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Research Paper

What role does employment play in collaboration between Sports Management academia and the sports industry?

Master Thesis

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Declaration of Authorship

“I hereby declare:

- That I have written this work on my own without other people’s help (copy-editing, translation, etc.) and without the use of any aids other than those indicated;
- That I have mentioned all the sources used and quoted them correctly in accordance with academic quotation rules;
- That the topic or parts of it are not already the object of any work or examination of another course unless this has been explicitly agreed on with the faculty member in advance;
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Date: [12.12.2020]

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Signature: 

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Abstract

Interorganizational collaboration has been researched extensively in the field of management in the last decades. University-Industry collaboration is one of the branches that have sprung out of this research as a consequence. This form of collaboration, in the context of the sports industry, has rarely been examined. More specifically, this research investigates what role employment might play in collaboration between Universities and the sports industry. The Triple Helix Model was used in this research as a theoretical framework. Methodologically, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with sports Management faculty, businesses in the sports industry, researchers, and policymakers within collaboration. The findings conclude that, even though employment is a motivation for collaboration, the relationship between government, universities, and the industry varies between countries, universities and businesses. Research implications are given based on this research.

Keywords: University-Industry collaboration, Triple-Helix Model, Employment, Sports Management, Sports Industry

Table of Contents

Declaration of Authorship	2
Acknowledgments	3
Abstract	4
Table of Contents	5
List of Figures	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Theoretical framework	10
3. Literature Review	14
4. Methods	20
5. Findings	25
6. Discussion	36
7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations	39
References	42
Appendices	50

List of Figures

- Figure 1 The Triple Helix Models
- Figure 2 Collaborations in the Triple Helix Model
-

1. Introduction

The famous saying "knowledge itself is power" can be attributed to one of the founding fathers of science, Francis Bacon (Hobbes, 1839). Knowledge today is spreading faster than ever, making today's societies incorporated into what is known as a knowledge-based society, where knowledge, competence, and information are crucially important to further innovation and human flourishing (Castelfranchi, 2007).

The right knowledge, information, and competencies are crucial to adapt to a world known for its rapid changes and demands on the human race. As Yorke & Knight (2004) point out, societies with a strong connection between a well-educated workforce and the market can reap economically beneficial outcomes.

Organizations are not immune to the rapid changes. Managing any organization demands excellent competence and the ability to handle the challenges and rapid changes in the organizational landscape. One industry that has experienced massive growth through the last decades and is in a highly competitive environment, is the sports industry. These evident struggles are very much present in sports, where the need for good managerial conduct, organizational, and leadership skills are in high demand (Maitland, Hills, & Rhind, 2015).

Sport Management as an educational pathway has grown immensely and is offered on a broad, global basis and constitutes an ever-increasing pool of future employees and leaders in the industry (Shilbury et al.2017; Costa, 2005). Ensuring that students are employable and ready to tackle the sports industry's challenges has become one of the Sport Management programs' highest priorities (Schepper & Sotiriadou, 2017). Even though enhancing students employability has received increased attention, there is a gap between what the industry expects from their future employers and what the Sport Management academia produces in terms of graduates (Minten, 2010).

With an educational background in Sports Management, the upcoming workforce needs to possess a broad set of competencies and skills to meet the high demands and challenges facing them. The knowledge and skills necessary need to be rooted in industry demands and be oriented towards solving "real-life problems" (Wohlfart & Adam, 2019). However, knowledge needs to be put into fair use through practice.

One approach that has been pursued in order to combine theory and practice is through collaboration between these different institutions, by sharing knowledge and resources. A collaborative interaction between knowledgeable stakeholders can be a bridge to put knowledge to use (Meyer, 2010). Collaboration between organizations often referred to as inter-organizational collaboration, has had a long history in the managerial literature (Rybnicek & Königgruber, 2017). Collaboration between Universities and the industry has been studied increasingly in the last two decades. However, collaborations between Sports Management academia and the sports industry has not been researched to a large extent.

Even less has been studied about how collaboration between academia and industry are motivated by employment in sports. This research is trying to address this issue.

Governments are also related to this issue. Since high employment levels and a competent workforce can be regarded as a performance indicator (Dinning, 2017), their role will be relevant to this research. Understanding the interactions between state, academia, and the market has been explained through many models and theories. The Triple Helix Model is a theoretical framework that seeks to explain how a closer interaction between these three actors can foster social and economic development, based on the transfer of knowledge and innovation between different institutions (Leydesdorff, 2012). The model will be explained in further detail in the theoretical part of this research paper.

The motivation behind this research started as a case study challenge at Geneva Business School, Campus Barcelona, in the late fall of 2019. A group of students was gathered to discuss, brainstorm, and create solutions for a new start-up. This case study challenge aimed at creating a platform with a mission to offer students, passionate about sports, an opportunity to work within the sports industry. How could a stronger connection between the relevant stakeholders come to benefit the students that one day will step onto the stage in the sports industry? This thesis is the result of my investigation into these questions surrounding the interaction between University and Industry.

By investigating this topic, it can further the understanding of why and how Sports Management academia collaborates with the sports industry. By examining this, successful collaboration practices can be discovered, but also an eventual lack of collaboration. More profound knowledge of how collaboration might be motivated by students' employment and movement to the industry can be revealed. Thorough research on how universities can enhance their students' probability of getting into the industry could be helpful for all parties by their collaborations.

Therefore, this thesis's research question goes as follows: "What role does employment play in collaboration between Sports Management academia and the sports industry?".

In this research project, a set of sub-questions underlies the main research question:

1. The question of why and how collaboration is being conducted across institutional spheres.
2. What role do the different stakeholders in the theoretical framework play in collaboration
3. How does the student's benefit from this practice
4. What are the competencies and skills that Sport Management students need to be successfully integrated into the working life of sports
5. What measures do the stakeholders take to employ Sport Management students

This research paper is structured as follows: the next chapter lays out the research's theoretical framework. Chapter 3 presents the existing literature that is relevant to the research. Chapter 4 informs about the method used, the targeted populations, and the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 puts forth the relevant results from the extracted data. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results gathered, with emphasis on how the results align with the existing literature. A conclusion is provided in chapter 6, following implications for theory and future research.

This thesis intends to contribute to a better understanding regarding employment through University-Industry Collaboration. In terms of responsible leadership, being in the spirit of Geneva Business School, this paper will be aligned with the business school's aim and desired goal, creating responsible and sustainable business practice.

2. Theoretical framework

Before approaching the topics that make up this research paper, a theoretical framework for the research must be established. A framework lays the foundation for the research by grounding it in a theory, which helps the research become more meaningful and thus more generalizable (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018). The framework can be regarded as the blueprint for the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Another useful metaphor for describing a framework stems from Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010), suggesting that the construct can be considered a map. This map makes sure that the research does not deviate from its original path, making it more guided and focused within the theoretical framework provided for the research.

The theoretical framework, which will serve as a map for this research paper, is grounded in what is known as The Triple-Helix Model. The Triple-Helix model has been described as a useful framework to explain the interaction between university, government, and industry. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2001) constructed and popularized the model and is widely regarded as a model with great utility for fostering economic growth, entrepreneurship, and knowledge sharing. Helical framework theory has been utilized as a policy-making tool.

The different stakeholders in the University-Industry-Government interaction triangle have traditionally been more or less separate entities, with their own clearly defined roles and objectives in society. The mission of the different institutions is rapidly changing as society changes over time.

Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995) argue that a new social contract between universities, companies, and governments have evolved. One example is the role of universities. As Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2001) point out, Universities have, in the last decades, moved from their traditional missions, which focused on teaching and researching. These are referred to as universities' first (education) and second mission (research). A third mission for the universities develops, which focuses on providing solutions to societal problems and needs.

This third mission, universities working as a stakeholder in solving day to day problems, puts pressure on universities to become more entrepreneurial in their approach. This is in the Triple Helix theory defined as the "entrepreneurial university."

As formerly explained, the Triple-Helix Model aims to delineate how universities, industries, and governments can cooperate to gain a mutual advantage, creating a strong interaction to foster innovation. The following paragraphs will explain further the Triple-Helix Model and its utility according to the literature.

The Triple-Helix Model forms three circles that intertwine with each other (see figure 1.) Each circle is represented by a sector, government, university, and industry in this representation. The different circles in the model will overlap, depending on how the various sectors choose to interact.

The degree to how the different sectors interact depends on several factors. Interactions between government, academia, and industry rely on what relation each sector has to each other, and which stakeholder is the driver for interactions. For instance, governments with a strong position in society can incentivize closer ties between universities and industries to increase innovative efforts and knowledge sharing from a top-down position. In the Triple Helix Model, this type of interaction where the government has a leading role is known as a statist model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

In contrast to the statist model, you have the laissez-faire model. In this stage, the market is the driving force to innovation, and all the entities in the model are very much separate from each other. The third configuration of the model is the "balanced Triple Helix mode", where all the spheres intertwine. In this model, the different sectors do not only cooperate, but one sphere can substitute or strengthen a weak sphere that underperforms (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013).

The intention of creating a so-called Triple-Helix is to foster an environment of innovation between the state, universities, and industries. The ultimate goal is to create a non-linear flow of knowledge, where all the actors in the helices effectively share knowledge and create positive value for society at large (Brundin et al., 2008). In other words, the closer the different stakeholders in the triangle cooperate, the more effectively knowledge can be used to solve problems and needs in society, which always exists in our daily lives.

Several changes have developed in society as a consequence of fostering a Triple Helix configuration. Examples of organizations that have emerged as a result of bringing different organizational forms together are, for instance, innovation clusters. Such clusters can combine various organizations from businesses, universities, and governments with high levels of innovation. A higher rate of start up-employment, successful business creation, and patent rates has been shown by creating such networks (Akpinar & Qi, 2020).

Another example of an organizational form that has developed from a Triple Helix interaction is incubators. Incubators incorporate a structure that has been influenced by governments, academia, and the market (Etzkowitz, 2008). When this intended environment of innovation and shared knowledge is established, this sets up for an innovation system.

An innovation system is, according to Eriksson, Christensen, Clarhäll, and Dolk (2002), a nexus of both private and public organizations, where the knowledge of new technology and ideas are shared and takes place. Jackson (2011) defines an innovation ecosystem, which consists of both human and material resources. These resources are possessed by different stakeholders, which seeks to enhance innovation.

According to Ratten & Jones (2020), sports entrepreneurship and innovation are rapidly increasing topics, given the continued need to change and adapt in the market it finds itself. As they further note, Sports managers have been increasingly aware of this need and have also started interacting with other entities. This is done by enabling connections with different kinds of organizations, sharing relevant knowledge.

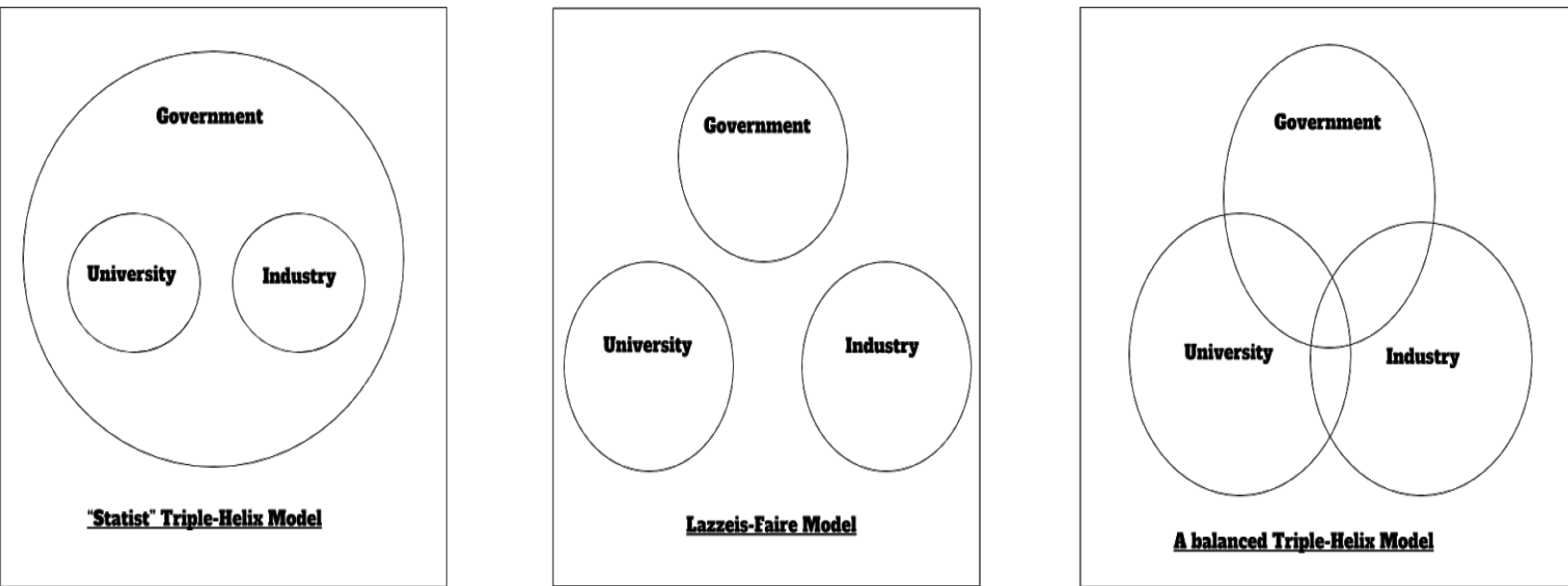


FIGURE 1

The different forms of the Triple Helix Model
Source: derived from Etzkowitz (2008)

The Triple Helix Model has been met with some criticism by several scholars. Cook (1997) proposes more research on the application of the Triple-Helix Model in developing countries. As the research at that given time was mostly focused on industrialized countries, where such innovation systems might be easier to conduct and thus be successful. The Triple Helix Model has been criticized for being too simplistic (Liu & Huang 2018) and not taking into consideration the importance of the preconditions of the stakeholders in ordering to foster a suitable environment for development. Therefore, much of the criticism focuses on its lack of utility in developing countries (Cai, Ough & Liu, 2015).

This research will focus on using the Triple Helix Model to map which entities that collaborate in the Triple Helix configuration. The use of the Triple Helix Model is relatively scarce when trying to explain collaboration between the helices to enhance innovation and knowledge sharing related to sports. The coming section will present the relevant literature on the topic.

3. Literature Review

When going through the relevant literature, the need for a critical mind and awareness of the selected material's quality is evident. A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied to this research paper. An inclusion criterion is, according to Salkind (2010), a collection of predetermined characteristics that identifies what will be included in a research project. Furthermore, it makes up the criteria that define the study's objective. Thus, this enhances the validity of the literature that is being examined. The subjects of this research are extensively broad, making it hard to cover all the relevant literature.

Several databases were used to gather the literature that was deemed most useful for the research. EBSCOHost was the primary search engine for finding relevant literature. Specific criteria for picking literature included peer-reviewed articles and that the papers were available without any additional cost. At the same time, Google Scholar, Jstor, and Researchgate worked as additional tools for literature search, applying the same demands for quality and availability of scientific articles.

Snowball sampling was applied in order to access new literature. Snowball sampling is a method of acquiring as much relevant data and literature effectively. By identifying articles in the reference lists of an article that meets high research standards, one can easily access more relevant material and is therefore considered an efficient method for obtaining enough background material (Information Literacy History: Search methods, 2019.)

Terra, Batista, Cortines Campos & Almeida (2013) investigated how the Triple-Helix Model could be used to gain innovative efforts, specifically to the sports industry. They investigated the Brazilian sports market, exploring how Brazil could become a producer of sporting products and not just a buyer. By applying the principles of the Triple-Helix Model, using it to analyze the environment for collaboration in the sporting goods market.

As the authors state that this interaction had great potential in Brazil —first, a favorable environment in business development through non-repayable financial support. Second, an increasing number of business incubators, which makes up many workplaces (29,905) and generates revenues in the billions.

Sport is a heavily technological-based industry with an increasing demand for science and technology that would improve, for instance, athletic performances. The authors argue that an interplay between involved stakeholders in the Triple Helix Model can be instrumental for knowledge sharing and, in consequence, provide products and solutions that are useful on a broader basis.

The result of this research concludes that close interaction between the Triple Helix stakeholders produced innovative products. As the stakeholders collaborated, innovative projects stemming from Ph.D. or master's degrees were stimulated through government grants, R&D support from the universities, and companies contributing to expertise in marketing and know-how from the business sector.

Interaction between the Triple-Helix related stakeholders in the sporting field can lead to new organizations being created from the collaboration, a phenomenon known as a business spin-off. A business spin-off is, according to Steffensen et al. (2000), a business that is created by other organizations, which can originate from several sources.

The research project did not specifically target Sport Management as a topic. However, the authors cite Ratten (2011), which suggests that sports entrepreneurship is relevant and a developing concept in Sport Management that focuses not only on innovation and technological development but also on sports marketing and social entrepreneurship. Innovations from the new businesses generated through collaborations did not only produce innovative and tangible technologies but also services, under the rubric of "sports promotion".

The literature review did not reveal any other relevant articles that addressed the Triple Helix Model related to sports. This suggests that the topic is underdeveloped and should be investigated further.

The literature on collaboration between universities and industries has grown immensely in the last two decades, but there is still a lack of literature between Sports Management academia and the sports industry. In general, a great deal has been written about these types of collaborations, ranging from motivations to critical determinants for what constitutes successful collaboration across different organizational domains (Rybnicek & Königgruber, 2019; Hillebrand and Biemans 2003; Parkhe 1993). Before investigating the topic more thoroughly, a definition of the term is useful.

Collaboration is not necessarily a term that is straightforward to define, given that researchers generally struggle to determine how to measure it and how to compare results; therefore, a consensus of theory has not been established in the literature (Gajda, 2004; Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009). In organizations, collaboration can be defined as an inter-organizational and intentional collaboration that aims to create value and benefit of the partners involved and the stakeholders involved (Bailey & Koney, 2000). One applicable definition of collaboration between University and Industry can be derived from Bryson et al. (2006), suggesting a linking between two sectors that seek a collective outcome that would not be achieved otherwise.

To further understand why collaborations are being engaged, it can be useful to understand the underlying motivations. Aligning motivations between organizations are vital, but often complicated. Several hurdles must be overcome to align motivations, first and foremost through reciprocal needs. Mapping out expectations, contractual agreements, and realistic outcomes are necessary. It is not given that motivations can be identical between different types of organizations. Even though they might differ to some extent, trade-offs can mitigate these differences (Bodas Freitas & Verspagen, 2017).

Not only are motivations and goals hard to meet and incorporate in collaboration, but differing organizational structures have also been blamed for the lack of collaboration between universities and industries across several sectors. Universities have focused on teaching and research as their traditional mission, which adopts a different timespan according to their original mission. At the same time, organizations are measured on productivity in a volatile and highly competitive landscape, with shorter time horizons (Dasgupta & David, 1994).

In other words, collaboration is not a coincidence. Industries are now looking to the universities, where the future workforce is usually being created. This exploration of talent and collaboration has led to increasing R & D opportunities for businesses and academia (Kunttu & Takala, 2019; p.1-2). Vanishingly few articles on this topic are found about Sport Management students.

In a knowledge-based economy, communities and the economy can be changed through knowledge, such as the development of technology and science, which aims to solve problems. Communities and societies develop as a result of knowledge-intensive structures being pushed forward. By analyzing the interplay between University, Industry, and Governments, one can draw measures of the utility of the collaborations (Momeni, F., Arab Mazar Yazdi, A. & Najafi, 2019).

Enhanced public policies can partly explain the increased focus on collaboration between universities and industries. The “Europe 2020” and “Horizon 2020” program initiated by the European Commission, aiming to enhance education, employment, and productivity can explain part of the incentivizing collaboration across sectors (Davey, Meerman, Muros, Orazbayeva & Baaken, 2018). Identifying skill gaps between industry and academia are also part of this development (European Commission, 2010).

Collaboration between sports organizations, rather than with universities, has been researched to a much larger degree in the Sports Management literature. However, the number of articles of collaboration across sectors increases, e.g., partnerships through gathering resources, sponsors, or human capital. (Babiak, Thibault, & Willem, 2018).

One extensive report that was brought forth by the E.U. sought to map out the successful determinants of Sports Management education. The report was based on a careful investigation in nine countries, exploring how to improve Sports Management as an educational branch by defining the former, present, and future competencies in the field. Collaboration across sectors was mentioned as a useful means to decrease the gap between academia and industry. For instance, by creating long term cooperation with industry, suggesting industry proactively approaching graduates and offering them internships and have an open dialogue between the different sectors (Wohlfart & Adam, 2019).

Zaharia & Kaburakis (2016) researched the lack of collaboration between Sports Management academia and the sports industry in the U.S but did not mention the effects on employment in their study. This study suggests that there need to be more incentives for collaboration between academia and the industry, which can generate high-quality research and integrate it into commercially valid ideas and products. As they note, there is a need to examine the role of government within collaborative endeavors. The study has some weaknesses, given that it was only conducted surveys in the U.S., and the sample was not extraordinarily high.

Barriers that inhibit collaboration between Sports Management academia and the industry are, for instance, the administrative structure between the different types of organizations. Also, concerns about collaboration goals between the organizations. These findings are not only a-typical of collaborations between academia and the sports industry, but it holds true in other disciplines as well (Bruneel, J., D'Este, P., & Salter, A. (2010).

Possible solutions to these barriers have been presented by scholars in the literature several times. By inviting more managers and experts from the industry into the classroom, it could positively impact getting a better connection between the industry and academia (Irwin & Ryan, 2013; Sutton, 2012). Pressure from government, industry, and the increasing demand for universities to contribute to economic growth drives the need for such collaborations. (S, Ankrah, O, Tabbaa, 2015; Giuliani & Arza, 2009, Meyer-Krahmer & Schmoch, 1998; Blumenthal, 2003; Philbin, 2008). This pressure on the different institutions has led to an increased and intensified effort to collaborate and amplify their economic and competitive advantage (S, Ankrah, O, Tabbaa, 2015; Perkmann et al., 2013).

Curtis & Haake (2004) delved deeper into the importance of collaboration between academia and the sports industry. As they argue, universities showed strong contributors to sports product innovation and therefore contributed to have gained a competitive advantage, based on sharing knowledge with universities. Although mentioning sports specifically, Sport Management was not mentioned in the paper.

As the literature of the possible motivations, reasons, and rationale for going into collaboration has been presented, this begs the fundamental question of this research. In light of this particular research, the sports industry's outcomes, specifically related to employment, will be the main focus. In the following section of this research paper, employment in the sports industry will be more closely examined.

The term employability and employment have been widely examined and studied in the last decades. These constructs are complex and can be characterized as having a multivariate component to explaining them. Many scholars have defined these terms, and they vary to some extent in the literature. One definition stems from Yorke (2006, p.5), which suggests that employability is dependent on a graduate's capacity to function in a specific job.

Minten (2010) uses in her work on employability in the sports industry, the definition provided by Hillage & Pollard (1998, p.2), which proclaims that employability is one's ability to obtain and keep fulfilling work. Furthermore, the definition suggests that successful employment is characterized by the individual's attributes, among other attitudes, knowledge, and skills required in the market. This research paper adopts the former part of the definition, namely to obtain a job.

The lack of literature and reliable employment data in the sports industry has been addressed earlier, especially in some European countries. Madella (2003) examined how employment in the Sports Industry, specifically in the European Union, has lacked sufficient data and research. Furthermore, he emphasized the growing need for employment in the Sports sector, given its relevance at a local and governmental level for employment. This type of data has been improved since Madella (2003) addressed the lack of research on employment in the sports industry, particularly in the E.U (Baker et al., 2017).

Every year, people in high numbers get employed in the sports industry. According to numbers gathered from Eurostat in 2019, 1.76 million people worked within sports within the E.U. countries. Approximately 38% of the total workforce obtains a degree from higher education, ranging from tertiary to doctoral degrees (Eurostat, 2018). With a steady growth of jobs in the sports industry in the last years, approximately 1% of the E.U. workforce was related to sports. A weakness of the report is that Sport Management graduates are not tracked in this data, and is therefore hard to quantify precisely (Eurostat, 2019).

Davey et al. (2018) point to the human capital perspective of University-Industry collaboration, from the perspective of both sides. For academics, the employment of their students is a strong motivator in their practice. On the industry side, a motivation is to access skilled talents to their companies. This study is not aimed specifically at the linkage between sports academia and the industry. The literature review did not reveal any equivalent statistics from the sports sector.

Hutchinson (2008) did a study on employment in the sports industry. He discovers several factors for employment regarding Sport Management student's entry into the labor market. An increasing emphasis on core skills and fundamental business courses (DeSensi, Kelley, Beitel, & Blanton, 1988; Brassie, 1989; Slack, 1991) and a practical, hands-on approach, and a curriculum that is relevant to the industry is positive determinants for Sport Management students.

Personal factors include having completed a university degree, having business-related courses and communication skills, and high social capital, put in other words, having a broad network within the industry, and capitalize on this and have interpersonal skills and willingness to work. His qualitative analysis, in-depth interviewing eight different persons in the industry, constitutes a small sample and could be seen as a weakness from a methodological perspective. This concern is also shared with the author. In conclusion, the study suggests that employers in the industry regard experience as vital to hiring Sport Management graduates.

The literature on employment in Sport Management has put much focus on what is known as Work Integrated Learning (WIL). This is, in common parlance, referred to as internships. Chouinard (1993) stressed the importance of internships in the Sport Management field. He noted that an internship is a critical aspect of employment, as it is the arena where the academic sphere meets the industry. The student can show their credentials and thus increase the probability of obtaining future work. In other words, internships are where the textbooks meet the real world.

Employment is one of the many important aspects one needs to consider for such collaborations. Little engagement in collaborating can hurt the employability of students. One way to develop and improve employment and recruitment pathways is to broaden the understanding and development of collaborations between government, higher education institutions, and businesses (Davey et al., 2018).

Fleming, Hughes & Zinn (2009) research investigated how WIL could be a beneficial tool in order to enhance employability for graduate students in sports business-related courses. In brief, WIL is an initiative that seeks to make students ready for life after graduation and to give graduating students a taste of what is to come. By providing experiential learning and what the authors refer to as "cooperative education," the authors suggest that incorporating practical learning could be an effective means to enhance skills that are desirable for future employers.

In addition to this, the research sought to determine attributes and desired competencies from an employer's point of view. As already established initially in this section, the diverse nature of defining employability also makes it very hard to determine what skills and competencies necessary to secure a position in the industry. The authors note that the literature on the effect of work placements for sport science students is noticeable, especially in order to develop interpersonal skills, awareness of culture at the workplace, communication skills, and self-confidence.

Fleming, Hughes & Zinn (2009) suggest that cooperative education, where practical learning and real-life experiences are central, could be highly beneficial to develop all the vital skills and competencies to increase employment and make students ready for their next step after finishing their studies.

As a means to tackle the demands of work-life, the authors suggest that incorporating WIL will be able to bridge a gap for employment in the sports industry, at least to a certain degree. In other words, connecting the industry with academia, where universities offer students internships in relevant organizations and industry experts sharing experiences in the classroom, could be relevant actions to take.

De Schepper & Sotiriadou (2017) have outlined the potential reasons why there is a disconnect between the skills and attributes required from the industry and the skills that Sport Management graduates possess. As they argue, graduate students' employment serves every stakeholder involved; students, the educational institution, and of course, the employer hiring.

Galán-Muros (2016) identified several reasons, in his research defined as societal and organizational factors, why such collaborations are helpful on a mutual basis. Firstly, according to this research, a low level of innovation and access to highly qualified human capital can be addressed to businesses through University-Industry Collaboration, because of shared ideas, knowledge, and mobility of motivated students to the industry.

Several scholars have viewed collaboration between Industry and Academia as a ball work against this particular societal problem. With a well-functioning collaboration, scholars have argued that it can boost the relevance of the knowledge provided by the faculties of education and improved the development of relevant competencies for the industries, which in theory, can result in more promising job prospects for graduating students (Dutrenit, De Fuentes & Torres, 2010).

Similar claims have been provided, for example, by Herrmann (2008), which suggests that University-Industry Collaboration can have the effect of providing a curriculum that matches the needs of the industry, therefore adopting a more up to date supply of knowledge. This form of an adaptive creation, stemming from a collaboration between University and Industry, could be a decisive contributing factor to students' employment by integrating contemporary practices that the market seeks (Razvan & Dainora, 2009).

Employers report that mismatches in employee competence and difficulty finding employees often occur. A report from the European Committee (2011) confirms this as one of their discoveries. Minten (2010), points to the concern that graduates in sport-related studies are struggling to get employed, even though the demand in the market increases, as of an increasing number of graduates within the field. She notices, which is in sync with the data formerly presented, that the number of people with relevant education in the field increases and is in most employees occupying a position in sports.

One main accusation, trying to explain the disparity between the supply and demand of employees in the sports industry, is that higher education institutions have failed to generate graduates that can meet employers' demands (Bacon, 1996; Skills Active, 2006; SPRITO, 2001).

Many Sport Managers do not have a relevant academic degree in the field and might not utilize the attributes that a graduate student possesses, which stems from Minten (2010). She addressed the growing concern of U.K. sports graduates' low employability rates in the sports industry. Claims that sports-related programs have failed to produce the quality required for the working life, hence making employable students, have been raised. In conclusion, the research suggests that graduates must have the skills that the working environment is requiring. Minten's research suggests that leaders do not know how to use the graduates effectively, hence leading to "poor deployment" (Minten, 2010; p80).

Byers (2016) argues that there are many reasons why unemployment is a factor in the sporting industry, not only as a consequence of a lack of skills but also politically and economic explanations for it.

One study, conducted by Brown (1990), found that many factors predict the correlation between academic performance and employability, some more arbitrary than others. However, based on the sample size of students and results, it could not be solidly defined as conclusive. At the same time, the study was conducted at a time where sport management was still a relatively new brand of study and had not achieved the credibility that it has today.

The literature review found no relevant articles that directly linked sports, the Triple Helix Model, and employment, which suggests a potential for doing more research on these topics.

4. Method

The research project's data consists of gathering data from a qualitative research method. Following is an elaboration of the method and its utility in light of this given research. The samples for the research, the method, and analysis are all presented in this part. The table of interviewees can be found in appendix E.

4.1 Qualitative method

A qualitative method seeks to make a detailed and more humane understanding of the phenomena being investigated, which can range from emotions, experiences, and understanding processes in the social environment in which we act. Qualitative research in this research project aims to see coincidences and structures achieved by a smaller number of research objects. The main objective is to explore the research question from others' perspectives (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008).

To achieve this information, one has to have the appropriate approach to answering the research question. It is vital to find a relevant sample of the target population to give a deep and thorough response to the research question. The research subjects were taking part in semi-structured in-depth interviews.

An in-depth interview is a much used method to derive information from the qualitative research method, which gives flexibility to the observer and respondent. Emphasis should be to get as much comprehensive information as possible (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008).

When sampling for interview objects related to qualitative science, the interviewees should be considered part of the target population. The samples picked out for the interviews constitute a so-called convenience sampling from a methodological viewpoint. This is an efficient, and explicit in the term itself, a convenient approach, to obtain accessible attendees for a research project in the initial phase (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008, p.109).

4.2 Target population & sample

Different groups were targeted to provide answers to the research question. When gathering crucial data for research in the scientific domain, defining and narrowing the population is essential. The population is directly related to the topic and research question at hand. As is evident in the Triple Helix Model, three different groups form this model of collaboration. We have the University-Industry-Government link in the three helices, which is reflected in the sampled target populations used in this research. As the Triple Helix Model's stakeholders are clearly defined (University-Industry-Government), it simplifies whom to target to gather relevant data.

The different target populations vary in their respective sizes. The target populations, in general, cover a relatively broad range of potential research subjects. Sports Management is a renowned and growing field of study on the university side, which gives room for searching on a wide scale of institutions within and across countries.

The sports industry, which we covered in the literature review, is a massive industry, which gives room to search wide and broad for potential subjects to include in the qualitative research. As the sports industry is a global one and provides a diverse set of businesses, private, public, or non-profit companies, federations, and sporting teams, this gives much leeway to approach interview subjects.

The stakeholders in the Triple Helix Model have been established and explained earlier in this research paper. Government/state as a group, which makes up one of the three helices in the Triple Helix Model, was considered a too vague term to approach. Therefore, a more precise definition of both policy and policymakers was useful to target a more specific set of samples for the research.

According to the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (n.d), a policy is a course of action, plan, or regulations set by different institutions to influence a set of procedures or decisions. These policies intend to reach a particular outcome. A policymaker is in term a person that is responsible for formulating and revising policies. Policymakers tend to have expertise in a specific field and are therefore set to inform policy-making processes. With this as a working definition, relevant policy makers working with regulation and plans to enhance and facilitate

collaboration between the Triple Helix Model stakeholders regarding sport were approached. Both policymakers in national and international organizations were a part of this research.

One additional target population was added to the research, namely experts and researchers in University-Industry Collaboration and employment in sports. Researchers/scholars who had a relevant academic article keeping with the inclusion/exclusion criteria to this research were targeted to be interviewed. The rationale behind adding this additional target population was that scholars in collaboration and employment possess in-depth knowledge about the topic. Also, they might reveal additional information than what is written in their scholarly articles.

Therefore, the target population consists of four different groups. The defined target populations are the following ones:

- Universities that are offering Sports Management Programs
- Sports businesses
- Policymakers related to collaboration and employment
- Collaboration experts/scholars

4.3 Procedure

In this research project, a list of potential interviewees was picked out, based on a network of contacts gathered by Professor in Sports Management, Frank Hendrickx. The list consisted of faculty members that were related to Sports Management, with universities based in Spain primarily. This sample is a homogenous one, as they are all related to the same field in the same country. The same procedure was followed for the sports industry. A list of sports companies was contacted via email, derived from purposive sampling in the research's initial phase.

Additional samples from the university and industry target population were not derived from a convenient sampling method. To gather an even more significant number of interviewees for the research, new contacts that were relevant to the population were contacted.

Most of the interviewees were approached via email, where they were asked if they wanted to participate in an interview regarding University-Industry collaboration. Two research subjects were contacted via LinkedIn. If the targeted samples agreed to attend, an interview appointment was scheduled. Prior to the interview, a consent form was sent to the interviewees. The consent form includes all the relevant information for the research, intention, and statement declaring personal data to be held anonymous and confidential (see Appendix F).

Consent was given orally on the record, while some chose to return a signed copy of the consent form. As an initial part of the interview, the interviewees were read aloud what the research constituted, its purpose, assured their confidentiality and anonymity, and in addition their right to leave the conversation without any questions asked. These points were directly derived from a consent form, approved by the Ethics Committee of Geneva Business School (See Appendix F).

When constructing the interview script (See Appendix A,B,C & D), the intention was to get different viewpoints and insights derived from similar questions. There were several reasons for this approach. First and foremost, given that the different stakeholders in the Triple Helix stem from different institutional sectors, this might affect how the different groups perceive the utility of collaboration in terms of effects on employment and, therefore, might give a good insight into where the problems are and where the solutions lie. Several scholars suggest that the different organizational structures in the Triple Helix could affect how collaboration ought to be tackled, and might therefore have different solutions and viewpoints (Rybnicek & Köningsgruber, 2017).

The first question asked to all the interviewees was to talk about their background and talk about their current job to understand better their position and role in their respective organization. The interview question that followed for the university and industry members was constructed to find out whether they collaborated with the opposite sector. This was formulated to give a yes/no response. In interviews, it is usually a good idea to start with easy questions and then move on to more complicated and more comprehensive ones (Bryman & Cassell, 2006).

"Does the university collaborate with the sports industry?/ Does the company collaborate with a university?"

Based on the answer given, being a yes or no answer, it was then possible to ask what universities/companies they collaborated with. This led to the next question, for both the university and industry side; *Can you tell me a little bit about the reasons for collaborating with the sports industry?/What are the reasons for collaborating with the university(ies)?*

With this question, the interviewees could elaborate on why they collaborated with the "opposite" sector. Independent of whether the answer was yes or no, explanations based on either answer would be considered useful, as a "no" answer could reveal potential barriers and give insights into why a collaboration had not been initiated.

As a semi-structured interview, the conversation followed the pattern of the prepared questions, but new questions could be asked, based on the information given from the conversation. During the interviews, if something was unclear or a more elaborated was needed, probes were used to clarify and extract more useful information from the interviewee. Probes are often used when asking abstract questions and when complex answers are given (Smith et al., 2009). Follow up questions like "could you tell me more about that?" or "would you please elaborate further on how that went?" are examples of probes that would be asked during the interviews to extract more information from the conversation.

Listed in the interview questions was also about internships. As the literature review revealed, internships are a common practice that is linked to collaborations between university and industry. Therefore, if there was an active collaboration in the organization/university, the interviewees were asked whether they offered students internships. Again, being asked as a yes/no question led to new questions on how the internships have helped the students.

The questions regarding employment differed slightly between universities and sports companies. From the universities' perspective, finding out more about what the universities did to help students towards employment was of interest. On the industry side, the questions were designed to find out if the collaboration had ended in successful employment for students, from, for example, an internship in the company. The universities could also provide an answer to this question. The two remaining groups were given questions that differed somewhat from the university and industry groups.

Researchers within the related topics were asked to elaborate on their research in their respective fields. Follow-up questions and clarifications were asked for if needed. Finding out the motivations and the reasons for collaboration was an overarching topic of the conversation with this group. All of the researchers were in addition hired in a university as professors, so the questions that were directed towards universities did apply to the researchers as well as a consequence.

When interviewing the policymakers, the interview's main interest was to find out more about how their respective organizations facilitated collaboration across sectors and what benefit linking different kinds of sectors to each other had for the stakeholders, especially the students.

One question asked across the groups in the latter part of the interviews was what competencies the students need to succeed and be employed in the sports industry. Since competencies and employment are interrelated, it would be interesting to see if commonalities could be found across sectors. This topic will be brought up again in the discussion section. As the research is based on the theory of the Triple Helix Model, it was also relevant to find out more about what role, if any, the government played in regards to the collaborations.

4.4 Analysis

The in-depth interviews were all recorded. Otter is a transcription tool that uses artificial intelligence to record interviews in real-time. The conversations that were not in English were transcribed manually, and the main findings were extracted for the results section.

Faculty members from Sports Management in different universities, managers in the sports industry, collaboration scholars, and policymakers with experience in University-Industry collaborations were interviewed for the qualitative method. The interviews lasted, on average, approximately 45 minutes and were conducted via video calls with google Meet/Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft teams.

The analysis of the data happened in different stages. After an interview was conducted, the transcripts derived from Otter were reviewed and spelling errors were corrected. In addition after the interviews, the recordings were re-listened to in order to get a better understanding of the responses given and to get familiar with the content.

As a result of the interviews, the most relevant and vital information was extracted and put together to see if there were commonalities and patterns in the findings. The intention of the analysis and extraction of data is to present the most relevant answers to the research question(s)

5. Findings

In this section, the findings from the interviews will be presented. The relevant findings from each target population are presented. A representation of the Triple Helix Model based on the findings is presented in figure 2, at the end of this section to get a visual representation of how they fit in a Triple Helix Model. See appendix E for an overview table of the different interviewees.

One of the policymakers (PM1), a department manager, who worked in a Norwegian organization that facilitates collaboration with universities and industries, known as a cluster organization, pointed out a list of reasons for the missing link between universities and the industries. Even though not explicitly working within sports, this policymaker was experienced at developing a curriculum based on industry needs. The differences in how universities and the industries operate as separate entities were regularly mentioned as something that prohibited collaboration.

"We who work close to these businesses have seen this as a challenge. This has something to do with attitudes, cultures, incentives, and how they are thinking."

To deliver on the scientific front, within the structure of universities, that is what counts the most. How much this research is relevant to the industries might not be as necessary, but rather to publish scientific papers by itself.

There seemed to be a missing link between university, industry, and government in this particular country. This was mainly due to a lack of incentives.

"To deliver an industry-relevant curriculum is not incentivized by the ministry of education. That mindset often frustrates the industries, as they might need specific competencies immediately."

When asked about the effects and role of collaboration in transitioning students directly from higher education to companies, it was harder to give a clear cut answer and quantify for this policymaker. Even though the answer was hard to provide a clear solution to, this policymaker estimated that a more vital link between the universities, industry, and the government would give positive outcomes.

"The stronger connection you can get between companies and the universities, the better the growth and conversion, in my estimation, both in Norway and in the world in general."

The policymaker was then asked to provide insights into how students could increase their employment chances in general.

"To do relevant tasks that are industry-relevant, I think that is extremely useful. I think that is the easiest way to increase one's chance of employment."

"To always have a mindset that what one is doing is industry-relevant, that's crucial."

(PM3-I3U6) had relevant roles within all the different sectors, giving rich insight into how the relevant stakeholders relate to each other. This person had worked as an advisor for governments, ranging from Australia to England, lecturer in a university, and board member in the industry.

After working in different roles, it was clear that collaboration was seen as having great utility, but with its evident challenges:

"Industry will always benefit from extremely qualified individuals. One big challenge is bringing research expertise into professional practice".

One of the challenges that we face in the sports ecosystem as a whole is that it is an extremely unqualified professional environment. The individual with a bachelor's degree is an anecdotal element of the workforce. Being more of the individuals coming from vocational training and education. Most of them aren't qualified.

Collaborations had according to this policymaker had been beneficial for more than just the students:

"You create better job opportunities for students or greater added value for the industry which means better opportunities in the future".

A model exemplified was referred to as a "sandwich program" in England:

You study at one, and year two, and after year three, you go to industry to spend the whole year in the industry and after you come back in a year for you complete your degree, you know, yeah, of course, those things have happened in a number of areas that are usually are related with the strategic sectors in which the university has these spectacular strategic partnerships. And for the students is extremely beneficial, you know, I think that it's really interesting how you bring students into the industry environment because students are really good because they will challenge history, traditions, or ways of thinking.

Although beneficial on a broader scale, there was a clear lack of communication between the sectors according to this professional:

I have these guys always complaining that sometimes they interact, and when they interact it's wonderful. Generally what happens is that these guys are extremely busy. They will never go to you (the government).

"Which means that our proactive industry is what really transformed government action".

“We need better data to make decisions and research has to be working closely with the government you know, the government will never go to you”.

In order to give students the best opportunity to succeed in the industry, he proposed that closer collaboration was needed between the sectors to help the students progress.

And we are not a good sector for this. We bring students on internships, we put them to do that basic stuff, not exciting at all. That is terrible. So I think that we will need both industry and academic institutions to rise to the standards to protect the practical internship experience of the student for them later to come back to the industry and, you know, and drive transformation.

The policymaker (PM3-I3U6) recommended allocating funds to strengthen the bond between the sectors, and develop communication across sectors.

“There are specific communication skills and social abilities that industry leaders have to develop, to be able to interact with policymakers efficiently”.

This professor (CE1U3) worked in a university in the U.S, teaching sports business-related courses. The professor, who had done research on collaboration between Sports Management academia and the sports industry, expressed some frustration on the lack of collaboration between the sectors:

“There's different incentives to academia and different incentives to the industry, because, academia, maybe 100 years ago, they started focusing on this academic research that mostly doesn't have anything to do with the industry.”

Incentives were lacking in the professor's estimation.

“This is a bad thing in my perspective, but nobody really cares because the incentives there are in the universities, the incentive for example, for collaborating with industry, they are not there.”

The incentives for academia to keep their job is to publish in academic research, to teach, to do some service. If you look at the contract, there is no mention of "*now you need to collaborate with academia*". The incentives are just not there. In general, I don't think there is any change because nothing earth-shattering happened with academia to say '*oh we know we have to revise our contracts or we have to revise our incentive for this professor to stay in their job*'.”

The professor was integrating courses that connected the class with the industry.

For example, I will be teaching a class next spring. That basically connects companies with the students, because we're doing a type of a capstone course where companies, if they have any kind of issue, if they want to promote their product or they want to find something about their product then we have students that can help them. They can help

them with their issues inside a company, so we have, let's say seven-eight companies right now for next semester.

Asked what the motivations for the companies in the sports industry are, the professor replied:

For companies basically it's a win-win situation because they do not have to pay those students, right. They don't have to pay benefits or something else. And it's a win-win situation because for students, they will get involved in this kind of issue that companies actually support companies in (city). Basically, it's a win-win situation for the U.S, companies do not have to pay salaries, students will get experience being involved with sports companies. It's a win-win situation for companies, and for us.

Based on the practices that were followed in his courses, they had been helpful for students in terms of employment.

Students got hired. We have several companies and they keep coming back. They realize this. They realize he was a success. What we've done, say, a few years back, and they say *'we want to come back. We have some other problems that we need to solve inside of companies right, and we need the help of students'*, so I believe it's a success in terms of jobs here in the U.S, probably, it's the most developed sports industry in the world.

A scholar within collaboration (CE3U5) from Brazil, had researched innovation in the sports industry and the synergies between universities, the sports industry, and the government. One of the defined collaboration experts emphasized that the relationship between university, industry, and government depends on how they interact, stating that the laws and regulations play a role in fostering collaboration.

"The law of my country permits the startups to make an agreement with academic labs, and then they use these labs in order to develop the products, then because of this it is very possible in my country because of the laws".

The law governing startups in this country is based on non-repayable financial support from the government, if the service or product is regarded as viable, which can create a positive environment for entrepreneurs in sports.

"We have to present the project with some results that we hope to show at the end of the projects, and all of these firms receive money from this government call, and this money, they don't have to give back."

The collaboration expert as a researcher was well familiar with the Triple Helix Model and pointed out the strength of basing collaboration on such a framework:

"The advantage is related to have the networks that we can organize."

Before exemplifying how another country, The U.S, has had another approach in the expert's opinion:

They don't need the money from the government, but because the firms maintain the labs inside of the university, why do they decide to be there? Because of the new ideas. Because if you have your research groups working together, students have a great possibility to have new ideas, you have the possibility to put new projects in the marketplace with this person that would like to be there, to be noticed, this is another reason.

This led to asking what the benefits for the students are in terms of organizing university, industry, and government closer together.

They have a good idea. They are young people, they would like to create things. We can have students which are 25/24 (years old). It's wonderful, because they would like to create things, they would like to develop their lives.

The benefits of collaboration for the industry was mentioned as "enormous" when industries interact with entrepreneurial students in the sports industry.

"Because they can put money inside of the products and then become and also the owner of parts of that product."

"They have many kinds of interactions with big industry that will commercialize the product, and then the network is organized, there is an enormous benefit for the industry".

Job creation and employment were, according to this expert, a product of the creation of new startups.

They also proposed to create more jobs. And the persons that developed the idea can indicate persons to work in these new jobs created. We have a lot of different contracts that could organize it. And I think this is very important.

Entrepreneurship, through collaboration, was a keyword:

Because of the innovation, we can offer more jobs, because of innovation, we can improve the quality of life, transportation, health, education, because we have more money when you sell the products for the country and outside of the county, because of innovation, we can put more technology in your life and then you can have a better life

Another one of the researchers (CE2U4) had specialized in sports graduate employability in England, in addition to being a professor in sports business and simultaneously engaged within the sports industry. This provided insight from many different perspectives.

One point that was initially mentioned and emphasized, which could explain a disparity between sports academia and the industry, was suspicion about what universities can provide them in terms of competence, especially in the past:

They wanted to do things as they always did, and they were also quite suspicious of graduates coming into the industry. *'Why do you need a degree to come to this industry?'* And certainly, almost seen as, you know, *'do you think you know it all because you've got a degree?'*

Which was reflective of the quality that was delivered at that time:

The industry was very much saying to us at that time and when I was doing my Ph.D., *'you're not producing the right sort of graduates with the right skills'*, and which to be honest, we probably weren't. The courses weren't so applied then.

But this changed over time.

"Because it was a new industry in terms of sport. They wanted to identify what were the skills and knowledge that we were developing within students' dream degree courses, and how did that match up with what industry wanted?"

The interaction between graduate students, the university, and the industry was especially deemed important in terms of practical learning, but the transition was not always as easy for students.

"Part of it is about the employer understanding as educating the employee about what graduates can bring to an organization, how they can use them effectively."

This was obviously not always the case in the researcher's experience.

"One of the graduates, they ended up brain dead on the poor side."

A collective effort was proposed in order to make Sport Management graduates as employable as possible.

Where does employability lie? Is it with the student? Was it with the university or, or actually is it with the employer? It's about the three coming together to enable, as an industry, to enable us to develop people to move on and be really effective.

But it all starts with the student.

"Getting students to understand during their degree course, what are my values in relation to sport and therefore, which part of the sport am I going to be most comfortable in?"

The university that the professor was situated in did have close ties to the industry.

We have relationships with (the sports industry) because we're based in (city), obviously the football clubs. Rugby League, and community sports providers, and have been

inputted into the design of the course. We have a lot of guest lectures, and during the course, and most of the people we work with are pretty open to the students, so they'll enable them to network with them, to some extent. And then what we then do, it will be asked of our contacts *'have you got projects?'*. If you've got things you would like the students to do, and some of those might involve actually going in doing some shadowing and working with them, but it's primarily based on them undertaking some sort of project.

The advisory board for the sports courses had influential stakeholders from the industry, making sure that the course was relevant to the needs of the sports industry.

We've got people from that course from FIFA and UEFA, quite high up, so we do have a board, an advisory board of about, I think there are eight members on that from all parts of the sports industry. So they'll meet a couple of times a year. They're also the ones that we know we're going to ask for guest lectures.

In terms of employment, the approach had produced successful employment after graduation.

Just to pick out a few, this one of our graduates is working for (country) FA (Football Association), in the managing volunteers you've got students working for them. There was one table tennis (country) in marketing, and a few in the football club, so in (club) a few in Rugby. Rugby league events and ticketing, and there's just gone all sorts of different places, some have gone into sports retail organizations one would work for a startup.

Asked whether the local government had a part to play in the collaborations, the answer was clear.

"They really don't get involved at all."

In terms of strengthening the stakeholders' synergy, implementing it on a broader level than the universities could prove difficult.

I think then in terms of trying to do something that brings employers and universities together, European wise, or even, to be honest, within our own nations is really difficult. I think in a way, from my own experiences, I can only do it at a university level.

This person (CE4U6) worked as a Sport Management faculty member in Scandinavia, who had also researched how to make the Sport Management curriculum industry-relevant. In addition, this faculty member had experience in the sports industry.

The link between the school and the industry was characterized as close.

"We have very close bonds to the industry. We always strive to use practical case studies in order to implement theory into practice."

The school had several collaborations, but none of them were formally implemented.

"We have as per today no formal partnerships, but we have organizations that we worked with over several decades, without any forms of a formal agreement."

The motivations for the collaborations had several reasons.

"We want the students to learn things in practice. Secondly, to make sure that we educate students for the working life, not for unemployment".

A practical approach to equipping the students with the necessary attributes was vital for this university. This approach has become mandatory after pressure from several stakeholders.

"The leadership of (university) has put a lot of pressure on this because this came as a demand from the government, saying that it has to be implemented in terms of relevance to working life".

"We in the Department of Sport Management think this is great, that there is institutional pressure to develop collaboration with the industry."

"Since the government invests a lot in education, they don't want to invest people into unemployment.

The results from these practices had shown good results for the graduating students.

"Sport Management graduates have, compared to other studies at (university), more of them are employed. Most of them get into the job market pretty quickly, I think all of them are in a job six months after graduating."

Much of this success was attributed to the internship programs that this school offered its students. Many of the students that had been a part of an internship got directly hired as a consequence after the internship. The most successful internships were those that had a longer timespan.

The gap between university and industry was not perceived as very large in this country. Combining theory with practice, collaboration with the sports industry, institutional pressure from the government, and the ability to regularly revise the curriculum held this gap to a minimum.

We revise our curriculum at least once a year, meeting different people from the industries, telling them that: *'now we're going to revise this topic, could (a relevant stakeholder) come and look at this and revise what is important in this topic'?*

This university representative (U1) worked with corporate relations in Spain, with the responsibility of establishing collaborations with companies and sports entities. This person also worked very closely with career services at the university. There were many reasons why the university wanted to establish deals with the sports industry.

"To give more options to the students, to improve their opportunities into the sports industry, then to link these matches that we have a partnership with".

They share with us maybe some difficulties or challenges that the sport entities cannot make because they don't have the resources, or they don't have the time, so they can share that with us and give our students the opportunity to offer them to work in those projects.

The university and industry had mutual motivations for entering a collaboration:

Most of the sport entities are collaborating with us because we provide them with enthusiastic students to help them achieve their goals, maybe into an internship program. Another motivation is that these kinds of sports entities, most of them are in the development process. Our students can help them to achieve their goals, and also our students can learn from them and learn on the field, you know, with their real experience into the sports entity."

The government did not play a role in these partnerships.

The university had a great belief in this approach.

"We believe that partnerships are the best way. First of all, because almost every vacancy of internship programs that we have, basically they all come from our partners."

The attributes and skills demanded from the industry were not necessarily characterized by technical knowledge but rather based on attitudes towards

Most of them are not very focused on technical skills. All of them want to be proactive, to be very compromised with the strategy of the company. And they really want our students to be very enthusiastic. So they are very focused on soft skills, more than technical skills.

These industry representatives were located in different companies with different titles, ranging from consultants to directors. Everyone had long experience in the sports industry.

One of these representatives (I3) worked as a consultant with a broad network of companies, from small-medium enterprises to large companies, in the sports industry. In the consultant's experience, the companies he was working for did not collaborate with any universities, without specifying why that could be. Although the consultant was not familiar with collaborations between universities and the companies, the consultant had an in-depth knowledge of what the sports industry wanted from graduating students:

"People need to be wise about, you know, laws and financial aspects, so you will have three areas in the, in the industry but to me, the most one is the one who creates value"

The knowledge of social media was deemed very important as well:

You have to know how the fans interact, what the fans care about in your industry. You have to know the sport, you have to be skilled in the sense that you need to be able to sell and work hard and develop a network of people.

(I2) A Spanish non-profit organization with a mission related to sport and health, had several ties to different sectors to promote their mission. The organization had collaborations with the education sector, other sports companies, and governmental departments.

"We have several partnerships...we lead a network of 13 university research groups from different universities around Spain to coordinate all the data collection."

Regarding the government, we don't have any partnerships in terms of funding. But we work very closely with the ministry of health, and we have just signed an agreement with the ministry of integration, because we want to work together, and how we can promote physical activity within the school setting.

The company was highly involved in curriculum development, given their competence in sports and physical health. Collaborations were also initiated with other companies.

(I5) A manager for a Spanish organization worked specifically within the sports industry, and the company strived to connect different sectors together.

"We have universities as members, we have technology centers as members, we have big companies, such as (company). One very important part for us is networking. One of our goals is to try to connect the dots, connect the needs, connect the supply and demand."

Universities, with their students in mind, was considered an important stakeholder:

Good universities are important for us, for example, we have interns from them in our cluster. We try to connect these students with the ecosystem. We try to offer proposals from the companies to the students.

The manager explained their conscious effort to connect students with the sports industry for employment:

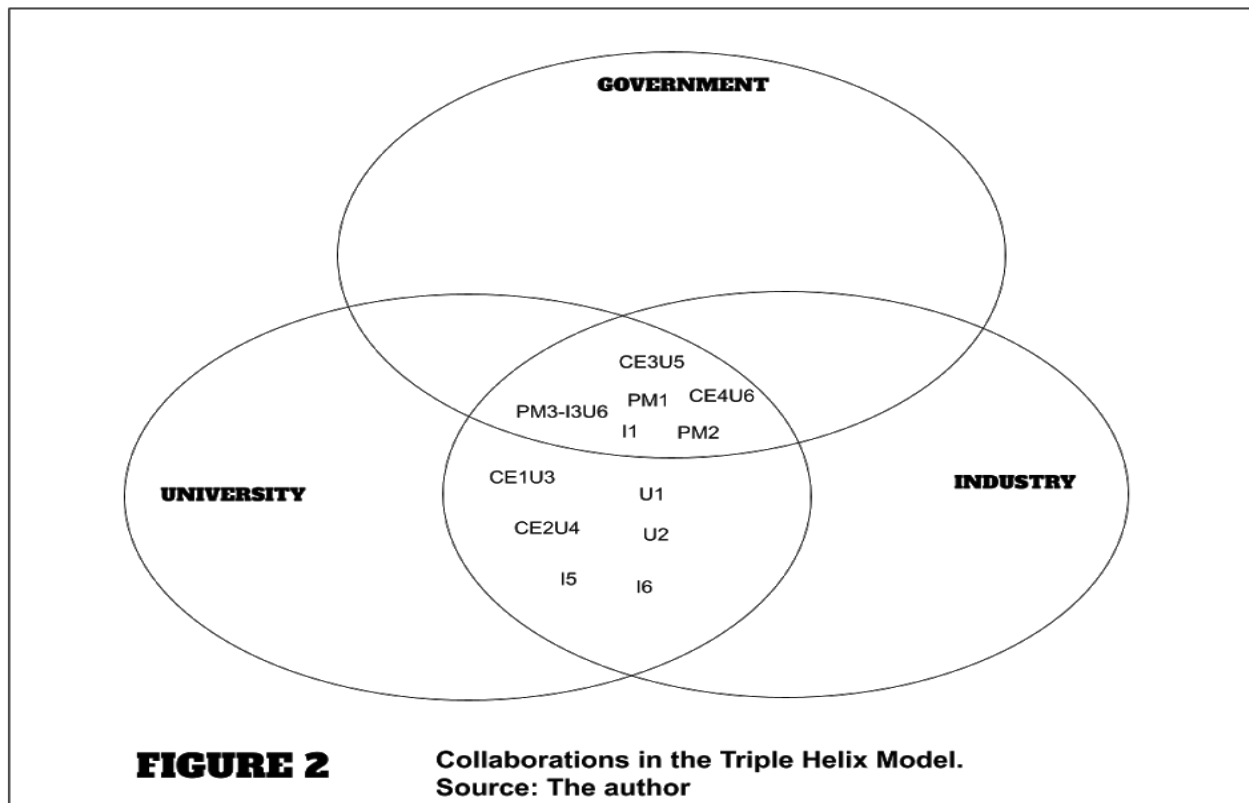
We try to connect them to work as an intern but try to have the option to be hired as an employee. We are a perfect tool for the universities to share with them all the knowledge related to the industry. We are a perfect tool for the student because they receive this knowledge from an industry that sometimes it's difficult to receive.

This approach was revealed to be a tool to employ students directly as being a part of this ecosystem, through internships:

Actually, this is one of our goals as a cluster now we tried to connect the ecosystem. We try to take all the knowledge and share it with the different dots, and one of these dots is the university. Universities are a very interesting tool for us as a provider. The final number I would say, from my perspective, we could assume that one or two students per year could be hired from these kinds of companies. They (Universities) are happy, we are able to connect these students with the companies.

Another CEO in Spain (I6) had extensive experience in the sports industry, as well as in the field of education. The CEO explained the importance of students getting exposed to real-life problems in the sports industry. The CEO had also been contributing to research what competencies the sports industry needs in the future, and therefore could provide insight into what is demanded from Sports Management graduates.

Being able to do projects and write a Master's Thesis was considered an important link between University and sports companies when it came to hiring students. Furthermore, it was noted that education should provide students with theoretical knowledge, but mixing it with case studies and application to real-life situations. In terms of better chances of being employed, increasing emphasis on networking, along with students being trained to put forth potential projects to employers in the sports industry.



6. Discussion

Sports Management is to be regarded as a social science in its essence, which might explain how the different stakeholders interact in forming collaborations with each other. Bodas Freitas & Bekkers (2008) have explored that knowledge transfer rates differ vastly based on sectors, as they have different goals, motivations, and challenges facing them in the knowledge-based economy. The degree to which patents and licensing of commercially viable goods vary considerably since some forms of knowledge are transferable to products and inventions that can be sold and distributed, making collaboration between some industry sectors viable and maybe even in some cases inevitable.

As Bodas Freitas & Bekkers (2008) further notes, in terms of variations of collaboration between sectors, collaborative research and the need for a steady flow of graduating students are high, for example, in engineering. As sectors matter and differ from each other, disciplines in social sciences have shown that labor mobility also matters, but is harder to measure.

Since mostly the research that has been established on innovation and knowledge transfer is based on tracing patents and technology transfer from university over to often technology-heavy industries, the contribution of knowledge and competence within the social sciences is not as easy to trace and thus quantify.

Paunov, Planes-Satorra & Moriguchi (2017) provide several arguments about why social sciences contribute enormously to several sectors without getting the proper appraisal for its contributions. Organizations are not only dependent on generating products and inventions. Organizations also need to uphold good governance, provide the right marketing strategies, and ensure that they are well run in several other areas. Here is where the contribution of the social sciences is due to its credit as a discipline.

Sport Management can be said to enact the same role in the sports industry. As has been revealed and repeated throughout this research paper, the sports industry is a large enterprise globally. Based on the research findings, a set of questions would need to be discussed more thoroughly.

In this research, the Triple Helix Model was used as a framework and a theoretical model to explain and understand the relationship between university, industry, and government regarding innovation and knowledge sharing. This research is an attempt to contribute to more research and fill the void that exists. As the literature review revealed, vanishingly few articles link the model to the sports industry, and no one was found that explicitly mentioned Sports Management. There might be several reasons why researchers in the Sports Management field have scrapped the Triple Helix theory. Firstly, the model has been used mostly to explain innovation and knowledge sharing through registered patents and tangible products that are easier to track.

Secondly, other theories might also be more relevant and easier to apply in research than the Triple Helix model. The meta-analysis of Babiak, Thibault & Willem (2018) uncovered the methodological approaches to analyze partnerships in the sports sector. Their findings suggest that only a handful of theories are predominantly used to explain the relationship between different organizations and how they interact.

The dominant theories within collaboration in sports are briefly mentioned here. Resource dependency theory seeks to explain collaboration as a means of accruing much-needed resources between sports organizations. Stakeholder theory in the literature has been used to analyze each stakeholder's influence on collaborations. Lastly, institutional theory has frequently been used to investigate how new practices and rules change concerning collaboration, as the institutional landscape changes over time (Babiak, Thibault & Willem, 2018).

This research revealed variations to the degree to which the different groups interacted with different sectors, ranging from close interaction with all the different groups in a Triple Helix framework to being more or less independent of other sectors. As the Triple Helix model's theory suggests, the closeness between the different sectors varies and depends on many factors.

As was covered in the theoretical section, the Triple Helix model ranges from the statist model where the government has control over higher education and the market, to the laissez-faire model where the sectors are more or less separate, and the market is the predominant force. A balanced Triple Helix model is found somewhere between the two extremes, where mutual collaboration occurs (Cai & Etzkowitz, 2020). The findings from this research must, therefore, be related to the theoretical underpinnings.

It is interesting to note, as Babiak, Thibault & Willem (2018) do in their research about collaboration in sport, that the interest around the topic based on the number of articles written, stem from a small number of countries. They suggest that this might be a consequence of a strong emphasis on collaboration through policy and strategy documents, the decisive role governments have in the sports sector, and agencies in these countries generally fund collaboration. These countries are exemplified with the likes of Australia and England. This notion is somewhat relevant to the findings of this research paper.

The research uncovered that collaboration and motivations for employment were often tied together, but the degree to which all the Triple Helix interacted varied in no small degree. For instance, one large university in the U.S reported that they had been doing exceptionally well recruiting their graduating students through collaboration with many sports entities. Their results were promising and showed collaboration per se had been a useful tool in recruitment for their sports management. However, the university reported having no links to the government that provided incentives or pressure to collaborate with other sectors.

On the opposite side of the spectrum of Triple Helix interaction, another university based in Scandinavia reported a typical balanced Triple Helix interaction. The government incentivized collaboration and put institutional pressure on the university to do so. This university had many sports organizations that they collaborated with, which positively affected their students' employment, with a high employment rate.

The first example can be regarded as having adopted a Laissez-faire mode of collaboration, where the ties were only relevant to the sports industry. The government where this university is located has traditionally had a more market-oriented focus, with the government less involved. The latter example is from a country where the government has a much more prominent role in the socio-cultural landscape and garners more control over educational institutions and the market.

It is interesting to note that the two opposing examples reported having great success with collaboration, but with such different connections with the government. This raises further questions about the utility of the Triple Helix Model in this context, whether it is an appropriate theoretical framework for this research question, or if other factors come into play that are more important for collaboration and employment. If and how the Triple Helix Model can be usefully applied will be outlined further in this research paper's conclusion.

The findings from this research give several indications of what to do to create a stronger connection between Sports Management academia and the sports industry. An evident red line in the findings is based on implementing a practical approach.

Several scholars have been cited in this research, claiming that universities' competencies do not match what the industry requires. Therefore, it creates a gap, leading graduating students to lack the skills to excel and be employed in the sports industry. As the literature presented in this research indicates, a practical approach where students get to expand their knowledge and use their skills seems to be recurring both in the relevant literature and in this research's findings. Scholarly articles have revealed the utility of work-integrated learning (Fleming, J., Martin, Hughes, & Zinn, 2009; De Schepper & Sotiriadou, 2017; Hutchinson, 2008).

The literature on internships and practical learning can be mapped onto the findings derived from this research. Interviewees from several sectors in this research stressed the importance of giving students a relevant education that offered internships that can develop core skills and work as a catalyst for employment. Employers often seek former real-life experience (Minten, 2010). Policymakers, researchers, universities, and the industry all mentioned the importance of students getting experience and pursuing industry relevant activities.

Even though the usefulness of internships and a more hands-on approach has been praised in the relevant literature, counter-evidence in the Sports Management literature exists. Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent & Turner (2005) surveyed Sport Management students from four different universities before and after their internships. The students who had finished their internship periods reported lower anticipated career satisfaction, affective occupational commitment, and lower intentions to enter the Sports Management profession. This study suggests that internships, if provided to students, should provide relevant tasks that can contribute to the development of the students. The findings based on the interviews, also suggests that relevant and meaningful internships should be a consequence of collaboration.

Throughout this research, the findings from the interviews suggest to a certain extent that employment played a relevant role in collaboration for several stakeholders. Many potential factors and trends can help to explain why this is.

For instance, the findings from this research support the Erasmus+ report from the E.U, which aimed at mapping out how Sports Management as a field should be developed in the future. Incorporating closer ties with the industry and making sure that the demands from the industry are met has and will be of great importance in the future (Wohlfart & Adam, 2019). Several of the research subjects reported that they are working continuously to improve their connection with the sports industry/academia. As different interview subjects revealed, collaboration had been beneficial in terms of recruitment.

7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

This research has attempted to address and investigate the relationship between collaboration and employment, specifically between Sports Management academia, sports entities, and governments. The research has uncovered a diverse set of motivations, barriers, practices, and insights into how and why they are pursued, with its effect on Sport Management students' employment. However, the research can not conclude that it has found a “size fits all” solution or a silver bullet.

Answers to how collaboration and employment interconnect have been given. However, questions simultaneously have been produced due to this research. Further research needs to be done to find the determinants of best practices in this case. In terms of answers, it is clear that certain collaboration practices between University, industry, and government have benefitted students' employment. However, this research has not been able to clarify whether collaboration is at its most useful for employment when all the stakeholders are interacting with each other or not. This is an evident weakness of this research and will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

7.1 Limitations

This research paper comes with its limitations. Complexities are not rare when gathering data, and this research is not an exception. The weaknesses of the methodological part and the research, in general, can be addressed in several ways.

Firstly, gathering sufficient samples in a research project is not always an easy task. Given the nature of qualitative research, which does not stress the number of research subjects to the same degree as a quantitative approach (Research Business Methodology, n.d), does not mean, however, that the research would not have benefitted from a larger sample. A greater number of interviewees could have given more insight into the research and thus provided more relevant results.

Secondly, a more even amount of research subjects from each group could have been beneficial for the findings. Although it is only speculative, this might have benefitted the research with a more balanced set of opinions and solutions. The different sectors might see the situation in a different light, have differing agendas and solutions. In the process of finding relevant research subjects, there were several targeted research subjects that did not respond or could not participate in this research. This includes stakeholders from all relevant sides like the Ministry Of Education and Research in Norway, The North American Society for Sports Management, Ministry of Culture in Norway, scholars, and organizations like Telanto and University Industry Innovation Network, which facilitate collaboration between university and industry who could have provided more information that could have brought in more data and insight to the research.

Thirdly, as was mentioned when laying out the relevant literature, a similar research that incorporated the Triple Helix Model, collaborations, employment, and sports management or sports, in general, were absent.

7.2 Validity

Assessing the validity of research comes down to how appropriate the data, tools, and the research process itself has been to answer the research question at hand (Leung, 2015). To the degree that the methodology, data, and research samples are relevant to answer the research question, it is useful to evaluate the appropriateness of these components.

The research question of this thesis was formulated in a manner that encouraged a qualitative approach. Quantitative research, as opposed to qualitative research, often builds on a numerical and reductionist approach in order to answer a research question or hypothesis. Qualitative research takes into account a non-numerical and more interpretative approach, in order to answer questions like “*what, how, why, where?*” (Leung, 2015). Based on the research question, the methodological approach can be justified. Although eliminating any threat of research reliability is virtually impossible (Business Research Method, n.d), this research has attempted to the best of the author’s effort to minimize it.

7.3 Implications for future research

As have been addressed in this research paper, there has been little research on the effect of employment through collaboration between universities and industry in sports. Future research can contribute to filling the gap in the literature in several ways.

This research only provided a qualitative method approach for answering the research question, therefore diverse methods can be utilized to answer such a research question more thoroughly. Methodologically, more reliable and dependable data can be derived from studying this research question with a more multifaceted and rigid method.

Future research should apply a mixed-method to give more richness to the data. A suggestion will be to survey governments, Sport Management faculty, and sports entities (e.g., companies, teams, federations) to what their view and motivations are towards collaborating. In addition to uncovering the motivations, barriers, and opinions towards collaborating, suggestions to best practices can be given from different stakeholders.

Another approach is by measuring the degree to which each stakeholder in the Triple Helix Model is involved in collaboration and tracking the effects on employment. As this research only focuses on employment and not employability, which differs in the sense that employment focuses on securing a job, employability considers one's ability to secure a job and move efficiently through the labor market (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), exciting research can be done in terms of employability.

Longitudinal studies comparing universities that collaborate, versus universities that do not, could give insights into what effect collaboration has on Sport Management students' career success regarding employability.

Comparative analyses can be done on several levels and in different contexts. Tracking relevant collaborations that provide internships or practical learning and measuring the employment rate from different institutions can indicate its effect. Such research can be useful, at least on a national level. As has been mapped out in this research, countries differ to what degree sectors link together.

There are still reasonable practices and insights that need to be discovered. I hope that you have found this both an interesting and useful read. Hopefully, this research has shed light on and paved a pathway to new and exciting research.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview script - University

Tell me a little bit about yourself and your background.

Collaboration between universities and the industries are a growing trend; how does your university relate to this topic?

Does the university collaborate with the sports industry?

If yes:

- What sporting companies is the university collaborating with?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the reasons for collaborating with the sports industry?

If no:

- what are the reasons for not having a collaboration with the sports industry?
- What do you feel are the barriers to such a collaboration?

If so, what do you find challenging to create collaborations with companies in the sports industry?

- How do you proceed to go into a collaboration/partnership?

How have this/these collaboration(s) been helpful?

Does the university offer internships/practical learning for students to prepare for working life?

Yes:

- Could you tell me more about the process?

No:

- Is there any other approach that is taken in order to give students practical learning?

How has this collaboration been useful to give students internships/jobs?

- Helpful;
- Not helpful;
Why do you think the collaboration hasn't been as useful in achieving this?

How does the university help the students in Sport Management to be ready for their work-life?

In your opinion, what are the primary skills and attributes that are needed from Sports Management graduate students to succeed in the sports industry?

APPENDIX B

Interview script - Industry

Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background

Does your company collaborate with a university/faculty of education?

Yes:

What are the reasons for collaborating with the university(ies)?

No:

What are the reasons for not collaborating with a university?

How have this/these collaboration(s) been helpful?

What role, if any, does the government have in this process?

Has this collaboration been useful to hire students for internships/jobs?

Yes:

- In what way?
- How many students do you usually offer internships to?
- How many of these internships have generated permanent jobs in the company the last year?

No:

- How do you approach the labor market in terms of hiring new employees?
- what are the main barriers to not hiring graduate students?

What skills/attributes are your company looking for in a new employee?

Is there a specific educational background that the company seeks?

Appendix C

Interview script - Researchers/experts

Tell me a little bit about your background

Could you tell me more about your specific research related to University-Industry collaborations/employment in the ?

What are usually the reasons for collaboration between Universities and the industry?

What are the main motivations and barriers to such collaboration?

What role does collaboration play in terms of gaining access to skilled labor?

How are collaboration between University-Industry helpful for the students?

Appendix D

Interview script - Policymakers

How does the organization facilitate collaboration between universities and the industries?

What are the main arguments for closer collaboration between the universities, industries, and governments?

What are the main challenges when facilitating collaboration between universities and industries?

In what way are collaborations between universities, industries, and governments benefiting graduate students?

How might such a collaboration affect the student's chance of getting employed?

What are your recommendations for strengthening employment opportunities for students?

Appendix E

Table - Interview Subjects

Note: All of the research subjects under the rubric of “collaboration experts” was also hired in a University, and are therefore included in the University section. One of the policymakers had a position in all of the sectors.

Example:

CE1U3 = Collaboration expert 1 hired in University 3

PM3-I3U6 = Policymaker 3 hired in company 3 and in university 6

U= University

I = Industry

CE = Collaboration expert

PM = Policy maker

University	position/title
U1:	Corporate relations
U2	Director
U3: (CE1U3)	
U4:(CE2U4)	
U5: (CE3U5)	
U6: (CE4U6)	
Industry	position/title
I1	Executive director
I2	consultant

I4	
I5	Cluster manager
I6	CEO
Collaboration expert	position/title
CE1	professor/researcher
CE2	professor/researcher
CE3	Professor/researcher
CE4	Professor/researcher
Policy maker	position/title
PM 1	Department Manager
PM2	Deputy Director-General
PM3	Chief Research & Innovation Officer

Appendix F

Appendix - Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I agree to participate in the research project entitled “What role does employment play in collaboration between Sports Management academia and the sports industry?” undertaken by the researcher(s) named below Ola Hatling Midtbø

By signing below, I acknowledge that:

- I have agreed to participate in this study.
- I have been informed of and understand the purpose of this study.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- Details relating to anonymity and confidentiality have been explained and I understand these.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.