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**Editorial: Special issue: Policy and politics of women's sport and women in sport**

***International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics***

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Research on women's sport (i.e. specifically on sport played by women, e.g. participation) and women in sport (i.e. more broadly any roles hold by women in sport, e.g. leadership roles) has been increasing over time, particularly in the last decade. In the social sciences, humanities and management disciplines of sport (as opposed to sport sciences, e.g. physiological demands and player physical characteristics), this growth has been highlighted by several recent literature reviews (Burton 2015, Fink 2015, Valenti et al. 2018, Hartzell and Dixon 2019, Evans and Pfister 2020). Another illustration of this growing trend is provided by special issues in academic journals focusing on women's sport and women in sport. Based on a review of the special issues related to the social sciences, humanities and management disciplines of sport from 2014 to 2020, Scelles (2020) identifies research on females and gender as one of the 21 main themes covered by the special issues.

Fifteen special journal issues focussing on females and gender in the context of sport have been edited in the period studied, with Susanna Hedenborg and Gertrud Pfister being identified as the most prolific editors on the topic with three issues each, including two together (Hedenborg and Pfister 2015, 2017). A special issue with a relation to sport will soon be edited by Susanna Hedenborg with Aage Radmann (Radmann and Hedenborg, to come). Another is the present issue of *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, edited by Gertrud Pfister with Nicolas Scelles. It is also worth noting the editors and authors of three special issues, which are focussing on the intersection between policy and politics as well as on women and gender. One of these issues, edited by Chawansky and Hayhurst

(2015), is entitled 'Girls, International Development and the Politics of Sport': it focuses specifically on sport for development and peace. Another issue on 'Football Feminisation: Political, Sociological and Cultural Issues' is edited by De Waele and Bernoud (to come): it provides specific insights as it deals with a sport which is still dominated by men. The third new special issue is the present publication. It aims to be broader in nature than the other two publications by focusing on a broad spectrum of policies, politics and practices of women's sport and of women in sport.

This special issue is timely given the current international interest in and importance of the development of women's sport and of gender equality in sport. These trends are highlighted by a number of relevant organisations such as the International Olympic Committee (2018), UNESCO (2019), UN Women (2019), the Council of Europe (2019) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019). These different organisations underline the role that policy (e.g. a policy specifically implemented in sport), political (e.g. the broader national political context) and governance (e.g. the structure and processes by which a sport organisation is directed and controlled) discourses and practices play or can play in promoting, but also in preventing gender equality in sport. In line with these claims, this special issue provides in depth analyses of policies, political and governance activities in relation to gender equality, as well as generally to women's sports in different geographical and cultural contexts.

We are delighted by the interest this special issue generated among potential authors. Indeed, we received 28 expressions of interest, and later 22 abstracts and 13 full papers. This would not have been possible without the help provided by the Editor-in-Chief Prof Jonathan Grix, the Editorial Assistant Dr Qi Peng, the Co-Editor Dr Kirstin Hallmann who managed the submissions we could not handle ourselves due to conflicts of interest, Ms. Usha Sangar who oversaw the production process, and of course the anonymous reviewers who gave very

useful and constructive feedback. We want to thank them all for their contribution to the special issue. This issue includes 10 papers, which covers a great range of topics and territories. The topics include: electoral competition and gender quotas in national sports federations; introduction of athletics regulations and policy interpretations similar to Title IX; gender (in)equality in interuniversity sport; policy frameworks for girls' practice of sport; soft power (ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce; Nye 1990) and the role of social media in engaging it to challenge perceptions of gender norms in sport; gendering of recruitment and selection processes to boards in national sports federations; policy, political and economic determinants of the evolution of competitive balance (sporting equilibrium between teams) in the FIFA women's football World Cups; financial well-being (defined as the ability to sustain current and anticipated desired living standards and financial freedom) of sportswomen; integration between women's and men's sport clubs; and women's tennis diplomacy through the example of Li Na as sports celebrity diplomat. The geographical areas covered include: the Arab World, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Italy, Nigeria, Poland and the United Kingdom.

Two articles have been published in a previous issue of this journal (2020, Volume 13, Issue 2). In one article, Annabelle Caprais, Fabien Sabatier (both from the University of Bordeaux) and Stéphanie Rubi (University of Paris Descartes) ask: 'Electoral competition and gender quotas: dearth of female applicants or structural resistance?' To answer this question, they explored the situation in France using a mixed methods approach, which included a quantitative study conducted on 107 national sports federations and a qualitative investigation with 17 semi-structured interviews of the members of one Olympic federation. Their statements in the interviews suggest that there is in general no bias against women and there is mostly no lack of female candidates. However, visible and invisible forms of resistance do exist, with some federations applying the law of gender equality but also including male ex-

officio members in the count and considering quotas as maximal numbers. Moreover, the authors identify backstage power strategies, which influence both the number of applications and the results of the elections as the main reason for the dominance of men in positions of power.

The authors of the other article published previously are Emeka Anaza (James Madison University, USA) and Augustus Hallmon (Northwest Missouri State University, USA). They investigate the ‘Thoughts and attitudes towards mimicking regulations and policy interpretations like Title IX’. Building on Anaza and McDowell (2017), they explore the Nigerian case. Research participants familiar with Title IX and Nigeria’s educational athletic programmes participated in their study. Anaza and Hallmon found that mimicking regulations and policy interpretations similar to Title IX may serve as a useful strategy to decrease sexism within Nigerian educational sports programmes, but there are specific challenges and barriers that need to be manoeuvred and overcome.

The present issue includes the eight other articles of the special issue. In the first of these articles, Mark Norman (McMaster University), Peter Donnelly and Bruce Kidd (both from the University of Toronto) address ‘Gender inequality in Canadian interuniversity sport: participation opportunities and leadership positions from 2010-11 to 2016-17’. Combining results from four separate studies of gender equality in Canadian interuniversity sport, which were conducted biennially across four academic years, their paper analyses gender proportions across the 56 universities that comprise U SPORTS, the pan-Canadian governing body for Canadian interuniversity sport. Their findings indicate that Canadian interuniversity sport is characterised by persistent and ongoing gender inequality in both the opportunity to participate as an athlete and to be employed in leadership positions.

In the second article of the current issue, Michaël Attali (University of Rennes) and Natalia Bazoge (University of Grenoble Alpes) look at ‘Accessing sport through education. Policy

frameworks for girls' practice of sport in France from 1945 to today'. Their research is based on the study of official texts and institutional reports published since 1945. The authors chose an historical approach to apprehend the processes that structured policy action and to identify the changes over the long term. Attali and Bazoge show that a policy of segregation was initially applied to girls, due to naturalist representations leading to a belief in inherent female fragility in sport. It was then followed by a universalist perspective (i.e. no segregation between girls and boys) adopted from the 1980s onwards. However, failure to consider the social gender-related division of sports practices constituted an obstacle to gender equality. This gave way to a reflection on the diffusion of sexist stereotypes that achieved consensus and opened the door to policies integrating the processes of gender socialisation at the beginning of the 2000s. Yet, naturalist representations and sexist stereotypes still influence access to sporting practices nowadays, meaning a need to go beyond the stage of policy guidelines, now subject to assessment.

In the third article, Hussa K. AlKhalifa and Anna Farello (both from Loughborough University London) focus on 'The soft power of Arab women's football: changing perceptions and building legitimacy through social media'. Their study examines the capacity of Arab women's football committees to engage soft power to challenge local and international perceptions of gender norms and gain acceptance in the region. They investigate the utilisation of social media by women's football committees as a tool for generating soft power in the Arabian Gulf region. The research undertaken followed a one-year exploration of the Instagram posts of three accounts women's football committees in the region. It indicates two overarching aims: changing perceptions of women's football and building legitimacy for the game within public opinion. These aims are targeted through four mechanisms of "sport social media soft power": Campaign Involvement (association with international campaigns through official partnerships); Community Engagement (engagement

with families, fans and youth, as well as affiliations with local businesses); Technical Displays and Event Hosting (hosting regional tournaments and development courses, involving the showcasing of technical football skills); and Enhancing Formal Ties (efforts to associate themselves with formal institutions such as FIFA by supporting major events in other countries and connecting with notable football figures, as well as through formal greetings, participation in external workshops and exchange programmes, and connections with the local men's national teams). The contribution of this study to the fields of sport policy and politics as well as political sciences is two-fold. First, it expands the understanding of sport as a means of exercising soft power by presenting social media as an instrument for sport diplomacy in the Arab world. Second, it analyses women's success in sport and its use to shape public perception and achieve international recognition.

In the fourth article, Natalia Organista (Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw) explores the 'Gendering of recruitment and selection processes to boards in Polish sports federations'. To do so, the author conducted 24 individual in-depth interviews with persons occupying leadership positions. The results show significant discrepancies between women and men in terms of perceiving barriers which prevent the development of more diverse and gender-balanced boards. Women indicated that the selection policy significantly reduced women's possibilities to be elected in positions in boards. Usually, the selection is preceded by a search for appropriate candidates by members of federations. According to the female respondents, lack of trust towards the leadership abilities of women and the power of old boys' network are the causes of nominating predominantly male members. However, the male respondents did not agree with these opinions. They pointed out that lack of willingness and commitment of women results in the current gender hierarchy in the world of sport. Men did not identify gender as a significant variable and a prerequisite for a positive development of an organisation. The research indicates the need to make the leaders of sports organisations

more aware of the gendered structure of their organisations, as well as the need to deepen a discussion about the recruitment and selection policy for board members.

In the fifth article, Nicolas Scelles (Manchester Metropolitan University) focuses on the 'Policy, political and economic determinants of the evolution of competitive balance in the FIFA women's football World Cups'. This study adopted a mixed methods approach, with the data relying on sources documenting the historical policies and politics of gender equality and women's football, while also enabling the measurement of the competitive balance and the test of its determinants in the women's football World Cups over the 1991-2019 period. The findings show that competitive balance has increased over time. This is consistent with the hypothesis that the growing participation (number of women's football players) internationally leads to a better quality of the different women's football teams that, ultimately, leads to a better competitive balance (sporting equilibrium between them). This growing participation is influenced by the different (sport) policies and politics across countries, as well as the decisions made by FIFA. This is particularly true with regard to the increasing number of teams taking part in the competition and the breakdown per confederation, i.e. making sure that each confederation has enough spots as incentives for their national associations to develop their women's football team.

In the sixth article, Emmanuel Mogaji (University of Greenwich), Foluké Badejo (Queensland University of Technology), Simone Charles (University of Greenwich) and Jacqueline Millisits (University of Connecticut) explore the 'Financial Well-being of Sportswomen'. Their study presents the results of an analysis of interviews with 27 UK sportswomen in different sports (athletics, boxing, cycling, football, gymnastics, hockey, netball, rugby, swimming, tennis and volleyball). The interview questions were framed and participants' experiences interpreted using the financial well-being framework developed by Brüggén et al. (2017). This framework enabled to distinguish the findings according to five



key elements of financial well-being, namely: contextual factors (being underrepresented, accepting the gender pay gap and playing in a team sport as a constraining factor when it comes to take control of their image); financial well-being interventions (being excluded and relying on social support); financial behaviour (being prudent and living lean); consequences of a lack of financial well-being (delaying life plans and feeling depressed); and personal factors (being a woman and coming of age limiting their ability to earn, as well as the need to look different to be made brand ambassadors). This study yields implications for a range of stakeholders, including governing bodies, policymakers, sports media, team and talent managers and financial institutions. It highlights the need to advance gender equity policies and practices that can positively impact on sportswomen's financial well-being.

In the seventh article, Maurizio Valenti, Qi Peng (both from Manchester Metropolitan University) and Claudio Rocha (University of Stirling) explore the 'Integration between women's and men's football clubs: a comparison between Brazil, China and Italy'. Using the Multiple Streams Framework, their article examines the context, timing and conditions leading to the implementation of the policy of integration in these three different countries. The authors collected and analysed policy documents and media reports to identify factors influencing the policy formulation. Their results indicate that national associations' engagement with policies supporting the development of women's football are influenced by several factors: the declining performances of senior women's national teams; the low participation rates of female players; external pressures from supranational football institutions encouraging (in Asia and Europe) or obliging (in South America) some men's clubs to support the creation of a women's section; and an increased societal view supporting that public institutions should proactively engage in initiatives to reduce gender disparities. While potentially helping women's football as it enhances its visibility and commercialisation, the policy of integration risks that the women's game continues to be seen

as subaltern to its men's counterpart. Implications of the policy of integration for the long-term development of women's football and two possible future scenarios are discussed, namely further integration by men's football versus a non-men's football dependent model. In the eighth and last article, Jorge Knijnik and Chuanqian Zhao (both from Western Sydney University) investigate 'Women's Tennis Diplomacy: Australia-China Cultural Relations and Li Na as a Sports Celebrity Diplomat of the Australian Open'. By examining Tennis Australia's diplomatic strategy to raise its profile in neighbouring countries with the Australian Open Asia-Pacific campaign, this study adopts the perspective of non-state-based sports diplomacy. It particularly explores the diplomatic role of Li Na, the Chinese female tennis player who has become a global sports celebrity after being the first Asian player to win a Grand Slam women's singles title in 2011. By using a content analysis of significant Australian and Chinese newspapers between 2006 to 2019, this study examines Li Na's global celebrityhood's impact in the Australia-China binational connections. The findings suggest that Li Na's gender image as an independent woman, her neoliberal citizenship and her remarkable engagement with Australian and Chinese tennis fans, facilitate her unofficial ambassadorship on behalf of the Australian Open. As a remarkable example of women's tennis diplomacy, Li Na's cultural influence shapes the understanding between Australian and Chinese publics beyond their governments.

In conclusion, the special issue meets the target to collect a number of articles on the development of women's sport and gender equality in sport from a policy and political perspective, as well as to advance knowledge on the policy and politics of women and sport, which was until recently a men's domain. It has to be emphasised that such advancement of knowledge is based on a truly international picture, consistent with what can be expected of contributions to the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. It is hoped that the studies included in the special issue will be inspirational and influential internationally.

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