Peculiarities That Position Sport Management

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Finance/Economics - Other (Other) virtual asynchronous
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
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As Sport Management (SM) evolves, scholars have continued searching for distinctive characteristics under which to operate. The apparent need for legitimization has been a consistent topic of discussion (Chelladurai, 1992; Chalip, 1995; Frisby, 2005; Amis & Silk, 2005; Chalip, 2006; Newman, 2014; Heere, 2018). Much of it relates to academic survival; that we must build an underpinning knowledge base to legitimize our existence. Despite this inquiry, a strong legitimization for the field has, until recently, been ignored: its competitive (cooperative) economic structure. This point was originally highlighted by Neale (1964), though its adoption in SM need not focus upon strategic management, as suggested in recent work recognizing its importance (Shilbury, 2012; Agha & Dixon, 2019).

Indeed, serving industry strategy alone may obscure the need for critiques of sport institutions and their respective treatment by policymakers (Chalip, 1995). Weese (1995) first details pitfalls in doing so, and other scholars have followed suit. For example, Amis and Silk (2005) discuss the importance of critique, rather than stakeholder service, in legitimizing SM as a field in the social sciences. These concerns are strongly echoed by Singer (2005), Frisby (2005), and Newman (2014). Nevertheless, ensuring disciplinary survival drives a need to serve industry stakeholders alongside the rest of society (Bowers, Green, & Seifried, 2014).

An economic framework can reconcile these interests, as the market structure of sport provides an opportunity to unite the field’s many disciplinary approaches (Rascher, Maxcy, & Schwarz, 2019). Despite claims in the SM literature (Newman, 2014), a careful reading of the Sports Economics literature reveals sharp criticisms of the unnecessary market power that sports organizations use to exploit consumers, labor, and the public sector. Using foundations from industrial organization clarifies the central role that economic structures have in driving inequalities, discrimination, and professionalization.

Centering SM upon the economic organization of sports is also inclusive, particularly important for departments with necessarily diverse faculty interests. Studying market structures necessitates the use of law and history, while using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the development of institutional boundaries and cultural norms stemming from economic status (Washington, 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2004; Washington & Zajac, 2005; Washington & Ventresca, 2008; Wegner, Jordan, Funk, & Clark, 2016; Nite & Nauright, 2019). Even marketing research on fan attachment can help reveal how these organizations expand and exert their market power (Mills & Winfree, 2016).

This presentation will outline the centrality of market structures in positioning the SM discipline and in driving the institutional boundaries that guide most research in the field. I synthesize past work on competition and policy studies to center an approach to developing an impactful SM literature. Beginning with a description of industrial organizational lessons for SM research, I exhibit how this framework provides scholarly substance to the trajectory of the discipline. Although this approach is necessarily grounded in the economic structure of sport, I do not argue for a supremacy of economics research. Rather, I argue that framing work in this way allows for a legitimized and epistemologically inclusive area of social science that does not sacrifice its managerial roots.