers on a continuum by considering career related priorities and available resources. While planning and managing their careers, athletes favored "compatible careers." The participants shared that it was rational and meaningful to study or work in sports related areas.

> “I would have liked to study software engineering, but then again, I knew I wouldn’t be able to maintain a good balance. So I think I would need to give my complete dedication to that field. I think sports management is a much more logical choice for me as an athlete. I intend to use the experiences I have gained here in my future career” (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

> “This is one of the advantages of studying physical education, or rather coaching education. Because we usually have practical lessons. And since I am an athlete, practical lessons are much easier for me and I am able to pass them with ease” (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “I have already become an athlete, and the most meaningful way for me to continue in this sense would be a career in sports management” (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

Concerns about balancing DC demands in areas outside of sports domain guided their career-related decisions. Some Paralympic athletes expressed concerns about their capabilities except for the sports related fields, which urged them to favor enrolling in sports related programs. DC Paralympic athletes believed that academic staff in sports science departments would be more understanding of the demands of an athletic career and provide more flexibility. Pursuing an academic career in sports science or working in a sports-related institution was considered a more manageable way to navigate their DC experience. Additionally, DC Paralympic athletes’ future plans about post sports career and capitalizing on their sports expertise guided their career decisions, which centered around sports related areas.

> “Of course, I couldn't have chosen another department. It had to be a department related to sports. I mean, I'm not as smart as [name of athlete]. I graduated from School of Physical Education and Sports,, and I say this because the academic staff there are a little more accommodating. They are truly more tolerant towards athletes. Since I wanted to be successful in sports, I didn't want to choose a department that would make things challenging for me” (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> “I was already involved in sports, so the department in which I chose to study needed to be sports as well. I mean, it couldn’t have been anything else. Sports is what I know, and I think it’s better to share something that you have knowledge about with others. Since sports is what I love the most right now, it is also the department that I should go for. What I mean is, I couldn’t have studied anything other than sports” (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

> "If I had studied law, which was my dream, and had tried to become a lawyer, I probably would have had a very difficult time" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "It was important for me to choose a department that I could manage alongside sports, where the academic staff would be understanding when I couldn't attend classes. I made my school choice with that in mind, sports were actually the main priority for me" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee-athlete).

> "I started school only to see that everything was related to my field. For instance, the academic staff ask questions, and even having competed in the Paralympic Games is a huge advantage for me, such things that are as simple as this. I probably couldn't have studied in a different department!" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The academic and vocational careers of all participants were supported by institutional support, including legislative provisions that provided opportunities such as reserved quotas in sports science programs, scholarship schemes, and employment positions for national athletes. These structural supports played a crucial role in guiding the participants' career-related decisions. For instance, most DC Paralympic athletes relied on reserved quotas to enroll in sports science programs. Additionally, three athletes benefited from the national athlete scholarship program, enabling them to pursue their academic careers at foundation universities, one of whom enrolled in a psychology degree to fulfill her childhood dream. Similarly, some participants began their vocational careers through employment quotas designed for individuals with disabilities.

However, discriminatory practices also hindered the career planning process for Paralympic athletes. For example, Para taekwondo athlete Mehmet faced overt discrimination during the university admission process. He was denied entry into a physical education teacher education program based on his disability that forced him to enroll in the coaching education department. Imposing what a person with a disability could do or become by solely taking impairment into account restricted career opportunities for DC Paralympic athletes.

> "Because we are disabled, we can't study physical education teacher education. That's why I'm working as a coach... Actually, I want to study teaching because, due to my achievements in sports, I can be directly appointed. I don't

> have to deal with exams like KPSS[6]. Additionally, because of my achievements in sports, the Taekwondo Federation directly gives me a fourth-level coaching certificate" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

DC Paralympic athletes planned and managed their careers on a continuum and approached with a long-term perspective, as they recognized that sport was not a lifelong career. Moreover, both athletes and their families expressed concerns about the risks associated with a sports career. They planned and managed their careers by considering the effects of age-related pressure on athletic performance. DC Paralympic athletes perceived that they had limited time for high performance sports whereas academic and vocational careers were perceived as more flexible and unaffected by age. Consequently, many athletes adopted a strategy of prioritizing their athletic careers for the present while delaying their academic or vocational aspirations. Most DC paralympic athletes stated that their current focus was on their sports careers.

> "I have some responsibilities to fulfill here [sports career], and swimming is what shapes my life. Because I mean you can have an academic career at any age. You can use your mind, you can use your brain at any age, but after a certain age, especially in swimming, you can't progress or achieve much. Age really affects performance a lot, and I can observe that" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "The part I'm really focusing on right now is my sports life" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

> "Even with my life divided into three parts right now, sports is already more dominant. I focus less on the other two. To be honest, I'm more focused on sports at the moment" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "Sports is a rewarding thing, but sports is also an ungrateful thing at the same time. It's actually something that can destroy your whole life with a single injury. Therefore, I think that there should be another regular life after doing sports or after the compulsory farewell to it. I think that you need to have a different profession. That's why I can say that I value the importance of studying or the significance of getting a job" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

> "As I said, one day I'll have to stop doing sports. Whether it's because of an injury or age, it's inevitable. I'm thinking of opening a gym when that time

[6] Public Personnel Selection Examination.

> comes. I could work as a coach there and get people to do sports" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

The pragmatic attachment to sports was also influential in prioritizing sports as athletes were experiencing increased financial security and receiving pensions through their outstanding achievements, enjoying increased public recognition and pride through athletic success, in contrast to their ordinary experiences in academic and vocational domains. This pragmatic attachment to sports further reinforced their decision to prioritize their athletic careers.

> "You go to a tournament and get the national anthem played. Where else can you experience that pride? Can ordinary people give that pride to Türkiye? No, they can't. You're not one of them. You're special. That's how I motivate myself" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "As I achieved success, the meaning of being seen as extraordinary changed. It was no longer about being extraordinary stemming from a disability, but rather about being extraordinary as someone successful" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "My life is built around archery now. I owe everything to archery, how can I say, I have made it to where I am now thanks to it [archery], so I cannot be ungrateful in any way. My top priority is currently archery" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "For example, I played in the final in Tokyo. When I returned to Türkiye, I had an incredible recognition rate. I mean, people on the street, on the avenue, here and there or even at a petrol station know me now. Or sometimes, when I stop at a red light, the police stop me and ask from where they know me. I tell them: "I don't know, I'm an athlete, so maybe that's why." Also, I say yes if they ask about Tokyo, and then they want to take a picture together. Imagine, the police stop you at a red light and take a picture with you" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

As mentioned previously in the initiation and acclimatization phase, DC athletes with high support needs depended on their support network for both daily life and sports participation, and they co-constructed their DC pathways with their support network including caregivers, guides, and coaches. Similarly, in strategizing period and careers phase, the dependence on the support network further complicated the DC processes

for the athletes with severe impairments, requiring them to secure collaboration and support to maintain their DC pathway.

The concept of *co-experiencing* signified the coordinated efforts shared between DC Paralympic athletes and their support networks, including sacrifices, mobilization, collaborative decision-making, and navigating the challenges of the DC process together. Athletes with severe impairment relied on the support and the sacrifices of their caregivers and in some cases of their guides to experience and sustain their DC pathways. Thus, in addition to the demands of their sports, academic and vocational careers, athletes also needed to be in coordination with their support network as they required to become a mini-DC team performing together. This interdependent relationship further complicated experiencing the DC processes.

DC Paralympic athlete Aslı, who gradually lost her sight, increasingly relied on external support for daily life and for the continuation of her sports career. To manage traveling to training sessions, she needed her husband's assistance. Therefore, as her caregiver, her husband became an indispensable part of the DC experience by sacrificing and arranging his work schedule to align with training schedules of DC Paralympic athlete Aslı. This interdependent relationship revealed the complexity of co-experiencing process, where both the athlete and the support network needed to co-navigate and co-sacrifice to sustain the DC pathway. As para judo athlete Aslı expressed:

> "During the training sessions outside the national team, I need someone to take me to and from the training sessions, and that person is my spouse. Because of this, he has to plan his work or the job he'll start working at entirely around my training schedule. This is something that wouldn't be an issue for a non-disabled athlete, but for us, it requires some sacrifice. It also asks for sacrifices not just from us but from those around us as well" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Similarly, to sustain her sports career and thus her DC pathway, para archer Aylin needed her mothers' support and sacrifices as a caregiver. Attending the frequent and long-duration national training camps required both the DC athletes and her mother to spend extended periods away from home. Besides, she had to negotiate her

individualized needs with her coach and advocate for her mother to accompany her as a caregiver during these camps. As Aylin shared her experience:

> "At first they didn't want a caregiver [at national training camps]" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Acknowledging this interdependent relationship, in which her mother fulfilled the caregiver role, was crucial to maintaining Aylin's DC experience. However, convincing others, such as her coach about the necessity of this need added another layer of complexity to the already challenging DC pathway of Aslı.

The multidimensionality of guide and athlete partnership, as the relationship between para athlete Defne and her runner guide revealed, extended beyond performing together and achieving athletic success. Para athlete Defne, who lost her sight gradually relied on her guide while she was running. Initially, their relationship centered on training and competing as a cooperative team. However, when Defne decided to pursue her academic career in another city, their partnership took on a new dimension and required them to navigate athletic and academic challenges together. Their interdependent relationship incorporated a co-experiencing dynamic, where they supported each other and navigated both on and off the field of play challenges together. Adapting to this relationship of becoming like Siamese twins required them to *co-experience* their lives, including the DC experience together. Adapting this interdependent relationship was crucial to maintain Defne's DC pathway.

> "I can't take a step right now without a guide [guide athlete]. Our coach is the one who sets up our system [training program]. The important days and tempo days are already scheduled to help us track our progress and achieve our goals. On other days, we arrange the times ourselves. We train accordingly…. We go everywhere together, of course, like Siamese twins" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

This multidimensional and complicated partnership underscored the significance of co-experiencing in enabling DC Paralympic athletes to overcome the unique challenges of their DC journeys.

To conclude, during the strategizing period and careers phase, negotiating priorities and careers, considering cyclical demands, adopting period-based and career-based approaches as well as co-experiencing DC with the mini DC team were prominent features that DC Paralympic athletes experienced.

### 4.2.4. Temporary or Prolonged Cessation Phase

In addition to commonly experienced phases, there were also non-normative phases conceivably experienced by some Paralympic athletes pursuing dual and multiple career pathways, such as temporary/prolonged cessation and unsuccessful re-initiation loop followed by re-initiation with experience phases, illustrated by dashed arrows in the Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways.

Some Paralympic athletes experienced the temporary or prolonged cessation phase either as a planned or forced experience, with some encountering possibly multiple times. To focus exclusively on a specific career within a critical period and keeping competing demands of different careers manageable were among the reasons for planned temporary cessation. For example, one participant decided on an academic freeze during the pre-Paralympic Games (PGs) cycle to prioritize their sports career and increase their chances of qualification. Similarly, another participant delayed their enrollment in university due to coinciding schedules between a critical competition and the university entrance exam. Another example involved a Paralympic athlete who was planning pregnancy after the next PGs, revealing another possible reason for temporary cessation.

> "In the recovery phase [of sports], I'm still trying to get myself back on track. Yes, I earned the Olympic[7] qualification, but I haven't been able to return to the strength and performance of my old days yet. I'm currently focusing more on how to get back to that, how should I put it, the school is on pause, and I'm just trying to manage work and sports" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

> "In 2020, there was a match in the United States. Normally, I had to take the exam that year and go to university in 2020. The university exam and the match in the US overlapped. I did not take the university exam and preferred the

[7] Paralympics

> match, so I lost a year" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).
>
> "After the Paralympic Games, yes, I will continue my active sports career, but I need to have a child. Age is advancing, you know. I plan to take a little break and then continue towards 2028, and after 2028, I want to end this journey" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Unlike a planned temporary cessation experience, Paralympic athletes pursuing dual or multiple careers also encountered a forced temporary or prolonged cessation phase. Health issues, unexpected medical operations, injuries, familial issues necessitating change of residence, and de-selection from the national team temporarily led Paralympic athletes to interrupt their dual career experience. During the temporary cessation, athletes sometimes faced challenging dynamics with their coaches. For instance, one participant shared how a necessary medical operation created tension with their coach, who questioned the necessity and timing of the operation and suggested a postponement.

> "When we went to the doctor, they told us that it puts pressure on the heart. That's why my health is important for me. Even [the national team coach] was angry with me, he said Aylin, you are in the performance trajectory, don't you have a chance to have [surgery] after the Olympics[8]?" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The critical distinction between temporary cessation and dropout was related to whether the athlete intended to resume the same dual career trajectory. The temporary cessation phase involved plans to resume the initial DC pathway, whereas dropout often resulted in different DC trajectories, such as a new version of career combinations or a forced termination in some cases.

#### 4.2.4.1. Unsuccessful Re-Initiation Loop

Paralympic athletes attempting to re-initiate their DC pathway also encountered unsuccessful re-initiation loops. They faced challenges to resume their previous dual career trajectory. These unsuccessful attempts to re-initiate their DC pathway prolonged the temporary cessation phase.

[8] Paralympics

> "I had made an effort to return to sports. I received an answer saying that they couldn't accept me to the national team because I hadn't been training for a long time. When I arrived, maybe the athletes they had trained wouldn't be able to go" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Lack of systematized para athlete development pathways encouraging Paralympic athletes to re-initiate their careers and person-dependent practices, such as coaches favoring athletes from their own sports club for national team selection, challenged DC paralympic athletes' attempts to re-initiate their sports careers.

#### 4.2.4.2. Re-Initiation with Experience

Following the temporary cessation phase, Paralympic athletes could resume their interrupted dual career pathways either through self-initiated efforts or with encouragement of coaches. The desire to accomplish career goals, familial support to avoid wasting prior efforts, existing commitments, and the risk of losing pragmatic benefits such as employment opportunities motivated athletes to re-initiate their DC journey.

> "Because it coincided with the time I quit sports, I could not be appointed [to the civil service]" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Moreover, the previous performance of Paralympic athletes and their potential for medal attainment encouraged coaches and sports managers to reach out to athletes and encourage them to resume their interrupted careers. Especially, significant periods such as the pre-PGs cycle mobilized athletes to reconsider resuming their athletic careers and make an accelerated come back. As one participant shared their experience:

> "They [my teammates] were at competition. I definitely wanted to be there. I wanted to be with them. I was really determined. [The national team coach] had called me and said, "Aylin, I really want to see you here." I told him I had no energy. Then I became really determined. I said, "I have to be at the 2016 European Championship." It was a qualification competition in 2016. I told myself I had to get that quota there. After that, I joined the national team. In 2016, I became the European runner-up. Then I got the quota in the qualification competition. That's how I reached my goal of the Paralympic

> Games" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).
>
> "I was called by the Ministry, and, how should I put it, since no one had won a championship at the Olympics by this date, they asked me to return to sports" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Paralympic athletes' personal motives, coaches' encouragement, and certain significant periods stimulated athletes to re-initiate their DC pathways.

### 4.2.5. Dropout and Experiencing New Version of Dual Career Phase

The dropout phase, a non-normative phase experienced by Paralympic athletes pursuing dual and multiple careers, is affected by both voluntary decisions and forced choices. This phase often led Paralympic athletes to follow three different pathways forward: a new version of a dual career, talent transfer, and forced termination.

The dropout phase, followed by a new version of dual careers, involved dropping out of education or work careers. Later, the interrupted DC trajectory was resumed with new career combinations of academic, vocational, and sports careers. The dynamic interplay of personal, social, environmental, vocational, and sports-related factors affected these in-and-out sequences, changing the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes.

For instance, the dropout experience of Demir, a para archer who initially pursued a DC pathway as an employee-athlete, revealed the interaction between these diverse factors leading him to decide to end their employment career. On the one hand, accessibility issues at the workplace, impairment effects challenging to maintain previous work routines after acquiring impairment, and on the other hand, experiencing positive reflections of sports participation interacted and stimulated Demir to interrupt DC pathway by dropping out of work and exclusively prioritizing sports.

> "I felt really good on the days I went to training. I felt physically improved, I felt better mentally. But on the days I worked at the agency, I felt worse. That's why I believed that sports was a path for me at that time"... "I couldn't leave

> the office whenever I wanted, I couldn't move very easily in the office. I had a lot of difficulty physically" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

The DC pathway of Demir later resumed by initiating his academic career, which was facilitated by privileges such as reserved quotas easing academic pursuits of decorated national athletes and scholarship programs targeting national athletes. The future career aims to become a sports manager, considering future career opportunities after sports careers and capitalizing on para sports expertise led athletes to shape their career-related decisions. The initial DC trajectory as an employee-athlete changed into a student-athlete, illustrating the first pathway of post-dropout: a new version of DC.

> "I will use the experiences I have gained here [in sports] in my future career. I think I will be able to evaluate them in some way and transfer them to people. I mean, the reason why I studied sports management is to be able to plan my life after sports. I really want to work as a sports manager in a very high-level institution. I have goals in this regard" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

Similarly, another DC Paralympic athlete, Aylin, prioritized their sports career during the pre-Paralympic Games cycle, when coinciding schedules of exams and competitions created challenges to maintain their DC pathway. These challenges stimulated Aylin to reconsider their commitments and prioritize their athletic engagements, leading to a dropout in their academic career and interrupting the DC pathway. It was only after achieving a personally defined milestone in their sports career and recognizing the academic domain as a critical missing piece that Aylin resumed their DC trajectory.

> "I had to go to competitions because I started archery. It coincided with the finals. So, I chose archery.... Honestly, I didn't really feel like it [education] because I had archery on my mind. Then, after I reached a certain career in archery, I said I needed to study. After [name] spoke, I got a little bit fed up. I said I need to study, because only that [education] was missing" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete)

Privileges-based mobilization through social policies facilitating employment opportunities for people with disabilities and desiring to have another focus other than sports careers encouraged paralympic athletes to re-initiate their DC pathway with a new version of DC combining sports and vocational careers. Moreover, despite questioning their academic capabilities, the facilitative role of a flexible work

environment and managers supporting training schedules and sports careers encouraged DC paralympic athletes to complete the missing piece: academic career.

> "Before starting to study at [university], I used to think, can I do it? How old am I? I was 27 at that time. Can I still study at this age? I had many doubts like, will it be possible for me? For example, my professors always refer to me as Aylin, our Paralympic athlete, the person representing us on behalf of Türkiye. They always treated me that way. At first, I had prejudices like, I'm disabled, can I do it? Or can't I?" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The stance toward dual careers in academic and vocational domains, available support, and interpersonal relationships were critical while pursuing the DC pathway. Unsupportive work environments and unfulfilling job descriptions sometimes urged athletes to reconsider their vocational commitments. Wheelchair basketball player Kerem's relationship with two directors resulted in different workplace experiences. While failing to recognize Kerem's qualifications as a Paralympic athlete and provide a fulfilling job description stimulated thoughts of resignation, emphasizing and valuing Kerem's expertise fostered a meaningful, fulfilling, and collaborative vocational experience.

> "Those first days they put me in a hall. Inside this hall, they said, here is the supervisor, you will stay there. I go in the morning, it's a place in the greenery, it's inside the child welfare institution. I stayed there from morning till night. I said, "'l will resign. Because I can't be useful like this" ... "After that, when the next manager came, he always made me like my job more. He increased my sense of responsibility. In other words, he [the newly appointed manager], by giving me more work freedom, increased my motivation and commitment to my workplace. But if the acting manager was still in charge, I probably would have quit. I couldn't have been able to bear it" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

While some athletes redefined their DC pathways, other athletes explored alternative pathways following dropout phase, such as talent transfer.

### 4.2.6. Dropout and Talent Transfer Phase

Talent transfer was another pathway forward after DC Paralympic athletes experienced the dropout phase. Contrary to constructing a new version of the DC pathway, in the talent transfer pathway, athletes did not change their career sequence

and combinations as they re-initiated a sports career after the dropout experience. Encouragement of coaches convincing athletes about their promising future sports performance was effective in deciding on a talent transfer. Despite being a difficult decision, talent transfer offered DC Paralympic athletes an opportunity to progress and excel in other para-sports. Previous para sports experience facilitated the fast progression and ensured a quicker pathway to the elite level.

> "We started sports and were athletes for six months. We went to Çankırı for the Turkish Championship, and I became the runner-up in Türkiye when I was just six months into the sport" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee-athlete).

Establishing a trusting relationship with their coach motivated Paralympic athletes to embark on a new sports experience, re-initiating the DC pathway in another para-sport.

> "I cut out basketball and put all my focus on table tennis. You know how they say that you have to do what you love in life, it means a lot to do what you love with the people you love" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee-athlete).

Belongingness and connection facilitated the decision to experience talent transfer. While developing and achieving success in sports, experiencing the whole process with people they loved, valued, and appreciated impacted their decision to transfer talent.

### 4.2.7. De-Classification and Forced Termination Phase

Following the dropout phase, while some athletes reconstructed their DC pathways by exploring alternative pathways, others could not continue their sports careers and experienced a forced termination due to the de-classification process.

DC Paralympic athletes faced involuntary termination due to the de-classification process. Because of the changes to classification rules determined by the international governing bodies, they became ineligible to compete for the national team. This unexpected forced dropout beyond the control of DC Paralympic athletes led them to feel all their efforts and sacrifices were for nothing and wasted.

> "We were upset, went through very difficult days. I was really sad, very sad. The years of hard work in the national teams suddenly went to waste... All the years you served, the sweat you put in, the time spent without seeing your family, the sacrifices you made, suddenly became nothing. When they told me that I would never play again, it truly felt like boiling water was poured over my head" (Barış, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, employee-athlete).

The frustration they had to experience revealed the concerning effect of the de-classification process and forced dropout on the well-being of Paralympic athletes. This experience was devastating, as another wheelchair basketball player expressed:

> "You were the World Champion a year ago, and a year later, your international license is canceled. And you have been playing this sport since you were 11 years old, you have given your life to this sport and so it is a big devastation for the people who play" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

> "The athletes whose pictures were shared on websites for years were forced to end their national team careers overnight accompanied with sadness and tears, just because of de-classification from wheelchair basketball" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

While experiencing such a challenging process, the support from the sports community and still having goals to accomplish allowed de-classified athletes to adapt and move on, proving the significance of external support for DC Paralympic athletes.

### 4.2.8. Dual Career Transformation and Multiple Careers

Another non-normative phase experienced by Paralympic athletes was the DC transformation phase, during which DC Paralympic athletes extended their career engagements beyond two pursuits by initiating a third career.

Concerning student-para athletes, DC transformation involved incorporating a vocational career in addition to their existing academic and sports careers. Paralympic athletes took their families' concerns about the uncertain and risky nature of sports careers and their expectations for guaranteed employment in state institutions, into consideration and explored employment opportunities.

> "But like I said, if I had only been an athlete, my family wouldn't have been at ease. Because there wasn't a guaranteed job, they were worried that one day I would get injured and that would be the end of it" …" They want a guaranteed job; they have that kind of thinking. Rightly so. I had already taken that exam

> [EKPSS] in order not to disappoint them" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).
>
> There is a classic saying that you should lean your back against the state and just relax. Because she was in that mood, my mother was one of the most pleased people that I was appointed to youth sports [the Ministry] appointed as a sports expert. She was relieved, so now she said with peace of mind that her son is now a civil officer" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete)".

Employment opportunities for decorated national athletes as PE teachers and sports experts through legislation, as well as accessing employment via the Public Personal Selection Examination for People with Disabilities (E-KPSS), enabled Paralympic athletes to extend their dual career to multiple career pathways. Securing and sustaining alternative income generation opportunities, planning for a post-sports career, and giving back to the sports domain by relying on their para-sports experience were the main motives behind initiating their vocational career. Additionally, their networks, involving sports managers at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, were crucial in informing them about available job opportunities and encouraging them to pursue them.

> Since I am a national athlete, I was appointed through the national athlete system... We were in Tokyo. We were talking with [name of two sports managers]. [Name of a sports manager] mentioned that there were appointments from the national athlete system. ... While I was at the Paralympic village in Tokyo, at the management center, [name of a sports manager] said the same thing. They said it would be good if I applied. After that, they told me that they really wanted athletes to work with us in this way" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

Similarly, employee-athletes who decided to initiate an academic career embarked on a multiple career journey as well. The interplay between planning their future, promotion opportunities at work by obtaining academic qualifications, and privileges offered to national athletes through reserved quotas facilitated and encouraged Paralympic athletes to initiate an academic career in addition to their sports and vocational careers.

> "Then, after I reached a certain career in archery, I said I needed to study"... "There was a situation where coaches or contractors could be granted

> permanent workforce. There, all the achievements, rankings, etc., were enough. When I called [name], they said, "Aylin, everything is perfect, but the only thing missing is your education." I was actually training at that moment. I said that I needed to study. Then, the next year, I directly took the exams" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Consequently, Paralympic athletes experienced a DC transformation that evolved from managing two different careers into incorporating a third one, either a vocational or an academic career. Their career development process evolved from being an employee-athlete or a student-athlete to a student-employee athlete, requiring them to manage all three careers concurrently. This transformation that introduced more complex dynamics than their previous dual career pathways, required Paralympic athletes to renegotiate new routines through the expectations of different stakeholders across academic, vocational, and sports domains. Ultimately, their career development was shaped by the dynamic interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors.

### 4.2.9. Retirement with Post DC Goals and Mission

While all participants were active athletes, they were well aware of the limited time span of a sports career. Therefore, they strategically planned their careers on a continuum by considering a post-sports career.

As they experienced high demands while combining different careers, some DC Paralympic athletes delayed their career-related plans other than sports after retirement. As para athlete Defne and goalball player Demet expressed:

> "I had thought that I would study law and psychology later on. I still think about it, and I still have that idea. It hasn't passed yet. That's why I chose school of physical education of sports, because I couldn't focus on studying my lessons as much" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Another para athlete Defne delayed her dreams about acting after their sports career.

> "I also love acting very much. I mean, I had a 3-year career. I had to quit because of sports. My trainings increased a lot... Actually, after stopping to do sports, I plan to continue with acting. I think I would pursue acting if I have the chance and if it fits into my career" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

Moreover, DC Paralympic athletes felt responsible for being role models for other people and children with disabilities. During their DC pathway and after retirement they aimed to raise awareness about para sports and stimulate children with disabilities to believe in themselves and consider education, work, and sports.

> "There will be many more people like us. There are many individuals with disabilities who are inspired by us and want to reach the positions we are in. We need to be role models for them... My main goal is for them, to be able to reach a people with disability in their own homes. For a child to see me and think, "[Mert] did it, he worked hard, he succeeded. Look, he did sports, went to university, got appointed to the ministry," and then telling their parents, "Take me to sports too," that's what we are trying to make happen" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

Paralympic athletes with dual and multiple careers reflected on their post-sports career goals. They emphasized giving back after their DC pathway, as they had experience in the para sports domain. For them, studying in sports-related fields was rational and meaningful, and they could rely on their expertise in para sports. They were aiming to prevent other athletes from experiencing the problems they had experienced.

> "We have to give something to our country, which has given us something all these years, we have to give something to our country after sports. I chose this to help the next ones, to train athletes or to guide them" (Kerem, M, 38, AI, wheelchair basketball, multiple careers: pro club player-employee-athlete).

While discussing retirement, almost all DC Paralympic athletes expressed frustration and negative emotions such as sadness, feeling emptiness, emotional devastation. A Paralympic athlete even considered retirement to be like death, while others said they wished the question about retirement had not been asked.

> "Right now, I feel really down. You just asked me this question, and it wasn't on my mind at all, but now I feel a heaviness inside" (Mert, M, 32, CI, para table tennis, employee- athlete).

> "I would probably feel like I was living my last day. Because it feels like experiencing death. After all, this is a kind of identity death" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

> "It would really be a gap in your life because like I said, 90% of my life is sports" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> "I mean I would be sad because there are so many things I want to accomplish, things I dream about" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).
>
> "I'd probably feel like I'd lost something I loved very much in this life. I would fall into avoid" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).
>
> "Right now, I think if I were to quit archery, I have school, I work, and I think it wouldn't be a problem. But facing that moment, I think it would emotionally break me. Because archery is already the best and most important part of my life. If I had to quit, I don't know, I'd probably be upset" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Their thoughts and reflections highlighted concerns about identity foreclosure as they seemed to over-identify with their athletic roles, which might challenge the transition into retirement.

## 4.3. Dual Career Pathways of Paralympic Athletes

Paralympic athletes' career development experiences involved differentiated pathways with linear as well as interrupted non-linear characteristics, indicating differences from the generally referred conceptualization of a dual carer pathway with consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational pursuits concurrent with different athletic developmental phases. Accordingly, four patterns of career development pathways were identified based on career sequences and number of careers pursued. These pathways included typical pathway with DC and MC as well as atypical pathway with DC and MC.

### 4.3.1. Typical Pathway with Dual Career

Paralympic athletes following *the typical pathway with DC* experienced a relatively normative and linear pathway, typically beginning during compulsory education by combining education and sports careers and progressing through consecutive educational progressions before moving on to vocational pursuits that coexisted with different phases of athletic development. There were two profiles of athletes within the typical pathway with DC: student-athletes and employee athletes, which also included self-employed athletes as well.

Regarding the career sequences, Paralympic athletes' initial career was education before embarking on their DC journey. During compulsory education, PE teachers, families and peers had critical roles in encouraging them to participate in sports. However, within the typical pathway with DC, talent transfer from non-disabled sports also enabled one of the participants to initiate his DC journey during tertiary education.

Similar to the experiences of all participants in this study, being selected for the national team transformed their sports experience into a sports career, which required them to learn and adapt to new expectations and routines. Paralympic athletes pursuing the typical pathway with DC progressed through common phases, including mobilization, initiation and acclimatization, strategizing period and career development phases.

However, while pursuing the typical pathway with DC, some Paralympic athletes also experienced non-normative phases such as temporary/prolonged cessation and unsuccessful re-initiation loop followed by re-initiation with experience phases. The main reasons behind experiencing temporary/prolonged cessation were injury, burnout and familial issues that resulted in interrupting their sports career for a later comeback. Deciding to freeze their academic career to move to another city or to prioritize their sports career during critical periods, such as the pre-Paralympic Games cycle, was also among the reasons for experiencing a temporary/ prolonged cessation phase. While pursuing the typical pathway with DC, Paralympic athletes struggled to re-initiate their sports careers upon temporary cessation, forcing them to experience an unsuccessful re-initiation loop, which prolonged the process of temporary cessation.

Lack of systematized para athlete development pathways encouraging and welcoming Paralympic athletes who interrupted their sports career and person-dependent practices with coaches favoring, selecting athletes from their sports club for the national team challenged DC paralympic athletes' attempts to re-initiate their sports careers.

Similarly, Paralympic athletes following the typical pathway with DC experienced the non-normative phase of dropout that followed two different trajectories. The first experience revealed that DC Paralympic athletes faced involuntary termination due to de-classification and became ineligible to compete for the national team following changes to classification rules determined by the international governing bodies. This unexpected forced dropout beyond the control of DC Paralympic athletes led them to feel all efforts and sacrifices were for nothing and wasted, which was concerning for the well-being of Paralympic athletes.

Another non-normative phase of dropout experienced by a DC Paralympic athlete involved a talent transfer path directing them toward another para sports with the encouragement of the coach. Despite being a difficult decision to make, talent transfer offered the DC Paralympic athlete an opportunity to, as described in their words, “do what you love with the people you love” and re-initiated the DC pathway.

Even though DC Paralympic athletes dropped out of sports while experiencing the typical pathway with DC, the path they followed did not change the career combinations and sequence, as one trajectory ended by involuntary termination, and the other re-entered the DC pathway by re-initiating a sports career. Therefore, the defining characteristics of the typical pathway with DC involved the concurrent pursuit of two different careers and initiating the DC journey through education as the initial career followed by combination with an athletic career.

### 4.3.2. Typical Pathway with Multiple Careers

Paralympic athletes following *the typical pathway with multiple careers (MC)* shared similarities with their fellow athletes who combined two different careers through the typical pathway. However, the most critical aspect differentiating their pathways was initiating a third career while already pursuing a dual career pathway as student-athletes. Therefore, Paralympic athletes with MC who followed a typical pathway initiated their vocational careers before graduating from university, occasionally increasing career-related demands.

Paralympic athletes following the typical pathway with MC were student-employee athletes who combined academic, sports, and vocational careers. They experienced a relatively normative and linear pathway. However, rather than experiencing consecutive progressions from education to vocational careers, Paralympic athletes with MC initiated their third career by acknowledging their families' concerns about sports careers being risky and uncertain. Structural, institutional support through legislation facilitating employment opportunities for successful national athletes as PE teachers and sports experts, as well as accessing employment via The Public Personal Selection Examination for People with Disabilities (E-KPSS), enabled them to extend their dual career to multiple career pathways. Securing and sustaining alternative income generation opportunities, planning for post-sports career, giving back to sports through guiding potential athletes, and contributing to the country's sports system were the main motives for initiating their vocational career and following the typical pathway with MC. By strategically planning and managing their careers, Paralympic athletes experienced a DC transformation that signified an evolution from managing two different careers into incorporating a third one, vocational career. Consequently, the experience of managing three different careers became fundamentally different from what it had been before, creating a more complex dynamics compared to the previous DC experience.

The typical pathway with MC challenged the general conceptualization of an athlete's career development assuming consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational careers and instead revealing simultaneous multiple career experiences. Within the typical pathway with MC, in addition to common phases of mobilization, initiation and acclimatization, strategizing period and career development phases, Paralympic athletes also experienced temporary/ prolonged cessation followed by re-initiation with experience phases due to interrupting their sports career upon deselection to the national team as well as interrupting their academic career by delaying transition into university due to coinciding schedules of major competitions and exams. While following the typical pathway with multiple careers (MC), athletes had periodic drawbacks regarding academic careers to prioritize sports careers and be able to qualify for the Paralympic Games.

The defining characteristics of the typical pathway with MC involved the concurrent pursuit of three different careers, education, sports, and work, and initiating the DC journey through education as the first career followed by pursuing athletic as well as vocational careers concurrently.

### 4.3.3. Atypical Pathway with Dual Career

Unlike typical pathways, Paralympic athletes following *the atypical pathway with dual career (DC)* experienced interrupted career sequences with entry, exit, and re-entry trajectories. These in-and-out sequences included dropping out of education or work careers, later followed by reinitiating their DC trajectory with new career combinations of academic, vocational, and sports careers. During their career development processes, these in-and-out sequences changed their DC pathways, resuming with new trajectories reflecting the dynamic interplay of personal, vocational, and sports-related factors over time.

The experiences of Paralympic athletes following the atypical pathway with DC were non-linear, therefore challenging the general conceptualization of an athlete's career development assuming consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational careers coexisting with athletic development. Instead, the atypical pathway with DC involved dynamic trajectories shaped by interplay of disability experience, impairment effects, external opportunities and career planning.

Paralympic athletes, at first, initiated their DC journey by combining their initial vocational career with a relatively late sports career, progressing through the initiation and acclimatization phase. DC Paralympic athletes, by considering impairment effects and activity limitations, first experienced a learning and adaptation process during which they figured out necessary adaptations in training and equipment. Experiencing the positive reflections of sports participation, such as increased competence, physical empowerment and considering the potential of living an inspirational life through a sports career, encouraged them to reconsider their DC pathway. To exemplify, multidimensional factors related to work and disability experiences that involved accessibility issues at the workplace, impairment effects hindering maintaining

previous work routines and vocational career as well as experiencing positive reflections of sports participation interacted and encouraged DC Paralympic athletes to prioritize sports by dropping out of work. Consequently, the DC pathway was interrupted.

By strategically planning and managing their careers, considering future career opportunities for post-sports careers, and capitalizing on para sports expertise, Paralympic athletes re-initiated their DC pathway by combining sports with academic careers. Therefore, the DC pathway that initially started as an employee-athlete pathway changed into a student-athlete pathway as the interrupted career trajectories resumed with a focus on academic development.

Due to experiencing interrupted career sequences and re-initiating DC journey with new career combinations, Paralympic athletes pursuing the atypical pathway with DC, experienced mobilization, initiation and acclimatization, strategizing period and career phases more than once, requiring them to consider and adapt to new circumstances. To exemplify, future career plans, positive expectations about the future as well as the privileges such as reserved quotas easing academic career of athletes were the motives that re-mobilized Paralympic athletes to initiate their academic careers and experience their DC journey as student-athletes.

While progressing through the atypical pathway with DC, Paralympic athletes, upon dropping out of the DC trajectory, re-initiated their DC journeys with a new version of dual career combinations through sports as the first career guiding the development of new dual career path. The defining characteristics of the atypical pathway with DC highlighted its non-linear progression with interrupted career sequences, later re-initiating a new version of dual career reflecting the dynamic interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors.

### 4.3.4. Atypical Pathway with Multiple Careers

Paralympic athletes pursuing *the atypical pathway with multiple career (MC)* shared similarities with the atypical pathway with DC as both involved interrupted career

sequences with entry, exit and re-entry trajectories changing Paralympic athletes' career combinations and profiles. The in-and-out sequences experienced by Paralympic athletes involved dropping out of education or work careers, continued with constructing a new dual career version with differentiated career combinations, which was further transformed by incorporating of a third career.

Initially, Paralympic athletes began their DC journey by combining their initial academic career with a relatively late sports career and progressed through the initiation and acclimatization phase. As they progressed rapidly and were selected for the national team, their commitments to their sports careers intensified. Frequent, prolonged national training camps, coinciding schedules of exams and competitions, and the interplay between questioning their academic capabilities on the one hand and the perceived significance of a para sports career on the other hand led them to reconsider their DC pathway and drop out of their academic careers. Consequently, the DC pathway was interrupted.

The privileges-based mobilization through social policies facilitating employment opportunities to people with disabilities and desire to have another focus than just sports career encouraged Paralympic athletes to re-initiate their DC pathway but this time with a new version combining sports and vocational careers. Therefore, the DC pathway that initially started as a student-athlete pathway changed into an employee-athlete pathway as the interrupted career trajectories resumed with incorporating vocational career. The mobilization phase was experienced twice since Paralympic athletes re-initiated their DC pathway.

The initiation and acclimatization phase experienced for the second time involved learning and adapting to the vocational environment and available flexibilities to maintain their sports and vocational careers successfully. While pursuing the atypical pathway, Paralympic athletes also experienced non-normative phases such as temporary/ prolonged cessation and re-initiation with experience phases. For instance, health issues forced them to temporarily interrupt their vocational and sports careers to resume later for unaccomplished goals.

The interplay between planning their future, promotion opportunities at work by obtaining academic degrees, available flexibilities, and privileges such as reserved quotas for national athletes encouraged Paralympic athletes to consider initiating an academic career in addition to their sports and vocational careers. Consequently, Paralympic athletes experienced a DC transformation from being an employee athlete to a student-employee athlete. Managing three different careers introduced different and more complex dynamics, requiring Paralympic athletes to negotiate new routines through the expectations of different stakeholders across academic, vocational, and sports domains.

Paralympic athletes following the atypical pathway with MC were at first student-athletes, followed by employee-athletes, and finally, upon combining three careers, student-employee athletes. The atypical pathway with multiple careers (MC) revealed that Paralympic athletes were able to change their career paths and sequences through entry, exit and re-entry trajectories to plan their future.

The atypical pathway with MC introduced a new perspective by revealing novel career experiences of Paralympic athletes, challenging the consecutive progressions of education followed by employment as well as showing concurrent multiple career experiences.

The defining characteristics of the atypical pathway with MC involved the concurrent pursuit of three different careers: education, sports and work, characterized by non-linear progressions with interrupted career sequences. The atypical pathway with MC reflected the dynamic interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors shaping the career development of Paralympic athletes.

### 4.4. Factors Influencing Dual and Multiple Career Processes

The dual career experiences of Paralympic athletes were shaped by complex and dynamic interactions across personal, interpersonal, contextual, socio-cultural and environmental factors. While Paralympic athletes shared some DC challenges with

their non-disabled counterparts, such as time conflicts, lack of flexibility, long commutes between training, home and school, struggling to maintain social relationships with friends, they also faced unique stressors associated with disability experience and para sports context. The stressors regarding Paralympic athletes' DC experiences were classified under disability experience, educational/vocational, and para sports domain related stressors often interacting and affecting the challenges experienced by DC Paralympic athletes.

### 4.4.1. Disability Experience

Disability experience added a layer of complexity while Paralympic athletes pursued dual or multiple career pathways. Beyond the impairment effects, discriminatory conditions also affected how Paralympic athletes constructed their careers. Discrimination based on disability manifesting itself through inaccessible environmental structures designed and constructed by considering only those who satisfy normative standards in mind and internalized ableism involving Paralympic athletes' questioning their capabilities had reflections on the DC experiences of Paralympic athletes. To exemplify, wheelchair basketball player Kerem encountered challenges while enrolling in university as the faculty buildings were inaccessible and lacked elevators to access upper floors, eventually excluding him and restricting academic opportunities he wished to pursue. Because of this challenging experience, Kerem could not complete the admission process and decided to continue his academic journey through an open education system, bypassing the inaccessible environments.

Accessibility concerns in academic, sports, and work environments that non-disabled DC athletes rarely encountered required DC Paralympic athletes to deal with environmental challenges, pre-plan, and find out possible solutions with relevant stakeholders. Similarly, Goalball player Demet faced challenges due to discriminative attitudes during her educational pathway as her teachers were unable and unwilling to acknowledge her needs and provide individualized support such as reader assistance. The lack of facilitative measures to accommodate students with disabilities challenged Paralympic athletes' academic experiences.

> "They didn't enlarge the writing for my convenience. Nor did they let someone read it, so I got a low score" (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

Experiencing a progressive impairment further complicated the DC processes. By gradually losing her sight, visually impaired para judo athlete Aslı's need for external support increased significantly. Managing transportation and traveling to training sessions became gradually challenging requiring Aslı to rely on her support network and coordinate the process with her husband. To maintain DC journey, not only Paralympic athletes but also their support networks experienced an adaptation process to the changing circumstances. Both DC Paralympic athlete and their support network navigated the challenges by *co-experiencing*. As para judo athlete Aslı expressed:

> "He [husband] also adjusts himself, his life, everything to be based on me. Because I need my husband to go to training as I can't see at all. So he picks jobs accordingly.What I mean is that he tries to find jobs where he can go to work without disrupting my training" (Aslı, F, 29, para judo, AI Progressive impairment, employee-athlete).

Societal perceptions and media portrayals of Paralympic athletes posed additional challenges. DC Paralympic athletes criticized the social perception distinguishing Olympic and Paralympic achievements. According to them, while Paralympic success was often presented through sympathy, inspiration, or compassion, similar Olympic achievements were embraced with pride and appreciation. This distinction regarding athletic achievements appeared as an additional stressor for Paralympic athletes to challenge. Some DC Paralympic athletes felt responsible for addressing these media representations and societal perceptions. They were motivated to actively challenge these perceptions by reviewing interviews to ensure they conveyed the right messages to the public. Balancing these extra efforts with the demands of academic, vocational, and athletic careers required them to further dedicate time and effort.

> "Frankly speaking, I have come to the conclusion that they [disabled sports] are not considered as performance sports. That is to say, while the success of an Olympic athlete is honoured, the success of a Paralympic athlete is sympathised with, compassion is shown"... "I think the media has a lot of influence on this"... " and I try to have my interviews checked beforehand for example"... "Ayşe paid a lot of attention to the projects she participated in after 2020. She examined the given interviews carefully afterwards, and made sure that journalists didn't create any agitation. She strived to be an athlete who

> accurately represented Paralympic athletes, their coaches, teams, and her own efforts" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).
>
> "After the World Championship, I specifically told the reporters who came for interviews not to write headlines like he was confined to a wheelchair or he was confined to bed, after that he achieved this or that… As I really don't like those cliché things. I would say it directly. They were still writing those things, but I was insisting on my point. In fact, I even got into an argument with someone about it once" (Demir, M, 30, AI, para archery, student- athlete).

### 4.4.2. Para Sports Related Stressors

Concerning the para sports domain, the classification process was a critical stressor for DC Paralympic athletes. As previously mentioned, the progression of impairments complicated the DC processes as external support needs increased to maintain daily routines such as traveling to training sessions and school, revealing the support network's role and commitment in the continuation of the DC journey. Similarly, Paralympic athletes' changing sports classes due to impairment progression or classification rule changes had critical reflections on their sports career as well as the DC journey. For instance, as para athlete Defne's impairment gradually progressed, her sports class changed, ultimately requiring her to run with a guide. Adapting to the new experience of running with a guide was difficult and challenging process.

> "The first time I met my guide, it was a bit of a strange experience for me. I struggled a bit of course because two people are running side by side, tied together with a rope. It's a very different system. You need to take steps together, move synchronously. It was a challenging process, but I got used to it... We go everywhere together, of course. Like Siamese twins" (Defne, F, 19, para athletics, CI Progressive impairment, student- athlete).

Athletes and their guides needed to adapt this interdependent relationship both on and off the field of play, as they were required to become like Siamese twins and learn to work together. The guide of para athlete Defne even moved to another city with her to support her academic career. Athletes with high support needs faced additional stressors in their DC trajectories and failing to understand these needs created challenges that neither non-disabled athletes nor those with less severe impairments encountered.

Similarly, Paralympic athlete Aslı experienced a change in her sport class due to rule changes, which had reflections on her potential competitiveness and relative position within the new sport class, requiring her to adopt new strategies corresponding to the new competitors.

Paralympic athletes' career trajectories were affected by the classification process, sometimes even leading them to experience involuntary retirement. For instance, the de-classification process had been a challenging experience for wheelchair basketball player Barış, resulting in being ineligible to compete on the national team. The challenging processes that Paralympic athletes experienced ultimately affected their para sports career as well as the DC pathways, underscoring the interplay between different dimensions.

The experiences of DC Paralympic athletes revealed that para athlete development pathways were mainly structured through the national team training camps in Türkiye. All DC para athletes shared that they had to attend very frequent and long national training camps, requiring them to leave their city of residence for long periods of time. Because of the frequent travel demands, competitions and extended training camps, DC para athletes had limited time to experience commonly practiced routines as average students usually experiencing such as attending to school or attending university preparation courses. Some DC Paralympic athletes were stressed about compensating for their academic pursuits because they were unable to experience commonly practiced routines.

> "When I returned to [the name of the city] from the Olympics, there were about two or three days left before the schools started. So I went to school, I mean, I didn't have any possibility or chance to go to a preparatory course for the university exam during the summer... During the hours when an athlete isn't supposed to go to bed, I was burning the midnight oil to complete my missing lessons, preparing for the university exam" (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> "Actually, I don't have much of a student life because of the national team camps. Because of these camps and matches, I can't actually go to university too often. I usually just take exams. I do some memorization, study lesson presentations and so on before the exams, and I try to pass them" (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “Actually, I can't attend lessons that much, because we are in camp for ten months. I can't go to many classes during these two months. Those two months usually coincide with the holidays. I have to go and take the exams straight away with the notes I get from the academic staff” (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

Due to time conflicts, demanding athletic careers, and traveling for training camps or competitions, DC Paralympic athletes often sacrificed their social relationships and experienced struggles with their friends. They could not commit, invest enough time in their friendship, maintain their friendships, and meet the expectations of their social circle. The interpersonal conflicts experienced with friends were a source of additional stressors throughout their dual career journey, which DC Paralympic athletes commonly expressed. Moreover, the age disparities in the national team environment also challenged some younger DC para athletes socially, often leading to communication difficulties within the team. Being the newest team member was challenging for some DC para athletes as they experienced exclusionary attitudes and conflicts due to social groupings in the team.

> “When I first started archery, I had a large circle of friends…One day, my coach pulled me aside and told me that I need to make sacrifices. My focus was devoted to archery, and I could only meet up with my friends when I was free. But many times, I had conflicts with my friends about this issue” (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “I get to meet up with my best friend just two or three times a year. We don't get to see each other quite often as we are both quite busy” (Ayşe, F, 19, CI, para swimming, student- athlete).

> “I don't have time to meet my friends or have a social life” (Mehmet, M, 21, CI, para taekwondo, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

> “I stopped talking to most of my friends. I had to do so because I couldn't spare any time for them. They wanted me to spend time with them, and honestly when I couldn't, they got upset and stopped talking to me” (Demet, F, 21, CI Progressive impairment, goalball, multiple careers: student-employee-athlete).

Another crucial stressor was related to coaches' attitudes and to what extent they acknowledged Paralympic athletes' commitments beyond sports. DC Paralympic athletes often struggled to initiate or maintain their academic careers due to the lack of

systematized approaches, as their decisions were instead influenced by coaches' person-dependent practices. The experience of para archer Aylin revealed coaches' person-dependent practices. Some athletes were supported and provided flexibility in initiating their academic careers, whereas others were forced to choose between their sports and academic careers, affecting their decisions regarding their DC pathways.

> "The national team coach used to tell us that we should study and that they would support us in our endeavors. But before, for example, [name of the national athlete] was not allowed to study. I mean, they said it was either the national team or school. So that athlete had to stop coming to the national team for a while... Later, the athlete took a break from school and came back. In the beginning, there was that kind of attitude, but then they told us that we should study and that they would be of support" (Aylin, F, 29, AI, para archery, multiple careers: student-employee- athlete).

The attitudes and support of coaches toward their athletes' DC experience fluctuated, especially during specific significant periods such as the pre-PGs cycle. DC Paralympic athletes' experiences revealed that as the athletic demands increased during the qualification period of the PGs, coaches' stance toward the DC pathway changed. Coaches who were previously supportive regarding the DC experience of their athletes became concerned about the potential distractions from other domains. They even asked their athletes to prioritize their sports careers and delay other commitments except sports until after the PGs. Athletes often found themselves in a difficult position, attempting to assure their coaches that they could manage the DC pathway. Therefore, the pre-PGs cycle was challenging not only for sports careers but also for maintaining academic careers as coaches changed their attitudes and decreased their support for the DC experience.

Adapting to a new routine by dealing with training issues in a new city was also challenging for athletes and required them to reconsider their responsibilities. Para swimmer Ayşe experienced a performance decline because she could not train with her coach after moving to another city for her academic career, further complicating her DC journey. These stressors often interacted with significant periods and associated expectations, which made athletes revisit their priorities, like Ayşe, who resumed her academic pursuits via online courses until the post-PGS cycle.

### 4.4.3. Stressors in Academic and Vocational Domains

Regarding the academic and vocational environments, accessibility concerns and transportation were prominent barriers during DC experiences. DC para athletes commonly shared that during the pandemic, it was easier for them to follow courses through online education without worrying about transportation or the accessibility of the built environment.

One of the most significant stressors of experiencing DC in educational or vocational domains was the lack of system-based practices. While some instructors understood the demands of a high-performance athletic career and provided flexibility by allowing online exams or rearranging the exams' dates, others refused to accommodate by reminding student athletes about their academic responsibilities. The ambiguity associated with person-dependent approaches made the DC process unpredictable, leaving athletes to navigate these challenges alone and find out who could support them.

A critical finding of this research was that DC athletes had limited time left to study, especially after being selected for the national team. While some had plans to study in fields other than sports science, with restricted study time and the facilitative role of the structural support through legislative provisions easing enrollment in sports science departments, they decided to study at sports-related departments such as coaching education or sports management. Some DC para athletes delayed their academic goals to study fields other than sports science after athletic retirement. Moreover, they had concerns about their capabilities outside the sports domain, again channeling them to consider studying sports science.

Colleagues complaining about DC athletes' absence from the workplace and gossiping about evading responsibilities were among the challenges DC athletes encountered in the vocational domain. Increased athletic demands due to significant periods, such as preparation for major competitions, necessitated DC athletes being away to attend training camps, making them more vulnerable to such complaints. To respond to these perceptions, athletes often felt pressured to make their training visible and prove their dedication by sharing training videos or photos on social media.

The complex interplay of disability-specific challenges, para-sport demands, and sociocultural and environmental factors shaped DC experiences for Paralympic athletes.

### 4.4.4. Facilitators During Dual Career Processes

While DC para athletes experienced the above-mentioned challenges, there were also facilitators during their DC experience. Multidimensional factors such as personal competencies, external support, and social policies interacted with and facilitated Paralympic athletes' DC journey.

Personal competencies involving self-awareness, timely assessment of situations, anticipation of potential challenges, communication, and planning skills were important resources for Paralympic athletes to depend on. Moreover, being aware of the dynamics of para sport, educational and vocational environments, and accessing significant actors in the context were influential in addressing, overcoming challenges that facilitated the DC processes.

Paralympic athletes' experiences showed that they were accustomed to navigating challenges in daily life and educational and vocational spheres. The person-dependent approaches in the academic domain similarly necessitated DC para-athletes to increase their agency and reach out to academic staff to request possible flexibilities.

The transferrable skills gained through sports experience also played an important role in DC facilitation. As para swimmer Ayşe expressed, her ability to focus developed during her athletic career later benefitted her academic pursuits.

In addition to personal competencies, relying on external support was another critical factor for DC Paralympic athletes. A supportive DC environment where the academic and vocational domains acknowledge athletic identity and the athletic domain recognized their student and employee identity was a significant facilitator in DC processes. Acknowledging individualized needs and communicating with DC Paralympic athletes to provide the support they needed, such as personal assistance during campus life, providing lecture notes or flexibility such as online or take-home exams, together with part-time work opportunities, were crucial facilitators in

managing the DC experience. The participants' experiences also revealed that a successful athletic career was a prominent factor in securing understanding and sympathy of academic staff for DC facilitation. As most DC Paralympic athletes shared, being a decorated athlete with a successful athletic career contributed to the support and accommodations in academic and vocational domains.

Apart from the support of academic and vocational environments, families fulfilled vital roles that facilitated Paralympic athletes' DC journey. Their families shaped considerably the way Paralympic athletes experienced their DC pathways. Besides facilitating sports participation, they supported their children emotionally and practically during their DC experience by organizing their schedules with various stakeholders and assisting them regarding transportation needs, and becoming an indispensable part of the DC process by attending training camps or moving to another city to fulfill caregiving role when DC athletes initiated their academic careers. Their involvement was indispensable in ensuring athletes with high support needs could sustain their dual careers effectively.

Living in a small city also facilitated managing the demands of DC experiences. Shorter travel times between school and training sessions and extended social networks facilitated by living in a small city, eased the DC processes. Moreover, Paralympic athletes highlighted their spouses as a crucial source of support, both in taking over parenting responsibilities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings on their behalf and in co-experiencing the dual career process, mainly when the athletes relied on their spouses for assistance due to their high support needs.

The facilitative role of the social policies was prominent in supporting Paralympic athletes' access to higher education and employment. In initiating academic and vocational careers, participants relied on legislative provisions supporting employment opportunities for people with disabilities through quota schemes and public personal selection exams (E-KPSS). For their academic careers, DC Paralympic athletes relied on DC policies such as reserved quotas and scholarship schemes targeted at national athletes to facilitate their university admission processes.

The double-sided facilitation of the legislative framework based on social policies targeting people with disabilities, as well as decorated athlete profiles, increased the available support mechanisms and opportunities. The employment quotas designed to increase employment opportunities both in the private sector and at the state institutions, as well as the additional facilitative measures at the university admission exam, supported DC para-athletes in pursuing their academic and vocational plans. Lastly, the findings revealed that acquiring information about the legislative provisions and awareness about the social policy instruments providing financial support was critical to relying on to facilitate the DC process.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

A dual career pathway generally refers to the process by which DC athletes progress through consecutive educational progressions, followed by vocational pursuits, concurrent with different athletic developmental phases (Wylleman et al., 2020). The relevant literature indicated that individuals pursuing dual career in sports had two different career foci involving sports and education or sports and work, navigating developmental journeys across diverse domains with interrelated, concurrent, overlapping transitions and phases (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). There were diverse DC pathways depending on different contexts and athletes' preferences (Stambulova et al., 2024).

However, to date DC research has been student-athlete-centric and has ignored DC para athletes and their DC experiences to a great extent (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Moreover, the para sport specific features identified by studies focusing both on talent identification and athlete development pathways (Baker et al., 2017; Dehghansai et al., 2022; Lemez et al., 2020) and retirement experiences in para sports (Bundon et al., 2018) underlined the contextual complexity and suggested that despite the available models or frameworks situated in non-disabled sports domain provided valuable insights, they were not accurately reflecting the unique features of para athletes' experiences (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020).

To the researchers' knowledge, there has not been any research studying Paralympic athletes' DC pathways to date. Therefore, this study aimed to supplement the DC literature by conducting contextually informed research, considering the dynamics of para sports and disability-related factors in shaping DC experiences. In this context, this dissertation explored Paralympic athletes' dual career pathways and developed a

substantive exploratory theory about their DC pathways through employing constructivist grounded theory.

The results of this study revealed that Paralympic athletes' career development experiences involved individual pathways with linear as well as interrupted non-linear characteristics, indicating differentiations from the generally referred conceptualization of a dual carer pathway with consecutive progression from education to vocational careers alongside athletic development.

Paralympic athletes' DC pathways were shaped by a complex interplay of personal, contextual, social, cultural, structural, and organizational factors. While Paralympic athletes shared common experiences with non-disabled DC athletes, the disability experience, para athlete development pathways, and para sport-specific stressors and facilitators also differentiated their experiences, highlighting that their experiences were both common and yet very unique. From initiation to retirement, all phases of career development were shaped by these factors and revealed distinct challenges and opportunities that differentiated Paralympic athletes' DC and MC pathways.

Despite the experiences of Paralympic athletes involved unique and diverse characteristics, the shared aspects enabled to conceptualize their career pathways. Accordingly, four patterns of career development pathways were identified based on career sequences and number of careers pursued.

The first pathway, "*Typical Pathway with Dual Career*" involved a relatively normative and linear trajectory, typically beginning during compulsory education by combining education and sports careers and progressing through consecutive educational progressions before moving on to vocational pursuits that coexisted with different phases of athletic development, encompassing both student-athletes and employee athletes.

The second pathway, "*Typical Pathway with Multiple Careers*" also involved a relatively normative and linear progression, but it was differentiated by the initiation of a third career, with student-employee athletes combining academic, sports, and vocational careers.

The third pathway, "*Atypical Pathway with Dual Career*" was characterized by interrupted career sequences, with Paralympic athletes experiencing entry, exit, and re-entry trajectories that involved dropping out and later resuming their DC with new combinations of academic, vocational, and sports careers, reflecting dynamic trajectories shaped by the interplay of disability experience, impairment effects, external opportunities and career planning. Thus, the atypical DC pathway that initially started as an employee-athlete pathway changed into a student-athlete pathway as the interrupted career trajectories resumed with a focus on academic development.

The fourth pathway, "*Atypical Pathway with Multiple Careers*" similarly involved in-and-out sequences experienced by Paralympic athletes, including dropping out of education or work careers, continued with constructing a new dual career version with differentiated career combinations. This pathway was further transformed by the incorporation of a third career, exemplifying a journey that evolved from being an employee-athlete to becoming a student-employee-athlete.

As above-explained classification of career development pathways pursued by Paralympic athletes revealed while some Paralympic athletes' career pathways followed a normative and linear progression combining two or three careers, other Paralympic athletes' career pathways were characterized by interrupted career sequences, ultimately resuming with new dual or multiple career trajectories differing from the initial dropped out career combinations. The processes in the para athlete development pathways and the stressors as well as facilitators related to disability experience were the most significant features making para athletes' DC experiences unique compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

In a similar vein, the dependence on the support network, and the severity of impairment further complicated DC processes for the athletes with severe impairments, revealing *co-constructing* and *co-experiencing* processes as they navigated their DC journey. Diverse profiles of Paralympic athletes, encompassing student-athletes, employee-athletes, and athletes with multiple careers who combined academic, vocational and athletic careers, were identified. This multitude of experiences and late career construction styles challenged the typical DC

conceptualization in the DC literature and prevented Paralympic athletes' career development processes from being conceptualized solely by age-based normative and consecutive progressions of careers.

A phase-based model illustrated by the Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Career Pathways acknowledging the different stages of career development processes better reflected the diversity of the Paralympic athletes, their decisions related to career development processes as well as the in-and-out career sequences. The model considered both micro level analysis addressing Paralympic athletes' social relationships, coping strategies, and career experiences, as well as macro level analysis revealing organizational and sociocultural contexts in shaping their career trajectories by creating opportunities or constraints.

### 5.1. Dual Career Motives

During the pre-DC phase, individuals with disabilities were mobilized to embark on a dual career journey through the interplay of multidimensional motives and the influence of significant social agents, such as families, coaches, PE teachers, and teammates. These motives included commonly shared factors identified in previous studies, such as securing a future in case of injuries, widening social networks, and enhancing employability (Defruyt et al., 2020). However, additional motives unique to the disability experience or facilitated by para sports development pathways also played a significant role.

Expanding restricted opportunities associated with monotony or a lack of activities in segregated schools, utilizing talent transfer from non-disabled sports as a second chance following a severe injury, or exploring the possibility of pursuing a para sports career later in life even without prior athletic experience upon teammate encouragement were crucial motives that encouraged individuals with disabilities to consider a dual career pathway. Similarly, the decision to either live a restricted, limited life or strive to inspire others and become an exemplary individual motivated DC Paralympic athlete Demir to pursue sports as a gateway to reclaim his life. This aligns with Bundon's (2019, p. 81) reflection that "newly injured individuals may be particularly receptive to participating in sports because it affords them an opportunity

to maintain a continuity of identity otherwise challenged by impairment." From the very start of the DC journey, Paralympic athletes' experiences underline that the disability experience and athlete development pathways played a significant role in shaping their decisions related to dual career experiences.

Despite the studies indicating early career construction styles of DC athletes from young ages, impacting their actions (Aunola et al., 2018; Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021; Chamorro et al., 2016), the experiences of DC Paralympic athletes showed different pathways as they had late sports and academic careers as well. The absence of age bound development pathways in para sports (Patatas, De Bosscher, Derom, & Winckler, 2020) enabled participants to consider a late para-athletic career even if they lacked prior sports experience. Especially Paralympic athletes with an acquired impairment due to a life-changing event such as an accident had the opportunity to initiate a relatively late athletic career, experiencing an accelerated transition to the high-performance pathway. Their experiences confirmed that elite athletic careers in para sports were not necessarily constructed at young ages. Similarly, DC Paralympic athletes resumed their interrupted academic careers in a different field of study and constructed a new academic path. Therefore, the profile of DC Paralympic athletes and the age at which they participated in para sports or (re)-initiated their academic careers were diverse, with these careers not necessarily being constructed at young ages.

The facilitative role of structural support was prominent in supporting para athletes' and people with disabilities' access to higher education and employment. The employment quotas designed to increase employment opportunities both at private sector and the state institutions as well as the additional facilitative measures at university admission exam supported DC Paralympic athletes in pursuing their academic and vocational plans. The double-sided facilitation of legislative framework based on disability as well as successful sports careers appeared to increase their opportunities and facilitate the initiation of DC pathways. The findings suggest that "educational and vocational gaps" (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021) may not have been as profound stressors for Paralympic athletes as they were for non-disabled DC athletes. Thus, being informed about the available facilitative measures

and the social policy instruments supporting career opportunities seemed critical for effectively using these resources and facilitating the DC process.

## 5.2. Career Pathways of Paralympic Athletes

The existing DC research is mostly grounded in a single theoretical framework that emphasizes a linear progression from education to vocation alongside athletic development and finally to athletic retirement (Deason, 2019). However, the findings of this research reveal that the dominant DC conceptualization insufficiently reflects the DC experiences and pathways of Paralympic athletes involving nonlinear career progressions and diverse profiles. Accordingly, as mentioned previously DC Paralympic athletes had four distinct pathways with differing career sequences and number of career combinations.

In contrast to the previous studies categorizing DC pathways into three main categories such as “linear, convergent and parallel paths” (Torregrosa et al., 2015) or “students doing sports” following an educational- vocational pathway, “athletes trying to study” following a sporting pathway and “athletes searching for optimal balance” following a dual career pathway (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021; Stambulova et al., 2015), the experiences of DC Paralympic athletes involved a more fluid and atypical progression. They navigated across these different DC typologies throughout their DC journey due to personal, social, organizational and environmental factors and by simultaneously pursuing three careers, they initiated a multiple career pathway that extended beyond these three-fold DC categorizations.

Accessibility issues, the effects of impairments, de-classification experiences, and the prioritization of careers based on their relative importance shaped how DC Paralympic athletes navigated their dual career pathways. These factors often led athletes to experience planned or forced temporary cessations or even dropout phases. Theoretically, the atypical pathway of DC Paralympic athletes involves navigating across different typologies, “convergent, linear, and parallel pathways” throughout their DC journey (Torregrosa et al., 2015). For example, para archer Demir began his DC journey as an employee-athlete, combining a vocational career with a relatively late start in sports. During the employee-athlete pathway, he prioritized his sports

career over his vocational career, reflecting a "convergent pathway" (Torregrosa et al., 2015). However, after encountering workplace accessibility issues and the effects of his impairment, which hindered his ability to maintain his previous work routines, together with experiencing the positive outcomes of his athletic success, Demir chose to focus exclusively on his sports career, transitioning to a "linear pathway" (Torregrosa et al., 2015). As Demir progressed through his athletic career, he later resumed his DC pathway by initiating an academic career facilitated by reserved quotas for decorated national athletes and scholarship programs. His goal of becoming a sports manager and capitalizing on his para sports expertise led him to emphasize both sports and academic careers simultaneously, signifying a "parallel pathway" (Torregrosa et al., 2015). The DC journey of para archer Demir revealed a fluid and atypical progression from employee-athlete to student-athlete, aligning with the concept of "fluid transition pathways" proposed by Mateu et al. (2020).

Unlike the double facilitation provided by structural supports, such as disability-related social policies and facilitative measures related to their successful sports careers, DC Paralympic athletes face compounded challenges in navigating their dual careers. These challenges related to the experience of disability, such as accessibility barriers, the effects of impairments, discriminative practices and adapting to progressive impairment as well as to the demands of managing dual careers, encompassing lack of flexibility and dialogue between stakeholders, time conflicts, often complicated their pathways compared to their non-disabled counterparts. As Dowling et al. (2018) emphasized, layers of complexity must be acknowledged in the context of para sports, since macro-level factors, such as infrastructure, available resources, policy priorities, and the broader social and cultural experience of disability play a critical role in shaping access to para sports and the opportunities available to develop and support high-performance para athletes. Understanding and addressing these interconnected factors is essential to providing equitable and effective support for DC Paralympic athletes.

A para sports specific challenge experienced exclusively by DC Paralympic athletes involves the classification process, a critical stressor having profound reflections on Paralympic athletes' career trajectories. Changes in sports classes, whether due to

impairment progression or changes to classification rules, often require athletes to adapt to new circumstances beyond their control, leaving them to face challenging experiences. In some cases, athletes had to change their training strategies or learn to run with a guide, adjust to new competitors related to sports class review, or even face involuntary, premature retirement in case of de-classification. Consistent with the study by Bundon et al. (2018), forced retirement associated with de-classification have unique reflections on Paralympic athletes' career trajectories that non-disabled DC athletes do not encounter. Similar to Paralympic athletes with high support needs adapting to relying on their support networks while navigating DC pathways, Paralympic athletes with less severe impairments also encounter unique challenges as they face the risk of forced dropout if they fail to meet the minimum impairment criteria, which can profoundly affect their DC journeys. These unique challenges to DC Paralympic athletes highlight the interconnected nature of the classification process, para sports careers, and DC pathways. Therefore, establishing appropriate policies and support systems that account for these multifaceted challenges is essential.

This research also offers a novel contribution by identifying diverse pathways pursued by Paralympic athletes, expanding the previous report by TASS (2021) that outlined possible trajectories of para athletes in higher education in the UK after graduating from university. Accordingly, four possible paths for para athletes following their graduation from higher education were identified as becoming a full-time para-athlete, retiring from sports to pursue a vocational career due to the difficulties in balancing sports with full time work, pursuing postgraduate studies alongside an athletic career, or continuing an athletic career while being unemployment and relying on disability benefits (TASS, 2021). However, this research revealed that Paralympic athletes even extended the student-athlete DC pathways by initiating vocational careers and thereby transforming their dual career pathway into a multiple career pathway. Moreover, instead of exclusively pursuing a full-time athletic career or transitioning entirely to full-time work as suggested by the TASS report (2021), Paralympic athletes navigated toward combining sports and work, embracing their roles as employee-athletes.

The flexibility provided by employers, academic staff, and coaches, along with how DC Paralympic athletes were perceived and the expectations placed on them across

sports, academic, and vocational domains, played a significant role in encouraging them to pursue both employee-athlete and multiple career pathways. Additionally, facilitative measures enabling access to higher education and employment, as well as familial expectations for securing a secured future, also contributed to shaping their career choices. However, messages conveyed by employers or academic staff that emphasized athletic success above all else, such as statements like "Just come back as a champion, that's enough for us" risked reinforcing an over-identification with their athletic roles. This overemphasis on athletic identity not only created challenges for maintaining a balanced dual career pathway but also posed potential difficulties for their transition into retirement. As Wylleman (2019) noted, successfully developing other identities beyond the athletic role does not depend solely on the athletes themselves but requires a supportive environment and the facilitation of opportunities across all domains of their dual career pathways.

### 5.3. Co-Constructing and Co-Experiencing

Previous research on DC pathways and transitions suggests that "athletes act as active agents in constructing their careers, and therefore DC pathways also depend on athletes' own preferences usually based on their appraisal of sport and academic importance/success" (Stambulova et al., 2024). While the dual and multiple career pathways of Paralympic athletes partly aligned with this suggestion, Paralympic athletes with high support needs often relied heavily on their support networks such as caregivers, family and guides for navigating both daily life and sports participation necessitating them to collaboratively figure out and negotiate their DC experience. The findings of this study revealed that while initiating their DC journey, Paralympic athletes with high support needs engaged in a "co-constructing" process, where a collective decision-making involving input and negotiation with their support network shaped their career trajectories.

To exemplify, Paralympic athlete Defne, who requires a guide runner for her sports career and a personal assistant for daily life, described a collaborative decision-making process when determining her higher education pathway. Together with her family, coach, and guide, she decided to forgo studying acting and instead enrolled in a sports

management program. This decision was influenced by discussions within her support network as studying physical education teacher education program was considered difficult due to her visual impairment, and acting was deemed challenging to manage with her sports career.

While the visual impairment of para athlete Defne may limit certain activities, it seems that her support network's assumptions related to who qualifies as a PE teacher and what a para athlete with visual impairment can become imposed restrictions during the co-decision making process about her academic and future vocational careers. This process led her to internalize ableism as she approved her support network's perspective by acknowledging they had a point and it would be difficult for her to be a PE teacher, ultimately directing her to study sports management. The co-constructing process highlighted how the interplay of disability experience, ableist perspectives and anticipated career compatibility shaped academic trajectories of Paralympic athletes.

The co-constructing process also transformed the external support providers, such as caregivers and guides, into DC team members, through which they became indispensable parts of the DC experience. Apart from emphasizing the stakeholders' role in supporting athletes (Leiva-Arcas et al., 2023), the critical role of this mini-DC team in enabling or constraining DC pathways is not acknowledged in the DC literature.

The relationship between the collaborative decision-making process and DC Paralympic athletes' decisional autonomy and control in making career-related decisions is a critical aspect to consider in enhancing DC Paralympic athletes' intrinsic motivation toward their DC pathways. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the feeling of autonomy and control over one's actions is a fundamental psychological need facilitating intrinsic motivation development. However, during the co-constructing process of DC, there is a risk that engaging in collaborative decision-making may unintentionally undermine athletes' autonomy and control over their career construction. This is of particular concern, as a lack of decisional autonomy has the potential to affect athletes' motivation and engagement in their DC journey. To prevent dependence from dictating career decisions during the co-

constructing process, it is crucial to inform key support network members, such as caregivers, guides, coaches and family members on respecting the decisional autonomy of DC Paralympic athletes by providing adequate support without interfering. By this means, the balance between necessary support and autonomy can be maintained, ensuring that athletes remain actively engaged and motivated in their career pathways.

The experiences of DC Paralympic athletes with high support needs indicated that they needed a pre-planning process before initiating their DC pathways which is consistent with the study by Ryba et al. (2015), underscoring the importance of understanding available flexibilities and support services before attending a university. DC Paralympic athletes, especially athletes with high support needs, communicated their needs with relevant stakeholders at the universities and negotiated possible flexibilities, support, and scholarships in order to make informed decisions and sustain their DC pathways. Being out of their comfort zone and experiencing an unfamiliar environment, dealing with accessibility issues was challenging for DC Paralympic athletes. MC wheelchair basketball athlete Kerem's challenging experience during the university admission process revealed the added layer of complexity associated with accessibility issues. The inaccessible faculty buildings, absence of elevators denied him access to his desired academic program. Consequently, Kerem could not complete the admission process and decided to continue his academic journey through an open education system, bypassing the inaccessible environments. This challenging experience highlighted that despite being able to initiate their academic careers, sustaining and experiencing the career were more difficult for DC Paralympic athletes as they had to address more complicated needs than the well-referenced challenges such as lack of time (Stambulova et al., 2015), financial struggles and inflexibility of coaches (Cosh & Tully, 2015).

The disability experience added a layer of complexity while navigating the DC pathways. Universities offering clear information about their facilities, scholarship opportunities, and available sports programs to enhance para athletes' informed choices was similarly voiced by the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme's report as a critical factor in supporting student-para athletes (TASS, 2021). In this sense,

information and transparency about academic and sports environments may help DC Paralympic athletes assess the compatibility of their DC environments with their individual needs, thus promoting a better decision-making process and preventing them from dropping out of careers.

### 5.4. Period and Career Based Strategies

The findings of this research showed that Paralympic athletes navigated the challenges of their DC pathways through considering period and career-based strategies. As articulated by one of the student-para athletes, "initiating the DC was easier than experiencing it," highlighting the necessity of developing coping strategies to manage their DC journey.

After initiating their DC journey and experiencing a rapid transition into the high-performance para sports pathway, Paralympic athletes developed an awareness regarding critical periods requiring them to reevaluate their priorities and adapt their focus by understanding dynamic and cyclical nature of DC demands. Consistent with the previous studies (Mateu et al., 2020; Stambulova et al., 2015), it was not possible for DC Paralympic athletes to achieve a balance by investing fully and equally in their different careers and addressing competing demands. The critical periods involving transitioning into university, navigating pre-PGs cycles or major championships, injury experience, health and familial issues required them to adopt a period-based strategy.

Additionally, some DC Paralympic athletes experienced progressively demanding transitions such as transition into university coinciding with qualifying for PGs that further necessitated them to negotiate periodic priorities, reschedule programs, weigh the cost and benefits, seize the available support and expectations of significant others. During these challenging periods, DC competencies such as timely assessment of the situation, anticipation of the possible challenges, learning from their friends' experiences, reaching out to available networks, communication and planning skills, were valuable resources that Paralympic athletes depended on, confirming previous studies stressing DC competencies as valuable assets (De Brandt et al., 2017, 2018). Additionally, support of their families, flexibility granted from academic staff and

revisiting training programs with their coaches facilitated managing their DC pathway, reiterating the significance of support provided by significant others (Knight et al., 2018).

However, the continuity of the provided understanding and support seemed an issue as coaches' attitudes toward the DC changed on a continuum over the course of para athletes' DC journey. The pre-qualification period of PGs was one of the most critical periods that considerably affected the coach's attitudes, expectations and planning. Coaches who were once very supportive became anxious and concerned about the demands of other careers during the pre-PGs cycle, affecting their support toward DC experiences. This raises concerns about the sustainability of recognizing and supporting multidimensional roles and responsibilities of DC Paralympic athletes and highlight the significance of optimizing flexibility to support the holistic development of DC Paralympic athletes.

When balancing dual careers became challenging particularly due to a lack of flexibility or increasing demands of their sports careers, another coping strategy adopted by DC Paralympic athletes was delaying their careers, usually their academic careers by deciding on an academic freeze or temporarily pursuing a linear pathway (Torregrosa et al., 2015). Similarly, the study by Dehghansai et al. (2021b) revealed that some athletes paused their academic or vocational careers until the post-PGs period, aligning with the experiences of some participants in this study.

In addition to the period-based strategic planning and management, DC Paralympic athletes also adopted career-based strategies, including planning careers on a continuum, relying on institutional support and favoring compatible careers as they stressed age pressure on their athletic careers. However, discriminatory practices restricting career opportunities, such as denying enrollment in physical education teacher education programs based on disability, prevented a Paralympic athlete from enjoying full and equal access to education and exercising autonomy in his career planning, reinforcing the need for non-discriminatory, inclusive policies and practices. Besides, these discriminative practices and forced career choices presents potential threats for the psycho-emotional wellbeing of the DC para athlete.

Except for one student-para athlete, all participants favored fields such as sports science or coaching by underlining the career compatibility, future career plans as well as the anticipated flexibility of academic staff in sports-related programs. These findings align with the study by Kavoura and Ryba (2020), which emphasized career related decisions being affected by the compatibility of careers in managing a DC and the limited lifespan of an athletic career. For DC Paralympic athletes, pursuing compatible careers appeared to be a pragmatic approach, offering flexibility and support in managing their careers while potentially preserving their athletic identity through roles such as sports manager or expert, even after retirement.

The experiences of Paralympic athletes with dual and multiple careers revealed that they adopted a dynamic relationship between period and career-based strategies. Their career planning and management that considered both periodic and career-based priorities, coupled with provided flexibility and understanding allowed them to manage periodic demands while maintaining a broader perspective on their overall career trajectory.

## 5.5. Implications

To the best of researcher's knowledge, this study is the first one to explore and conceptualize the DC pathways of Paralympic athletes. This research provides a new perspective by shedding light on dual and multiple career pathways of Paralympic athletes and introducing new concepts such as "co-constructing" and "co-experiencing" that contribute to the growing body of DC literature in sports. This section presents the study's theoretical and policy implications that might be beneficial for researchers, stakeholders in para sports and policymakers.

### 5.5.1. Theoretical Implications

The research to date has focused on several areas of DC in sports. However, Paralympic athletes' dual career experiences and the unique dynamics of para sports context have been under-researched topics. Consequently, previous studies' exclusive focus on the non-disabled sports context missed an important piece of the DC mosaic: Paralympic athletes and their DC experiences. By exploring and

conceptualizing DC pathways and experiences of Paralympic athletes and developing the theoretical model, "Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways," this study addresses this theoretical gap.

In contrast to the dominant DC pathway illustrating DC athletes advancing through a linear, consecutive progression from education to vocational careers alongside athletic development, this study conceptualizes diverse pathways followed by Paralympic athletes and introduces a phase-based perspective by accommodating non-linear progressions and temporary cessation periods. While the Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Careers Pathways has similarities with the regular process of experiencing a DC with its four general phases formulated by Li and Sum (2017), this research further identifies non normative phases, possible challenges and opportunities changing career trajectories, phases leading to new versions of DC pathways as well as atypical progressions specific to para sports context. The proposed model highlighted the availability of differentiated DC pathways with entry, exit, and re-entry phases, incorporating diverse career combinations within the DC experience.

Further studies might examine the characteristics of athletes in these differentiated pathways, the proposed theoretical models' naturalistic generalizability, and their adaptability to other contexts. Additionally, DC phases proposed by the model might be further explored and tested by adopting an intersectionality perspective. Researchers are encouraged to consider and test each pathway by exploring the DC experiences of their sample situated in other contexts.

By proposing a theoretical perspective, the current study explored the dual career experience over the lifespan of interviewed athletes. The qualitative nature of this study provided rich and detailed information on how dual and multiple career pathways are experienced within para sports context.

The findings highlighted some critical periods including transitioning to a high-performance pathway, pre-PGs cycle, and higher education. As experiencing dual or multiple careers become progressively demanding within critical periods, Paralympic athletes adopted period and career-based strategies to plan and manage their careers.

Similarly, researchers are encouraged to consider and test period and career-based strategies and understand the demands and coping strategies.

Additionally, this study introduces the concepts of "co-constructing" and "co-experiencing," which reflect DC athletes with severe impairments relying on the support and collaboration of their support network to sustain their dual career journeys. The complexity and diversity of DC Paralympic athletes' experiences are manifested through this interdependent relationship necessary to maintain DC experience. Therefore, exploring the role and experiences of support providers and guides within this interdependent DC relationship and how DC Paralympic athletes' decisional autonomy and control over their lives are exercised could be an area for consideration.

### 5.5.2. Policy Implications

The findings of this research showed that although most DC Paralympic athletes did not initially plan to pursue an athletic career, they ended up experiencing a rapid transition into a high-performance pathway, often becoming national para athletes in an accelerated way. Becoming a national para athlete led to significant changes, including increased expectations for commitment and adaptation to long, frequent national training camps. Previous research on meanings attached to sports participation of individuals with disabilities showed that there were motives other than the performance narrative and individuals with disabilities expressed frustration when their motivations are overlooked in favor of performance-driven programming (Allan et al., 2018).

Although transitioning into high performance pathways worked well for the sample of this study, directing individuals into high-performance pathways without considering their sports participation motives might result in negative experiences and even dropping out of sports. Moreover, managing fast track independence expectations upon transition to centralized training facilities especially challenged athletes with high support needs, revealing concerning experiences for their wellbeing (Miller et al., 2024). Therefore, coaches, program managers, and policymakers should acknowledge diverse motives for sports participation, individualized needs and offer para sports

opportunities that correspond to participants' needs and goals. By this means, individuals with disabilities will be able to engage in sports that align with their personal goals.

The experiences of DC Paralympic athletes showed that although they were supported in initiating their DC journeys through double facilitation based on disability-related social policies and DC policies such as employment quotas or reserved quotas in sports science programs and scholarship schemes, Paralympic athletes often faced challenges after initiating their careers, such as lack of flexibility, accessibility issues, transportation problems which sometimes led them to experience temporary cessation or drop out of their DC pathways. Therefore, in addition to providing initial support to construct their careers, it is also crucial to ensure continuous, collaborative support and integrated efforts throughout their dual-career experiences. Consistent with other studies underscoring the social and physical barriers that prevent the full and equal participation of people with disabilities (Akbulut, 2012; TOHAD, 2015), there is a strong need to establish a policy agenda aimed at removing disabling barriers and promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including DC Paralympic athletes.

Another policy implication of this study involves supporting DC Paralympic athletes in their efforts to raise awareness about para sports and encourage other individuals with disabilities to participate in sports and become more active. Moreover, to promote dual career in sports and encourage athletes to pursue academic and vocational careers, benefiting from DC Paralympic athletes as ambassadors can play a crucial role in inspiring other athletes and highlighting the significance of dual career.

One of the key challenges experienced by student para-athletes was the transition out of higher education (TASS, 2021). DC Paralympic athletes have expressed negative emotions such as sadness, feeling emptiness, and emotional devastation while reflecting on retirement which underscore potential challenges they may encounter in transitioning to post sports careers. Thus, providing support for DC Paralympic athletes during the retirement phase should be a critical policy priority.

Consistently with the study by Geraniosova and Ronkaninen (2015), DC Paralympic athletes often engaged in self-initiated problem-solving processes and depended on personal efforts rather than relying on organized support systems, highlighting the urgent need for establishing a collaborative and integrated support system regarding dual career. To foster communication, coordination and achieve a collaborative approach to supporting DC athletes, establishing dedicated units or appointing DC coordinators within sports federations and universities should be a critical policy priority. Defining the institutional requirements, roles and responsibilities of DC stakeholders and establishing guidelines for supporting DC athletes can facilitate a clear and structured framework for providing comprehensive and consistent support throughout their DC pathways.

Such a collaborative structure should emphasize empowering DC athletes to manage their own DC experience, enhancing their agency, and adopting a competence driven approach to ensure athletes receive the necessary guidance and resources and develop DC competencies.

Lastly, this study and previous study conducted in Türkiye (Koçak et al., 2023) show that there is a need for organized, coordinated and systematized approach to supporting DC athletes in Türkiye. To promote a systematic approach and foster closer collaboration among DC stakeholders, it is essential to establish a comprehensive framework reflecting the national conditions and policy priorities. Outlining strategies to support DC athletes and defining codes of conduct for stakeholders that specify their roles and responsibilities by developing national guidelines on DC athletes is crucial to enhance coordination and ensure organized, integrated efforts among all stakeholders involved in supporting dual career athletes.

### 5.6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

Despite the promising contributions explained above, there are some limitations in this study as well. The first limitation is participant profile. The participants of this research consisted of active Paralympic athletes, therefore focusing on an elite level excluded participation level para athletes and their respective dual career experiences. Since there might be differences while initiating and experiencing dual career pathways

depending on different para-sports contexts, such as participation levels, the developed model is limited to other contexts except for high-performance para-sports pathways. Moreover, the inclusion criteria of participants excluding athletes with additional sensory and intellectual impairments prevented capturing respective DC experiences and associated pathways.

A similar limitation arises from involving only athletes from Paralympic sports, excluding those competing in non-Paralympic sports. Support systems and financial incentives, such as athlete grants provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports Türkiye, specifically target Olympic and Paralympic athletes (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2021). This could mean that para-athletes from non-Paralympic sports may have distinct DC experiences shaped by the absence of similar support structures.

Moreover, the study took place within a period corresponding to the pre-Paris 2024 Paralympic Games cycle, with athletes experiencing busy schedules, intense preparation and training schedules, and possible stressful experiences related to quota allocation and the qualification process. This period and associated experiences might have unique reflections regarding the prioritization of sports careers compared to other periods and cycles.

Relatedly, conducting sequential interviews with some participants was not possible due to the heavy schedules ahead of the Paralympic Games. Moreover, despite grounded theory methodology allowing the use of other data sources such as observation, journals, and social media accounts, the current theoretical explanation was developed solely based on the data obtained from in-depth interviews with participants because of time constraints.

In a similar vein, time constraints prevented researcher from designing and conducting a longitudinal study which could provide better insights especially into the retirement phase and associated experiences. Understanding Paralympic athletes' DC progression over time, examining DC experience around significant periods and their reflections on career decisions and experiences could also provide more comprehensive information.

Considering the above-mentioned limitations, the developed theoretical model is believed to have added fresh insights into DC in sports research and expanded the scope of DC research by considering Paralympic athletes. The research also aimed to attract attention to the para sports context within the wider sports science research.

With that being said, it would be beneficial to suggest further areas of research. Firstly, according to the constructivist grounded theory, the developed theoretical model introduces "one possible truth among many" (Weed, 2017, p. 153). Thus, there could be other alternative ways to conceptualize DC pathways in para sports.

With regard to the other athlete profiles, researching all-weather athletes competing in both summer and winter sports, junior para-athletes experiencing compulsory education periods, and transnational para-athletes by focusing on their DC experiences could further enlighten the processes and decisions during DC pathways. Exploring the pre-national team period and the experiences associated with participation level athletes could also provide novel insights. Furthermore, as legislative framework differentiates Paralympic and non-Paralympic sports regarding financial support provisions through athlete grants or supporting employment opportunities such as PE teachers or sports expert positions for national athletes from Olympic and Paralympic sports, researching how para athletes from non-Paralympic sports experience dual career pathways could provide new insights in DC research.

Since macro-level factors such as available social polices had facilitative reflections on providing employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities as the shared account of participants revealed, it is worthwhile to explore different welfare system and their interaction with DC experiences in para sports and how different welfare systems affect micro level experiences.

Lastly, exploring gender dynamics in the dual and multiple career development of para athletes could provide a deeper understanding of the impact of gender on dual career experiences as one of the male DC Paralympic athletes' transferred parental responsibilities largely to his wife. Examining how para athletes experience parenting responsibilities while managing different careers could provide a deeper understanding of the impact of gender on dual career experiences in para sports.

The above-mentioned research suggestions might reveal differentiated experiences regarding how DC is experienced, with associated expectations, challenges and demands. Therefore, researching suggested topics might provide new insights into DC research.

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

To fill a research gap on the dual career pathways of Paralympic athletes, this dissertation explored the experiences and DC pathways of Paralympic athletes by employing a constructivist version of grounded theory. To this end, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten active Paralympic athletes who were either studying at university, working full-time alongside their sports careers, or combining both academic and vocational pursuits.

The results of this study revealed that the dominant DC conceptualization, illustrating the consecutive educational progressions, followed by vocational pursuits, concurrently with different athletic developmental phases insufficiently reflected the DC experiences and pathways of Paralympic athletes involving nonlinear career progressions and diverse profiles. Paralympic athletes' career development experiences involved individual pathways with linear, as well as interrupted non-linear characteristics, indicating variations from the generally referred conceptualization of a DC pathway with consecutive progression from education to vocational careers alongside athletic development.

Paralympic athletes' dual career and multiple career pathways were shaped by a complex interplay of personal, contextual, social, cultural, structural, and organizational factors. From initiation to retirement, all phases of career development were shaped by these factors and revealed distinct challenges and opportunities that differentiated Paralympic athletes' DC and MC pathways. The processes in the para athlete development pathways and the stressors as well as facilitators associated with experience of disability and para sports were the most significant features making para athletes' DC experiences unique compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Despite

the experiences of Paralympic athletes involved unique and diverse characteristics, the shared aspects enabled to conceptualize their career pathways based on career sequences and number of careers pursued.

The first pathway, "Typical Pathway with Dual Career" involves a relatively normative and linear trajectory, typically beginning during compulsory education by combining education and sports careers and progressing through consecutive educational progressions before moving on to vocational pursuits that coexisted with different phases of athletic development, encompassing both student-athletes and employee athletes. The second pathway, "Typical Pathway with Multiple Careers" also involves a relatively normative and linear progression, however it is differentiated by the initiation of a third career, which includes student-employee athletes combining academic, sports, and vocational careers. The third pathway, "Atypical Pathway with Dual Career" is characterized by interrupted career sequences, with Paralympic athletes experiencing entry, exit, and re-entry trajectories that involve dropping out and later resuming their DC pathways with new combinations of academic, vocational, and sports careers, reflecting dynamic trajectories shaped by the interplay of disability experience, impairment effects, external opportunities and career planning. Thus, the atypical DC pathway that initially started as an employee-athlete pathway changes into a student-athlete pathway as the interrupted career trajectories resumed with a focus on academic development. The fourth and final pathway, "Atypical Pathway with Multiple Careers" similarly involve in-and-out sequences experienced by Paralympic athletes, including dropping out of education or work careers, continued with constructing a new dual career version with differentiated career combinations. This pathway is further transformed by the incorporation of a third career, exemplifying a journey that evolves from being an employee-athlete to becoming a student-employee-athlete.

Diverse profiles of Paralympic athletes, encompassing student-athletes, employee-athletes, and athletes with multiple careers who combined academic, vocational and athletic careers, were identified. This multitude of experiences and late career construction styles challenged the typical DC conceptualization assuming consecutive educational progressions followed by vocational careers concurrent with athletic

development and prevented Paralympic athletes' career development processes from being conceptualized solely by age-based normative and consecutive progressions of careers.

A phase-based model illustrated by "the Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Career Pathways" acknowledging the different stages of career development processes better reflects the diversity of the Paralympic athletes, their career-related decisions and processes as well as the in-and-out career sequences. The model considers both micro level analysis addressing Paralympic athletes' social relationships, coping strategies, and career experiences, as well as macro level analysis revealing organizational and sociocultural contexts in shaping their career trajectories by creating opportunities or constraints. Consequently, career pathways of Paralympic athletes are conceptualized by situating different processes and social relationships within the environment.

The Relational Model of Paralympic Athletes' Dual and Multiple Career Pathways illustrates typical phases experienced by all DC and MC Paralympic athletes, such as "mobilization," "initiation and acclimatization," "strategizing period and career," and "retirement" as well as probable phases including "temporary cessation," "talent transfer," "DC transformation multiple careers," "new version of DC," and "de-classification- forced retirement."

The findings indicate that the severity of impairment and the dependence on the support network further complicated DC processes for the athletes with severe impairments, which revealed co-constructing and co-experiencing processes as they navigated their DC journey. Paralympic athletes with high support needs often relied heavily on their support networks such as caregivers, family and guides for navigating both daily life and sports participation necessitating them to collaboratively figure out and negotiate their DC experience. Moreover, de-classification as well as transitioning from non-disabled sports to para sports following a severe injury and undergoing adaption and transformation processes while pursuing DC were among the unique features experienced by Paralympic athletes.

This research showed that Paralympic athletes navigated the challenges of their DC and MC pathways through adopting period and career-based strategies, allowing them to manage the periodic demands and priorities while planning their careers on a continuum.

The findings of this dissertation underline the vital importance of supporting Paralympic athletes in a holistic manner, especially through emphasizing their individual needs and experiences throughout the initiation and progression of their DC and MC pathways.

Lastly, this study extends the existing DC literature by proposing a novel conceptualization of Paralympic athletes' career pathways and aims to encourage researchers to further explore dual career experiences in para sports context.

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# APPENDICES

## A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY
T: +90 312 210 22 91
F: +90 312 210 79 59
ueam@metu.edu.tr
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr

Sayı: 28620816 /

14 OCAK 2022

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

**Sayın Prof.Dr. Mustafa Levent İNCE**

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Gizem GİRİŞMEN "Paralimpik Sporcuların Sporda Çift Kariyer Yolları: Bir Temellendirilmiş Kuram Çalışması" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **0038-ODTUİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof.Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

## B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM (IN TURKISH)

### ARAŞTIRMAYA GÖNÜLLÜ KATILIM FORMU

Sayın Katılımcı,

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Bölümü doktora öğrencisi **Gizem Girişmen** tarafından **Prof. Dr. Mustafa Levent İnce** danışmanlığındaki **doktora tezi** kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

Bu çalışma tarafımdan tasarlanmış olup "*Paralimpik sporcuların sporda çift kariyer süreçleri ve deneyimlerini engelli sporları bağlamında incelmeyi ve bir kuram geliştirmeyi"* amaçlamaktadır.

Araştırma konusuna ilişkin deneyimlerinizi ve görüşlerinizi öğrenmek amacıyla bireysel mülakatlar ve odak grup görüşmeleri gerçekleştirilecektir. Görüşmelerin yaklaşık olarak bir saat sürmesi beklenmektedir. Görüşme sırasında, paylaşımlarınıza ilişkin notlar ve aynı zamanda ses kaydı alınacaktır. Ancak söz konusu notların ve ses kaydının metne dönüştürülmüş hali üçüncü kişilerle paylaşılmayacaktır. Paylaştığınız bilgiler sadece bu araştırma kapsamında değerlendirilecek ve sadece bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır. Bununla birlikte, araştırma kapsamında paylaştığınız kişisel bilgileriniz ve isminiz kesinlikle gizli tutulacaktır.

Görüşmeden sonra, ses kaydının metne dönüştürülmüş hali ve görüşmede alınan notlar gözden geçirebilmeniz ve onayınız için sizinle paylaşılacaktır. Çalışmaya ilişkin sorularınız varsa sorabilirsiniz. Son olarak, bu araştırmaya katılımınızın gönüllü olduğunu ve istediğiniz zaman görüşmeyi sonlandırabileceğinizi belirtmek isterim.

Katılımınız için teşekkür ederim.

Gizem Girişmen
Doktora öğrencisi

Yukarıda yer alan bilgileri okudum ve anladım, bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

| İsim /Soyisim | Tarih | İmza |
|---|---|---|
| | ----/----/---- | |

## C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (IN TURKISH)

**Görüşme Soruları**

**Kişisel bilgiler**

Kendinizden bahsedebilir misiniz? Sizi tanıyabilir miyim? Spor ve eğitim/iş yaşamınız ile ilgili bilgi alabilir miyim?

Eğer sakıncası yoksa engelinizden bahsedebilir misiniz?

Engelli biri olarak Türkiye'de yaşamak nasıldı paylaşabilir misiniz? Eğer karşılaştıysanız, ne gibi zorluklarla karşılaştınız?

**Sporla ilk temas**

Sporla ilk tanışmanız nerde ve nasıl oldu bahsedebilir misiniz? İlk deneyiminiz nasıldı? Geri dönüp düşündüğünüzde sporla ilk temasınızla ilgili neler hatırlıyorsunuz?

Devam etmeye nasıl karar verdiniz?

Size göre, deneyimlerinize göre toplum engelli sporlarını nasıl değerlendiriyor? Toplumun engelli sporculara bakışını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

Geçmişten günümüze toplumun engelli sporuna ve engelli sporcularına bakışında bir değişiklik var mı sizce?

**Sportif kariyerin ilk aşamaları**

Sportif kariyerinizin ilk aşamalarından bahsedebilir misiniz?

Spora başlamanızda ve sportif yaşantınızda etkili olan kişilerden bahsedebilir misiniz? Mesela ailenizin rolü? Varsa kardeşinizin? Antrenörünüzün? Arkadaşlarınızın?

Sportif kariyerinizi düşündüğünüzde, kim ve ne gibi süreçler, faktörler önemli rol oynadı? Hem olumlu hem de olumsuz kırılma noktaları, süreçler deneyimlediniz mi? Olduysa nasıl etkiledi sportif kariyerinizi bu süreçler?

Engelli bir sporcu olarak neler deneyimlediğinizi anlatabilir misiniz? Varsa, engelli bir sporcu olarak ne gibi zorluklar yaşadınız? Sizce bu yaşadıklarınız sportif kariyerinizi nasıl etkiledi?

Varsa, sportif kariyerinizi neyin/kimin kolaylaştırdığın, yardımcı olduğunu paylaşabilir misiniz? Neler deneyimlediğinizi anlatabilir misiniz?

Milli takıma seçim sürecini anlatabilir misiniz? Varsa, nasıl kriterler ve değerlendirmeler içeriyor? Bu süreçle ilgili kendi deneyiminizden bahsedebilir misiniz?

**Elit spor kariyeri aşaması- Paralimpik sporcu olmak**

Elit spor kariyerine sahip olmaya ne zaman karar verdiniz? Bu yolu seçmenize ne sebep oldu, nasıl gelişti süreç?

Sportif kariyerinizin başındaki hedeflerinizi, beklentilerinizi düşündüğünüzde, neler planladığınızı paylaşabilir misiniz? (Süreç içerisinde bir değişiklik oldu mu? Olduysa ne olduğunu sorabilir miyim? Ne/kimler etkili oldu?)

Elit seviyede engelli bir sporcu olarak, varsa yaşadığınız sizin için özel anları paylaşabilir misiniz? (Sportif kariyerinizi, spora bakışınızı nasıl etkiledi?)

Elit seviyede engelli bir sporcu olarak, varsa yaşadığınız sizin için zor zamanları, deneyimleri paylaşabilir misiniz? (Sportif kariyerinizi, spora bakışınızı nasıl etkiledi?)

**Sporda çift kariyerli sporcu olmak- deneyimler**

Akademik/İş yaşamınızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?

Çift kariyerli bir sporcu olmaya giden süreç nasıl gelişti? Nasıl karar verdiniz? Ne zaman? Neden?

Günlük rutininizi anlatabilir misiniz? Hayatınızdaki iki farklı önemli alanı (spor-eğitim/iş) dengeleyebiliyor musunuz? Nasıl dengeliyorsunuz? Bu süreçte deneyimlediğiniz zorluklar var mı?

Çift kariyerli engelli bir sporcu olmak nasıl bir deneyim, bahsedebilir misiniz? Size göre, sadece sportif bir kariyer sahibi olsaydınız daha farklı olur muydu? Nasıl farklı olurdu, paylaşabilir misiniz?

Bu zamana kadar sporla eş zamanlı olarak yürüttüğünüz eğitim/iş yaşamına ilişkin deneyimlerinizi nasıl anlatırsınız? Yaşadıklarınızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?

Hiç zorluklarla karşılaştınız mı? Olduysa, bu zorluklarla nasıl başa çıktınız? Nasıl üstesinden geldiniz? (Kim(ler)/ ne(ler) etkili oldu bu süreçte? Kolaylaştıran veya zorlaştıran faktörler?)

Hiç hayal kırıklığı ya da kariyerinizde kırılma noktaları yaşadığınız mı? Neler olduğunu paylaşabilir misiniz? Yaşadıklarınız sporda çift kariyer deneyiminizi etkiledi mi? Nasıl etkiledi? Aldığınız kararları nasıl şekillendirdi? Sporda çift kariyere ilişkin bakış açınıza etkisi oldu mu?

Sizin için önemli kişiler, sporda çift kariyer kararınız ve deneyiminizle ilgili ne düşünüyor sizce? Kim(ler) etkili oldu bu kararınızda, bahsedebilir misiniz?

Çift kariyerli bir sporcu olmanızla ilgili, yaşadığınız deneyimle ilgili aileniz neler düşünüyor? Tutumları, davranışları nasıl?

Çift kariyerli bir sporcu olmanızla ilgili, yaşadığınız deneyimle ilgili antrenörünüz (kulüp ve milli takım) neler düşünüyor? Tutumları, davranışları nasıl?

Kendi deneyiminizin ötesinde, genel olarak antrenörler, aileler engelli bir sporcunun yaşamında eğitim/iş yaşamının rolü hakkında neler düşünüyor sizce?

Akademik ortamınız, üniversitenin (iş ortamınızın) sizin sporda çift kariyer deneyiminizle ilgili düşünceleri neler sizce? Karşılaştığınız zorluklar var mı? Kolaylaştıran süreçler, faktörler? Hocalarınız, eğitmenleriniz, danışmanınızın (iş vereninizin) yaklaşımı nasıl? Sporun sizin hayatınızdaki yeri ve rolünü nasıl değerlendiriyorlar sizce?

Sizce daha farklı bir bölümde okuyor olsaydınız nasıl bir deneyiminiz olurdu? Ya da daha farklı bir üniversite okusaydınız? Size destek sağlayan sistemler var mı? Ya da akademik ortamda karşılaştığınız problemler oldu mu?

(Sizce daha farklı bir iş yerinde/kurumda olsaydınız nasıl bir deneyiminiz mi olurdu? (Size destek sağlayan sistemler var mı? Ya da iş ortamda karşılaştığınız problemler oldu mu?)

Öğrenci olarak (çalışan olarak), varsa yaşadığınız sizin için özel anları paylaşabilir misiniz?

Öğrenci olarak (çalışan olarak), varsa yaşadığınız sizin için zor zamanları, problemleri paylaşabilir misiniz?

Elit seviyedeki engelli bir sporcu olarak, yaşamınızdaki diğer uğraşlarınızla, sorumluluklarınızla karşılaştırdığınızda, sporun yaşamınızdaki payı sizce ne kadar? Yaşamınızın ne kadarını kaplıyor? Ya diğer aktiviteleriniz?

İdeal, olması gereken bir engelli spor kariyeri ile ilgili düşüncelerinizi paylaşabilir misiniz? Peki ideal bir sporda çift kariyer için neler söylersiniz? (Bu süreçte spor federasyonlarının, paralimpik komitenin bir rolü var mı sizce?)

Kurumsal düzeyde destek mekanizmaları, destek sağlayan sistemler var mı? Varsa, sizi çift kariyerli bir sporcu olarak deneyiminizi nasıl ve ne ölçüde destekleyebiliyor?

Sporda çift kariyer deneyiminizde etkili olabilecek kurumlardan/kuruluşlardan beklentileriniz neler, paylaşabilir misiniz? Sizi nasıl destekleyebilirler? Nasıl desteklemeliler?

Paralimpik oyunlar sürecine giden son yıl nasıl bir deneyiminiz oldu? Çift kariyerli bir sporcu olarak o süreçteki programınız nasıldı? Nasıl bir süreçten geçtiniz bahsedebilir misiniz? Hayatınızdaki iki farklı alandaki dengeler nasıl şekillendi? Diğer yıllarla karşılaştırmanızı istesem?

**Pandemi gibi belirsiz süreçlerde sporda çift kariyer deneyimleri**

Yaşadığımzı pandemi gibi belirsizlik yaratan ve yaşatan bir süreçte sporda çift kariyer deneyiminiz nasıl şekillendi? Eş zamanlı olarak yürüttüğünüz spor ve eğitim/iş yaşamınızda ne gibi değişiklikler oldu?

**Gelecek ile ilgili planlar- emeklilik**

Sportif kariyerinize devam edemeyecek olsanız ne hissedersiniz?

Daha önce hiç spordan emekli olmayı düşündünüz mü? Sportif kariyerinizi sonlandırmakla, emeklilikle ilgili hislerinizi, düşüncelerinizi paylaşabilir misiniz?

Sportif kariyerinizi sonlandırdıktan sonraki gelecek planlarınızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?

## D. SAMPLE DOCUMENT OF PARA SPORTS' TRANSFER OF GOVERNANCE

T.C.
GENÇLİK VE SPOR BAKANLIĞI
Spor Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü

Sayı : E-55713576-125.99-3607076 10.11.2022

Konu : Para Okçuluk Branşının Türkiye Okçuluk Federasyonuna Alt Branş Olarak Bağlanması

DAĞITIM YERLERİNE

7405 sayılı Spor Kulüpleri ve Spor Federasyonları Kanunu 45 inci maddesinin 1 inci fıkrasında "Spor dalları Bakanlık tarafından belirlenir ve teknik ve idari bakımdan spor federasyonlarına bağlanır", 1 sayılı Cumhurbaşkanlığı Teşkilatı Hakkında Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesinin 189 uncu maddesinin (j) bendi "Spor dallarının belirlenmesini tayin ve tespit etmek, spor federasyonlarının kurulmasına ve faaliyetlerinin sona erdirilmesine ilişkin iş ve işlemleri yapmak" hükümleri yer almaktadır.

İlgili Kanun ve Kararname hükümleri doğrultusunda Bakanlık Makamının 09/11/2022 tarihli ve 244 sayılı olur ile Türkiye Bedensel Engelliler Spor Federasyonu bünyesinde faaliyetlerini sürdüren Para Okçuluk branşının ayrılarak Türkiye Okçuluk Federasyonuna bağlanmasına karar verilmiştir.

Bilgilerini ve gereğini rica ederim.

Murat KOCAKAYA
Genel Müdür a.
Genel Müdür Yardımcısı V.

Dağıtım:

Türkiye Bedensel Engelliler Spor Federasyonu Başkanlığına
Türkiye Okçuluk Federasyonu Başkanlığına

Bu belge, güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.
Doğrulama Kodu: DB66D6F4-E036-4366-AD53-52A96A5DE54E Doğrulama Adresi: https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/gsb-ebys

Örnek Mahallesi Oruç Reis Caddesi No:13 Altındağ / Ankara
Telefon No: 444 0 472 Faks No: (312) 596 70 48
İnternet Adresi: www.gsb.gov.tr KEP Adresi: genclikvesporbakanligi@hs01.kep.tr
Bilgi için:Serpil TANIŞMAZ
Sportif Eğitim Uzmanı
Telefon No:(312) 596 63 73

500134431 - 45001343

## E. CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Girişmen, Gizem

### EDUCATION

| Degree | Institution | Year of Graduation |
|---|---|---|
| MS | METU Social Policy | 2017 |
| BS | Bilkent University<br>Business Administration | 2004 |
| High School | Ankara Özel Tevfik Fikret Lisesi | 2000 |

### WORK EXPERIENCE

| | |
|---|---|
| 2016- present | Sports Advisor, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Türkiye |
| March 2018 - July 2018 | Head of the Foreign Relations Department, Directorate General of Sports Services, Ministry of Youth and Sports |
| September 2016 | 2016 Rio Paralympic Games<br>Deputy Chef de Mission NPC Türkiye |
| 2014- 2022 | Member of Paralympic Games Performance Evaluation Commission (2016 Rio & 2018 PyeongChang & 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games), Ministry of Youth and Sports, Türkiye |
| August 2013 - 2016 | Programmer, Directorate of Foreign Relations<br>Ministry of Youth and Sports, Türkiye |
| July 2011 - August 2013 | Programmer, Directorate General of Vocational Services, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Türkiye |
| November 2006 - July 2011 | Programmer, Directorate General of Construction Works, Ministry of Public Works and Settlement, Türkiye |
| November 2004 - March 2005 | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<br>Intern, Public Information Unit |

**FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Advanced English, Advanced French, Basic Italian

**ARTICLES & BOOK CHAPTERS & CONFERENCE PRESENTATION**

Girişmen, G. (2025). Para Spor. in M.L. İnce (eds.), *Bütüncül Sporcu Gelişimi Antrenör El Kitabı*, (pp. 127-140). https://www.antrenorum.com/_files/ugd/b34e37_86e14d794c4f4c2091f99f543c4251b9.pdf

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Girişmen, G. (2018). Kararların Ardındaki Kuralları Bilmek. *Limitsiz Spor Dergisi*, 2(9), pp 10-11.

Girişmen, G. (2018). Sosyoekonomik Etmenler Başarıyı Nasıl Etkiler? *Limitsiz Spor Dergisi*, 2(10), pp 6-8.

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# F. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

## Giriş

Son yıllarda, sporcuları yalnızca performans odaklı rolleri ile tanımlayan yaklaşımın değişimi, onların spor dışındaki rollerinin kabul edilmesini ve yaşamlarındaki sporun ötesindeki çok boyutlu alanlara olan ilgiliyi ve araştırmaları da beraberinde getirdi. Sporda çift kariyer (ÇK) araştırmalarının gelişimi, sporcu kariyer gelişimi araştırmalarının evrimiyle yakından ilişkilidir. Sporcu kariyer araştırmalarının başlangıç odağı spordan emeklilik, spor sonrası yaşama uyum, kariyer destek programlarını incelerken, 90'lardaki gelişme aşaması sporcu kariyerini, spor alanındaki aşama ve geçişleri ile kavramsallaştırarak araştırmıştır (Stambulova vd., 2021).

Sporcu kariyer gelişimi ve geçişleri ile ilgili yapılan araştırmalar, sporcuların spor alanı dışında da, ergenlikten yetişkinliğe geçiş, değişen sosyal çevre, üniversiteye geçiş, kimlik karmaşası, finansal sorunlar, mesleki kaygılar gibi zorluklar ve çok düzeyli geçişler deneyimlediklerini belirlemiş ve bu deneyimlerin çok boyutlu bir yaklaşım ihtiyacını ortaya koyduğunu vurgulamıştır (Wylleman ve Lavalle, 2004; Wylleman vd., 2013; 2020; Stambulova ve Samuel, 2020). Dolayısıyla, spor alanındaki geçişleri izole olarak araştıran çalışmalar, sporcuların gelişim süreçlerini birbiriyle ilişkili, eş zamanlı, dinamik yapısını ortaya koyan çok düzeyli, yaşam boyu ve bütüncül bir perspektifle ele alan sporcu kariyer gelişimi çalışmalarına evrilmiştir (Stambulova vd., 2021).

Bütüncül yaşam boyu perspektifin sağladığı kavramsal değişim, sporcuların spor dışındaki rollerini ve sorumluklarını önemseyen "bütüncül birey" (Wylleman vd., 2013; Wylleman ve Rosier, 2016), farklı kariyer ve eş zamanlı uğraşları dikkate alan "bütüncül kariyer" (Wylleman vd., 2013; Stambulova vd., 2021) ve sporcuların yer

aldıkları ve geliştikleri geniş çevreye odaklanan "bütüncül çevre" (Henriksen vd., 2010; 2020) gibi çok katmanlı bir odağın benimsendiği çalışmaları teşvik etmiştir. Bu çok boyutlu odak, sporcuların spor dışındaki yaşamlarının araştırılmasına ve ÇK araştırmalarına artan ilgiyi de desteklemiştir.

İlk kez 2007 yılında Avrupa Komisyonu'nun yayımladığı Beyaz Kitap'ta yer alan çift kariyer terimi (Guidotti vd., 2015), spor ve eğitim veya spor ve iş yaşamını birlikte sürdürmeyi ifade etmektedir (Stambulova ve Wylleman, 2015). Uzun yıllar, Kuzey Amerika'da emeklilik, sporcu kimliği, kariyer geçişleri gibi konularda öğrenci-sporculara odaklanan çalışmalar, Asya, Avrupa, Avustralya gibi dünyanın farklı coğrafyalarında da araştırma konusu olmuş (Stambulova ve Ryba, 2014), Avrupa Birliği Sporcuların Çift Kariyer Kılavuzu'nun (EC, 2012) yayımlaması ile birlikte Avrupa'da araştırma gündeminde bir öncelik haline gelmiştir (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Türkiye'de de sınırlı sayıda öğrenci-sporcuların ÇK deneyimlerini ve karşılaştıkları zorlukları inceleyen araştırmalar ve ölçek uyarlama çalışmaları yapılmıştır (Semiz, 2018; Karadağ ve Aşçı, 2021; Bozyiğit vd., 2022; Koçak vd., 2023). Sporda çift kariyer alan yazını, çift kariyeri genellikle eğitimden meslek hayatına geçişin spor kariyerindeki gelişimle eş zamanlı olarak yürütüldüğü doğrusal bir yol olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır (Wylleman vd., 2020; Stambulova ve Harwood, 2022).

Araştırmalar ekseriyetle öğrenci- sporculara odaklanmıştır ve ÇK'li sporcuların çeşitliliğini yansıtmakta yetersiz kalmıştır (Stambulova ve Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova vd., 2024). Para spor bağlamı ve Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimleri de büyük ölçüde göz ardı edilmiştir (Stambulova ve Wylleman, 2019) ve sıklıkla araştırma boşluğu olarak işaret edilmiştir (Stambulova vd., 2024).

Yakın zamandaki sınırlı sayıdaki çalışma, para sporcuların deneyimledikleri ÇK zorluklarını inceleyerek (Magnanini vd., 2022; Vaquero-Cristóbal vd., 2023; Maciá-Andreu vd., 2023) onların, çakışan programlar, zaman kısıtlılıkları, ev, antrenman ve okul arasında uzun mesafeli zaman alan yolculuklar gibi alan yazında ortaya konan ortak zorlukların yanı sıra erişilebilirlik sorunları (Magnanini vd., 2022), seyahat

zorlukları (Vaquero-Cristóbal vd., 2023) ve engellilik deneyimi (Campbell, 2018) gibi farklılaşan sorunlar yaşadığını da belirlemiştir. Benzer şekilde, elit Paralimpik sporcuların emeklilik deneyimleri ile ilgili yapılan araştırmalar (Bundan vd., 2018), sınıflandırma dışı kalma, spor sakatlıklarına bağlı ikincil engel durumlarının deneyimlenmesi gibi zorunlu emekliliğe yol açan farklılaşan zorluklara dikkat çekmiştir.

Para sporda sporcu gelişim yollarını inceleyen çalışmalar (Hutzler vd., 2016; Baker vd., 2017; Dowling vd., 2018; Dehghansai vd., 2017; Patatas vd., 2018; 2020; Lemez vd., 2020; Legg et al., 2023), sporcu profillerinin çeşitliliğine, sınıflandırma, yetenek tespiti ve sporcu gelişim yolları arasındaki etkileşimsel ilişkiye, altyapı, politika öncelikleri, engelliliğin sosyal ve kültürel deneyimi gibi makro düzey faktörlerin etkisine dikkat çekerek sporcu gelişim yollarına ilişkin engelli olmayan spor alanında geliştirilen mevcut modellerin aktarılabilirliği ile ilgili endişelerini dile getirmiş ve bağlamsal özellikleri dikkate alan, para sporcuların deneyimlerinin farklılaşan yönlerini yansıtan çalışmalara gerek olduğunu vurgulamışlardır.

Ayrıca, para spordaki profesyonelleşme trendi (Radtke ve Doll-Tepper, 2014; Houlihan & Chapman, 2017), artan adanmışlık beklentilerinin sporcuları eğitim ve mesleki kariyerlerini yeniden değerlendirmeye yönlendirmesi (Dehghansai vd., 2021, Bundon, 2022), sınıflandırmayla bağlantılı olarak para spor kariyerinin kırılganlığı (Miller vd., 2024), emeklilik sonrası istihdam endişeleri (Bundon vd., 2018; Bundon, 2021), engelli bireylerin eğitim ve istihdama erişimindeki eşitsizlikler (UN, 2018) gibi deneyimler para spor bağlamında ÇK süreçlerinin nasıl şekillendiğine ilişkin araştırma ihtiyacına işaret etmektedir.

Sporda ÇK araştırmaları kapsamında ise, araştırmacılar genellikle kültürel ve bağlamsal özellikleri dikkate almadan, araştırmaya yön veren çerçevenin bağlamla uyumunu eleştirel bir şekilde değerlendirmeden hakim söylemleri benimsedikleri için eleştirilmiştir (Ryba ve Stambulova, 2013; Stambulova ve Ryba, 2014).

Tüm bu çalışmaların da ortaya koyduğu gibi para spor bağlamına özgü farklılıklar, engellilik deneyimiyle ilişkili zorlukların ÇK sürecini karmaşıklaştırdığı ve Paralimpik sporcuların, engelli olmayan akranlarına kıyasla farklılaşan zorluklarla karşılaşma potansiyelini ortaya koymuştur. Dolayısıyla, Paralimpik sporcuların ÇK deneyimlerinin arkasındaki kişisel ve sosyal süreçleri anlamanın, ÇK yollarını para sporlara özgü unsurları dikkate alarak kavramsallaştırmanın kritik önem taşıdığını göstermiştir.

**Çalışmanın Amacı**

Alan yazında para spor bağlamına özgü dinamikleri ve özellikleri yansıtan çalışmalara büyük ihtiyaç duyulduğu belirtilmekte ve bu tür çalışmalar teşvik edilmektedir (Hutzler vd., 2016; Patatas vd., 2020). Bugüne kadar Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yollarını, para spor bağlamının özelliklerini dikkate alarak araştıran bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu çalışma, alan yazındaki bu araştırma boşluğunu gidererek Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yollarını kavramsallaştırmayı ve onların ÇK deneyimlerini kuramsal olarak açıklamayı hedeflemektedir.

**Araştırma Soruları**

Bu çalışma, aşağıda yer alan araştırma sorularına yanıt aramaktadır:

Paralimpik sporcular sporda çift kariyeri nasıl deneyimlemektedir?

- Paralimpik sporcuların sporda çift kariyer yaparken deneyimledikleri süreçler nelerdir?
- Çift kariyer yolları nasıl değişiklikler göstermektedir?
- Sporda çift kariyer süreçlerini neler etkilemektedir?
- Paralimpik sporcular, sporda çift kariyer deneyimlerinde ne gibi aksiyonlar almaktadır?

## Metodoloji

### Araştırma Yöntemi ve Deseni

Bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Nitel araştırma yönteminin seçilmesinin temel gerekçesi, para spor bağlamında çift kariyer deneyimlerine ilişkin mevcut araştırmaların sınırlı olması ve konunun derinlemesine incelemenin gerekliliğidir. Katılımcıların deneyimlerini, içinde bulundukları bağlam içerisinde anlamlandırmak, para sporların dinamiklerini göz önünde bulundurarak Paralimpik sporcuların inşa ettikleri gerçeklikleri ve bağlama özgü deneyimlerini anlamak, nitel çalışma yöntemlerini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, nitel araştırma yönteminin benimsenmesi, bu çalışmanın temel amacını gerçekleştirmek için gerekli olan bağlamsal duyarlılığı ve yorumlayıcı yaklaşımı desteklemiş ve Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmada etkili bir yol sunmuştur.

Bu bağlamda, araştırma deseni olarak yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram tercih edilmiştir. Yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram, özellikle süreç, eylem ve etkileşimleri açıklamaya yönelik araştırmalarda ya da mevcut teorilerin ve modellerin çalışmanın örneklemine ilişkin yeterince geliştirilmediği, test edilmediği durumlarda uygun bir yöntem olarak öne çıkmaktadır (Creswell, 2013; 2016). Weed (2017) de sosyal süreçler ve deneyimlere ilişkin sınırlı bilgi bulunan alanlarda bu yöntemin en uygun seçenek olduğunu vurgulamıştır.

Bu yöntemin seçilmesinin nedenlerinden biri, Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerine dair bağlamsal özellikleri dikkate alan ve açıklayıcı bir kuram geliştirme imkânı sunmasıdır. Yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram deseninin süreçlere odaklı yapısı, Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer gelişimlerini ve çift kariyer deneyimlerini derinlemesine anlamaya için olanak tanımaktadır. Araştırmanın dayandığı göreli ontolojik ve yapılandırmacı epistemolojik duruş, araştırmacının da bilgi üretim sürecinde oynadığı aktif rol ve araştırma soruları ile araştırma deseni arasındaki uyum, yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram metodolojisinin bu çalışmada kullanılmasını desteklemiştir. Bu yaklaşım, araştırmacıya, sporcuların

kariyer yolculuklarında yaşadıkları temel süreçleri anlamlandırma ve açıklayıcı bir kuramsal model geliştirme fırsatı sağlamıştır.

**Katılımcılar ve Örnekleme yöntemi**

Bu çalışmada, ilk olarak Paralimpik sporculardaki çeşitliliği yansıtabilmek amacıyla bireysel ve takım sporları, cinsiyet, engel durumu, türü, seviyesi, sporculuk deneyimi gibi unsurları dikkate alan amaçlı örneklem yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Bu kapsamda, çalışmaya spor kariyerini aktif olarak sürdüren, Olimpik ve Paralimpik Sporcu Yetiştirilmesine dair Yönetmelik kapsamında yüksek performans sporcu harçlığı alan, çeşitli engel durumlarını (doğuştan, sonradan, fiziksel, görme engel) karşılayan, spor kariyerlerinin yanı sıra üniversitede okuyan ya da tam zamanlı çalışan veya hem akademik hem de iş yaşamlarını bir arada yürüten Paralimpik sporcular dahil edilmiştir.

Araştırmanın ilerleyen aşamalarında, ilk üç görüşmeden elde edilen veriler, engel seviyesinin ve engelliliğin bireysel deneyiminin etkilerinin, sporcuların kariyer planlaması ve çift kariyer yolları üzerindeki rolünü ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, çoklu kariyer yürüten sporcularla yapılan görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler, bu sporcuların çift kariyer yollarındaki deneyimlerinin farklı dinamikler oluşturduğunu göstermiştir. Bu nedenle, kuramsal örnekleme yöntemi benimsenmiş ve günlük yaşamının yanı sıra spor deneyiminde de destek ihtiyacı duyan yüksek engel grubundaki sporcular ve çoklu kariyer yürüten sporcular araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir. Bu yaklaşımla, farklı engel seviyesi ve kariyer kombinasyonlarının çift kariyer yolları üzerindeki yansımaları analiz edilebilmiştir. Yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram kapsamında, örneklem büyüklüğü, kuramsal doygunluk kavramına dayanmaktadır (Charmaz, 2006). Kuramsal doygunluk, kategoriler ve kavramlar arasındaki ilişkilerin yeterince ortaya konulduğu, kuramsal bütünlüğün sağlandığı ve yeni veri toplamanın kuramı daha geliştirmekten ziyade verimsiz hale getireceği noktayı ifade eder.

Araştırmacının para spor alanındaki uzmanlığı, kuramsal örneklemenin benimsenmesi ve katılımcılar ile birden fazla görüşme gerçekleştirilmesi, yeterli düzeyde kuramsal

doygunluğa ulaşılmasını desteklemiştir. Ayrıca, para spor federasyonlarından üç uzmanın katkısıyla örneklem planının gözden geçirilmesi ve zengin veri sağlayabilecek katılımcılara ulaşılması bu süreci kolaylaştırmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmaya spor kariyerlerinin yanı sıra üniversitede okuyan ya da tam zamanlı çalışan veya hem akademik hem de iş yaşamlarını bir arada yürüten, yüksek performans sporcu harçlığı alan, on aktif Paralimpik sporcu katılmıştır.

**Verilerin Toplanması**

Çalışmaya ilişkin etik izin (Protokol No: 0038-ODTUİAEK-2022) Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Komitesi'nden alınmıştır. Bu çalışma için gerekli veriler, sportif kariyerlerinin yanı sıra üniversitede okuyan ya da tam zamanlı çalışan veya hem akademik hem de iş yaşamlarını bir arada yürüten on aktif Paralimpik sporcuyla gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, öncelikle araştırma ile ilgili sözlü olarak bilgilendirilmiş ve görüşmeler yazılı onamları akabinde yapılmıştır.

Bu çalışmada Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yollarına odaklanılmış olsa da, bu deneyimlerin, bağlam anlaşılmadan ve yaşam öyküsü perspektifinde ele alınmadan tam anlamıyla kavranmasının mümkün olmadığı görülmüştür. Görüşme soruları, katılımcıların kişisel bilgilerinin yanı sıra sporla ilk temaslarını, spor kariyerlerinin başlangıç ve elit aşamalarını, çift kariyer süreçlerine geçişlerini, çift kariyer deneyimlerini, spor ve akademik/iş ortamlarındaki ilişkilerini, milli takıma seçilme veya Paralimpik oyunlara hazırlık dönemlerindeki deneyimlerini, emekliliğe dair düşünceleri, planları ve geleceğe dair beklentilerini kapsamlı bir şekilde araştırmayı amaçlamıştır.

**Verilerin Analizi**

Görüşmeler sırasında ses kaydı alınmış ve bu veriler yazılı olarak deşifre edilmiştir. Temellendirilmiş kuram deseninde veri toplama ve analiz aşamaları ayrı faaliyetler olmaktan ziyade birbirleri ile ilişkili süreçleri içeren, veri toplama ve analizini sürekli

karşılaştırmalı döngülerde tekrar eden, dinamik bir şekilde gerçekleştirmeyi içermektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmada veri analizi, ilk görüşmenin tamamlanmasıyla birlikte başlamış ve tüm araştırma süreci boyunca tekrar eden döngüler benimsenmiştir. Veriler toplandıkça analiz edilmiş, ardından yeni veri toplama ve analiz süreçleri bu sürekli karşılaştırma döngüleri doğrultusunda ilerlemiştir. Görüşmelerin analizi, başlangıç, odaklanılmış ve kuramsal veri kodlamaları, kuramsal notlar (memo oluşturma) ve sürekli karşılaştırmalı veri analizi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir (Charmaz, 2006). İlk aşamada, başlangıç kodlaması kapsamında veriler satır satır kodlanmıştır.

İzleyen süreçte, odaklanılmış kodlama ile başlangıç kodları daha soyut kavramlara dönüştürülmüş, kodlar arasındaki ilişkiler kurulmuş ve betimleyici bir yaklaşımdan kavramsal bir anlayışa geçilerek analitik bir kavramsallaştırma hedeflenmiştir. Veri toplama süreci ilerledikçe, yeni görüşmeler önceki verilerle karşılaştırılarak farklılıklar ve benzerlikler belirlenmiş ve teori geliştirme sürecini yönlendirmiştir. Kuramsal kodlama aracılığıyla, kavramlar arasındaki ilişkilerin belirlenmesini ve bu ilişkilerin birbirine bağlanmasını mümkün kılmıştır (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2016). Bu süreç, çift kariyer deneyimlerinde belirli koşulları kavramsallaştırmayı desteklemiştir. Örneğin, "birlikte deneyimleme" kavramı, yüksek destek gereksinimi olan sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerini sürdürebilmeleri için koordineli çabaların önemini açıklamıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların hem kendi deneyimleri hem de diğer katılımcılılarla aralarındaki farklılıklar ve benzerlikler için sürekli karşılaştırmalı veri analizi gerçekleştirilmiş ve bu karşılaştırmalar, oluşturulan kavramlar ve kavramlar arasındaki ilişkileri belirlemeyi mümkün kılmıştır.

Kodlama süreci araştırmacı tarafından yürütülmüş olsa da para spor bağlamında deneyimli iki uzman ile yapılan tartışmalar analizlerin eleştirel bir gözle incelenmesini sağlamıştır (Smith ve Sparkes, 2020). Veri toplama ve analiz süreçlerinde, temellendirilmiş kuram metodolojisinin önemli bir unsuru olan kuramsal duyarlılık dikkate alınmış, sporda çift kariyer alan yazını bu farkındalık çerçevesinde geliştirilen kavramların önceden belirlenmiş bir çerçeve tarafından etkilenmesini önleyecek şekilde ele alınmıştır.

## Güvenilirlik

Bu çalışmanın güvenilirliğinin sağlanması amacı ile önceden belirlenmiş sabit kriterler odağında bir yaklaşım yerine bu çalışmaya özgü özelliklerin değerlendirildiği, çalışmanın amacı ve benimsediği paradigmayı dikkate alan, bunlarla uyumlu olan yöntem odaklı, göreli bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir (Burke, 2016; Smith ve Sparkes, 2020). Bu kapsamda, Weed'in (2009, p. 505) temellendirilmiş kuram çalışmaları için önermiş olduğu mikro ve makro düzey değerlendirme unsurları göz ününde bulundurulmuştur. Ayrıca, Charmaz'ın (2006) yapılandırmacı temellendirilmiş kuram için önermiş olduğu inandırıcılık, özgünlük, yankılanma ve kullanışlılık unsurları dikkate alınmıştır. Dolayısıyla, çalışmanın inandırıcılığı kapsamında, Paralimpik sporcuların çeşitliliğini yansıtan örnekleme ve ilerleyen aşamada veri toplamaya yön veren kuramsal örnekleme ile derinleşen yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Sporda çift kariyer alanındaki önemli bir araştırma boşluğunu giderme çabasının ve "birlikte deneyimlemek" gibi yeni geliştirilen kuramsal kavramların özgünlük unsurunu, verilerin analizi, yorumlanması ve kuram geliştirme sürecinde para spor alanında uzman eleştirel arkadaşlarla yapılan görüşmeler ve onların eleştirel bakışı ile desteklenen sürecin yankılanma unsurunu, araştırmanın kavramsal çerçeveyi genişleten, çeşitlilik içeren deneyimleri yansıtan ve alana açılım getirecek katkısının kullanışlılık unsurunu karşılaması amaçlanmıştır.

## Bulgular ve Tartışma

Bu bölümde, katılımcıların deneyimlerinden elde edilen bulgular, çalışmaya rehberlik eden araştırma sorularını cevaplamaya yönelik olarak sunulmuş ve alan yazındaki araştırmalar ışığında değerlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca, çalışmanın kısıtlılıklarına, gelecek çalışmalar için önerilere, kuramsal ve politika çıkarımlarına ilişkin değerlendirmelere de yer verilmiştir.

**Paralimpik Sporcuların Sporda Çift Kariyer Deneyimleri**

Alan yazında sporda çift kariyer (ÇK), eğitimden meslek hayatına geçişin spor kariyerindeki gelişimle eş zamanlı olarak yürütüldüğü doğrusal bir yol olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır (Wylleman vd., 2020). Ancak bu çalışma, Paralimpik sporcuların deneyimlerinin hem doğrusal hem de kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan özellikler taşıdığını ve Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer yollarının, alan yazında hakim olan tipik ÇK kavramsallaştırılmasından farklılıklar gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur.

Bazı Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer yolları, eğitim hayatı ile eş zamanlı gelişen spor kariyeri ve izleyen süreçte istihdama geçiş ile spor ve iş yaşamının birlikte yürütüldüğü görece normatif ve doğrusal bir yol izlerken, diğer Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer yolları giriş, çıkış ve yeniden giriş deneyimleriyle kesintili kariyer örüntülerini ortaya koymuştur. Çift kariyer yolundaki giriş, çıkış ve yeniden giriş örüntüleri, geçici ara verme dönemlerinin yanı sıra sporcuların eğitim veya iş kariyerlerini bırakıp izleyen süreçte farklı kariyer kombinasyonlarıyla yeni çift kariyer deneyimi inşa etmelerini içermektedir.

Para spordaki sporcu gelişim yollarındaki süreçler, sporcuların engelliliğin yanı sıra para sporları nasıl deneyimledikleri ve bu deneyimlerle ilişkili stres yaratan ve kolaylaştırıcı etkide bulunan unsurlar, Paralimpik sporcuların sporda çift kariyer deneyimlerini engelli olmayan akranlarının deneyimine göre farklılaştıran en önemli unsurlar olarak belirlenmiştir. Erişilebilirlik sorunları, para sporda sınıflandırma süreçleri ve ayrımcı uygulamalar, içselleştirilmiş sağlamcılık, engelliliğin bireysel deneyimi, sporcuların eğitim, spor ve mesleki kariyerlerini şekillendirme sürecinde önemli rol oynamıştır.

Sporda ciddi bir sakatlık deneyiminin akabinde engelli olmayan spor alanından para sporlara geçiş yaparak çift kariyer deneyiminde psikolojik ve fiziksel adaptasyon ve dönüşüm süreçlerinden geçmesi, Paralimpik sporcuların farklılaşan deneyimleri arasındadır. Benzer şekilde, destek ağına bağımlılık, ağır engelli sporcular için ÇK süreçlerini daha karmaşık hale getirmiş ve destek sağlayıcılarını ÇK deneyiminin

ayrılmaz bir parçasına dönüştürerek "birlikte yapılandırma" ve "birlikte deneyimleme" süreçlerini ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimine ilişkin bir diğer farklılaşan özellik, eğitim hayatından mesleki kariyere doğru gelişen süreçleri kavramsallaştıran tipik çift kariyer deneyiminin aksine mevcut çift kariyer deneyimlerine zaman zaman üçüncü bir kariyeri daha ekleyen çoklu kariyer sahibi Paralimpik sporcular ile çeşitlenen sporcu profilidir. Çoklu kariyere sahip paralimpik sporcular arasında, üniversite eğitimi ile para spor kariyerlerini birlikte sürdürürken mesleki kariyer yolculuklarını başlatan öğrenci sporcular veya daha önce bırakmış oldukları akademik kariyeri farklı bir bölümde yeniden başlatan çalışan sporcular yer almıştır. Dolayısıyla, spor kariyerlerini, akademik veya mesleki kariyerleri ile birleştiren öğrenci-sporcular veya çalışan-sporcular ve bunların ötesinde eş zamanlı üç kariyeri bir arada yürüten çoklu kariyer yollarını takip eden sporcuları da içeren farklı Paralimpik sporcu profilleri belirlenmiştir.

Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer gelişim süreçleri, erken ve geç kariyer inşa tarzlarını göstermiştir. Erken kariyer inşa tarzına sahip Paralimpik sporcular, genellikle lise yıllarında çift kariyer yolculuklarına başlamışlardır. Bu sporcular, alan yazındaki hakim ÇK kavramsallaştırması ile benzerlik gösteren deneyimleri ile eğitim ve spor kariyerlerini eş zamanlı olarak sürdürmüş ve doğrusal bir kariyer yolunu takip etmiştir. Sağlık sorunları veya çakışan sorumluluklar nedeniyle çift kariyer yolunda giriş, çıkış, yeniden giriş süreçleri yaşamış olsalar da bu sporcular kariyer yollarını koruyarak geçici ara verme evrelerinin ardından aynı kariyer kombinasyonları ile çift kariyer deneyimlerine devam etmişlerdir.

Geç kariyer inşa tarzına sahip sporcular, giriş-çıkış döngüleri yaşamış ve bu durum mevcut çift kariyer yollarını değiştirmiştir. Bu sporcular, çift kariyer deneyimlerinde eğitim veya mesleki kariyerlerinden ayrılarak çift kariyer yollarına farklı kombinasyonlarla geri dönmüştür. Örneğin, çift kariyer yoluna iş yaşamı ile sporu bir arada yürüterek başlayan bir sporcu, iş yerindeki erişilebilirlik sorunları ve geçirmiş olduğu kaza sonrası önceden sürdürmekte olduğu sabahlayarak çalışma rutinini

zorlaştıran engelliliğin bireysel deneyimi nedeniyle mesleki kariyerini bırakmış ve izleyen süreçte eğitim kariyerini başlatarak çalışan sporcu olarak başladığı çift kariyer yoluna öğrenci sporcu olarak devam etmiştir. Benzer şekilde sonradan engelli olan sporcular, geçmiş spor tecrübesi eksikliklerine rağmen hızlıca yüksek performans yoluna geçiş yaparak görece geç bir spor kariyeri oluşturmuştur. Para spordaki gelişim yolları, bu sporcuların geç spor kariyeri inşasını desteklemiştir. Geç kariyer inşa tarzı, yalnızca spor kariyerini değil, aynı zamanda akademik kariyeri de kapsamıştır. Çakışan sorumluluklar veya içselleştirilmiş önyargılarla geciktirdikleri ya da yarıda bıraktıkları eğitim hayatlarına, farklı alanlarda, bölümlerde yeniden başlayan Paralimpik sporcular geç kariyer inşa etme deneyimini akademik alanda da deneyimlemişlerdir.

Kariyer gelişimi ve deneyimindeki bu çeşitlilik ve hem sporda hem de eğitimde geç kariyer inşa etme stilleri, alan yazında hakim olan ÇK kavramsallaştırmasından farklılaşan deneyimleri açığa çıkarmış ve Paralimpik sporcuların dinamik ve çok boyutlu kariyer gelişim süreçlerinin sadece yaşa dayalı, normatif ve ardışık ilerleyen kavramsallaştırma ile yeterince açıklanmayacağını ortaya koymuştur.

Paralimpik sporcuların farklı yaşlarda ve gelişim seviyelerinde bireysel yollar içeren kariyer gelişimine ilişkin deneyimlerinin karmaşıklığı göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu süreçlerinin hem doğrusal hem de kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan özelliklerini ortaya koyan evre odaklı bir model, çift ve çoklu kariyerlerini sürdüren Paralimpik sporcuların çeşitliliğini daha iyi yansıtmıştır. Bu sebeple, Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarını gösteren evre odaklı bir kavramsallaştırma, engellilik deneyimiyle daha da karmaşık hale gelen kariyer deneyimlerinin bağlamsal özelliklerini ve dinamiklerini yansıtmaya ve doğrusal olduğu kadar kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan özelliklerini de ortaya koymaya imkan sağlamıştır.

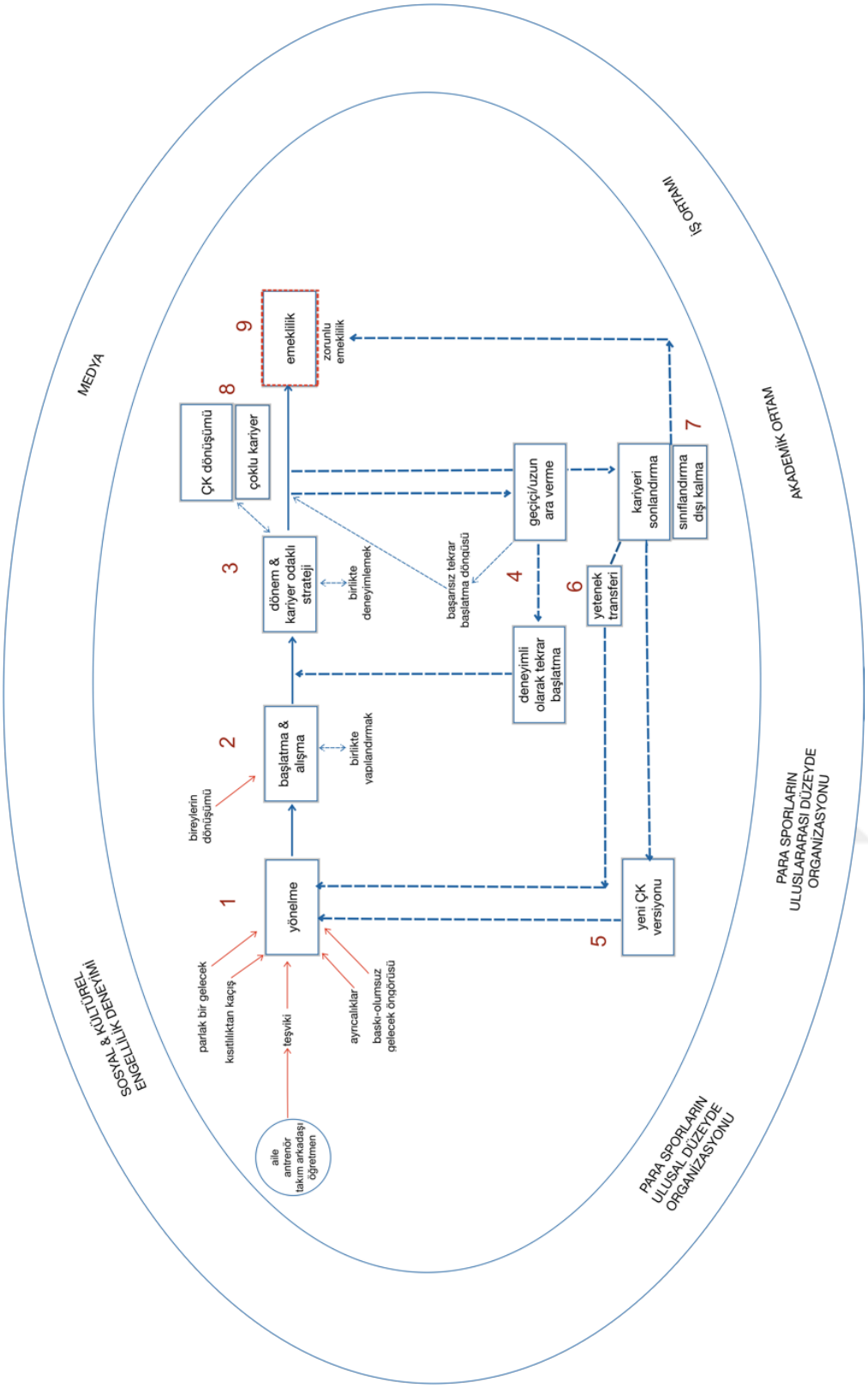
**Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli**

Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli, sporcular tarafından deneyimlenen bireysel süreçlerin yanı sıra sosyal, çevresel ve bağlamsal

faktörlerin etkileşimini de dikkate alarak, daha kapsayıcı bir perspektif sunmayı amaçlamıştır. Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer yolları ve ilişkili süreçler, sporcuların ÇK öncesi aşamadan emekliliğe kadar geçen süreçte deneyimledikleri farklı ve birbiriyle ilişkili evreleri ortaya koyarak bağlamda konumlandırarak kavramsallaştırılmaktadır. Model, tüm çift ve çoklu kariyerli Paralimpik sporcuların ortak deneyimlediği yönelme, başlatma ve alışma, dönem ve kariyer odaklı strateji ve emeklilik gibi evrelerin yanı sıra geçici/uzun ara verme, başarısız tekrar başlatma döngüsü, deneyimli olarak yeniden başlama, çift kariyer dönüşümü, kariyeri bırakma ve yeni çift kariyer deneyimi veya yetenek transferi ya da zorunlu emeklilik gibi deneyimlenmesi olası evreleri de içermektedir. Dolayısıyla, kesintili kariyer yollarına olanak sağlayan ve yeniden başlama süreçlerini yansıtan evreleri de kapsamaktadır.

Modelin iç katmanı, sporcuların sosyal ilişkilerine, aksiyonlarına ve kariyer deneyimlerine ışık tutarken, dış katman, sosyal yapı ve makro çevreyi temsil ederek çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarını etkileyen unsurları tanımlamaktadır. Görselde yer alan kesikli olarak gösterilen oklar, Paralimpik sporcuların deneyimlemesi olası evrelere işaret etmektedir.

Paralimpik sporcuların deneyimleri ile şekillenen modeli, çift kariyere yönelme gerekçelerini, sosyal, yapısal dinamikleri ve bağlamı daha iyi anlamak için sporcuların çift kariyer yolculuklarından önceki deneyimlerin anlaşılması önemli bir unsur olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Paralimpik sporcular, eğitim ve gündelik hayatlarında sıklıkla dışlanma deneyimi, ayrımcı tutumlar, alay edilme, istenmeyen sıra arkadaşı olma, akran zorbalığı, öğretmenler tarafından yok sayılma, ihtiyaçlarının göz ardı edilmesi, erişilebilirlik gibi zorlayıcı ve eşit fırsatlara erişimi kısıtlayan deneyimlerle karşılaşmıştır. Bu deneyimlerle ilişkili olarak yeni okul arayışı, eğitim hayatını sürdürebilmek için şehir değiştirme gibi kendi inisiyatifleriyle şekillenen çözüm üretme süreçlerine girişmişlerdir. Yönelme evresinden emeklilik evresine kadar Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer deneyimleri, bireysel, sosyal ve çevresel faktörlerin karmaşık bir etkileşimini yansıtmaktadır.




**Şekil 1**

*Paralimpik Sporcuların Kariyer Gelişim Yollarında Deneyimledikleri Farklı Evreleri Görselleştiren Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli*

**Yönelme Evresi: Fırsatların Çeşitlendirilmesi**

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer (ÇK) yolculukları, yönelme evresi ile başlamaktadır. Bu evre, sporcuların çift kariyer yolculuğuna yönelmesini teşvik eden sosyal ilişkiler ve çok boyutlu yönelme gerekçelerinin bir araya geldiği aşamadır. Aileler, antrenörler, beden eğitimi öğretmenleri ve takım arkadaşları gibi önemli sosyal aktörler, sporcuların çift kariyer yolculuklarına başlamalarında kritik roller oynamıştır.

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yoluna yönelmeleri dört farklı yönelme gerekçesi ile kavramsallaştırılmıştır: 1- Parlak bir gelecek için ÇK'ye yönelme- geleceğe ilişkin olumlu beklentiler (spor kariyeri ile gelir elde etme, sosyal ağları genişletme, hareketlilik ve sosyalleşme fırsatları), 2- Kısıtlılıktan kaçış için ÇK'ye yönelme- şimdiki zamandaki olumsuz deneyimler (monoton, kısıtlı hayat deneyimleri, beden eğitimi derslerinden dışlanma, erişilebilirlik sorunları, engelliliğin bireysel deneyimi, görme yetisini yavaş yavaş kaybetme sürecinde spor deneyimi ile farklı bir odak edinme), 3- Ayrıcalıklar sayesinde ÇK'ye yönelme- şimdiki zamandaki mevcut olanaklar (engelli bireyler için eğitim ve istihdam fırsatlarını kolaylaştıran düzenlemeler, Engelli Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı (E-KPSS) gibi kolaylaştırıcılar ve başarı elde eden sporculara sağlanan yükseköğretime giriş kolaylıkları, sınıflandırma ve ihtiyaç duyulan spor sınıfı profili), 4- Baskı ve olumsuz gelecek öngörüsü ile ÇK'ye yönelme- geleceğe ilişkin olumsuz beklentiler, riskler (sakatlık riski, ailelerin güvenli bir gelecek için ısrar ve beklentileri, spor kariyerinin bir gün sona ereceği bilinci, gelir çeşitliliği ve sürdürülebilirliğini sağlama isteği). Bu çok boyutlu ve birbirleriyle etkileşim içerisindeki yönelme gerekçeleri, katılımcıları sporda çift kariyer yoluna yönelmeye itmiştir.

Sporda çift kariyer sahibi Paralimpik sporcu olma süreci, hem bireysel inisiyatifle-planlı olarak hem de dışsal teşvik ve önemli sosyal aktörlerin desteği ile önceden planlamaksızın gerçekleşen pratikleri içermektedir. Özellikle, antrenörler ve aileler hem Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerinin başlangıcını hem de sporda çift kariyer yolları sırasındaki deneyimlerini etkileyen en etkili sosyal aktörler olarak

belirlenmiştir. Yönelme evresi, Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yolculuğuna başlamalarında sosyal ilişkiler, fırsatlar, kısıtlılıklar ve bireysel motivasyonların nasıl etkileşim içerisinde bir arada çalıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu evre, sporcuların bireysel çabalarının yanı sıra çevrelerinden aldıkları destek ve onların teşvik edici çabalarıyla kariyer planlamalarını şekillendirdiklerini de göstermektedir.

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yoluna yönelme gerekçeleri, alan yazında belirtilen geleceği güvence altına alma, sosyal ağları genişletme ve istihdam edilebilirliği artırma (Defruyt vd., 2020) gibi unsurların yanı sıra engellilik deneyimi ve para spordaki gelişim yollarıyla ilişkili farklılıkları da içermektedir. Çalışmada yer alan bir Paralimpik sporcunun geçirmiş olduğu kaza sonrası engelliliği iki uçta konumlandıran paylaşımı ve yaşamını yeniden inşa etmek, başkalarına ilham vermek amacıyla spor kariyerine yöneldiğini ifade etmesi, Bundon'un (2019) sonradan engelli olan bireylerin spor yoluyla kimliklerini yeniden kazanma sürecini vurgulayan çalışmasıyla paralellik göstermektedir.

Engelli bireylere yönelik sosyal politikaların ve milli sporcuların eğitim ve istihdam olanaklarını kolaylaştıran yüksek öğrenimde ayrılan kontenjanlar, daha düşük baraj puanları, milli sporcu bursu gibi kurumsal desteklerin, çift kariyer yolunu başlatmada hem engellilik durumu hem de başarılı sporcu profiline bağlı çift katmanlı bir kolaylaştırıcı rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Paralimpik sporcuların söz konusu kolaylaştırıcı kaynaklara başvurabilmeleri ve etkin şekilde kullanabilmeleri için mevcut sosyal politikalar ve kolaylaştırıcı uygulamalar hakkında bilgi sahibi olmalarının önemi belirlenmiştir.

**Başlatma ve Alışma Evresi: Çift Kariyerli Sporculuğa Geçiş**

Yönelme evresinin ardından Paralimpik sporcular, çift kariyer yolunda başlatma ve alışma evrelerini deneyimlemiştir. Bu evreler birbirinden bağımsız olmaktan ziyade, birbirine bağlı ve kesişen süreçler olarak şekillenmiştir. Sporcular, bu süreçte çevrelerini, beklentileri ve sorumlulukları öğrenip adapte olmuş, spor kariyerlerinin

yanı sıra akademik ve mesleki kariyerlerini birlikte deneyimleme sürecine uyum sağlamışlardır.

Çoğu sporcu, başlangıçta yüksek performans düzeyini hedeflememiş ve elit düzeye geçişi planlamamış olsa da spor deneyimleri hızlı bir gelişim süreciyle değişmiş ve milli takıma seçilme ile spora katılım bir kariyere dönüştürmüştür. Bu hızlı gelişim, sporcuların yeni bir ortamda, farklı paydaşlardan gelen beklentilere adapte olmalarını, ortamdaki dinamikleri öğrenmelerini gerekli kılmıştır. Bu değişim, sporcuların yalnızca spora ilişkin performanslarını değil, aynı zamanda yeni bir kariyer rutini ve paydaşların beklentilerini yönetme becerilerini de geliştirmelerini gerektirmiştir. Sık ve uzun süren milli takım kamplarına katılım, üniversiteye geçişle birlikte, sporcuların derslere devam gibi akademik yükümlülükleri yerine getirmesini zorlaştırmış ve sorumluluk alarak programlarını yönetmelerini, haklarını öğrenerek mevzuatın tanıdığı esneklikler konusunda ilgililerle ve hocalarıyla iletişime geçerek alternatif çözümler bulmaya yöneltmiştir.

Başlatma ve alışma evresi, sporcular için bağımsızlık kazandıkları ve engelli kimliklerini benimsedikleri bir dönüşüm sürecini de vurgulamaktadır. Profesyonel bir tekerlekli basketbol takımına transfer olma sürecinde şehir değiştirme ile bağımsız yaşam deneyimi, özgüven ve yetkinliğin gelişimi, "normal" basketboldan tekerlekli sandalye basketboluna geçişle birlikte deneyimlenen psikolojik ve fiziksel adaptasyon, milli takımda beklenen ve istenen sporcu profilini öğrenme ve değişim, hastane sandalyesinden aktif bir tekerlekli sandalyeye geçişle birlikte engelli kimliğinin sahiplenilmesi, sporcuların yaşadığı bireysel dönüşüme ve çok boyutlu adaptasyon sürecine işaret etmektedir.

Bu evre, aynı zamanda günlük yaşamda ve yarışmalarda destek ihtiyacında olan yüksek engel grubundaki sporcuların destek ağlarıyla birlikte ortak bir adaptasyon ve öğrenme sürecini de ortaya koymuştur. Bu durum, sporcular ve destek ağlarının birlikte yeni rutinleri keşfetmelerini ve adaptasyon sürecini ortaklaşa yönetmelerini gerektirmiştir. Aile, antrenör ve kılavuz atleti içeren destek ağı, "mini çift kariyer ekibi" oluşturmuş, sporcuların çift kariyer yolunu yapılandırma ve adaptasyon

sürecinde birlikte iş birliği içerisinde hareket etmiş, kararlar almış, mobilize olmuş ve gerekli fedakârlıkları yapmıştır. Sporcunun annesinin, babasının milli takım kamplarında refakatçi, kardeşin partner sporcu rolünü üstlenmesi ya da kılavuz atletinin sporcu ile birlikte başka bir şehre eğitim için gitmesi deneyimlerini de ortaya koyan bu süreç, birlikte yapılandırma kavramı ile destek ağını çift kariyer deneyimin ayrılmaz bir parçasına dönüştürmüştür. Bu evrede bireylerin dönüşümü ve "birlikte yapılandırma" süreçleri iç içe geçmiş; sporcular ve destek ağları birlikte öğrenip uyum sağlayarak ÇK deneyimini sürdürülebilir hale getirmiştir.

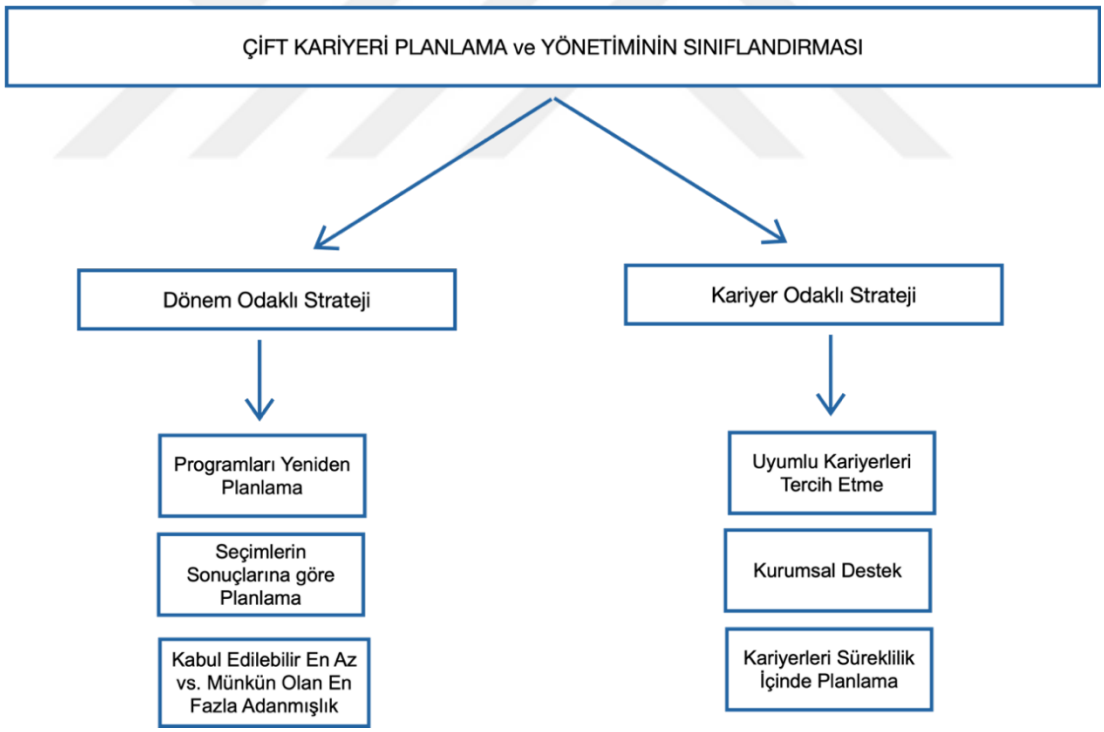
Çift kariyer yolları ve kariyer geçişleri ile ilgili yapılmış araştırmalar (Stambulova ve ark., 2024), sporcuların kariyerlerini inşa ederken aktif ajanlar olarak rol aldıklarını ve çift kariyer yollarının, sporcuların spor ve akademik kariyerleriyle ilişkili değerlendirmelerine, tercihlerine bağlı olduğunu belirtmiştir. Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yolları kısmen bu tespitle örtüşse de, günlük yaşamlarında ve yarışmalarda destek ihtiyacında olan yüksek engel grubundaki sporcular için çift kariyer sürecinin inşası ve deneyimlenmesi destek ağıyla birlikte karar alma, ortak hareket etme pratiklerini gerektirmiştir.

Öz-belirleme kuramına (Ryan ve Deci, 2020) göre, bireyin kendi eylemleri üzerinde özerklik ve kontrol hissi, içsel motivasyonun gelişimini kolaylaştıran temel bir psikolojik ihtiyaçtır. Ancak çift kariyer yolunun destek ağıyla birlikte inşa edilmesi süreci, sporcuların kariyer inşası üzerindeki özerkliklerinin ve kontrolünün istemeden de olsa azalması riskini taşımaktadır. Bu durum, karar alma özerkliğinin etkilenmesi ile sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerine ilişkin motivasyonlarının olumsuz olarak etkilenmesi potansiyelini de taşımaktadır. Birlikte yapılandırma ve deneyimleme süreçlerinde, kariyerlere ilişkin kararların destek ağında yer alan bireyler (refakatçi, kılavuz atlet, antrenörler) tarafından empoze edilmesini önlemek için destek ağının Paralimpik sporcularının karar alma özerkliğine saygı göstermeleri ve müdahaleci olmadan yeterli desteği sağlamaları büyük önem taşımaktadır. Böylece, gerekli destek ile özerklik arasındaki denge korunarak, sporcuların kariyer süreçlerinde aktif rol üstlenmeleri desteklenmiş olacak ve motivasyonlarının sürdürülebilir hale getirilebileceği düşünülmektedir.

**Dönem ve Kariyer Odaklı Strateji Evresi**

Başlatma ve alışma evresinin ardından, Paralimpik sporcular ÇK deneyimlerinde dönem ve kariyer odağında strateji evresine geçmiş ve kariyerleri ile ilişkili kritik dönemler hakkında farkındalık geliştirmişlerdir. Paralimpik Oyunlar öncesi hazırlık döneminin spora dair artan talepleri, beklentileri deneyimlemek, üniversiteye geçiş sürecinde artan akademik sorumlukları dengelemek, antrenör, aile gibi önemli sosyal aktörlerin değişen beklenti ve desteğini deneyimlemek, farklı dönemlerin değişen adanmışlık beklentileri ve sorumluluklar içerdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu durum, ÇK Paralimpik sporcularının dönemsel öncelikleri göz önünde bulundurmasını ve çift kariyerlerini yönetebilmek için değişken odağı benimsemelerini gerektirmiştir.

Bu evrede, Paralimpik sporcular, ÇK yollarını planlamak, sürdürmek ve yönetmek için dönem ve kariyer odaklı stratejik yaklaşımlar benimsemişlerdir.




**Şekil 2**

*Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift Kariyeri Planlama ve Yönetimin Sınıflandırması Kapsamında Dönem ve Kariyer Odaklı Strateji Pratikleri*

Dönem odaklı stratejik yaklaşım kapsamında, Paralimpik sporcular dönemsel önceliklerine göre programlarını ve günlük rutinlerini yeniden planlamış, seçimleri ile ilişkili riskleri değerlendirmiş, planlarında gerekli değişiklikleri yapmayı benimsemişlerdir. Paralimpik Oyunlar hazırlık sürecinin üniversiteye geçiş gibi kritik bir dönemle çakışması, her iki kariyerde de artan talepler, sporcuların günlük rutinlerini yeniden düzenlemelerini ve dönemsel önceliklerini değerlendirmeyi zorunlu kılmıştır. Örneğin yaklaşan Paris 2024 Paralimpik Oyunlar süreci, yurtdışında yüksek öğrenim planları yapan bir Paralimpik sporcuyu, yeni bir ülkeye, kültüre, dile, okula ve antrenöre alışma sürecini, sportif performans kaygıları ile birlikte değerlendirmesi sonucunda kararlarını tekrar gözden geçirmeye yöneltmiş, yüksek öğrenimini Türkiye'deki bir üniversitede deneyimleme ve kendi antrenörü gözetiminde hazırlıklarını sürdürme kararına itmiştir. Benzer şekilde, kariyerin ilgili dönem içerisindeki önemi, spor, akademik veya iş alanındaki paydaşların ÇK Paralimpik sporcuları nasıl gördükleri, onlardan beklentileri, sporcuların kariyerleriyle ilgili başa çıkma stratejilerini belirlemiş ve iki ana stratejik pratiği göstermiştir: 'En Az Kabul Edilebilir ya da Mümkün Olan En Fazla Adanmışlık'.

En az kabul edilebilir adanmışlık stratejisinde, Paralimpik sporcular, spor dışındaki kariyerlerini gereken kabul edilebilir asgari çabayı göstererek sürdürmüşlerdir. Örneğin, bir akademik personelin "Sadece şampiyon ol gel, bizim için yeterli" gibi beklentiler dile getirmesi, sporcuların akademik gereklilikleri, sorumluluklarını en düşük düzeyde karşılamasına yol açmıştır. Akademik veya mesleki yaşamlarıyla ilişkili talep ve beklentiler yüksek olduğunda, Paralimpik sporcular mümkün olan en fazla adanmışlık stratejisini benimsemiş ve spor dışındaki kariyerlerinde mümkün olan maksimum çabayı göstererek eksikliklerini telafi etmeye çalışmıştır. Örneğin, sporcular, milli takım kampları nedeniyle akademik veya iş yerindeki devamsızlıklarını telafi etmek için üstün performans göstermeye ve ekstra çaba sarf etmeye çalışmıştır.

Kariyer odaklı stratejiler kapsamında, sporcular uzun vadeli kariyer hedeflerini ve mevcut kolaylaştırıcı destekleri göz önünde bulundurarak kariyerlerini süreklilik içinde planlamışlardır. Sporcular kariyerlerini planlarken ve yönetirken, sporla ilişkili

alanlarda eğitim almayı veya çalışmayı mantıklı ve anlamlı bir tercih olarak niteleyerek akademik veya mesleki kariyerlerini sporla uyumlu alanlarda sürdürmeyi tercih etmişlerdir. Bazı paralimpik sporcular, spor dışındaki alanlarda yetkinlikleri ve yapabilirlikleri konusunda endişelerini dile getirmiş ve Paralimpik sporcu olarak spor bilimleri alanında eğitim almanın veya sporla ilişkili bir kurumda çalışmanın daha yönetilebilir olacağı, esneklik ve anlayış sağlayacağına ilişkin beklentileriyle kariyerlerini şekillendirmiştir. Ayrıca, ÇK Paralimpik sporcularının spor sonrası kariyer ve spora dair uzmanlıklarından faydalanma konusundaki gelecek planları, sporla ilgili alanlara odaklanan kariyer kararlarını yönlendirmede etkili olmuştur.

Kariyerlerini planlama ve yönetme süreçlerinde milli sporculara yüksek öğrenimde ayrılan kontenjanlar, daha düşük baraj puanları, milli sporcu bursu ya da başarılı milli sporculara yönelik istihdam olanakları gibi mevcut kurumsal destekler kolaylaştırıcı rol oynarken, bir Paralimpik sporcunun deneyimlemiş olduğu örnekte olduğu gibi beden eğitimi ve spor öğretmenliği bölümüne kayıt olmasını engelleyen ayrımcı uygulamalar da kariyer tercihlerini zorunlu olarak şekillendirmiş ve sporcuları kısıtlanmamış seçeneklere yönlendirmiştir.

Paralimpik sporcular, spor kariyeriyle ilişkili riskler ve sporun ömür boyu sürecek bir kariyer olmadığının bilincinde olarak kariyerlerini süreklilik içinde planlamış ve uzun vadeli bir perspektifle yaklaşmışlardır. Paralimpik sporcuların akademik ve mesleki kariyerlerin daha esnek ve yaş unsurundan etkilenmeyen kariyerler olduğuna ilişkin paylaşımları, birçoğunu akademik ya da mesleki kariyer hedeflerini erteleyerek spor kariyerlerine öncelik verme stratejisine yönelmiştir.

Bu evre, Paralimpik sporcuların dönemsel ve kariyer odaklı stratejik yaklaşımlar benimseyerek ÇK deneyimlerini sürdürebilmek için gösterdikleri bireysel çaba ve pratikler kadar özellikle yüksek engel grubundaki Paralimpik sporcuların destek ağlarıyla iş birliği içerisinde "birlikte deneyimleme" sürecini de ortaya koymuştur. Destek ağına bağımlılık, ağır engelli sporcular için ÇK süreçlerini daha da karmaşık hale getirmiş ve destek sağlayıcılarını ÇK deneyiminin ayrılmaz bir parçasına dönüştürerek ortak bir çaba içinde hareket etmelerini, birlikte karar alma süreçlerini

deneyimlemelerini, zorlukları birlikte aşmayı gerektirmiştir. Bu nedenle spor, akademik, mesleki yaşamlarında deneyimledikleri taleplere, zorluklara ek olarak destek ağının koordinasyon içinde hareket etmesini sağlamak da ÇK deneyimine dikkate alınması gereken ek bir boyut getirmiştir.

Giderek görme yetisini kaybeden bir Paralimpik sporcunun hem günlük yaşamında hem de spor kariyerini sürdürmek için daha fazla desteğe ihtiyaç duyması, antrenmanlarına giderken, seyahatlerinde refakatçi ihtiyacı, eşinin bu desteği sağlayabilmek için iş programını antrenman takvimine uyacak şekilde düzenlemesini gerektirmiş ve onu ÇK sürecinin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Benzer şekilde başka bir sporcu, uzun süren sık milli takım kamplarında annesinin refakatçi olarak eşlik etmesiyle katılabilmiş ve spor kariyerini sürdürmesi için birlikte fedakarlık yapma deneyimini yaşamıştır. Görme engelli başka bir Paralimpik sporcu, kılavuz atletiyle birlikte yalnızca sahada performans için değil yaşamının diğer boyutlarında birlikte deneyimleme dinamiğini yaşamış ve eğitim kariyeri için başka bir şehre taşınma sürecinde birlikte hareket etmişlerdir. Paralimpik sporcuların paylaştığı bu deneyimler, "birlikte deneyimle" kavramının örnekleri olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır.

Öncelikler ve kariyerlerin müzakeresi, döngüsel talepleri dikkate alma, dönem ve kariyer odaklı yaklaşımları benimseme ve çift kariyer deneyimini destek ağıyla "birlikte deneyimleme" bu evrenin öne çıkan özellikleri olarak belirlenmiştir.

**Geçici / Uzun Ara Verme Evresi**

Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarında, ortak evrelerin yanı sıra deneyimlenmesi olası evreler de kavramsallaştırılmıştır. Bu evreler arasında geçici/uzun ara verme, başarısız tekrar başlatma döngüsü ve deneyimli olarak yeniden başlama evresi bulunmaktadır.

Paralimpik sporcular, çift kariyer yollarına geçici veya uzun süreli ara verme deneyimini, çakışan sorumluluklar sebebiyle bir kariyeri önceleme veya erteleme kararı, hamileliği planlama gibi planlı ya da sakatlık, sağlık sorunları, takıma

seçilememe, ailevi sorunlar gibi zorunlu nedenlerle yaşamışlardır. Bu ara verme süreçlerini bazen bir, bazen de birden fazla kez deneyimlemişlerdir. Sporcular, çift kariyer deneyimlerine geri dönmek üzerine bir kariyere ara verme veya erteleme kararı almış, dolayısıyla çift kariyer yoluna ara vermişlerdir.

Geçici ara verme evresi, kariyeri bırakma deneyiminin farklı bir kariyer kombinasyonuyla yeniden başlaması deneyiminin aksine çift kariyer deneyiminin aynı kariyer kombinasyonuyla devam etmesi planlarını içermiştir.

**Başarısız Tekrar Başlatma Döngüsü**

Çift kariyer yolunu yeniden başlatmaya çalışan bazı Paralimpik sporcular, başarısız tekrar başlatma döngüleri yaşamıştır. Bu süreç, sporcuların önceki kariyer yollarına geri dönmekte zorluklarla karşılaştığı ve geçici ara verme süresinin uzadığı durumları ortaya koymuştur. Paralimpik sporcuların kariyerlerini yeniden başlatmalarını teşvik eden para sporda sistematik gelişim yollarının eksikliği, bu süreci zorlaştırmıştır. Ayrıca, milli takım seçmelerinde bazı antrenörlerin kendi spor kulüplerindeki sporcuları tercih etmesi gibi yaklaşımlar, Paralimpik sporcuların, spor deneyimini ve dolaysıyla çift kariyer yolunu yeniden başlatma çabalarını olumsuz etkilemiştir.

**Deneyimli Olarak Yeniden Başlama Evresi**

Geçici ara verme evresinin ardından bazı sporcular, kariyer yollarını kendi inisiyatifleri ile ya da antrenörlerin teşviki ile yeniden başlatmıştır. Bu süreçte, henüz tamamlanmamış hedefler için geri dönüş, kariyer hedeflerine yönelik motivasyon, aile desteği ve Paralimpik Oyunlara hazırlık süreci gibi önemli dönemlerin sporcuların çift kariyer yolunu tekrar başlatmalarına yönelik hareketlenmelerinde önemli rol oynamıştır. Ayrıca, antrenörler ve spor yöneticileri, sporcuların geçmişteki performanslarını ve madalya potansiyellerini değerlendirerek onları spor kariyerlerine dönmeye teşvik etmiştir. Deneyimli yeniden başlama süreci, sporcuların önceki tecrübelerinden faydalanarak daha bilinçli bir şekilde kariyerlerini yönetmelerini

sağlamıştır. Bu süreçte, hem sporcuların bireysel çabaları hem de destek ağlarının teşvik edici yaklaşımı kritik rol oynamıştır.

**Kariyeri Bırakma ve Yeni Çift Kariyer Versiyonu Evresi**

Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarında deneyimlenmesi olası evrelerden biri olan kariyeri bırakma ve akabinde izleyen üç farklı kariyer yolu (çift kariyerin yeni versiyonunu oluşturma, yetenek transferi ve zorunlu emeklilik), hem istekli ve planlı kararlar hem de zorunlu durumlar nedeniyle yaşanmıştır. Bu evre, sporcuların eğitim veya meslek kariyerlerini bırakmalarını izleyen süreçte çift kariyer yolunu, akademik, mesleki ve spor kariyerlerinin farklı bir kombinasyonuyla yeniden yapılandırmalarını kapsamaktadır.

Kariyeri bırakma ve çift kariyerin yeni bir versiyonunu deneyimleme evresi, önemli bir yeniden yapılandırma sürecini vurgulamaktadır. Bu süreç, sporcuların kişisel hedefleri, destek ağlarının ve çevresel koşulların dinamik etkileşimiyle şekillenmiştir. Örneğin, iş yerindeki erişilebilirlik sorunları, engelliliğin bireysel deneyimiyle bağlantılı olarak önceki iş rutinlerini sürdürememek ve sporun olumlu etkilerini etkileşim içerisinde deneyimlemek, mevcut çift kariyer yolunu yeniden değerlendirerek mesleki kariyeri bırakma ve sadece spor kariyerine odaklanma sürecini getirmiştir. Akabinde, daha önce yarım kalmış eğitim sürecini tamamlayarak spordaki uzmanlığını gelecekteki mesleki kariyerine spor yöneticisi olarak taşıma hedefi, çift kariyer yolunun eğitim kariyeri ile yeniden yapılandırılmasını içermiştir. Dolayısıyla çalışan sporcu olarak başlayan çift kariyer yolu, mesleki kariyerin sonlandırılmasının ardından eğitim kariyeri ile öğrenci sporcu olarak yeni bir çift kariyer versiyonuna evrilmiştir. Bu süreç spor bilimleri alanında milli sporcular için ayrılan kontenjanlar ve başarılı milli sporculara yönelik burs programları gibi desteklerle kolaylaşmıştır.

Benzer şekilde, çift kariyer yoluna öğrenci sporcu olarak başlamış bir Paralimpik sporcu, Paralimpik Oyunlara hazırlık sürecinde spor kariyerine öncelik vermek ve sınavlar ile müsabakaların çakışması nedeniyle akademik kariyerini bırakmış izleyen

süreçte engelli bireylere yönelik istihdam kotalarından yararlanarak mesleki kariyerini başlatmıştır. Çift kariyer yolunda, eğitim hayatı ile birlikte mesleki kariyerde yükselme olanakları, akademik kariyerin yaşamının eksik bir parçası olduğunu düşünme, çift kariyer yolculuğunu eğitim ve spor kariyerini birlikte yürüterek yeniden başlatmaya yöneltmiştir. Dolayısıyla, öğrenci sporcu olarak başlayan çift kariyer yolu, eğitim kariyerinin sonlandırılmasının ardından mesleki kariyer ile çalışan sporcu olarak yeni bir çift kariyer versiyonuna, izleyen süreçte eğitim kariyerinin başlaması ile de öğrenci çalışan sporcu olarak çoklu kariyer yoluna evrilmiştir. Bu evrede, yeni çift kariyer versiyonunun oluşturulmasında, sosyal politikalar, anlayışlı, esnek iş ortamı, spordan farklı bir odağa da sahip olma isteği, sosyal ilişkiler ve sağlanan destek önemli rol oynamıştır.

**Kariyeri Bırakma ve Yetenek Transferi**

Bazı sporcular, çift kariyer deneyimlerinde kariyeri bırakma evresinin ardından yeni kariyer yolları oluştururken, diğer sporcular yetenek transferi gibi alternatif yollar deneyimlemiştir. Bu süreçte, sporcular önceki yaptıkları spor dalından farklı bir branşa yönelerek kariyerlerini yeniden yapılandırmıştır. Yetenek transferi kararında, sporcuların potansiyel spor performansına inanan antrenörlerin teşviki etkili olmuştur. Antrenörlerle kurulan güvene dayalı ilişkiler, sporcuları yeni bir spor branşında kariyerlerine yeniden başlamaya cesaretlendirmiştir.

Yetenek transferi, Paralimpik sporcular için başka bir para spor dalında ilerleme ve başarılı olma fırsatı sunmuştur. Daha önceki spor deneyimlerinin sağladığı birikim, sporcuların hızlı bir gelişim süreci ile elit seviyeye ulaşmalarını kolaylaştırmıştır. Bu durum, sporcuların kariyerlerini bırakmış bile, yeni bir branşta başlangıç yaparak hızla adapte olmalarını sağlamıştır.

Sporcuların yetenek transferi yolundaki kararlarını etkileyen önemli bir diğer unsur, aidiyet duygusu olmuştur. Sporculuk deneyimini sevdikleri, değer verdikleri ve kendilerini değerli hissettiren insanlarla paylaşma arzusu, yetenek transferi kararında belirleyici olmuştur. Takım arkadaşları, antrenörler ve destek ağlarıyla kurulan güçlü

sosyal bağlar, sporcuların bu süreci daha kolay bir şekilde benimsemelerine olanak tanımış ve yetenek transferinin başarısında önemli unsurlar olarak belirlenmiştir.

**Kariyeri Bırakma ve Zorunlu Emeklilik**

Kariyeri bırakma evresinin akabinde bazı Paralimpik sporcular çift kariyer deneyimlerini alternatif yollarla yeniden inşa edebilirken, diğerleri, sınıflandırma dışı kalma süreci nedeniyle spor kariyerlerini zorunlu olarak sonlandırmak durumunda kalmıştır. Sınıflandırma dışı kalma ve izleyen süreçte zorunlu emeklilik evresi, Paralimpik sporcuların kontrolü dışında gerçekleşen bir kariyer sonlanma sürecini temsil etmektedir.

Uluslararası spor yönetim organları tarafından belirlenen sınıflandırma kurallarındaki değişiklikler, bazı Paralimpik sporcuların yarışma yeterliliğini kaybetmesine neden olmuştur. Bu süreç, sporcuların psikolojik iyi oluşunu olumsuz etkilerken, spor topluluğunun desteği, sporcuların bu zorluğa rağmen hayatlarına devam etmelerine yardımcı olmuştur. Bu evre, sporcuların kariyerlerinin ne kadar kırılgan olduğunu ve sınıflandırma süreçlerinin sporcular üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu zorlu süreçte, spor camiasından gelen desteğin yanı sıra hala ulaşmak için çabalanacak hedeflere sahip olmak, sınıflandırma dışı kalan sporcuların bu duruma uyum sağlamalarına yardımcı olmuştur.

**Çift Kariyer Dönüşümü Evresi**

Çift kariyer dönüşümü ve çoklu kariyer evresi, Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer gelişim süreçlerinde önemli bir değişim ve dönüşüm sürecini ifade etmektedir. Bu süreçte, bireysel hedefler, sosyal ilişkiler ve çevresel faktörlerin etkileşimi, sporcuların kariyerlerini yapılandırma süreçlerini belirlemiştir.

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer dönüşümü, iki farklı kariyeri (spor ve eğitim/iş) yönetmekten, üçüncü bir kariyeri (akademik veya mesleki) eklemeye doğru bir dönüşüm içermiştir. Akademik ve spor kariyerlerini sürdürmekte olan sporcular,

ailelerinin spor kariyerinin belirsizliği ve risklerine yönelik endişelerini dikkate alarak istihdam fırsatlarını araştırmış, spor sonrası süreç için planlama yapmış ve mesleki kariyerlerine başlamıştır. Ayrıca, çalışan sporcular, gelecek kariyer planları ve üniversite mezuniyeti ile terfi olanaklarını artırmak için de akademik kariyerlerini başlatmışlardır.

Akademik, mesleki ve spor alanlardaki paydaşların beklentilerini karşılamak, Paralimpik sporcuların kariyer yollarını şekillendiren karmaşık bir dinamik oluşturmuş ve sporcuların rutinlerini yeniden müzakere etmelerini gerektirmiştir. Çoklu kariyer yolunu başlatma sürecinde, sporcular kurumsal kolaylaştırıcılardan ve sosyal ağlarından önemli destek almış ve mevcut iş fırsatları hakkında bilgilendirilmiştir.

Çoklu kariyere sahip paralimpik sporcular arasında, üniversite eğitimi ile para spor kariyerlerini birlikte sürdürürken mesleki kariyer yolculuklarını başlatan öğrenci sporcular veya daha önce bırakmış oldukları akademik kariyeri farklı bir bölümde yeniden başlatan çalışan sporcular yer almıştır.

**Emeklilik Evresi: Kariyer Sonrası Hedefler ve Misyon ile Emeklilik**

Emeklilik evresi, Paralimpik sporcuların spor kariyerlerinin sona ermesinden sonra hayatlarını nasıl yeniden yapılandıracaklarına odaklandıkları kritik bir dönemi işaret etmektedir. Paralimpik sporcuların emeklilikle ilgili paylaşımları, spor kariyerlerinin sınırlı ömrünün farkında olduklarını, çift kariyer deneyimleri boyunca emeklilik sonrası hedeflerini ve misyonlarını stratejik bir şekilde planladıklarını ortaya koymuştur.

Sporcular, bu süreçte yalnızca bireysel hedeflerinin değil, aynı zamanda spora katkı sağlama, geri verme isteklerinin ve para sporlara ilişkin farkındalık yaratma misyonlarının da altını çizmiştir. Paralimpik sporcular, emeklilik sonrası kariyerlerini şekillendirirken spor kariyerlerinden edindikleri deneyimleri değerlendirmeye odaklanmış ve sporla ilgili alanlarda çalışmayı mantıklı ve anlamlı bulduklarını

paylaşmışlardır.  Ayrıca ertelemiş oldukları kariyer planlarına yönelme isteklerini de ifade etmişlerdir. Sporcuların, emekliliği "ölüm gibi" bir deneyime benzetmeleri, bu konuyla ilgili konuşmaktan kaçınmaları, emeklilikle birlikte yaşanabilecek olası kimlik krizi ve duygusal zorluklara işaret etmiş ve bu geçiş sürecinin daha fazla destek gerektirdiğini göstermiştir.

**Paralimpik Sporcuların Kariyer Gelişim Yolları**

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimleri, farklılaşan ve hem doğrusal hem de kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan bireysel yollar izleyen özellikler taşımasına rağmen, ortak paylaşılan yönler, kariyer yollarının kavramsallaştırılmasını mümkün kılmıştır. Buna göre, kariyer örüntüleri ve birlikte yürütülen kariyer sayısına dayanarak dört farklı kariyer gelişim yolu belirlenmiştir: Tipik Çift Kariyer Yolu, Tipik Çoklu Kariyer Yolu, Atipik Çift Kariyer Yolu ve Atipik Çoklu Kariyer Yolu.

Tipik Çift Kariyer Yolu**,** genellikle zorunlu eğitim sırasında eğitim ve spor kariyerlerinin bir arada yürütülmesi ile başlayan, normatif ve doğrusal bir ilerleme içermektedir. Bu yol, eğitimden meslek hayatına geçişin spor kariyerindeki gelişimle eş zamanlı olarak yürütüldüğü doğrusal bir yol olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Hem öğrenci-sporcuları hem de çalışan-sporcuları içermektedir.

Tipik Çoklu Kariyer Yolu, benzer şekilde normatif ve doğrusal bir ilerleme içermektedir ancak, üçüncü bir kariyerin başlatılmasıyla farklılaşmaktadır. Eğitim ve spor kariyerlerini birlikte sürdürürken mesleki kariyeri ya da iş yaşamı ile spor kariyerini bir arada yürütürken eğitim kariyerini başlatmayı içerir. Tipik çoklu kariyer yolunda, öğrenci-çalışan sporcular, akademik, spor ve mesleki kariyerlerini bir arada yürütmektedir.

Atipik Çift Kariyer Yolu, kesintili ve doğrusal olmayan kariyer örüntülerini ve özelliklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Paralimpik sporcular, giriş, çıkış ve yeniden giriş döngülerini deneyimleyerek, akademik, mesleki ve spor kariyerlerinin yeni versiyonları ile çift kariyer yollarını yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Engellilik deneyimi,

erişilebilirlik sorunları, kurumsal kolaylaştırıcılar ve kariyer hedeflerinin etkileşimiyle şekillenen dinamik bir yolu ortaya koymaktadır. Paralimpik sporcuların eğitim veya mesleki kariyerlerini bırakmalarını izleyen süreçte çift kariyer yolunun, akademik, mesleki ve spor kariyerlerinin farklı bir kombinasyonuyla yeniden yapılandırmalarını kapsamaktadır. Dolayısıyla çift kariyer yolunun, bırakılan kariyerden farklı bir kariyer ile yeniden yapılandırılmasını içermiştir. Çalışan sporcu olarak başlayan çift kariyer yolu, mesleki kariyerin bırakılmasının ardından eğitim kariyeri ile öğrenci sporcu olarak veya öğrenci sporcu olarak başlayan çift kariyer yolu, eğitim kariyerinin sonlandırılmasının ardından mesleki kariyer ile çalışan sporcu olarak yeniden yapılandırılmıştır.

Atipik Çoklu Kariyer Yolu, benzer şekilde Paralimpik sporcuların deneyimlediği giriş-çıkış döngülerini içermektedir. Eğitim veya iş kariyerlerini bırakan Paralimpik sporcuların akabinde yeni bir çift kariyer versiyonunun oluşturmasını kapsamaktadır. Bu yol, üçüncü bir kariyerin eklenmesiyle çift kariyer dönüşümünü içermiş ve çalışan-sporcudan, öğrenci-çalışan-sporcuya evrilen bir yolculuğu temsil etmiştir.

Alan yazındaki araştırmalarda çift kariyer yolları genellikle üç ana kategoriye ayrılmıştır: "doğrusal, yakınsayan ve paralel yollar" (Torregrossa vd., 2015) veya akademik- mesleki bir yol izleyen "spor yapan öğrenciler", spor odaklı bir yol izleyen "okumaya çalışan sporcular" ve çift kariyer yolunu takip eden "optimal bir denge arayan sporcular" (Stambulova vd., 2015; Cartigny vd., 2021). Ancak, çift kariyer yolundaki Paralimpik sporcuların deneyimleri daha akışkan bir ilerleme göstermiştir. Kişisel, sosyal, kurumsal ve çevresel faktörlerle ilişkili olarak sporcular, bu farklı çift kariyer kategorileri arasında zaman zaman geçiş yapmışlar, bazıları ise aynı anda üç kariyeri birden sürdürerek, genel çift kariyer kavramsallaştırmasından farklılaşan çoklu kariyer yolları oluşturmuşlardır. Bu süreçte erişilebilirlik sorunları, engelliliğin bireysel deneyimi, sınıflandırma dışı kalma ve bir kariyerin görece önemine bağlı olarak öncelenmesi, Paralimpik sporcularının çift kariyer yollarını nasıl deneyimlediğini şekillendirmiştir. Dowling vd. (2018) tarafından da vurgulandığı gibi, para sporlardaki farklı katmanları ve makro düzeydeki unsurları dikkate alan bir

yaklaşım, çift kariyer yolunu deneyimleyen Paralimpik sporculara ihtiyaç duydukları desteği sağlamak adına büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Sınıflandırma süreci, önceki araştırmalarla da uyumlu olarak (Patatas vd., 2020; Fortin-Guichard vd., 2023), para spor bağlamındaki çift kariyer deneyimlerinde dikkate alınması gereken önemli bir unsur olarak belirlenmiştir. İlerleyen engel durumu veya sınıflandırma kurallarındaki değişikliklerle ilişkili spor sınıfı değişiklikleri, sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerinde kontrolleri dışında gelişen yeni koşullara uyum sağlamalarını gerektiren zorlayıcı süreçlerle karşı karşıya kalmalarına neden olmuştur. Bazı durumlarda sporcular, antrenman stratejilerini değiştirmek, kılavuz atletle birlikte yarışmayı ve çift kariyeri deneyimlemeyi öğrenmek veya yeni rakiplere uyum sağlamak zorunda kalırken, bazıları da sınıflandırma dışı kalma nedeniyle zorunlu erken emeklilikle yüzleşmek zorunda kalmıştır. Bundon vd.'nin (2018) çalışmasıyla tutarlı olarak, sınıflandırma dışı kalmaya bağlı zorunlu emeklilik, Paralimpik sporcularının kariyer yollarında, engelli olmayan sporcuların karşılaşmadığı farklı zorluklara yol açtığını ortaya koymuştur.

**Çift Kariyer Deneyimini Etkileyen Faktörler**

Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yolları, kişisel, bağlamsal, sosyal, kültürel, yapısal ve kurumsal faktörlerin karmaşık bir etkileşimi ile şekillenmiştir. Paralimpik sporcular, engelli olmayan ÇK sporcularıyla zaman kısıtlamaları, ev, antrenman ve okul arasında uzun mesafeli zaman alan yolculuklar, sosyal ilişkileri sürdürmedeki zorluklar gibi ortak deneyimleri paylaşsalar da, engellilik deneyimi, erişilebilirlik sorunları, ayrımcılığa maruz kalma, para sporlar ve sporcuların temsili ile ilgili topluma doğru mesaj verebilme çabası, ilerleyen engel durumu, çift kariyeri "birlikte yapılandırma ve deneyimleme" gibi unsurlar Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerini farklılaştırmıştır.

Para spordaki sınıflandırma süreçleri, ilerleyen engel durumuyla bağlantılı değişen spor sınıfları, sınıflandırma dışı kalma deneyimi, kılavuz atletle koşmaya alışma süreci ve sadece birlikte performans göstermenin ötesinde çift kariyer sürecinde de birlikte

deneyimle, uzun ve sık milli takım kampları üzerinden şekillenen para sporcu gelişim yolları, para sporlara özgü stres faktörlerini ortaya koymuştur.

İletişim, planlama becerileri, öz farkındalık gibi kişisel yetkinliklerin yanı sıra engelli bireylere yönelik sosyal politikalar, istihdam ve eğitim olanaklarına ilişkin kurumsal kolaylaştırıcılar, başarılı sporcu profili, küçük şehirde yaşamak ve sosyal çevrenin sağladığı destek, kolaylaştırıcı unsurlar olarak belirlenmiştir. Tüm bu unsurlar, Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerini farklılaştırarak ortak yönler kadar özgün bir yapıya da sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

**Kuramsal Katkılar**

Bu çalışma, Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer yollarını araştıran ve kavramsallaştıran ilk çalışma olarak literatürde önemli bir boşluğu doldurmuştur. Paralimpik sporcuların ÇK deneyimleri bireysel ve farklılaşan yollar içermesine rağmen, kariyer örüntüleri ve kariyer sayısına göre dört farklı kariyer gelişim yolunu tanımlamıştır. Söz konusu kariyer gelişim yolları, alan yazında hakim olan çift kariyer kavramsallaştırmasından farklılaşan deneyimleri açığa çıkarmış ve Paralimpik sporcuların dinamik ve çok boyutlu çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarının sadece yaşa dayalı, normatif ve ardışık ilerleyen kavramsallaştırma ile yeterince açıklanamayacağını göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla, sporcuların kariyer yollarındaki farklı evreleri ve süreçleri ortaya koyan Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli geliştirilmiştir. Ayrıca "birlikte yapılandırma" ve "birlikte deneyimleme" gibi yeni geliştirilen kuramsal kavramlarla, destek ağlarının ağır engelli Paralimpik sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerindeki kritik rolünü belirlenmiş ve koordineli çabaların gerekliliği vurgulanmıştır. Bu araştırmanın kuramsal önermeleri para spor bağlamındaki çift kariyer deneyimlerini anlamak ve daha kapsayıcı politikalar geliştirmek için bir kavramsal çerçeve oluşturmuştur.

**Politika Çıkarımları**

Bu araştırma, çoğu çift kariyerli Paralimpik sporcunun başlangıçta bir spor kariyeri planlamamış olmasına rağmen hızlandırılmış bir ilerlemeyle yüksek performans

düzeyine geçtiğini ve milli sporcu olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak, sporcuların bireysel motivasyonlarını, spora katılım amaçlarını göz ardı eden yüksek performans odaklı yönlendirmeler, olumsuz deneyimlere ve sporu bırakmaya yol açma potansiyeli taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, antrenörler, spor yöneticileri ve politika yapıcılar, sporcuların bireysel hedeflerini, ihtiyaçlarını ve katılım motivasyonlarını göz önünde bulundurarak daha esnek, kişisel hedeflerle uyumlu para spor fırsatları sunmalıdır.

Araştırma ayrıca, çift kariyerli Paralimpik sporcuların kariyerlerine başlarken çeşitli destek mekanizmalarından (istihdam kotaları, burs programları) faydalanmalarına rağmen, bireysel ihtiyaçlarının göz ardı edilmesi, esneklik sağlanmaması, ulaşım ve erişilebilirlik sorunları nedeniyle sürdürülebilir bir destek sistemine ihtiyaç duyduklarını göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, spor federasyonları ve üniversiteler bünyesinde çift kariyer koordinatörleri atanması ve paydaşların rollerini tanımlayan bir ulusal politika kılavuzu geliştirilmesi, sürdürülebilir, sistematik, koordineli ve kapsayıcı bir destek sisteminin oluşturulması adına önemli bir politika önceliği olmalıdır.

Paralimpik sporcuların eğitime erişimde deneyimlediği ayrımcı uygulamalar, hak ve özgürlüklerinden tam ve eşit şekilde yararlanamadıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Engelli bireylerin tam ve eşit katılımını engelleyen sosyal ve fiziksel bariyerleri, ayrımcı uygulamaları vurgulayan diğer çalışmalarla tutarlı olarak (Akbulut, 2012; TOHAD, 2015), engelleri ortadan kaldırmaya ve engelli bireyler, çift kariyerli Paralimpik sporcular için, eşit fırsatlar sağlamaya yönelik bir politika gündeminin oluşturulmasına acil ihtiyaç vardır.

**Çalışmanın Kısıtlılıkları**

Bu araştırma, Paralimpik sporcuların ÇK deneyimlerinin dinamik ve çok boyutlu yapısını anlamak için para spor bağlamının özelliklerini dikkate alan kuramsal bir çerçeve sunmak adına önemli bir adım atmıştır. Ancak bu araştırmanın, yalnızca elit düzeydeki Paralimpik sporcuları içermesi, Paralimpik olmayan para spor branşlarından sporcuları dışarda bırakması, verileri sadece derinlemesine

görüşmelerden elde etmesi ve temellendirilmiş kuram metodolojisinde yararlanılabilecek diğer kaynaklara başvurmamış olması, çalışmanın kısıtlılıklarını oluşturmaktadır. Ayrıca, araştırmanın Paris 2024 Paralimpik Oyunları öncesi döneme denk gelen bir süreçte gerçekleştirilmiş olması, sporcuların dönemsel olarak yoğun hazırlık ve antrenman süreçleri yaşamaları ve dönemsel sorumlulukları, deneyimleri, diğer dönemlere kıyasla spor kariyerlerinin öncelenmesi konusunda kendine özgü yansımalar içerebileceğinden kısıtlılık yaratabileceği düşünülmektedir.

**Gelecek Çalışmalar için Öneriler**

Bu araştırma, Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarını kavramsallaştırmış ve ÇK deneyimlerini anlamak için "Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli" ile yeni bir çerçeve sunarak literatüre katkı sunmayı amaçlamıştır. Gelecekteki çalışmalar, önerilen modelde tanımlanan evreleri ve dönem ve kariyer odaklı stratejik yaklaşımı farklı bağlamlarda ve sporcu profillerinde inceleyerek modelin aktarılabilirliğini değerlendirebilir. Ayrıca, yüksek engel grubunda yer alan sporcuların "birlikte yapılandırma" ve "birlikte deneyimleme" süreçleri, destek ağının perspektifinden araştırılabilir. Katılım düzeyindeki sporcuların veya milli takıma seçilme öncesi dönemdeki sporcuların çift kariyer deneyimlerinin, Paralimpik olmayan para spor branşlarında deneyimlenen çift kariyer yollarının, farklı refah devleti modelleri ve sosyal politikaların çift veya çoklu kariyer deneyimlerine yansımalarının, toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerinin ÇK deneyimindeki etkisinin gelecek araştırmalarda incelenmesinin alan yazına katkı sağlayacağı ve faydalı olacağı düşünülmektedir. Son olarak, boylamsal çalışmalarla sporcuların kariyer yolculukları, emeklilik süreci ve ÇK yollarındaki uzun erimdeki değişimler incelenebilir ve Paralimpik sporcuların emeklilik dönemindeki uyum süreçlerine ve deneyimlerine odaklanılabilir.

**Sonuç**

Bu araştırma, Paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yollarını kavramsallaştırmış ve ÇK deneyimlerini anlamak için "Paralimpik Sporcuların Çift ve Çoklu Kariyer

Yollarının İlişkisel Modeli" ile yeni bir çerçeve sunarak alan yazına katkı sunmayı amaçlamıştır. Paralimpik sporcuların ÇK deneyimleri bireysel ve farklılaşan yollar içermesine rağmen, kariyer örüntüleri ve kariyer sayısına göre dört farklı kariyer gelişim yolunu ortaya koymuştur. Paralimpik sporcuların sporda ÇK deneyimlerini farklılaştıran en önemli etmenler; para spordaki gelişim yollarındaki süreçler, sporcuların engelliliğin yanı sıra para sporları nasıl deneyimledikleri ve bu deneyimlerle ilişkili stres yaratan ve kolaylaştırıcı etkide bulunan unsurlar olarak belirlenmiştir. Son olarak, bu çalışma, paralimpik sporcuların çift ve çoklu kariyer yolları boyunca, özellikle bireysel ihtiyaçlarını dikkate alarak bütüncül olarak desteklenmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

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**YAZARIN** / AUTHOR

**Soyadı** / Surname : Girişmen
**Adı** / Name : Gizem
**Bölümü** / Department : Beden Eğitimi ve Spor / Physical Education and Sports

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