

A Systematic Review of Research on Sport Migration

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Abstract

Research on sport migration spans many disciplines and strands of inquiry, with some studies seeking to analyse the academic outputs. However, these studies sometimes are focused on certain specific contexts or offer only qualitative analysis. This present study aimed to analyse the literature on sport migration. Through a systematic review, we combined data from the articles to propose a classification of the sport migration research field. The results show that research in sport migration have focused on athletes who are mostly men, working in elite sports, and with attention to more globally practiced sports, such as football. Regarding migratory flows, they are often carried out from peripheral countries to central countries. Considering all advances in academic output on sport migration, this line of research needs to broaden, observing other dynamics involved, such as other migratory routes, groups of migrants, and social agents.

Keywords: Sport; migration; globalization; knowledge production; review

Introduction

Sport migration is a very relevant global social phenomenon (Madichie, 2009). Studies related to this topic constitute a multidisciplinary research area that deserves attention from economists, historians, sociologists, geographers, political scientists, among other academics (Maguire & Falcous, 2010).

Sport migration studies have grown considerably in the last decade. They can offer a better understanding on migrants' disposition and motivation for mobility, the troubles and challenges they face thereof, as well as contextual influences on the agency into the sport field (Marques et al., 2021). All these topics, and other possible analyses, consist of a very relevant body of knowledge (Gavira et al., 2013; Nascimento et al., 2020; Rojo, Njororai, & Starepravo, 2020).

Some literature touched on this topic. Pisarevskaya et al. (2020) have proposed an empirical analysis of migration research in different fields of society; however, sport is not evident in

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the data corpus. Some studies have focused on specific analysis of sports migration, such as the relationship between migration and student-athletes (Carter-Thuillier et al., 2017; Polumbo et al., 2021), and sport and physical activity practised by migrants (O'Driscoll et al., 2014; Smith, Spaaij, & McDonald, 2019).

Other research covered areas such as the expatriation of athletes (Faggiani et al., 2016), forced and refugee migration (Spaaij et al., 2019), diaspora in sports (McSweeney & Nakamura, 2019), and social theories used to analyse sport migration (Crossan, 2012). Similarly, Rojo, Njororai, & Starepravo (2020) analysed the research methodologies of studies on sport migration. Gavira et al. (2013) analysed the academic production on the topic using descriptors in English and published between 2000 and 2011, and Nascimento et al. (2020) mapped and analysed the original academic productions on the migration process in sport, searched with keywords in Portuguese.

Observing the contributions provided by the mentioned studies, we realized that they are usually presented in a report model, configuring themselves as qualitative syntheses of the content present in the analysed articles. In this sense, the present study seeks to expand these contributions by quantifying some variables to know the tendencies of knowledge production on sport migration.

Within this scenario, this study aims to analyse the academic production on sport migration published in articles. Our intention is to offer an innovative approach contributing to the mentioned gaps in the literature. For this, we expand the landscape of research on migration and sport.

Methods

This study is a systematic review, which analyzed data from journals' literature on sport migration, indexed in the following databases: *Web of Science TM* (Thomson Reuters); *Scopus* (Elsevier); and *SPORTDiscus* (EBSCOhost). The first two were chosen because they are comprehensive in terms of indexing a large number of journals from different areas of knowledge and are widely used by researchers from different backgrounds (Vieira & Gomes, 2009; Chadegani et al., 2013). SPORTDiscus has established itself as a sport-specific database, covering a large number of academic journals in several countries and languages (Chiasson, 1997).

We used the following descriptors: (Sport Migration) OR (Sport Labor Migration) OR (Athlete Migration). Only documents available online were selected to compose the research dataset. The selection of articles did not limit the initial period of publication, however, the last year of analysis of the selection of manuscripts was 2017. The searches occurred between May and June of 2018.

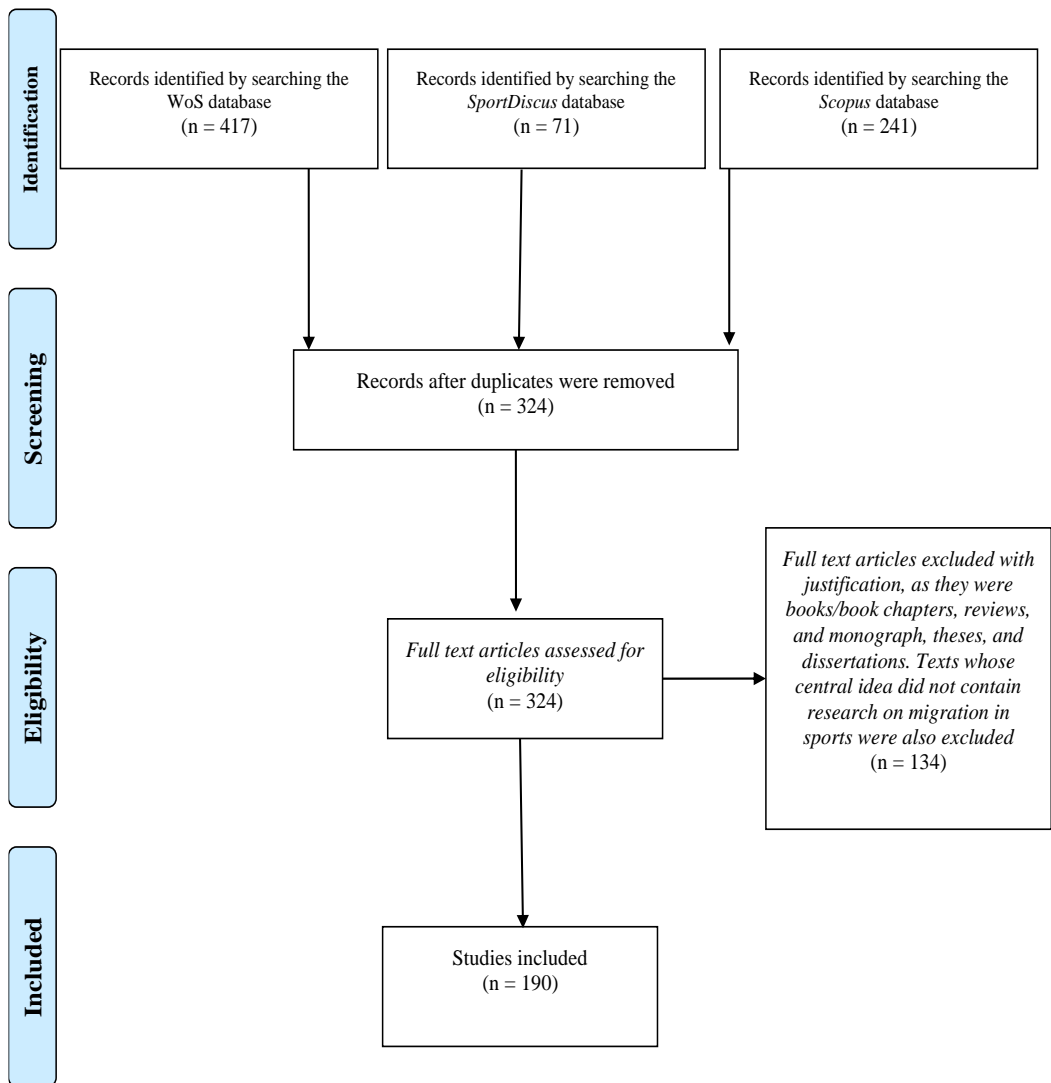
Figure 1 illustrates the process of selecting articles for review. Searches in the databases identified 729 references. From this data corpus, 405 articles were excluded because they were duplicated in more than one database. Another 134 articles met other exclusion criteria (Fig. 1). A total of 190 studies, published between 1994 and 2017, met the inclusion criteria.

The exclusions were grounded on the following criteria: works characterized as books/book chapters, reviews, monographs, theses, and dissertations; sources or texts that did not contain



research on sport migration; duplicate articles; and those that did not have full online availability.

Figure 1. Article searching map.



After the articles selections, the first author of this study proceeded as follows: 1) reading of the abstracts; 2) reading of the complete papers; 3) listing of the main articles' topics.

After that, the information was catalogued using the Microsoft Office Excel software according to the following categories: title, year of publication, journal, sports practice, migrants' place of origin, migrants' place of destination, type of migration, and the central

topic of the study. The other two authors were critical friends supporting both the analysis and writing of the article.

Results and discussions

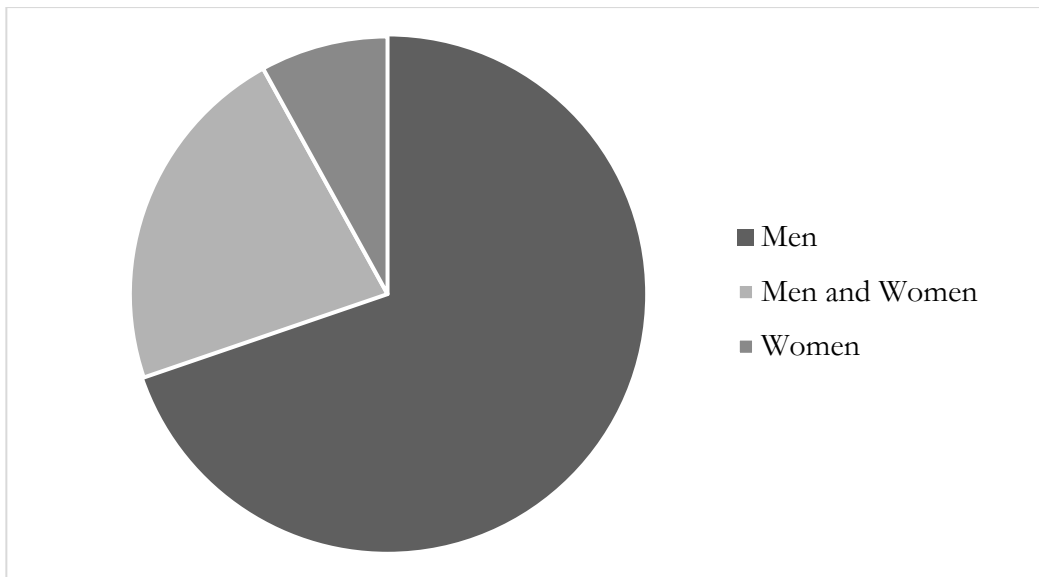
From the data corpus, 190 files were selected. These are spread over an interval of 24 years, with the first publication in 1994 by the author Joseph Maguire. Approximately, 87 academic journals published on the topic were found, with attention to the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, which published the larger number of texts (a total of 22), followed by *The International Journal of the History of Sport* and *Sport in Society*.

Results and discussion sections are organized following three categories. The first one was composed of characteristics of the migrant person, where we observed gender, their social position/role, and the sporting event/practice studied. The second one was sports practices and their migration tendencies, with special attention to how migratory flux are constituted. Finally, the third category addresses the research topics covered in the studies.

Characteristics of the migrant athlete

There are tendencies regarding the gender of migrant athletes (Figure 2). From 190 manuscripts analyzed, only 162 had mentions related to sports migrants' gender.

Figure 2. Distribution of migrant athletes' gender.



The distribution of studies, based on the migrant athletes' gender, shows a predominance of men. From a total number of 162 studies that presented gender information, 113 were about men, 13 about women, and 36 about both genders.

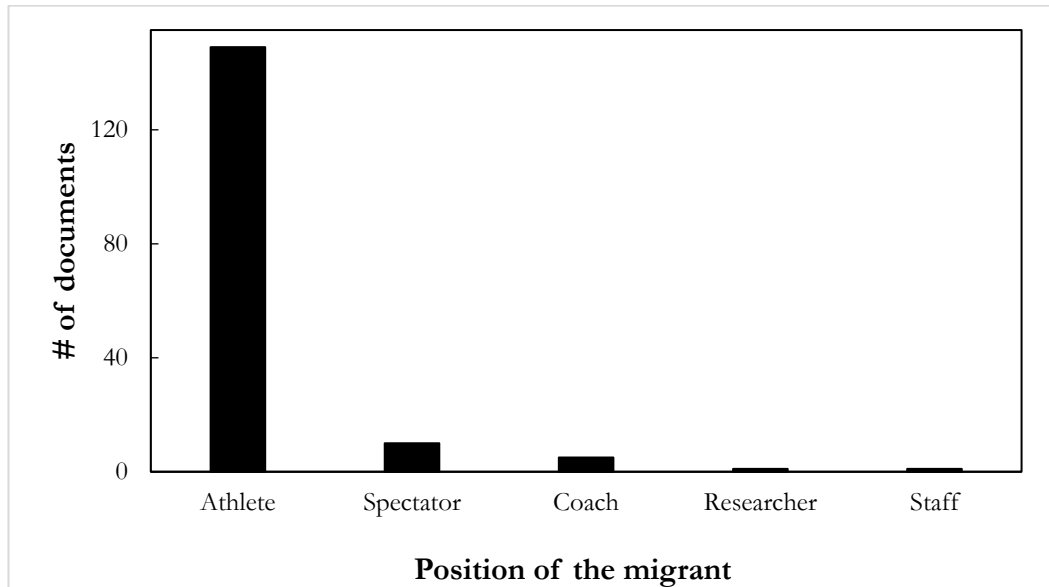
The lack of interest in studying women migrant athletes has been described by Agergaard (2008) and Agergaard and Botelho (2014). However, it is worth mentioning here that, since then, Agergaard herself was one of the researchers who dedicated efforts to researching



women's sport and its migratory moves. Of 13 articles that focused on the migration of women in sport, seven were developed by this author.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of migrants according to their social position/role into sport context. From 190 articles, a total of 166 were considered.

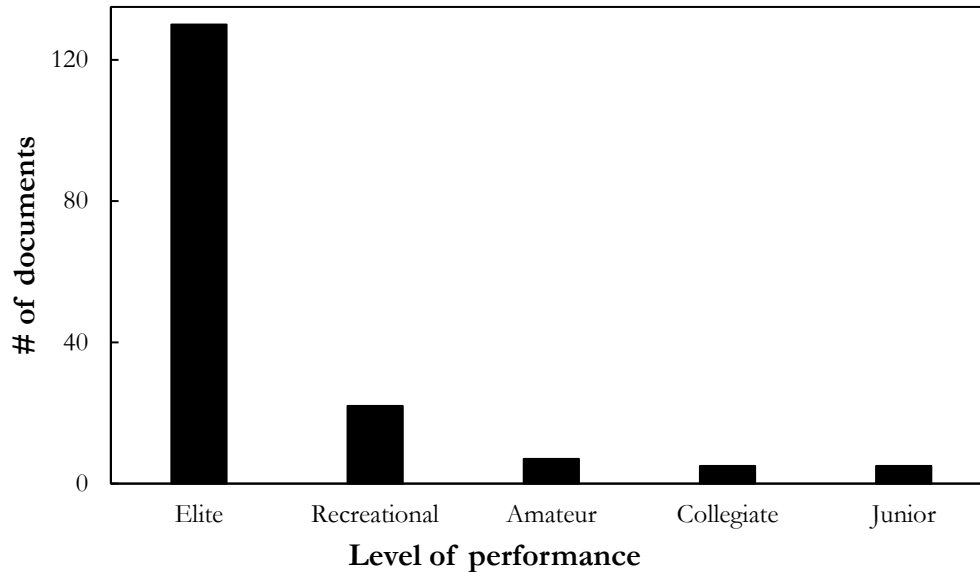
Figure 3. Number of documents by social position/role of the researched migrant.



From 166 studies, 149 (89.8%) analyzed athletes' migration. In 10 articles, the research was on the displacement of persons as spectators of sporting events. Coaches centered articles composed five studies. Finally, two other articles were found, one involving the researcher himself and the other investigating individuals who migrate to work at sporting events.

The migration of people related to sport obviously involves not only athletes but also coaches, administrators, spectators, and other professionals involved with sport, as well observed by Agergaard and Ryba (2014). Despite this, our data show a predominant view of athletes to the detriment of other people involved with sport. We, therefore, defend, in line with Carter (2013), that a broad research agenda on sports migration should include the other actors involved within this phenomenon.

Migrants occupy different social positions in society, but they are also involved in sport at different levels. Therefore, we will expose and discuss the level of performance/stage of sports development in which migration was analyzed in the selected articles; more specifically, the sports manifestation in which the migration took place will be addressed.

Figure 4. Level of performance/stage of sports development.

Elite sports received more attention from migration researchers. From 169 studies, 130 (76.9%) analyzed this perspective. The research that analyzed the migrant as a recreational sports practitioner appeared in 22 articles. We considered recreational practice the physical activities in general, performed by the population without necessarily having competitive characteristics.

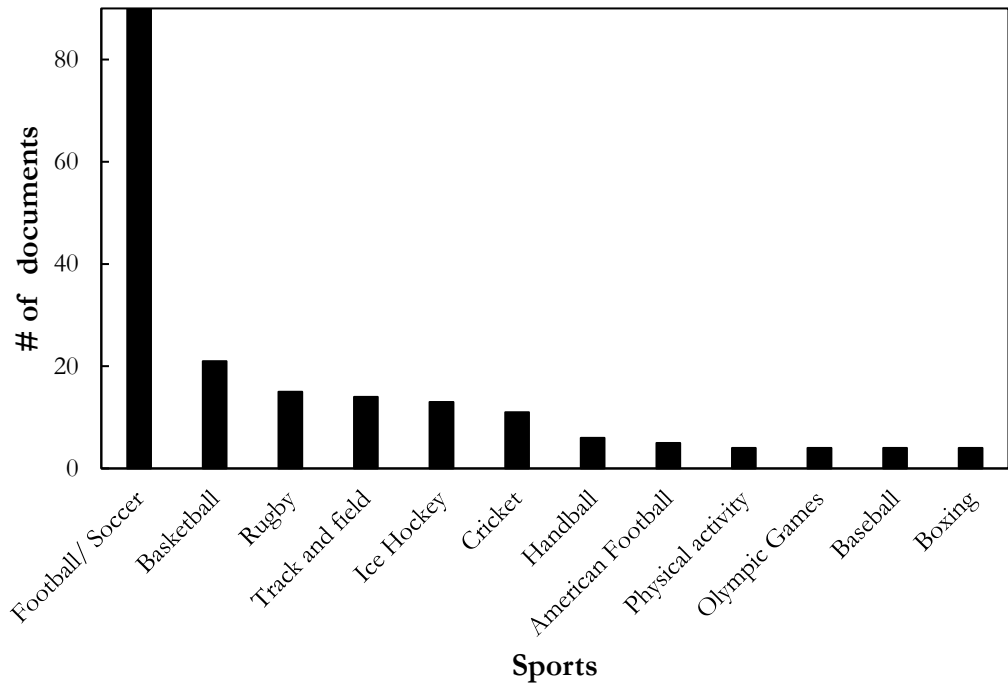
On the other hand, amateur sports are understood as competitive sports practice, but in different contexts than professional or elite competitions, that is, without wages or job contracts. Migration in the sport practice appeared in seven articles. Finally, the other two levels of performance/stage of sports development have been presented in five studies each: the school one, that is, the sport practised in educational institutions leagues, and the children's sport, which refers to the sport practiced by children in clubs, for example.

As evidenced by our data, there is a predominance of academic interest in elite sports, what corroborates the research from Gavira et al (2013), in which the authors concluded that professional sports are the most studied. It is plausible that the majority interest in this level of performance/stage of sports development is influenced by its huge socio-economic impact on the globalized world and media. But within the sports field, there are still other relevant forms of manifestation that face the migratory processes and need to be deeply analyzed.

Sports and their migration patterns

We found a total range of 32 sports into the analyzed articles.



Figure 5. Number of articles by sport.

The most mentioned sport was football, with a total range of 91 articles. Other detached sports were basketball (21 articles), rugby (15), track and field (14), and ice hockey (13). On the other hand, 16 sports are presented with only one publication. They are less marketable sports with global parameters, being commonly regionalized sports, like is the case with Highland Games, Alpine skiing and Rock climbing.

The discourse that researches on sport migration commonly involves several sports is common (Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Lee, 2010; Orłowski et al., 2018). However, our data shows that football is markedly predominant, corroborating other studies (Elliot & Maguire, 2008). According to Agergaard (2008), the less prominent sports do not meet attention from academic literature. The fact pointed out by the researchers can be proved in view of the quantitative data raised by this review.

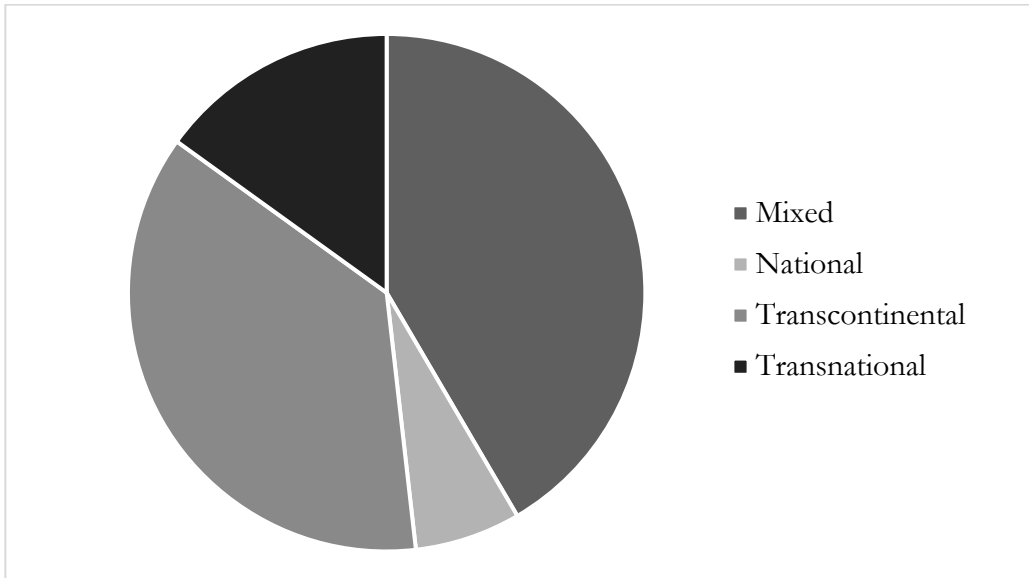
Tendencies of mobility flux is an important topic on migration studies in a general context. This does not differ from sport. In order to understand the geographical mobility dynamics of sport migrants, we made a diagnosis of the origin places and destination of these persons.

As the data suggests, most of the documents involve research which analyzed migrant displacements at global levels, as most studies analyzed countries from different continents. Looking at the data from a worldwide perspective, there is a pattern of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries sending their sports talents to the major centers of the global economy.

In addition, in this migration sport landscape, we use the mobility categories presented by Maguire (1994), who divides the displacement into three levels: intranational migration, which is the movement of persons between regions within the same State/Nation; transnational

migration, which is shaped by the flow of persons from one country to another, within the same continent; and transcontinental migration, characterized by mobility between regions in different continents.

Figure 6. Number of articles by type of migration pattern.



Considering the categories presented by Maguire (1994), there is a trend in studies focusing on mobility involving different countries. Research that analyzes intra-national migrations corresponds to 5.8% of the articles, while analyses on transnational migration appeared in 25 (13,2%) documents and trans-continental in 61 (32,1%). Finally, research involving mobility between more than one type of migration, categorized here as mixed, related to 69 (36,3%) studies.

Both the migrations of individuals involved with sports and the cases analyzed by researchers in the area of sports migration have prevailed on a global scale, since most studies involve movement between different regions of the planet. For Gavira et al. (2013), the places that have received the most migrants are North American and European countries, which corroborates the findings of the present research; on the other hand, the origin of migrant individuals is more dispersed, involving countries from Africa, South America, Oceania, and Europe. In this way, the study by Gavira et al. (2013) also corroborates the data presented as, for the authors, most migrants are from South America, Asia, and Africa.

In order to understand the dynamics of migration that occurs in different sports, we have to consider which migrant individuals are related to has an important influence on mobility patterns (Crossan, 2017). Therefore, a survey of the places involved in the displacement of sports migrants was carried out, detailing the peculiarities of each sport. For this reason, the five sports with the most studies were selected: football, basketball, rugby, athletics, and ice hockey.

Migration in ice hockey happens only between the countries of the Global North, which is a tradition in this sport, in addition to weather conditions consistent with its practice. This



means that the flux of migrants is both intra-national and transnational. Among the countries participating in the process, Canada, the United States, England, Russia, and the Scandinavian countries were the most common (Maguire, 1996; Wong & Trumper, 2002; Depken et al., 2017).

Related to track and field articles, eight are related to elite sport and sports workers. However, two studies have analyzed the migration of a specific athlete during the first half of the 20th century, the case of the Finnish runner Hannes Kolehmainen (Viita, 2012; Berg & Dyreson, 2012). Regarding the most recent mobility, athletics studies have focused their efforts mainly on athletes originating from Kenya, and their destinations were mapped in different countries, such as the United States, European nations, and Qatar (Chepyator-Thomson, 2003; Njororai, 2010; 2012); other African countries, such as Ethiopia, have also been studied, consolidating themselves as important places of origin for migrant athletes (Chepyator-Thomson & Ariyo, 2016).

Specifically regarding to rugby, some countries had predominance on the origin of migrant athletes. The rugby migrant players were from the Oceania region countries, such as Samoa, Australia, and Fiji. Regarding the destinations of these migrants, there is greater dispersion around the globe, mainly in Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia, and England (Horton, 2012; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013; Evans & Stead, 2014; Guinness & Besnier, 2016).

The second sport most analyzed by researchers of sport migration was basketball, with 21 articles. The sport, despite having its predominance in some regions, unlike athletics and rugby, is more advanced in the globalization stage of its consumption and practice. Therefore, we could find studies with varied migrant origins and destinations, for example, Chinese athletes migrating to Australia (Hibbins, 2005), Lithuania to England (Evans & Piggott, 2016), and players from Taiwan moving to China (Jiang & Lee, 2016). This phenomenon occurs both in relation to athletes who leave countries such as Japan, Israel, Czech Republic, England, among others (Maguire, 1994; Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Shor & Galily, 2012; Chiba, 2013; Crossan, 2016) and those who enter the North American country (Chiba, 2012; Ryba et al., 2015; Chepyator-Thomson et al., 2016). From the data we present, we can indicate that the various migratory flux between different regions of the planet, even if starting from a limited cut of the analyzed research, shows that basketball is a global sport.

The sport that received the most attention from researchers was football, the most widely practiced sport in the globalized world (Alvito, 2006). Football is part of several countries' cultures and the financial values that involve the market of players are relatively superior to the majority of the other sports. This fact, therefore, contributes to a greater number of migratory flux, and consequently, also a greater academic interest in studying the phenomenon. As for the mobility tendencies of football sports workers, migration routes are multilateral, and studies analyze the mobility of players in different directions around the planet. However, one direction is predominant in the studies analyzed. The origins are diverse, but the destination is mainly the European countries, where the richest and more important football leagues are sited (Maguire & Stead, 1998; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Poli, 2006; 2007; Ribeiro & Dimeo, 2009; Egilsson & Dolles, 2017).

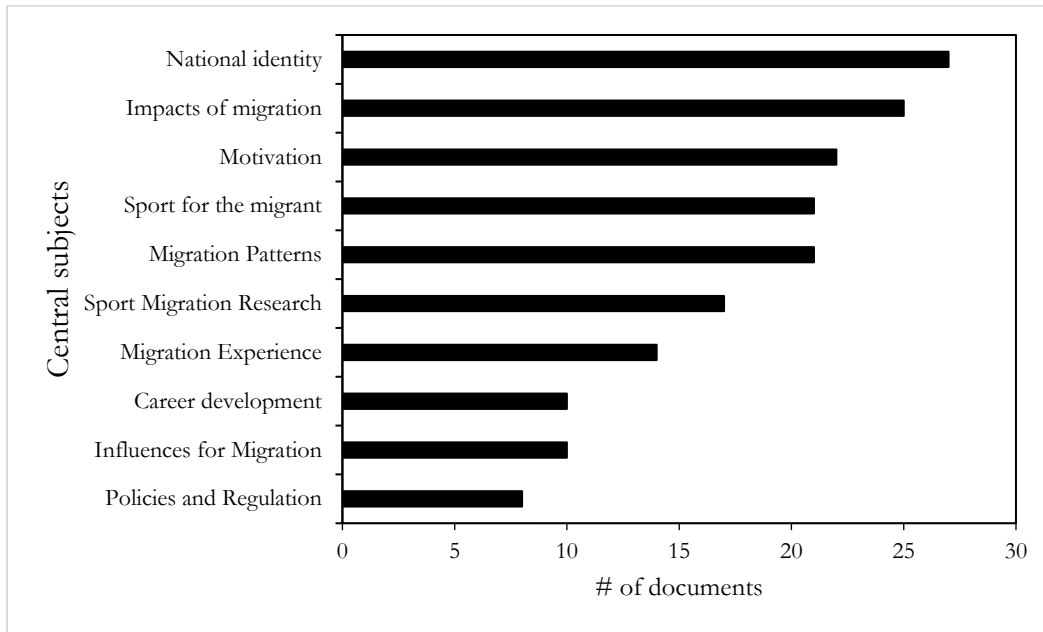
As evidenced from our data, the academic preference for studies that analyze migratory flux towards the major European leagues, which can be explained by the location of the researchers who publish the most sports migration studies, who mostly reside in European

countries (Rojo, Ribeiro & Starepravo, 2021). However, the data presented by the CIES football observatory in the year 2020 show that more than 120 leagues in the world receive athletes from different origins. Since regions such as China, Middle East, have also become important sending places of players in global football.

Central topics of study

Finally, the analyses focus on the central topics addressed in the selected articles in this review. We generated 16 central topics from articles.

Figure 7. Central research topics of study.



The figure shows a series of works distributed by the 10 most searched central subjects, among the 16 catalogued. The topic of national identity was central in 27 of the 190 articles. Studies involving national identity have focused their efforts on understanding how migrant individuals felt about their recognition of belonging to their destination. Aspects of recognition of the foreigner by the local population are discussed, as well as how sports contribute to reproducing some of the characteristics of their country of origin even when living abroad (Malcolm, 2001; Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Krøvel, 2012; Gehring, 2016; Usher, 2017).

Regarding the impacts of migration, studies on sports focus on investigating the social changes in the migrant's country of destiny. As an example, we can highlight the studies that address how the incensement of foreigners influences the development of new talents in the receiving country, and the consequences reflected in the teams representing nations, as well as in the level of local competition (Crossan & Pecha, 2016; Travlos et al., 2017). The consequences on the migrant's own life were also classified in this topic, as is the case of studies by Njororai (2012) and Weedon (2012).



The third topic with the highest number of publications was the motivation to migrate, which amounted to 22 studies. We understood motivation as the factor that leads individuals to leave their places of origin to migrate with a focus on sport. Studies show that this motivation may be due to the desire to have a professional career in sports (Stead & Maguire, 1998), to achieve success as an Olympic athlete (Njororai, 2010), and personal motivations such as love and passion for the sport (Botelho & Agergaard, 2011). In this topic, it is worth mentioning that some studies are based on the types of migration developed by Maguire (1996) and Magee and Sugden (2002) to identify the factors that motivate the displacement of individuals (Stead & Maguire, 2000; Love & Kim, 2011; Chiba, 2013).

With 21 published texts, the sports and physical activities practised or accompanied by the foreign population in a given destination is another analysed topic. In this sense, studies are predominantly supported by the idea of how sports and physical activity contribute to the feeling of integration of migrants in their new home, which may be a young/school population (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Barker et al., 2014), as well as adult migrants (Ludwing & Schierl, 2013; Long; Hilton et al., 2014).

With appropriations from discussions in the field of geography, studies addressing migration tendencies amounted to 21 articles. The surveys were carried out to identify the flux of different sports, detecting the countries that donate and those that receive sports workers in different sports realities, as in football (Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Storey, 2011), baseball (Takahashi & Horne, 2006), and basketball (Chepyator-Thomson et al., 2016).

In addition to the central topics previously exposed, others were identified in fewer publications. Articles addressing research on sport migration amounted to 16 documents, migration experiences amounted to 14 studies and career development of sports migrants and factors that influence migration in 10 articles. A smaller number of published articles included the topics of policies and regulations, migration networks, sports businesses, resistance to migrants, management implications, team loyalty, and gender identity. However, it is necessary to consider that the central topics with fewer categories may have been addressed in other texts, but in a secondary way, as in the case of policies and regulations and migration networks that are considered in several articles.

Countries have their local characteristics in relation to sports. In addition, bringing to a recent context in history, understanding can be applied in the production of localities or even identities. According to Giulianotti and Robertson (2007), a specialization of local culture, that is, the countries with the greatest capacity to produce talents in certain sports, send their athletes around the world to universalize their local cultures.

Final remarks

The present study aimed to analyse the academic production on sport migration published in articles. Therefore, we have found that research is predominantly related to football, migrants are mostly athletes, the recurrent level of performance is the elite one, and the gender of most migrants is men. Other information, such as migration flux, was analyzed, and we can conclude that the sport's commercial, cultural and geographical aspects influence migration tendencies. Finally, in relation to the topics addressed by researchers on sport migration, aspects of national identity, impacts of migration, and the motivating elements for the individual to migrate were points of interest found in the analysed literature.

This systematic review fills an important gap. Based on the quantification of the information presented in the reviewed studies, we could reveal some important aspects, in addition to offering a synthesis of the content of the articles. We have identified tendencies in the literature that reveal the characteristics of the migrant person, such as gender, role in the sports field, level of performance the person involved. We also identified the sports that are most investigated and move towards understanding how migratory tendencies and flux occur, exposing the places of origin, as well as the destination of these migrants.

We point out that this present article can contribute to the academic field of sports migration. An important pattern we found is that the migration routes were mainly directed to major sports centres, that is, to the most economically developed countries in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, we identify that investing on research that can focus on sport migration in countries outside the Global North can be very fruitful. This can be complemented with a broader look at other groups of sports agents, such as coaches, staff, journalists, as well as mainly women.

However, based on the literature reviewed on sport migration, we also emphasize that it is relevant to invest efforts in diverse sports practice studies besides football. It is worth mentioning that there are some limitations in this study. It is important to remember that searches were carried out in three databases, with descriptors in English. Thus, some publications may not have been included in the dataset. This is because not all of the journals that may be used for the topic are indexed in the selected databases, with texts published in regional/national focus. Therefore, we point to a field of investigation that deserves to be further explored by more and wider systematic reviews, which, as ours, can update the scientific community on the directions that sport migration studies have taken.

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