

The Geography of Sport Management Research in 2022

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Introduction

Building on the analysis of the 180 empirical articles published in the first half of 2022 in the 10 targeted journals, this essay examines the geography of empirical sport management (SM) research throughout 2022 or a total of 342¹. By using the same coding protocol for the analyses reported in the previous two *Sport Management Digest* issues, we first examine the distribution of the key components that form SM research settings (i.e., sport domain, specific sport, and continental context) in these articles and then investigate the continental distributions of SM knowledge production in terms of authors' institutional affiliations and geographical contexts.

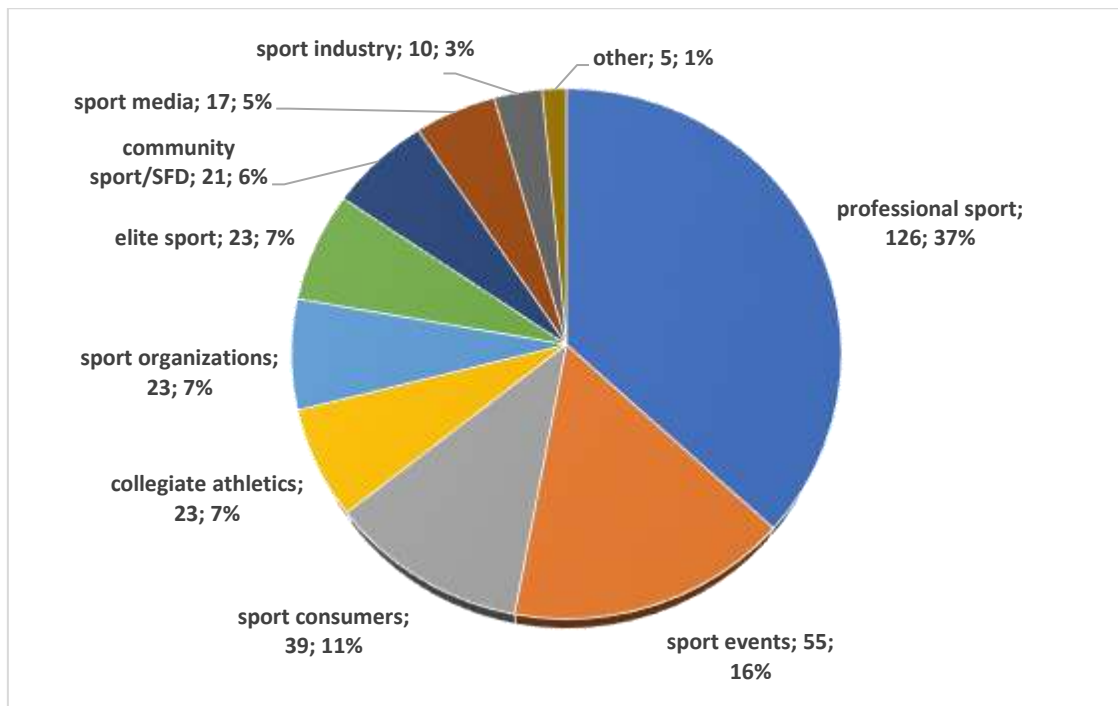
Geography of the SM research settings

Based on the product/service offerings and key stakeholders involved in the SM research settings, we identified 10 **sport domains** that give rise to SM knowledge production. These domains are heuristic categorisations because a given SM research setting may involve multiple domains. For instance, an article examining the media coverage of an Olympic Games is set in both domains of 'sport events' and 'sport media'. In these instances, we coded the article to the domain of 'sport events' and added a code to indicate that it had a mediated research setting. Further, these domains are not mutually exclusive. For instance, professional sport, sport media, and events can all be considered as part of the sport industry. In these instances, we followed the rule of concrete domains first. Only when a research setting cannot fit into one of the concrete categories (e.g., professional sport), it is placed in one of the more general categories (e.g., sport industry).

For the 342 empirical articles published in 2022, articles in the domain of professional sport accounted for the largest share (37%), followed by sport events (16%), and sport consumers (11%). Collegiate athletics, sport organizations, and elite sport each accounted for 7% of these articles. Community sport/Sport for Development (SFD), sport media, sport industry, and other sport domains accounted for 6%, 5%, 3% and 1% respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The distribution of sport research domains

¹ We collected a total of 429 articles published by the 10 targeted journals in 2022. After removing 70 articles not based on empirical studies (i.e., editorial, conceptual, and review articles) and 17 book reviews, 342 empirical articles were retained for this analysis.



Summaries of the topics covered by articles in each domain are provided below for a better understanding of the context.

Professional sport: this domain covers a variety of professional sport settings. The most common ones are football leagues in Europe, and the major professional sport leagues in North America. The sports covered by the 126 articles in this domain include football, basketball, American football, ice hockey, baseball, rugby, cricket, tennis, MMA, e-sport and so on. A rough coding showed that the most common topics examined were related to fans (18.3%), business/economics (18.3%), followed by attendance/viewership (11.1%), race/gender/ethnicity (10.3%), media presentation/communication/social media (9.6%), on-field performance (7.9%), referee/coach/manager/owner (7.2%), marketing (6.3%), athlete (5.6%), politics (3.2%) and others (2.4%).

Sport events: this domain includes both sport mega-/major-events, mass participant sport events (MPSEs), and charity events. Out of the 55 articles in this domain, over half used Olympic-related settings, and over a dozen used major sport event-related settings. A small number of publications used MPSE- or charity event-related settings. For the articles in Olympic and other major sport event-related settings, a wide range of topics were examined including event legacy and leveraging, media presentation and framing, social media, marketing, audience and spectators, national identity, soft power, public support, economic-related, doping and so on.

The few articles using a MPSE- or charity event-related contexts mainly examined topics related to participant-, sponsor-, and donor-related issues.

Sport consumers: this domain contains studies that mainly use a sport consumer (e.g., viewers, spectators, fans, and participants) sample without specifying a particular sport consumption setting or a concrete sport domain (e.g., professional sport, sport events, collegiate athletics, and community sport/SFD). Most of the 55 articles in this domain examined the effect of a set of variables on consumer experience, consumer decision, consumer expenditure, consumer evaluation of sport brand/product/service, and consumers attitude toward focal issues in sport.

Collegiate athletics: included in this domain are also articles set in high school athletics. The 23 articles mainly addressed issues related to athletes, administrators, employees, referees, and coaches in collegiate athletics contexts. In addition, a few articles explored gender and race issues in this setting. A small number of articles examined marketing and communication issues in collegiate athletics.

Sport organizations: the 23 articles in this domain mainly used non-profit sport clubs or national sport organizations as study settings. The most common topics examined were diversity, gender, and equality, followed by membership-related and management/policy-related issues (e.g., strategic management, innovation, and communication).

Elite sport: the 23 articles in this domain addressed policies or issues related to doping, youth sport, disability, gender, athlete dual-career, naturalised athletes, national sport success, and sport performance.

Community sport/SFD: this domain consists of two categories. The first category includes articles using community sport settings to explore topics on physical environment or sport facility for sport participation, grassroots sport participation of special groups (e.g., immigrants, women), and views of coaches/managers on community sport development. The second category concerns articles examining various aspects of the identified SFD programmes such as the achievement of programme outcomes, managerial issues, and funding.

Sport media: The 16 articles in this domain mainly concerned with work life in sport media, sport media content production, and media presentation and framing of chosen issues.

Sport industry: this domain includes articles using sport-industry related settings that do not belong to other sport domains, such as sport goods retailing, sports betting, e-sport economy, and managing sponsorship.

Other: The 5 articles not fitting into the above sport domains examined sport policy related topics, and the development of a given sport (e.g., parkour).

Table 1. Sport domains across continental contexts

Sport domain	Continental context								Total
	NA	EU	OC	AS	AF	CSA	CC	IN	
Professional sport	59	34	5	15	0	0	4	9	126
	46.8%	27.0%	4.0%	11.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	7.1%	100%
Sport events	11	12	5	14	1	3	5	4	55
	20.0%	21.8%	9.1%	25.5%	1.8%	5.5%	9.1%	7.3%	100%
Sport consumers	17	6	1	14	0	0	0	1	39
	43.6%	15.4%	2.6%	35.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	100%
Collegiate athletics	22	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	23
	95.7%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Sport organizations	2	11	5	3	0	1	1	0	23
	8.7%	47.8%	21.7%	13.0%	0.0%	4.3%	4.3%	0.0%	100%
Elite sport	3	6	1	4	0	0	0	9	23
	13.0%	26.1%	4.3%	17.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	39.1%	100%
Community sport/SFD	4	5	5	5	1	0	1	0	21
	19.0%	23.8%	23.8%	23.8%	4.8%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	100%
Sport media	11	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	17
	64.7%	11.8%	11.8%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	100%
Sport industry	7	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	10
	70.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100%
Other	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	5
	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	100%
Total	136	79	25	57	2	4	13	26	342
	39.8%	23.1%	7.3%	16.7%	.6%	1.2%	3.8%	7.6%	100%

Note: NA = North America; EU = Europe; OC = Oceania; AS = Asia; AF = Africa; CSA = Central and South America; CC = Cross-continental; IN = International.

We then plotted the distribution of the articles in the 10 sport domains across their **continental contexts** (see Table 1). North America served as the continental context for the greatest number of articles (39.8%), followed by Europe (23.1%), Asia (16.7%), and Oceania (7.3%). Articles based in cross-continental contexts and international contexts accounted respectively for 3.8% and 7.6% of the total. An examination of Table 1 led to the following observations:

First, of the 126 articles in the domain of professional sport, 46.8% were in the North American context, followed by Europe (27.0%), and Asia (11.9%).

Second, the 55 articles in the domain of sport events covered all six continents with most of them taking place in Asia (25.5%), followed by Europe (21.8%) and North America (20.0%).

Third, the 39 articles in the domain of sport consumers mainly used samples drawn from the contexts of North America (43.6%), followed by Asia (35.9%).

Fourth, research underpinning all 23 articles in the domain of collegiate athletics, except one, took place in North America.

Fifth, the European context contributed to the largest number of articles in the domain of sport organizations (47.8%), followed by Oceania (21.7%) and Asia (13.0%).

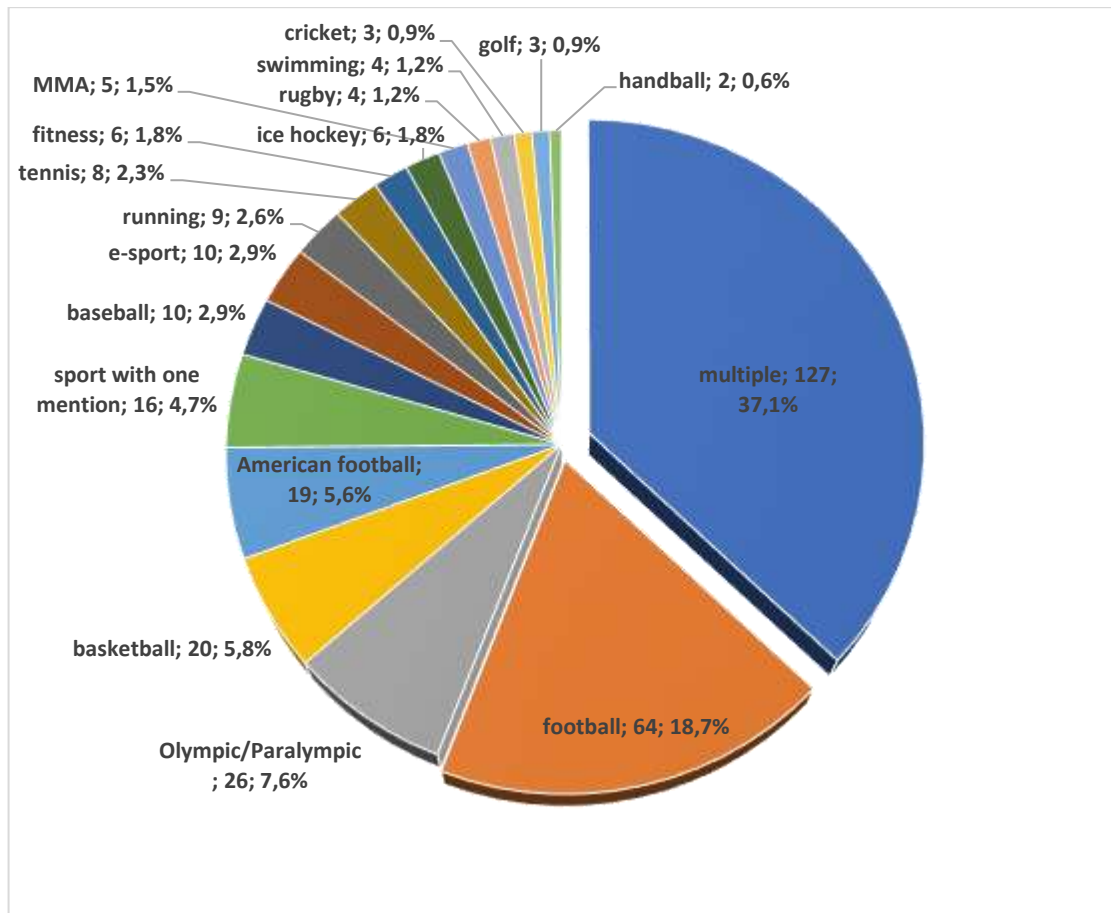
Sixth, the 23 articles in the domain of elite sport mainly came from an international context (39.1%), followed by Europe (26.1%).

Seventh, the geographical contexts of Europe, Oceania, and Asia contributed equally (23.8%) to the 21 articles in the domain of community sport/SFD, followed by North America (19.0%).

Eighth, the 17 articles directly situated in the domain of sport media were mainly distributed across North America (64.7%), Europe (11.8%), and Oceania (11.8%). It should be noted, though, that there were another 46 articles in other sport domains using a mediated research context including 22 in the domain of professional sport, 13 in sport events, 5 in elite sport, 3 in collegiate athletics, 2 in sport organizations, and 1 in community sport/SFD.

Finally, most of the 10 articles in the domain of sport industry came from a North American context (70%).

Figure 2. The distribution of specific sports research



The **specific sport** serves as a key dimension of the SM research setting. As shown in Figure 2, football served as the research setting for the largest number of articles (18.7%), followed by Olympic and Paralympic sports (7.6%), basketball (5.8%), and American football (5.6%). Second, 37.1% of articles were situated in study contexts that either featured multiple sports (most often a combination of sports played by the major North American professional leagues) or mentioned no specific sports. Third, over a dozen articles applied research contexts featuring non-traditional sports such as e-sport (2.9%) and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA, 1.5%). Fourth, popular participatory sports such as running (2.6%), and fitness (1.7%) also had a decent presence in the SM research settings. Fifth, 16 other sports were included in one article.

Table 2. Specific sport by continental context

Continental context									
Sport	NA	EU	OC	AS	AF	CSA	CC	IN	Total
Football	9	32	0	15	0	2	2	4	64
Olympics/Paralympics	5	4	2	7	1	2	3	2	26
Basketball	18	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	20
American football	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
Baseball	9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10
E-sport	7	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	10
Running	3	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	9

Note: NA = North America; EU = Europe; OC = Oceania; AS = Asia; AF = Africa; CSA = Central and South America; CC = Cross-continental; IN = International.

We further examined the distribution of continental contexts of the articles in the top 7 sports. As shown in Table 2, football-related contexts were most popular in Europe, followed by Asia and North America. The contexts of Olympic/Paralympic sports covered all six continents with Asia having the greatest number of articles. Research contexts including basketball, American football and baseball were mostly seen in North America. A potential explanation being that these sports were commonly associated with professional leagues and collegiate athletics popular in North America. Moreover, articles in e-sport related contexts were most likely to take place in North America, followed by Asia. Interestingly, most of the studies related to running were based in Asia, followed by North America and Oceania.

Geography of SM knowledge production

We examined the geography of SM knowledge production through two sets of distribution of: (1) articles' continental contexts in relation to continental location of author's institutional affiliation, and (2) the continental contexts of the articles published by each targeted journal in 2022.

The association between an article's geographical context and the geographical base of the author(s) who produced it is interesting to untangle. Although the geographical location of an author's affiliation may be misleading in some cases because an author from a USA institution may well have a South Korean origin conducting research in the South Korean context. Nonetheless, in most cases, a consistency between the two indicates that the author examines a SM issue in a local context native to his/her own culture, thus, easy to grasp the locally grounded meanings. This consistency functions analogous to the emic study approach in cultural research (Pike, 1967, e.g., the Balinese cockfight, Geertz, 1973). Conversely, an inconsistency between the

two indicates that the author may investigate research questions in a foreign cultural context. As the research context is ‘foreign’ to the author, additional care should be taken to appreciate hidden assumptions grounded in that culture. Finally, a SM study can be carried out through cross-continental collaborations comprising both local and foreign researchers which allows due prudence to both local idiosyncrasy and cross-cultural generalisability.

Table 3. Continental context versus author institutional affiliation

Continental context	Author institutional affiliation					
	NA	EU	OC	AS	CC	
NA	116	7	0	1	12	136
	85.3%	5.1%	0.0%	.7%	8.8%	100%
EU	3	63	1	3	9	79
	3.8%	79.7%	1.3%	3.8%	11.4%	100%
OC	2	1	16	0	6	25
	8.0%	4.0%	64.0%	0.0%	24.0%	100%
AS	9	6	0	17	25	57
	15.8%	10.5%	0.0%	29.8%	43.9%	100%
AF	0	0	0	1	1	2
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100%
CSA	1	2	0	0	1	4
	25.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	100%
CC	2	5	0	1	5	13
	15.4%	38.5%	0.0%	7.7%	38.5%	100%
IN	8	12	1	1	4	26
	30.8%	46.2%	3.8%	3.8%	15.4%	100%
Total	141	96	18	24	63	342
	41.2%	28.1%	5.3%	7.0%	18.4%	100%

Notes: 1. NA = North America; EU = Europe; OC = Oceania; AS = Asia; AF = Africa; CSA = Central and South America; CC = Cross-continental; IN = International. 2. Author institutional affiliations in cross-continental authorships covered all six continents.

These three types of geographical context-author associations (i.e., 1. consistent context-author geographical location, 2. inconsistent context-author geographical location, and 3. cross-continental collaboration) were captured in Table 3 and a few patterns were observed as discussed below.

First, for articles taking place in the Global North, the majority was produced by authors with institutional affiliation in the same continent (e.g., North America: 85.3%; Europe: 79.7%; Oceania: 64.0%).

Second, for the articles with a geographical context in the Global South, the majority was produced by authors with institutional affiliation in another continent or by a cross-continental collaborative team (e.g., Asia: 43.9% by cross-continental research teams; 26.3% by authors based in the Global North; Africa: one article each by a cross-continental authorship, and authors based in Asia; Central and South America: three articles by authors based in the Global North, and one by a cross-continental research team).

Third, articles using a cross-continental context or an international context were mainly produced by authors based in the Global North or by cross-continental research teams.

Given the sizable number of articles with cross-continental author teams (n=63), we further unpacked the pattern of cross-continental collaborations regarding whether authors based in the same continent as the study's geographical context were included in the research team. It was found that for the 54 articles based in a single continental context (the other 9 were studies based in a cross-continental or an international context), 50 articles (except 4 articles based in an Asian context) had at least one author whose institutional affiliation was in the same continent as the geographical context of the study. This finding is encouraging as it indicates that research teams in SM knowledge production were structurally equipped to be sensitive to identifying findings with both culture-specific features and features shared across cultures.

Finally, we examined the distribution of continental contexts of the articles published by the 10 targeted journals in 2022. First, articles based in a North American context accounted for the greatest numbers of studies published by JSM, SMR, IJSMS, IJSF, IJSC, JSE and C&S in 2022. Second, consistent with the production locations of the journals, articles based in a European context were more likely to appear in ESMQ and IJSPP. Similarly, JGSM published the greatest number of articles with an Asian context. Finally, it was noted that IJSMS published the largest number of articles based in an Asia context in 2022 across all 10 journals, followed by JGSM, ESMQ and SMR.

Table 4. Continental contexts of articles from the 10 journals

Continental context									
	NA	EU	OC	AS	AF	CSA	CC	IN	Total
JSM	18	4	3	3	0	0	1	3	32
	56.3%	12.5%	9.4%	9.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	9.4%	100%
SMR	16	4	7	6	0	0	0	2	35

	45.7%	11.4%	20.0%	17.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%	100%
IJSMS	22	9	0	15	0	0	1	0	47
	46.8%	19.1%	0.0%	31.9%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	100%
ESMQ	4	15	5	8	0	0	3	1	36
	11.1%	41.7%	13.9%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	2.8%	100%
IJSF	10	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
IJSC	16	2	2	4	0	0	3	3	30
	53.3%	6.7%	6.7%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100%
IJSPP	3	13	5	4	1	1	1	3	31
	9.7%	41.9%	16.1%	12.9%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	9.7%	100%
JSE	11	7	0	3	0	1	1	8	31
	35.5%	22.6%	0.0%	9.7%	0.0%	3.2%	3.2%	25.8%	100%
C&S	28	12	3	4	1	1	1	4	54
	51.9%	22.2%	5.6%	7.4%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	7.4%	100%
JGSM	8	7	0	10	0	1	2	2	30
	26.7%	23.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%	100%
	136	79	25	57	2	4	13	26	342
	39.9%	23.0%	7.3%	16.6%	.6%	1.2%	3.8%	7.6%	100%

Note: NA = North America; EU = Europe; OC = Oceania; AS = Asia; AF = Africa; CSA = Central and South America; CC = Cross-continental; IN = International.

Concluding thoughts

We embarked on the analysis of the geography of SM research with the intuition that an appreciation of settings used in SM studies as well as geographical distribution of SM knowledge production was valuable for the SM field and research community. As this is the third analysis in a row covering a total of over 500 empirical articles published by the 10 targeted journals in 2021 and 2022, it becomes imperative to answer the question ‘what is the value of tracking SM research’. We believe that the value of continually tracking the geography of SM research is at least three folds:

First, it informs us of the types of settings (i.e., sport domain, specific sport, and continental context) used in published SM studies in the given period. This knowledge helps us to identify new frontiers for theory testing and knowledge building. For instance, while sports such as football, basketball, and American football are commonly used as settings of SM studies, there is a dearth of SM studies using a context in emerging and lifestyle sports. Embracing these sports may contribute to the knowledge expansion in our field. In the 342 empirical articles published in 2022, 16 sports including alpine skiing, athletics, Australian football, Canadian football, cycling, drag racing, free-diving, gymnastics, horse racing, netball, parkour, soft ball, surfing, taekwondo,

and volleyball, appeared only once. More attention to these marginalised sports and those not yet researched in SM studies may well serve the field.

Similarly, while most of the articles using a geographical context in the Global North and produced by authors whose institutional affiliations were based in the Global North, the presence of studies based in Africa and Central and South America were conspicuously lower. Out of the 342 articles, only 2 were based in an African context and 4 in a Central and South American context. Even more concerning is the fact that only 2 out of these 6 articles were produced by cross-continental research teams including authors with institutional affiliations in these two continents. In an era marked by increasing globalisation of sport, more research attention to these largely uncharted geographical contexts would be beneficial for the SM field.

The third value is a practical one. Publishing in SM journals has become increasingly competitive. Our analysis provides knowledge about the sport domains and issues/topics addressed in these domains, specific sports and continental contexts used in SM studies. This may enable a better sense of direction when a SM scholar search settings for the research questions to be addressed, and vice versa. Further, knowing the distribution of articles with different continental contexts published by SM journals may provide an additional piece of information when searching the suitable outlets to submit and publish SM research.

Finally, the analysis sheds light on the importance of international collaboration in SM research. International collaboration is clearly essential for expanding the geography of SM knowledge production. And it is also effective for successful publishing as demonstrated by the amount of article using an Asian context produced by cross-continental research teams. Nonetheless, it also begs the question 'how can our field effectively involve SM researchers in other two continents of the Global South, in addition to Asia, to enhance the presence of SM knowledge production'. In a broad sense, the value of international collaboration goes well beyond SM knowledge production in an increasingly turbulent world.

1. References

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