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Career consolidation or reformulation? A careership theory approach to football coaches' transnational migration and career development

Ce Guo ^a, Richard Giulianotti ^{a,b} and Minhyeok Tak ^a

^aSchool of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK; ^bDepartment of Sports, Physical Education and Outdoor Studies, University of South-Eastern Norway, Telemark, Norway

ABSTRACT

This article examines the career development of international football coaches in the context of their transnational migration. Previous research has mainly relied on the normative stages models to explain coaching career development, which has limitations in capturing the complexity and diversity of coach career trajectories, particularly in terms of unique individual experiences and contextual impacts on their career development. Drawing upon the theory of careership, this article seeks to bridge the gap by focusing on how individual coaches navigate their careers according to their horizon for action. Careership theory provides a useful lens through which to examine the interactions between individuals and their contexts, in gaining a more nuanced understanding of how these interactions shape career trajectories. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight international coaches who worked in China to gather qualitative data. The results show that the migration of coaches closely intertwined with their career development in a variety of ways, which were manifested in different career horizons for migration within two distinct stages of career development: (1) 'career-consolidation' reflecting the willingness to stabilise and solidify the career pathways, and (2) 'career-reformulation' highlighting the desires or needs to change the current career trajectories. The findings of this article suggest that career development is a multifaceted process encompassing normative, longitudinal steps, individualised approaches, objectives, constraints and unexpected events. Analysing coaches' horizons for action allows researchers and practitioners (e.g. coach educators) to gain a holistic picture of individual and contextual distinctions within the longitudinal stages of coaching career development.

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Coach; coaching career development; career stages; migration; careership; career horizons for action; China

Introduction

In the era of contemporary globalisation of sports, increasing numbers of sports professionals migrate away from their home countries to ply their careers abroad (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Maguire, 2008). The global mobility of professional football coaches has become a significant component of sport-related migration. As Poli et al. (2020) reported, by the 1st of June 2020, 28.3% of coaches in charge of 1646 football teams across 110 leagues in 79 countries worldwide were

CONTACT Ce Guo  c.guo2@lboro.ac.uk  School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, UK

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expatriates. Sport migration studies have revealed a range of factors that proved to be important in influencing sport coaches' international movement, such as higher competitive environment or titles, financial rewards, overall economic conditions, new experience, and geographical proximity (Borges et al., 2015; Smith, 2016; Wicker et al., 2018). However, only a few studies have considered the migration of sport coaches as part of their career development pathway (see Samuel et al., 2021; Smith, 2016) despite the fact that coaches' migration, be it intentional or accidental, is likely to have an enormous impact on their career identities and trajectories (Smith, 2016). Indeed, migration can be understood as a spatial expansion of career development activities through which coaches acquire relevant social, economic, cultural and sporting capital. Therefore, increasing transnational migration of sports coaches can serve as a valuable social setting in which to observe coaches' consideration of career development.

Although research into sports coaching has increased in quality and quantity over the last two decades, the subject of sport coaching careers is in its early stages and remains largely under-explored (Christensen, 2013; Jones et al., 2010; Purdy & Potrac, 2016). Current research on coach career development has primarily focused on the transition from novice to professional and elite positions, known as career promotion (e.g. Erickson et al., 2007; Koh et al., 2011; Watts & Cushion, 2017). More particularly, the realm of career development for these sport coaches is a topic of ongoing debate. For example, the stage-based career models have been used to explain the constructed process of coaching careers (Erickson et al., 2007; Koh et al., 2011; Piggott, 2012; Ronkainen et al., 2020), presenting generic and sequential trajectories of career development by age-specific and chronologically arranged milestones (Christensen, 2013).

However, the normative stage-based models have been criticised for ignoring individual backgrounds, sociocultural and contextual differentials, and for failing to explain meaningful or accidental events in the life course (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Christensen, 2013; Purdy & Potrac, 2016; Thompson et al., 2015). Indeed, the career of sport coaches does not always progress as expected in pre-defined stages; rather, it is a life course project with 'the ever-present possibility of career failure and rejection' (Purdy & Potrac, 2016; Roderick, 2006, p. 246). In this sense, Purdy and Potrac (2016) challenge the stage-based models by investigating the career experiences of a high-performance coach who questioned her career trajectory after following the perceived 'logical' linear career trajectory. Christensen (2013) also explores different pathways to becoming an elite coach and indicates that a coach's career development is a plural phenomenon and could be conceptualised as a typology rather than a staged model. Thus, despite the existing normative stages models' contribution to understanding coaching career progress and developing coach education (Cushion et al., 2012), there needs to be an additional focus on the unique experiences and circumstances of individual coaches, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which they operate (Kim et al., 2020; Purdy & Potrac, 2016).

This article aims to contribute to filling this gap by investigating the transnational migration of coaches from the perspective of career development. Specifically, we employ the sociological theory of 'careership' to explore coaches' career horizons for action when they decide to emigrate. The careership theory utilises the conception of 'horizons for action' to describe the arena within which decisions are made and actions taken (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). We assume that career development is one of the most important considerations in coaches' horizon for migration because transnational migration offers a comparatively uncommon career pathway in itself. This makes coaches' transnational migration an ideal case with which to explore the complex, dynamic interactions between individuals and contexts, and their subsequent impact on coaches' career trajectories beyond the existing normative stage-based frameworks.

China offers fertile ground for observing the intersection of coaches' migration and career development in a cross-cultural environment. Since 2015, the Chinese state has established the 'inviting in' policy as one of the main ways of improving its national football at all levels while remedying the shortage of qualified football coaches (Tan et al., 2016). For example, the Chinese Ministry of Education recruited approximately 500 international football coaches for Chinese schools from 2015

to 2019 (National Youth Campus Football Work Report [2015–2019], 2019). Apart from the education system, football clubs, private academies, and agencies have also actively recruited international football coaches to respond to the call for nationwide football reform (Connell, 2018). As a result, diverse cohorts of international football coaches have been drawn into the country. By analysing qualitative data from interviews with eight international coaches who had worked in China, this article presents various career horizons for migration and two main stages in coaching career development via migration: (1) the stage of career-consolidation where migration serves to stabilise and advance coaches' career development; and (2) the stage of career-reformulation where coaches use migration to change their current occupational and/or financial status. This paper contributes to the existing literature on coaching career development by providing a framework that enables researchers to integrate individual distinctions with normative career stages for fuller explorations of the coaches' career development process. Therefore, this framework and our findings could be utilised for future studies examining the career development of coaches and other sport-related educators, as well as a broader array of sport professionals.

Careership theory: conceptualising career decision-making

Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) careership theory provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals make career decisions in the changing landscape of the labour market. It considers career decision-making and development occur in the interaction between individuals and the contexts in which they manoeuvre (Hodkinson, 2009, p. 4). Within this interaction, individual career development is bounded by 'horizons for action', which means the area in which they make career decisions (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Individuals' horizons for action are influenced by both of the social structure and their own 'habitus' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1977, as cited in Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) concept, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 33) use 'habitus' to describe the way that 'a person's beliefs, ideas, and preferences are individually subjective but also influenced by the objective social networks and cultural traditions in which that person lives'. Moreover, the careership theory emphasises that people's career consists of uneven routines, interspersed with different turning points (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). People make career decisions at turning points based on their horizons for action, which are influenced by the routines they experience (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) (see Figure 1). Turning points represent occasions when individuals make career decisions and change career pathways, while routines mean the periods between turning points (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Lundahl et al., 2017).

The current body of literature has delineated five career routines: confirmatory, contradictory, socialising, dislocating, and evolutionary (Hancock, 2009; Hodkinson et al., 2013; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

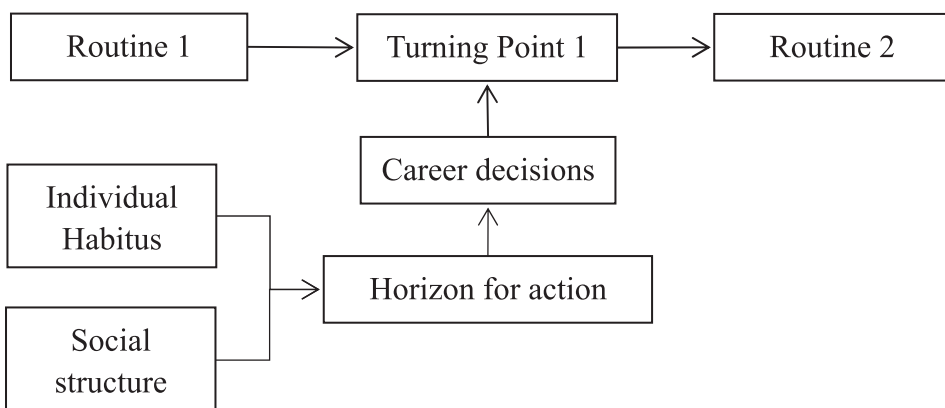


Figure 1. Career decision making process in the careership theory.

Confirmatory routines indicate situations where people reinforce a career decision already made, so that a new identity or position develops broadly in the way this subject hoped and intended (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Contradictory routines arise when people recognise that their current career or work status no longer fulfils their needs, causing dissatisfaction with certain aspects that may undermine their prior choices (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Socialising routines characterise a temporary phase where individuals reluctantly accept a career that does not align with their desired trajectory, and adapt to the reality of life until opportunities arise to realise their intended career path (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019; Hancock, 2009). Dislocating routines describe situations where individuals neither accept nor feel capable of transforming a career identity that they dislike (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Lastly, evolutionary routines occur when individuals gradually outgrow their original career identity without undergoing significant contradiction or pain (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

These routines are maintained, interrupted, or changed at different ‘turning points’ in the life course of each individual (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Careership theory presents three types of turning points: structural, forced, and self-initiated (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Structural turning points come about by the external structures of societies and institutions (e.g. young people are supposed to decide whether to advance to higher education or leave at the end of schooling) (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Self-initial turning points usually emerge from critical reflections on self, ideals, norms, practices, and relationships, instead of being stimulated by uncontrolled or unexpected conditions (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014). Finally, sometimes external events and/or the actions of others bring about forced turning points (e.g. being dismissed). Such incidental events impact a person’s career outside their control (Hancock, 2009).

These notions of careership theory (routines, turning points and horizons) serve as heuristic tools for us to capture diverse individual backgrounds and contextual conditions behind football coaches’ migrant decision to move to China. At the same time, we used the notions as key building blocks to develop a systematic understanding of coach migration as a means of career development.

Methods

In order to explore individual coaches’ career routines and turning points before migration, this study employed a qualitative research design with interviews for data collection and a thematic approach for data analysis. A total of eight interviewees were purposively recruited based on their migratory experience and backgrounds. The key criterion for selection was that participants must have experience working for at least one football club (academy) in China since 2015. Specifically, this study focused on coaches who had migrated outside the continent of their homeland. To recruit interviewees across China, we obtained contact information for coaches through the personal network of the lead author who has the experience of working with international coaches as a translator. In an effort to maximise the diversity of the participant’s experiences and perspectives, we recruited participants who were coaching at various levels from grassroots and school or college levels through to professional football clubs. Given that we had yet to find female

Table 1. List of interviewees.

No.	Participants	Age group	Coaching license	Current or previous role(s) in China
1	Brazilian coach 1	35–40	A CBF	Head coach for a university football team
2	Brazilian coach 2	30–35	No license	Coaching for a grassroots football academy
3	Brazilian coach 3	25–30	B CBF	Goalkeeper coach for a third division club
4	Columbian coach	35–40	C UEFA	Coaching for a grassroots football academy
5	Serbian coach	35–40	A UEFA	Coaching for a professional football academy
6	UK coach	30–35	B UEFA	Coaching for a football project
7	Spanish coach 1	30–35	pro UEFA	Coached for one Chinese Junior Men’s National team Coaching for a regional football youth team
8	Spanish coach 2	30–35	pro UEFA	Coached for a professional football academy Coaching for a football project

international football coaches in China, male interviewees were the main resources for this research. The interviewees were anonymised to guarantee their confidentiality (see [Table 1](#) for the list of interviewees and their brief backgrounds).

Upon obtaining the ethics approval from the authors' institute, potential interviewees were contacted via email, and informed about the research purpose and key procedures for interview participation (e.g. audio recording, right to withdrawal, and approximate duration). Informed by literature on sport labour migration and careership, the interview questions covered a range of topics related to the participants' career routines and turning points around their move to China, including: (1) the interviewee's work history, current work status, general conditions of the football coaching industry in their home country, (2) their career status prior to this movement, (3) differences in the football coaching industries between China and their home country, and (4) external events and internal motives that had led to their migration. The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions which allow interviewees to present their thoughts and experiences more freely (Patton, 2015).

The interviews were performed online via Microsoft Teams and Skype. Because of the COVID-19 quarantine measures and restrictions in many regions during 2020–2022, we were unable to conduct face to face interviews. The challenge of the online interview is that the author cannot actually 'see' interviewees, so interviewees might have feelings of strangeness and defensiveness (De Villiers et al., 2022). To prevent this concern, a mutual friend of the primary author introduced each interviewee so that the primary author and all interviewees established a sufficient level of trust. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 min. All interviews were carried out in English, all of which were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

To analyse the interview data, Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis was utilised. As Braun and Clarke (2019) suggested, we continually reflected, questioned, and queried the assumptions made during coding and interpreting the data. The first stage was to tidy up interview transcripts and codes. All interview recordings were transcribed and uploaded into NVIVO 12 for systematic analysis. Codes were developed during the transcription process based on the researchers' deliberations, aimed at capturing both expected and unexpected codes (Bryman, 2012). The second stage was to inductively and abductively infer the research participants' career routines and turning points, considering the individuals' specific goals, dispositions, preferences, and surroundings. This generated the 'pattern codes' based on the 'causes/explanation' relation (Miles et al., 2014, p. 87) which we registered as the career routines of interviewees when they considered migration.

The third stage was to summarise the themes of the predominant meanings of the interviewees' migration, thus generating interpretive stories about the data, such as the fierce competition in local coaching market, financial hardship and high commitment for coaching. Finally, we ascertained coaches' horizons for migration and the career stages by appraising the similarities and differences regarding the meanings of migration for coaches in different career routines. The results are presented in the sections that follow.

Findings: football coaches' career development via horizons for international migration

This section details two main career stages, which were identified based on the coaches' horizons for migration: (1) the stage of 'career-consolidation' and (2) the stage of 'career-reformulation'. The stage of career-consolidation reflects the need of these coaches to maintain or advance their career trajectory in a stable, deliberate, and measured manner, while the stage of career-reformulation highlights a coach's need to make rapid transformation to career paths. Data show that coaches who experienced relatively stable career development were more likely at the stage of career-consolidation. In contrast, obstacles in career development of sport coaches which are caused by differentials in their characteristics, backgrounds, and unique contexts, tend to locate them in the stage of career-reformulation.

Stage of career-consolidation: pursuing ongoing development

This study describes a stage in which coaches continuously followed stepwise career development or goal achievement as 'career-consolidation'. Coaches considered this stage as an ideal period of their professional development, which is mainly manifested in this study as 'confirmatory' and 'evolutionary' routines. Firstly, the confirmatory routine is a sustained part of the development of identity and habitus (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Research participants in a confirmatory routine might find it easier to make migration decisions if they believe that such a transnational movement could further their career development. This study found that a confirmatory routine accommodates all three types of turning points (structural, self-initiated, and forced). Secondly, evolutionary routines are characterised by a strong willingness to obtain a new desirable career identity. Such routines could result in eventual transformation 'with or without a contributing turning point' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 41).

Horizon for career stabilisation

The migration of the interviewed coaches can be attributed to their continual evaluation of new career opportunities and the possibility of maintaining current career stages. Given the precarious trajectories of professional football coaching career and the highly volatile feature of the job market (Paola & Scoppa, 2012), professional coaches very often evaluate their career trajectories and weigh the spectrum of available work opportunities to stabilise what they have achieved in their career stages. Hence, some coaches' migration was prompted by structural turning points in their confirmatory routines, which were influenced by the foreseeable structural property of the coaching profession. For example, one coach from Serbia indicated that his horizon for migration was always based on the pursuit of career stability:

I often received offers from other countries. I consider offers depending on where I am going to work and at which level. Firstly, I came to China because I could get a lot of money. It is important to work with a satisfying salary. Secondly, I wanted to come to a serious project. If I confirm to work in a place, the level should be similar to my previous places or even better. I will say that it is very important. (Serbian Coach)

Horizon for career advancement

Coaches who had the horizon for advancing their career through migration were more likely to experience self-initiated turning points in a confirmatory routine. In such cases, these coaches' desire to attain stepwise career development made them more motivated to migrate as new opportunities were perceived to offer greater advantages. It is noteworthy that coaches who experienced self-initiated turning points in a confirmatory routine might not have an urgent need to develop their careers. Instead, the decision to migrate was well thought-out based on their comparison between the potential benefits of working abroad and what they could achieve in their current place. For example, a Brazilian coach, who previously worked in three countries, including China, commented that he believed that relocating to China would advance his career position:

I played futsal football for seven years in Italy and two years in Portugal. People think all footballers can get high salaries and be successful. However, many players cannot get a big salary and keep stable. We need to fight to get the salary. So when I ended the contract in Portugal, I went back to Brazil and decided to become a coach. I worked for a team in the Brazilian secondary division. I moved to China because it would be a good opportunity. If I went to China, maybe in 3 years, I could change to a high level. I really want to work in a club where I can show my talents, my skills, and my passion. (Brazilian Coach 1)

Horizon for personal penchant in career

On the other hand, the evolutionary routine found in this study helps to explain the relative roles of instrumental purpose and intrinsic penchant in one's horizon for migration. For instance, the UK

Coach had a firm intention to be involved in football coaching, which facilitated his migration to seek a career evolution, that is, to be a full-time coach. He worked full-time as a lawyer and part-time as a coach in one Welsh top adult team with a UEFA B licence. His intrinsic penchant for coaching, combined with an instrumental purpose of working in a top club, facilitated his decision to migrate. This interviewee was recruited by an England top football club's cooperation project with the Chinese Education Ministry to coach in China.

I thought that [by moving to China] I was able to have more time to coach. Because it is a full-time position, I could spend all day in football, plan a programme properly in the long term, and make my programme as what I want. In Wales, most football jobs were part-time. Even if you were the first team manager in the top tier, it was also a part-time job. So a lot of coaches would be a combination of roles. My full-time job as a lawyer was progressing well. When I told my boss I would leave, she actually offered me a role as a director to try to get me to stay, but I said that it wasn't really about the money or about the role in the firm. It was more about I want to follow my passion for working in football full time. China offered the opportunity to do that through the project. So I was motivated by the experience of the new country and to develop myself as a coach, to be able to work all time on football within a good football club. (the UK Coach)

His turning point can be considered structural because he would not be able to work as a full-time coach at a top club in his country while his viable migratory path was shaped by the structural opportunities.

Stage of career-reformulation: changing the status quo

The stage of career-reformulation refers to a phase in which individuals seek to modify, transfer, or reset their career path to discard their present career status. This desire for change often stems from the obstacles encountered in the perceived stages of career development, resulting in negative sentiments toward oneself and/or one's surroundings (e.g. job dissatisfaction, financial hardship, depressing future, and potential career risks). We extracted these negative sentiments from coaches' contradictory, socialising, and dislocating routines. The contradictory routine is the phase when these coaches recognised that the identity or position they assumed at the previous turning point is no longer capable of meeting their career needs. The socialising routine refers to a phase where coaches were temporarily distracted from reaching individual career goals due to the presence of objective restrictions. Last, the migration decision made within a dislocating routine emerged when a coach wanted to extricate themselves from their present identities or perceived that they were unable to make further progress within their current stages. The migration decisions of coaches at the stage of career-reformulation seemed to be relatively pragmatic and dependent on their circumstances, as these coaches expected that there would be immediate changes following migration. Our findings suggest that the coaches' career horizons for action shaped within the stage of career-reformulation primarily facilitated a better and faster return to career developmental trajectories they perceived as normal or ideal in the long term.

Horizon for reducing employment uncertainties and dissatisfaction

The overproduction of sport workers in certain countries and wage gaps have facilitated the transnational movement of coaches (Elliott & Maguire, 2008). Coaches from football powerhouses (e.g. Spain and Brazil) commonly experienced a contradictory routine, characterised by fierce competition and unclear career prospects in their domestic football industry. This often led to work-related dissatisfaction and prompted coaches to make migration decisions as structural turning points in their careers. Such dissatisfaction tended to be more related to the degradation of working conditions or the inability to find employment (Bygnes, 2017), which was further escalated by learning the level of salaries provided by potential Chinese employers. Hence, migration was seen as a means of overcoming structural barriers to career development. For example, a Spanish coach decided to migrate because of his uncompetitive position in Spain where he faced worsening working conditions and was unable to secure satisfactory employment:

Before I came to China five years ago, I worked as a coach and a physio at a top football club's academy in Spain. But I didn't spend too much time considering the [Chinese] offer. I liked this offer and accepted it quickly because I wanted to go out of Spain. And everyone supported my decision because my opportunity in Spain was limited. It was not easy to live only doing football [as a] job. So going to China was the better choice for me at that time. (Spanish Coach 2)

Furthermore, the insecurities in employment can lead some coaches to avoid (potential) risks in their career development (Purdy et al., 2019). The football coaching sector, particularly at the professional level, has been characterised by short-term contracts, constant assessments, high-stress levels, and frequent dismissals (Bentzen et al., 2020). Some coaches may accept the risk of losing jobs and wait for the opportunity to continue a coaching position (e.g. head coaching) as those in the career-consolidation stage do. Others, particularly those at lower levels, may not want to take such a risk. The (potential) risk of dismissals, therefore, can be seen as a forced turning point, which pressurised some to prioritise economic security and pursue a safer, alternative career path. A Brazilian coach recalled how he had undergone his own unwanted turning point:

In the beginning, I received an offer from China, but I didn't accept it because the [Chinese] academy was only training kids football for fun. The salary was good. But for me, the priority is not the money. However, I accepted the second offer to come to China. At that moment, I just finished the season with a U20 professional team. Then, my club had an election for the president. I thought that they would probably change everything. I didn't know what would happen. So I didn't want to take the risk of staying there because all things might be changed. (Brazilian coach 2)

Horizon for shortening career pathways

We also found that coaches situated within socialising routines may experience challenges in developing their coaching careers due to the demands of undertaking part-time employment. These participants often carried unfavourable conditions (e.g. unremarkable footballing or academic background, economic hardship) which made it inevitable for them to work part-time jobs to make ends meet. A Brazilian coach stated,

In Brazil, you might have a good opportunity if you have more professional football experience or a better educational background. Otherwise, you would start working in a bad opportunity and need to work in two or three places to make money. (Brazilian coach 3)

Under this horizon for migration, coaches may put their career aspirations on hold in order to meet other obligations, but may eventually return to pursuing their career goals once these restrictions have been lifted.

Consequently, when coaches were exposed to potential job information in China, they perceived that moving to China might provide a shortcut to developing or resuming careers. The case of a Spanish coach provides an example of structural turning points in a socialising routine. This coach dreamed of becoming a professional coach, but he realised that it might not be viable in Spain. Through his network, he learned about the coaching opportunity available in China and decided to relocate. This opportunity befitted his horizon for migration as it enabled this coach to focus on achieving career goals through an alternative career pathway. Therefore, coaches in a socialising routine may ponder migration as a 'springboard' to their coaching career aspirations:

The most important thing for me is to be a professional coach. At that time, I worked as an assistant coach in a higher-level team and played for a semi-professional team. I knew I had to make much effort to be a professional football coach. The high competition made it difficult to be a professional coach in Spain. There are so many coaches in Spain and Europe, so even though I was in a good position, it was still really hard to be a professional coach. So I thought that going to China was probably a faster way to be a professional coach. Maybe I could do something well in China or Asia. After that, I could enter professional clubs, and then I could go back to Europe. At some points, my career there may open some doors in Europe. (Spanish Coach 1)

Sport coaching is a growing profession that requires individuals to have both formal education and practical experience (Jones et al., 2012). However, coaches from less privileged backgrounds or

without sufficient credentials may face significant barriers to accessing better opportunities and establishing a sustainable career path. This empirical reality challenges the normative stage-based models of coaching career development, as the need to engage in part-time employment may divert their attention and resources away from advancing their coaching careers, thereby perpetuating a cycle of limited upward mobility. By comparison, the chance of migration allowed them to refocus on their coaching career and return to one of the normative stages to keep upward mobility.

Horizon for discarding a disliked identity

Dislocating routines are uncommon in sports coaching, especially when leveraging the coaching capacity to migrate, because coaching profession involves a range of specialised skills and knowledge. However, this study found that Chinese employers recruited coaches with no previous coaching experience. In addition, the differentials in football popularisation allowed some to meet the requirements in China without a coaching licence or occupational background. Therefore, the chance to coach in China was attractive to some who viewed working abroad as a rare opportunity to transform their career identity. These people would seize the chance to experience a different work and life, or understand different facets of the world, particularly when dissatisfied with their present work. A coach from Columbia highlighted that a strong desire to experience a new country was the main reason for his migration, even with only a small rise in income:

I did not come for money. I thought I was always in an office, I had many papers, and my boss told me, 'Don't do this, don't do that'. I was playing in a football club in my hometown [at a semi-professional level]. Also, I was working in training and management. I didn't even know how much money I would make after coming to China. My salary was raised from 3,800 to 5,500 CNY [around USD 553–800] per month in the beginning. However, I only took one day to make this decision. Because it might be the only chance for me to go out of my country to see the world and see how other things out of my knowledge [are]; this is the way for my heart, and I want to take it. (Columbian Coach)

The comments above echoes those of coaches in evolutionary routines in which the instrumental purpose of achieving a change in job or income status and the intrinsic desire to push beyond their previous identities collectively led to migration. It means that not only the 'functional' but also the intrinsic, subjective value which people ascribe to migration reflects the role of individuals in shaping their career trajectories through migration. Such desire may exist across different types of routines of coaches (e.g. evolutionary routines). However, it appears to become stronger in a dissatisfying period, locating some coaches in a dislocating routine.

Discussion: career development based on horizons for migration

In this article, we have employed the careership theory to analyse coaches' career stages where they navigated their career development according to their horizons for migration. The findings of this article show that coaches' decisions regarding migration were significantly influenced by their horizons for action. Generally, the influence of coaches' horizons for migration on their career stages varies depending on coaches' habitus (needs, aspirations, and personality variables), and social and contextual features relevant to career development (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; McLean & Mallett, 2012). By exploring coaches' horizons for migration, we have proposed two main stages of coaches' career progression (career-consolidation and career-reformulation) which can be used as a supplement to the existing normative models of coaching career development in our establishing an enhanced understanding of the development processes.

Our research sheds light on the role of different horizons in elucidating the motivations behind coaches' migration decisions. While multifaceted factors may influence coaches' migration decisions (Borges et al., 2015; Smith, 2016; Wicker et al., 2018), we suggest that applying careership theory to analyse their horizons can assist researchers in uncovering the underlying reasons behind these migration patterns. Specifically, within the career-consolidation stage, coaches' personal habitus appears to exert a substantial influence on their horizon for migration. As we discovered, it

became evident that coaches in this stage possessed greater autonomy in determining the way of developing their career journey. Whether driven by the desire to stabilise their existing positions, pursue further professional advancements, or explore personal inclinations, these coaches opted to migrate strategically, aiming to ensure a longitudinal and smooth progression trajectory in the coaching field.

In contrast, the career-reformulation stage, which involved the discontinuous career progress, underscored the contextual impacts on coaches' migration decision. Those in the career-reformulation stage viewed migration as an opportunity to disengage from their previous occupations or identities and reconstruct their careers. The severe competition and wage imbalance, coupled with unfavourable conditions (e.g. lacking professional athletic backgrounds), precluded some coaches from developing their careers according to the normative stages, which led them to choose to restructure their careers in a new place where more opportunities were available. Consequently, the understanding of coaches' migration decisions necessitates an exploration of both their internal habitus and the external influences that shape their horizon for migration.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the normative stage-based models provide consistent, step-by-step explanations about coaches' career progression. In our data, for instance, all coaches' horizons for migration implied a desire to move up to the next step in their careers. This finding aligns with the longitudinality of career development which the stage-based career models suggested (Ronkainen et al., 2020; Watts & Cushion, 2017), supporting the significance of adopting a stages-based perspective in comprehending coaches' career pathways. However, it is equally important to point out such stage-based models' limitations especially in capturing the complex fluctuations in coaches' career pathways. For example, although Erickson et al.'s (2007) stages model indicates specific ages when part-time early coaching (age 24) and high-performance head coaching (age 29) careers begin, such an age- or chronological order-based career progression is not clearly seen in our coach participants who had rather developed diverse career backgrounds in their home countries and in the volatile global football industry. In this respect, the results of this article reveal that the coaches who deviated from the normative career pathway seemed more likely to see moving to China as a shortcut to making rapid changes and recasting careers. As such, more untypical career trajectories, beyond the assumptions of the normative stages models, can be better explained by the concept of career horizons.

Coaching career development has been recognised as a socially constructed phenomenon, which is inseparably intertwined with coaches' individuality, and the particular societal and sporting context in which they manoeuvre (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Santos & Jones, 2022). As our data reveal, some coaches' career development followed the normative stages models, while others' career pathways were more influenced by particular individual and social circumstances in which they were located. That is, coaching career development may not be a linear process; rather coaches may move back and forth between stages. In this sense, this article suggests that exploring individual coaches' career horizons for action can contribute not only to refining the normative model's explanations of the progress between and within career stages, but also deepen our understanding of how coaches' career needs and status fluctuate over time, moving between the career stages.

Conclusion

This study has employed the careership theory to investigate the career development stages of migrant coaches, as reflected in the stages of career-consolidation and career-reformulation. Career development is a complex and multifaceted process that involves normative, longitudinal steps, as well as a variety of individualised approaches, objectives, constraints, and unexpected events. At its core is a process that seeks to facilitate the growth and progression of individuals across different career stages and horizons for action. Our analysis of coach career development in the context of migration contributes to the academic knowledge and research in this realm.

The results reveal that the majority of coaches view migration as a means to advance their coaching career development. The two career stages (career-consolidation and career-reformulation), depending on the horizons for migration for these educators, can enable us to conduct more holistic examinations of coaches' career pathways. On the one hand, the stage of career-consolidation was particularly relevant when coaches migrate to consolidate their existing skills and experiences, and to expand their expertise and capabilities. This stage can help us understand the meaning of migration for coaches when they experience normative and stepwise career development. On the other hand, the stage of career-reformulation can be used to analyse coaches' career trajectory when they deviate from the expected development track. This latter stage was more apparent when coaches migrated to transform their career status immediately and return to the perceived ideal pathway of their career development.

Overall, we underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of the career development of coaches and other sport-related educators. This study contributes to the theoretical and practical comprehension of sport coaches' career development, particularly concerning their horizons for migration. From a more academic perspective, our work displays the advantages of the careership framework in comprehensively analysing variables in coaching career development. This approach provides a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of a coach's career development than normative stage models alone. One of the main advantages of using the theory of careership is that it allows researchers to explore the impacts of coaches' subjectivity and social contexts on their career development by identifying the type of turning points. Turning points not only represent the analogous notion of milestones (e.g. meaningful events and transformation) in the longitudinal stage-based models, but also allow researchers to consider the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in coaches' career trajectories. The second advantage is enabling researchers to analyse the detailed status of coaches' career by learning their routines, including their needs, aspirations, and the contextual influence on their coaching careers, which helps researchers comprehensively grasp the impacts of diverse factors on coaches' actions in career development, and the rationale behind those actions. Finally, by identifying and examining coaches' stages through their horizons for actions, administrators and policymakers can make more informed decisions regarding the recruitment and retention of coaches, as well as the development of policies and programmes that support coaches' professional, personal development, and well-being.

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ORCID

Ce Guo  <http://orcid.org/0009-0006-3372-818X>

Richard Giulianotti  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7561-3755>

Minhyeok Tak  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1020-7342>

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