

Sport management: Bibliometric study of key source titles in the research field

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Abstract:

The aim of the study is to profile the most productive and influential source titles publishing research work on sport management. The analysis is centered around the following study questions: (1) which journals are the first choices of scholars cultivating the research field to disseminate their findings? (2) which journals have had the most most impact on the research field? Bibliometric data for analysis are retrieved from the Scopus database. The study combines the methodology of bibliometric descriptive studies (research profiling) with science mapping (citation analysis). Citation analysis and visualization of its findings are supported by VOSviewer software. The study shows that the leading source titles disseminating research on sport management are indexed in the following subject areas defined by Scopus: Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Decision Sciences, Health Professions, and Medicine. Taking into account the number of published papers, the most productive journals in the field are: *Sport Management Review*, *Journal of Sport Management*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, and *Sport Management and Education Journal*. Citation analysis points out that the journals having the most most impact on the research field are: *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review*. The study contributes to more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure of the sport management research field and supports authors to make insightful decisions where to publish the outcomes of their research.

Key Words: sport management, source titles, journals, bibliometrics, research profiling, citation analysis, Scopus, VOSviewer.

Introduction

Sport management is a dynamically growing research field, which results in amassing scientific production. As of 27 June 2020, the search for the phrase ‘sport management’ in the titles of publications indexed in the Scopus database retrieved 411 records. The same search extended to include titles, keywords and abstracts increased the number of indexed publications up to 2,074. The increase in the number of publications, which has been particularly noticed in recent years makes the field an interesting object of bibliometric studies. Bibliometric studies, employing descriptive approaches focused on presenting the research output in a field and behavioral approaches exploring the relationships among the items taken for analysis [1], contribute to better understanding of the intellectual and conceptual structure of a field. Nevertheless, as observed by Lis and Tomanek [2], the sport management research field, remains an unexplored area from the bibliometric point of view. They reported only 11 publications indexed in Scopus, employing bibliometric methodology to investigate the body of research on sport management. As of 28 June 2020, only 3 additional works were discovered [2–4]. Simultaneously, recently, bibliometric studies have become more and more popular in areas related to sport management such as: sport entrepreneurship [5,6], sports innovation [7], leadership in sport [8]. Therefore, there is a need for further research contributing to discovering and mapping the structure of the sport management field.

Bibliometric studies deal with various units of analysis including: documents (publications), authors, organizations (research institutions), countries, journals (source titles) or words [9,10]. One of the categories of bibliometric studies identified by Lis and Tomanek [2] relates to leading journals within the sport management research field. The bibliometric publications taking sport management related journals as the units of their analyses are aimed at: (1) identifying “the most frequently cited sport management and non-sport management journals based on the analysis of the [...] manuscripts published in the *Journal of Sport Management*, *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Sport Management Review*” [11, p. 434.], and (2) examining the impact of “sport management and marketing journals on sport-related research published in 20 top tier generic management and marketing journals” [12, p. 423]. Both the aforementioned works were published in 2011. In the Scopus database, we found only one more up-to-date publication, which, nevertheless, focused on a bibliometric analysis of single journal. Its aim was to “investigate the research trends of the journal of *Sport Management Review* based on the Web of Science (WoS) citation database in the period 2011-2018” [3, p. 223]. The identified gap in the body of knowledge is motivation for conducting another bibliometric analysis exploring and mapping leading journals in the sport management research field.

Thus, the aim of the study is to profile the most productive and influential source titles publishing research work on sport management in order to contribute to more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure of the research field. The following study questions are taken for analysis in order to operationalize the research aim: (1) which journals are the first choices of scholars cultivating the research field to disseminate their findings? (2) which journals have had the most most impact on the research field? The research process and the structure of paper are determined by the aforementioned study questions. The remainder of the study is structured as follows: firstly, the research sampling process and methods of study are explained; secondly the results from research profiling and citation analysis are presented, thirdly, the findings from analysis are compared and contrasted with previous bibliometric studies and discussed.

Material & methods

Bibliometric data for analysis were retrieved from the Scopus database. Along with the Web of Science, Scopus is found among the most reliable sources indexing high quality publications [13–15]. Comparing and contrasting with the Web of Science, Scopus was chosen for the research sampling process as it provides more bibliometric records related to sport management research. As of 28 June 2020, searching for the phrase ‘sport management’ in the titles of publications indexed in Scopus, 411 bibliometric items (Title Sample) were retrieved. Extending the scope of search to include titles, keywords and abstracts of publications increased the number of records for analysis up to 2,074 (Topic Sample). Similar queries in the Web of Science Core Collection database resulted respectively in 314 items for title search and 1,133 items for topic search.

Publications comprising the Title Sample and their source titles are attributed to 20 subject areas defined by Scopus. In the case of the Topic Sample, scientific production is distributed over 26 subject areas. In both samples, Business, Management and Accounting (BussManAcc) is found to be the leading subject area. The followers are: Social Sciences (SocSci), Decision Sciences (DecSci), Health Professions (HealthProf) and Medicine (Med). Comparing the samples, two interesting findings are noticed: (1) the Social Sciences subject area is more represented in Title Sample, while the Decision Sciences subject area has a stronger position in Topic Sample, (2) the Psychology subject area is higher ranked in the case of Topic Sample. In both samples, journal articles are the major category of documents and English is the dominant language of publication. The parameters of the research samples are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Parameters of the research sample

Category	Title Sample	Topic Sample
Scope of search	Titles of publication	Titles of publications, keywords, abstracts
Number of publications	411	2,074
Top 10 subject areas (N)	Business, Management and Accounting (247); Social Sciences (168); Decision Sciences (101); Health Professions (93); Medicine (78); Economics, Econometrics and Finance (31); Computer Science (25); Engineering (19); Psychology (15); Arts and Humanities (8)	Business, Management and Accounting (1,483); Decision Sciences (790); Social Sciences (464); Health Professions (286); Medicine (238); Economics, Econometrics and Finance (107); Psychology (92); Computer Science (82); Engineering (62); Arts and Humanities (28)
Document types (N)	Article (288); Review (38); Book Chapter (31); Conference Paper (26); Book (11); Editorial (10); Erratum (4); Note (2); Undefined (8)	Article (1,684); Review (118); Conference Paper (99); Book (74); Book Chapter (66); Editorial (16); Erratum (6); Conference Review (4); Note (4); Short Survey (1); Undefined (2)
Language (N)	English (390); Russian (9); Spanish (9); German (4); Croatian (3); French (1); Turkish (1)	English (1,963); Spanish (51); Russian (34); Portuguese (13); Croatian (7); French (6); German (4); Chinese (3); Turkish (3); Persian (2); Arabic (1); Lithuanian (1); Catalan (1)

Source: Own study based on data retrieved from the Scopus (28 Jun. 2020).

The study combines the methodology of bibliometric descriptive studies (research profiling) with science mapping (citation analysis). The method of research profiling [16] is employed to identify the leading journals in the field publishing the highest number of papers, which may be considered as a manifestation of attractiveness of these journal for researchers to disseminate the findings of their research. From the comprehensive framework of research profiling [cf. 17], the components of general publication profiling and subject area profiling focused on source titles as a unit of analysis are used in the study. Profiling conducted from the perspective of source titles is supplemented with the analysis of bibliometric indices measuring citation rates of journals under the study, as this information is important for submission decisions made by scholars. The indices provided by Scopus database, such as CiteScore, SJR and SNIP, are employed. Citation analysis is used to identify journals having the most most impact on the research field. As noticed by Shilbury [11, p. 434], the author of one of the most recognized bibliometric studies in the sport management research field, “[c]itation analysis is a powerful tool to better understand the intellectual foundations of a field and to identify those journals publishing the majority of important articles”. Citation analysis and visualization of its findings are supported by VOSviewer software [18,19]. Detailed parameters of VOSviewer taken for analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. VOSviewer parameters used for citation analysis

Item	Characteristic/ value
Type of analysis	Citation analysis
Unit of analysis	Source titles
Minimum number of documents of a source	Title Sample – 2; Topic Sample – 5 (default setting)
Minimum number of citations of a source	Title Sample – 0; Topic Sample – 0 (default setting)
Total number of sources	Title Sample – 154; Topic Sample – 461
Number of sources meeting the threshold	Title Sample – 45; Topic Sample – 38
The largest set of connected items (to be displayed)	Title Sample – 25; Topic Sample – 33
Method of normalization of strength of the links between items	Association strength method
Layout	
Attraction	2 (default setting)
Repulsion	0 (default setting)
Clustering	
Resolution parameter (detail of clustering)	1 (default setting)
Minimum cluster size [N]	5
Merging small clusters	Switched on
Visualization	
Scale	1.25
Weights	citations
Labels size	0.50
Maximum number of lines	1000

Source: Own study.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Scientific output in Title Sample is distributed over 154 sources, among which 45 titles (29%) contribute with 2 or more publications, while 109 (71%) published only single papers. The analysis shows that the most productive source titles, i.e. those which have published the highest number of papers, in sport management research are: *Journal of Sport Management* (50 items), *Sport Management Review* (37) and *Sport Management Education Journal* (36). They are followed by: *European Sport Management Quarterly* (20) and *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education* (17). It means that the threshold for the Minimum Bradford Zone (MBZ) [20, cited after 21] in the field equals 55, and consequently MBZ consists of two journals only (*Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review*), which contribute with 21% of all publications in the field. In regard to the number of received citations, the number of citations per publication and h-index, *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review* are unquestioned leaders among source titles disseminating research on sport management. In Topic Sample, 140 (30%) among 461 source titles contribute with minimum 2 papers, while 321 (70%) of them have single contributions, only. MBZ threshold, which is 161, is filled by *Sport Management Review*, which occupies the dominating position both in the case of the number of publications (570) and the number of received citations (12,175). Consequently, its number of citations per publication (21.4) and h-index (52) stand out from remaining source titles. The following journals are: *European and Sport Management Quarterly*, which issued 338 papers, cited 3,807 times, and *Journal of Sport Management*, contributing with 129 publications and 2,987 citations. Both of them achieved the h-index equal to 31. The latter differentiates with the highest citations per publication ratio (23.2) among analyzed journals. Detailed data concerning key source titles in the sport management research field, including the total number of publications (TP), the total number of citations (TC), the average number of citations per publication (C/P) and h-index are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Top 10 source titles in the sport management research field (sorted by the total number of publications)

Title Sample Source titles	TP	TC	C/P	h- index	Topic Sample Source titles	TP	TC	C/P	h- index
Journal of Sport Management	50	1245	24.9	21	Sport Management Review	570	12175	21.4	52
Sport Management Review	37	743	20.1	18	European Sport Management Quarterly	338	3807	11.3	31
Sport Management Education Journal	36	74	2.1	5	Journal of Sport Management	129	2987	23.2	31
European Sport Management Quarterly	20	171	8.6	7	International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	64	364	5.7	11
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	17	65	3.8	6	Sport Management Education Journal	59	92	1.6	5
Quest	12	73	6.1	6	Teoriya i Praktika Fizicheskoy Kultury	31	26	0.8	3
International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	10	45	4.5	4	Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal	25	121	4.8	6
Journal of Global Sport Management	9	3	0.3	1	Journal of Global Sport Management	21	39	1.9	3
Teoriya i Praktika Fizicheskoy Kultury	9	12	1.3	1	Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	21	79	3.8	6
Journal of Physical Education and Sport	5	27	5.4	1	Quest	17	160	9.4	7
Sport Science	5	27	5.4	2					

Source: Own study based on data retrieved from Scopus (28 Jun. 2020).

As already mentioned in the methodological section, Business, Management and Accounting is found to be the leading subject area in the sport management research field in regard to the number of categorized publications. The other subject areas which include the most of the scientific output are: Social Sciences, Decision Sciences, Health Professions and Medicine. This structure of the research field is well represented among the identified most productive source titles (cf. Table 3). As subject areas are defined by Scopus on a non-exclusive basis, 12 journals (cf. Table 2) selected for analysis are distributed among subject areas as follows: Business, Management and Accounting – 8 journals, Social Sciences – 4, Decision Sciences – 3, Health Professions – 4, and Medicine – 2.

As willingness to place research findings in journals increasing likelihood of receiving attention of other scholars may be considered as a determinant of submission decisions, the identification of the most productive journals in the sport management research field is supplemented with the analysis of their citation rates indices. Such metrics, based on Elsevier’s Scopus, including CiteScore [22,23], SJR [24,25] and SNIP [26] are collected for the journals under the study and displayed in Table 3. CiteScore, similarly to its main direct competing metrics of Clarivate Analytics’ Journal Impact Factor (JIF), measures the impact of a journal with the ratio of citation count to the number of published papers. “SJR weights citations according to the status of the citing journal and aims to measure journal prestige rather than popularity. SNIP compensates for disparities in citation potential and aims to account for differences in topicality across research fields” [27, p. 215].

Table 3. Key source titles in the sport management research field (sorted by the CiteScore index)

Source titles	Subject Area	CiteScore 2019	SJR 2019	SNIP 2019
Sport Management Review	BussManAcc, DesSci	5.2	1.390	2.241
Journal of Sport Management	BussManAcc, DesSci, HealthProf, Med	4.4	1.340	1.773
European Sport Management Quarterly	BussManAcc	3.4	0.797	1.515
Quest	SocSci	3.2	1.272	1.599
Sport Science	HealthProf, Med	2.8	0.759	1.177
Journal of Hospitality, Lesisure, Sport & Tourism Education	BussManAcc, SocSci	2.3	0.420	1.151
Journal of Physical Education and Sport	HealthProf	2.2	0.357	0.916
Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal	BussManAcc	1.8	0.293	0.653
Journal of Global Sport Management	BussManAcc	1.7	0.331	0.987
Sport Management Education Journal	BussManAcc, SocSci	1.2	0.326	0.728
International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	BussManAcc, DesSci	0.7	0.212	0.392
Teoriya i Praktika Fizicheskoy Kultury	HealthProf, SocSci	0.5	0.213	0.793

Source: Own study based on data retrieved from Scopus (28 Jun. 2020).

Comparing and contrasting data concerning publication productivity of key source titles (Table 2) with their citation rate metrics (Table 3) indicates that the journals which are the preferred choices for spreading research findings in the field are those of highest values of CiteScore, SJR and SNIP, i.e. *Sport Management Review*, *Journal of Sport Management* and *European Sport Management Quarterly*. Such an observation may be considered as an indicator of high quality of scientific output on the one hand as well as a manifestation of consciousness and attention paid by sport management researchers to publish in high impact, prestigious journals on the other hand.

Science Mapping

Descriptive bibliometric analysis is supplemented with science mapping visualizing the findings from citation analysis of source titles. Item density visualizations employing the number of received citations as weights for the Title and Topic Samples are displayed respectively in Figures 1 and 2. In the visualizations produced with the use of VOSviewer software, “[t]here are two standard weight attributes referred to as the Links attribute and the Total link strength attribute. For a given item, the Links and Total link strength attributes indicate, respectively, the number of links of an item with other items and the total strength of the links of an item with other items” [19, p. 5]. In the case of citation analysis, “[a] citation link is a link between two items where one item cites the other. Citation links are treated as undirected by VOSviewer. Hence, no distinction is made between a citation from item A to item B and a citation in the opposite direction” [19, p. 25]. The strength of a citation link is a positive value representing the number of citations between the two items. Relevant values of links (L) and total link strengths (TLS) for the key source titles in the sport management research field are provided in Table 3.

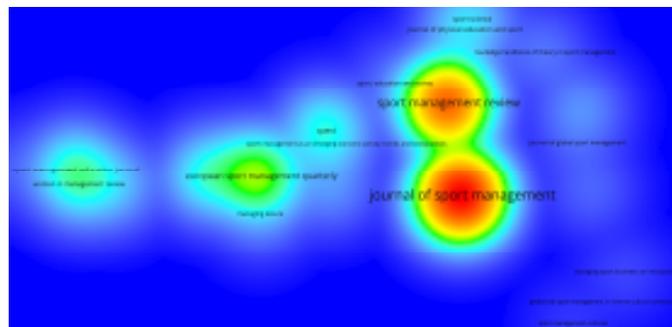


Fig. 1. Item density visualization of citation analysis in the sport management research field (Title Sample)

Source: Own study based on data retrieved from Scopus and analyzed with the use of VOSviewer (28 Jun. 2020).

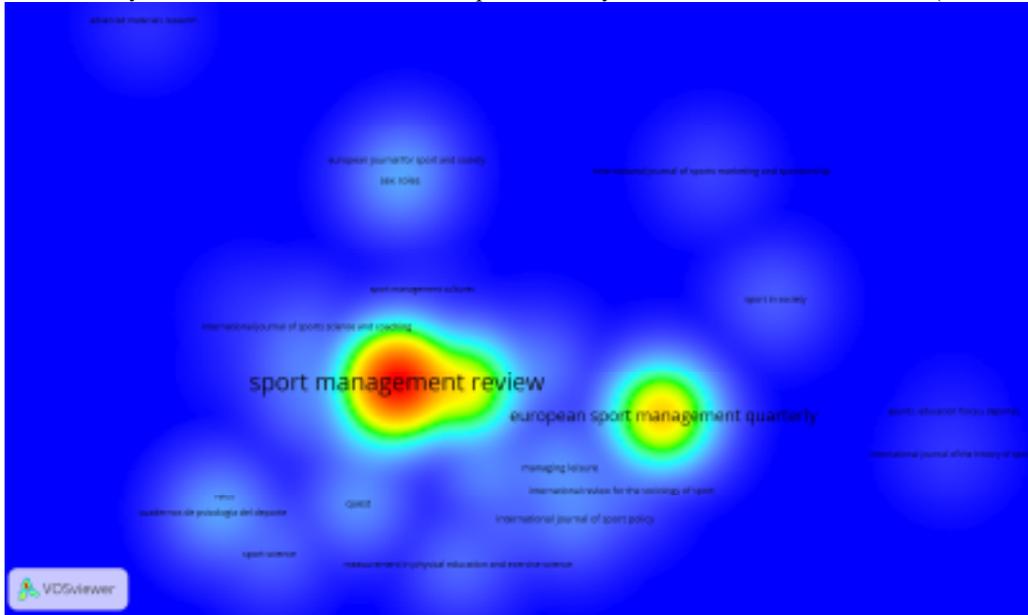


Fig. 2. Item density visualization of citation analysis in the sport management research field (Topic Sample)
Source: Own study based on data retrieved from Scopus and analyzed with the use of VOSviewer (28 Jun. 2020).

Table 3. Top 10 source titles in the sport management research field (sorted by the total link strength)

Title Sample	L	TLS	Topic Sam	L	TLS
Journal of Sport Management	18	227	Sport Management Review	30	1647
Sport Management Review	15	152	European Sport Management Quarterly	24	1090
European Sport Management Quarterly	10	71	Journal of Sport Management	22	879
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	11	63	International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	13	158
Sport Management Education Journal	11	63	Sport Management Education Journal	12	128
International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	5	29	Journal of Global Sport Management	8	94
Quest	8	26	Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	13	90
Annals of Leisure Research	4	25	Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal	11	80
Journal of Physical Education and Sport	5	17	Managing Sport and Leisure	8	75
Sport, Education and Society	3	13	Managing Leisure	7	53

Source: Own study based on data retrieved from Scopus (28 Jun. 2020).

In regard to Title Sample, item density visualization of citation analysis (Figure 1) highlights the leading position in the field occupied by *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review*. Their central positions are also confirmed by analysis of links and total link strength attributes. What is interesting, these source titles are located close to each other in the map and create numerous citation links i.e. they cite the publications of each other. As the distance between two items in VOSviewer’s visualizations represents their relatedness, a strong relationship between these two journals may be assumed. Two followers taking into account the citation prominence, i.e. *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Sport Management Education Journal* constitute separate ‘islands’, which may indicate their weaker relationships with *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review*. In regard to Topic Sample, citation analysis (Figure 2) highlights the dominant position of *Sport Management Review*, which is the main node in the intellectual structure of the field. In the given scale of items density visualization, *Sport Management Review* overshadows three other journals (i.e. *Journal of Sport Management*, *Sport Management Education Journal* and *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*), which are often cited but due to proximity of their locations to the dominant *Sport Management Review* are not even displayed in the map. The second top most cited source title in the field i.e. *European Sport Management Quarterly* is distanced from this node which indicates its weaker relatedness with the aforementioned journals. Taking into account standard weight attributes used by VOSviewer, the central position in the field is observed for *Sport Management Review*, *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Journal of Sport Management*.

Discussion

Taking into account the number of published papers, the following source titles are found to be the most productive in the sport management research field: *Sport Management Review* (Title Sample – rank 2, Topic

Sample – rank 1), *Journal of Sport Management* (Title Sample – rank 1, Topic Sample – rank 3), *European Sport Management Quarterly* (Title Sample – rank 4, Topic Sample – rank 2), and *Sport Management and Education Journal* (Title Sample – rank 3, Topic Sample – rank 5). The aforementioned journals are characterized by their multidimensional character. Certainly, Business, Management and Accounting is the most often represented subject area. Among 12 leading journals under the study, 8 of them are indexed under this category. However, as Scopus categorization of subject areas in non-exclusive, leading journals are also assigned to Social Sciences – 4 journals, Decision Sciences – 3, Health Professions – 4, and Medicine – 2. In response to the first research question, the journals which are the preferred choices for spreading research findings in the field are those of highest values of CiteScore, SJR and SNIP, i.e. *Sport Management Review*, *Journal of Sport Management* and *European Sport Management Quarterly*, which consequently makes them the most productive source titles in the field.

As highlighted by McCain [28, p. 290] “[t]he scholarly journal is the major formal channel in which research and other scholarly activities are recorded and communicated. Through citation analysis of the references in journal articles, bibliometricians can identify the ‘core’ literature of various fields of scholarship as represented in their journal literature”. In response to the second research question, as an outcome of citation analysis, the journals found to have the most most impact on the research field are: *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review*. These findings are confirmed by the analysis of links and total link strength attributes, which indicates the central positions occupied in the research field by *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review* in both research samples, and additionally by *European Sport Management Quarterly* in the case of Topic Sample. *Journal of Sport Management* and *Sport Management Review* are also publication platforms for the most influential core references in the field. *Journal of Sport Management* includes among other the works of Chalip [29], who discussed the way of sport management development towards a distinctive research discipline and of Frisby [30], who analyzed sport management research in the context of the critical social science paradigm. These two articles, published in mid-2010s, may be considered as seminal works in the field. *Sport Management Review* is a source title for the three most cited core references in a wider context of the sport management research. Among them, Funk and James [31] study psychological connection to sport among fans and spectators. Gibson [32] provides the review of literature on sport related tourism. Murray and Howat [33] analyze “[t]he concept of value and its relationships to service quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions” (p. 25).

What are the antecedents of such high productivity, impact and centrality in the research field of the journals identified above? Firstly, all these journals are directly focused on sport management issues, which is even manifested in their titles. Secondly, they are well established in the field, have long traditions and coverage by Scopus. *Journal of Sport Management* was founded in 1987, and its Scopus database coverage dates back to 1996. *Sport Management Reviews* was established in 1998, and the issues from that date to present have been indexed. Published since 2001, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, joined the Scopus database in 2010. Thirdly, all these journals are characterized by high citation rate metrics, which results in their attractiveness for the scholars cultivating the sport management research field.

Comparing and contrasting the aforementioned findings with the study by Shilbury [11], covering the early decades of the sport management research field development, the leading position of *Journal of Sport Management* is confirmed. *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Sport Management Review* are among the followers. Similarly in both cases, key source titles are found to have a multidisciplinary focus, which is considered by Shilbury as potentially “impeding the field’s ability to establish stronger patterns of influence” (p. 451). The lack of *Sport Marketing Quarterly* among the leading source titles in the field in the 2020 study makes the difference. In another study, Shilbury [12] identifies the impact of sport management and marketing journals on topical publications in generic management and marketing source titles, finding *Sport Marketing Quarterly* and *Journal of Sport Management* among the most influential journals.

Conclusions

The study has profiled the most influential source titles publishing research work on sport management. It has identified journals which are the first choices of researchers to disseminate their findings, have the most most impact on the research field and occupy central positions in the field. The main added value of the study is of theoretical character as it contributes to more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure of the sport management research field. Nevertheless, recognizing and exploring key sources titles may have a very practical aspect for submission decision making processes. Informing about journals’ productivity, citation rates and measures, positions in the field and relationships with other source titles provides valuable knowledge enabling the authors to make insightful decisions where to publish the outcomes of their research.

In order to ensure objectivity of the study, its limitations should be revealed. Firstly, employing research profiling and citation analysis only may not be sufficient to provide a complete bibliometric picture of the structure of source titles in the sport management research field. Thus, in further studies, it is recommended to employ other science mapping methods such as e.g. bibliometric coupling [34] and co-citation analysis [35,36] to point out the central, peripheral and bridging journals in the field and explore more thoroughly the relationships among the source titles. Secondly, although Scopus is recognized a quality source of bibliometric

data, dependence of the study on the only one database is to be considered as its weakness. Consequently, replication of the study with the use of other databases, including those less biased towards English as a language of publication is suggested.

Supplementing the aforementioned recommendations for further research some other options may be indicated. For instance, following Gholampour et al. [3], who analyzed *Sport Management Review*, and conducting bibliometric analysis of other leading journals in the field, such as *Journal of Sport Management*, *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Sport Management and Education Journal* could be an interesting line of prospective study. Moreover, examining the influence of sport management source titles on publications in generic management journals, as Shilbury [12] did a decade ago, may be another option.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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