

Knowledge, Competencies, and Skills for a Sustainable Sport Management Growth: A Systematic Review

Flavia Guidotti *, Sabrina Demarie [†], Simone Ciaccioni [†] and Laura Capranica 

Department of Movement, Human and Health Sciences, University of Rome “Foro Italico”, 00135 Rome, Italy; sabrina.demarie@uniroma4.it (S.D.); simoneciaccioni@yahoo.it (S.C.); laura.capranica@uniroma4.it (L.C.)

* Correspondence: guidotti.flavia@gmail.com; Tel.: +39-34-8544-6432

[†] These authors contributed equally to this work.

Abstract: The present systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of sport management relevant knowledge, competencies, and skills analyzing and harmonizing the European skills classification for sport management employment profiles and evidence-based information from the scientific literature in this field. The information search in the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations platform resulted in four main sport management professional profiles, whereas literature searches in SPORTDiscus (EBSCOhost), Scopus, and Google Scholar databases resulted in 48 manuscripts meeting the inclusion criteria. The main findings showed a substantial scholars’ interest in deepening the understanding of necessary sport management-related knowledge/competencies/skills from different research perspectives. However, a disconnect between industry demands and students and/or employees’ preparedness and performance emerged, which substantiates the need to systematically update education and training in the sector to foster the sustainable development of this scientific area. Furthermore, in recognizing the centrality of the background, foundational, sport management-related knowledge, the crucial role of competencies and soft skills emerged. The present study not only provided a comprehensive, evidence-based, overview on sport management relevant knowledge/competencies/skills but also proposed a harmonized framework grounded on different relevant clusters that should be considered in developing and implementing educational sustainable programs for sport managers and leaders.

Keywords: sport management; knowledge; competencies; skills; education; employability



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1. Introduction

“As sport changes, what is required to be a competent sports manager is transformed”. (cit. Hoye, 2004 [1]).

Today, sport is a large and fast-growing business. In North America, sport ranks among the top 15 sources of Gross Domestic Product [2]. Similarly, in the European Union, the share of sport-related Gross Domestic Product and of sport-related employment accounts for 2.12% and 2.72%, respectively [3]. Furthermore, worldwide sport is an employment-intensive and continuing growing economic activity [3,4], generating a greater and faster increase in employment rate than other working sectors, leading to its entrance into mainstream business and the establishment of intertwined relationships with other social institutions (i.e., politics, education, economics, religion, and foreign relations) [5]. To meet the industry demands, the need to equip sport managers and administrators with sports- and business administration-related relevant knowledge, competencies, and skills (K/C/S) has become crucial [6,7]. Hence, sport management educational programs have been established and implemented [8–16]. Furthermore, in 2012, the World Association for Sport Management (WASM) was formed to stimulate research, academic exchange and collaborations between sport management academic stakeholders as well as foster the evidence-based implementation of academic curricula [17].

Theory holds a special place across academic disciplines [5,18,19], offering insights into specific field-related most relevant aspects, and informing teaching and practice to adjust academic and vocational training. Over the past decades, the sport management as an academic discipline raised the attention of many scholars in search for its legitimacy within the academic environment. In particular, the research interest has been focused on the sport management definition in relation to its core disciplines and its ability to produce theory from inside (i.e., sport management educational curricula, employment in the sector, sport managers' attributes, dynamics within sport organizations). This was a necessary process to strengthen the characterization of its foundational knowledge, relevant K/C/S, and teaching/learning methodologies as well as generally progress its state of the art [14,20,21]. In particular, the identification of training and educational needs for sport management specialists has become a crucial topic. In general, to raise the graduates' employability, a competence-based education targets the development of relevant K/C/S to succeed in future employment [12,22,23]. Although the reform of higher education supported the establishment of a European educational framework in relation to Bachelor's and Master's degrees and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System [24], no guidelines for competence-driven curricula exist [12]. In fact, sport management higher education programs still lack a distinct competence framework to bridge the knowledge gap between employment demands, students' preparedness, and skills development strategies. Therefore, curricula may vary considerably within, between, and among national contexts [12]. In particular, due to the heterogeneity of the sport sector (i.e., sport organizations, sport communication agencies, tourism, health, fitness, commercial goods), the definition of necessary K/C/S for sport managers is complex [12,23,25]. In fact, entry-level sport managers should be equipped with a wide range of K/C/S to allow them progressing vertically (i.e., advancing within a given sport organization), moving horizontally (i.e., job mobility among sports bodies appertaining to a defined category, such as major non-profit organizations), and transversally shifting between organizations of different natures (i.e., such as moving from a sport federation to a professional sport club) during their professional career. Furthermore, profound differences existing between sports organizations in relation to their nature (i.e., non-profit organizations, ranging from sport governing bodies to local sports clubs, and for-profit organizations, including professional leagues and professional sport clubs), size (i.e., ranging from major-governing to minor-local sport organizations), and organizational structure (i.e., ranging from very structured and professionalized, to less structured and less professionalized) should be also taken into account. In fact, sport managers could be posed to perform from a very limited and specialized tasks to manage a diverse range of tasks within different organizational departments [23,26]. Therefore, the development of both appropriate quality education for sport managers and effective managerial models can strongly contribute to the organizational efficiency, its sustainable growth, the nurturing of innovation, and the employee motivation and satisfaction.

Since the early study by Jamieson [27] on competency-based approaches to sport management, the functional relevance of organization, administration, finance, budgeting, marketing, staffing, coordination, planning and evaluation, and specific sport management K/C/S for entry, middle, and top managers has been addressed. Thereafter, other studies have implemented this hierarchical approach toward the identification of relevant competencies for sport managers [22], contributing to progress the scientific knowledge and professional and educational standards [11]. To note, the study of Miragaia and Soares [11] examined the literature on Higher Education in Sport Management published from 1979 to 2014 in relation to curriculum characteristics, knowledge development, and accreditation process, identifying three main components of a sport management curriculum: (a) the foundational areas of study (i.e., including business management, marketing, economics, accounting, finance, and computer science); (b) the application areas (i.e., sports sociology, sports law, sports economics, sports marketing, and sports administration); and (c) field experiences, including practicums and internships. Although the study provided a relevant knowledge framework, no comprehensive picture regarding the specific competence

profile for sport managers as a basis for educational standards emerged [22]. Therefore, the European project New Age of Sport Management (NASME) [22] was recently financed to bridge the gap between the sport management graduates' competency profiles and the real sport sector needs. Insights from experienced professionals from the sports sector have been considered to develop a competency model and recommendations to incorporate a competency-based educational approach into traditional sport management educational paths have been provided [22]. However, there is a need to continue exploring this research area when considering the effects of new trends in society such as internationalization, commercialization, and digitalization on the necessary K/C/S toward a sustainable growth of this sector [13].

According to Ciomaga [20], to avoid atrophy, scientific disciplines need to constantly reiterate their foundations, to explore new trends, and to provide guidance to scholars and professionals in the sector regarding major discipline-related aspects that should be addressed and/or implemented and/or included within educational curricula. In the sport management literature, a number of methods have already been used to examine the dominant trends in the field, such as literature reviews [11,15,21], meta-analyses [28], and bibliometric methods [20]. Furthermore, the need to continue exploring industry needs, theoretical advancements, and shifting societal expectations to ensure the field continues to thrive and expand has been highlighted [5,20,22]. However, there is a knowledge gap in the literature regarding the identification of relevant K/C/S through a systematic screening of existing scientific and international professional standards (i.e., within the European framework).

Gender equality is vital for fulfilling the European Union (EU) objectives of economic and social cohesion and to increase employment opportunities as well as for ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness [29–32]. Furthermore, a well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society should be guaranteed by appropriate policies and actions promoting quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all [30]. Sport has been recognized as a relevant driver of sustainable development due to its role in the realization of development and peace, in its promotion of tolerance and respect, and its contributions to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives [30]. However, women are underrepresented in leadership positions within sport organizations [33,34], with a lack of networking opportunities, perceptions of being as less qualified with respect to their male counterparts, and gender stereotypes as major barriers to their career advancement. Therefore, changes in male-dominated sectors is needed, providing women the necessary knowledge, competencies, and skills, fighting against traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and guaranteeing equal professional opportunities to the European citizenship at large [33,34]. In trying to modify this situation, the European Commission has recently financed the New Miracle Project [35], which aimed to provide a tailored management education and training to entry and middle level women sport managers. Therefore, the initial phase of the project was dedicated to the development of a competence framework, which would include the necessary and relevant sport management K/C/S to be acquired by participants in the project through different types of learning (i.e., formal, non-formal and informal). Therefore, the general purpose of the present study was threefold: (i) to examine the European professional classification and standards in relation to sport management employment profiles and relative required major K/C/S; (ii) to systematically review the evidence on the major sport management K/C/S within the scientific literature, considering empirical quantitative and qualitative study designs; and (iii) to develop an harmonized, evidence-based, K/C/S framework to contribute to a sound and sustainable implementation of sport management educational paths for young managers. In particular, the specific objectives of the present systematic review were: (i) to verify the presence of recognized sport management professional profiles within the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) database, and to extract potentially available

K/C/S information; (ii) to systematically identify and review primary research articles in the field of sport management K/C/S in relation to different research topics, methodologies, and outcomes; (iii) to apply a systematic, valid and reliable approach for data extraction of sport management K/C/S and provide a quantitative overview of collected information; (iv) to compare European-based information with scientific-based information in relation to sport management K/C/S to identify potential mismatch between the different information sources; and (v) to develop a harmonized, evidence-based K/C/S framework to provide a comprehensive overview for guiding curricula implementation and future research directions.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study was performed under the Erasmus+ Sport Collaborative Partnership “Women—new leader’s empowerment in sport and physical education industry—New Miracle” project (Project number: 622391-EPP-1-2020-1-LT-SPO-SCP), which was co-financed by the European Commission.

2.1. Information Search within European Professional Databases

To provide a comprehensive picture of the relevant K/C/S in contemporary sport management, the European framework and databases in relation to sport management professional profiles and required K/C/S have been considered in the present study. In particular, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) [36] and the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) [37] have been screened. Whilst ESCO provides a multilingual classification of skills, competences, qualifications, and occupations relevant for the EU labor market, education and training, ISCO is a statistical four-level classification of occupation categories. Both frameworks have been built to provide an exact match between each occupation (i.e., in ESCO) and professional unit group (i.e., in ISCO) within a hierarchical structure. Therefore, the ESCO platform has been searched to retrieve information regarding relevant K/C/S within formal European sport management-related professional profiles. In particular, two researchers performed the database screening for: (i) the identification of recognized sport management-related occupational profiles and (ii) the data collection in relation to the listed K/C/S for each retrieved occupational profile.

Collected K/C/S have been recorded on an Excel file for data processing, which consisted of duplicates removal and the clustering of individual items within thematic categories. In case of disagreement between the two researchers in the cluster definition, a third author’s opinion was sought. Furthermore, results from the ESCO platform screening have been considered for comparison with major findings emerged from the systematic literature review.

2.2. Protocol and Eligibility Criteria for the Systematic Literature Review

The systematic literature review was based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses-PRISMA guidelines [38]. To be included in the present review, selected studies had to meet the following criteria: (i) original peer-reviewed articles published between January 2012 and December 2022 in English language; (ii) primary studies with no restriction regarding the methodology (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) and study design; (iii) the relevance regarding the research purposes, including the citation of K/C/S within the results, discussion, and conclusions sections. Conversely, exclusion criteria encompassed: (i) review articles (i.e., meta-analyses, systematic reviews) and not peer-reviewed publications (i.e., letters to the editor, translations, book reviews); and (ii) the absence of relevant cited K/C/S. Reviews and meta-analysis have not been considered in the present study, although they have been retained for other research purposes.

2.3. Literature Search Process

In September 2022, a systematic literature search of original articles was performed on the following databases: SPORTDiscus (EBSCOhost), Scopus, and Google Scholar. The

following search string was used: (sport management) AND (competence OR competencies OR skill*). The asterisk (*) was used to pull all derivations of the similar root word (i.e., skill* = skill and skills). The literature search was performed on papers published from January 2012 to September 2022. To ensure the inclusion of the most updated articles in the present review, alert notifications of new publications have been activated in all the included databases until December 2022 (i.e., end of the data collection).

2.4. Study Selection and Data Collection Process

To ensure conformity with the inclusion criteria and pertinence in relation to the purposes of the present review, two authors specialized in Sports Science education and involved in the New Miracle project independently performed the articles' screening based on title, keywords, abstract, and full text, reporting reasons for exclusion. In case of disagreement on eligibility, a third author's opinion was sought.

2.5. Data Extraction

Two reviewers extracted the data of the final studies sample. The following information was extrapolated and examined from the included articles: author(s) and publication year; journal; country in which the study was conducted; research context (i.e., sport management education, sports organizations); sample; sample size; gender of participants; level of experience of participants (i.e., experienced, not experienced) or data sources; methodology; dependent variables; applied instruments/tools; and main outcomes. Furthermore, for each considered manuscript, cited relevant K/C/S were extracted considering the results, discussion, and conclusions sections. For both data extraction and study quality assessment, each included article was evaluated separately by two researchers, and in case of disagreement, a third author's opinion was sought.

2.6. Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of each selected article was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)—Version 2018 [39], which was designed for the appraisal stage of systematic mixed studies reviews (Supplementary Materials File S3). In particular, the instrument allows the quality assessment of five categories of studies: qualitative research, randomized controlled trials, non-randomized studies, quantitative descriptive studies, and mixed methods studies. Originally developed in 2006, the current 2018 version was implemented based on the findings from the literature review of critical appraisal tools, interviews with MMAT users, and an e-Delphi study with international experts [39]. The appraisal consists of two screening questions (i.e., (1) Are there clear research questions? and (2) Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?), which were followed by five questions specifically designed for each study category (Supplementary Materials File S3). Each question should be rated through a positive (i.e., "Yes"), negative (i.e., "No"), or doubtful (i.e., "Can't tell", applicable when appropriate information to answer "Yes" or "No" are not present and/or unclear) answer. Whether the answer is "No" or "Can't tell" to one or both the screening questions, further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate. Positive answers were considered as providing one point to the evaluated article. To ensure the relevance of emerging findings and to avoid the inclusion of studies showing a lack of methodological quality, a 4-positive answers threshold (i.e., 4 points out of 7 appraisal questions) was applied to determine the final list of included manuscripts.

3. Results

3.1. European Framework for Sport Management Related Occupations and Relevant K/C/S

The information search within the ESCO platform [36] resulted in four main sport management-related occupational profiles (Supplementary Materials File S1), as reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Sport management-related occupational profiles in the ESCO platform, relative description, and emerged transversal skills.

Occupation	ESCO Code	Description
Sport administrator	1349.22	Sport administrators act in a middle management role within sport organizations at all levels, in any sport or country in Europe (e.g., sport clubs, federations, and local authorities). They carry out organizational tasks across a wide range of functions in accordance with the strategy and policies set by management, boards of directors and committees. They play a crucial role in the overall delivery of sport and their work in sport organizations directly impact the unlocking of the potential of the sector in Europe towards health, social inclusion, and economy.
Sports, recreation and cultural center managers and Sport facility manager	1431 and 1431.3	Sports, recreation and cultural center managers plan, organize and control the operations of establishments that provide sporting, artistic, theatrical and other recreational and amenity services. Sport facility managers lead and manage a sport facility or venue, including its operations, programming, sales, promotion, health and safety, development, and staffing. They ensure it provides excellent customer service whilst achieving business, financial and operational targets.
Sports program coordinator	2422.17	Sports program coordinators coordinate sports and recreation activities and policy implementation. They develop new programs and aim to promote and implement them as well as ensure the maintenance of sports and recreation facilities.
Recreation policy officer	2422.12.13	Recreation policy officers research, analyze and develop policies in the sports and recreation sector and implement these policies to improve the sport and recreation system and improve the health of the population. They strive to increase the participation in sports, support athletes, enhance the performance of athletes in national and international competitions, improve social inclusion and community development. They work closely with partners, external organizations or other stakeholders and provide them with regular updates.
Main transversal skill set (<i>n</i> = 29)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analytic/evaluation/control skills Business and entrepreneurship knowledge/experience Career awareness and planning skills Conflict management skills Creativity and innovation skills Cross-cultural competence Effective interpersonal communication skills (internal/external) Event management Finance and administration management Fundraising/funding opportunities Human resources management Leadership skills Legal and policy management Marketing knowledge Meetings management Networking Planning/organization/coordination skills Political skills Problem solving skills Research skills Risk management Safety/security/health management Stakeholders management Strategic management and ability to manage change Tasks and resources management Teamwork Technological and digital skills Volunteer management

Note: data retrieved from the ESCO platform [36].

The analysis showed a list of essential and optional K/C/S, which resulted in a total of 113 recorded citations. After the removal of duplicates and synthesis of common themes, a final list of 29 main K/C/S was obtained. In particular, major findings regarding sport management-related occupational profiles reported the need to develop a multifaceted skill set, including: (i) comprehensive background knowledge in the field of sport management (i.e., event management, finance and administration, human resources, legal, marketing, sport policy, strategic management and ability to manage change); (ii) conceptual competencies to plan, implement, and evaluate a range of different tasks and resources within sport organizations of different size and/or type; (iii) business and entrepreneurship knowledge and experience to implement business plans; (iv) cross-cultural competence to safeguard diversity (i.e., gender, race, religion) and special groups (i.e., minors, immigrants, older adults) when implementing sport programs within different contexts (i.e., leisure sport, school sport, health-enhancing physical activity); (v) leadership and political skills to guide and influence; (vi) networking skills to foster professional cooperation; (vii) teamworking and conflict management skills to nurture a collaborative working environment; (viii) stakeholder management skills to effectively interact with different actors (i.e., costumers, members, other sport organizations, governmental agencies, representatives); (ix) safety/security/ health management within sport venues.

3.2. General Findings from the Systematic Literature Review

The initial search through the three considered databases (i.e., EBSCOhost, Scopus, and Google Scholar) reported 1467 records. After the removal of duplicates, title/keywords screening, and abstract evaluation, 135 papers were retained for in-depth analysis. Among them, 44 review manuscripts were not considered in the present study, whereas 91 primary studies were processed for data extraction. Forty-three studies have been rejected due to the following reasons: (i) out of scope of the present systematic review; (ii) not listing relevant K/C/S to be collected for further analysis; (iii) not meeting the quality assessment threshold of four positive answers out of seven MMAT appraisal questions [39] set for the present study. Forty-eight manuscripts met the inclusion criteria (Figure 1) and have been included in the final list, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of the included studies and geographical representation.

Ref.	Authors and Year	Research Context	Country	Continent
[40]	Parent et al., 2012	Sport events	Canada and Norway	Mixed
[41]	Bravo et al., 2012	Collegiate athletic administration	United States	North America
[42]	Arnold et al., 2012	Leadership in sport organizations	United Kingdom	Europe
[25]	Emery et al., 2012	Employability and work in sport management	Australia	Oceania
[43]	Won et al., 2013	Collegiate athletic administration	United States	North America
[44]	Pauline, 2013	Sport events	United States	North America
[45]	Eksteen et al., 2013	Sport organizations	South Africa	Africa
[46]	Hardin et al., 2013	Collegiate athletic administration	United States	North America
[47]	Shahram and Mehran, 2013	Sport organizations	Iran	Asia
[48]	Jones and Jones, 2014	Sport management education	United Kingdom	Europe
[49]	Diacin and VanSickle, 2014	Sport organizations	United States	North America
[50]	Fang and Kim, 2014	Sport management education	China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan	Asia
[51]	Benar et al., 2014	Leadership in sport organizations	Iran	Asia
[52]	Misener and Doherty, 2014	Sport organizations	Canada	North America
[53]	Eksteen et al., 2015	Sport management education	South Africa	Africa
[54]	DeLuca and Braunstein-Minkove, 2016	Sport management education	United States	North America
[55]	Marjoribanks and Farquharson, 2016	Leadership in sport organizations	Australia	Oceania
[56]	Molan et al., 2016	Leadership in sport organizations	Ireland	Europe

Table 2. Cont.

Ref.	Authors and Year	Research Context	Country	Continent
[57]	Wemmer and Koenigstorfer, 2016	Sport organizations	Germany	Europe
[58]	Magnusen and Kim, 2016	Sport management education	United States	North America
[59]	Tsitskari et al., 2017	Employability and work in sport management	Greece	Europe
[60]	Megheirkouni, 2017	Leadership in sport organizations	Syria	Asia
[61]	Dinning, 2017	Employability and work in sport management	United Kingdom	Europe
[62]	Freitas et al., 2017	Leadership in sport organizations	Brazil	South America
[63]	Megheirkouni and Roomi, 2017	Leadership in sport organizations	United Kingdom	Europe
[64]	Shreffler et al., 2018	Employability and work in sport management	United States	North America
[23]	Fahrner and Schüttoff, 2019	Employability and work in sport management	Germany	Europe
[65]	Pierce, 2019	Sport management education	United States	North America
[66]	Wohlfart et al., 2019	Employability and work in sport management	Germany, Norway, and Spain	Europe
[67]	O'Boyle et al., 2019	Leadership in sport organizations	Australia	Oceania
[13]	Ströbel et al., 2020	Sport management education	Germany and United States	Mixed
[68]	DeLuca et al., 2020	Sport management education	United States	North America
[69]	de Schepper et al., 2020	Employability and work in sport management	The Netherlands	Europe
[70]	Pate and Bosley, 2020	Sport management education	United States	North America
[71]	Sattler and Achen, 2021	Employability and work in sport management	United States	North America
[12]	Wohlfart et al., 2021	Employability and work in sport management	Germany	Europe
[72]	Omrčen, 2021	Sport management education	Croatia	Europe
[73]	Duclos-Bastías et al., 2021	Sport organizations	Chile	South America
[74]	Sauder et al., 2021	Sport management education	United States	North America
[75]	Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021	Sport organizations	Spain	Europe
[76]	Lu, 2021	Sport management education	Taiwan	Asia
[77]	López-Carril et al., 2021	Sport management education	Spain	Europe
[22]	Nová, 2021	Sport organizations	Nine EU countries (NASME project)	Europe
[78]	Robinson et al., 2021	Collegiate athletic administration	United States	North America
[79]	Veraldo and Yost, 2021	Sport management education	United States	North America
[80]	Finch et al., 2021	Employability and work in sport management	United States	North America
[81]	Davies and Ströbel, 2022	Sport management education	Germany and United States	Mixed
[82]	Atilgan and Kaplan, 2022	Sport organizations	Turkey	Europe

Excluding one book chapter [22], the other retained manuscripts were research articles published in several scientific journals, with *Sport Management Education Journal* ($n = 8$ studies), the *European Sport Management Quarterly* ($n = 5$ studies), and *The Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education* ($n = 4$ studies) as the most represented.

Regarding the research context, the majority of the studies were focused on sport management education ($n = 15$, 31%) [13,48,50,53,54,58,65,68,70,72,74,76,77,79,81], which was followed by employability and work in sport management ($n = 10$, 21%) [12,23,25,59,61,64,66,69,71,80], and non-profit sport organizations ($n = 9$, 19%) [22,45,47,49,52,57,73,75,82]. Other categories showed a lower representation ($n = 8$, 17%: leadership and management in top sport organizations [42,51,55,56,60,62,63,67]; $n = 4$, 8%: collegiate athletic administration [41,43,46,78]; and $n = 2$, 4%: sport events [40,44]).

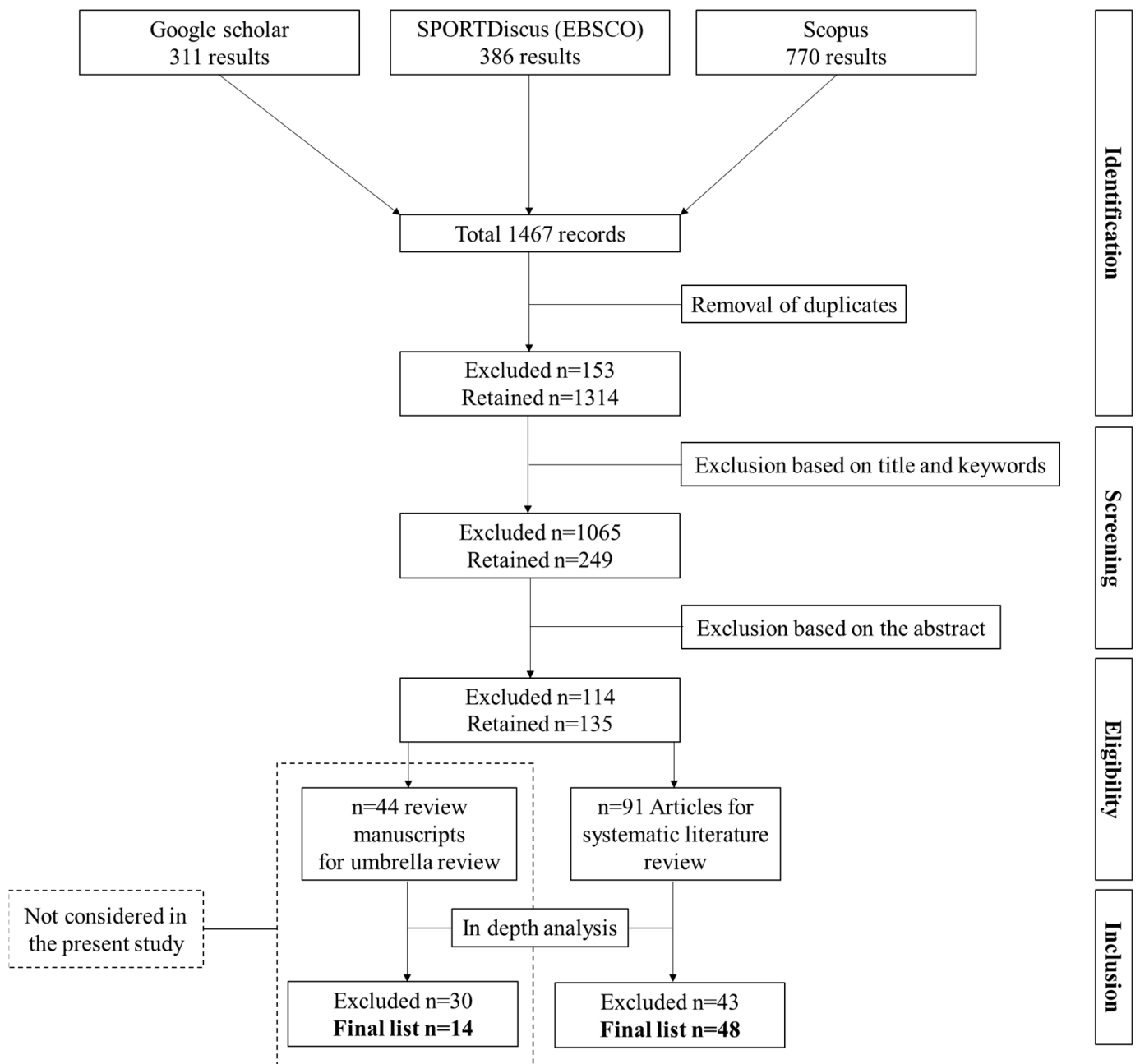


Figure 1. Flowchart of the systematic process of review.

The geographical representation of the included studies resulted in the highest occurrence for North America ($n = 17$ studies, 35%, with United States as a leading country), which was followed by Europe ($n = 16$ studies 33%, with Germany as a leading country) and Asia ($n = 5$ studies, 10%). Furthermore, three studies included countries from different continents [13,40,81], and one study was performed under an EU-funded project involving partners from different European countries [22]. Lower frequencies of occurrence emerged for Oceania ($n = 3$ studies, with Australia as the only represented country), Africa ($n = 2$ studies) and South America ($n = 2$ studies).

3.3. Characteristics of the Included Studies

3.3.1. Emerging Topics

Regarding the characteristics of the included studies (Table 3), a wide range of research settings and topics have been identified. Studies focused on sport management education addressed the need to cultivate relevant K/C/S to manage effectively [53] a number of tasks within different types of organizations, ranging from business/entrepreneurship-related skills [48,50,65] to cross-cultural competencies [72,74] and digital skills [70,77]. In particular, a strong emphasis was placed on the adaptation of traditional sport management formal educational curricula to meet the needs of a fast-paced growing environment, which should consider students' motivations and career aspirations [58,68], the central role of experiential learning opportunities to better prepare students for the labor market [54,76], and the emerging need to internationalize educational paths toward a growing global sport marketplace [13,72,79,81]. Regarding the employability and work in sport management, emerging topics were relevant K/C/S to work in the sport sector [23,25,71,80], the alignment between university education and employers' expectations regarding graduates' competencies and skills and the students' proficiency in performing them [12,59,61,64,69], the internationalization of the sport management labor market and necessary adjustments in educational curricula [66], and the role of critical reflection during work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences to better prepare sport management students for future employment [69]. Several studies were performed within the non-profit sport sector, investigating the specific K/C/S a sport manager should possess, the proficiency of sport managers in performing them and using assessment tools [22,45,47,49,52,73,75,82], and the role of creativity and innovation in sport management [47,57]. Within manuscripts focused on leadership and management in top sport organizations (i.e., sports federations, professional sport clubs), competencies and attributes of sport governance main actors (i.e., Presidents, CEOs) emerged in the majority of the studies [42,51,55,56,60,62,67]. Furthermore, one study was specifically focused on the empowerment of women as leaders in sports organizations [63]. Studies related to collegiate athletic administration were focused on the investigation of the career progression of NCAA Division I Athletic Directors (i.e., educational background, career length, and career background), their involvement in daily activities and functions [46], and their leadership and political skills [78]. Furthermore, the relevant K/C/S when hiring new potential candidates within athletic departments [41,43] was found as an important aspect. Finally, in considering the specificity of sport events and their management, two studies have examined sport events from the educational [44] and implementation [40] perspectives.

Table 3. Purpose, participants' characteristics, methodologies and tools, variables, and quality assessment of the included studies.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[40]	To examine the brand creation process for international recurring sports events, using the FIS Cross-Country Alberta (Canada) World Cup 2008 and the FIS Cross-Country World Cup Drammen (Norway) 2008 as case studies	Key organizing committee members and event stakeholders	Key organizing committee members ($n = 10$) Event stakeholders ($n = 5$)	ND	Qual (triangulation strategy)	Semi-structured interviews ($n = 15$); Archival documents review ($n = 46$)	Key components in the branding process	7
[41]	To examine the perceived importance of skills and attributes for entry-level applicants to collegiate athletic departments during the hiring process	Directors (Athletic, Associate, Departmental) from Division I, II, and III	$n = 315$ (response rate: 15.2%)	Male (62%); Female (33%); ND = 5%	Quant	Online Quest. (20 closed-end items with a 1–5 pt. Likert Scale; One open-end question)	Rating of the importance of easily observable and not-readily observable skills, traits, abilities and other attributes	7
[42]	To enhance performance leadership and management in elite sport	Performance directors	$n = 13$	Male (90%); Female (10%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Recommendations, advices, and suggestions for other leaders, managers, and SOs to manage Olympic programs more effectively	7
[25]	To determine employers' needs in the Australian SM job market and to evaluate occupational audit of SM positions	Job advertisements over a six-month period from different employment websites	$n = 13$	NA	Mixed	Website screening	Keywords search ('sport' and 'management') in promotional, job descriptions, and publicly available working positions. Full and part-time employment data were collected and screened	7
[43]	To examine how collegiate athletic administrators consider job attributes when hiring for entry-level positions and the perceived skills and traits to succeed in this environment	Directors (Athletic, Associate, Departmental) from Division I, II, and III	$n = 279$ (response rate: 15.8%)	Male (60%); Female (40%)	Quant	Online survey (closed-ended items, 11 pt. scale)	Rating of profiles and 10 conjoint scenarios of both hypothetical job candidate or employee (attributes, and skills needed to succeed in the job)	6

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[44]	To describe an experiential learning process that incorporates reflective learning within the context of a sport event management course and to investigate the relative learning outcomes	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 55$	ND	Qual	Reflective journal assignments and assessments (triangulation)	Students' perceptions of the experiential learning process	6
[45]	To compare the perceptions of both sport club managers (self-perception) and coaches in relation to managers' competencies	Sport club managers and coaches from 9 sport disciplines	$n = 60$ (response rate: 79%); (sport managers $n = 30$; coaches $n = 30$)	Male (71.5%); Female (28.5%)	Quant	Quest (closed-ended scaled items)	Rating of the importance and application of 25 competencies to manage effectively a sports club	4
[46]	To examine the career progression of NCAA Division I Athletic Directors (educational and career background) and their involvement in activities and functions within the athletic department.	Athletic Directors from Division I	$n = 99$ (response rate: 29.4%)	ND	Mixed	Online Quest (open-ended questions) and an adapted version of the Scale of Athletic Priorities	Educational information, career progression, professional experience, and the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of their position; their involvement in duties and responsibilities	4
[47]	To analyze the relationship between communicational skills and barriers to individual creativity of personnel of a Department of Sports and Youth and Sport Boards	Board members	$n = 174$ (estimated response rate: 90%)	ND	Quant	Quest	Barton (1990) standard questionnaire for the assessment of communication skills; Pfeiffer (1990) standard questionnaire to assess barriers to individual creativity	4
[48]	To explore the attitudes and experiences of Sports Development and Sports Management students toward entrepreneurship education, highlighting best practice from a pedagogical perspective	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 122$	Male (49.2%); Female (50.8%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Impact and value of entrepreneurship education upon attitudes, knowledge and career choices through introductory, follow-up and probing questions	7

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[49]	To investigate the specific computer programs used by sport organization employees, the tasks they performed with those programs, and expectations regarding computer competencies SM graduates as job applicants should possess	Employees in different SOs	$n = 35$ (response rate: 82%)	Male (57%); Female (43%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Specific computer programs used by participants, the tasks they were completing with these programs; insights into participants' expectations with regard to the computer competencies a candidate for employment a graduate in SM should possess	6
[50]	To address the establishment of the competence indicators for sports business management professionals within the education programs in Asian higher education institutions (10 university departments)	Professors, chairmen, and class/program planners in sport business and management; experts and scholars from academia, government and industry.	$n = 58$	ND	Mixed	Focus groups, interviews, online Quest. (44 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	Evaluation of six dimensions in relation to sport business professional competence indicators (professional knowledge, professional skills, communication, administration, work-related attitude and creativity)	5
[51]	To examine the skills of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of professional sports clubs and to present and suggest an appropriate skills model for managers	Sport managers of professional sport clubs	$n = 76$ (response rate: 91.5%)	Male (77.6%); Female (22.4%)	Quant	Quest (19 closed-ended items Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	Assessment of the managerial skills (conceptual, human, technical, and political)	4
[52]	To examine the relationship between community SOs (CSO) and sponsors, in terms of critical elements of the relationship process and their perceived impact on important outcomes for those clubs	Presidents of CSOs (or their representative)	$n = 250$ (response rate: 42%)	ND	Quant	Online Quest (45 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–7 pt.)	Perceptions of the CSO–sponsors relationship process and outcomes in relation to “operational competence” (capturing technical and conceptual skills), “dependability” (consistency and trust), “balance”, and “relational competence” (interpersonal skills)	7

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[53]	To determine the competencies and training needs of secondary school sport managers in South Africa	School sport managers (only 5% as full-time employees as school sport managers)	$n = 79$ (response rate: 64%)	Male (75%); Female (25%)	Quant	Quest (closed-ended, scaled items)	Competencies perceived as important to manage school sport; to which extent participants perform these competencies; their perceived training needs in relation to specific SM competencies	4
[54]	To examine SM curricula to ensure a progression and evolution toward a superior level of student preparedness for their internship experiences	SM students; site supervisors	Students: $n = 136$ (survey: $n = 100$, response rate: 74%; focus groups: $n = 59$, response rate: 43%); Site supervisors: $n = 82$ (survey: response rate: 100%; feedbacks: $n = 49$; response rate: 60%)	Students: Male (75%); Female (25%); Site supervisors: Male (78%); Female (22%)	Mixed	Online survey (closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.); Intern performance analysis; Focus groups; Site supervisor feedback	Survey: Five dimensions related to career preparation (general preparation, communication skills, critical thinking, technology, and leadership development and ethics). Written feedback from students for qualitative responses regarding their internship experiences. Focus groups: semi-structured questions to assess student's perceptions regarding their academic path and internship experiences. Supervisors' feedback related to how the SM program could better prepare interns and what specific skill areas students were lacking.	4
[55]	To examine the construction of competence through an analysis of leadership and management in AFL clubs, during a period of great change for the AFL (2003–2006), considering leadership and management competence as social and organizational constructions	Chief Executive Officers (CEO), presidents/chairs (president), and football managers from 16 AFL clubs	$n = 38$	ND	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Participants' perceptions of their club: mission, organizational success, organizational structure, relations, commercial aspects, how organizational relationships were managed, decision making, key decision makers, and challenges faced. Perceptions regarding competencies, knowledge, and background experience required to be a manager and leader in an AFL club	4

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[56]	To explore the manager of the pitch leadership role, utilizing semi-professional football in Ireland as the research setting	Managers, players and board members from four clubs	$n = 11$ (4 managers, 4 players and 3 board members)	Male (100%); Female (0%)	Qual	Interviews	Perceptions regarding the manager's leadership role with players away from the coaching and in-game context, the manager's interactions with the board, support staff, and the media	5
[57]	To investigate open innovation (i.e., the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to innovate) in the context of non-profit sports clubs	Board members of non-profit sport clubs	$n = 11$	Male (73%); Female (27%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Participants' perceptions regarding the management of different aspects in their club (competition, cooperation, costumer integration, distribution of tasks, qualifications, commitment, organizational structure, infrastructure, financial situation), also in relation to innovation	7
[58]	To examine the mediation effects of leader-member exchange (LMX) in the relationships between political skill and four career-related outcomes (career satisfaction, perceived external marketability, life satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness) in SM	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 201$ (response rate: 85%)	Male (70%); Female (30%)	Quant	Quest. (Modified versions of validated scales)	Assessment of six main domains corresponding to political skill, career satisfaction, perceived external marketability, life satisfaction and general life satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness	5
[59]	To examine Greek sport and recreation employers' perceptions of employees' skills needed in this industry, testing the applicability of the Greek version of Survey of Employability Skills Needed in the Workforce (SESNW, Robinson, 2006)	Employers in the sport sector (owners and/or general managers, executive or technical manager, P.E. counselor)	$n = 193$ (response rate: 60.7%) divided in four groups of employers	Male (72.5%); Female (27.5%)	Quant	Quest. (Greek version of the SESNW: 50 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	Employers' expectations on graduates' employability skills	5

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[60]	To explore leadership competencies in non-profit SOs	Presidents of sports federations from 7 sport disciplines, department managers, board members, and Olympic coaches	$n = 18$	Male (72%); Female (28%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Perceived relevant leadership behaviors, competencies and capabilities in non-profit SOs	6
[61]	To explore skills, attributes, capabilities, and knowledge that a sports employer requires a SM graduate	Employers in the sport sector, sport industry professionals, and academic scholars	$n = 21$	ND	Qual	Semi-structured interviews and written feedback	Perceptions of the most important knowledge and skills graduates should have and how university can develop them (i.e., employability skills and enterprise skills)	5
[62]	To explore the management competencies of Presidents of Brazilian Olympic Sport Federations (OSF) presenting different degrees of professionalization and how they operate	Presidents of Olympic Sport Federations	$n = 10$	Male (90%); Female (10%)	Mixed	Online Quest. (Managers' competencies (MBI): Lawrence et al., 2009); semi-structured interviews; Observations	Rating of real and ideal competencies; perceptions on management competencies; observations included visits to presidents' federation offices and notes were taken about their communication behavior, staff dress code, workplace's physical layout and other artefacts	7
[63]	To explore the positive and negative factors influencing transformational learning experiences of female leaders in women's leadership development programs in sports	Sport managers from several SOs	$n = 10$	Male (0%); Female (100%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews (phone)	Participants' perceptions and experiences regarding their participation in the leadership program	4

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[64]	To determine the prominence of sales courses within SM curricula as well as industry perceptions of preferred qualifications	Colleges/universities and SM hiring managers	Colleges/universities: $n = 481$; SM hiring managers: $n = 10$	Male (100%); Female (0%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews (phone and Skype)	Expectations for new hires in relation to: prior industry experience, educational degree; potential differences when considering education and prior industry experience in the hiring process; difference between a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in SM when hiring; requisite skills to succeed as a sales representative; level of preparedness of graduates	7
[23]	To examine how specific patterns of competencies are associated with SM alumni's occupational context	SM graduate students	$n = 142$ (response rate: 51%)	ND	Quant	Online survey	Four competency dimensions (Self-competency, Social competency, Methodological competency, SM competency)	7
[65]	To examine the curriculum posted on program websites of sales education in undergraduate SM programs	Institutional websites of universities; SM program directors, sales scholars, department chairs	$n = 104$ (response rate: 28.4%)	ND	Quant	Institutional website screening; Online survey	SM curricula screening for sport sales courses; survey to examine how sport sales courses are administered and the plans and perceptions of programs not offering a sport sales course yet	7
[66]	To apply "Europeanness" to the analysis of internationalization in the SM labor market and which changes this trend necessitates for SM curricula	SM professionals	$n = 30$	Male (73%); Female (27%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Open-ended questions related to main themes, trends, competencies, job development, and recruitment	7
[67]	To explore leadership within non-profit sport governance	Board members and Chief Executive Officers	$n = 16$	ND	Qual	Interviews	Leadership style, skills and characteristics, the challenges of leading in a federally-based governance model, and the issue of shared leadership between the CEO and the board	7

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[13]	To examine how international co-branding can be implemented as a strategic advantage in the development of SM programs to better prepare future practitioners for a growing international sport marketplace	Co-branded double degree program involving two universities; practitioners in the global sport industry	$n = 68$	ND	Mixed	Program analysis; online survey	Qualitative data (i.e., program description, analysis of program in both universities, publicly available information about the institutions); online survey with practitioners in the global sport industry to obtain the views of professionals working in the sport industry about joint global SM programs	7
[68]	To holistically examine the decision-making process of SM students, including their motivations to enter the major and their career aspirations	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 47$	Male (47%); Female (53%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews; focus groups (gender-segregated)	Factors related to the decision to enroll in SM education, perceptions and expectations related to the major, career aspirations, and industry perceptions	7
[69]	To examine the extent to which SM students address the individual and social dimensions of critical reflection during work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences and whether these skills align with what employers seek in the hiring process	Students, academic supervisors and industry supervisors from 20 universities	$n = 288$ (Industry Supervisors ($n = 35$), Academic Supervisors ($n = 25$), Students ($n = 228$))	ND	Mixed	On-line semi-structured Quest. (37 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–6 pt; open-ended questions)	Assessment of the individual and social dimension of critical reflection during WIL; perceptions regarding the need for critical reflection in SM graduates	7
[70]	To explore how to best prepare SM students to enter the field of sport communication, specifically using social media in college athletics	Professionals overseeing social media accounts for university athletic departments	$n = 4$	Male (100%); Female (0%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews	Participants' perceptions on the use of social media, skills sought in students, and how to educate students	4
[71]	To examine professional sport industry internship job postings in the United States by examining the content of online announcements	Internship postings from two designated online databases over a six-month period	$n = 2$ websites (215 unique internship announcements)	NA	Qual	Website screening	24 variables to examine each internship job posting (descriptive information, administrative components, and transferrable skills)	7

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[12]	To examine competencies needed in the sport industry and the proficiency of SM students (Erasmus project “New Age of SM Education in Europe”, NASME)	Experts from the field of SM in Germany; SM students	Experts: $n = 54$ (response rate: 54.4%); Students: $n = 83$ (response rate: 67%)	Experts: Male (81%); Female (19%); Students: Male (66%); Female (34%)	Quant	Semi-structured Quest (72 items)	Rating of competencies, skills and requirements (importance and proficiency). Competence areas: social, action, personal, marketing management, digital, general management, SM	7
[72]	To determine the importance of the knowledge of English as a foreign language, language skills, and knowledge of sports management-specific terminology	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 70$	Male (63%); Female (37%)	Quant	Quest. (57 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale)	Assessment of basic language skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking—and the specific English vocabulary knowledge in relation to SM	4
[73]	To analyze the validity and reliability of Sports Managers Competency Scale (COSM) in the Chilean context	Municipal sport managers	$n = 212$	Male (82.5%); Female (17.5%)	Quant	Quest. (Closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	31 management competencies, grouped into six dimensions: governance, sport foundations, budgeting, risk management, computer skills, and communication	4
[74]	To explore how SM students conceptualize diversity and inclusion	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 13$	Male (39%); Female (61%)	Qual	Semi-structured interviews (phone)	SM students’ conceptualization of diversity and inclusion, their holistic perspectives on the topic beyond the traditional focus on race and gender	7
[75]	To understand the influences of entrepreneurial orientation and passion for work on service quality and sporting performance in SOs	Managers of non-profit sport clubs	$n = 199$	ND	Quant	Quest	Assessment of entrepreneurial orientation, passion for work, service quality, and sporting performance	4
[76]	To develop an industry–academia strategy to help undergraduate SM students enhance employability through practical experiential learning (PEL) in a specific sporting event	Students, professors and enterprise mentors (Taiwan Masters Golf Tournament)	Students: $n = 65$; Professors: $n = 6$; Enterprise mentors: $n = 4$	ND	Mixed	In-depth interviews and Quest. survey	Perceptions of supervisors and students who participated in the event regarding PEL in sport industry and employability by performing the importance-performance analysis (IPA)	5

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[77]	To introduce an innovative course on LinkedIn in an SM program through experiential learning, as a driver of students' career development and professional interactions. To assess the learning outcomes, a new scale was developed and tested	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 90$ (response rate: 82%)	Male (82%); Female (18%)	Quant	Quest. (LinkedIn's Professional Development Potential SM Scale, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	Assessment of students' perceptions of LinkedIn as a tool to develop their professional profile and entrepreneurial attitudes as a SM operator	7
[22]	To test the suitability of a general managerial competency model for sport managers	Experts in the sport labor market (clubs—30%; federations—22%; public sector—29%; private sector—19%).	$n = 557$	ND	Quant	Online Quest. (72 closed-ended items, Likert-type scale 1–5 pt.)	Rating of the perceived performance and importance of SM competencies	5
[78]	To explore servant leadership and leader effectiveness outcomes in sport administration and to examine if political skill plays a moderating role	Athletic directors and coaches	Athletic directors: $n = 250$; Head coaches: $n = 809$	Male (75%); Female (25%)	Quant	Online Quest. (Political Skill Inventory (PSI): 18 items, Likert-type scale 1–7 pt.; Servant Leadership Scale: 14-item Likert-type scale 1–7 pt.)	Athletic directors: Assessment of political skills (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity, and networking). Head coaches: evaluation of the servant leadership behaviors of their school's AD and leader effectiveness. Perceived affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction	7
[79]	To examine the experiences of students participating in service learning and travel abroad, to explore whether these experiences are useful to work internationally in sport	SM students (undergraduate)	$n = 6$	Male (33%); Female (77%)	Qual	Journals; Focus groups	Personal experiences during the trip; focus groups ($n = 2$) after the trip to critically reflect upon the travel experiences	4
[80]	To examine the credentials and competency demands of the sport business labor market in the United States	Job advertisements in 2008 and 2018	$n = 613$ (2008: $n = 200$; 2018: $n = 413$)	NA	Mixed	Website screening	Job postings for sport business positions categorized according to sector, organization size, and functional role	7

Table 3. Cont.

Ref.	Purpose	Sample	Sample Size	Gender	Methodology	Instruments/ Tools	Variables	MMAT Score
[81]	To identify an innovative solution to improve global SM learning, showing how institutions from different countries can collaborate virtually to provide students with practical international perspectives through an applied sport globalization project	SM students (undergraduate)	American students: $n = 30$; German students: $n = 13$	ND	Qual	Prompts and narrative reflections	Learning experiences and evaluation of the international joint class project	5
[82]	To investigate the relationship between crisis management, decision-making styles, and self-confidence skills in decision making in sport managers	Sport managers	$n = 226$	ND	Quant	Online Quest. (Crisis Management Scale; Melbourne Decision-Making Quest. I-II; Self-Confidence Scale)	Assessment of the crisis management skills, the self-esteem and decision-making styles, and the level of self-confidence	5

Note: ND = not declared; SM = sport management; SOs = sport organizations; Qual = qualitative; Quant = quantitative; Quest = questionnaire.

3.3.2. Methodologies, Instruments, Participants' Characteristics, and Quality Assessment of the Included Studies

The selected studies presented both qualitative ($n = 20$) [40,42,44,48,49,55–57,60,61,63,64,66–68,70,71,74,79,81] and quantitative ($n = 19$) [12,22,23,41,43,45,47,51,52,58,59,65,72,73,75,77,78,82] approaches. Furthermore, mixed methods (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) emerged in nine studies [13,25,46,50,54,62,69,76,80]. Quantitative assessment tools in the form of validated scales and/or semi-structured questionnaires and/or surveys have been applied in the majority of the included manuscripts [12,13,22,23,41,43,45–47,50–54,58,59,62,65,69,72,73,75,76,78,82], which were followed by interviews and/or semi-structured interviews [40,42,48–50,55–57,60–64,66–68,70,74,76], focus groups [50,54,79], website screening [25,65,71,80], and other methods (i.e., written feedbacks, journal assignments, narrative reflections, direct observations, documents review) [13,44,54,61,62,79–81].

Participants in the studies represented all the main actors within the sport management field, including sport management professionals and/or potential employers [12,13,22,25,45,49–51,53,55,56,59,61,63,64,66,69–71,73,75,76,80,82], undergraduate and/or graduate students [12,23,44,48,54,58,68,69,72,74,76,77,79,81], board members within sports organizations and/or event organizing committees [40,47,52,55–57,60,62,67], academic staff (i.e., professors, supervisors) [50,61,65,69,76], athletic directors [41–43,46,78], and other sportspersons (i.e., coaches, players) [45,56,60].

With the exception of the three studies [25,71,80] focusing on the websites screening regarding sport management job postings, all the other manuscripts involved participants. Overall, 5757 participants (range: 4–1059) have been involved in the considered studies, with a response rate to the different data collection methods reported in sixteen studies only (response rate = $59 \pm 26\%$; range: 15–91%).

Regarding the gender of the participants, this information was not reported in eighteen studies [13,22,23,40,44,46,47,50,52,55,61,65,67,69,75,76,81,82]. In general, male participants were more represented ($69 \pm 22\%$) with respect to their female counterparts ($31 \pm 23\%$), with four studies only showing a higher female participation (range: 51–77%) [48,68,74,79]. Furthermore, a gender-segregated picture emerged in four studies (male participants only [56,64,70]; female participants only [63]).

Satisfactory quality (Supplementary Materials File S3) emerged for the included studies as indicated by the MMAT average score (5.7 ± 1.3 pt.) with twenty-two studies resulting with the highest value (7 pt., 46%) [12,13,23,25,40–42,48,52,57,62,64–69,71,74,77,78,80] and thirteen studies resulting with the lowest one (4 pt., 27%) [45–47,51,53–55,63,70,72,73,75,79].

3.4. Relevant K/C/S Extracted from the Included Studies

The full text analysis of the Results, Discussion, and Conclusions sections of the included studies resulted in a total of 682 recorded citations (Supplementary Materials File S2). Common themes retrieved in the selected manuscripts have been analyzed and synthesized into major labels, which resulted in a final list of 61 individual thematic items. Each item was further clustered according to its nature and characterization into seven main categories: (1) Background Knowledge (BK), including all the theoretical and methodological aspects generally acquired through formal (i.e., university) and/or non-formal (i.e., training courses provided by certified sport educational bodies, such as Olympic Committees and/or sports federations) educational paths; (2) Competence (C), defined as “the ability to meet complex demands successfully through the mobilization of mental prerequisites. Each competence is structured around a demand and corresponds to a combination of interrelated cognitive and practical skills, knowledge, motivation, values and ethics, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioral components that together can be mobilized for effective action in a particular context” [83]; (3) General Experience (GE), pertaining individual attitude, background, and work-related experiences in the field of sport, management, business, and entrepreneurship; (4) Hard Skills (HS), including technical skills acquired and enhanced through practice, repetition, and education which increase employee productivity and efficiency; (5) Personal Traits/Attributes (PT/A), pertaining to personality characteristics that

are relatively stable over time and influence behavior and actions; (6) Soft Skills (SS), identified as non-technical skills, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities applied in performing a variety of tasks and activities [84]; (7) Other attributes = citations not included within a major cluster due to a limited registered frequency of occurrence.

Findings regarding K/C/S data extraction are presented in Table 4. The highest frequency occurrence (65%) was registered for Effective interpersonal communication skills (internal/external), which was followed by Leadership skills (54%) and Communication skills (written/oral) (48%). Technological/digital/social media skills and Teamwork were also strongly represented (46%), which were followed by Finance and administration, Networking (44% each), and Ethical commitment and behavior/integrity (40%). Other features were also well represented within the included manuscripts, showing a frequency of occurrence between 30 and 35% (i.e., Marketing knowledge, Problem solving, Managerial knowledge/experience, Stakeholders management, Strategic management and Change management, Analytical/evaluation/control skills, Sport-specific knowledge/experience, Critical thinking skills, Facility/operations management, Planning/organization/coordination skills, Business and entrepreneurship attitude, and Cross-cultural competence). Twenty-seven items accounted between 30% and 15% of frequency of occurrence, whereas the remaining fourteen items presented a lower representation (range: 2–13%). Among the top twenty mostly cited K/C/S, major findings showed that SS was the most cited cluster ($n = 7$ items), with Effective interpersonal communication skills, Leadership skills, Teamwork, Networking, Ethical commitment and behavior/integrity, Stakeholders management, and Critical thinking skills considered crucial for sport managers. Competence was the second most relevant cluster (5 items), with Problem solving, Analytical/evaluation/control skills, Facility/operations management, Planning/organization/coordination skills, and Cross-cultural competence considered extremely relevant features in this work sector. A lower impact emerged for the other clusters (BK = 3 items: Finance and administration, Marketing, Strategic management and Change management; GE = 3 items: Managerial, Sport-specific, and Business and entrepreneurship knowledge/experience; HS = 2 items: Communication skills (written/oral), Technological/digital/social media skills). Furthermore, no PT/A was considered a requisite in top twenty features in sport management.

Table 4. Relevant sport management K/C/S extracted from the included manuscripts, presented as frequency of occurrence (%), and comparison with those identified in the ESCO platform.

Assigned Cluster	Items (K/C/S)	Frequency of Occurrence (%) in the Included Studies ($n = 48$)	Presence in the ESCO Platform
Background knowledge	Sport management education, qualifications, academic achievements	19	
	Event management	25	Present
	Finance and administration	44	Present
	Human resources	25	Present
	Legal and sport policy	23	Present
	Marketing	35	Present
	Strategic management and change management	33	Present
Competence	Analytical/evaluation/control skills	33	Present
	Cross-cultural competence	29	Present
	Decision-making skills	23	
	Emotional and interpersonal intelligence	10	
	Facility/operations management	31	Present
	Fundraising and grant writing	6	Present
	Goal orientation/setting	15	
	Knowledge transfer to practice	17	
	Planning/organization/coordination skills	31	Present
	Practical intelligence	2	
	Problem solving	35	Present
	Risk management	21	Present
	Sponsorship management	17	
	Tasks and resources management	25	Present
Transfer skills	6		
Volunteer management	6	Present	

Table 4. Cont.

Assigned Cluster	Items (K/C/S)	Frequency of Occurrence (%) in the Included Studies (<i>n</i> = 48)	Presence in the ESCO Platform
General experience	Managerial knowledge/experience	35	
	Sport-specific knowledge/experience	33	
	General work-related experience	17	
	Business and entrepreneurship attitude	31	Present
Hard skills	Communication skills (written/oral)	48	
	Foreign languages	13	
	Information management/statistics	17	
	Project management	15	Present
	Research skills	10	Present
	Safety/security/health management	13	Present
	Technological/digital/social media skills	46	Present
Personal Traits	Initiative/proactivity	13	
	Learning (skills and will)	19	
	Maturity	2	
	Motivation/Enthusiasm/Passion	21	
	Personal attributes (generic)	17	
Soft skills	Ability to deal with pressure/stress	6	
	Accountability	17	
	Adaptability/flexibility skills	23	
	Appropriate working behavior/professionalism skills	27	
	Career awareness and planning skills	15	Present
	Conflict management skills	13	Present
	Creativity and innovation skills	25	Present
	Critical thinking skills	33	
	Effective interpersonal communication skills (internal/external)	65	Present
	Ethical commitment and behavior/integrity	40	
	Leadership skills	54	Present
	Meetings management	8	Present
	Networking	44	Present
	Personal/self-management	19	
	Political skills	19	Present
	Respect of hierarchies, role boundaries, and responsibilities	15	
	Responsibility	15	
	Social skills/People skills	23	
	Stakeholders management	35	Present
	Teamwork	46	Present
Time management skills	21		
Working autonomy skills	10		

Note: In **bold** items cited in $\geq 15\%$ of the included studies.

3.5. Comparison between K/C/S in the ESCO Platform and in the Scientific Literature

The comparison (Table 4) between emerging data retrieved in the ESCO platform (*n* = 29 items) and in the scientific literature (*n* = 61 items) showed a general match between the two information sources. In fact, all the items collected from the ESCO classification are included within the list extrapolated from the included studies. Furthermore, out of the twenty top-cited K/C/S within the included scientific manuscripts, fifteen items matched the ESCO's professional profiles. However, the remaining five of the most relevant items ($\geq 30\%$) emerged in the included studies (i.e., Communication skills (written/oral), HS; Ethical commitment and behavior/integrity, SS; Managerial knowledge/experience, GE; Sport-specific knowledge/experience, GE; Critical Thinking skills, SS) were not included in the ESCO's classification. Finally, it should be highlighted that some evidence-based relevant K/C/S were not mentioned in the ESCO's sport management professional profiles especially in relation to PT/A (*n* = 0 items), SS (*n* = 12 items not matched), and C (*n* = 7 items not matched).

3.6. Harmonized K/C/S Framework Derived from the Scientific Findings

Based on evidence emerged in the present study, a K/C/S framework was developed (Figure 2). To harmonize results derived from different information sources (i.e., the

scientific literature and the ESCO platform), also in relation to their relevance (i.e., citation percentage) and the different sport management professional profiles (i.e., job description, main operation environment and related tasks), the framework was conceptualized and built based on the following considerations:

- Core relevant aspects pertaining to essential and transversal BK, HS, C, and SS have positioned at the core;
- Additional, complementary, emerged BK, HS, C, and SS have positioned at the superior and inferior edges, based on their potential relevance and/or pertinence in relation to the different sport management professional profiles;
- Academic preparation and achievements, GE, and PT/A have been considered as modulating factors, further enriching the sport management professional in succeeding in the labor market;
- A comprehensive and harmonized approach, including different types of learning (i.e., formal, non-formal, and informal) in relation to both theoretical knowledge and practical experience (i.e., experiential learning, internships, workshops), and in a global perspective (i.e., internationalization) should be considered in educating future sport management professionals. In fact, to allow sport managers to progress vertically, to move horizontally, and/or to operate transversal working shifts during their professional career, it is crucial to equip them with a wide variety of K/C/S to be developed through different approaches and/or training methodologies.

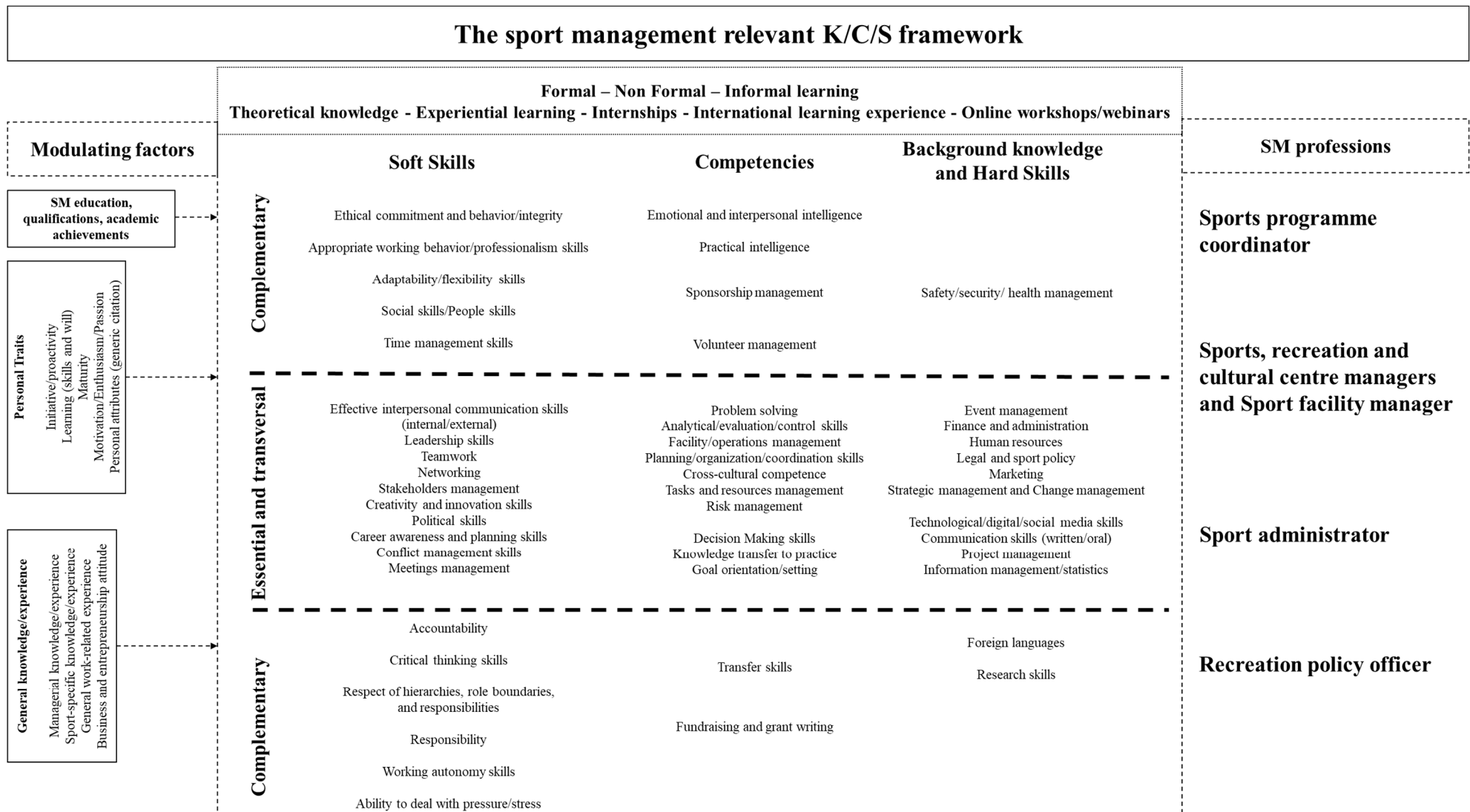


Figure 2. The sport management harmonized K/C/S framework.

SM professions

Sports programme coordinator

Sports, recreation and cultural centre managers and Sport facility manager

Sport administrator

Recreation policy officer

4. Discussion

The present study attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of relevant K/C/S within the sport management field, taking into consideration the sport management higher education and labor market perspectives, different information sources (i.e., scientific literature and European professional frameworks), and different professional profiles. The main findings showed a substantial scholars' interest over the past decade in deepening the understanding of sport management related knowledge on necessary competencies and skills from different research perspectives. However, a disconnect between the sport sector demands and the sport management students' and/or employees' preparedness and performance emerged in many studies, which substantiate the need to systematically update education and training for a sustainable growth of the sector. Although the data retrieved from the ESCO platform generally matched those extracted from the included studies, differences emerged between the two considered information sources in relation to the number of identified relevant K/C/S associated with sport management profiles. Finally, to our knowledge, the present study represents the first attempt to not only provide a comprehensive, evidence-based, overview of existing information on sport management relevant K/C/S but also develop a harmonized framework grounded on different relevant clusters (i.e., BK, C, HS, SS, GE, PT/A) that should be considered in developing and implementing sustainable educational pathways for sport managers and leaders.

Regarding the major identified research topics and trends, the sport management education [13,48,50,53,54,58,65,68,70,72,74,76,77,79,81], the employability and work-related features [12,23,25,41,43,59,61,64,66,69,71,80], and non-profit sport organizations' characteristics [22,45,47,49,52,57,73,75,82] were the most represented. In this sense, higher education is urged offering sport management students and entry-level managers a wide range of K/C/S through different types of learning and to help them understanding sport industry demands [22,23,25,45,47,49,52,71,73,75,80,82] and career opportunities. To foster future employability, the need to integrate the academic and working environments and to provide experiential [54,76], international [13,66,72,79,81], and vocational [12,59,61,64,69] learning opportunities emerged, which calls for the establishment of inter-institutional cooperation agreements between the sport and the educational bodies. This approach would not only benefit the implementation of sport management academic curricula in terms of content (i.e., cultivating relevant K/C/S) and delivery (i.e., integrating different types of learning) but also better prepare future professionals and provide students with entry-level employment opportunities upon graduation. Hence, the provision of both theoretical and practical learning activities, the involvement of the sport industry to offer quality internship opportunities, the strengthening of the educational focus toward the development of both business-related K/C as well as SS [48,50,53,65,70,72,74,77], and adapted teaching approaches to help students realizing their strengths and weaknesses and their career aspirations [58,68] before graduation should be foreseen.

In a global, fast-growing, sport marketplace [13,66,72,79,81], a relevant number of studies highlighted the need to develop a wide range of K/C/S [22,45–47,49,52,73,75,78,82] that sport managers and leaders should possess and be proficient at, especially in the non-profit sector. In considering the need to continue to professionalize paid staff and leading volunteers within sport organizations [42,51,55,56,60,62,67] to meet the challenges of the working sector and to foster its sustainable growth [73,75], lifelong learning and periodical vocational training and courses should be encouraged, targeting K/C/S also in relation to the different professional profiles and levels (i.e., entry, middle, senior management; governance main actors and sport leaders).

Regarding the geographical representation of the included manuscripts, results confirm that sport management development occurred mostly in Western societies, with 35% and 33% of the studies performed in North American and European research settings, respectively. This finding is substantiated by the leading role of major sport management continental and international associations [8–10,17] in nurturing excellence in the field of sport management research and education. Regarding the gender representation, results

confirm the general underrepresentation of women within sport settings [29,85–87]. In particular, the lack of gender-related information in 37% of the studies, and the predominance of male participants over their female counterparts in the majority of the included studies, if not exclusive as appeared in three studies, reflect the traditional male hegemony in sport governance and management, with women struggling in breaking the glass ceiling [88] toward executive positions in sport organizations [34]. This aspect is particularly relevant in considering the gender equality quest of the United Nations [30], the European Parliament [31], the European Commission [29], and the Council of Europe [32], which seek to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls for having a greater role in management to be integrated at the economic, social, and environmental levels. Actually, in the present study, only five manuscripts presented a women representation higher than that of men [48,63,68,74,79], with one study specifically focused on the empowerment of women as leaders in SOs [63]. Furthermore, the lack of women in top-level positions seems also to affect also the gender proportion in sport management students, with women accounting on average for 30% of the study participants. These findings substantiate the urgent need to continue promoting inclusive and sustainable actions to fight gender discrimination in sport, providing women managers and new leaders with relevant K/C/S, and young generations with mentoring programs and role models [89,90] to support the different stages of their career advancement, which represents the main purpose of the New Miracle Project.

Regarding the main findings of extracted relevant K/C/S, communication skills as both an SS (i.e., effective interpersonal communication with the different stakeholders) and an HS (i.e., the ability to communicate effectively through written and verbal (i.e., oral presentations, public speaking) modalities, also including the use of tools) proved essential in the sport management field, overall being cited in almost all the studies. This result is confirmed by the study of Novà [22], which stressed the centrality of communications skills within the meta-competencies sport managers should possess. Another crucial component of the emerged sport managers' competency framework is represented by leadership skills, which is due to its centrality in managing and leading sport organizations. In particular, it fosters the need to investigate leadership skills from many different perspectives, ranging from board members leadership style and performance [42,51,55,56,60,62,63,67] to the empowerment of women in sport through the development of functional skills for their career advancement [63], to the need to cultivate leadership skills in young managers and sport management students [13,23,25,48,50,54,59,61,71,76,80] to better prepare them for meeting the challenges of the work sector.

In recognizing the centrality of the background, foundational, sport management-related knowledge (i.e., well represented in both major cited items in the considered studies and within the ESCO's sport management profiles), the present study highlights the crucial role of C and SS to succeed in this working sector. In fact, SS such as teamwork, networking skills, integrity, and critical thinking accounted for a relevant frequency of occurrence as determinants of working effectiveness in sport management settings, confirming that non-technical skills should not be underestimated in any high-competitive job market where the majority of candidates possess comparable knowledge and qualifications [25]. Similarly, also C such as problem solving, analytical/evaluation skills, and planning/organization skills ranked among the top emerged features, emphasizing the need to go beyond a theoretical-based approach in educating future sport management professionals. These findings further stress the urgent need to continue incorporating SS and a competency-based approach within educational curricula in sport management [13,23,43]. Actually, in bridging the existing gap between the demands of the sector and the graduates' preparedness, the tendency of higher education remaining resistant to change in relation to curricular specificity and course structure should be overcome to drive innovation and to combat the ever-changing conditions in society [91]. In fact, independently from the professional sector, the labor market urges formal academic education to continuously innovate to adapt to the rapidly changing employability demands and to ensure educational

programs stimulating the necessary knowledge acquisition, talent development, and skills and competencies development [91]. Hence, sport management programs should reflect the changes occurring in business and society, which are aligned to industry demands and international policies [92,93]. Therefore, a harmonized, sustainable, educational and vocational approach based on different types of learning [94] is strongly recommended to provide a strong emphasis in applying theory to practice, to stimulate creativity and innovation [47,57,73], to cultivate technological and digital skills [70,77], to formulate strategies to concrete issues, and to implement solutions within different sport settings.

5. Conclusions

To succeed in any working sector, professionals should develop a deep awareness and understanding of the field's employment opportunities, essential K/C/S required by the industry, and necessary education and training to acquire theoretical and experiential effective learning. In this regard, it is an essential task for academic disciplines to update their related knowledge framework to meet both educational and employment demands and to foster the sustainable growth of the sector. The present study contributed to deepen the evidence-based knowledge in relation to the complex sport management educational and employment environments and formulated recommendations for curricula adjustments. In particular, the systematic review and analysis of the sport management higher education and labor market primary research perspectives and outcomes, and the rigid quality assessment applied in the present study, could have increased its scientific rigor. Furthermore, the harmonization of information retrieved from different sources (i.e., scientific literature and European professional frameworks) through a valid and reliable research approach represents a crucial step toward the enhancement of the sustainable growth of sport management (matching theoretical evidence with international professional standards). Finally, the present study represents the first attempt to not only provide a comprehensive, evidence-based, overview of existing information on sport management relevant K/C/S but also develop a harmonized framework grounded on different relevant clusters (i.e., BK, C, HS, SS, GE, PT/A) that should be considered in developing and implementing sustainable educational pathways for sport managers and leaders.

However, results should not be considered conclusive, and some limitations have to be mentioned. First, the limited number of screened databases for the scientific literature ($n = 3$) could have influenced the number of identified records. Second, the rigid quality assessment criteria applied in the present study could have excluded further potential interesting contributions. Third, to guarantee the accuracy in retrieving evidence-based relevant K/C/S, the present study did not consider systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses. Finally, in the present study, only the ESCO platform in relation to sport management professional profiles has been considered. Therefore, future studies need to enlarge the data collection by: (i) addressing main findings emerged in review papers in the field of sport management competencies and skills; and (ii) screening other international professional databases in relation to the sport management labor market.

In considering the fast-growing sport management employment sector, additional research should be envisioned to update the proposed harmonized K/C/S framework, to verify its applicability within current formal educational pathways, and to stimulate the provision of different types of learning. Furthermore, due to the complex structure of the sport management labor market presenting organizations of different nature, size, and organizational structure, future studies should be foreseen to provide a deeper understanding of sport management relevant K/C/S in relation to the different types of SOs. Finally, to foster the effective management of SOs, future research should be considered to investigate the applicability of the proposed competency framework and relative educational needs in relation to the different managerial levels (i.e., entry, middle, and senior management).

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su15097061/s1>, File S1: Data extracted from the ESCO platform; File S2: Data extraction regarding relevant K/C/S mentioned in the included studies, and assigned cluster; File S3: Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) checklist items; File S4: PRISMA 2020 checklist.

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