Toward a More Well-Balanced Approach: A Content Analysis of NASSM Conference Abstracts from 2002 to 2015

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The breadth of sport management study has been especially important for last 20 years since the Sport Management Program Review Council (SMPRC) of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) - National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) was established. However, Slack (1996) and Pitts (2001) insisted that research in this discipline has not been diverse enough to explore, to explain, to describe, and to forecast unique phenomena in sport management fields. In addition, Pitts (2005) suggests that the major academic journals in sport management have also seen a limited focus. Pitts and Danylchuk (2007) found that textbooks in this discipline have predominantly focused on marketing and management. This can also be said for dissertation and research articles. However, sufficient effort has not been made to analyze diversity of the research proceedings except for Soucie and Doherty (1996), Mowrey (2003), Han and Kane (2007), and Han, Kane and Bae (2008). It is necessary to examine conference proceedings, in addition to textbooks, peer reviewed journals, and dissertations, to better explore the diverse academic interests and pursuits of the numerous professionals in this discipline. Han and Kane (2007), and Han, Kane and Bae (2008) found in their consecutive studies that certain specific areas including marketing, management/leadership, socio-cultural aspects, and education professional preparations have outnumbered in NASSM conferences than other areas. A replicative study is warranted to verify the most up-to-date trends in NASSM conferences with the comparison of past years.

The present study collected data from a total of 3,098 abstracts of NASSM conferences from 2002 to 2015. This approach was evaluated by 3 sport management professors prior to actual data collection process, and resulted in this study having sufficient face validity. North American Society for Sport Management conference abstracts were coded by 2 coders respectively using the sport management categorization based upon the SMPRC. Those areas include marketing, management/leadership, organizational theory, governance, finance, economics, ethical aspects, legal aspects, communications, tourism, socio-cultural aspects, education/professional preparation, research method, and others. Intercoder reliability was 87.3% that is greater than 80% of agreement (i.e. Tan, 1985). Intracoder reliability was checked and showed 94%, which is considered acceptable. Chi-square test was employed to perform statistical analyses, and the significance level was .05.

The results indicates that on average 221.3 proceedings were presented in each year in NASSM from 2002 to 2015, while marketing was the most presented area (25.8%) followed by socio-cultural aspects (14.7%) and management/leadership (14.0%). Marketing continues to be the most represented conference topic during this 14 year span. Management/leadership was the second topic from 2002 to 2009 followed by education/professional preparation and socio-cultural aspects. In 2010 however, socio-cultural aspects became the second most presented area followed by management/leadership and education/professional preparation. The least presented area was ethical aspects (1.7%), followed by finance (1.8%), tourism (3.2%) and governance (3.6%). Chi-square tests reveal the difference on the overall observed cases amongst each areas were statistically significant, \(x^2(13)=2593.22, p<.001\).

These results are generally consistent with previous research on NASSM presentations (Han & Kane, 2007; Han, Kane & Bae, 2008), sport management dissertations (Stephen, Phelps & Mahony, 2005), and textbooks (Pitts & Danylchuk, 2007). However, one unique difference in recent years, socio-cultural aspects, has grown with significant numbers of investigations. Legal and ethical aspects, finance, tourism, and governance have been understudied and thus, if balance is desired in the sport management discipline, should be studied more frequently. The results of this investigation will be beneficial for professors who guide their students and graduate students into seeking new
competitive directions. In addition, it is healthy for the sport management discipline to be reflective and evaluate the direction of future interests.