

# A Unique Training for a Unique Talent

## Integrating a MOOC into blended learning approach

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### **Abstract:**

*The AtLETyC project aims to train active or former elite athletes on entrepreneurship. A crucial part in the project is the development of a MOOC addressing communication and team-work, marketing clues, and topics around understanding and leading business. In the article the authors present the pedagogical design of the AtLETyC training which merges face-to-face training with online support for the athletes and with the MOOC where a broader target group will participate.*

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**Keywords:** athletes, MOOC, entrepreneurship, blended learning

## 1. Athletes Learning Entrepreneurship

### 1.1 The Project

The overall aim of the project is to develop and implement a training on entrepreneurship which is particularly designed for active or former elite athletes. The goal of the learning program is to encourage and stimulate the Dual Career approaches of sportsmen and sportswomen from all athletic fields (cf. AtLETyC, 2017) (2015- 3343/001 – 001).

In the recent years many efforts have been made (by the public and the private sector) to support and expand entrepreneurship education in Europe. But within that development, there was no specific emphasis on the education of athletic entrepreneurs. Since this part of entrepreneur education hasn't been implemented yet by any educational institution, the goal of the AtLETyC (**A**thletes **L**earning **E**ntrepreneurship – a new **T**ype of Dual **C**areer Approach) project is to correct this fact and help athletes to realize their own business ideas (cf. AtLETyC, 2017). The connection of sport and business in an educational program seems to be obvious, since athletes and entrepreneurs have very similar characteristics, for example: high level of motivation, commitment, resilience or taking responsibility (cf. AtLETyC, 2017).

For that reason, many EU papers and research results emphasize the fact, that athletes have a strong potential to also become successful entrepreneurs, for example in the "EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes" (cf. EU Expert Group

“Education and Training in Sport”, 2012). This policy shows that successful athletes have the appropriate and potential experience to continue and establish a successful entrepreneurship career. The European Commission released in 2007 with its white paper on sport a similar statement: *“sport has a strong potential to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and new jobs through its positive effects on social inclusion, education and training, and public health”* (European Commission, 2007).

So the main goals for the project are to promote the possibility for athletes to get involved in the entrepreneurship process and to help athletes to build and develop their Dual Career ambitions.

But the ambition for the project is not only relevant for EU officials, there is also a need stated by athletes themselves. The athletes-to-business survey, initiated by the European Commission, showed that 76 % of the polled athletes were concerned about their career after their professional sports career, but only 10 % of them were part of any form of a career program (cf. European Commission, 2015).

Another innovative specialty of the project is that the educational program will be performed on a digital learning platform. This platform will use the concept of a MOOC (**M**assive **O**pen **O**nline **C**ourse) and provide interested athletic learners a comprehensive and guided learning experience to gain professional knowledge on the foundation of a business. Since technology has massively changed the framework of education, this project takes advantage of new digital learning environments to provide a current and effective learning experience. Furthermore, digital learning forms are far more flexible in their usage, which is also an important point, when it comes to providing athletes a suiting learning schedule beside their training obligations.

The coordinator of the project is the FH JOANNEUM, which is located in Graz, Austria. Further partners are The WUS (World University Service Austria), KADA (Verein Karriere Danach), the University of Ljubljana of Sports (FSP) and the Slovenian University Sport Association (Susa), the University of Torino (UNITO) and the Italian Culture and Sports Associations (AICS), the Lithuanian Sports University (LSU) and the Lithuanian Union of Sports Federations (LSFS), the Hungarian University of Physical Education (HUPE) and the Hungarian Association of Sports and Management (HASM), the University of Sarajevo and the Olimpijski Komitet i Hercegovine (OKBIH).

## 1.2 Framework for Training

The development and implementation of the digital MOOC platform is the main core of the AtLETyC project. Since being a successful entrepreneur requires a wide range

of skills the learning content must reflect this wide range of capabilities. That is why the learning content provides soft and hard skill learning modules which will be described in the next points.

One of the main intents using a MOOC learning platform is to support and connect international learning groups all over the world and provide a learning environment for their individual learning habits. Therefore, different types of materials, links, questions for discussion and tasks were developed by the MOOC creators and those documents will be available online anytime for all learners on the MOOC platform. Additionally, moderators from the AtLETyC team will play an active part within the MOOC platform and encourage athletes to get involved in the MOOC environment and also share their learning experience on the web.

The philosophy of the digital learning framework is based on the idea of connectivist learning theory. Connectivism promotes a new understanding of learning in terms self-regulated and interconnected learning behavior in times of digitization (cf. Downes, 2010). That means for our MOOC that learners have enough autonomy to make their own decisions within the learning framework and that a diverse learning experience is ensured. Interactivity and openness ensures the possibility, that that all kind of learners can get involved in the learning program.

In preparation of the AtLETyC MOOC a MOOC for the AtLETyC team was created under the name *“AtLETyC MOOC Camp”* to get all AtLETyC team members familiar with the MOOC experience and give them a short and effective introduction on how to create materials for a MOOC and what has to be considered when it comes to the creation of a digital learning framework (AtLETyC, 2017). The three weeks of the MOOC were open to all interested learners and by the end of the MOOC project team members have learned together with learners from other fields and institutions outside the AtLETyC network. Altogether the MOOC Camp attracted 50 learners.

## 2. Athletes Learning Entrepreneurship

### 2.1 Introduction

The challenge of the AtLETyC training lies in the combination of face-to-face and online training on the one hand and on the integration of learners groups on the other hand. The main target group of the AtLETyC project are high performance athletes in the partner countries during their active phase or after it. They will be trained face-to-face and online and can gain 3 ECTS if they fulfil the tasks and tests. Nevertheless, other athletes and everybody else with interest in the topic can attend the online part of the training as well which is provided in form of a MOOC (massive

open online course). Participants who are active learners during the MOOC will get a badge, provided by the MOOCs conveners/moderators. Figure 1 shows the different target groups of the AtLETyC MOOC.

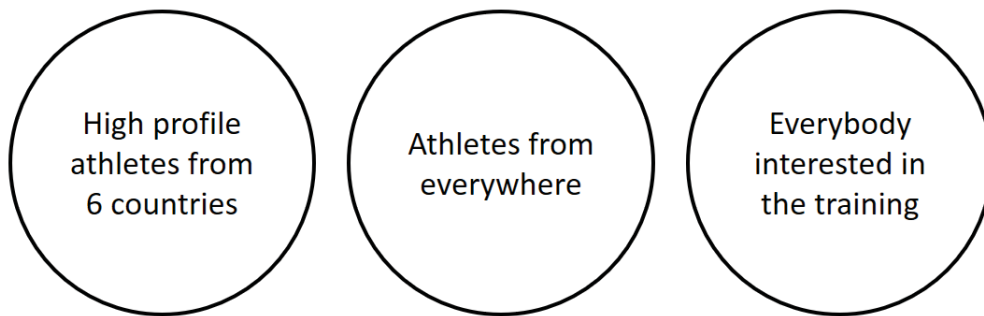


Figure 1: Target groups of the AtLETyC training

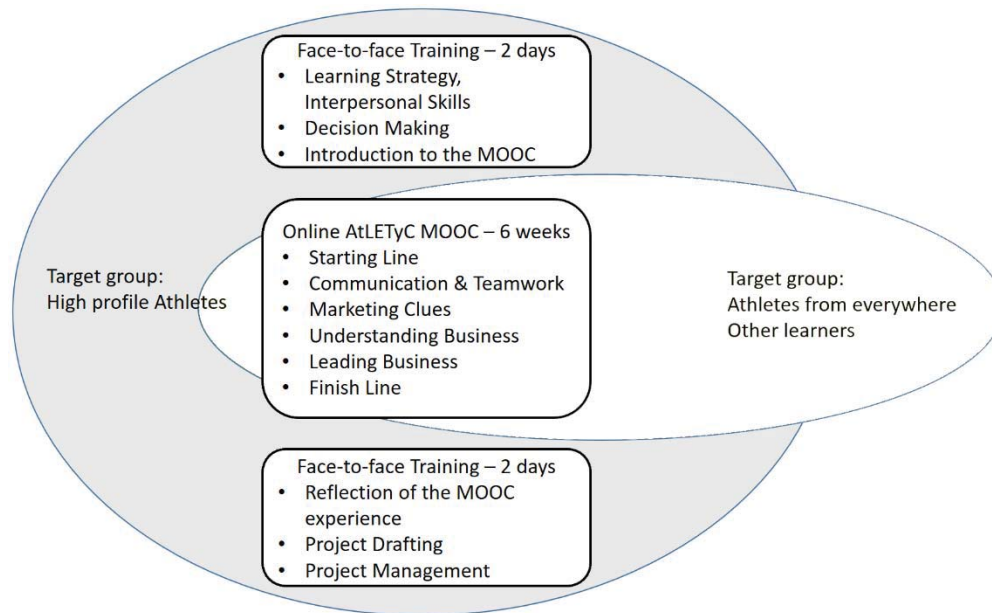
## 2.2 Schedule and Content

In autumn 2017 the training for the high profile athletes will start with two days of face-to-face training in six countries. Altogether 90 athletes (15 in each country) will start the face-to-face (f2f) training. The topics of the first two days will be learning strategy, interpersonal skills and decision making including a two hours' introduction to the MOOC. The learning material will be in English and in the local language, the interaction with the trainer mainly in the local language.

The AtLETyC MOOC will run for six weeks from October to December 2017. The topics of these weeks are:

- an introduction to the MOOC and its content and a task to connect the learners as starting line,
- communication and teamwork,
- marketing clues including a practical case,
- understanding business,
- leading business,
- and reflection and evaluation as finish line.

In December the athletes will attend another two days of face-to-face training in their local group. The content of this training will be a reflection of the learning experience in the MOOC and project drafting and project management.



**Figure 2: Overview of the AtLETyC training programme**

Figure 2 gives an overview of the training within the AtLETyC project. The 90 athletes who already attended the face-to-face training will be joined by further learners, the project team expects 300 to 500 additional learners in the MOOC. Materials, tasks and the learning process will be provided in English. All learners in the MOOC will be challenged to interact online and make their learning process and results visible. In addition, the high profile athletes have to complete an online test about each MOOC week.

## 2.3 Training concept

### 2.3.1. Material and online learning spaces

All materials in the AtLETyC project are provided in English. If necessary, some parts are translated into the local languages.

#### **Two f2f days**

Local trainers will work with the groups of high profile athletes during the face-to-face trainings. All learning materials will be provided in a learning platform (e.g. Moodle) or a social learning environment (e.g. Facebook group). At the end of the first training session these athletes get access to the learning environment and have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with it. As preparation for the MOOC the learning platform or social learning environment contains a link to the MOOC platform and a video which explains how to deal with the MOOC.

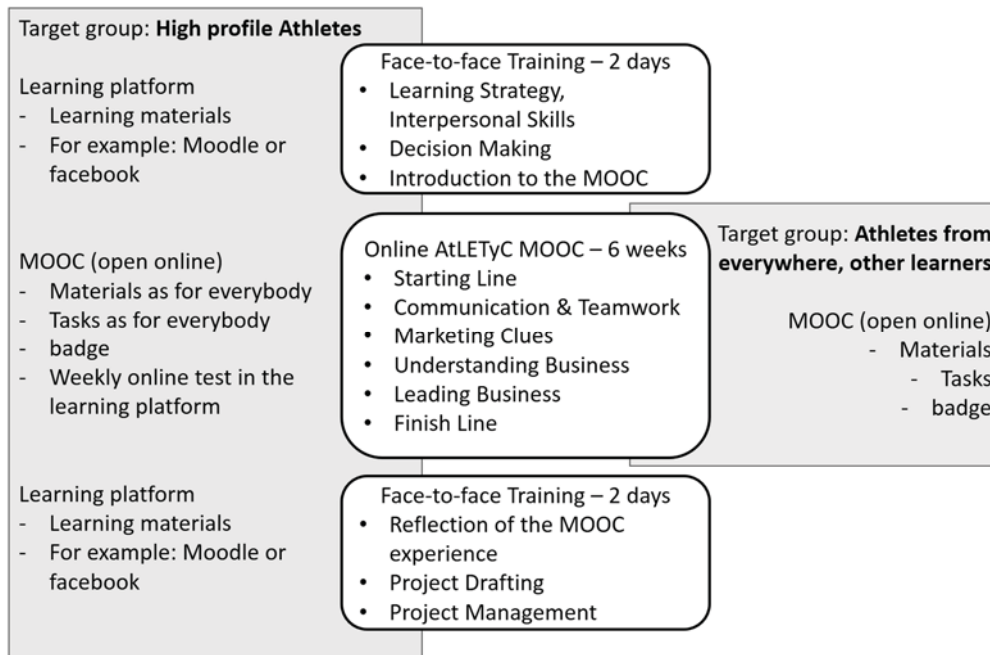


Figure 3: Material in the AtLETyC training programme

## MOOC

The AtLETyC MOOC is implemented on a Wordpress blog (<https://wordpress.com/>). Learners can join the MOOC using a nickname, learning is possible without a login. The MOOC design is based on experiences with the cope14 MOOC (cf. Pauschenwein & Pernold, 2014) and aims to trigger the engagement of the learners and to support common learning processes (cf. Mackness & Pauschenwein, 2016). A multitude of resources and learning paths in a hybrid learning space challenges the learners to assume responsibility for their own learning. The online tasks are based on Salmon's model (2013) and on the principles of connectivism – autonomy, diversity, interactivity and openness (cf. Downes, 2010). The learners collaborate with others, complete the tasks and to share their results on the web. To foster a good learning experience in the MOOC the 90 athletes will be supported by the local project group as well.

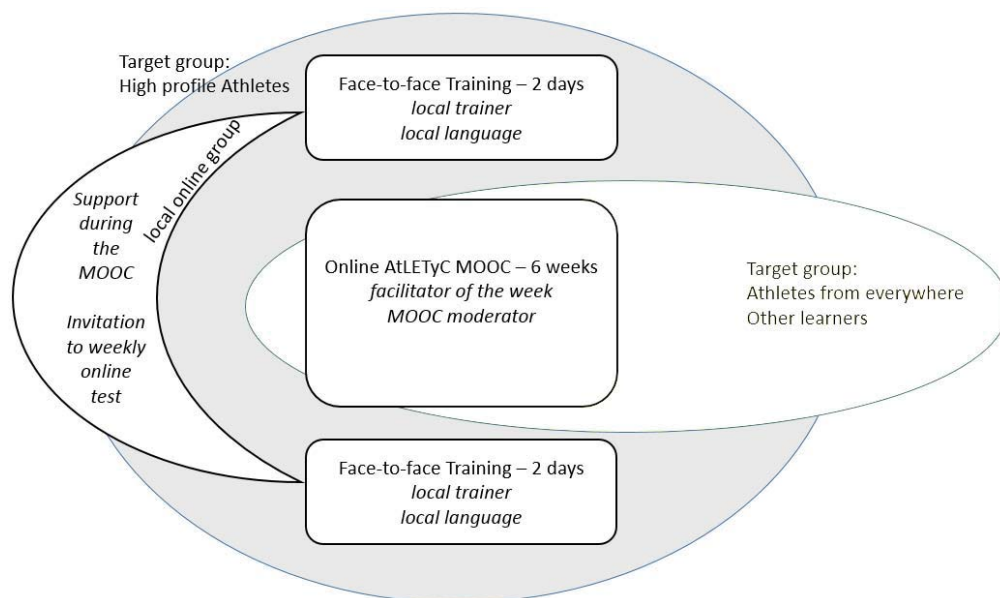
## Two f2f days

In the final workshop days, the high profile athletes learn about project management and reflect what they have learned in the MOOC and their competences of learning in online environments.

Figure 3 summarizes the materials produced for the training, in which platform these materials are available and the target group engaged with the material.

### 2.3.2. Support

Local trainers work with the high profile athletes in the face-to-face workshops. They speak the local language and can help to explain the material which is provided in English. Furthermore, a local convener supports these athletes during the whole training period. As members of a local online group, the athletes can contact the convener or their colleagues if they encounter problems in the training.



**Figure 4: Support in the AtLETyC training programm**

In the MOOC facilitators provide material, tasks and professional support with respect the content of the weeks, the MOOC moderators monitor what's happening in the MOOC and document the activities. These moderators are responsible to support the whole group of learners. Figure 4 illustrates the support structure for the learners. The responsibility of facilitators lies more behind the scenes and on a technical level, while moderators are more visible within the MOOC course itself.

### 3. Summary and discussion

In this paper the European project AtLETyC is described and the training design within the project is explained. It is a challenge for the project partners to support their local high profile athletes in their learning processes one the one hand and to support a much broader group of learners on the other hand. Learning in the project is mostly blended learning where online and face-to-face learning scenarios merge. It will be important to evaluate the different parts of the training to get insights how the design worked and to learn about further aspects of blended learning approaches. The focus will lie on a Social Network Analysis to analyse in which parts learners have been especially active or unactive to take the results into the next projects.

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