An academic field is recognized as such only when a unique body of knowledge has been engendered and distributed in the field. Hence, creating a distinctive body of knowledge along with theories and methodologies is vital to enhance the legitimacy of a particular academic field (e.g., Costa, 2005; Culnan, 1986). As a growing field, the identity of sport management is subject to many issues and challenges. These include, but are not limited to definition, boundary, fundamental theories and methodologies, and base disciplines (Costa, 2005; Parkhouse & Ulrich, 1979; Pitts, 2001; Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008; Zeigler, 1987). While many intuitive reflective studies have provided insights to help resolve these issues and challenges based on scholars’ own experiences (e.g., Chalip, 2006; Chelladuria, 2013; Paton, 1987; Slack, 1991), there have been only a few attempts in the discipline to empirically disclose the visible knowledge structures of sport management, and to analyze those constructions systematically (Olafson, 1995).

To fill this gap, the authors completed a bibliometric analysis of citations to illustrate the structures of knowledge within the discipline of sport management. In particular, this study explored the knowledge structures of North America and Europe. As Kuhn (1962) explained, citations “indicate membership of the same paradigm sharing the same conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and methodological standard,” and “cluster in turn operationalizes the notion of a paradigm as a network of scientific practices connected by conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and methodological commitments” (p. 42). As one of the most prevalent sources for comprehending knowledge production and distribution, academic practitioners have used the analysis of citations in two different ways: through evaluative and relational techniques.

The majority of citation studies have used evaluative techniques (e.g. Santos & Garcia, 2011; Shilbury, 2011), which try to assess the impact of studies. This stream of research typically includes assessment of the contributions made to scientific advancement of the field by two or more individuals or groups (Thelwell, 2008). Such techniques have been used in order to inform research policy and direct funding for research (Moed, 2005). Relational techniques differ in that they are utilized to highlight relationships among scientific publications. Examples of these relationships include cognitive structure of research fields, new and emerging areas of research, and national and international patterns of co-authorship (Thelwall, 2008). Relational techniques are able to shed light on the assembly of academic knowledge reflecting the way scholars refer to previous scientific documents (e.g., Guardo & Harrigan, 2012; Shafique, 2013). This makes them more suitable for constructing knowledge structures of sport management; therefore, a relational technique was used in the present study.

While most citation studies in sport management have employed evaluative techniques (e.g., Santos & Garcia, 2011; Shilbury, 2011), Kim (2012) used a relational approach to disclose the knowledge structure of sport management by analyzing citations of the Journal of Sport Management (JSM). The researcher explored the knowledge structure within the field of sport management at multiple levels using citation analysis, co-citation network analysis, keyword analysis, and keyword co-occurrence network analysis on articles published in the JSM between 1997 and 2010. One major finding in this study was that JSM articles rarely cited articles in the European Journal of Sport Management (ESMQ), raising the possibility that there might be regional differences in knowledge constructions between North America and Europe within the discipline of sport management. In fact, comparative studies of knowledge productions and developments have been conducted in various academic subfields within the discipline of business, such as organizational studies (e.g., Üsdiken & Pasadeos, 1995), industrial marketing (e.g., Möller, 2013) and business ethics (e.g., Enderle, 1996).
The researchers investigated knowledge production within the field of sport management, comparing two separate bodies of knowledge constructed by the JSM and ESMQ, examining the similarities and differences in central paradigms, theoretical frameworks and methodologies between these two journals.

As an analytical tool, the authors of this study employed citation analysis from a bibliometrics approach. Bibliometrics is an “empirical, quantitative methodology that can describe the underlying structure of an intellectual field and help identify paradigms within the field” (McMillan & Casey, 2010, p. 209). This bibliometric analysis provides an effective means of identifying influential publications within a scientific field. Frequency analyses of citations were conducted in order to detect the seminal documents in the knowledge bodies for Sport Management in North America and Europe through two of its most prominent journals: JSM and ESMQ. These two journals were selected because the JSM and ESMQ were the only journals that have been included in Web of Science database for at least five years. Moreover, these two journals have broadly covered the general subfields of sport management rather than just one subfield of sport management such as sport marketing, sport finance or sport economics. Raw citation data was extracted from the Web of Science directly through the SITKIS software (Schildt, 2002). Overall, the JSM had 3,043 citations that were cited 10,467 times in 198 articles by 321 authors. ESMQ data included 5,311 citations that were cited 6,549 times in 142 articles by 254 authors.

Eight journals within the JSM's 25 most frequently cited list were specific to marketing/sports marketing representing the publications' dominant topic area. This tendency toward topics of marketing and consumer behavior was reflected in the most frequently cited articles, books and chapters, which included the works of Funk and James (2001; 2006), Gladden and Funk (2002), Wann and Branscombe (1993), and Trail and James (2001).

With the ESMQ group a tendency toward general management and sport management publications was found, with articles covering a range of management issues. ESMQ’s most cited articles were concerned with topics of organizational behavior and theory (e.g. Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Kikulis, 2000; Parent, 2008; Wolfe & Putler, 2002) and finance and economics (e.g. Dobson & Goddard, 2001; Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Lera-López, & Rapún-Gárate, 2005; Morrow, 2003).


The results demonstrated some differences between the knowledge structures of the two regions. These differences provide the basis for further comparative studies of knowledge structures among the expanded range of geographical locations such as North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Additionally, further studies will be needed to see if there are influential external factors (i.e., policy networks, government structure, and etc.) that have led to the emergence of two unique paths of knowledge development between the two regions.