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"I would not be satisfied if I had not given it a try":

The expectations and experiences of students in a high-school skiing program

Abstract

The article presents results from a panel study among students who attended a high school program dedicated to the development of athletes in various skiing disciplines. Using the conceptual framework of Bourdieu, the study examined the students' social backgrounds, their expectations of succeeding in the field of skiing as well as in the field of education (secondary school), and the extent to which their expectations were fulfilled. Integral to the latter, were the students' negotiation of uncertainty and realities related to fulfilment of expectations. The investigation was conducted at the first and the third year at the school, employing quantitative and qualitative methods. In general the students came from resourceful families with a distinct sport habitus. The expectations were reduced during the period both to skiing achievements and to obtain good school grades. Many had experienced challenges. About one fifth of the sample had quit during the three years and almost one third had considered quitting at one point. The qualitative interviews revealed how the students managed to adjust and reevaluate their ambitions, particularly with respect to skiing.

Keywords

Skiing gymnasium, dual careers, expectations, experiences, Bourdieu

Introduction

To pursue a career as an elite athlete requires a lot of effort and time investment, and it may be difficult to combine with education. Therefore, during the last two-three decades we have witnessed an increase in school programs that have a systematic but flexible approach to assisting young athletes in combining sport with a secondary school education (Radke & Coalter, 2007). In Norway, the first of this type of school, the Norwegian Alpine Gymnasium, was established in 1981 and later on other sports followed. Today the school operates under the title of the Norges Toppidrettsgymnas (NTG) and is located in six schools focusing mainly on winter sports (Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2015). In addition, a few secondary schools offer special programs for participants in various skiing disciplines. Although the educational system facilitates the athletes' "dual careers" (sport and education), and despite the fact that a growing number of students enroll in these schools, we have little knowledge of the experiences, the expectations and the perceived outcome of the students. Therefore, this is the topic of the present article, based on a panel study of students combining skiing with secondary school. This kind of school is labelled "skiing gymnasium." The contribution of the article is knowledge about expectations to sport as well as to schoolwork, and fulfillment of these during the three years at the school. Further, we also learn how the students in retrospect evaluated the choice of school compared with "regular" secondary school.

With reference to Bette (2004), athletes striving for an elite career face opportunities as well as challenges and uncertainty. They have to take the physical, psychological and social risks and face the consequences involved. In addition to the academic and athletic efforts the students meet social demands, as most of those attending a skiing gymnasium have to move away from home due to the location of the schools near ski resorts. To attend a skiing gymnasium also requires considerable economic investment. The school fee, lodging, skiing equipment, camps and competitions, all add up to be quite an expensive affair. Little attention has been paid to the family background of the students in earlier research. Therefore we wanted to explore the students' family background as part of the total investment in attending a specialist sport school. Theoretically, the study is based on Bourdieu's conceptualisations, we used first and foremost the concepts of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus*.

Former research

In an international context, the expansion of sport schools¹ has evoked the interest of scholars, and has resulted in studies highlighting processes of foundation, discourses, reforms and curriculum in various countries (Ferry et al., 2013; Houlihan, 2000; Lund, 2014; Metsä-Tokila, 2002). A German study identified possibilities, limitations and barriers of schools combining elite sport and school (Borggreffe & Cachay (2012). In a review of sport schools in ten different countries, Radke and Coalter (2007) identified various models of policies and

¹ Sport school is a common term in the English language, however, other terms such as sport gymnasium and elite sport schools are employed in some countries, as well as names covering the specific sport such as skiing school or ski gymnasium etc. The varieties in concepts as well as scientific approaches make it difficult to provide a systematic literature review. Therefore, we have searched in relevant journals in sport sociology/social science and sport and education. References in articles have also led us to other studies.

practice of the combination of sport and school. The models varied on dimensions such as flexible curricula, academic records, dropout rates, sporting issues, partnerships and funding. The schools were classified according to degree of integration into regular classes with other students, from wholly integrated to specialist provision.

Other scholars have focused more on individualistic aspects. Some have explored long-term effects on education and athletic achievements by comparing high performance athletes attending a sport school with high performance athletes who had gone through regular secondary school (Emrich et al., 2009; Rens, Elling & Reijersberg, 2015). Henriksen (2010) examined talent development in sport from a holistic and ecological perspective based on a comparison of three different models/milieus in the Scandinavian countries. From a psychological perspective, Engstroem (2011) explored adjustment to and satisfaction with the school program during the first six months at a sport gymnasium in Sweden. A study by Romar (2012) highlighted various aspects of athletic and academic success among Finnish skiing school students. Additionally, gender issues were raised in a Swedish study with focus on dominating values in the sport schools, and how females and males evaluated these differently. For example did females experience pressure toward performance more than males (Uebel, 2006).

In Norway, there are very few studies in this line of research. Kristiansen and Houlihan (2015) have explored the role of private sport schools (NTG) in Norway in developing young athletes, with particular attention to organisational matters and policy processes. Kårhus (2014, 2016) analysed education policy discourses that contributed to the development of sport schools, from being only private schools to also be included in the public school system. Havelid and Moser (1997) published a report on the learning environment of the first year students at NTG. One longitudinal study investigated eating disorders among students at sport schools (Martinsen, 2015). The study revealed higher prevalence of eating disorders among students at the sport schools compared to students in general schools. Furthermore, the study reported 19 % dropout from the sport schools. Dønnestad (2013) investigated reasons for dropping out. Geographical distance (from home), dissatisfaction with the school/school program and finding more preferable alternatives, injury/illness, and decreased interest were the most frequently reported causes. We have identified three master theses, all focusing on pedagogical/psychological aspects among students specialising in skiing (Berthelsen, 2010; Olsen, 1998; Rapp, 2006). We still do not know much about the background of the students and how they evaluate their experiences. In order to shed more light over this, we used Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

In analytical terms, a *field* is defined as a network of objective relations between positions. These positions are "objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present or potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 97). To explain internal field dynamics, Bourdieu makes an analogy with games. Central to the dynamics of fields are stakes, which for the most part are the product of

the competition between players. Players are taken in by the game and they oppose each other. They agree that the game is worth playing as a basis for the competition. Each field possesses a basic law, *nomos*, or principles that constitute the field. The agents are "being caught up in the game, in the *illusio*, understood as a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership" (Bourdieu, 1992, 11). According to Bourdieu (1998), to be caught up in and by the game inherently impacts which games are important to the individuals involved. With reference to the present study, the field of skiing – or the game – is significant, but the field of education is also important. Thus, the sport school with skiing on the program was selected in order to combine investment or participation in both fields.

In order to explain participation in various fields Bourdieu used the concept of capital. The concept of capital is elaborated to explain spatial representation of socially significant cultural practices. The social space is constituted according to three main dimensions: the relative composition of capital (economic and cultural), the total volume of the two forms of capital, and changes in these properties over time (Bourdieu, 1984). Economic capital relates to economy and material resources. Cultural capital takes various forms, however the most distinctive is education. Social capital refers to social networks, and symbolic capital is the form that the former species of capital takes when it is grasped through perceptions that recognize the specific logic of its possession and accumulation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Examples are diplomas from education or medals and prizes from the field of sport.

Bourdieu (1978) also introduced the term physical capital, predominantly in relation to social class and embodied practices, which associates with habitus, lifestyle choices and sporting practices. For Bourdieu (1984) *habitus* is a mediating construct impacting the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification. The habitus is internalised and converted into dispositions that generate meaning-giving perceptions and practices. For example skiing appears a vital part of the habitus of young people who aspire for a skiing career. However, in order to perform well in skiing the athletes need to develop physical capital relevant for the requirements of the field.

Bourdieu's work is widely used in scholarly research on sport and physical activity, however also debated as well as further elaborated (i.e. Lisahunter, Smith & Emerald, 2015; Shilling, 1993). Worth to note is Wacquant's (1992) "classic" study of a ghetto gym in Chicago demonstrating how boxing was linked to the living conditions. Several studies have a particular focus on gender issues, such as in snowboarding (Thorpe, 2009, 2010; Sisjord, 2009, 2013), adventure racing (Kay & Laberge, 2004) and boxing and soccer (Mennesson, 2012). Further, the influence of the family/parents on the children's participation in sport has been addressed (Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Light & Kirk, 2001; Swanson, 2009).

Based on gaps in the existing literature and Bourdieu's theoretical framework we wanted to investigate the following questions: Firstly, what are the family backgrounds of students attending a skiing gymnasium? Secondly, what are the students' expectations to the investment in the field of skiing and the field of education at the first year at the gymnasium? Thirdly, how did the students perceive and deal with their achievements at the end of the third year?

Methods

The research design is a panel study (de Vaus, 1990) with data collection during the first and the third year of the education, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Students from eight schools participated in the quantitative part, which at the time were all the schools that offered the combination of skiing and regular high-school curriculum. A survey was conducted in the fall of the first year (T1) and at the end of the third year (T2). At T1 the number of participants was 113 (35 females and 76 males, 2 unanswered) at T2 the number had decreased to 97 participants (31 females and 62 males, 4 unanswered).² The data collection was administered by the schools via the contact persons (rector or deputy head).³

The results presented are part of a larger investigation. In the survey we asked about the engagement in skiing of parents and siblings (T1), and the highest level of education of the parents (T2) as indicator of social class. Education was classified by “elementary school only”, “secondary school (including vocational education)”, “college/university 1-3 years”, and “university 4 years or more.”⁴

The expectations of the students were measured by indicating agreement on a four item Likert type scale ranging from "not at all"(1) to "to a great extent" (4) whether they expected a) to make a skiing career, b) to get good school grades. The T2 survey also included the question: "Have you ever during the time at the skiing gymnasium seriously considered quitting?" with "yes" and "no" as response alternatives. The “yes” alternative was followed by possible reasons categorised as: sport related reasons, school related reasons, and social aspects.

Supplementary to the survey we conducted qualitative interviews with students at one of the schools. We selected a public school rather than a private one, expecting more diverse social backgrounds there because the private schools have higher costs. Selection was further based on having enough students in the main skiing disciplines, as well as both genders represented. This resulted in ten students the first year; five of each gender, five from cross-country and five from alpine skiing.⁵ The intention was to interview the same students in the

²It is reasonable to anticipate that dropouts from our study have moved to another (regular) secondary school. Dønnestad's (2013) study reported that 96 % of dropouts from all “sport schools” continued at a regular secondary school.

³ As the contact persons administered the data collection, we do not have the exact N for the sample. Some asked for some extra questionnaires in case of miswriting etc. However, based on the amount of questionnaires sent to the schools it is reasonable to anticipate response rate to be about 90 % for both data collections. The procedure for data collection allows analyzing data on group basis, not to connect data from individuals.

⁴ At T1, we asked for the occupation of the parents, which resulted in insufficient information, 39 % did not answer the question and some gave imprecise information. Therefore, we decided to ask for education at T2 which worked better, although 13 % did not answer the question.

⁵ Cross-country and alpine skiing are the most common disciplines among the students attending the skiing gymnasiums. In addition there are ski jumping, combined skiing, biathlon, twin-tip and snowboarding with a very few students.

third year. However, two had quit (females/alpine), resulting in eight interviewees. Both data collections were made at the end of the skiing season.

The interviews were undertaken in a classroom at the school and lasted 45 to 60 minutes. They were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was comprised of questions related to the school situation in general terms, expectations for skiing and schoolwork, and psychosocial wellbeing. The first year we focused on how the students handled moving away from home, and the combination of skiing and schoolwork. The last year we explored whether the expectations were fulfilled, challenges they had faced, and further plans for skiing and education. The transcriptions were coded with main categories and associated sub-categories (Strauss 1996), and cross-case analyzed (Patton, 1990) in order to compare each issue across the sample of interviewees.

The study proposal was approved by the Norwegian Data Supervision Bureau (NSD). The participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation and that they were free to withdraw any time. Further, they were told that the data presentation would secure anonymity. The interviewees consented to the researcher's possible use of quotations from the interviews.

Results and discussion

The results are presented in four parts in response to the research questions. The first focuses on family background. The second focuses on the students' experiences and expectations the first year. The third and the fourth part focus on fulfillment of expectations and experiences made. The first is addressed based on data from the quantitative investigation, the remaining questions relate to both survey data and the qualitative interviews.

Family background

Seeing education as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) the results showed that 51 % of the fathers and 52 % of the mothers had education at a college/university level. National statistics for the age group 40-49 years (which seems relevant for comparison) report 39 % to have a college/university education (Statistics Norway, 2013). Education among the parents in our sample were considerably higher. Our investigation does not provide data on economic capital. However comparable data have been reported by Kristiansen and Houlihan (2015) showing that attending a sport school may cost up to NOK 200 000 yearly. Moreover, skiing is a rather expensive sport in itself, as demonstrated by a Norwegian study exploring sport participation, income and level of education of parents (Vaage, 2006).

Our data also revealed that the majority of the students were raised in families active in skiing, as 88 % of the fathers, and 66 % of the mothers were reported to be active skiers. In addition, 78 % of the respondents had one or more siblings who were skiers. In comparison, a

national survey based on a sample aged 15 years and more, reported that 24,1 % engaged in cross country skiing and 9,5 % in downhill skiing at least once a month during the season (Breivik, 2013). Our results are not surprising, a common concept in Norway is "ski families" or in Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisation: people characterised with a distinct skiing habitus, which reflects socialisation in the field of skiing. The parents' interest in the daughter/son's potential skiing career was also reflected in the fact that 96 % reported that the parents supported the choice of attending the skiing gymnasium. Taken together, the results support former research showing that the family plays a crucial role in the process of nurturing sports talents by providing essential financial resources and accommodating the activity patterns required by the sport (Kay, 2006). In general, as stated by Dagkas and Quarmby (2012), the intersection of the family's social class, cultural and pedagogical exchanges prominently shape young people's dispositions toward sport participation and physical activity.

Expectations and experiences during the first year

From the first year of school, we discuss the following issues: Expectations as to skiing and academic outcome, and issues around moving from home, as well as the combination of skiing and schoolwork. The survey revealed high expectations regarding both sport and academic outcome. The distribution of expectations to make a skiing career was 42 % "to a great extent", 50 % "partly", 7 % said "not at all" or "to a little extent." The expectations as to good school grades were 51 % "to a great extent", 47 % "partly" and only 2 % answered "to a little extent" or "not at all." There were significant differences neither between female and male students, nor between the skiing disciplines.

The interview data showed that the students focused much more on their skiing accomplishments than the schoolwork, which may be related to the fact that the interviews were conducted at the end of the skiing season. However, it should also be noted that two of the interviewees admitted that their first priority for a secondary school would have been a vocational course (for example carpentry), but as the skiing gymnasiums only offer program for specialisation in general studies (which are more directed towards college/university education) the aspiration for skiing guided the choice. One of them expressed that "for me, skiing is the most important thing" indicating skiing to be a central part of his habitus, which according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), "contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense of value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (p. 127).

When the students elaborated on how they perceived their academic efforts, most interviewees spoke in positive terms such as "I believed I was doing worse than I used to, but actually I had improved. I guess, when you become so structured in training, you also become more structured in schoolwork." Another student answered more ambiguously: "There's not much time for that you know, because we travel so much. It's been ok, but my grades are not as good as they should be....But I can make up for that next year." The achievement did not correspond to his ambitions, but he still seemed optimistic. Two other students expressed dissatisfaction with their academic results while blaming themselves for not trying hard enough – or having paid most attention to training.

The interview results showed more variance in expectations to skiing than the quantitative data, ranging from “I just do my best”, to more concrete goals, such as national ratings. One cross-country skier had succeeded in his efforts throughout the season. To the question “So, do you think about a sport career?” he answered: “Yes, I do. But you cannot count upon becoming a professional, so then, I have to continue studies as well.” Another revealed some kind of adjusted aspirations: “I want to try and see how far I can go. But, I realise that I will not become best in world. That’s not a goal for me, have given up that.” Whether becoming “best in world” was a former dream or just a phrase is hard to say, but his narrative described a winter season with obstacles and challenges:

After a while [at the school], I was falling behind, I just felt that I didn't have as much improvement as I used to. That's been a little disappointing, and then I have suffered a lot from illness. And it is very stressful, there's so much to do all the time, that's probably the reason I have not progressed so well, because I am constantly tired. I have not found any surplus energy anywhere.

The quotation indicated a negative spiral with illness and lack of energy, which the student repeated throughout the interview. However, also interviewees who had reached their goals admitted some kind of obstacles, as illustrated by a cross-country skier:

I have reached my goal for the season, getting down to the number fifteen [in national rankings] and being allowed to start in the Norwegian Cup, I have managed both. However, the way it turned out, I could have done better. I have had some bad luck, stomach problems and things. It happens during competitions, I start vomiting and stuff, but there is nothing to do about it.

This student was very concerned with his accomplishments. The stomach problems manifested itself during competitions, but was accepted as part of the game. This demonstrates the belief in *illusio*, as a tacit recognition of the value of the stake of the game and as practical mastery of its rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The interviews revealed gender differences in expectations that did not surface in the quantitative data. Only one female mentioned elite level, however, with laughter: “I really don’t have big plans like, aaa, I’ll become a world champion and so. In fact, I will just see how far I can make it, right now.” Another had already decided to quit and continue secondary school in the hometown. For her, it was “too much skiing, she found it boring to do skiing as the only sport. Hence, she did not have sufficient interest in the skiing field, or with reference to Bourdieu’s (1998, 77) term “belief in *illusio*” – being caught up in and by the game, which inherently impacts which games are important to the individual – as the “game” of skiing appeared less attractive. In comparison, Ubel (2006) showed that the females more than males had to balance between the values that generally are desirable from a gender point of view and the values of elite sport expressed at the sport schools. With reference to the masculine domination in society, Bourdieu explains how girls during socialisation are directed to stay away from certain careers regarded as masculine whereas boys are encouraged to choose them. Hence, a whole series of “previous experiences, particularly in sport, which often gives rise to experience of discrimination, has prepared them to accept such

suggestions as foreshadowings and has made them internalize the dominant vision.” (Bourdieu, 2001, 262). The fact that females compose one third of the sample in the quantitative investigation may relate to Bourdieu’s observation, since relatively less females than males tend to aspire for a skiing career.

The quotation “You expect quite a lot from yourself when you start at the skiing gymnasium”, reflects the expectations of the students. There are also expectations from the environment and the family’s investment in a possible skiing career. In line with the quantitative data, the interviews revealed strong support from the parents when selecting the skiing gymnasium. One explained that she had had skiing gymnasium in mind since the age of six years, she had always wished to do well in skiing. A few also revealed more direct expectations from the parents, one of the female cross-country skiers said: “Well, no, ... or dad is very optimistic about things like that (making a skiing career), but it’s more difficult than he probably thinks.” A male interviewee, also cross-country skier, explained:

They expect that I achieve somehow. But it’s not so that I have to perform right away, just that I show some progress. That makes them very happy. They like very much that I do better every year. They do put a lot of money in it, as well. So you cannot, ...you must try to perform or deliver a little too.

Both quotations reveal expectations from the parents, the first even indicating a possible discrepancy between herself and the perceptions of her father. The latter includes an economic dimension reflecting the parents’ investment, which assumingly requires some pay back in terms of improvement – “that I show some progress” and “try to perform or deliver a little too.”

Most of the interviewees experienced a challenge in living on their own, making food, laundry etc. Getting organized and keeping track of all tasks appeared demanding, as illustrated in this quotation:

It's hard, you have to keep things tidy and try to keep a structure in your life so that you get all the chores done. We have to do the washing, find time to eat in time before training, doing homework, that's all difficult to manage. However, I am improving. From the beginning, it appeared quite hopeless, I was not in bed before 2 – 3 o'clock every night.

Due to a lot of travel to competitions and training camps, the students were often absent from school. With reference to Radke and Coalter's (2007) classification of integration, the students were integrated into regular classes with other students. Therefore they missed parts of the teaching, which they had to catch up on their own. Although the school facilitated for self-study during the training camps, most interviewees complained about the tight schedule and lack of surplus energy for the schoolwork. One said: "the training is tiring, and then we are supposed to do schoolwork in between training sessions, which we have twice a day. So between training sessions you'd rather sleep instead of doing homework." The focus on sport accomplishment was stressed by another saying: : "you know we are here to become better skiers". This indicated an emphasis on skill enhancement and

aggregating physical capital which refers to the development of bodies in ways which are recognised as possessing value in social fields (Shilling, 2003). The results are similar to Uebel's (2006) finding that the students felt training so time consuming that it was difficult to focus on schoolwork. Engstroem (2011) on the other hand, reported that the participants felt most pressure towards their studies.

Although the interviewees indicated that the combination of sport and school at times might be stressful, the teachers and coaches were praised for always being there for the students, even after ordinary school-time when needed. All in all the interviewees appeared quite satisfied both with the sport and academic programs offered by the school. The results associate to Romar's study (2012,) reporting that the majority of the students "perceived that skiing schools helped in combining sport and school" (p. 35).

In general, the interviews showed that the students faced challenges and uncertainty as well as opportunities (Bette, 2004). A few mentioned the minimal chance of succeeding expressed as such: "Everybody cannot be the best, of course. There are a lot of students who have studied here and very few who have reached the top, so it is very difficult, if you think about becoming the best." Another related the uncertainty as to possible obstacles in the skiing development: "It is impossible to say, so much can happen. Suddenly you can get ill and not be able to train properly for a whole year – that's the end of it." It is therefore of interest to see how the students perceived their efforts and outcome at the end of the third year.

Experience and fulfillment of expectations the third year

First, we present the results on fulfillment of expectations from the quantitative investigation before we direct attention to the qualitative interviews. Furthermore, we address the question whether the students had thought about quitting school, and finally we highlight whether the students retrospectively perceived it worth the effort to attend the school.

The survey results at T2 showed that less than one third had their expectations fulfilled to a great extent, fewer for the sport than for the academic outcome. The distribution in fulfillment of expectations to skiing results were: 25 % answered "to a great extent", 43 % "partly", and 31 % "not at all" or "to a little extent". The distribution on fulfilled expectations to get good school results were 26 %, 53 % and 22 % respectively. There were significant differences neither between female and male students, nor between cross-country and alpine skiers.

The changes from T1 to T2 appeared to reflect a reality orientation among the students supposedly due to lack of wanted results. As Bourdieu (2000) explains, investment in a field or a game is associated with uncertainty, where the subjective expectations and objective chances define investment. Agents have powers, defined by the volume and structure of their capital, which are very unequal. As for their expectations and aspirations – these are also very unequally distributed – the subjective hope of profit tends to be adjusted to the objective probability of profit in the various fields. Hence, for a great many of the students, investment

in physical capital in terms of making a skiing career, and accumulating cultural capital as measured in evaluations of their school grades, had not resulted in the expected outcome. Yet, it is worth noting that around half of the participants felt that their expectations partly had been fulfilled. Therefore, it is interesting to listen to the students' own voices at the end of the third year through the interviews.

At this time only a few participants revealed aspirations for a possible skiing career. However, there seemed to be a noticeable difference between the alpine and cross-country skiers. The remaining three alpine skiers in our interview sample had decided to quit or had already done so, which reflects changes in their position in the field caused by decrease in the capital needed for participation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). They all related a lot of injuries that had set them out for quite a while, expressed such as “the last years have been one steep uphill all the way” or “rather frustrating and stressful, you know, after all, I came here to ski.” Some interviewees told about serious injuries, one had been set out for a long time because he had “broken a bone in the lower back”. Another had during one school year “disrupted a ligament in the ankle, had inflammation in both knees, two places, and inflammation in Achilles. All of the alpine skiers revealed some frustration “by a feeling of being outside what’s going on when the others go away for training camps or competitions”. Taken together, the narratives relate to Bette's (2004,) elaboration of uncertainty and “the extreme dependency on the body that marks the athletic enterprise” (p. 103). Every athlete runs the risk of failure on account of injuries, illness and declining performance.

The three alpinists did not think that many others in their discipline would continue, they answered: “Probably one or two. Last year no one did, neither the year before” and “I think most will quit, or maybe someone still believe in the dream.” The last quotation may be interpreted in terms of something unrealistic or a very strong belief in *illusio* where the subjective perception of chances to succeed supposedly are not adjusted to objective probability of profit (Bourdieu, 2000). Furthermore, it seems to be a common understanding among the alpine skiers that in order to continue at their age, they need to be high on the ranking lists – “if not, game is over”. In addition to ranking points the interviewees emphasised the necessity of having reached the national team in order to continue. This was said to be different from the cross-country skiers who “more easily can practice on their own.”

Realising that a skiing career was unlikely they apparently put more emphasis on schoolwork, or in Bourdieu's (2000) terms, orient the playing strategies according to accumulated positive or negative profits. All expressed satisfaction with their results so far, and said that when they could not ski, they got more time for homework. One explained: “I have more energy. I am not so tired all the time as when we had heavy loads of training along with the school.” They planned for university studies and were concerned with their results becoming good enough to pass.

The interviews from the cross-country skiers paint a more diverse picture. All five were still there. Only one had definitely decided to quit, due to lack of motivation and long periods with illness:

I have been more or less ill since December, so the season was wasted. One flu after the other and in between some stomach problems. I have sort of given up, I realise that I have no need for skiing. I am really terribly fed up.

Two more appeared more reluctant, assuming a "wait and see" attitude. One would start studies at the university and possibly take part in some competitions, admitting she had no aspirations for the elite level. The other intended to do one more year at the school, which is an option for the students in order to improve their grades and/or take extra courses needed for further studies. Similar to the alpine skiers, results from the three cross-country skiers indicated changes in their positions in the field and distribution of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The remaining two would continue and see how far they could reach. Both intended to enroll in a program that facilitates the combination of skiing and sport studies at the university level (one-year study over two years). They had succeeded according to their aspirations so far: "Yes, I have been on the podium twice in the Norwegian Championship [for juniors] and probably I will reach the national team next year." The other one said: "I set goals for each season, so that sets the pace. This year I came forth as the best result. Last year was better than the year before, so it has gone the right way." Although both intended to combine skiing with sport studies, they did not reveal any concrete plans for further education. Hence, they gave priority to skiing and postponed the decision whether to quit or continue, which indicates a persistent belief in game and value of the stakes (Bourdieu, 2000).

Just under a third had thought about quitting. The majority reported reasons related to the lack of sport achievements, a smaller part gave social reasons, whereas one single respondent related the reason to the schoolwork. In comparison, Dønnestad (2013) reported that dissatisfaction with the sport program, getting bored, and finding more preferable alternatives were the most frequent reasons for dropout while a smaller percentage mentioned injuries and/or illness. In our study relatively more females than males had thought about quitting, 45 % vs 19 %. Similarly, Dønnestad's (2013) study that covered several sports, revealed a relatively higher percentage of dropouts among females than males in the skiing disciplines.

Was it worth the effort?

Evaluating the years at the skiing gymnasium as a whole, all but one were satisfied with their choice of school. A predominant trait appeared to be satisfaction with the experience of personal growth and increased independence, and learning to trust their own decisions. Several underlined that they had become more structured and better organised due to the tight schedule including training, schoolwork and domestic work. Yet, some of them admitted that the learning curve had been steep at times. Only one said she might have been happier at a "regular school", but she also added "but, then I would not know what it would be like...."

The interviews uncovered a strong belief in the field of skiing – *illusio* – with statements such as "I wanted to see how far I could go" and "I would not be happy without giving it a try." One expressed more clearly: "I had decided to devote the junior years and then see if I had the potential for success to become really good." In line with the latter, negotiating the uncertainty appeared to have taught the students to become realistic according

to their hopes and further plans. This may be illustrated by two different perspectives. One of those who wanted to continue skiing considered future chances as such:

That's impossible to say. It's very much up to oneself, but you need quite a lot of luck, as well as doing the right things the whole way. I don't know whether that's my goal, but I feel like trying.

Another, who had totally given up skiing, said he had realised how much it would cost, which in itself was a good lesson to learn. He summarised:

I am quite happy with how I have spent my time here, although I did not really succeed in skiing. Right now, sport does not matter so much for me anymore. I am not bitter or sad because it did not turn out better, not at all. I think, in the long run it is for the best that it ended as it did.

The statement indicated that he was satisfied with the current situation and in the prospect of the future as well. Elsewhere in the interview, he said it had been a great time during the three years at the school, a good way to do the secondary school, "probably better than doing it at home."

Another aspect of perceived outcome reflected durable habits of exercise, and knowledge beyond the secondary school curriculum. Several students expressed that they certainly would continue with exercise on a regular basis, phrased in terms such as "I will never stop exercising. I think I am quite addicted to it for my wellbeing" and "I think it becomes a bit of a habit to keep in shape and the feeling of being in good shape." One alpine skier related future exercise to what he used to do at the school: "I will train regularly, for sure, with various activities. But, heavy squats – that I'm done with." In various ways, the quotations associates to habitus, as consisting of "a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata for perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 16).

Most of the interviewees also mentioned the coaching education, which is part of the courses at the skiing gymnasium. They referred to its content as well as the prospect of a future job as a coach. None of them really thought of coaching as a full-time profession, it seemed more likely to be on a club level, for example besides studies or in their club at home. The coach education relates to formal qualifications of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) when passed exam and certification. Qualifications achieved during practice may be regarded as informal cultural capital.

Conclusion

The study showed young skiers' investment in the field of skiing. A strong belief in the game – *illusio* - and expectations to succeed were demonstrated in data from the first year. In general, the students came from resourceful families in terms of capital (cultural and supposedly economic), and a great majority belonged to "skiing families" with strong skiing habitus. In other words, the students appeared privileged in the sense of being able to try out their potential for a possible skiing career along with secondary school.

At the end of the first year, the respondents seemed mostly concerned with the skiing skill development, which at times compromised the schoolwork. The interviews also uncovered challenges with experienced stress and health issues, as well as moving away from home and manage the daily life duties.

The third year demonstrated that a considerable dropout had taken place. Approximately one fifth of the respondents from the survey had dropped out and two from the qualitative investigation sample. Furthermore, almost one third of the survey respondents had considered quitting school, for a great deal due to lack of results in skiing. For a considerable number the expectations to sport achievements dropped over the three years. This may illustrate that the students were faced with the realities and the uncertainty of making a skiing career. Likewise, the expectations to good school results also dropped, although not to the same degree as expectations to skiing results. While realizing that a skiing career was unlikely, the interviewees tended to focus more on schoolwork and further education. Only two of the students that were interviewed clearly expressed that they would continue skiing whilst also revealing some degree of uncertainty of success.

The qualitative interviews gave more nuances to the survey data, and shed light on how the students negotiated challenges and adversity, and where injuries and illness appeared to be a major concern. Yet, almost everyone expressed satisfaction with "having tried" even if the expectations were not fulfilled. Nevertheless, all interviewees at the third year emphasised the positive outcome of becoming more independent and trust their own decisions more. Seemingly they had gained sport capital in terms of exercise habitus as well as cultural capital through coaching qualifications.

The interviews also revealed aspects that did not surface in the survey data. Among them differences between the skiing disciplines, which may reflect central features of the sports. The age of the participants may play a role in terms of sport development, as the cross-country skiers tend to have the opportunity of a "longer" timespan for achievements. Moreover, alpine skiers seemed to be more vulnerable for injuries. Gender differences surfaced as to aspirations for a skiing career and dropout from the school. This may be explained by gender socialisation as well as opportunities for a skiing career.

The study has some limitations. In the quantitative part we did not provide comparable data on an individual basis, which might have given a more accurate picture of changes in the expectations of the students. Having more schools and skiing disciplines included in the qualitative part might have contributed to a broader picture. In further research, it may also be valuable to examine the perspectives of the parents as to having their daughter/son enrolled in a skiing gymnasium. To examine young skiers taking "regular" high-school while pursuing a skiing career would also provide more insight to the issue of the "dual career" – skiing and education.

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