



New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe (NASME)

Research Project under the Erasmus + Programme carried out by research teams from

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General conclusions and recommendations

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NASME – general conclusions and recommendations¹

The NASME (New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe) project provides insight on the competencies required by the sport industry in Europe – now and in the future. It addresses general trends and it points to variations between different nations and sectors. The sport market in Europe is growing and developing fast. It is influenced by changes in society. Trends like commercialisation, professionalisation, globalisation and digitalisation have major impact. This development effects the demand for the labour market. The people working with sport related issues must be highly qualified and flexible.

Generally considered, you can find a somewhat clear path from the sport management education field to the sport organisations and business institutions in sport. Whether you are working in a Lithuanian basketball club handling foreign players and a European club format, in a Greek hotel setting up sporting activities for tourists or working in a Norwegian municipality helping refugees navigate in Norwegian society and culture through sport, the sport management education is highly relevant for these tasks.

From 2017 to 2019, the partners in the NASME project have researched the current sport market in relation to the sport management education in nine European countries: Denmark, Finland, Czech Republic, Norway, Germany, France, Spain, Greece and Lithuania. A total of 635 responses from individuals in the sport management labour market in the nine partner countries are included in the project. Most responses are from a questionnaire translated into 9 different languages. In total 557 people answered this questionnaire. In order to give deeper insights these responses were supplemented by 78 interviews with individuals. They can be regarded as experts in the field of sport management. The majority have a practitioner's perspective while others some work with sport management in academia.

The research in the NASME project has focused on the similarities and variations within and between four sectors. They are 1) sport clubs, 2) sport federations and regional organisations, 3) public sector organisations and 4) private sport businesses.

¹ This paper is based on the 2019 NASME report: Wohlfart, O. & Sandy, A. (2019), New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe (NASME) Concluding report, Leipzig University, ISBN: 978-87-994449-8-4

The findings are related to the current and expected, future labour market. The ambition of the project is that based on the findings of the NASME, the curricula for Sport Management education can be adjusted to fit future demands. An important aim for the NASME project is to make the collaboration with and transition from educational institutions to the labour market more relevant and flexible.

The NASME is an EU-funded ERASMUS+ project. It builds on the results of a previous, similar study called AEHSIS (Aligning a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Sciences, 2003-2007)². Six of the countries participating in AEHSIS is also part of the NASME project.

When doing a European research project in nine different countries, one will inevitably encounter similarities. The key findings from the NASME project are highlighted in the following. However, it is important to note that the perception of the general topics differs across borders and cultures. One example of this is that the massive tourism industry in Greece reflects the demands within sport management field much more than in the other participating countries. Sport tourism is part of this industry in Greece, and students from sport management will be able to join the labour force in sport tourism and event management companies.

2. Key findings of the NASME project

2.1 Societal trends' impact on sport management in Europe

The preceding study conducted in 2006 (AEHSIS project) showed that the trends of commercialisation, digitalisation and internationalisation would affect the sport management area in education and on the labour market. The NASME project confirms these findings as these trends are still dominant in the sport management arena of today.

It is clear from the NASME project that sport is continuously affected by internationalisation. A great many of the respondents stress that competencies to deal with transnational issues are important. In addition, in some of the countries, the respondents argue that speaking a second language, especially English, is a skill which the labour market asks for.

The trend of commercialisation is also continuing to develop at a fast pace. As many sports reach an audience through different media forms, it is expected that the interest from

² <http://eose.org/ressource/aehehis/>

commercial partners will increase. Another example is that the world of sport has experienced a huge increase in the value of media rights during the last few decades. The same applies to transfers of athletes, especially in football, where a large fee is often paid to the selling club.

The Norwegian study suggests that the trend of commercialisation will cause an increase in costs for participating in sports. One likely reason for this could be that sport has become more and more professional in many aspects. Not only for the top division in different sports but also on a sport-for-all level in regard to, e.g., administration in the local club. This is reflected in the competencies required for a sport manager: Creative work, marketing, entrepreneurship and being able to conduct business with companies as well as consumers.

The use of information technology affects the sport management area. Most of the respondents agree that the sport industry has been undergoing changes because of the digital revolution: e.g., profiling clubs, athletes or products on social media platforms is one aspect here. Therefore, specialists in information technology, social media, digital marketing and communication are required. Digitalisation can be perceived as more than a trend. Almost all areas of working life, whether it is in sport or other areas, are influenced by digitalisation on an everyday basis. Computers, internet, digital communication platforms, digital calendars, sales and membership databases are just a few examples of this. An organisation must be able to make the best of the often-changing options coming from digitalisation. Maybe therefore we find a more reluctant relationship towards digitalisation in the non-profit and public sector. Here digitalisation is viewed as a necessity in terms of, e.g., administration and other aspects of bureaucracy. In Germany, representatives from the private sector organisations and professional sport clubs perceive digitalisation as more than a mere trend that an organisation can follow or not. They find it a prerequisite for future competitiveness in their markets. In that sense, digitalisation is believed to be able to stimulate the expansion of commercial activities both in the domestic and international markets.

The competence of being able to apply knowledge to practice or to adapt to new situations is among the most frequently given responses provided by respondents across most of the researched countries. In many ways, this competence reflects the complexity of working in sport. As reflected in the NASME project, the sport industry, whether we are on the level of

business or public administration, is considered to move into new fields. The demands from consumers, business partners, public sectors and members increase and vary. The sport management educations must give students a variety of tools and competencies to meet these demands. One of these tools is the ability to adapt and combine knowledge from the rather different elements of sport management education. This way, when the students enter the work market, they can mix the tools at hand to create new ways of doing things. They need to be flexible and innovative. Add to this, that employees should be relationally competent. They should have professional abilities to allow them to join various communities with different stakeholders.

The project also identified other trends that are independent of the sectors under scrutiny. These are global awareness about environment and sustainability challenges together with value-based leadership and co-creation. Public health and the management of it is another area with an increasing agenda for sport and physical exercise. These trends are great examples on how the sport industry changes. Naturally, it is important for any sport manager to be able to handle these and, also, future new trends.

2.2 Major differences among the four sectors

The results from document analysis, survey and interviews in the NASME project show that to a large extent the different countries have similar needs for the future. The table 1: *Top 5 Future Competencies Required of Sport Management* illustrates the similarities. However, looking more distinct at each country and each sector, you will find differences. One example is that the sport clubs require dominantly competencies of managing finances and events. In addition, the employees need to have knowledge and understanding of the political landscape. The sport federations and regional confederations want first and foremost digital communication, organisational knowledge, political knowledge, leadership skills and financial management. The public sector prioritizes networking, the ability to apply knowledge in practice, political knowledge, cooperation across different sectors and teamwork, organisational skills and oral communication. The private sector requires more focused digital marketing and communication, data analysis, networking, capacity to learn and strategic planning and development.

The aspect of leadership is especially relevant for sport clubs and sport federations. A manager in these organizations will often lead two types of personnel. The paid members of staff and the volunteers. Handling these groups requires skills in decision-making and project management.

Table 1: Top 5 Future Competencies Required of Sport Management Professionals (European and national results from the questionnaire)

EU	Czech Republic	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Lithuania	Norway	Spain
Teamwork	Teamwork	Teamwork	Leadership skills	Organisational skills	Teamwork	Digital marketing	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	Communication skills and management	Teamwork
Decision making skills	Capacity to adapt to new situations (Flexibility)	Networking	Networking	Planning skills	Networking	IT-skills	Capacity to learn	Organisational skills	Problem solving skills
Oral communication	Planning skills	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team	Capacity to adapt to new situations (Flexibility)	Oral communication	Sport tourism	Decision making skills	Teamwork	Data management skills
Planning skills	Written communication	Use of social media in work	Decision making skills	Oral communication	Decision making skills	Networking	Ability to make conclusions from research data	Leadership skills	Decision making skills
Organisational skills	Capacity to learn	Digital marketing	Ability to communicate with experts in other fields	Teamwork	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	Sponsorship management	Organisational skills	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	Capacity to adapt to new situations (Flexibility)

3. Recommendations for sport management curricula

To fulfil the sport management industry's future needs, curricula for sport management programs need to include the topics highlighted above. Especially, the competencies of being able to work in teams, networking, turning new trends into concepts and action are key areas. On the same line is the competencies of strategic planning and development and leadership skills. We also need to add to the list: Being able to work across national borders using a second language. In addition, working in sport requires the ability to handle different digital tools and platforms. Social media could be one example.

The sport management programs must develop students' competencies to enable them to match the demands of the complex labour market now and of the future. No matter which of the four sectors in sport, the demands for working in the sport industry will change over the years to come. It is essential for the employees to realise that sport is an arena with many diverse stakeholders, and one must be able to communicate with a diverse group of individuals

and organisations. Both orally, in writing and maybe with visual communication, e.g., promotion video on social media.

The future labour market will need a flexible and innovative work force. One way of providing sport management students with these skills is through case-based studies. The cases should reflect the practices and experiences of the challenges and issues encountered in the sport industry.

The NASME project also found that having practical work experience is highly valued among all sectors. Students are recommended to gain experience for example through internship programs. The German partners in the NASME project found explicit evidence to suggest that the sport management labour market considers personal, socio-communicative and activity and action competencies as quality labels.

The NASME project finds it important that the institutions, which offer a sport management education, harmonise their study programme. Hence, that the different courses complement each other in a useful and logic way educating sport management students with the competencies required by the sport industry. In addition, the project recommends that there is a connection between the research and practice. Teaching must be transferable into practice. Therefore, the project also recommends a more efficient corporation and dialogue between relevant stakeholders (e.g. institutions of higher education, academics, students, business, and politics). This could also be through internships and exchange of students, lectures and researchers.

When discussing the content of future curricula across Europe, it is necessary to stress, that in many cases the design and implementation of the sport management curricula is left to be decided by the respective educational institutions. This leaves us with the hope that the findings from the NASME project can stimulate discussions in and between educational institutions offering sport management courses as relevant to the labour market as possible.