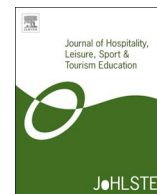


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Higher education in sport management: A systematic review of research topics and trends

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the literature on Higher Education in sport management published in international journals from 1979 to 2014. A systematic review was carried out, and a total of 98 articles were obtained. The authors, the most cited articles, the publication journals, and the topics and research trends were then identified. Through an inductive content analysis, eight research themes were distinguished: Curriculum and Knowledge; Internship, Experiential Learning, and Service Learning; Employability; Pedagogy; Gender; Technology and e-Learning; Globalization and Internationalization; and Accreditation Process and Quality. The findings suggest that sport management education should be developed to enhance self-employability through new pedagogical approaches that allow the improvement of critical thinking by the inclusion of internship, new technologies, and e-learning. Furthermore, the current social and economic dynamics represents an opportunity to increase the quality of programs and to orient them toward a globalization and internationalization approach.

1. Introduction

Sport management programs have significantly increased in many universities, most likely due to the interest of students, academics, and employers (Pitts, 2001; Yiamouyiannis, Bower, Williams, Gentile, & Alderman, 2013). It is argued that this interest derives from an appreciation that sports, in general, has a strong impact on the social and economic life of citizens (Darnell, 2010; Deery & Jago, 2005; Gibson, McIntyre, MacKay, & Riddington, 2005). Regardless of public or private sector and profit or not-for-profit organizations, sport management has gained a professional dimension that must be anchored on higher education. As mentioned by Chalip (2006), sport management should be a distinctive discipline with a sports-focused model, which requires expertise and advanced research in sport management disciplines. Given these new dynamics, the learning outcomes provided in higher education should be structured to develop competencies relevant to the new challenges of the professional market (COSMA, 2013; McQuaid, Green, & Danson, 2005). Consequently, an analysis of the sport management curriculum in this environment is proposed (Choi, Kim, & Park, 2013; Danylchuk, 2011; de Haan & Sherry, 2012). We argue that this area involves general and specific skills/competences that require theoretical knowledge and reflexive thinking (Bower, 2014; Miettinen, 2000), which should be articulated consistently with a perspective of internationalization and globalization. Hence, research about higher education in sport management is important toward helping relevant stakeholders in the process of quality improvement (COSMA, 2013). However, to define a research strategy that will be useful to the entire community involved (universities, accreditation agencies, teachers, students, and employers), it is important to identify the topics that have been studied and the main findings that have been reported in this area.

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Such identification will give sport management experts a more concrete idea about the research gaps and thus provide insights for further studies toward advancing sport management research in a more sustainable way.

Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to identify and understand the relationship between higher education in sport management and the professional market field, particularly with respect to undergraduate and master's degrees. To accomplish this purpose, the study was structured around two research questions.

RQ1: How has the scientific community approached sport management in higher education in the last 35 years (1979–2014)? Specifically, which journals have published this topic, who are the top authors and from which affiliation/country, which articles are most cited, and what are the research lines?

To provide specific suggestions for future investigations in this area, it is important to identify the most recent findings (in last 10 years, from 2004 to 2014) and their recommendations for study continuity. For this reason, a second research question was formulated.

RQ2: What are the current research issues and trends in sport management programs in higher education?

The answers to these research questions are important toward understanding the changes that need to be made in an international learning and teaching community (Danylchuk, Doherty, Nicholson, & Stewart, 2008). In an increasingly global and international sports business, sport management education must be responsive to sport innovations and sports marketing needs and demands.

2. Method

The methodology adopted in this study is a systematic review of the topic of sport management in higher education through the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Weed (2005), a systematic review can be done with any type of data, and the application of qualitative and/or quantitative analysis, as well as the epistemological paradigm of positivism or interpretivism, should be strategically selected according to the research purpose. To guarantee the study quality, the protocols recommended in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) statement were followed (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). Fig. 1 shows the PRISMA diagram of the selection strategy.

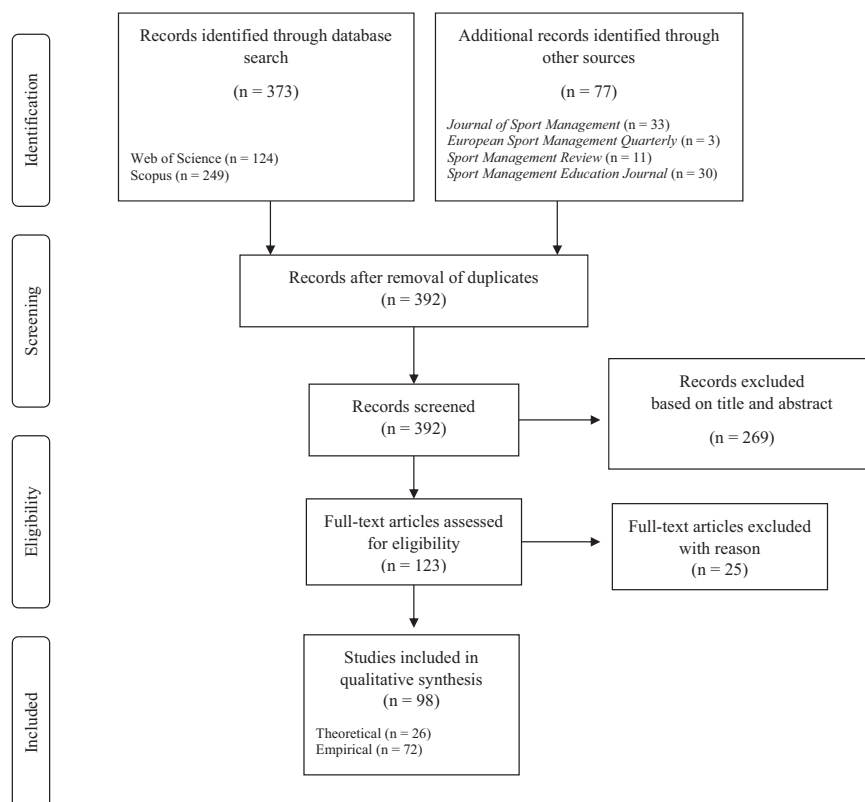


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the search process and selection strategy.

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