

Professional development, skills, and competences in sports: a survey in the field of sport management among public managers

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Abstract:

Background: Sport management in municipalities has an enormous importance and is becoming increasingly complex, requiring specific and robust skills from sport managers. The discussion about the role of sport managers has gained increasing importance within scientific research in sport, being crucial to possess essential knowledge and skills to act efficiently and effectively in increasingly complex and differentiated contexts, based on academic training. **Approach:** This study aims to deepen the knowledge about managers and municipal officials with responsibilities in sports by identifying the socio-demographic profile, professionals with specific training in sport management and its perceived value in the improvement of skills. **Methods:** Methodologically, it is a descriptive quantitative study of exploratory nature, data were collected in a universe of 308 Portuguese municipalities through a questionnaire survey, obtaining 433 valid responses from 302 municipalities (98% representativeness). **Results:** The results revealed that managers are mainly male (74,5%), as are the municipal officials (73,6%), both are aged between 41-49 (51,3% and 54,4%) and have a degree, with the first having specialised in physical education (34,0%) and sport (32,0%) and the second in other non-sport areas (55,2%). Despite the low level of academic training in sport management (10,0% and 8,0%), both consider this expertise important in improving professional skills and practices (>80,0% and >75,0%). **Conclusion:** We conclude that there is an unequivocal appreciation of sport management training as a tool for improving management and leadership skills, making it imperative to analyse the fields of intervention in which it distinguishes itself. Universities have made enormous progress in adapting their academic curriculum to the needs of contemporary sport management, however, there are still very few professionals working in this area with specialized training. This scenario also makes it imperative to understand why current managers do not seek specialized training and/or if the existing training in universities offers a guarantee of a successful practice in sports organizations.

Keywords: managing public sport, professional improvement, management and leadership skills, sports development, local authorities.

Introduction

Scientific research within the scope of sports has substantially increased in the last decades, not only due to the natural evolution, need and demand for more and better knowledge about the sports phenomenon, but also due to the research field itself, which is now broader and multidisciplinary (Girginov, 2010; Miragaia & Soares, 2017; Szczepaniak, 2020; Gammelsaeter, 2021; Rayner & Webb, 2021; Cerezo-Esteve et al., 2022; Potop et al., 2022). The evolution of global sports phenomenon, especially from 1980 onwards, promoted and enhanced the necessary need to look at its development from different perspectives, with greater emphasis on the role of sports organisations and their importance in responding to paradigms that are becoming more accentuated over the last few years (Teixeira, 2009; Ciomaga, 2015; Skinner & Engelberg, 2017; Czupich, 2020; Szatkowski, 2022).

The study about the role of sports organisations and their characteristics is based on two conceptual currents, one from North America and other from Europe (Seifried, 2014; Cunningham et al., 2021). North America was pioneer in understanding the sports system itself as a result of the development of the first professional leagues and the resulting need to professionalise the sporting organisations (clubs), thus fostering a vision of sports as a business. In Europe there was also a great development of sports, however, founded on a political vision based on the promotion of public sport policies that would promote general access of all citizens without exception to regular sports practice, with the aim of ensuring healthy living habits and well-being under the designation "Sports for All" (Dyreson, 2011; Dichter et al., 2019).

The concept of sport management emerges based on the application and study of the theoretical foundations of management but applied to the particular characteristics of sports (Lis & Tomanek, 2020). This opportunity engaged the academic community in studying, understanding and sharing knowledge about the development of sports aiming to develop greater knowledge about sports organisations, as well as of their protagonists and the traits they should possess (Seifried, 2014; Miragaia & Soares, 2017; Dowling, 2018).

The European vision of sports development envisaged the definition and design of sport public policies at national, regional and local level, which mainly consisted of: 1) construction of sports equipment to promote a varied offer in the access to sports practice; 2) development of programmes to promote the practice of sports for the population in general; and 3) financial support for the associative movement as a fundamental element in this public strategy of sports (Dyreson, 2011).

Overall, this new paradigm of global development of sports immediately raised the issue and need for a professionalisation of sports organisations (Girginov, 2010; López-Carril et al., 2019). Having recognised this problem, a proposal emerged on what would be the prerequisites for the academic training of future professionals duly qualified, or for improving the skills of those already working in sports organisations. The North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), who pioneered the definition of the key characteristics that a sports manager should not only have, but also develop through the constant acquisition and improvement of their skills, launched the basis of academic training (Brassie, 1989) and that still persists today in the several advanced programmes in sport management.

The scientific knowledge about the importance of academic training in the success of sport management continues a topic widely explored by science, especially regarding the definition of skills and knowledge that a sports manager must have to act successfully (López-Carril et al., 2019; Zimmer & Keiper, 2020; Cunningham et al., 2021; Wohlfart et al., 2022). Several authors mention the existing difficulty in the definition of specific characteristics, especially because different contexts require different answers and, as such, different performances (Batista et al., 2011; Joaquim et al., 2011; Batista et al., 2016; DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Dowling, 2018). In this sense, the consensual point in scientific knowledge among researchers lies, roughly, in the advantage to have advanced training in sport management to better intervene in sports organisations, thus creating conditions for a professional practice of higher quality, effective and efficient, while ensuring the sustainable future of organisations.

The strengthening of research and knowledge of sport management, as well as the concern of higher education institutions to adapt their scientific programmes to the actual and future needs of intervention in this area, allows today, in a global way, to better understand sports organisations as well as to establish the bases for the training of a sport managers (Graham et al., 2018; Zimmer & Keiper, 2020; Lis, 2020; Seifried et al., 2021). This symbiosis of wide knowledge also allows us to understand that the performance of sport managers is made up of specific particularities about the context in which they act and that advanced training in sport management should be seen as the basis for a quality practice and a prerequisite for a successful performance (Jackson et al., 2022). In Portugal, the evolution of knowledge in the last decades has allowed a better understanding of several realities. Regarding the public sector, we observe that it continues to raise a lot of interest, however, the knowledge is still barely explored, especially regarding those who are involved in the public organisations (Teixeira et al., 2022). A paradigmatic case of need for more scientific knowledge are the Portuguese municipalities, given that they are at the center of the promotion and development of sport public policies (Teixeira, 2019). Some existing studies have helped to better understand specific cases, but not at a global level (Carvalho et al., 2013).

This research intended to analyse and identify the main actors of sport services in the Portuguese municipalities, and simultaneously assess the perception of the importance of training in sport management to improve skills and leadership according to the professionals themselves, specifically, the Municipal Sport Technicians (MSTs) and the Municipal Heads of Sport Services (MHSSs).

Sport management: conceptual overview

When discussing the strength of sport management as a scientific area and professional field of practice, it is important to note that it's still quite complex to define with accuracy the profile of competences of a sport manager (López-Carril et al., 2019; Teodora, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). Although the interest in studying this extremely relevant topic in Portugal (Sarmiento et al., 2006; Batista et al., 2011; Joaquim et al., 2011; Batista et al., 2016), it transcends the Portuguese reality, since there is a global ongoing observation of the necessary training skills for a sport manager in each particular context as close as possible to reality. However, the discussion around the professional competences to act in sport management is still marked by a diversity of opinions, originating a lack of consensus (Batista et al., 2011; Joaquim et al., 2011; Batista et al., 2016; Skinner & Engelberg, 2017; Fahrner & Schuttoff, 2019; Wohlfart et al., 2022). This gap can be interpreted by the difficulty in defining sport managers, since, as we shall see below, different authors identify different competences which may be different from context to context.

Sport management includes a whole set of competencies related to the sports activity organization and planning of sports activities, regardless of the context, in a rational and systematic way and may be directed to different target audiences (Teixeira, 2019; López-Carril et al., 2019). Sport management includes planning, organisation, direction and control (basic management skills) associated with the context of a sports organisation and seeks the development and optimisation of sports, whether it is competition, health, leisure, goods and services (Lis & Tomanek, 2020). We can also distinguish the skills of a sports manager by having (Teodora, 2020): 1) good communication and multidisciplinary management skills; 2) decision-making skills and ability to manage conflicts and setbacks; 3) knowledge about organizational rules and policies (internal/external); and 4)

leadership and motivation skills. In general, sport management is a multidisciplinary field, covering and intervening in several domains such as sports economy, sports law, leadership, accounting, sports marketing, events organization, auditing, public policies and several other areas (Zanata et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2019). This uncertainty to rigorously identify the distinctiveness of sport managers constrains the consolidation of their role, as well as the skills acquired through advanced academic training (Gammelsaeter, 2021). The aforementioned definitions help to understand that the fields of intervention for sport managers are multidisciplinary, demanding a range of skills that are not easy to define, since they vary by the nature of the organization, culture and specific policies of each country (Lis & Tomanek, 2020).

The scientific knowledge available has reinforced new paradigms of analysis and observation, indicating new paths and fields of intervention, new opportunities for professional growth in sport management, as well as the promotion of innovation in some fields (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Miragaia & Soares, 2017; Schepper & Sotiriadou, 2018; Taylor et al., 2020; Cunningham et al., 2021; Figueira & Teixeira, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial that sport managers not only master leadership processes but also be excellent leaders themselves while trying to be good managers (Billsberry et al., 2018; Newstead et al., 2019). Managing sports clearly demonstrates the need for managers to have the appropriate basic training, properly consolidated in the area of sport management, as well as the ability and expertise to intervene in sports (Dowling, 2018; López-Carril et al., 2019).

According to several authors (Ciomaga, 2015; Miragaia & Soares, 2017; Cunningham et al., 2021), the development of sport management and their professionals reveals the need for more research and scientific publications about sport management, as well as a greater connection between the academia and sports organisations (Picamilho et al., 2021; Teixeira et al., 2022). The training in sport management is more diversified and specialized nowadays, conducive to the reality faced by sports organisations and a significant number of Universities offers advanced higher education programs in several countries from undergraduate, master's and doctorate levels. They have been trying to adapt themselves to the constant needs of training in sport management by improving their scientific curriculums at a time when it is increasingly complex to define the specific characteristics that accurately distinguish a sports manager (Fahrner & Schuttoff, 2019; Wohlfart et al., 2020). However, we are still in a gap of significant data to provide us with information about the professionals with training in sport management, i.e., if they are properly integrated in the labour market or not, if they are developing activities related to sport management field or what is the contribution of this highly specialized training in improving their skills.

We truly believe that understanding sport managers and their multidisciplinary characteristics requires conceptual refinement of the research undertaken, so that we can understand the reasons why this area of expertise is relevant to certain individuals, while at the same time not capturing the interest of others for its added value. The more knowledge we have about this specific context, as well as about the characteristics required from each sports manager to better perform their roles, the easier it will be to pinpoint the minimum level of knowledge to perform in specific contexts (Ciomaga, 2015; Miragaia & Soares, 2017; Naess, 2021).

Sport managers in the public sector

According to the organisational structure in Portugal within sports, the Government is responsible for assuring the conditions to the development of public policies that respond to population needs, with a large part of intervention responsibilities being delegated to the Portuguese municipalities (Teixeira & Ribeiro, 2016; Figueira & Teixeira, 2021). The wide range of attributions and competences in sports is quite extensive and complex, therefore, it is important to better know one of the most significant realities within the scope of sport management in Portugal, as well as those working in the most diverse domains of municipal sports, i.e., the MSTs and MHSSs. The municipalities have increasingly assumed their role in the development of local sports by implementing sports policies and the evidence is the growth of most municipal structures (Teixeira & Ribeiro, 2016), as well as in the diversity of initiatives to promote sports in recent decades, being also the type of organization that keeps hiring most professionals in the sports field (Sarmiento et al., 2006).

However, the “sports manager” does not exist in the organic law of the public sector, existing only the position of MST, which is considered a specialized technician. Despite the existence of a public manager framework, it does not apply to MSTs with responsibilities in municipal sport management. The assignments of these technicians are multidisciplinary according to the context in which they are placed or the specific contracting framework of their functions. From the conceptual point of view, this is a scenario that does not contribute to a better definition of these technician’s role, as well as the importance of sport management education (Joaquim et al., 2011; Batista et al., 2011; Batista et al., 2016). The MSTs undertake a wide range of responsibilities and the only requirement for the assignment is the obligation to have an academic degree in sports or physical education.

The attributions of the MSTs are equivalent to a position of a public manager, in which their main areas of intervention are related to a set of functions that allow the execution of municipal sports policies in terms of sports programs, equipment and sports facilities, as well as the maintenance of a quality relationship with all stakeholders to comply with all the demands that sport’s needs (Batista et al., 2016). A sports manager is responsible for all the local intervention concerning the promotion and development of sports practice and the

access of population to the necessary conditions to do it. Planning and managing municipal sports are not an easy task nowadays. The public services, like the vast majority of organisations are forcing the rationalisation of resources in a sustainable way (Garcia-Unanue et al., 2021), especially when it comes to sports in which resources tend to be reduced at the same time that demands and needs of the populations are growing.

At the present, there is more and more discussion about the need for efficiency in public services (Correia & Martins, 2020), greater transparency, accuracy in performance and for objectives to be achieved in compliance with available resources increasingly smaller. That is one of the reasons why is essential to have specific skills and knowledge properly adapted to the reality of organizations, allowing professionals who work in sport management to have the appropriate tools to perform.

As we previously saw, this scenario contributes to the lack of consensus when it comes to identifying the profile of sport managers and which key characteristics they should have. In the municipal context the requirements vary from context to context, just like the skills required from MSTs. There are municipalities where the MST tends to have a more practical intervention, especially in teaching sports classes and activities, while in others a more direct responsibilities in the design of public policies, management and maintenance of sports facilities, on top of other duties.

The imprecise nature of sport managers performance in this context makes it more difficult to solidify the importance of sport management training in improving the skills of these professionals (Joaquim et al., 2011), so it is extremely useful to reinforce based on scientific research that specialised training in sport management is an added value for organisations. Establishing a specific profile based on a wide professional category makes it imperative to study this in more depth, demonstrating the areas of action that should preferably be occupied by qualified professionals with differentiated skills that the advanced education in sport management provides.

Methods

Research design and participants

In the municipal context of sports there are two figures directly responsible for the sport services, i.e., the MSTs who act as specialist in the field of sports and those in charge of sport services (leaders), who are mainly referred as municipal heads of division/department (MHSSs). The existence of autonomous sport services is verified but the vast majority are integrated in departments with other municipal services, so it became imperative to analyse these two figures. These last ones, although not always experts in the sports field, act as decision makers, so it is important to also understand the characteristics of the decision makers in the scope of municipal sport management.

The sample consists of 318 Municipal Sport Technicians (MSTs) and 125 Municipal Heads of Sport Services (MHSSs) in the Portuguese municipalities (Table 1) and requests for participation were sent directly to 302 of the 308 municipalities (98.0% representativeness). The data collection took place between November 2020 and February 2021 and all sport services were contacted directly. We decided to extend our research to the whole territory of Mainland Portugal (Algarve, Alentejo, Lisbon and Tagus Valley, Centre and North), the Autonomous Region of the Azores and the Autonomous Region of Madeira. This decision allowed us to obtain a rigorous analysis of the population under study, but also to update the scientific knowledge within the scope of municipal sport management.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire, which was the most feasible option to reach the broad universe under study. The questionnaire had 13 questions divided in two parts and made available on the Google Forms platform. The instrument was initially validated by two accredited experts and then a pre-test was conducted with four MSTs and two MHSSs in order to assess response time, structure and content understanding.

Considering the intention of identifying the profile of current MSTs, as well as the MHSSs, eight questions were asked concerning the sociodemographic variables (gender, age, academic qualifications, area of academic training and employment situation).

On the other hand, five specific questions were asked to analyse both groups regarding the importance of academic training in sport management in the acquisition of specific skills to act in the management of municipal sports, as well as in the context of leadership. Data analysis was performed using simple descriptive statistics to measure the distribution of variables (frequency and percentage), while comparing between groups and we used SPSS-24.0 program (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software).

Results

The study was developed within the scope of sport management to better understand a little-known reality, while gathering information from those who actually act in management and leadership roles in public sports. The research involved 302 of the 308 Portuguese municipalities and had a sample consisting of 443 participants, being the majority MSTs (n= 318, 72,0%), while the remaining were MHSSs (n=125, 28,0%).

Sociodemographic profile

The sample consisted of 318 MSTs, which 237 were male (74,5%) and 81 females (25,5%), with the MHSSs also presenting a predominance of males with 92 respondents (73,6%) and 33 females (26,4%) (Table 1). The majority of MSTs are aged between 40-49 (n=163), followed by 30-39 (n=98), corresponding to 51,3% and 30,8% respectively. On the other hand, the MHSSs also present a majority in 40-49 age group (n=68), followed by the 50-59 (n=33), corresponding to 54,4% and 26,4% respectively.

Regarding the academic qualifications and academic training, we can verify that most of MSTs have a Bachelor's degree (n=228), corresponding to 71,7%, followed by a Master's degree (n=79) with 24,8%, mostly divided between Physical Education (n=109) and Sports (n=102), corresponding to 34,0% and 32,0% respectively. The majority of MHSSs also have a Bachelor's degree (n=80), corresponding to 64,0%, followed by a Master degree (n=35) with 28,0% and more than half have training in an area other than sports. Of the 125 respondents, 69 have training in areas other than sports in general, corresponding to 55,2%.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents.

		MSTs		MHSSs	
		f (n=318)	%	f (n=125)	%
Respondents by geographic region	North	60	18,9%	27	21,6%
	Centre	76	23,9%	34	27,2%
	Lisbon and Tagus Valley	93	29,2%	26	20,8%
	Alentejo	54	17,0%	22	17,6%
	Algarve	19	6,0%	9	7,2%
	AR Madeira	6	1,9%	4	3,2%
Respondents by gender	AR Azores	10	3,1%	3	2,4%
	Male	237	74,5%	92	73,6%
Respondents by age	Female	81	25,5%	33	26,4%
	20-29	23	7,2%	0	0,0%
	30-39	98	30,8%	16	12,8%
	40-49	163	51,3%	68	54,4%
	50-59	30	9,4%	33	26,4%
Respondents by academic qualification	+60	4	1,3%	8	6,4%
	Bachelor	228	71,7%	80	64,0%
	Master	79	24,8%	35	28,0%
	Doctorate	2	0,6%	2	1,6%
Respondents by academic background	Others	9	2,9%	8	6,4%
	Physical Education	109	34,0%	9	7,2%
	Sport Sciences	102	32,0%	16	12,8%
	Physical Education and Sports	48	15,0%	21	16,8%
	Sports Management	32	10,0%	10	5,0%
	Others	27	9,0%	69	55,2%

Regarding the time they have been in public positions, most of MSTs have been in public positions for 15-19 years (n=91), followed by those been in public positions for 10-14 years, corresponding to 29,6% and 22,3%, respectively. The MHSSs have been in public office for more than 20 years (n=48), followed by those who have been in public office for 15-19 years, corresponding to 38,4% and 25,6% respectively.

There is a considerable time gap in the time they have held their current position in the MSTs, since 75 occupy their position between 15-19 years (23,6%), 76 between 10-14 years (23,9%) and 72 between 1-4 years (22,6%). Among the MHSSs, 51 occupy their position between 1-4 years (40,8%), followed by 33 occupying their position between 5-9 years (26,4%).

The majority of the MSTs have a permanent labour agreement (n=158), corresponding to 49,7%, while the MHSSs have a different type of contract agreement than the ones evidenced (n=41), followed by those who have a permanent agreement (n=38), corresponding to 32,8% and 30,4% respectively.

Skills and competences in sport management

Considering specific training in sport management (Table 2), only 32 MSTs have basic training in this area (academic degree) in a total of 10,0% of the participants. The MHSSs in their majority do not have training in the area of sports (n=69), being their training area dispersed among the most varied areas of knowledge, representing 55,2%. Regarding the training in sport management, only 10 MHSSs have training in this area (8,0%). The remaining MSTs who do not have basic training in sport management, only 22 have a specialization course (not leading to an academic degree) in sport management, corresponding to 7,6% of the remaining 286 technicians. Regarding the MHSSs who do not have basic training in sport management, it can be noted that only 6 have a specialization course in sport management, corresponding to 5,2% of the remaining 115.

When asked about the additional training in sport management, 212 MSTs replied they had no additional training, corresponding to 66,7%, while 106 responded positively regarding the acquisition of additional training,

corresponding to 33,3%. Regarding further training associated with leadership, communication or human resource management, the response was similar as 245 responded negatively, while 73 responded that they had training in these areas, corresponding to 77,0% and 23,0% respectively. Considering the MHSSs, 87 answered no, corresponding to 69,6%, while 38 answered yes, corresponding to 30,4%. Additionally in terms of training in leadership, communication or human resource management, 72 responded they had no training in this area (57,6%), while 53 responded affirmatively, corresponding to 42,4%.

When asked about the importance of academic training in sport management, the majority of MSTs and MHSSs considered sport management training to be important "for better management within sports organisations" - MSTs (81,4%) and MHSSs (76,0%); "it helps to enhance knowledge and skills in the functions they perform" - MSTs (83,3%) and MHSSs (78,4%); and "it could make you a better leader in sports" - MSTs (70,8%) and MHSSs (64,0%).

Table 2. Sport management skills.

	MSTs		MHSSs		
	f(n=318)	%	f(n=125)	%	
Academic training in Sport Management	Physical Education	109	34,0%	9	7,2%
	Sport Sciences	102	32,0%	16	12,8%
	Physical Education and Sports	48	15,0%	21	16,8%
	Sport Management	32	10,0%	10	8,0%
	Others	27	9,0%	69	55,2%
Advanced course in Sport Management	22	7,6%	6	5,2%	
Complementary skills and training in Sport Management	9 - Do you have complementary training in the area of Sport Management?				
	No	212	66,7%	87	69,6%
	Yes	106	33,3%	38	30,4%
	10 - Do you have any type of complementary training in leadership, communication or people management/human resources?				
	No	245	77,0%	72	57,6%
Perception of the importance of training in Sport Management	Yes	73	23,0%	53	42,4%
	11 - Is training in Sport Management important for a better management within sport organisations?				
	No	5	1,6%	5	7,0%
	Yes	259	81,4%	95	76,0%
	Maybe	54	17,0%	25	20,0%
	12 - Does the training in Sport Management help to enhance the knowledge and skills in the functions of municipal sport technicians/municipal head of sport services?				
	No	2	0,6%	2	1,6%
	Yes	265	83,3%	98	78,4%
	Maybe	51	16,0%	25	20,0%
13 - Could training in Sport Management make you a better leader in sport?					
No	9	2,8%	8	6,4%	
Yes	225	70,8%	80	64,0%	
Maybe	84	26,4%	37	29,6%	

Discussion

This research attempted to analyse the current profile of Municipal Sport Technicians (MSTs), as well as the Municipal Heads of Sport Services (MHSSs), while aiming to explore advanced training in sport management and the perception of its importance, according to the opinion of professionals working in the field of sport management. The representativeness reached by the study (98%) allows a better understanding of a reality that has been little explored (Teixeira et al., 2022), but which is extremely important regarding the study of sport management as an academic field as well as identifying some critical issues.

The findings demonstrate that male gender is still predominant within professionals involved in the management of municipal sports (Sarmiento et al., 2006). However, there is a considerable number of female professionals as Municipal Sport Technicians, as well as municipal leaders and heads of sports services. While in the private sector this depends essentially on the organisations themselves (Pape, 2020), in the public sector some instruments have been established to accelerate the entry of more women, as well as to stabilise their tenure and thus reduce the existing gap between men and women (Evans & Pfister, 2021). The equal gender topic has gained greater prominence not only in sports, but also in relation to women in positions of leadership, high responsibility and expertise (Swanson et al., 2020; Piggott & Pike 2020). We can't draw profound conclusions in this area, but this discrepancy can be understood by the existing gap in terms of interest in sports professions, i.e., mainly greater in males than in females, but also by cultural issues that have kept women away from practising sports for decades (Gregg & Gregg, 2017).

A critical point from the results concerns to the academic qualifications and training domains, since we can see that overall, from the MSTs surveyed only 32 (10,0%) have specific training in sport management

(academic degree), while only 10 MHSSs (8,0%) have specific training in this area. This paradigm contrasts with the substantial global increase of volume within scientific research, i.e., we are witnessing a gradual increase in professionals properly qualified in sport management, however, these professionals represent a small group in the public sector. If we consider the relevance of municipalities in the implementation of sport public policies, the complexity and requirement to act with increasingly smaller resources and the need for innovation in the sustainability of sports organisations, we consider that it is important to understand the reason holding back the recognition of these professionals, as well as the interest in getting academic training in sport management. Is the public sector not very interesting for these professionals? Is sport management still undervalued in terms of its ability to offer guarantees in the execution of particular positions? Or is the entry of new professionals hindered by the constraints of public executives themselves? Several questions arise in order to better understand this reality.

We can also question the academic training offered in higher education institutions and its role to attract individuals working in sport management (Teixeira et al., 2011; Weese, 2020; Zimmer & Keiper, 2020; Wohlfart et al., 2022). It's true that most training programmes in higher education are designed to meet the various needs of society, however, we note that evolution of certain areas of science are already in such specialisation fields that the way to continue evolving is to direct training programmes towards a specific context (López-Carril et al., 2019; Zimmer & Keiper, 2020). Sport management as an academic discipline is consolidated and science demonstrates its importance in most diverse fields, but regarding the practical intervention activity, there are more people without training in this area than those having a differentiated training in sport management. This is a contemporary paradigm that needs answers, i.e., what's missing for these professionals to consolidate in the labour market? Should higher education develop specific programmes in particular areas? Would the tailored training encourage and increase the presence of professionals trained in sport management in sports organisations? We tend to believe that the future of sport management may eventually pass through a more specific type of training to act in a particular reality, while establishing basis skills to act in any context.

This raises many questions about why there are not more professionals with training in sport management in municipalities, while it also reveals the opportunity of universities studying in detail the role of municipal sport managers and how this can be an added value, not in a conceptual way but through practical cases that clearly justify the need of more MSTs in the area of sport management, either by seeking this type of training from who already fulfil these functions, or by hiring specialised technicians with specific training in sport management. The skills of a sports manager, as we have verified, cover a multiplicity of technical and scientific areas, which may require different levels of knowledge and demand. Considering the constant evolution of the sports phenomenon, we believe that sport management needs to find enhancement solutions, as well as specific tools for those who seek academic training in this area (Ciomaga, 2015; Weese, 2020; González-Serrano, et al., 2021; Seguí-Urbaneja et al., 2022).

Based on these results and considering that municipalities play a key role in developing sports, we can argue that the discussion about the need for sport management training in improving skills is more current than ever (Wohlfart et al., 2020). In Portugal, we have found that only a small part of these professionals has training in sport management in both groups. If in MHSSs is understandable, given that many sport services are integrated in multidisciplinary departments headed by a single person, however, in the case of MSTs this situation raises greater concern. Public resources management is increasingly demanding, while it is necessary to do more and better with less public spending, so it would be expected a greater number of municipalities with duly qualified and trained professionals working in sports environment with a range of technical and scientific knowledge. Municipalities would greatly benefit from hiring professionals trained in sport management, especially when its necessary to plan and manage resources based on complex and demanding optimisation and differentiated knowledge.

Conclusions

The scientific field of sport management is very solid today and offers a wide knowledge in its various fields of intervention. Its global explosion and interest in research and investigation has boosted substantial improvements in the way we develop sports organisations, not only in terms of sustainability, but also in terms of innovation and improvements in performance practices. However, if on one side the field of intervention as an area of knowledge is today recognised as a differentiating factor when analysing the sporting phenomenon in a global way, on the other side there is still a very small number of professionals properly qualified with specialised academic training in sport management.

In general, Universities have been improving their scientific programmes in the area of sport management, being an academic area of growing interest. For this reason, among others, it is fundamental to analyse and identify the reasons that hold back the recognition of professionals with this type of training, while at the same time deepening the knowledge about the particularities of the practical performance in specific contexts, i.e., to identify the real needs in each context to then define the ideal and/or most suitable profile of competences for a certain type of intervention. As verified through this research, the characterization of the competencies is quite generalized, pointing out what simply should be the basic knowledge for a sports manager, being this one of the evidenced causes for the existence of a considerable number of professionals acting in

sports organizations with different types of training other than sport management (some without any academic training!).

Regarding the Portuguese reality, and specifically within the scope of the public management of sport in Portuguese municipalities, future studies could explore the reasons why there are very few MSTs with academic training in sport management, while reinforcing the relevance of sport management training in improving management and leadership skills. We believe that it is of the utmost interest for the knowledge in sport management that further research is carried out about the training and level of academic qualifications of those working in sport management, since this is a factor that increasingly influences the success of organisations, but also in terms of improving performance and professional skills.

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