Critical Social Science in Sport Management Research: A Scoping Review

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Since the early 2000s, sport management scholars have been making calls to the field to include more critical social science (CSS) in their research. Specifically, in her Zeigler address to the North American Society of Sport Management, Frisby (2005) highlighted the use and applicability of critical approaches to advancing the academic area of sport management. It has been over a decade since Frisby’s (2005) call to action, and while there have been improvements in the diversity of research approaches taken in sport management (e.g. Kitchin & Howe, 2013; Shaw & Hoeber, 2016), little is known regarding how CSS approaches are employed in sport management research. As such, the purpose of this scoping review is to examine the trends, gaps, and state of the use of critical research approaches in the sport management. Investigating the use of critical approaches in sport management is necessary to understand the growth and applicability of such approaches over time and their contribution to the sport management body of literature. As scholars have highlighted, the use of critical approaches in sport management work will help push the management field to expand our understanding of sport’s role in society, and to provide a strong theoretical basis for practical improvements (McGarry, 2019).

For this scoping review, inclusion criteria consisted of: 1) scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, available online, and written in English; 2) authors must have specifically stated employing a critical approach; 3) the research must fit within the following definition of sport management: the coordination of the production and marketing of sport services and sport organizations, including sport management education (NASSM, 2019). This definition was developed by consulting the Journal of Sport Management and the North American Society for Sport Management website (2019).

This review undertook two systematic search methods: 1) the traditional databases search; and 2) a systematic manual search, as previously suggested by Teare and Taks (2019). In the first method, five databases (i.e., ProQuest Social Sciences, ABI Inform, Business Source Complete, SPORTDiscus, Sport Medicine and Physical Education Index) were examined for articles where critical social science approaches were used in the context of sport management. Article titles, keywords, and abstracts were examined for relevance. The second method involved searching the online issues of academic journals for articles that employed critical social science approaches. Starting with the top three journals in sport management (JSM, SMR, and ESMQ), article titles, keywords, and abstracts were examined for relevance. After each round of journal search, the reference lists of identified articles were examined for additional relevant journals, undergoing a full search. This process was repeated until no new articles and journals arose. The database search yielded 117 articles. The systematic manual search is currently in progress. Further results on the state of the use of critical social science in sport management research will be presented.