

# Academic Sport Management Education in Germany: An Attempt to Converge Labour Market and Higher Education

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## Introduction

Higher education institutions have the task to qualify graduates of sport management programmes according to current and future needs of the labour market. The integrative design of academic vocational training requires an intensive analysis of the needs and expectations of the labour market (Arnold, 2015). Dunkel, Wohlfart and Borchert (subm.) conducted a curricular analysis concerning skills sport management programmes should impart and identified deficiencies in the training of required skills. For these reasons, this study focuses on the following goals: 1. To identify current and future job profiles in the sport management labour market; 2. To identify current and future skills requirements of (potential) employees in the sport management labour market, and; 3. To reach a common understanding, together with relevant decision-makers, on modernising sport management programmes at higher education institutions to accommodate labour market needs.

## Method

The present study is undertaken in two stages. First, 101 experts working in the German sport management sector were asked to participate in a survey conducted from 11.12.2017-31.1.2018. These experts fill leading positions in various sport organisations in Germany, such as national governing bodies, regional umbrella federations, professional and amateur sports clubs and sports marketing agencies. Their contribution to the study is especially valuable, as they can best assess current and future job profiles and skills requirements in the sport management labour market and anticipate upcoming trends in the course of commercialisation, professionalisation, Europeanisation and digitalisation of sport (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007). In addition, they are decision-makers in their respective organisations in terms of creating new positions and employing sport management graduates that are adequately qualified. Considering the role of higher education institutions to qualify sport management graduates according to future needs of the labour market, educators (e.g. heads of 51 sport management programmes in Germany) are advised to rely on these expert opinions when designing sport management curricula. The survey was conducted within the ERASMUS+ Project *New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe (NASME)* to identify skills required by current and future sport managers as well as to compare them with the sport labour market and higher education programmes in the context of Europeanisation. A total of 54 German experts from different fields of occupation completed the questionnaire. The results of the survey were analysed descriptively and exchanged during a meeting with the partnering universities of the project. Thereafter, the authors presented results and recommendations derived therefrom to and discussed with a panel of sport managers during the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the German Association of Sport Economics and Sport Management (24.-26.5.2018) in Munich.

## Results

According to the experts currently most positions are open in social media and project management but there will also be a high demand in e-commerce/sales and public relations. The experts were also asked to rate the importance of certain skills in the future. From a total

of 72 skills the following clearly stand out: *digital marketing, networking, decision-making skills, oral communication* and the *ability to work in a team*. Results clearly show that a growing number of employers fill vacancies with interns or through referral programmes. These findings underline how important it is to further dovetail labour market and higher education institutions within academic sport management programmes in order to increase the prospects of sport management graduates to start their career.

## Conclusion

The results allow implications for job profiles, required skills and recruitment tendencies that are significant for the future design of sport management curricula. It would be naïve to believe that curricula of academic sport management programmes could solely be modernised on the basis of the requirements identified in this study. This approach would neither be possible in a federally structured education system like Germany's nor would it be in the interest of freedom and diversity in teaching (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2016). However, digitalisation as a key element of future job profiles and skills requirements should carefully be taken into account when modernising curricula. Here it is imperative to not only facilitate knowledge acquisition but also to create technology-based learning environments (see e.g. Borchert & Schlöffel, 2017). Reliable partnerships between higher education institutions and the labour market should already be initiated when students are still training in sport management programmes in order to facilitate their successful entry into the profession. Especially internships, practice-related projects and networking events, such as job fairs, serve this purpose. Arnold (2015) already drew attention to the need for democratic legitimisation through evident proof and guidance for higher education institutions. The results and practical implications of the NASME project serve as starting point for a common understanding of the further development of academic sport management education to match labour market needs. To that end it is paramount that decision-makers from higher education institutions and the labour market engage in a more detailed discussion.

## References

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