

DO SPORT MANAGEMENT GRADUATES END UP IN SPORT MANAGEMENT JOBS?

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Context

Graduates are costly staff to train and to employ. It is important for educational institutions to have a clear understanding of the various labour markets, and 'fine-tune' the contents of the curriculum to skills demanded by employers (Hanson et al., 1998). Sport programmes have to address the pace of growth in the sport industry over the past two decades (e.g., Li, Hofacre, & Mahony, 2001; Taks & Kesenne, 2000) that has been accompanied by increased job and career opportunities. These opportunities appear to be endless and include jobs in the public sport sector, sport governing bodies, sport tourism, sporting goods, sports apparel, amateur participant sport, professional sports, recreation, high school and college/university athletics, outdoor sports, and other sport -related businesses like marketing, running events, and sponsorship (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). A European study *Sport et employ* (REISS/OE, 1999) revealed that the sector had increased its overall employment by 57% between 1990 and 1998, indicating just under 1 million jobs (as main occupation) in the former 15 European Union member states. Moreover, when focusing on sport management graduates, we have to consider that sport management is a fairly recent, and rapidly expanding programmes in Higher Education, both in the US (Chelladurai, 2001; Souci, 1994) and Europe (Taks et al, 2003). These programmes need to discover whether their sport management graduates actually end up in sport management occupations.

The research unit for social-cultural kinesiology at KULeuven has investigated the employment status of their graduates for more than 20 years (Beckers, 1999; Delsaer, 2004; De Muynck, 1999; Le Roy, 1998; Peeters, 2001; Tomsin 2004; Van Nieuwenhuysse, 1987). It should be noted that sport management was first introduced into its curriculum in 1983 as a post graduate programme (i.e. a fifth specialised year after a four year Bachelor's programme with thesis). In 1987, Sport Management became a specialization in the 3rd and 4th year in the undergraduate curriculum. The purpose of this study is first, to identify the employment situation of PE graduates in general, and sport management in particular. It focuses on students who graduated between 1996 and 2000, and enquires about their professional status at least five years *after* their graduation. Second, it will provide insights regarding the job market and required skills. Consequently, it may initiate discussion on the curriculum provided to the students. Furthermore, the study identifies how far professionalism takes place in the sports sector. Is it graduates from sport and sport related programmes who take key positions in the sports industry, or are their eclectic skills equally in demand by other sectors in the economy?

Methods

The sample consisted of 199 alumni of the 433 graduating between 1996 and 2000 (46% response). Of these 199, 48 (24%) had a specialization in sport management (at undergraduate or postgraduate level), compared to 151 students in another kinesiology area, such as fitness and health, adapted physical activity, or training and coaching. A questionnaire, similar to previous surveys (De Muynck, 1999; Le Roy, 1998) was mailed out in autumn 2003, focusing on the graduates' educational experience, additional education, career path, current professional situation, with some demographic information.

Results

In 2003 the average age of the alumni was 26.5 years (range 24 -32). In contrast with some specializations, men (48%) and women (52%) were equally attracted to the sport management programme. Most of both the sport management graduates (SMGs), and the others (KINs) obtained a teacher diploma, 79% and 88 % respectively. More SMGs acquired additional diplomas in the area of business administration, while more KINs took additional courses in nutrition and rehabilitation. The SMGs and the KINs both mentioned a strong emphasis on biomedical sciences in their curriculum, and complained about a lack of internship opportunities.

SMGs were indeed more frequently employed in sport as organizers or coordinators (23%), compared to their KIN counterparts (8%). SMGs were also more frequently employed as medical and paramedical sales representatives (16% vs 11%). While a relatively large proportion of both groups took on jobs in the educational sector, KIN graduates were ahead of SMGs (27.5% vs 18%). Finally, KINs showed a higher share in physiotherapy professions (9% vs 2%). More SMGs had full time positions at this stage of their career, and more were working in private for profit organizations compared to KIN graduates. Both groups were satisfied with their income, their professional responsibilities, their working environment, and their opportunities for personal development. They seem to be less satisfied about future prospects.

Discussion/Implications

Overall, the results indicate that males and females are equally interested in sport management education. Hopefully, this will lead towards a more equal gender balance in the male-dominated sport management (e.g., Chimot, 2004). sphere in future. As far as the SM curriculum is concerned, more opportunities need to be created to gain practical experience in the field through internships (as in Britain - Hanson et al, 1998). From a theoretical perspective, a shift is needed towards more socio-economic sciences and fewer biomedical sciences. A large proportion of the sport management graduates end up in a management job (i.e. organizing or coordinating) in the sport sector, which is a positive finding.

The sport sector is still growing, and rapidly changing. Providers of sport and sport management programmes need to be aware of the different types of job opportunities available to their graduates. This requires a continuing and up-to-date awareness of the labour market. It will remain important, however, that the scope of the sport management curriculum remains broad enough so that students can develop technical, interpersonal, and conceptual skills that can be applied in a variety of jobs. In the end, we want to produce graduates who are flexible enough to function in a rapidly changing environment. However, most importantly we want to have graduates out there who are passionate about sport and physical activity, and who will contribute to a higher level of professionalization in the expanding sport industry.

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