

The Geography of Sport Management Research

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Introduction

By using a coding protocol identical to that used in a previous *Sport Management Digest* (SMD) issue (see Xing, 2022), we coded 180 empirical articles to capture the geography of sport management (SM) research published in the first 6 months of 2022 by the 10 targeted journals.¹ These articles were produced by authors based in 36 countries in 6 continents, and the contexts of the articles covered sport management issues in 53 countries across the 6 continents and pertaining to more than 45 sports (Olympics/Paralympics counted as one sport). In the analysis that follows, we address the following questions:

First, which sport domains, specific sports, and geographical contexts constituted the SM research settings?

Second, where and in which journals was SM knowledge produced?

Addressing these questions offers a rough outline of knowledge production in SM research in the 10 targeted SM journals during the timeframe covered in this issue.

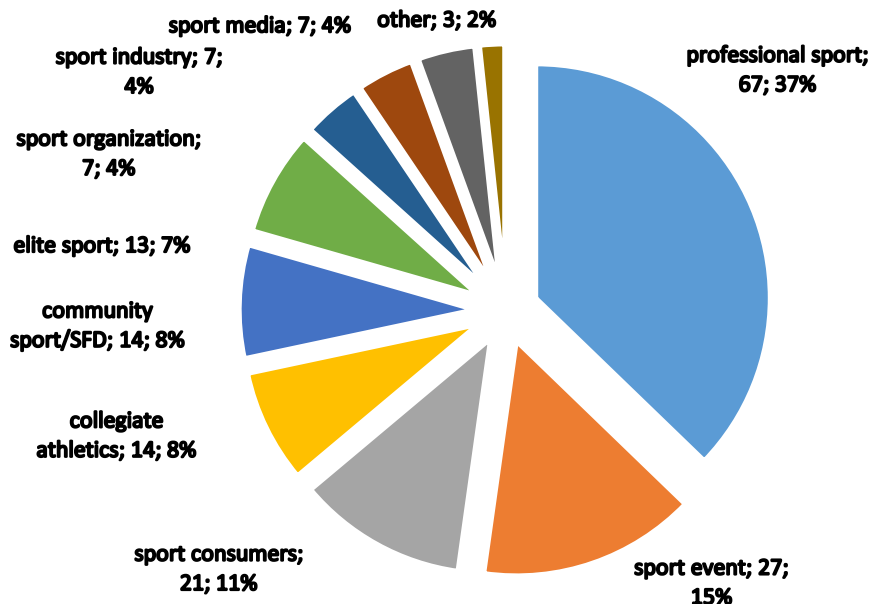
Geography of the SM research settings

SM researchers were brought together by shared concerns. As stated in the mission of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), ‘...members of the Society are concerned about the theoretical and applied aspects of management theory and practice specifically related to sport, exercise, dance, and play, as these fields are pursued by all sectors of the population’ (NASSM, n.d.). Sport, an integral part of people’s lives, is staged and played in various forms ranging from professional sport, collegiate sport, and the numerous types of sport events to community sports and sport for development (SFD) programmes. Some of these are consumed via various media outlets. As such, the value of sport in society is co-constructed by its product or service providers (e.g. sport organisations and broadcasters) and consumers (e.g. participants and spectators). There are also stakeholders (e.g. sponsors and betting operators) that leverage sport to achieve their own organisational objectives while advancing the sport industry. We categorise these various sport offerings (i.e. products and services) and related stakeholders as **domains of the SM study context** that give rise to SM knowledge production. As in the previous SMD issue, this heuristic categorisation yielded 10 **sport domains** in the current study. As shown

¹ There were a total of 231 articles, of which 31 editorial, review, and conceptual articles and 10 book reviews were excluded from the analysis.

in Figure 1, professional sport accounted for the largest share (37%) of the 180 empirical articles examined, followed by sport events (15%), and sport consumers (12%).

Figure 1. Study contexts by sport domain



Geographical context refers to the continent in which the contextual countries of a given study are located. The distribution of the articles in each sport domain across the continental contexts reflects both the popularity of sport domains across the continents and the research interests of the SM scholars. As presented in Table 1, the greatest number of articles were based on studies taking place in the contexts of North America (40%), followed by the contexts of Europe (23%) and Asia (15%). In addition, 12% of the articles were based in international contexts. Plotting the sport domains against the contextual continents yielded these observations:

First, all 14 articles in the domain of collegiate athletics featured the geographical context of North America. Second, North America had the greatest number of studies in the domains of professional sport (followed by Europe), sport consumers (followed by Asia), and sport industry. Third, Europe had the largest number of studies in the domain of sport events (followed by Asia). It also tied with Asia as the continent with the most studies in the domains of community sport / SFD programmes and sport organisation.

Fourth, of the studies in the domain of elite sport, the most common type of geographical context was the international setting, followed by the European setting. Finally, although 7 studies (6 of which were in North American settings) were directly situated in the domain of sport media, 22

studies from other sport domains (including 13 on professional sport and 6 on sport events) featured research questions that came from relevant media content.

Table 1. Sport domain in context versus continental context

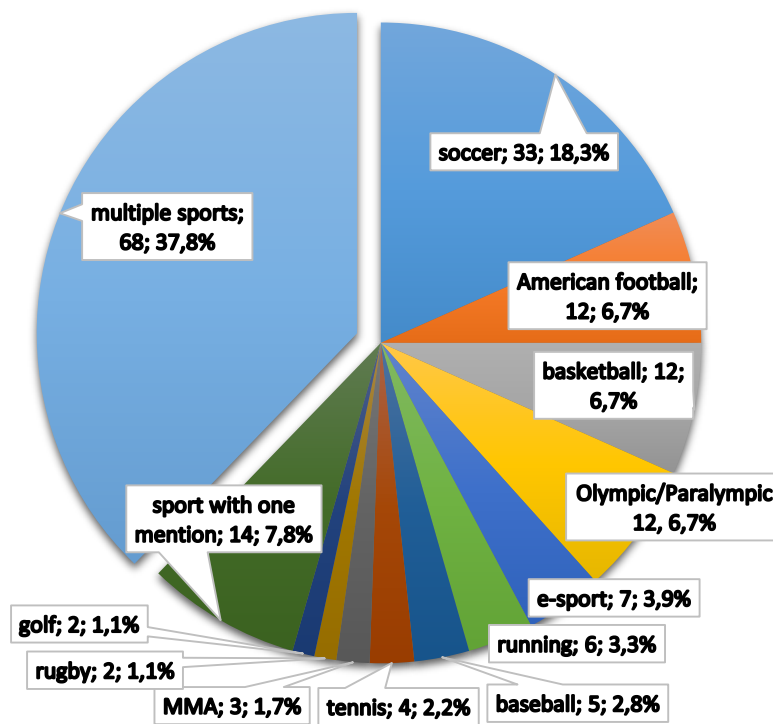
Sport domain	Continental context								Total
	NA	EU	AS	OC	AF	CSA	CC	IN	
Professional sport	32 48%	19 28%	5 7%	2 3%	0 0%	0 0%	3 4%	6 9%	67 100%
Sport event (mega, major, MPSE)	4 15%	8 30%	6 22%	3 11%	0 0%	1 4%	2 7%	3 11%	27 100%
Sport consumers	10 48%	2 10%	8 38%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 5%	21 100%
Collegiate athletics	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%
Community sport / SFD programme	2 14%	4 29%	4 29%	3 21%	1 7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%
Elite sport	0 0%	5 38%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	8 62%	13 100%
Sport organisation	0 0%	3 43%	3 43%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 14%	0 0%	7 100%
Sport industry	4 57%	1 14%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 14%	1 14%	7 100%
Sport media	6 86%	0 0%	0 0%	1 14%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	7 100%
Other	0 0%	0 0%	1 33%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 67%	3 100%
Total	72 40%	42 23%	27 15%	9 5%	1 1%	1 1%	7 4%	21 12%	180 100%

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

The **specific sports** associated with the continental contexts may serve as a lens to identify the locations of SM knowledge production. Our findings were similar to those in the previous SMD issue: First, soccer (18%) was the most popular sport in SM study settings, followed by American football (7%), basketball (7%), and Olympic and Paralympic sports (7%, see Figure 2). Second, 38% of articles were based on study contexts that either featured multiple sports (most often North American professional leagues encompassing American football, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey) or mentioned no specific sports. Third, there was a surge in the number of studies (4%) featuring e-sport, reflecting the rapidly increasing interest in e-sports worldwide. Meanwhile, mixed martial arts (MMA) was another nonconventional sport featured in 2% of the articles, expanding the scope of SM study contexts. Finally, although more than half of the articles

were accounted for by a few sports (i.e. soccer, American football, basketball, and Olympic and Paralympic sports), over a dozen of the sports appeared only in the study context of one article each, accounting for 8% of all the articles. These sports included Canadian football, Australia football, ice hockey, horse racing, cricket, handball, gymnastics, athletics, swimming, taekwondo, free-diving, outdoor sports, fitness, and drag racing. The selection showcases the wide variety of sports that inform SM research.

Figure 2. Study contexts by specific sport



Next, we investigated the distribution of specific sports across the geographical contexts. When the study contexts of the top seven sports were plotted against the continental contexts, the popularity of American football and baseball was noted to be confined to North America. Similarly, articles in the context of basketball and e-sport were based mainly in North America. In contrast, although articles with soccer-related contexts were based mainly in Europe, soccer was also a common setting in studies based in North American, Asian, and international contexts—reflecting the worldwide popularity of the sport. With the Olympic and Paralympic Games being hosted worldwide (except in Africa), studies associated with Olympic and Paralympic sports were most evenly distributed across continents. Finally, most of the studies related to running were based in Asia.

Table 2. Specific sport in context versus continental context

Sport	Continental context								Total
	NA	EU	OC	AS	AF	CSA	CC	IN	
Soccer	5	17	0	6	0	0	1	4	33
American football	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Basketball	10	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	12
Olympics/Paralympics	2	2	2	3	0	1	0	2	12
E-sport	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7
Running	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	6
Baseball	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

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

Geography of SM knowledge production

In cultural research, a distinction is made between emic and etic studies (Pike, 1967). Whereas emic studies have delineated meanings within a single culture (e.g. the Balinese cockfight, Geertz, 1973), etic studies have often compared differences along dimensions across cultures (e.g. Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions, Hofstede, 2001). Although a foreign researcher can "go local" – a practice commonly applied in anthropology studies – a local researcher may be better equipped to grasp ideas or meanings within the study context that are locally relevant. Furthermore, a research team comprising both local and foreign researchers may identify and interpret findings relatively efficiently, with due prudence to both local idiosyncrasy and cross-cultural generalisability. Accordingly, we plotted the continental distribution of the study contexts against that of the authors' institutional affiliations.

Table 3. Continental context versus author institutional affiliation (No/%)

Continental context	Author institutional affiliation					
	NA	EU	AS	OC	CC ¹	Total (%)
North America	64	2	1	0	5	72
	89%	3%	1%	0%	7%	100%
Europe	2	32	2	0	6	42
	5%	76%	5%	0%	14%	100%
Asia	5	4	4	0	14	27
	19%	15%	15%	0%	52%	100%
Oceania	2	0	0	5	2	9
	22%	0%	0%	56%	22%	100%
Africa	0	0	1	0	0	1
	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%
Central and South America	0	0	0	0	1	1
	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
Cross-continental	0	4	1	0	2	7
	0%	57%	14%	0%	29%	100%
International	6	9	1	1	4	21
	29%	43%	5%	5%	19%	100%
Total	79	51	10	6	34	180
	44%	28%	6%	3%	19%	100%

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

As shown in Table 3, most of the authors were affiliated with institutions in North America (44%) and Europe (28%), and most of the articles based in the context of North America (89%), Europe (76%), and Oceania (56%) were produced by authors with institutional affiliations in the same continent. By contrast, only 15% of the articles based in the Asian context were produced by authors with institutions also based in Asia, whereas 52% of these articles were produced by research teams with institutional affiliations across multiple continents. It is also interesting to

notice that one article on a sport event for peace and unity in an African country was produced by an author based in Japan.

Given the large number of the included articles ($n = 34$; 19%) produced by cross-continental research teams, we further investigated the pattern of cross-continental collaborations. It was revealed that 50% ($n = 17$) of these articles were collaboratively produced by authors based in the Global North (e.g., North America, Europe, and Oceania). Moreover, 41% ($n = 14$) of the articles were produced by research teams with at least one author based in Asia along with other authors from the Global North. Finally, one article in the context of Central and South Americas was produced by a collaborative authorship from Brazil and the United States.

The 10 SM journals vary in subject focus and geographical location in which they are published. These variations were somewhat captured by the distribution of the continental contexts from the articles the journals published. As presented in Table 4, most of the articles from JSM, SMR, IJSMS, IJSC, and C&S were based on a North American study context, whereas most of the articles from ESMQ and IJSPP were based on a European study context. The articles from IJSF were equally divided between North American and European study contexts. Most of the articles from JSE were based on North American and international study contexts. Finally, ESMQ ($n = 6$), IJSMS ($n = 6$), and JGSM ($n = 4$) were the journals that included most articles with an Asian study context.

Table 4. Continental contexts of articles from 10 journals (%)

	NA	EU	OC	AS	AF	CSA	CC	IN	Total	Total (%)
JSM	11	2	2	2	0	0	1	3	21	11.7
	52	10	10	10	0	0	5	14	100	%
SMR	7	2	1	2	0	0	0	2	14	7.8
	50	14	7	14	0	0	0	14	100	%
IJSMS	13	4	0	6	0	0	0	0	23	12.8
	57	17	0	26	0	0	0	0	100	%
ESMQ	1	8	2	6	0	0	3	1	21	11.7
	5%	38	10	29	0	0	14	5	100	%
IJSF	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	4.4
	50	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	%
IJSC	8	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	14	7.8
	57	7	7	7	0	0	7	14	100	%
IJSPP	0	9	1	3	1	0	0	3	17	9.4
	0	53	6	18	6	0	0	18	100	%
JSE	7	4	0	3	0	0	1	7	22	12.2
	32	18	0	14	0	0	5	32	100	%
C&S	17	4	2	0	0	1	0	1	25	13.9
	68	16	8	0	0	4	0	4	100	%
JGSM	4	4	0	4	0	0	1	2	15	8.3
	27	27	0	27	0	0	7	13	100	%
Total	72	42	9	27	1	1	7	21	180	100
	40	23	5	15	1	1	4	12	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

Sport is produced and consumed globally. Many professional leagues and sport events are global brands, which touch the lives of people worldwide. For instance, of the articles covered in this SMD issue, Dashti, Haynes, and Murad (2022) found that the local sport culture in Kuwait has been extensively affected by the English Premier League (EPL). In Kuwait, the EPL has shaped not

only the soccer fandom lifestyle but also how Kuwaiti people have played and attended soccer games. Indeed, the ongoing globalisation of sport leagues and events has increasingly exhibited local variations. Tang, Schallhorn, Guo, and Coombs (2022) investigated viewership behaviour of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in China, Germany, and the United States. Their findings were analogous to Green and Houlihan's (2001) observations on the increasing uniformity and diversity of cross-cultural sport systems in the domain of elite sport. In Tang et al.'s study, although 22 individual and structural factors all significantly predicted viewership behaviour across the three countries, significant mean differences were observed in most factors. Notably, patriotism exhibited the greatest variation, with Chinese fans reporting the highest level and German fans the lowest. As the authors discussed, the culture, traditions, and history of the countries and the evolution of their national sports may have undergirded such differences.

Because sport is both a global and local phenomenon, mapping the geography of SM research helps to inform our understanding of how SM knowledge is produced. On the basis of the analysis of the 180 articles in the current SMD issue, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn:

First, even though there are a few specific sports and sport domains that repeatedly show up in SM research contexts, overall, SM research still features numerous types of sports, providing room to explore uncharted territory in the testing and generation of SM theory.

Second, reflecting the development trajectory of both modern sport and SM as an academic discipline, SM researchers based in the Global North are responsible for the lion's share of SM knowledge production. SM knowledge is also largely concentrated in the contexts of North America and Europe.

Third, the trend of international collaborations among SM researchers is encouraging. Of the 34 articles with cross-continental authorship, a large number (15) were by authors based in Asia and South America in collaboration with authors based in the Global North. These research collaborations were possibly attributable to the mutual trust and understanding fostered by the continuing waves of Asian scholars obtaining doctoral degrees or holding visiting scholarships at SM programmes located in the Global North.

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