

The use of qualitative research in Sport Management: asystematic review

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Abstract

Problem Statement: The academic development of Sport Management occurred from the expansion of its practice, being an academic independent area in the United States, Europe, and Australia. In Brazil, the Sport Management academy slope is still under development and presents limitations, mainly in the studies' methodological part. In parallel, it is possible to observe a growth of qualitative researches in the area, both in English and Portuguese journals, with researchers indicating methods, instruments, and techniques for this approach. **Purpose:** The study aims to verify the use of the qualitative approach in articles published by the main English and Portuguese-speaking journals on Sport Management, identify the qualitative research methods, instruments, and techniques employed and check if they are related to the area methodological literature. **Approach:** A systematic integrative review of the articles published in 2016 in the leading journals written in English and Portuguese was carried out. **Results:** It was identified that the use of the qualitative approach is growing and is greater in the Portuguese language journals. The most adopted research method was the case study, the interview was a preeminent instrument in data collection, and the most used analytic technique was interpretation based on codification and categorization. The most of qualitative research methods, instruments, and techniques identified was quote in the methodological literature of the area although it is few used. **Conclusions:** Several methodological problems were identified in the Brazilian articles and actions for improvement were suggested for academics.

Keywords: Sport Management; Systematic Review; Qualitative Approach; Sport Management Journals..

Introduction

The worldwide growth of sports throughout the 20th century -increased in the 1990's (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002) by the development of means of communication (Chanavat & Desbordes, 2017) - helped it to become an element of the entertainment industry (Kaser & Oelkers, 2014) and turned it into a profitable business that reaches millions of people and generates large amounts of money all over the world (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Such context, originated in the United States and now spread around the world, forced sport organizations to perfect their management processes in order to deal with new demands, especially with the increase of fans/consumers and sponsor's expenses (Robinson, 2012).

This context has stimulated the scientific development of Sport Management (SM) (Chelladurai, 2009). The first academic courses to form sports managers were created in the 1960s in the United States and it has been considered as an independent academic area since the beginning of the 21st century, mainly in the United States, Europe and Australia (Chalip, 2006; Pires & Sarmiento, 2001; Pitts, 2001). The developments of SM as academic area was analyzed by many authors with emphasis to Pitts (2001) who pointed that the growth and acknowledgment of the area are related to five factors: (i) developing a body of knowledge and proper literature that concerns theory and practice; (ii) the existence of professionals in the area that teach, research and practice; (iii) professionals and scholars who act and educate others in order to promote the area; (iv) training and preparing professionals; and (v) area credibility as a whole.

If takes these points into consideration, it will be possible to observe SM academic advancement, starting from the establishment of a body of knowledge and proper literature related to areas such as the sport industry, sport organization management, marketing, communication, and sport-oriented public policies. Other actions encompass teacher and researchers training and the creation of academic associations as the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), the Sport Management Association of Australia & New Zealand (SMAANZ), the Latin American Association for Sport Management (ALGEDE) and the World Association for Sport Management (WASM). Further aspects concerning its evolution are the publication of books, articles and academic journals, like the Journal of Sport Management (JSM), the European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ) and the Sport Management Review (SMR)(Bastos, 2016; Chalip, 2006; Chelladurai, 2009; Masteralexis, Barr & Hums, 2012; Pitts, 2001).

In Brazil, several professors and researchers have been putting a lot of effort on studying the academic advancement of SM (Bastos, 2003, 2016; Francalacci, 2011; Mazzei & Bastos, 2012; Rocha & Bastos,

2011). The SM has had a practical beginning and was slowly absorbed by the academy, becoming a discipline of the Physical Education courses (Francalacci, 2011). The sport development of the country, mainly of football, has led to an increase of the researches, that accelerated after the country's choice as host of mega sporting events such as the 2014 Fifa World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games (Bastos, 2016).

Bastos (2016) analyzed the field development between 2009 and 2016 and identified some progress in the area consolidation process. The year 2009 was a milestone because Brazil was chosen as the host to the 2016 Olympic Games and the foundation of the Brazilian Association for Sport Management (ABRAGESP). The author noticed an increase in the number of research groups, in the number of academic journals and in the production of the field as a whole, even though there are problems like do not have specific undergraduate and postgraduate courses specific to SM. She also pointed out to the need for perfecting the research made in the country, mostly in the methodological aspect, and that all people working in the field should work as group so that SM is recognized and valued by society (Bastos, 2016).

About scientific production, Dalfovo, Lana & Silveira (2008) report the existence of many classifications based on its objectives, collection procedures, sources of information, nature of the research problem and the approach to it, that can be quantitative, qualitative or mixed. In the qualitative approach, a large amount of non-numeric data is used to generate detailed and deep information that is analyzed by the researcher. Its aims to provide a deep and interpreted understanding of the research participants from their context, experiences, perspectives, and stories. Insights are obtained that allow to deepen already quantified knowledge or to create a knowledge base to be quantified (Gephart, 2004; Snape & Spancer, 2003; Veal & Darcy, 2014).

The use of the qualitative approach has steadily increased (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Turato, 2005) and such growth leads to the emergence of diverse research possibilities anchored in multiple methods, techniques and instruments that aim to explore these phenomena in-depth (Andrew, Pedersen & McEvoy, 2011; Mesquita & Graça, 2013a). Some researchers (Andrew et al., 2011; Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Li, Pitts & Quaterman, 2008; Mesquita & Graça, 2013a, 2013b; Veal & Darcy, 2014) have developed studies aiming to create, adapt and present research methods, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques for qualitative researches on SM area.

Alongside the methodological researches in SM, studies that aimed to identify research methods, instruments, and techniques used in the academic production of this field have been developed. These works have been carried out since the 1980s and were initially focused on quantitative studies (Patton, 1987). As the qualitative approach became popular, it started to be included in the research, prominently in the works of Shaw and Hoeber (2016). The authors identified that 72 qualitative articles were published between 2011 and 2013 in JSM, ESQM, and SMR. Among them, a majority is characterized as single or multiple case studies with the adoption of semi-structured interview to collect data. They also employed codification and categorization methods to analyze data, with limited use of other methods, collection instruments and analysis techniques (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016).

Results led Shaw and Hoeber (2017) to suggest the use of contemporary qualitative research methods, namely the research-action e researches based on the community, as well as the use of unusual data sources such as artifacts, photographs, paintings, and dances along with new analysis techniques, for example the deconstruction, longitudinal analysis and narrative analysis (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017).

From the current moment of the SM in the Brazilian academy, the increase of use of the qualitative approach on scientific research, and aiming to collaborate with the development of the SM in Brazil by the comparison of its scientific production with that of other countries the study aimed answer the following questions: how often the qualitative approach is used in publications of the major SM journals in English and Portuguese?; which are the main qualitative research methods used?; and whether the identified methods are addressed by SM's methodological literature? Thus, the objectives of this study was: (i) verifying the employment of qualitative approach in the articles published by the main English and Portuguese-speaking SM journals; (ii) identifying qualitative research methods that are most often adopted; and (iii) observe whether these methods are connected to the methodological literature specific to SM.

We emphasize that the research aimed to analyze and to compare the scientific production in Sport Management published in the main Portuguese and English-language journals emphasizing the methodological part, without aiming to carry out an in-depth discussion on the scientific approaches, methods, and techniques, a function performed by the epistemology of scientific research. The research is justified because it allows to compare the Brazilian SM research, especially the qualitative approach, with that of other countries in order to contribute to the scientific development of the area, especially in Brazil, guiding the methodological part of new studies.

1. Materials and methods

This study carries out a systematic review (SR) grounded on comprehensive bibliographical research. A SR allows summarizing the content with rigor as an essential element, safeguarding its validity and replicability. Furthermore, it emphasizes how the knowledge that comes from a certain field is constructed, showing the gaps and viable directions to new research (Bento, 2014; Gomes & Caminha, 2014).

Among the types of the systematic review suggested by Gomes and Caminha (2014), this review is

characterized as integrative, since it makes use of elements that come from qualitative and quantitative approaches. We adopted the procedures developed by the Cochrane Institute¹ and detailed by Gomes and Caminha (2014). It is composed of seven steps: (i) the formulation of a research question; (ii) finding and selecting studies; (iii) critical assessment of studies; (iv) data collection; (v) data analysis and its presentation; (vi) data interpretation; and (vii) perfecting and updating the review.

The first step, the creation of the research question, previously mentioned. To accomplish the second step, we looked for articles published in English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking periodicals that are aimed at SM considering all editions. Concerning the journals in English, we selected three that are the oldest and the best ranked in the field:

- The Journal of Sport Management (JSM): linked to the NASSM, it is the oldest journal in the field (created in 1987) with an impact factor of 1.247. It had six editions published in 2016. (Journal of Sport Management, n.d.);
- The European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ): linked to the EASM, it currently has an impact factor of 1.778 and had five editions published in 2016 (European Sport Management Quarterly, n.d.);
- The Sport Management Review (SMR): linked to the SMAANZ. It had the biggest impact factor in the field (2.128) and it had five editions published in 2016 (Sport Management Review, n.d.).

As for the Portuguese-speaking journals, the following periodicals were identified:

- *Revista Intercontinental de Gestão Desportiva* (RGID): linked to the Aliança Intercontinental de Gestão Desportiva (Intercontinental Alliance for Sport Management) hosted in Portugal. This Portuguese-speaking journal of SM has been in circulation for the longest (since 2011) and is also published in Spanish, which makes it important not only for Brazilian and Portuguese researchers but also to those coming from Spain and Latin America. It is currently classified B4 at Qualis² and it had three editions published in 2016 (Revista Intercontinental de Gestão Desportiva, n.d.);
- PODIUM Sport, Leisure and Tourism Review (Podium): connected to Nove de Julho University (UNINOVE), it is the oldest Brazilian journal of SM in circulation (since 2012). It had three editions in 2016 (PODIUM Sport Leisure and Tourism Review, n.d.) and is classified B4 at *Qualis*;
- *Revista de Gestão e Negócios do Esporte* (RGNE): published by Fundação Instituto de Administração (FIA). It was founded in 2016 and is supported by ABRAGESP. It is classified B4 at *Qualis* and had two editions published in 2016 (Revista de Gestão e Negócios do Esporte, n.d.).

We considered all articles published in 2016 by the aforementioned journals: 183 in total. They were assessed (step 3) based on the following inclusion criteria: articles characterized as a research result (including bibliographical reviews). Thus, 12 essays, 12 teaching cases and 5 book reviews were excluded, amounting to 154 articles left, **29 Brazilians**, that were collected (step 4) in July 2017.

The data analysis (step 5) was established using the process of codification and categorization process in themes (Creswell, 2007; Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Moraes, 1999), with eight categories of analysis defined beforehand according to the research objectives (Table 1).

Category	Name	Description
Category A	Adopted approaches	Pinpoints the use of quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches in the articles analyzed.
Category B	Qualitative research methods	Intends to identify the research methods employed and pointed by the authors of articles and if they are related to the ones mentioned by the methodological literature part of Sport Management.
Category C	Methodological references	It exposes the mentioned methodological references, highlighting the mentioned authors and the academic field of them aiming the identification of the used methods' originating areas used in the SM area.
Category D	Data collection	Indicates the main data collection instrument adopted.
Category E	Data analysis	Aims to show the central data analysis techniques utilized in the articles.

Table 1 - Categories of Analysis

¹ Cochrane Institute, created in 1993, is an independent global network of researchers, professionals, patients, caretakers, and people interested in health. It devotes itself to the production of systematic reviews, mainly in the field of health, developing its own methods and procedures (<http://www.cochrane.org/about-us>).

² Qualis is a journal evaluation system produced by *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (Capes), a governmental agency responsible for graduation and post-graduation programs in Brazil. Qualis classifies Brazilian and international journals in A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4 e B5, being A1 the highest rating.

The categories were elaborated taking into consideration the information mentioned in the articles, without the researchers' intervention, what can cause distortions due to methodological mistakes made by the authors of the articles. In the data analysis, the mixed articles were considered because they have traces of qualitative approach and the descriptive statistics (Farias & Laurencel, 2006) was used to presentation, interpretation, and to compare the data. Finally, the presentation of data (step 5) and steps 6 and 7 (interpretation, discussion, and final considerations) are in the items that follow.

Results and discussion

Category A- Adopted approaches

Among the 154 articles analyzed, 69 (45%) are qualitative and 3 (2%) are mixed. The results according to each journal are presented in Figure 1.

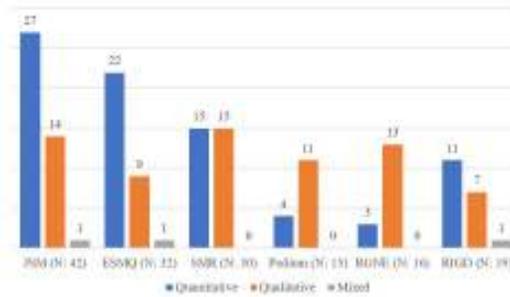


Fig. 1 -Use of quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches

When analyzing the results, we can infer that the ESMQ (68,8%) and the JSM (64,3%) have the highest proportion of quantitative articles, whereas RIGD (81,3%) and Podium (73,3%) are the ones that published qualitative articles the most. Mixed articles were published only by JSM, ESMQ, and RIGD.

If we compare the use of the qualitative approach in the English-speaking journals to the ones published in Portuguese, we can notice that they are inversely proportional, since the Portuguese-speaking journals published 62% of qualitative articles while the journals in English published 36%.

We highlight the fact that the publication of qualitative articles in English-speaking journals increased in relation to the results obtained by Hoerber and Shaw (2017): from 23.3% to 36%. It is also important to point to the use of the qualitative approach in the journals in Portuguese, chiefly in the Brazilian ones, demonstrating that such approach is much usual among Brazilians researching SM, which can be justified by the fact that area is still at the level of discovery in the country, with this approach being the most adequate for the exploratory studies (Li et al., 2008).

Category B - Qualitative research methods

Concerning the main research method employed in the 72 quantitative and mixed articles analyzed, according to what has been pointed out by the authors, we could verify the use of several methods (14). The most adopted ones were, respectively, the case study (single or multiple), in-depth interview, bibliographical review and bibliographical research (Fig. 2). It is important to emphasize that the main research method could not be identified in some works (17%).

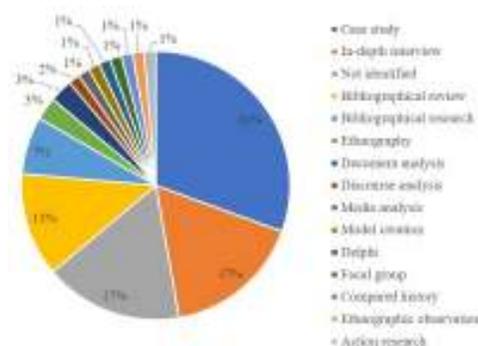


Fig. 2 - Qualitative research methods identified

The preference for the case study was also observed by Hoerber and Shaw (2017). It is important to point out that some case studies did not perform the triangulation analysis as indicated by Yin (2015). The considerable use of methods supported by secondary data sources (23%) disregarding fieldwork, such as the review, the

bibliographical research, and document analysis, is also a relevant fact. Considering only the Brazilian's articles was verified that 41% did not carry out field research, evidencing the distance between the academy and the SM practice. Also, noteworthy the high number of studies in which the method used is not mentioned (20%), confirming the methodological problems indicated by Bastos (2016).

Only two of the identified methods (media analysis and model creation) were not described in the literature on methodology produced by the authors associated with SM. This fact shows its relevance when dealing with the central methods adopted by researchers in the field and confirms the applicability of such methodological references. Another essential aspect to be called attention to is the fact that all methods employed and mentioned by the authors of articles have their origins in other areas, consequently showing that there are no methods exclusively created for SM.

Category C-Methodological References

The analysis of quotations by the methodological authors in the articles aimed to diagnose the main authors referenced and their academic fields to identify the origin of the methods used. 72 qualitative and mixed articles had references to 20 different fields, being that Business, Sociology, and Education were predominant references. 7 articles used methodological references derivative from SM researchers (Fig. 3).

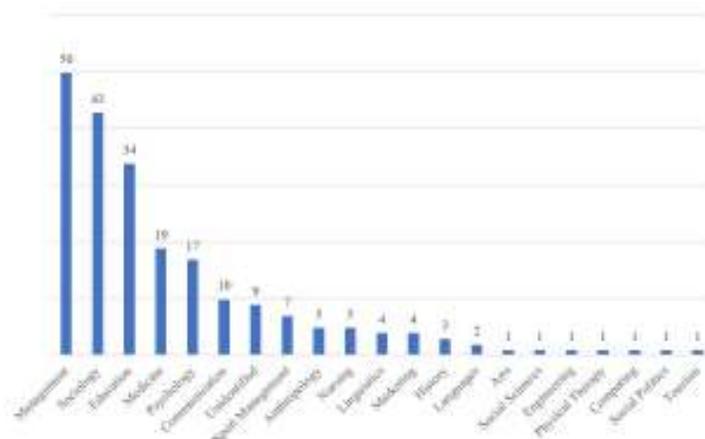


Fig. 3 - Areas of knowledge in the methodological references addressed

119 authors of research methodology were identified, and the most frequently mentioned were Yin (2015) (mentioned in 18 articles), Creswell (2007) (17), Miles and Huberman (1994) (14), Bardin (2013) (9), and Gil (2002) (6). Among the other authors, six that belong to the SM field were mentioned: Edwards and Skinner (2009), mentioned in 3 articles; Gomes and Caminha (2014), quoted twice; and Booth (2005), De Bosscher, Shibli, van Bottenburg, De Knop & Truyens (2010), Gratton and Jones (2004) and Li et al. (2008), quoted in one article each. Nine papers did not contain any mentions to authors that guided their methodological options and procedures.

The Brazilian articles, as to the origin of the methodological references, follow the general pattern identified, despite a lower use of references from Medicine and an increase in those originating from Psychology. As for the authors, the most cited are Yin (2015), Bardin (2013) and Gil (2002), with lower use of Creswell (2007) and Miles and Huberman (1994). Four Brazilian papers used methodological references from SM researchers: two used Gomes and Caminha (2014), one Booth (2005), and another one Edwards and Skinner (2009).

The results show that qualitative research in SM also has multidisciplinary grounds when it comes to the employed methods, drawing upon authors from several areas and emphasizing its strong links with Business. Furthermore, we can state that the methodological authors of SM are still not widely known and mentioned.

The diverse nature of the authors mentioned in the articles can be justified by several factors such as the methodological non-consolidation of the area, with a few SM methodological authors referenced and the use of many authors of different areas. This last point can also be positive if we consider the multidisciplinary of SM as something beneficial and enriching. The low use of the Sport Management methodological authors can be justified by the researchers' preference to use the original sources of the methods, and in Brazil we can also consider the lack of knowledge and access to these authors, since most are from other countries, making difficult the access to them (only one identified reference is in Portuguese: Gomes and Caminha (2014)).

Lastly, we underscore the fact that nine articles did not present any mentions or methodological references, which limits their quality and may affect not only the field credibility but also the reliability of the journals where they were published.

Category D-Data Collection

Regarding the central data collection instrument, the use of five instruments was determined: interviews (34 articles); documents (30); observation (5); surveys (2) and focal groups (1). The results obtained from the Brazilian articles differ, with 19 using documents as the main source of data. 6 used the interview, 2 the observation and 2 the questionnaire.

The results emphasize again the employment of secondary data in the research, especially in Brazil, showing again the distancing of the Brazilian SM from the practice (Bastos, 2016). Since the documents are based on data that have already been produced and analyzed previously, access to the primary information is limited and so is the creation of new findings, enabling only the analysis of data already dealt with (Marconi & Lakatos, 2003).

We must also point out other facts: a frequent use of the interview, as mentioned by Shaw and Hoerber (2016); the rare use of focal groups contradicting the results of Shaw e Hoerber (2016) and the adoption of surveys, a typical instrument of quantitative research (Veal & Darcy, 2014), in works classified by their authors as qualitative. Such findings could indicate either a mistaken use of the instrument or a mistaken classification of articles made by their authors when they should have labeled them as containing mixed or quantitative approaches. Regarding Brazilian articles, have been proven again the methodological problems identified by Bastos (2016), especially the high use of secondary data sources.

Lastly, the comparison between results and instruments appointed by the methodological researchers of SM indicates that all the instruments identified in the articles are mentioned by SM researchers. Hoerber and Shaw's (2017) statement about the use of few sources of data on SM researches was also verified and no analyzed article used the tools suggested by the authors, such as artifacts, images, and videos.

Category E-Data Analysis

Regarding the data analysis techniques, the employment of 10 techniques in the 72 mixed and qualitative articles was noticed. Interpretation based on codification and categorization is depicted in 28 articles whereas content analysis is used in 16 articles. 15 works had no information concerning how data were analyzed (Fig. 4).

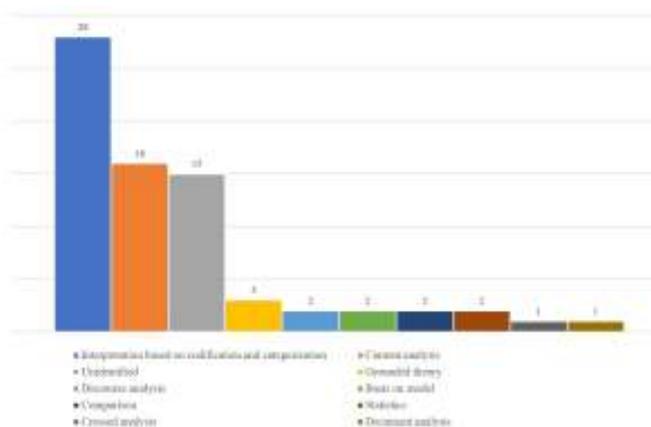


Fig. 4 - Data Analysis Techniques

Most of the Brazilian researches analyzed do not mention the analysis technique used and the most used is the Content Analysis (used in 8 articles), followed by the interpretation based on codification and categorization (4), Discourse analysis (2) and the Crossed Analysis, Comparison and Statistics, present in one an article each.

The varied range of techniques identified can be taken as positive, because this variety allows new interpretations on a determined phenomenon, enriching the knowledge generated by the field, as stated by Hoerber and Shaw (2017). Nevertheless, we still notice the massive use of one technique in general and in Brazil, the interpretation based on codification and categorization, which was also verified by Hoerber and Shaw (2016). As this technique is close to content analysis, it is possible to observe the prevalence of both, adopted in 61% of articles.

In general, we also noticed a low level of detail in the data analysis procedures, with most papers mentioning only the technique used, going against one of the main phases of scientific research (Creswell, 2007; Marconi & Lakatos, 2003; Veal & Darcy, 2014; Yin, 2015). Moreover, many papers do not even refer to any technique, which restricts the reproduction of the research and affects their quality. There were also some conceptual mistakes coming from authors, especially Brazilians, mainly regarding the identification of statistics in the data analysis of an article classified as qualitative, which caused some estrangement.

As for the techniques pointed by the specialists on SM methodology, we can state that the results depict a limited use of the possibilities described, since there is excessive use of codification and categorization in relation to

other techniques, such as conversation analysis, deconstruction, and grounded theory. This problem is also commented by Hoerber and Shaw (2017).

Conclusions

Taking the initial objectives into consideration, we could demonstrate that the use of the qualitative approach in the articles published in 2016 in the analyzed journals is higher than what had been identified in previous studies, showing an increase in the employment of such approach in the research on Sport Management, with a high use in Brazil, which can be justified by the fact that SM is a very recent academic area in the country and still in development, with the conducting of researches mainly exploratory and descriptive.

The qualitative research methods mostly adopted are the case study and the in-depth interview, being that two out of the fourteen methods identified are not mentioned in the literature that belongs to SM. It shows that SM tackles the usual methods, techniques, and instruments of the area, even though it is not commonly utilized.

The various methodological problems of the area in Brazil were evidenced and seeking to solve them we suggest a rise in the number of fieldworks that use interviews and focal groups, not to mention the need of having researchers who are able to deal with the traditional and the new research methods, instruments and techniques in order to diminish mistakes in application and to improve the description of carried out procedures.

As a limitation of this research, we point out the enormous diversity in the classification of methods, instruments, and techniques mentioned in the articles analyzed, a fact that made the data analysis difficult. This problem can be found in almost all qualitative methods, which in general present a diversity of classification, and also can be justified by the fact that SM is a new academic field that is still in process of consolidation, chiefly in the methodological question – it generates diversity and difficulty at the same time.

For future studies we recommend a longer period of data collection, the adoption of other sources of data - for example, journals that deal with specific themes proper to Sport Management, and studies to detail the problems of the Brazilian researchers and to indicate others solutions to the methodological problems identified.

In terms of practical implications for researchers, especially Brazilians, some points should be perfected when it comes to qualitative research on SM, such as use methodological authors from the SM area, as well as the creation of its own methods, the increase in use of images and videos as sources of information, and the utilization of contemporary techniques for qualitative data analysis.

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