

Higher Education and Employability in Sport

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Keywords: higher education, employability in sport, sport training, sport employment

Abstract: Employability could be demonstrated when there is a good balance between job supply and employment demand. To give an overview of the situation of the employability of sports graduates in the China, we will first recall the situation of the “national sport systems”, then define what can be called a “sports employment system” which refers to the job market in sport and sport related sectors, to further examine the “sport training and education system” which means the situation of the education and training supply and outcomes in the corresponding area, and finally describe the relations between the employment and training systems.

1. Introduction

Employability designates “the degree of adaptability an individual demonstrates in finding and keeping a job, and updating occupational competencies/skills. Employability depends not only on the adequacy of knowledge and competencies/skills of individuals but also on the incentives and opportunities offered to individuals to seek employment” [1]. To keep it simple, employability could be demonstrated when there is a good balance between job supply and employment demand. To give an overview of the situation of the employability of sports graduates in the China, we will first recall the situation of the “national sport systems”, then define what can be called a “sports employment system” which refers to the job market in sport and sport related sectors, to further examine the “sport training and education system” which means the situation of the education and training supply and outcomes in the corresponding area, and finally describe the relations between the employment and training systems.

We can understand sports as a system that itself is part of a broader national and international cultural, economical and political social system. The “sports system” is based on the interaction between four sub-systems corresponding to as many “markets”. The three main “sports sub-systems” are composed of a “sports good and services sub-system” where sports services are “marketed”; a “sports labor market sub-system” where the sports workforce is “marketed” and a “sports training sub-system” where competencies needed for the training of the sports workforce are also “marketed” [2]. But the sports system is not an autonomous entity unrelated to the society in which it develops. The links with society constitute a means of regulation for the sports system, which has four main components. “Market effects”, i.e., all the operations in the fields of consumption or production which establish themselves between sport and all other social activities. The direct intervention of public authorities, government, at regional or local level, in the form of laws or regulations maintained by public services. The cultural prevalence of a “traditional image of sports” related to volunteerism and its effects on the organization of sports in a country.

2. The Existing Situation of the “System of Sporting Activities” in China

Sport today is a major social phenomenon that concerns the fields of leisure, health, social cohesion and education. When dealing with “sport”, we must first differentiate between “sporting activities” sports sector and “sports-related activities”, using the national classification of economic activities. “Sports activity” (also called the “sports sector”) is confined to the services activities which are related directly to practicing sports, i.e., supervision of sporting activities. The only class where sport is isolated in the official classification systems are not homogenous (presence of sports associations, commercial sports service enterprises, self-employed professional sportspeople).

Sports-related activities” (also called, together with the sports activity, the “sports industry”) are activities which belong to other sectors but are needed for the delivery of sports activities (or exist as a result of them) [3]. For example, physical education clearly appears as an educational activity which may be related to sport depending on the various countries and to differing degrees. These classes are naturally far more diverse, since they group together industry, trade, education, public administration, etc.

3. Components of the Sports Sector and Sports-Related Sectors

One of the main indicators to measure sports activities is the level of participation in sports. You will see below the results of one of the last surveys conducted in a standardized way. We have classified those results in ascending order by GDP. We can see that the average level of participation at Chinese level is up to 23 % and that there is a close relationship between the level of economic development and the level of sports participation. But some “cultural exceptions” are also visible with a very high rate of participation. The sports sector itself is made up of several segments organized around the production of differentiated services: Professional sport, whose main focus is to produce events, in which professional football occupies a dominant position, well ahead of other sports (basketball, motor sports, tennis, golf, etc). Although professional sport only accounts for around 10,000 workers, with about 1,000 businesses (generally small businesses, an increasing number of which have commercial status), professional sport has high visibility because of its media coverage and its high degree of internationalization. Competitive associative sport is what forms the original and still dominant fabric of the sports sector [4]. It provides specific services where a sport competitive experience, as a base of education for young people, is combined with an apprenticeship to citizenship and democracy. It is made up of associations, which in turn come together in sports federations, and provides training and competitive sporting activities for the members.

Essentially run by volunteers, it is nevertheless characterized by an increasing professionalization in terms of human resources (coaches, managers, hospitality and maintenance staff). We estimate the number of people pursuing professional activity in this segment as their main activity at about 120,000 in China. The activity is run within more than a million associations, involving 10 million volunteers and 85 million members. Active sporting leisure is of growing importance in the sports sector. Services delivered cover a wide range of purposes: health and fitness, relation to the environment, etc. They are organized either by associations or by profit organizations, often very small businesses. Each sporting leisure field has its own particular features and its own identity. Some of them are confronted with problems regarding the mobility of their staff. There are more than 200,000 people working in this segment of the sports sector in more than 70,000 businesses, more than half of which are involved in the commercial sector. “Social sport” constitutes the last segment. It is difficult to estimate as it includes not-for-profit organizations aimed at groups for which social integration is difficult (the disabled, minorities, etc). We can estimate the number of people working in this sector at anything between 10 and 70,000, often close to social work and to local public services, strongly supported financially by them.

However, the sports sector cannot exist without the presence of “complementary activities”: Participation in sports requires sports facilities, or at least the possibility of accessing public spaces open to participants; suitable shared equipment made accessible by an effective distribution system are needed; as a rule, this activity must be run or at least assisted by public authorities; it is usually based on initiation provided within the primary and secondary education system; it generates medical and paramedical care and mobilizes various media, newspapers, magazines, radio, television [5]. Globally those activities mobilize an estimated 5 million workers. The total activities related to sports (the sports industry) represent as an average 1.1 of the GDP in China.

4. The “Labor Market Sub-System” in Sport

The global number of people working in the sports sector as their main activity is around

150,000 in China, partly depending on the level of sporting activities. If we ignore the unequal rates of volunteers participating in the production of sports services, it even gives a first idea of the industry's "productivity". Whether sporting activities are organized within associations, commercial companies or by public authorities, considerable human resources (unpaid workers or paid staff) must be mobilized for supervision purposes. Within sports associations, unpaid staff constitute by far the greatest workforce. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of salaried and self-employed professionals. Within the last 10 years the average increase has been up to 30% which makes sports one of the leading industries for employment growth. This forms a second system that we shall refer to as the "labor market system in sport", structured around a "supply of employment in sport" from organizations providing sports services, and a "demand for employment in sport" from those with an available unpaid or salaried workforce willing to invest in this domain. Another, more qualitative aspect needs to be emphasized [6].

The supply of services may be structured differently. It may also involve unpaid workers in the creation, implementation and "consumption" of services proposed, or, more traditionally, fall within a supplier-customer relationship. This situation will largely determine the type of work organization and content of "professions/jobs" which will provide the foundation for the service proposed. In compliance with the principles of the International Classification of Occupations, we will present the main type occupations related to sports in the following.

4.1. The Sport Professions

The sport professions group includes all persons who engage in a sporting activity for remuneration (professional sportspersons) and those who supervise this activity directly. Under this classification, the "unit group", entitled "Athletes, sportspersons and related associate professionals" belong to the "major group" of the intermediate professions. Knowledge of the theory and practice of sport and the application thereof is the basic skill of the "sports professions" belonging to this group. It covers five main types of functions³: "Professional sportspersons", participating in a limited number of sports and in general depending on the sporting events which constitute their livelihood ; "Sports officials", i.e., all those who, as referees, judges or timekeepers directly supervise the conduct of sporting competitions; "Sports activity leaders", who use sport as a means of getting specific groups of the population (elderly people, the disabled, young people, etc.) involved in team activities; "Sports instructors", who teach one or more specific sporting activities to groups of the population who learn from scratch or wish to develop their abilities; "Sports coaches" responsible for preparing and guiding systematic performance in a given sport [7].

4.2. The Sport-Related Professions

There is also a full range of professions which, although they belong to other large occupational groups, require a high level of specific skills in the field of sport. As for the sport-related activities, the EOSE has tried to provide as exhaustive a list as possible of these professionals who, to be identified as involved in a "sport-related profession", must show certain characteristics of institutionalization (professional trade unions, specific training, recognized designations, etc.). Classified in the order of ISCO 88, are listed: Professional managers of sports or sports-related organizations; Sports physicians; Physical education and sports teachers in the school environment; Sports journalists and other specialists in communication through or on sport; Physiotherapists specializing in sport Agents or promoters of events or professional sportspersons; Sellers of sporting goods; Caretakers of sports facilities and other reception staff; Maintenance workers of sports facilities. These professions, although they often correspond to actual jobs, relate to "occupational frames of reference" which may vary.

The forms of "professionalization" in operation in the field may bring about a process of "specialization": there is, for instance, a growing difference between coaches working at top level and those who teach beginners or allow non-competing players to perfect their level, whom we refer to as "instructors" in this context. However, we also see amalgamations emerging between these professions which, particularly within small structures, may include a "managerial" dimension. In the sports sector itself we have made distinctions between the 3 main positions for staff members,

managers, coaches, instructors or sports leaders and clerks, hospitality and maintenance workers. The last qualitative criteria we will present here is related to the level of qualification of that workforce, with some estimates on stocks and annual flows. Using the new European qualification framework we estimate the workforce total stock to be: 180,000 at level 3 (lower secondary level of qualification) with an annual flow estimated to be 20,000; 300,000 at level 4 and 5 (from upper secondary to postsecondary level) with an annual flow estimated to be 70,000; 90,000 at level 6 and 7 level (tertiary level of qualification, from bachelor to master) with an annual flow of 10,000. The estimation of the flow is based on general data relating to workforce turnover in China.

5. The “Sports Training and Qualification System” in China

The quality of the services on offer depends greatly on the competence of those participating. This introduces a third system that we shall call the “sports training system”. This system, like the preceding ones, is structured around supply and demand for sports training, with demand coming from those wishing to enter the “sports system” in the context of initial training or professional requalification, and people already present in the system but wishing to perfect their skills (continuing education).

In the field of training, we can differentiate between the stakeholders involved in running this system: decision-makers, whether with public status (such as government or regional authority representatives) or private status (such as voluntary and commercial sector employers or social partners); training institutions, which we tend to refer to as “training providers”. We have an estimated 700 training institutions present in sports, more than half of them are related to sports federations or confederations, a little less than 15% to Higher Education and the remaining part either depending on ministries of sports, professional organizations or private companies. These training institutions act in the framework of “training programs” aimed at people seeking training. The training courses are themselves categorized under three different types: general courses which aim to develop knowledge in a particular field within a framework that could be described as cultural; pre-vocational courses geared essentially to introducing participants to the labor sector and preparing them for entrance to vocational programs. Vocational courses are designed to provide the practical skills and knowledge required to carry out a specific profession in a particular field of employment. We also need to consider the “training pathway”, and the form of qualifications delivered. Most of the qualifications delivered in the sports sector are non-formal, which means they are not recognized as vocational education and training by the national qualification authorities. Another aspect relevant to supply is the level of training given. To keep traditional references, the levels of training mostly represented in the sports sector are level 3 (lower secondary education), level 4 (upper secondary education) and 6 (first degree of vocational Higher Education). Level 5 (post-secondary vocational education) and level 7 are less prevalent, albeit for different reasons. As in any other sector there is a general increase of the formal levels of qualification, even if the key criteria for employment remain the functional competence, mainly depending on field experience. As often observed in very small industries with strong identities, one of the key questions remains access to jobs [8].

Recruitment is based on prior field experience and interpersonal relations; access to managerial positions mainly related to internal ascending mobility. That means that a high level of qualification gained through formal education is not the easiest way to successfully join the industry. The same applies to associative sport, where there are few opportunities for anyone coming from outside the “family” to get the job as in commercial enterprises, previous experiences (at least as a client) is very much welcomed.

6. Conclusion

The quality of the relationship between the labor market and the training systems is a key factor of success in an “employability strategy”. Two aspects are crucial: striking a reasonable balance between the number of trainees and the level of annual flow of jobs open to recruitment; the

qualitative adaptation of the supply of training to training demands. The relationship between training supply and demand is characterized by a significant and growing supply of initial training and a weak and informal further education system. The objective of having 8% of the workforce in training yearly (lifelong learning) projected in the Education Agenda 2015, will be difficult to reach if both flexibility and consistency are expected. Reaching such an objective supposes that Higher Education institutions consider further education a key challenge for the coming years.

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