

# New sports management software: A needs analysis by a panel of Spanish experts

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## Abstract

This study sought to investigate the requirements of technology management tools for Spanish sport managers, in order to improve the quality of management in sports organisations and facilities. We hypothesised that current sport management computer software programmes do not adequately satisfy the manager's needs. This hypothesis was tested with an analysis by a panel of Spanish experts in the field of sports management. The results of this study indicated that these professionals are in need of a new computer software programme specifically tailored for their use. In this paper, we provide important information regarding the critical elements that need to be included within such a product.

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## 1. Introduction

Our evolving “socio-sport” environment has resulted in management of sporting installations becoming an increasingly complex process. There is growing competition within this field and increasing emphasis is being placed on providing high quality sport and recreation services. Individuals working within this area are required to possess a broader knowledge base than before and are therefore in need of management tools, such as customised computer software, that can further assist them in the workplace (Gallardo, 2005). There have been significant technological advances in this area in recent years (Bernstein, 1998; Hendrickson, 1998; Rofe, 1998) and sporting organisations, like any other business, must stay abreast of these improvements to remain productive (Kahle & Meeske, 1999; Mahony & Howard, 2001).

In Spain, the numbers of sport and recreation facilities have grown significantly in recent years through increased interest in both sporting activities and physical activity.

According to a national census in 2005, Spain possessed 75,000 sports complexes (facilities devoted to sports and recreation), 160,000 sporting spaces (fields, courts, etc.) and 150 million m<sup>2</sup> of space devoted solely to the practice of sport and physical activity (Gallardo, 2007). According to a further recent census in 2005, the number of Spaniards who practiced sport and physical activity regularly was approximately 16.7 million, an increase of 1 million from the previous survey in 2000 (García-Ferrando, 2006). These values are likely to increase further, given Spain's steadily growing population (INE, 2006). The same trend is occurring internationally. In France, Spain's neighbour and co-member of the European Union, the number of people belonging to a sport organisation has increased from 15% in 1980 to more than 21% today, and approximately 36 million people participated in sporting activities in 2002 (Bayle, 2005), over 60% of the French population (Richet-Mastain, 2007). In the United States, the cost of construction of sporting facilities now exceeds US\$ 16, an increase of approximately 800% in the last decade (Mahony & Howard, 2001). Some economists have warned that these investments will not produce the expected economic returns (Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Rosentraub, 1997). Therefore, effective management of

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these sporting facilities is a particularly important challenge within the sport and physical activity sector in the coming years.

Given the above information, it is hardly surprising that interest in professional management of sport and recreation facilities is growing rapidly, with increasing demands for training and technological support at various levels. New professionals within this field are now confronted with a job that requires knowledge and understanding of numerous areas, including sports legislation, economics, human resources, facility maintenance, and equipment and installation management, etc. (see Fig. 1).

The increasing consumer demand for efficient and high quality services is also a driving force for improvement of management services and businesses within our sector. Those businesses that are able to satisfy these demands will clearly be more successful in this market (Dorado, 2005; Pfeffer, 2001). Kaynak and Hartley (2005) have identified several factors associated with successful management, including: high quality product/design, effective process management, and efficient employee and customer relations. To confront the challenges and necessities of our changing times, any sport management organisation, whether private or public, must ensure that their internal management model is of high quality which in turn will assist in promoting optimal quality of service (Cano & Cano, 2006). Quality management practices can enhance businesses by improving operational performance, reducing costs, increasing sales and improving overall efficiency and profitability (Handfield, Ghosh, & Fawcett, 1998; Sousa & Voss, 2002).

At present, the sport management area within Spain does not possess adequate systems, services or software technologies that accomplish the requirements outlined above. Moreover, knowledge and training is also lacking in this area and research within this field has been scarce. There is an urgent need for development of efficient technological tools that satisfy the requirements of those working within this area, such as computer management software designed specifically for sporting facilities. In this paper, we describe guidelines that will assist in the process

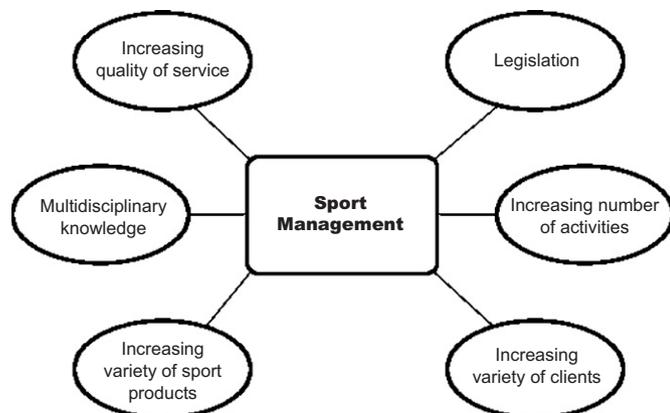


Fig. 1. Requirements in sport management.

of developing an efficient software programme for sports facilities and managers who strive to offer high quality services to their clients.

## 2. New requirements in sports management

Sporting organisations are not immune from environmental influences (Doherty, 1999) and have had to adjust to a more demanding consumer environment (Dorado, 2006). Municipal sports services, for example, have had to adapt to ensure that they offer the quality of service that is now expected (De Martelaer, Van Hoecke, De Knop, Van Heddegem, & Theeboom, 2002). Many of the problems encountered by sport managers exist due to a lack of understanding of the specific requirements, specifications and characteristics that apply to management of sporting installations. The major factors to consider within sports management can be broadly grouped as follows:

- *Accessibility*: to all of the sport facility's services by all possible users with special attention towards populations such as children, seniors or those with disabilities. Local legislation concerning accessibility exists within each of Spain's autonomous communities, although typically state (national) standards have been used such as the NIDE norms (CSD, 2006; NIDE, 1980) or the UNE norms (CSD/AENOR, 2006).
- *Comfort*: that the users feel while using the facilities. Comfort is a factor that has been widely studied in relation to various products (Bressel & Larson, 2003; Kolich, 2003; Lee, Jeong, & Freivalds, 2001; Mündermann, Stefanyshyn, & Nigg, 2001) and environments, especially the workplace (Sesé et al., 2002). However, until now this has been largely neglected within sporting facilities despite the fact that comfort is important for user satisfaction within the sports and recreation business.
- *Hygiene*: cleanliness of sports facilities is of obvious importance, for health and safety reasons. This is a highly legislated area.
- *Proper functioning of products, systems and processes*: this is required to ensure maximum profitability and efficiency of the services offered.
- *Safety*: necessary to protect the health of both clients and employees.
- *Profitability*: of critical importance for the overall sustainability of any sports facility.

These aspects shed some light on the complexity of the task facing sport managers. The issue is complicated further by the fact that the task includes management of not only sporting areas, but also non-sport-related auxiliary areas and elements such as equipment, facility maintenance, food services, emergency response, contractor services, the employee force and users. In addition, the employee force is a particularly important resource to manage effectively as they are the depository of most of the

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