
Introduction

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Biographical notes: Carlos Pestana Barros is a Professor of Economics at the Technical University of Lisbon, where he teaches sport economics. He has a PhD from the Technical University of Lisbon and has published on sport economics and management in *Applied Economics*, *Economic Modeling*, *Applied Economic Letters*, the *Journal of Sport Economics*, *European Sport Management Review* and the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*. He serves as the board of the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship* and the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Management*.

Michel Desbordes is a Professor of Sport Marketing at the ISC School of Management (Paris, France) and at the University of Paris 11, France. He is a Specialist in Sport Marketing; his research focuses on the management of sport events, sports sponsorship and marketing applied to football. He has published 16 books, 22 refereed papers and 13 chapters in this field. He has been a Keynote Speaker in conferences or an Invited Professor in Canada, China, the USA or Portugal. He also a Consultant in sport marketing and the Associate Director of MX Sports (www.mxsports.fr).

This special issue on fitness sport centres was motivated by the following phenomenon: the number of fitness centres grows each year in order to satisfy the growing demand for sport exercises. This growth signifies that fitness centres are an area of employment creation for sport management. Furthermore, health issues are an area of activity for fitness centres, signifying that it is an activity that complements sports with health and leisure. Confronted with this reality, and observing the almost complete focus on sports

leagues by the sport management and economic journals, the researchers linked to this special issue aimed to call the attention of the research community to this new sport activity.

A call for papers was posted on the website of the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*. In answer, a small number of papers were submitted. From those, the best papers were selected, resulting in the seven papers that constitute the present special issue, and corresponding to 35% of those submitted.

In the first paper, Bodet *et al.* (2008) present a market analysis of fitness centres, starting with a brand-image analysis, and then identifying social representation in terms of relevant constructs that represent a diagnostic tool for identifying attractive and repulsive aspects of the French fitness centres. This procedure enables the identification of marketing strategies for the fitness centres.

In the second paper, Barros and Gonçalves (2008) present an analysis of individual satisfaction with fitness centres. They conclude that almost all attributes identified contribute to individual satisfaction, signifying that fitness centres are an area where individuals have *a priori* expectations that are easily fulfilled.

Teixeira and Correia (2008) present a segmentation study of fitness centre customers and identify three segments: happy consumers, unhappy consumers and unattached consumers. This segmentation may be used for marketing strategies.

The fourth paper, by Sacavém and Correia, describes the dynamics of the fitness centre in the context of sedentary habits, obesity and tobacco.

The fifth paper, by Mischler *et al.* (2008), presents an analysis of the relationship between fitness centres and the manager's profile. The analysis is based on a questionnaire undertaken at the European level and supplemented by a qualitative questionnaire undertaken in the French province of Alsace.

The sixth paper, by Pedregosa and Correia (2008), presents a structural equation model to analyse expectations, satisfaction and loyalty among sport fitness clients. The result suggests that satisfaction is an intermediate variable, positively related to various other constructs and of crucial importance in determining the loyalty to health and fitness centres.

The seventh and last paper, by Sekendiz (2008), presents the status of professional development programmes in the Turkish health fitness industry.

Overall, these papers give a view of fitness centres that permits different aspects.

With this special issue, the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* contributes to the analysis of the sports sector, specifically through fitness centres constituting windows on this activity. Papers from three countries, France, Portugal and Turkey, are presented, revealing a variety of approaches that clarify the role of fitness centres in sports and well-being.