

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES AND EXPERIENCE IN SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL AQUATIC FACILITY MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT. The present article is aimed to evaluate the current state and suggest new ideas within the management of the aquatic facilities in Romania, as compared to the management in the same industry in the United States of America. Identifying the educational degree of the aquatic facility manager, as well as examining the management activities that can contribute to the improvement of the aquatic facilities performance were the main goals of this study.

Key words: *Sports management, sports and recreational aquatic facilities, swimming, professional competence, performance.*

REZUMAT. *Competențe profesionale și experiența în managementul bazelor acvatice sportive și de recreere.* Această lucrare are ca scop verificarea stării actuale și propunerea unor idei noi în domeniul managementului bazelor acvatice din România, comparativ cu managementul din același sector de activitate din Statele Unite ale Americii. Identificarea domeniului de învățământ absolvit și experiența managerului bazei acvatice, precum și examinarea activităților manageriale ce pot contribui la creșterea performanței bazelor acvatice au fost principalele obiective urmărite în acest studiu.

Cuvinte cheie: *Management sportiv, baze acvatice sportive și de recreere, natație, competențe profesionale, performanță.*

Introduction

Sports managers admit that sports facilities influence the organization in several ways. First of all, the number, type and quality of the sports programs and activities are directly influenced by the available facilities. Second, the quality of the sports facility is a direct reflection of the organization and its programs. Third,

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the sports facility represents an important advantage for the organization, which can affect in a positive or negative manner the revenue generation, the brand image and the customer satisfaction (Covell et al., 2003).

Objectives

- Establishing the role and usefulness of the aquatic and recreation facilities management, as well as examining the management activities that can contribute to the improvement of the aquatic facilities performance.
- Analyzing the activities of the aquatic facilities in Romania and comparing them with those in the United States of America.

Starting from these objectives, our study tries to establish interdisciplinary connections between the management field and that of sports and to provide solutions for the improvement of aquatic facilities performance. We hope that the results of our research, in a field too less addressed in Romania, will manage to contribute to the completion of the scientific literature and will provide support to the managers who lead the aquatic and recreation facilities.

We have tried to combine the information regarding aquatic activities and management activities and to find the ways that allow the optimization of aquatic facilities management and development of the programs they provide. Our study focused not only on the similarities and differences between the activities of aquatic facilities in Romania and the United States of America but also on the examination of professional certifications and work experience of managers leading the aquatic facilities.

Empirical research on the aquatic and recreation facilities management

The empirical research includes the research methodology, the study hypothesis, establishing the subjects and elaborating the surveys (in Romanian and English). Subsequently, we proceed to processing the data and interpreting them as well. Thus, based on the results obtained, we have tried to evaluate the activities of the aquatic facilities management in Romania.

Usually, a study has a goal, followed by addressing a research question or by testing a hypothesis. Formulating questions helps us guide the research process. The questions can originate from several sources including theories, observations, experience or from mere curiosity (Palys, 1997). In our research, we have established the following hypothesis: Professional competences and experience influence the holding of leadership positions within the aquatic facilities.

Establishing subjects and elaborating the survey

Within our research we have selected the aquatic facilities in Romania and the United States of America. This selection is due to the fact that in the United States of America there is a well-known tradition in the organization system of aquatic facilities and training programs for professionals in this field since 1914 by means of the resources provided by the American Red Cross. The personal experience in this field of many years of professional activity in the two countries contributed as well to the accomplishment of this research.

The American Red Cross teaches CPR and first aid courses to approximately 16 million people annually (ARC, 2010). Our wish is to take as a model the American system characterized by customer safety and satisfaction, but also by providing various aquatic programs in the sports branches where the USA excels when it comes to major sporting events (World Championships, Olympic Games). The comparative study deals with the management of aquatic and recreation facilities in Romania and abroad.

According to our investigation regarding the centralized situation of the swimming pools, we have relied on information provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the Romanian Swimming and Modern Pentathlon Federation, as well as the Romanian Water Polo Federation. As a consequence, we have learned that in Romania, in 41 counties and Bucharest there are 167 swimming pools, out of which 152 are functional. Our research aimed at analyzing the aquatic facilities, with a 93,33% coverage, in 9 counties: Arad, Bihor, Bistrița Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Harghita, Mureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj and Bucharest. The research at the swimming pools in the United States of America confined to aquatic facilities in 3 states: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, with similar activities to those in Romania, in which there were from 1 to 7 swimming pools included (at each sports facility).

We have used two surveys in our research, both edited in Romanian and English: one survey was addressed to managers and the other survey was addressed to customers. The survey provides us with a quantitative or numerical description of the tendencies or attitudes of a population we are interested in (Creswell, 2003).

Therefore, the managers from different aquatic facilities have been surveyed, from 26 years old to 62 years old, 72,85% of whom were males and 27,15% were females. At customer level, the people that have been surveyed, were from 18 years old to 83 years old, 44,9% of whom were males and 55,1% were females (Table 1).

Table 1. Number, age and gender of the surveyed people

	Number of those surveyed	Minimum age (years)	Maximum age (years)	Females (%)	Men (%)
Managers	24	26	62	27,15	72,85
Patrons	156	18	83	55,10	44,90

For processing the results of the surveys we have used the SPSS 14.0 statistic program and Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

Testing the hypothesis and interpreting the results

While analyzing the research hypothesis, considering the relationships between the investigated phenomena, we have performed descriptive and comparative analyses for obtaining more eloquent results.

According to the results, we can observe a better professional qualification of the managers in the United States of America as compared to the managers in Romania, both from the point of view of the certifications achieved, but also from the point of view of the work experience in the field.

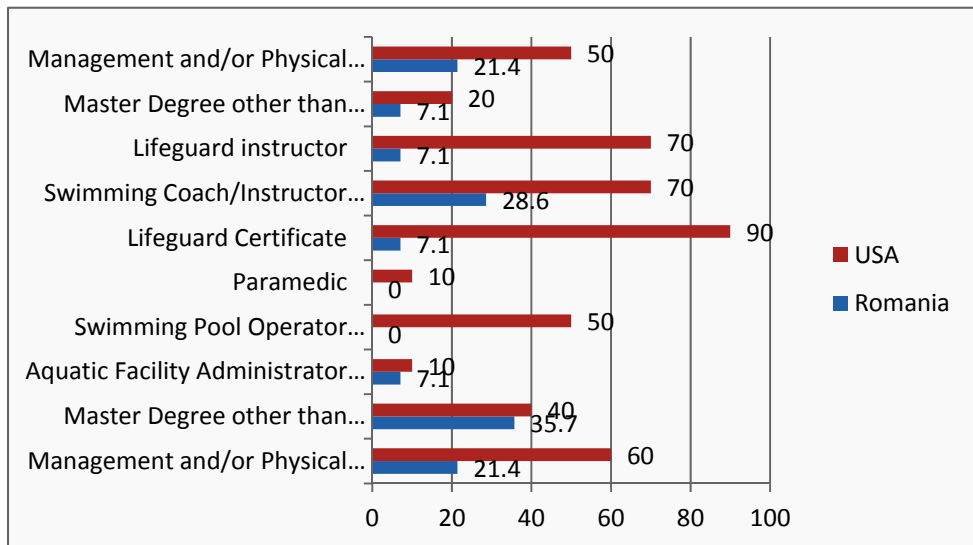


Figure 1. Education degree of the aquatic facility manager (percentage)

A value of the significance threshold under 0.05 can be observed when studying the experience in the work field as a manager, but also when it comes to the number of diplomas and certifications achieved by the managers of the aquatic facilities of the two countries studied. In order to be able to make the comparison, we have used the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The managers of swimming pools in the USA hold an average number of 4,1 diplomas and certifications in the field and 19,9 years of work in the field, 14,6 of which holding a management position, while, in Romania, the managers of the swimming pools have achieved an average number of 0,9 diplomas and certifications and have a work experience in the field of 7,7 years, 5,8 of which in a management position (Figure 2). Therefore our hypothesis confirms that professional competences and experience influence the holding of leadership positions within the aquatic facilities.

Table 2. Experience of the aquatic facility manager in this field – averages (ANOVA analysis)

	Romania	USA	Significance (p)
The average number of the manager's diplomas and certifications	0,9	4,1	0,000
The average number of years since the manager is working in this field	7,7	19,9	0,001
The average number of years spent working as manager in this field	5,8	14,6	0,009

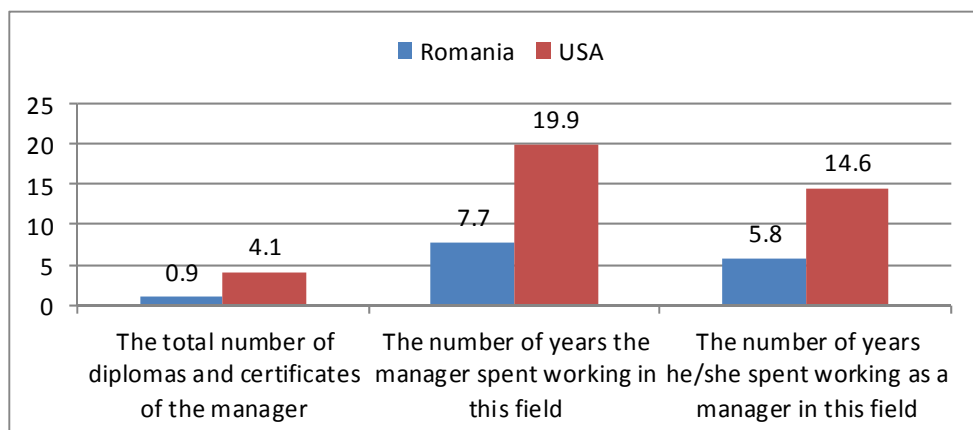


Figure 2. Experience of the aquatic facility manager in this field (comparison in Romania and USA)

The comparative study between the aquatic facilities in Romania and those in the United States of America has confirmed, from the point of view of the research hypotheses, certain differences regarding the management of these sports facilities, as follows:

- Managers in the United States of America have a professional qualification not only from the point of view of the diplomas obtained, but also from the point of view of the work experience in the specific field, which is better than the one of the managers in Romania. This is why it would be recommended for the aquatic facilities to organize management courses, as well as certain courses to obtain lifeguard certificates, recognized also abroad, in partnership with international organizations.
- The personnel in the aquatic facility should do everything necessary in order to keep up to date in their profession as sports facility managers. Therefore, it would be recommended for them to attend national and international meetings and conferences, to obtain the necessary certifications, to be up to date with the changes that take place within the personnel training programs and to be constantly looking for the best professionals available to work within the aquatic facilities they lead.
- We believe that is also essential to establish a national commission for accreditation and supervision of aquatic facilities operation.

Limits and perspectives of the research

Although the empirical research has been conducted at the level of a not very large sample because of financial limitation and difficult access to information related to these aquatic facilities, we are planning to extend the research in the future to a wider geographical spreading that would express a growth of the representativeness of the results within the present field of study.

As a perspective, we would like to conduct a similar comparative analysis between other countries of the European Union, which could provide essential information for the development of research within the sports management field.

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